



**Election quality,
public trust are central issues
for Africa's upcoming contests**

By Peter Penar, Rose Aiko, Thomas Bentley, and Kangwook Han

Introduction

Nothing kindles democracy's energies, anxieties, hopes, and frustrations like an election. The quality of an election can spell the difference between a cooking fire and an explosion.

If a successful election can calm and focus a nation (e.g. Namibia 2015), a disputed election can tear it apart (e.g. Burundi 2015, Côte d'Ivoire 2010, Kenya 2008).

With at least 25 African countries conducting national elections in 2016-2017,¹ great attention is focused on electoral management bodies – typically national electoral commissions – as crucial players in electoral processes and in shaping public perceptions of how well democracy is working. Poor electoral management can enable election fraud and, even if it doesn't swing an election, produce political alienation, public mistrust, protest, and violence. In 2016, we have already seen examples of unrest in Kenya, where opposition calls for electoral commission reforms using the hashtag #IEBCMustFall have sparked demonstrations and a violent reaction from security forces; in the Republic of the Congo, where election malpractices led to violent protests; and in Gabon, where bloody clashes erupted after President Ali Bongo claimed a widely disputed re-election victory. In Ghana, pre-election anxieties are high amid questions about the electoral commission's revision of the voter roll for December's election.

Against the backdrop of history's examples – in Africa and elsewhere – of tampering with voter rolls, suppression of competition and voter turnout, ballot stuffing, vote-buying, multiple voting, and manipulation of results, free and fair elections, agreed to in the African Union's Charter on Good Governance and Elections, depend on competent election management supported by citizen sensitization efforts to build public confidence.

Using 2014/2015 Afrobarometer data from 36 African countries, this analysis examines public perceptions of electoral management institutions and the quality of elections. Overall, public trust in national electoral commissions is moderate at best. Although a majority of citizens say their most recent elections were mostly free and fair, citizens express serious concerns about the fairness of vote counts, corruption during elections, and the safety of voters during campaigns and at the polls. Citizens' views of electoral commission performance and election quality generally mirror the opinions of country experts found in international assessments.

More broadly, many citizens say elections are not working well as mechanisms to ensure that people's views are represented and that voters can hold non-performing leaders accountable. Few countries have achieved improvement in the perceived performance of elections over the past decade.

Afrobarometer survey

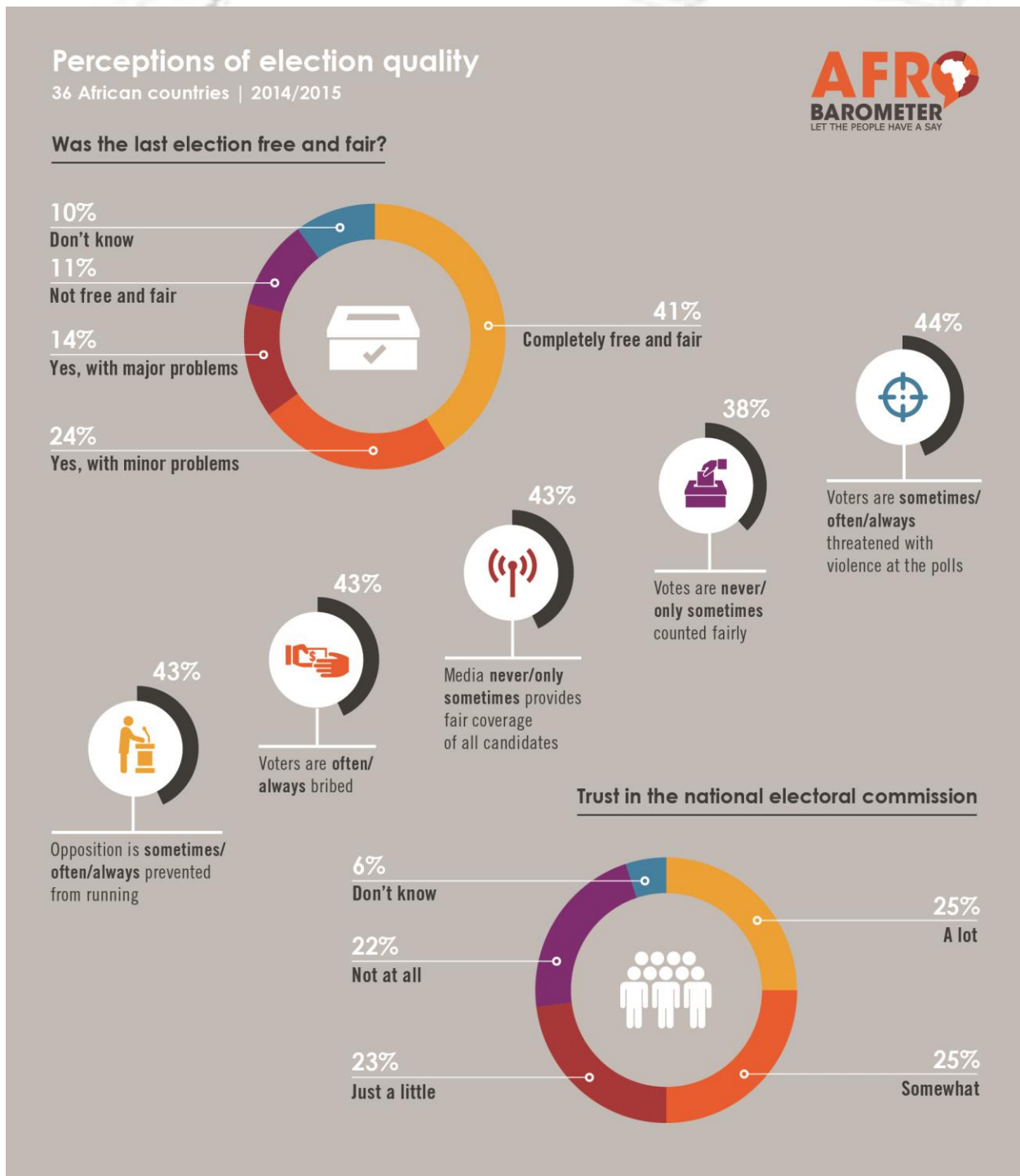
Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. Five rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and findings from Round 6 surveys (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.

Round 6 interviews with almost 54,000 citizens in 36 countries (see list in Appendix Table A.1) represent the views of more than three-fourths of the continent's population.

¹ According to the National Democratic Institute, national elections (not counting constitutional referenda) in 2016 include: Benin, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, The Gambia, Ghana, Morocco, Niger, São Tomé & Príncipe, Seychelles, Somalia, Uganda, and Zambia. In 2017: Algeria, Kenya, Liberia, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone. See <https://www.ndi.org/electionscalendar/>.

Key findings

- On average across 36 surveyed countries, just half (50%) of respondents say they trust their electoral commission “somewhat” (25%) or “a lot” (25%). Some of the lowest levels of trust are expressed in countries with closely contested elections in 2016 including Gabon (25%), São Tomé and Príncipe (31%), and Ghana (37%).
- Two-thirds of Africans rate their most recent election as “completely free and fair” (41%) or “free and fair, but with minor problems” (24%). Citizens’ views on election quality are generally consistent with assessments by international experts.



- But substantial proportions of the population are skeptical about the quality of their elections. More than four in 10 Africans say that voters are at least “sometimes” threatened with violence at the polls (44%); that opposition parties and candidates are at least “sometimes” prevented from running (43%); that the news media “never” or only “sometimes” provides fair coverage of all candidates (43%); and that voters are “often” or “always” bribed (43%).
- Only one-third (34%) of Africans think that votes are “always” counted fairly. Several countries with a history of election-related violence express low levels of confidence in the vote count, including Kenya (26%), Zimbabwe (22%), and Nigeria (6%).
- Fully half of Africans say that elections do not work well as mechanisms to ensure that people’s views are represented (50%) or that voters are able to remove non-performing leaders from office (51%). Countries with the highest levels of dissatisfaction with the representation and accountability performance of elections include Gabon, Morocco, Sudan, Nigeria, Swaziland, and Madagascar.

Trust in national electoral commissions

Election management in Africa is the focus of considerable attention from the United Nations, African regional organisations, and international entities such as the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the International Republican Institute (IRI), and the National Democratic Institute (NDI). At the national level, electoral management bodies are engaged in ongoing review and reform efforts to improve logistical management and transparency. Countries are auditing their voter rolls, implementing biometric voter registration and identification, engaging political stakeholders to monitor management procedures, and improving processes for transmitting results. Some of the most visible reforms have centered on electoral commissions themselves, with a view to improving performance on one important measure of election management: public trust in electoral management bodies.

Across 35 African countries, just half of citizens say they trust their national electoral commission “somewhat” (25%) or “a lot” (25%) (Figure 1). One in five respondents (21%) say they have no trust whatsoever in their election management body. On a scale of 1 (not at all) to 4 (a lot), the average extent of trust in electoral commissions in Africa is 2.6, which lies between “just a little” and “somewhat.”

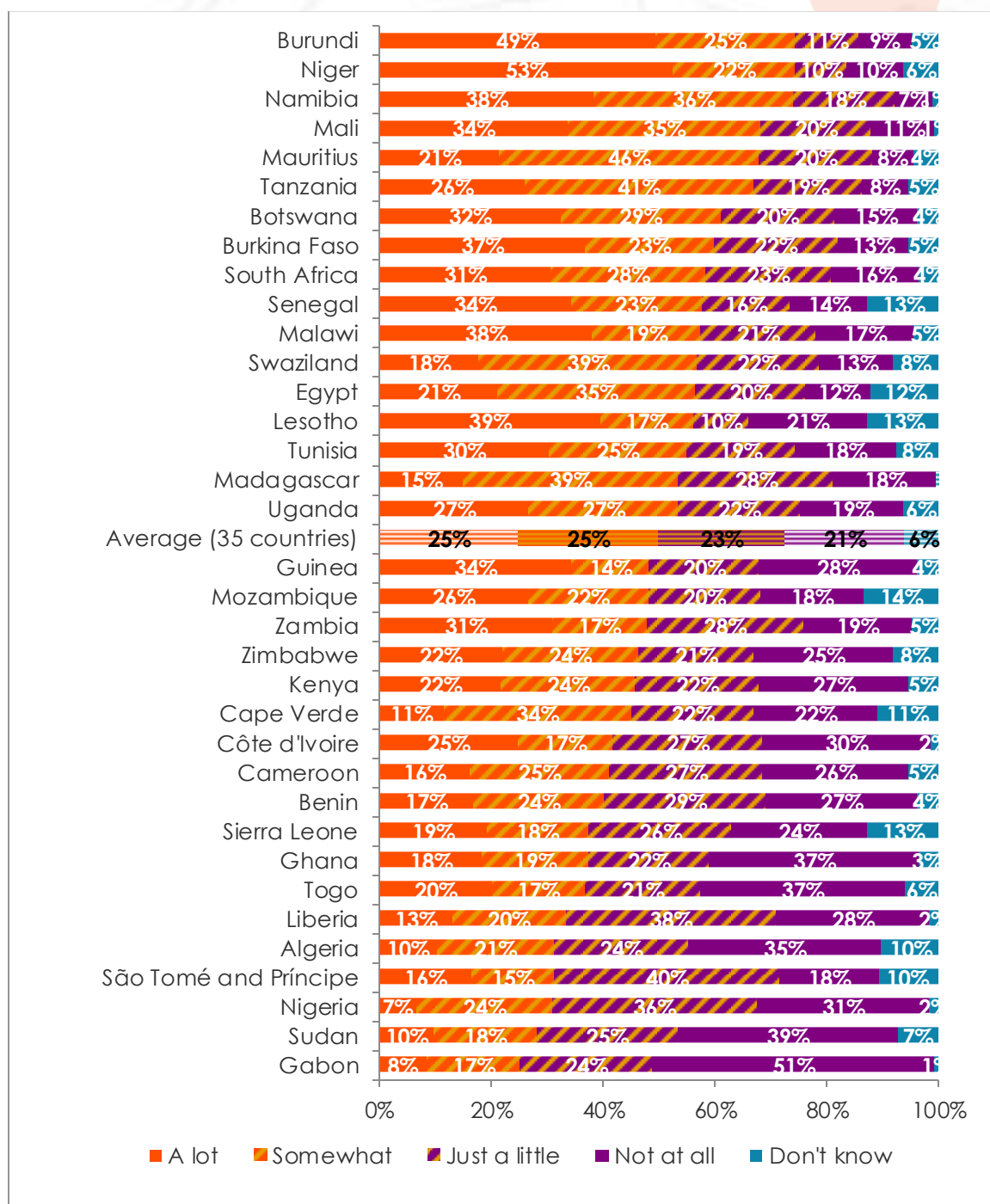
Three countries with elections this year express some of the lowest levels of trust: Gabon (25% trust “somewhat” or “a lot”), São Tomé and Príncipe (31%), and Ghana (37%). Other countries showing remarkably low levels of trust in their electoral commissions include Sudan (28%), Nigeria (31%), Algeria (31%), Liberia (33%), Togo (37%), and Sierra Leone (37%). At the other extreme are Burundi (surveyed in September-October 2014), Niger, and Namibia (each 74%).

With regard to elections in 2017 and 2018, there are warning signs for Kenya and Zimbabwe, as less than half (46%) of citizens trust their electoral commission in these countries, which have experienced high levels of election-related violence in the past.

When considering public trust levels by country, it is important to note the timing of the Afrobarometer Round 6 fieldwork and its proximity to elections (see Appendix Table A.1 for fieldwork and election dates). In Sudan, for example, where recorded trust levels are low, the survey was fielded shortly after the April 2015 elections, which were so flawed that the African Union considered not sending observers and all major opposition parties boycotted the polls. In Nigeria, the survey was conducted three months prior to the March 2015 elections, which were the object of widespread anxieties but turned out to be largely peaceful and successful. In Namibia, the survey was completed during the run-up to the November 2014 elections, a period marked by optimism about the implementation of electronic voting machines. These particulars of the timing of the survey relative to the

national election calendar can have some effect on the findings and should be kept in mind when making cross-country comparisons.

Figure 1: Trust in national electoral commissions | 35 countries* | 2014/2015

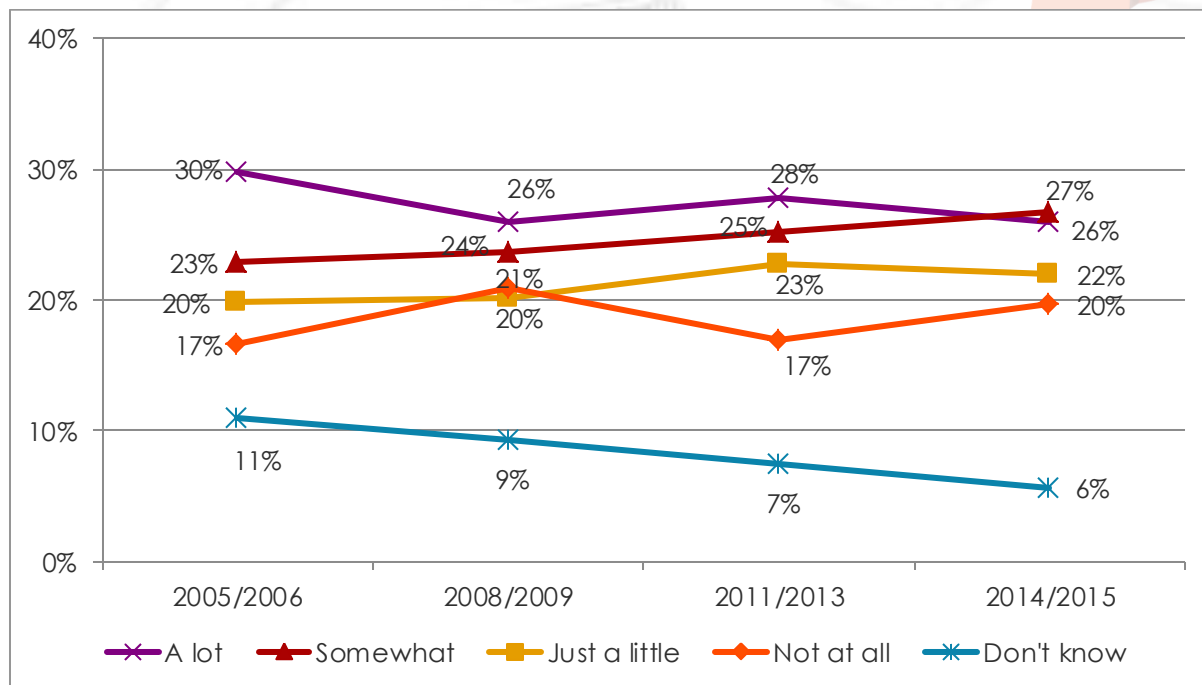


Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: National Electoral Commission? (* Question was not asked in Morocco.)

Average levels of public trust in electoral commissions have not changed dramatically over time. Across 32 countries where this question was asked in both Round 5 and Round 6, trust levels have remained essentially unchanged (50% "somewhat" or "a lot" in 2011/2013 and 51% in 2014/2015).

Across 18 countries² tracked since 2005/2006, trust shows a modest negative trend: Strong positive sentiments (trust “a lot”) have declined slightly, replaced by modest positive sentiments (trust “somewhat”), while a decrease in “don’t know” responses is matched by small increases in “not at all” and “just a little” responses (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Change in public trust in national electoral commissions | 18 countries | 2005-2015



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: National Electoral Commission?

While average changes are small, there is significant over-time variation within countries in public trust. Between 2011/2013 and 2014/2015, trust in electoral commissions increased sharply in Mali (by 28 percentage points), Egypt (22 points), and Namibia (17 points) while dropping precipitously in Ghana (by 22 percentage points), Sierra Leone (19 points), Benin (14 points), and South Africa (11 points) (Figure 3).

For some countries, increases in trust between 2011/2013 and 2014/2015 may reflect reforms and technological advances. Namibia, for example, introduced electronic voting in its 2014 general elections. In Mali and Madagascar, electoral commissions may have garnered trust from the way they managed elections that brought an end to political instability.

Interestingly, among those with significant recent decreases in trust are countries that have high levels of electoral competition and are generally viewed as relatively democratic, including Ghana, Benin, South Africa, Cape Verde, and Zambia. This may reflect citizens' rising expectations of what constitutes a high-quality election; increasing oversight of election processes, especially by opposition parties and civil society; and the view that even minor irregularities in elections may influence the outcome in very tight contests.

² Countries tracked since 2005/2006 are Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

Figure 3: Recent changes in public trust in national electoral commissions
 | 32 countries* | 2011-2015

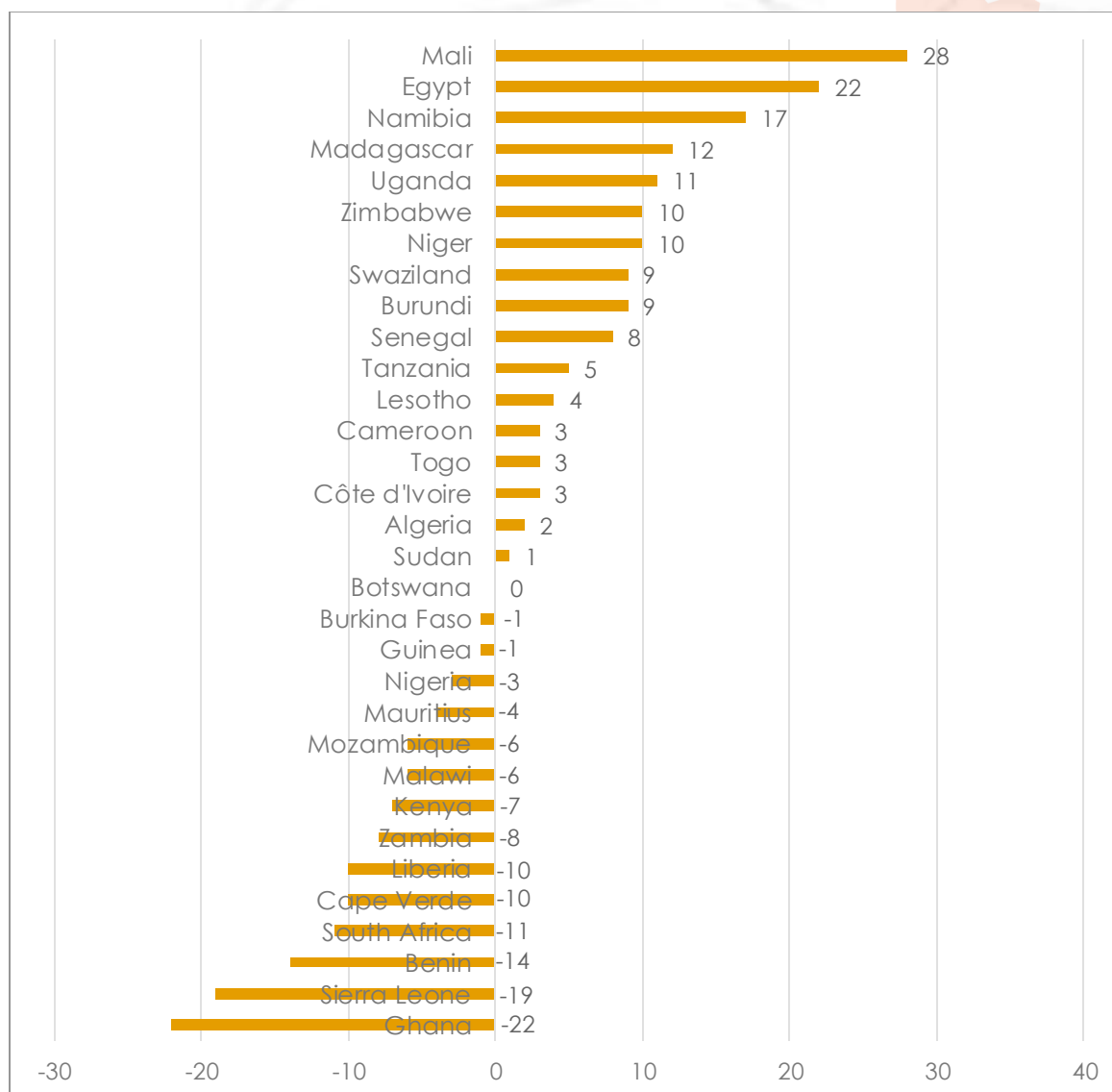


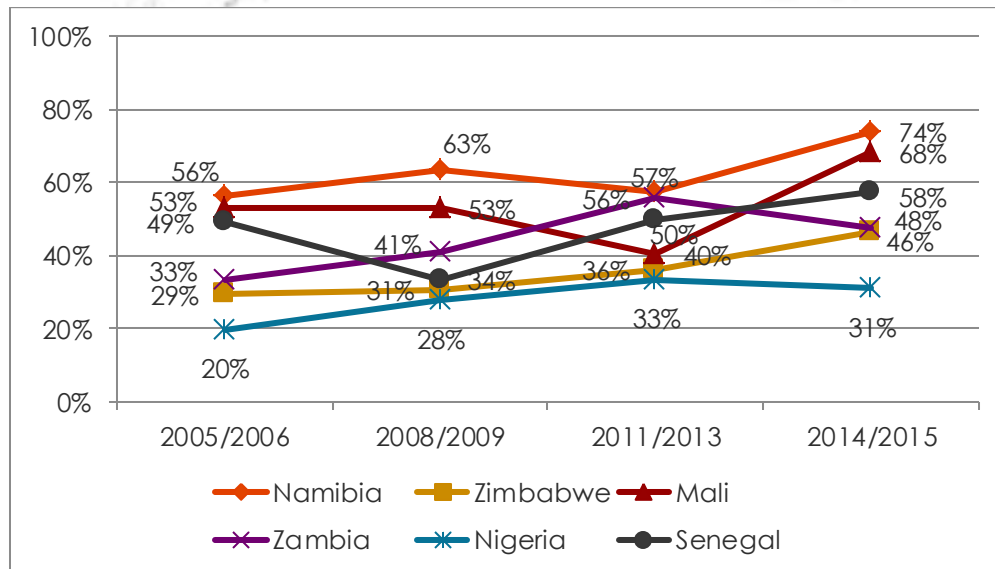
Figure shows increase or decrease, in percentage points, from 2011/2013 to 2014/2015 in the proportion of respondents saying they trust their national electoral commission "somewhat" or "a lot." (*Question not asked in Morocco, not asked in Tunisia in 2011/2013; Gabon and São Tomé and Príncipe were not surveyed in 2011/2013.)

Examining longer-term trends among 18 countries tracked over the past decade, significant increases in trust were recorded in Namibia (18 percentage points), Zimbabwe (17 points), Mali (15 points), and Zambia (15 points, although in Zambia trust started declining again in 2011/2013) (Figure 4). But several countries registered alarming decreases in trust over the past decade, led by Ghana (a drop of 38 percentage points), Mozambique (24 points), and Tanzania (19 points) (Figure 5).

Moreover, trends over the past decade may obscure significant short-term ups and downs within countries, such as dips in Senegal (2008) and Mali (2013) followed by increases. In Kenya, an overall 7-percentage-point decline in trust over the past decade includes a dramatic 27-point drop in the 2008 survey, reflecting the country's violent presidential election, followed by a full recovery in the 2011 survey. From 2011 to 2014, public trust in Kenya's electoral commission declined again (by 7 percentage points) – perhaps an example of the fact that in some cases, efforts to improve election practices may fail to

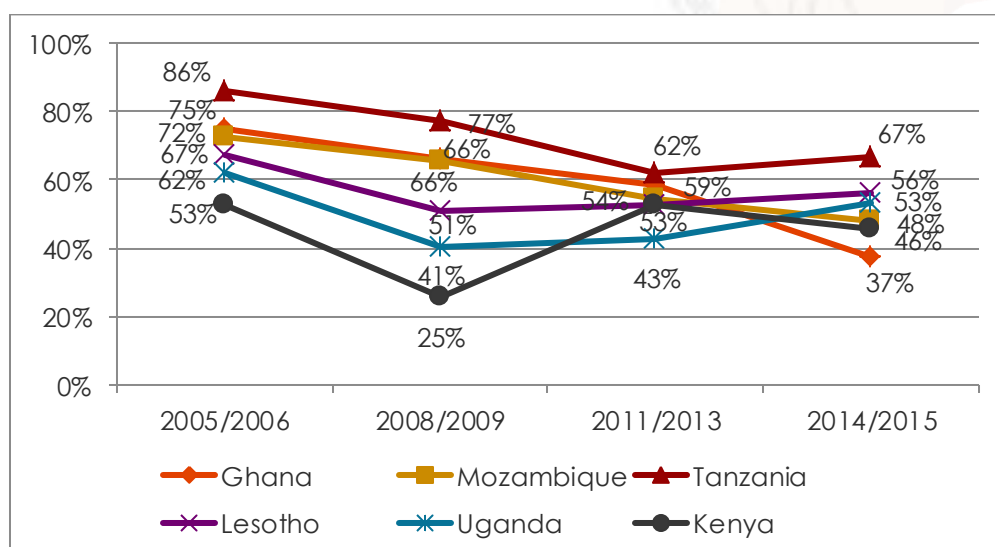
meet expectations and may even erode public confidence as existing weaknesses are revealed. Kenya implemented biometric voter registration and identification before its 2013 general elections, but procurement, management, and technical problems led many Kenyans to question the integrity or competence of the electoral commission. A more recent example comes from Ghana, where the electoral commission was directed by the judiciary to conduct a full audit of the voter list. The revelation of many inaccuracies in the voter list and questions about whether the electoral commission will have time to correct these inaccuracies by December 2016 may have aggravated the decade-long downhill slide of public trust in the commission.

Figure 4: Changes in public trust in national electoral commissions | countries with largest increases | 2005-2015



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: National Electoral Commission? (% who say "somewhat or "a lot")

Figure 5: Changes in public trust in national electoral commissions | countries with largest decreases | 2005-2015

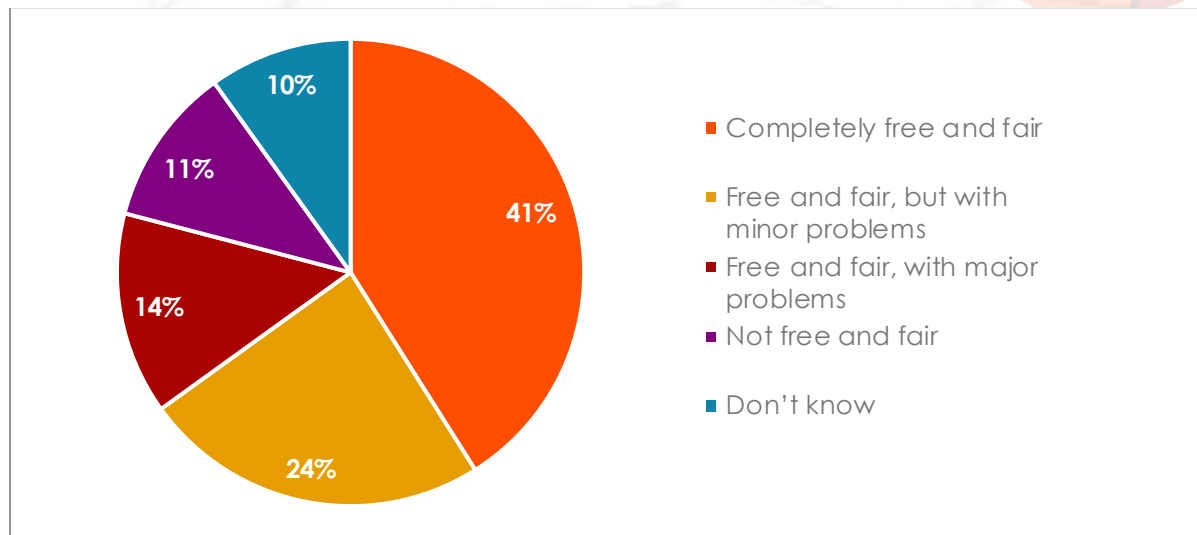


Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: National Electoral Commission? (% who say "somewhat or "a lot")

Freeness and fairness of elections

Citizens' assessments of the quality of their elections surpass their trust in their electoral commission: Two-thirds (65%) say their most recent election was either "completely free and fair" (41%) or "free and fair, but with minor problems" (24%) (Figure 6).

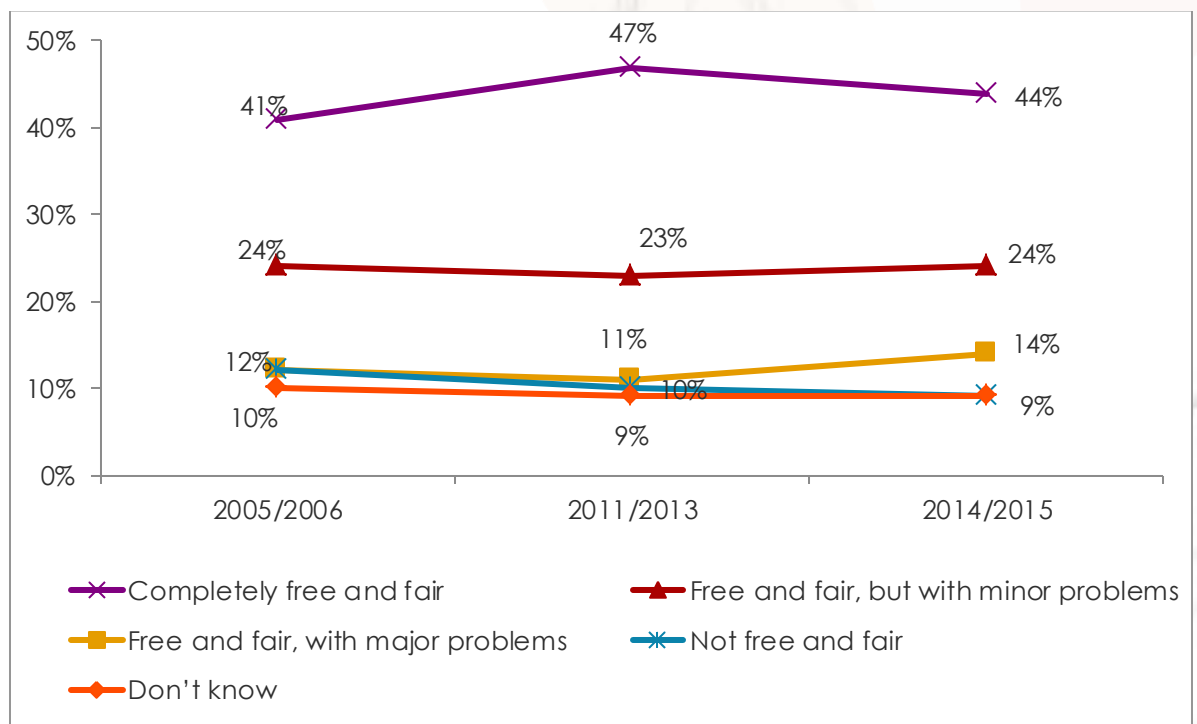
Figure 6: Freeness and fairness of elections | 36 countries | 2014/2015



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

This overall assessment has been fairly stable, both across 34 countries surveyed in 2011/2013 and across 18 countries tracked over the past decade (Figure 7),

Figure 7: Freeness and fairness of elections | 18 countries | 2005-2015



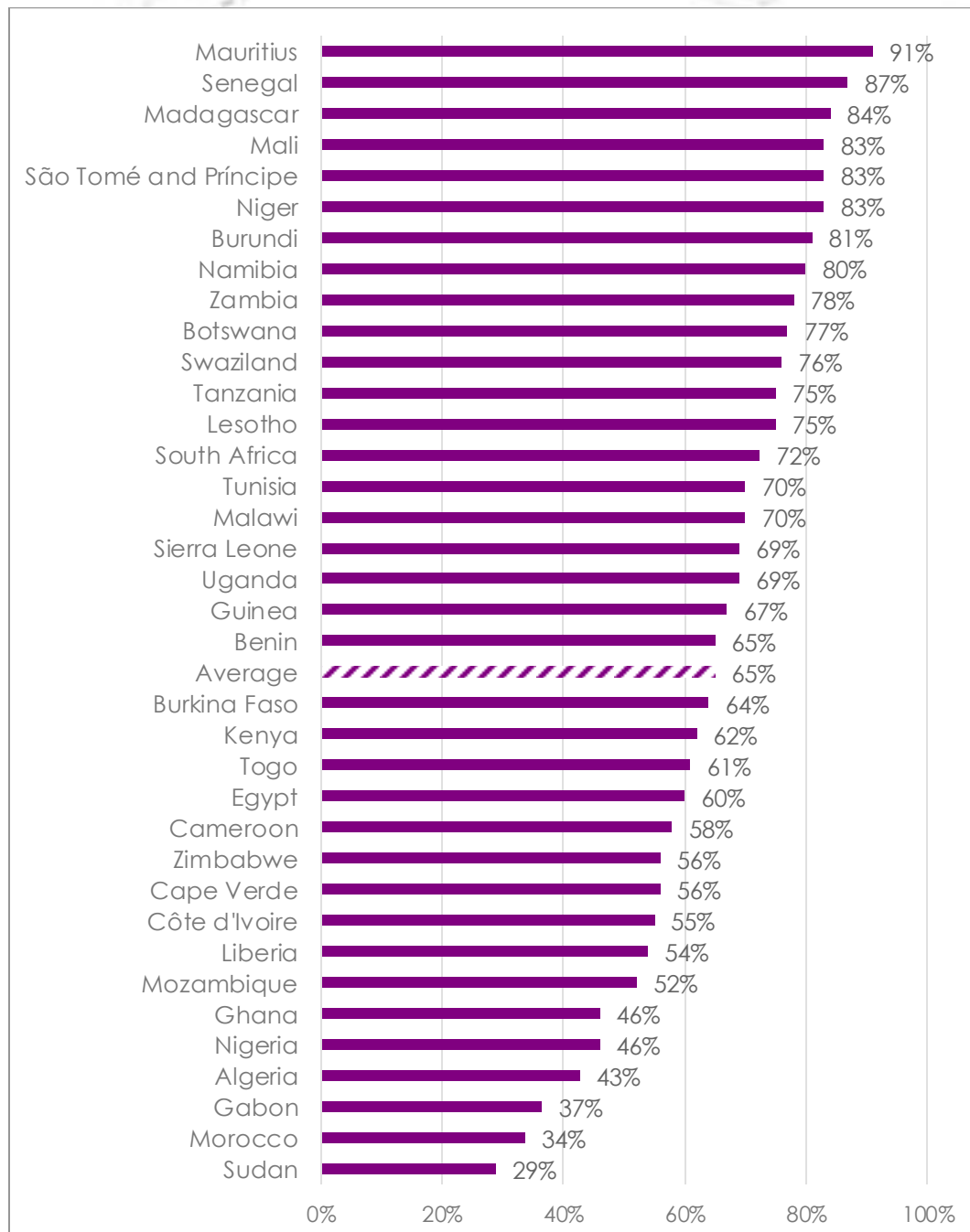
Respondents were asked: *On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in [20xx]?*

(Note: This question was not asked in Afrobarometer Round 4 (2008/2009).)

However, countries vary greatly in their citizens' perceptions of overall election quality. Citizens in Mauritius (91%), Senegal (87%), and Madagascar (84%) believe in overwhelming numbers that their elections are completely or mostly free and fair (Figure 8). Malagasy views on their 2013 general election are intriguing given persistent concerns about the management of recent elections. Burundians' views of their 2010 elections are also overwhelmingly positive (81%); these views were expressed well before the 2015 presidential election rejected by the international community.

In contrast, only minorities see their elections as free and fair in Sudan (29%), Morocco (34%), Gabon (37% for its 2011 election), Algeria (43%), Nigeria (46%), and Ghana (46%).

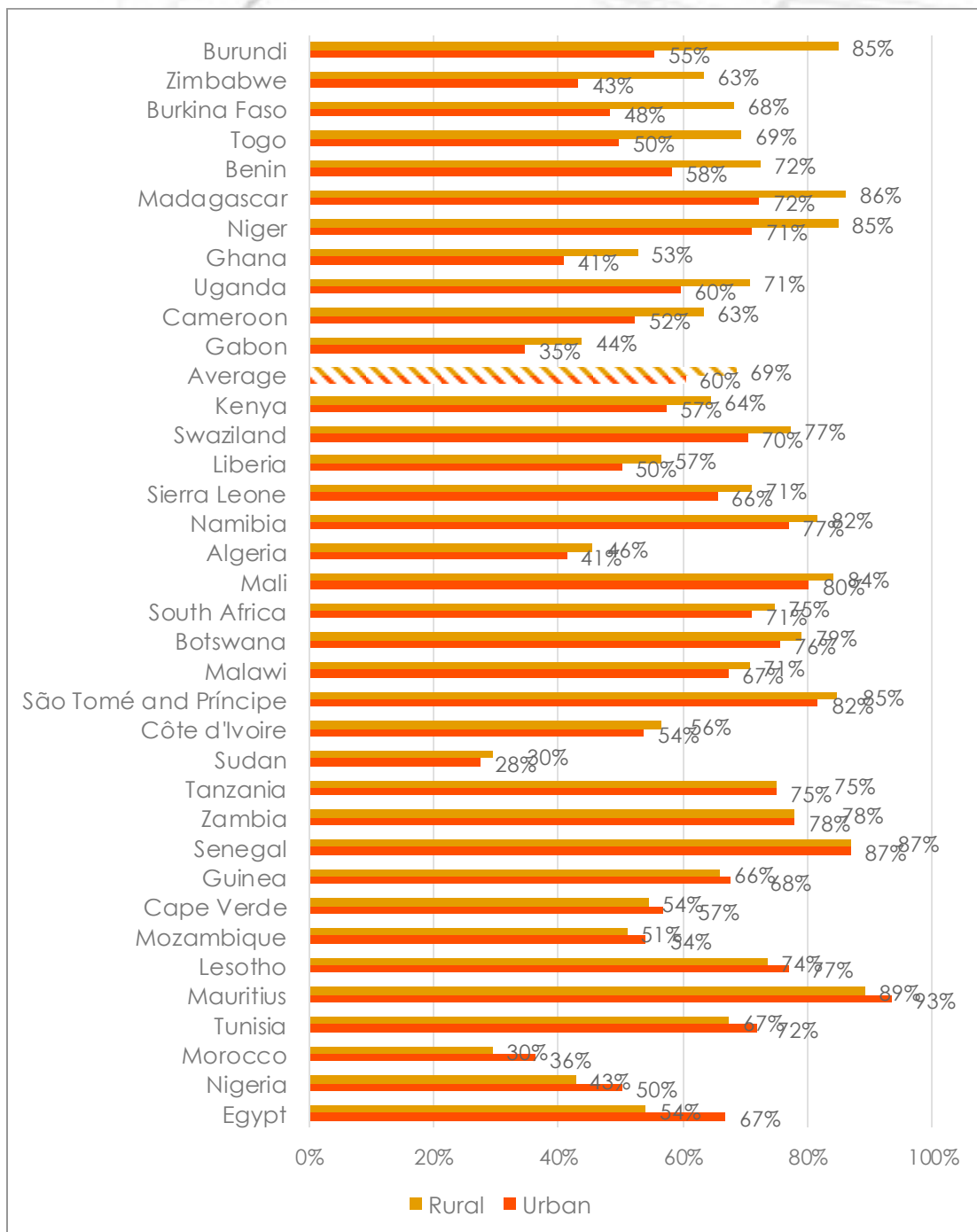
Figure 8: Freeness and fairness of elections | 36 countries | 2014/2015



Respondents were asked: *On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in [20xx]?*
 (% who say "free and fair, but with minor problems" or "completely free and fair")

Within countries, men and women offer similar assessments of the freeness and fairness of elections. But rural residents are more likely to see elections as free and fair than urban dwellers, 69% vs. 60%, which may reflect the amount and quality of information that reaches rural residents and the fact that many ruling parties invest heavily in rural areas. Gaps in rural vs. urban perceptions of whether elections were free and fair are largest in Burundi (85% rural vs. 55% urban), Zimbabwe (63% vs. 43%), Burkina Faso (68% vs. 48%), and Togo (69% v. 50%) (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Rural-urban differences in perceptions of elections as free and fair
| 36 countries | 2014/2015



Respondents were asked: On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in [20xx]?
(% who say "free and fair, but with minor problems" or "completely free and fair")

While average assessments of election quality may be fairly stable over time, individual countries have experienced significant changes. Since the previous survey round in 2011/2013, the proportion of Kenyans who describe their last national election as completely or mostly free and fair has increased by 31 percentage points, and similar improvement are seen in Madagascar (30 points) and Mali (26 points). At the other extreme are Ghana (a 34-percentage-point drop), Nigeria (25 points), and Liberia (22 points) (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Freeness and fairness of elections over time | 34 countries | 2011-2015

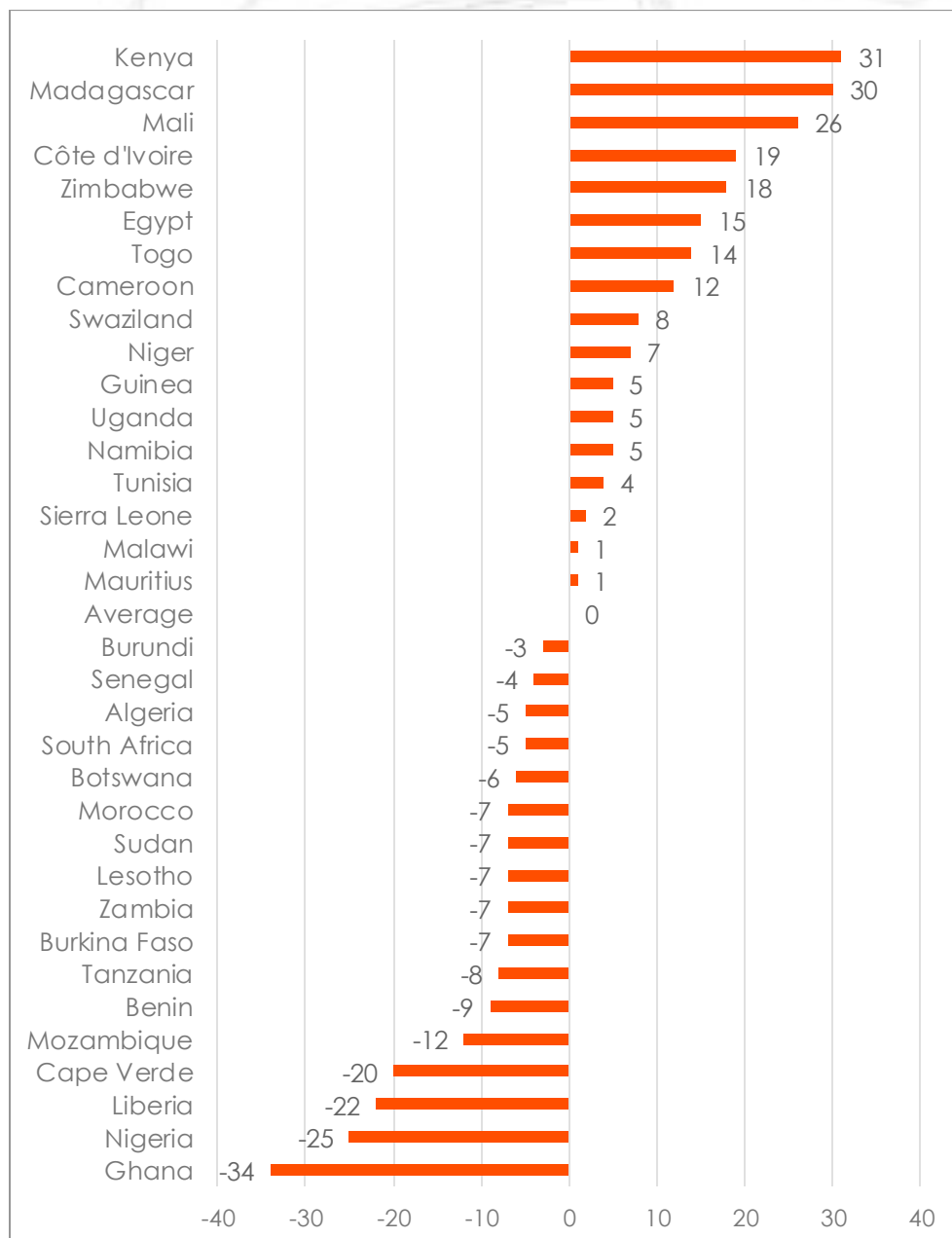


Figure shows increase or decrease, in percentage points, from 2011/2013 to 2014/2015 in the proportion of respondents who say their most recent national elections were “completely free and fair” or “free and fair, but with minor problems.”

Looking over the past decade, the proportion of citizens who see their previous election as completely or mostly free and fair has increased by 49 percentage points in Zambia, by 27 points in Malawi, by 20 points in Zimbabwe, and by 19 points in Mali (Figure 11). This does not necessarily mean that these countries have attained very positive views on election quality, only that there has been a large positive change. For instance, in Zimbabwe, while positive

assessments have risen by 20 percentage points since 2005 (after the severely flawed 2002 elections), still only 56% of citizens say in 2014/2015 that the 2013 election was free and fair (Figure 12a).

Notably, several countries that election support experts see as making progress on election management experienced sharp declines in public opinion about the freeness and fairness of elections, including Ghana (a drop of 31 percentage points), Kenya (17 points), and Benin (9 points) (Figure 12b). As with public trust in electoral commissions, these decreases may reflect increasingly vibrant political competition and higher citizen expectations of what a free and fair election should look like.

Again, changes over the past decade can obscure large short-term swings in citizens' perceptions of election quality that are highly dependent on the context of a particular election. Some of the biggest swings have occurred in Kenya, Madagascar, and Nigeria (Figure 12c). In Kenya, respondents in the 2011 survey rated the violent 2007 general election process very poorly, in contrast to much more positive views of the 2013 general election. However, ratings of the 2013 election are still more unfavourable than those given in the 2005 survey (concerning the 2002 general election).

For Nigeria, the 2011 election marked a high-water mark in election quality approval, after severely flawed elections in 2003 and 2007. However, in the tense run-up to the 2015 election, citizens may have begun to recast even the image of the 2011 election in light of what they saw as potential problems in the upcoming contest.

Figure 11: Change in perceived freeness and fairness of elections | 18 countries
| 2005-2015

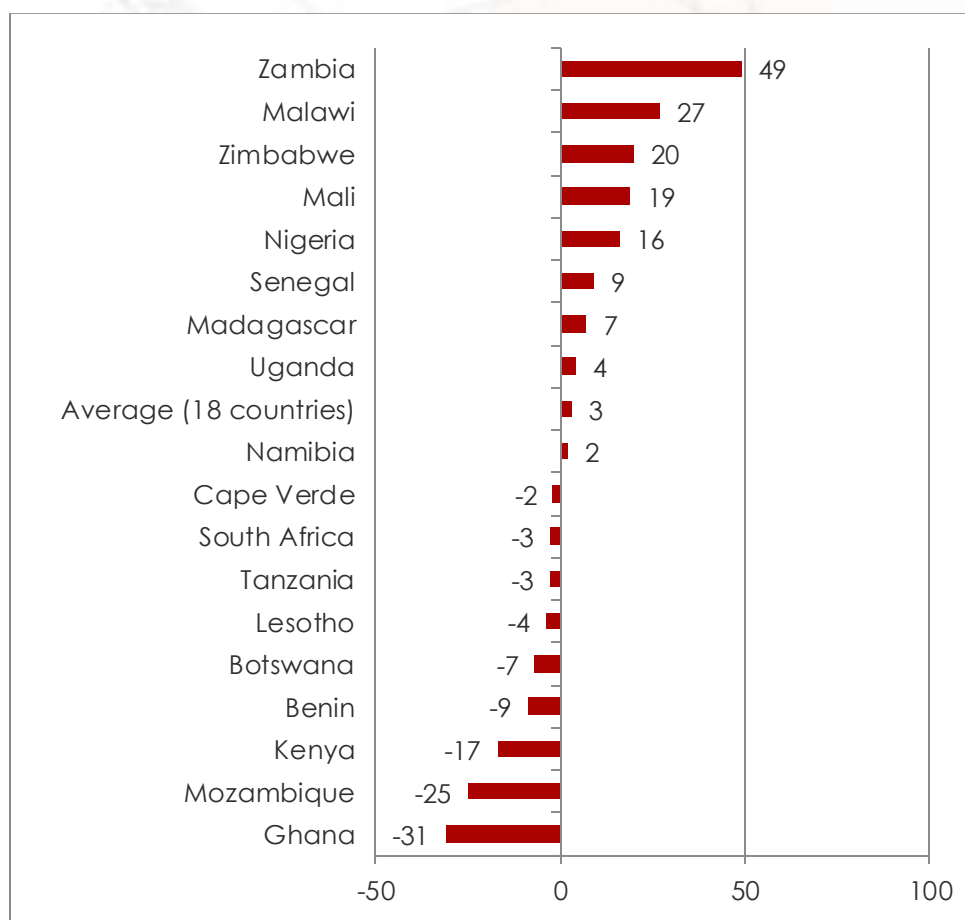
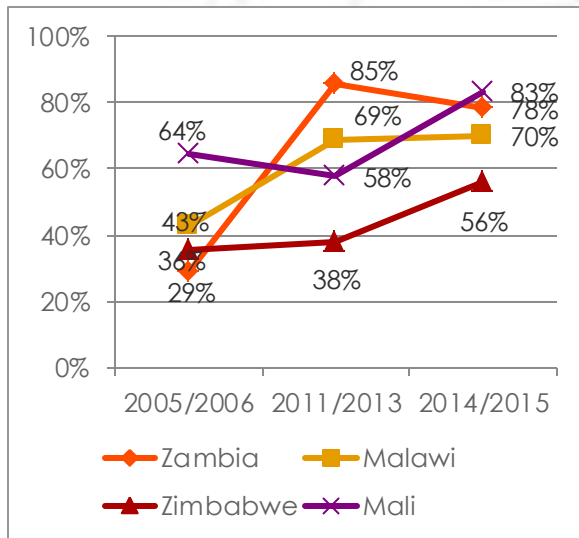


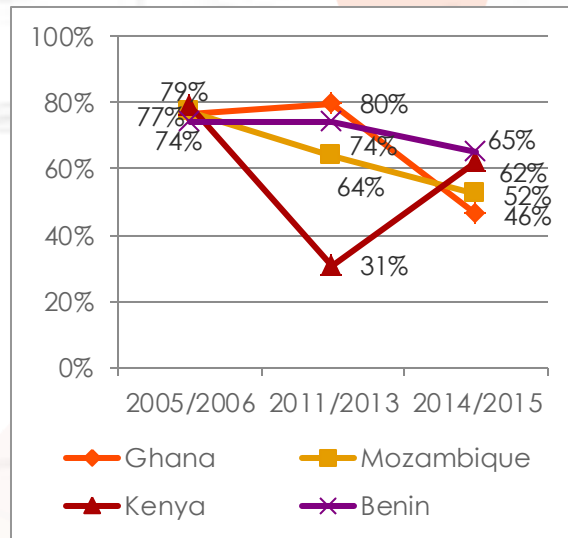
Figure shows the increase or decrease, in percentage points, from 2005/2006 to 2014/2015 in the proportion of respondents who say their most recent elections were “free and fair, but with minor problems” or “completely free and fair”)

Figure 12: Change in perceived freeness and fairness of elections | largest increases, decreases, and swings | 18 countries | 2005-2015

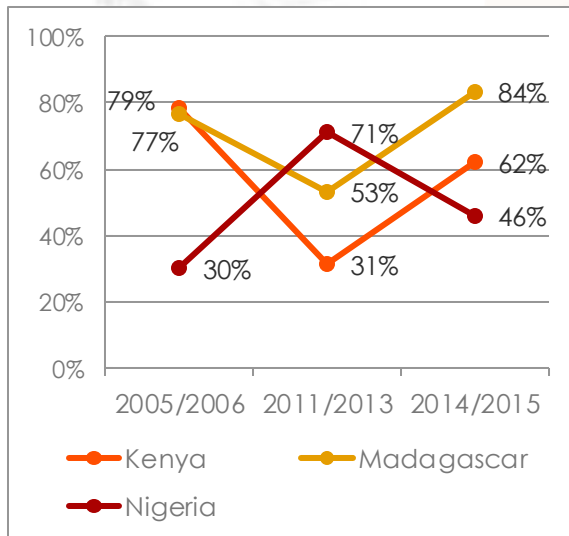
12a: Largest increases



12b: Largest decreases



12c: Dramatic changes



Respondents were asked: *On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in [20xx]?*
 (% who say "free and fair, but with minor problems" or "completely free and fair")

Citizens vs. "experts" as judges of election quality

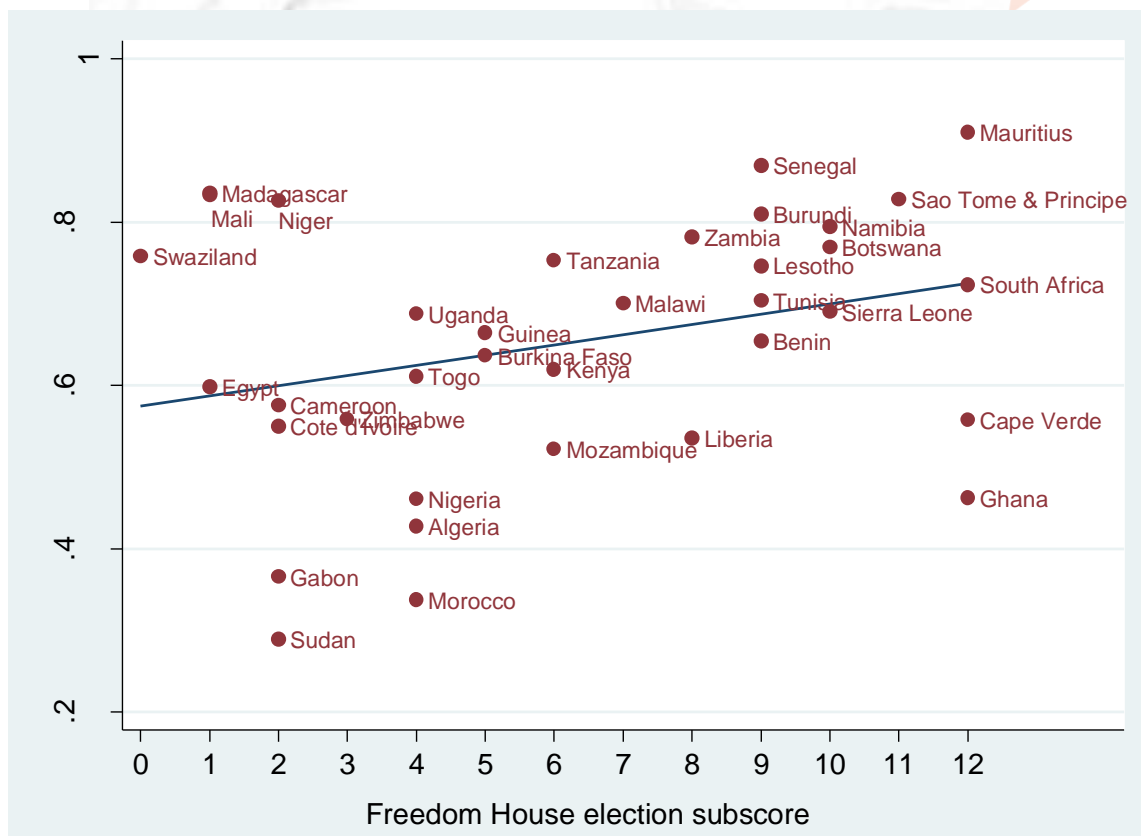
A comparison of Afrobarometer survey findings regarding election quality with ratings by Freedom House and the Electoral Integrity Project's Perceptions of Election Integrity (PEI) survey suggests that citizens generally reach similar conclusions about election quality as experts with access to election observation reports, feedback from political leaders, and other specialized information.

In addition to its broad ratings of civil and political freedoms, Freedom House provides a subscore for election quality (Freedom House, 2009-2016).³ These Freedom House scores and

³ The Freedom House election scores used here correspond to the elections that the Afrobarometer questionnaire asked about. For instance, Kenyans were asked about the 2013 election in the Afrobarometer survey, so the 2013 Freedom House election score is used.

citizens' perceptions of election quality are moderately correlated (at 0.30, $p < 0.076$) (Figure 13). If we remove from the analysis four countries where citizens rate election quality much higher than the experts (Madagascar, Mali, Niger, and Swaziland, shown in the upper-left corner of the figure), the correlation is much stronger (at 0.59, $p < 0.000$). In two countries (Ghana and Cape Verde, in the lower-right corner of the figure), citizens give significantly more critical assessments than experts.

Figure 13: Election quality: Citizen vs. Freedom House assessments | 36 countries | 2014/2015



Correlation coefficient: 0.30, two-tailed Pearson's correlation at $p < 0.076$
 Source: Afrobarometer and Freedom House

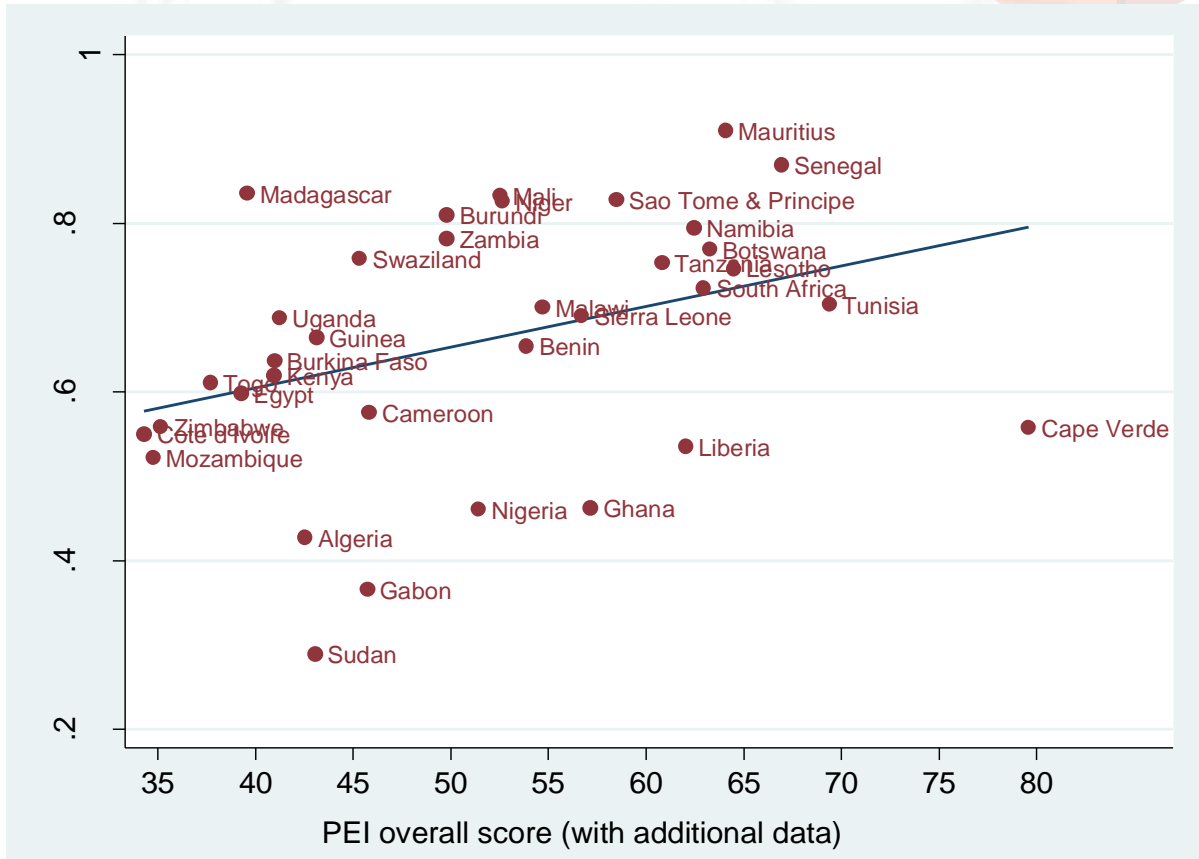
Another source of expert opinion on election quality is the Perceptions of Election Integrity (PEI) Index (Norris, Martínez i Coma, Nai, & Groemping, 2016), which has surveyed country experts about the quality of elections since 2012 across 49 subject areas (e.g. voter registration and roll, boundary demarcation, media freedom). PEI calculates an overall score for each election using the expert survey results. The imputed overall score (included in the PEI data set) used in this analysis corrects for any missing data from the expert survey. For the 18 countries for which both PEI and Afrobarometer data are available, citizen and expert opinions on election quality are correlated (at 0.34, $p < 0.171$).

While PEI Index scores were calculated only for elections from 2012 to 2015, with additional coding in PEI format⁴ we can calculate a PEI Index score for all elections covered in the Afrobarometer Round 6 questionnaire. Adding data in the PEI format for 17 countries not covered in the PEI data yields a similar correlation (at 0.36, $p < 0.031$) (Figure 14).

⁴ As part of his dissertation project, Peter Penar has coded elections not included in the PEI Index since 2000 using the same PEI survey. These data were merged with the existing PEI data to produce Figure 14.

Thus, comparisons with both Freedom House and PEI assessments suggest that citizens are largely drawing the same conclusions about election quality as experts with extensive access to additional information about the quality of elections.

Figure 14: Election quality: Citizens vs. Perceptions of Election Integrity Index (imputed) and additional data | 35 countries* | 2014/2015



Correlation coefficient: 0.36, two-tailed Pearson's correlation at $p < 0.031$
 Sources: Afrobarometer, PEI 4.0, Penar original PEI form at coding. (* No data are available for Morocco.)

Components of election quality

A free and fair election presupposes a level playing field for candidates and a safe environment for voters to express their preferences. Elections are full cycles that include components before Election Day (voter registration, maintenance of the voter roll), on Election Day (voting), and after Election Day (vote count, results announcement). Afrobarometer's 2014/2015 survey asked citizens about their personal safety during campaigns and at the polls, the opposition's ability to campaign freely, whether media coverage of all candidates was fair or biased, the fairness of the vote count, and bribery of voters.

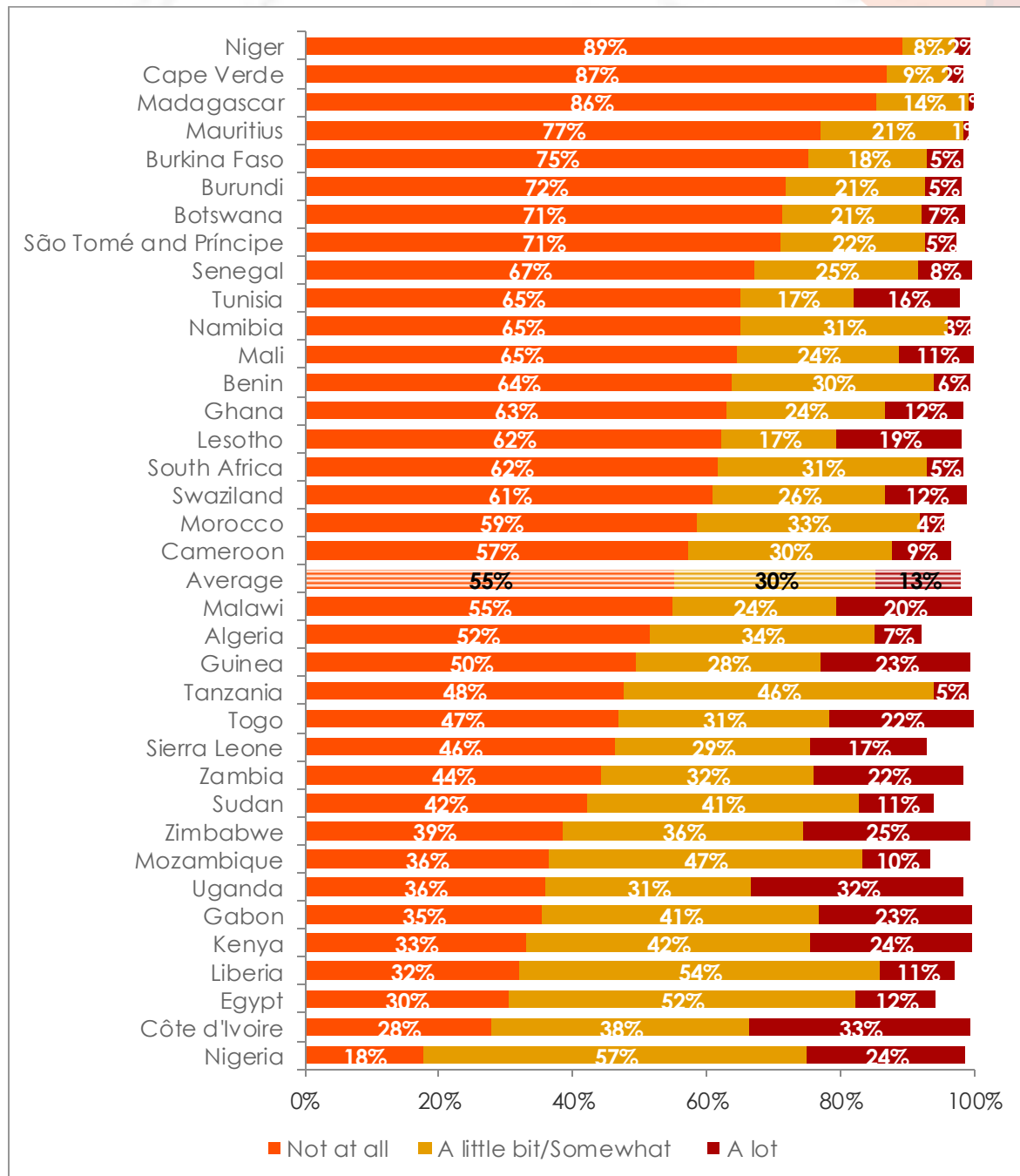
Fear during campaigns and at the polls

Ensuring voter safety during election campaigns and at the polls is an important part of protecting the freedom of citizens to express their political preferences. Government security forces can protect voters from ad hoc political violence, but they can also be used to repress political dissent and intimidate voters under the guise of ensuring public safety.

Across 36 countries, a majority (55%) of respondents say they do not fear becoming a victim of intimidation or violence during campaigns, whereas 30% say they fear this possibility "a little bit" or "somewhat" and 13% say they fear violence "a lot" (Figure 15). Fear is most

common in countries with a history of election-related violence and civil conflict, such as Côte d'Ivoire (where 33% of citizens express “a lot” of fear), Uganda (32%), Zimbabwe (25%), Kenya (24%), and Nigeria (24%). At the other extreme, almost nine in 10 citizens in Niger, Cape Verde, and Madagascar say they are “not at all” afraid during election campaigns.

Figure 15: Fear during election campaigns | 36 countries | 2014/2015



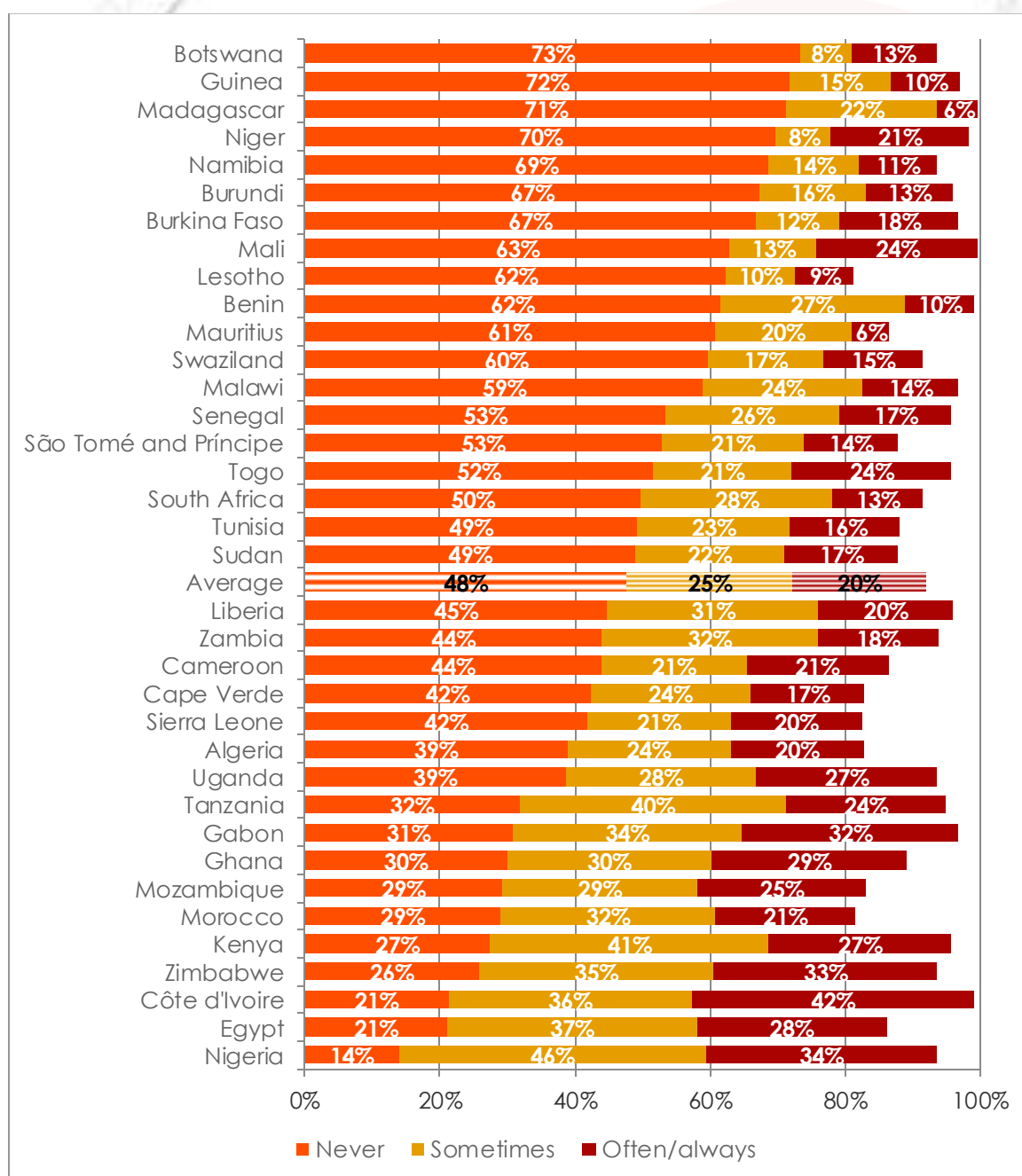
Respondents were asked: *During election campaigns in this country, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence?*

Similarly, about half (48%) of respondents say voters are “never” threatened with violence at the polls on Election Day (Figure 16). But substantial minorities say that violence threatens voters “sometimes” (25%), often (12%), or “always” (8%). At the aggregate level, there are only small differences between urban and rural dwellers and between men and women in their assessments of how often voters are threatened.

Citizens of Botswana, Guinea, and Madagascar are least likely to express concern about violence at the polls: More than 70% say it “never” occurs. Guineans, who have experienced election-related violence, appear to differentiate between violence associated with campaigns (which only 50% say they fear “not at all”) and the threat of violence on Election Day (which 72% say “never” occurs). This indicates that citizens’ concerns about violence can vary depending on the stage in the election cycle.

Taken together, survey findings suggest that fear is a very real part of the election process in a number of African countries, especially Nigeria, Côte d’Ivoire, Egypt, Gabon, Kenya, and Zimbabwe. This may call into question the legitimacy of the election process, since violence and intimidation can be used as manipulative tools to suppress campaign activities, voter turnout, and civil-society activities designed to ensure a free and fair election.

Figure 16: Threats of violence at the polls | 36 countries | 2014/2015



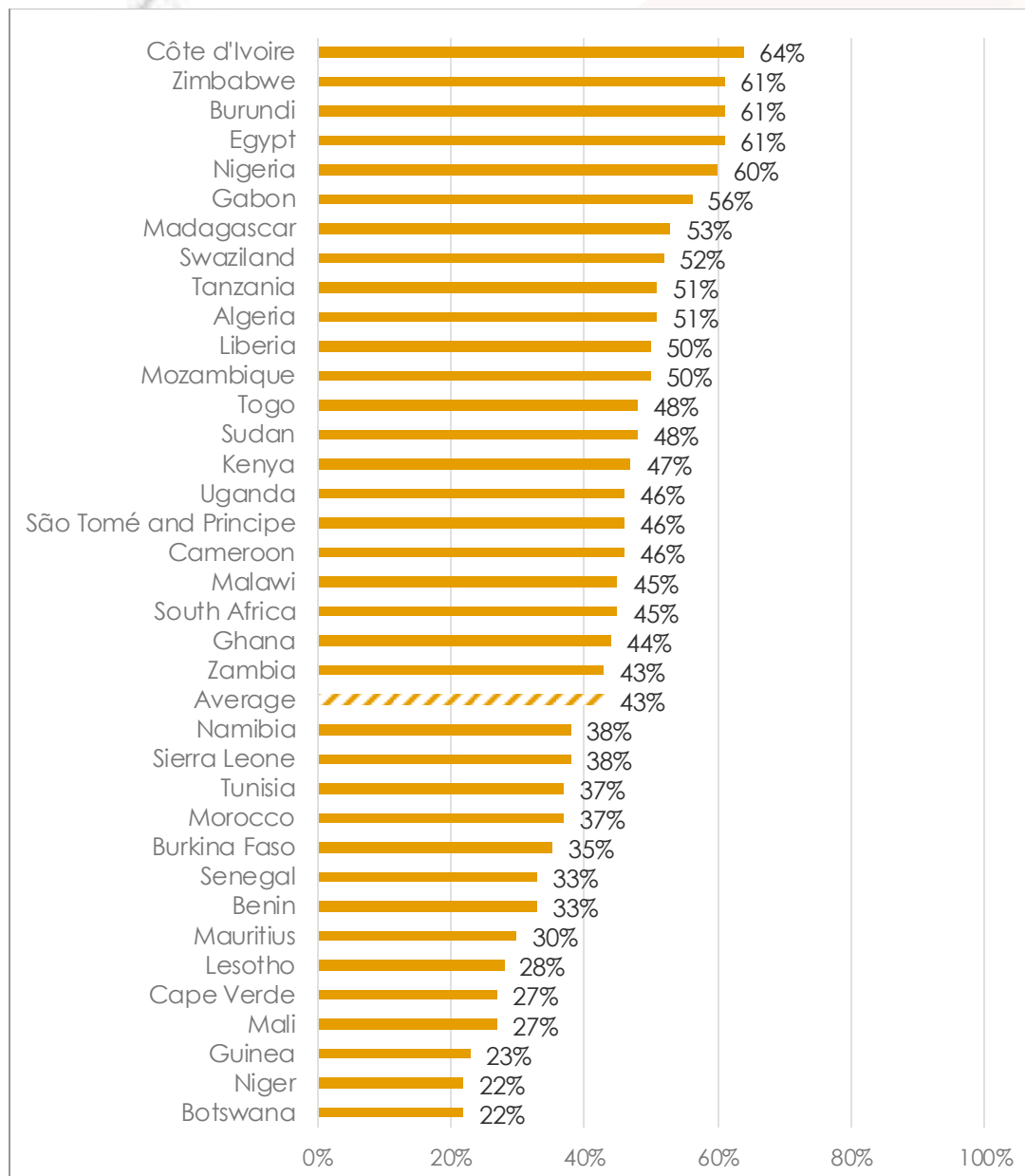
Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often do the following things occur in this country's elections: Voters are threatened with violence at the polls?*

Opposition's ability to contest

While multiparty elections cannot happen without opposition candidates, countries vary greatly in how much freedom the opposition is given to operate. Many election-related grievances involve treatment of opposition parties that is perceived as unfair, sometimes leading to protests and election boycotts.

Survey findings suggest that many African countries do not fully honour the spirit of multiparty competition. On average, fully 43% of respondents say that opposition candidates are "sometimes," "often," or "always" prevented from running for office. Majorities in 12 countries say that opposition candidates are at least sometimes prevented from contesting elections. This view is most common in Côte d'Ivoire (64%), Zimbabwe (61%), Burundi (61%), Egypt (61%), Nigeria (60%), and Gabon (56%) (Figure 17). Perceptions of opposition exclusion are lowest in Botswana (22%), Niger (22%), and Guinea (23%).

Figure 17: Opposition candidates prevented from running | 36 countries | 2014/2015



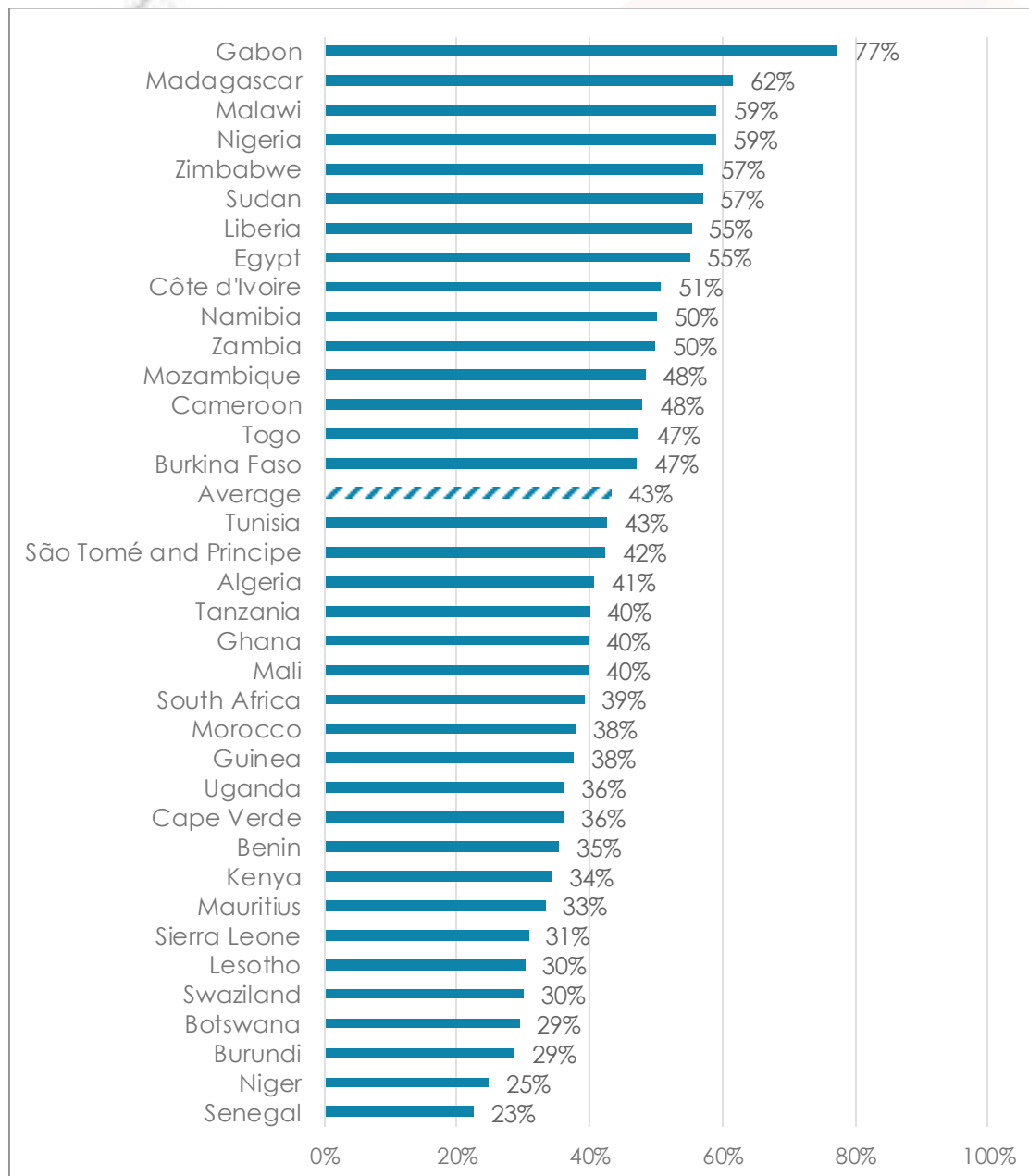
Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often do the following things occur in this country's elections: Opposition candidates are prevented from running for office? (% who say "sometimes," "often," or "always")*

Media coverage during elections

Although election observation reports consistently mention bias in media coverage, particularly in countries with a dominant state-controlled media outlet, efforts by civil society and international organisations to develop media regulatory frameworks and engage in media monitoring during elections can contribute to more balanced coverage. In addition, some countries have seen the expansion of private media outlets, which can provide a wider range of coverage.

Nonetheless, more than four in 10 Africans (43%) say the media “never” or only “sometimes” provides fair coverage of all candidates (Figure 18). Gabonese are the most critical of media bias (77%), followed by citizens of Madagascar (62%), Malawi (59%), Nigeria (59%), Zimbabwe (57%), and Sudan (57%). Most citizens in Senegal, Niger, Burundi (in late 2014), and Botswana say the media does a good job of providing fair coverage of all candidates.

Figure 18: Perceptions of unfair media coverage | 36 countries | 2014/3015



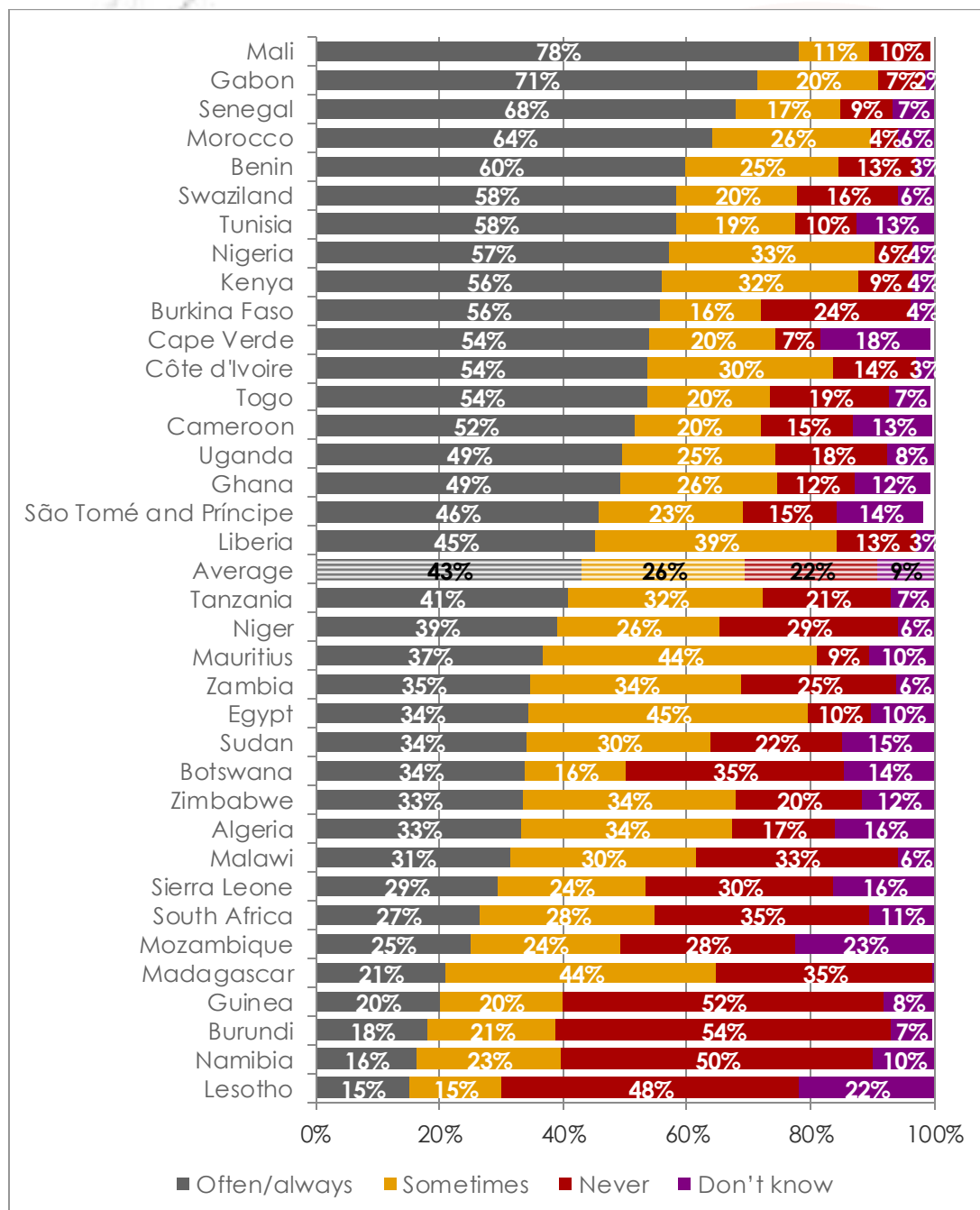
Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often do the following things occur in this country's elections: The media provides fair coverage of all candidates? (% who say "never" or "sometimes")*

Bribery of voters

The exchange of cash or “gifts” for votes is generally illegal and therefore difficult to observe directly. Although available evidence questions the effectiveness of vote-buying (Bratton, 2008), survey findings suggest that it persists as a common campaign strategy.

Almost seven in 10 Africans (69%) say that voters are bribed at least “sometimes”; 43% say this happens “often” or “always” (Figure 19). Bribery of voters is seen as pervasive in Mali (78% often/always), Gabon (71%), and Senegal (68%). In contrast, fewer than one in five citizens of Lesotho (15%), Namibia (16%), and Burundi (18%) believe that voters are routinely bribed. Urbanites are more likely than rural residents to say that voters are often or always bribed (48% vs. 40%), while men and women are about equally likely to hold this view.

Figure 19: How often voters are bribed during elections | 36 countries | 2014/2015



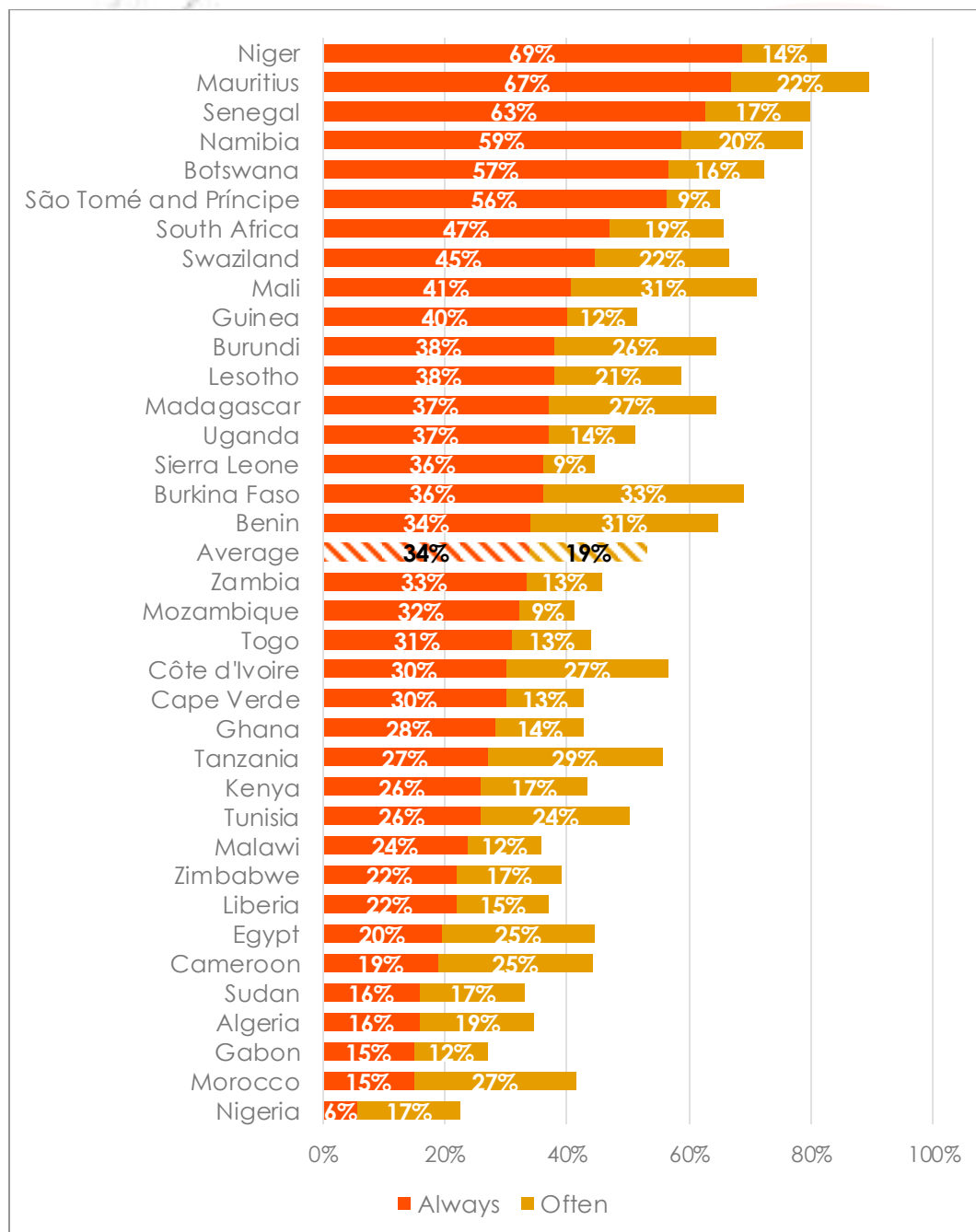
Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how often do the following things occur in this country's elections: Voters are bribed?

Fairness of the vote count

The vote count is arguably one of the most important parts of the election cycle. Counting votes requires high levels of logistical competence as well as transparency to overcome public skepticism about the intentions of the government and electoral commission to conduct the count fairly. Low levels of public confidence in the vote count put a country at risk of post-election protest and violence in response to perceived voter fraud and manipulation.

Across 36 countries, just one-third (34%) of citizens think that votes are “always” counted fairly (Figure 20). One in five (19%) say the vote count is “often” fair, while a plurality say the vote count is “never” (13%) or only “sometimes” (25%) fair.

Figure 20: Fairness of the vote count | 36 countries | 2014/2015

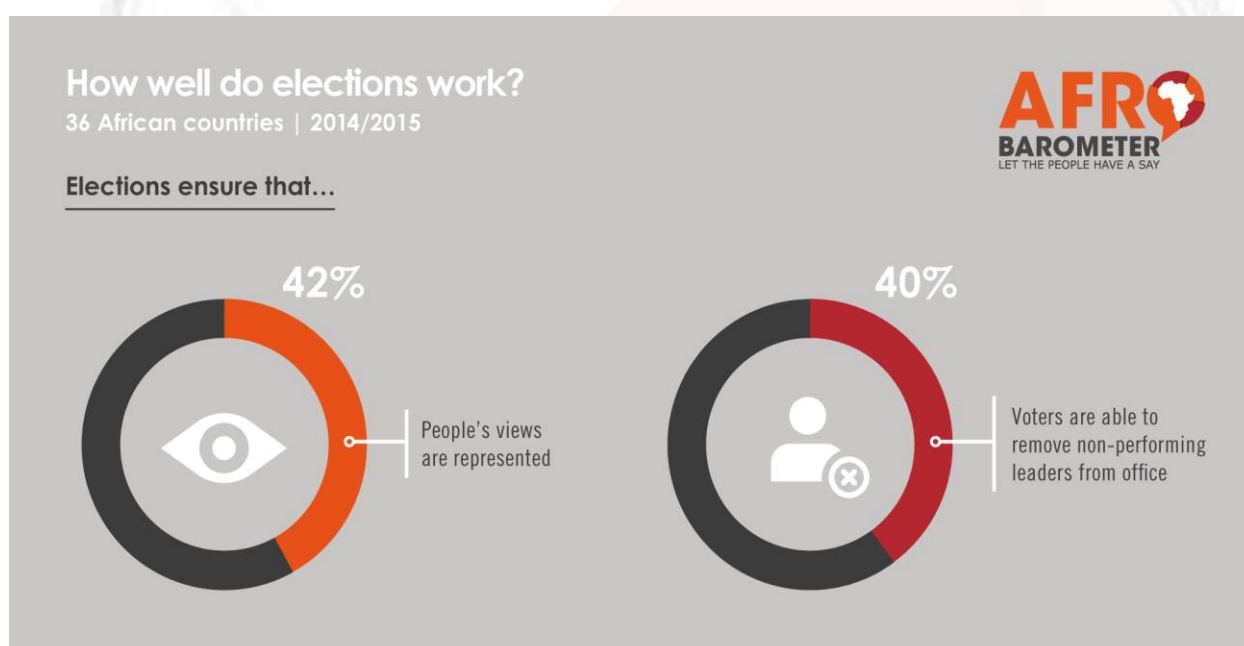


Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often do the following things occur in this country's elections: Votes are counted fairly?*

Large majorities have faith in the vote count in Niger (where 69% say it is “always” fair), Mauritius (67%), and Senegal (63%), but in 30 out of 36 surveyed countries, fewer than half of all citizens fully trust the vote count. Citizens in Nigeria (6%), Morocco (15%), Gabon (15%), Algeria (16%), and Sudan (16%) are the most skeptical. (See Appendix Table A.2 for a detailed breakdown.) Unsurprisingly, countries with a history of election-related protests and violence express quite low levels of confidence in the vote count, including Kenya (26%), Zimbabwe (22%), and Nigeria (6%). Rural residents are more likely to believe that votes are counted fairly than urban dwellers (57% v. 49%).

Do elections deliver?

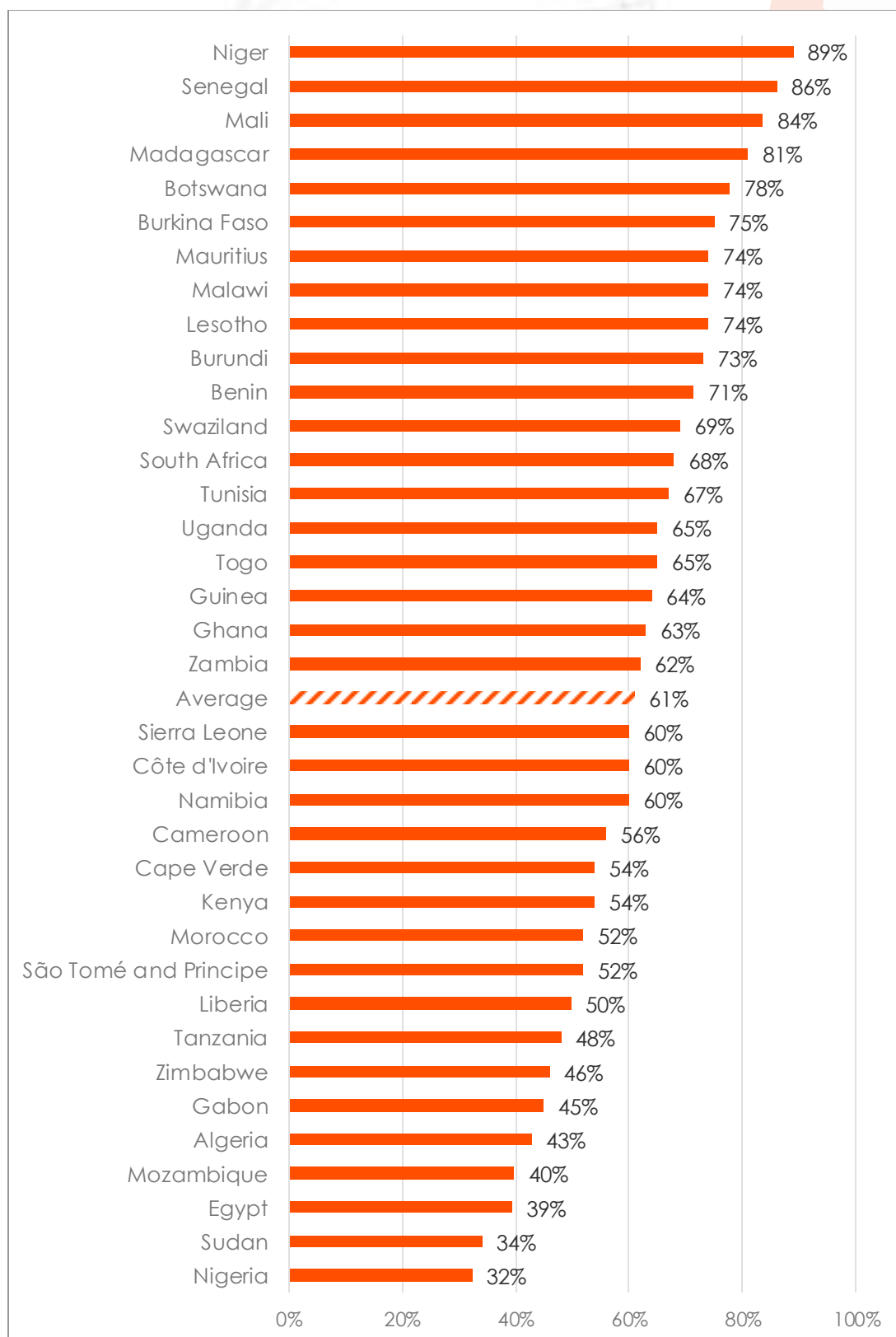
Beyond issues of election management and conduct, Afrobarometer asked three questions to explore whether people perceive that elections function effectively as a way to select representative and accountable leaders: 1) whether voters are offered a genuine choice at the polls, 2) how well their elections ensure that the people’s views are represented, and 3) how well their elections enable voters to remove underperforming leaders from office.



With regard to choice, six in 10 Africans (61%) affirm that elections “often” or “always” offer voters a genuine choice (Figure 21). More than eight in 10 citizens in Niger (89%), Senegal (86%), Mali (84%), and Madagascar (81%) say they are offered real choices. But less than four in 10 share this view in Nigeria (32%), Sudan (34%), and Egypt (39%). While the Sudan and Egypt results are not surprising, given government’s role in vetting candidates, the small proportion of Nigerians who feel they have a real choice in their country’s competitive elections may reflect a general skepticism or dismay about the electoral process.

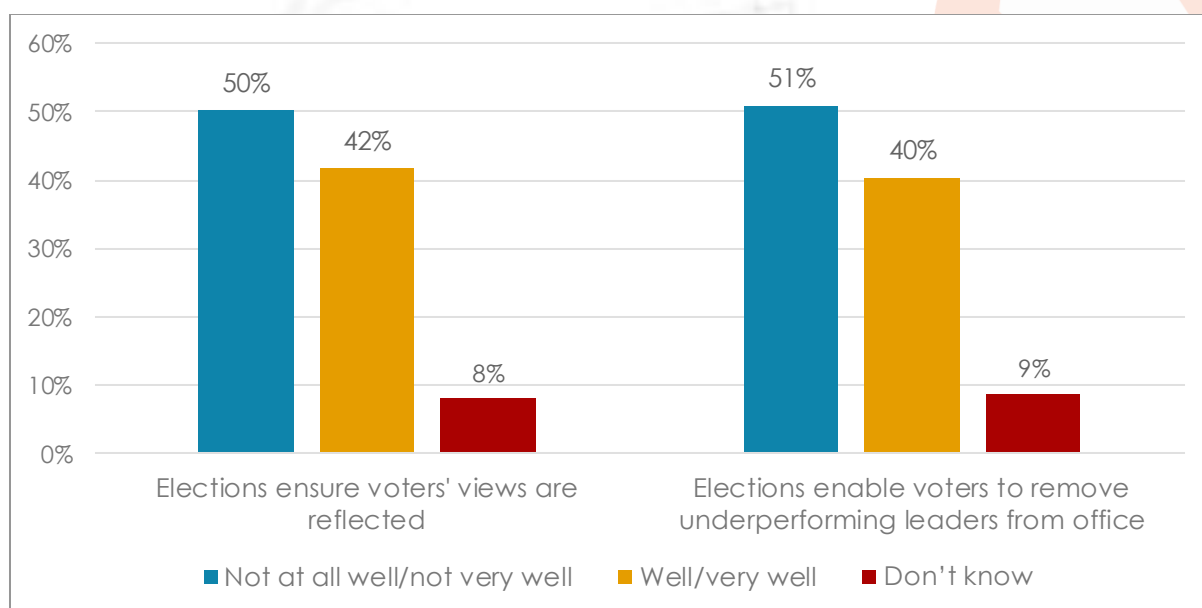
Even if most Africans believe they are offered real choices at the ballot box, many are dissatisfied with elections as a vehicle for ensuring that leaders are representative and accountable. Half (50%) of respondents say that their elections function “not very well” or “not at all well” to ensure that those elected reflect the views of the people (Figure 22). Similarly, 51% believe that their elections do not work well in enabling voters to remove leaders who don’t do what the people want.

Figure 21: Voters given genuine choice at the polls | 36 countries | 2014/2015



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often do the following things occur in this country's elections: Voters are offered a genuine choice in elections?*
 (% who say "always" or "often")

Figure 22: Performance of elections in Africa | 36 countries | 2014/2015

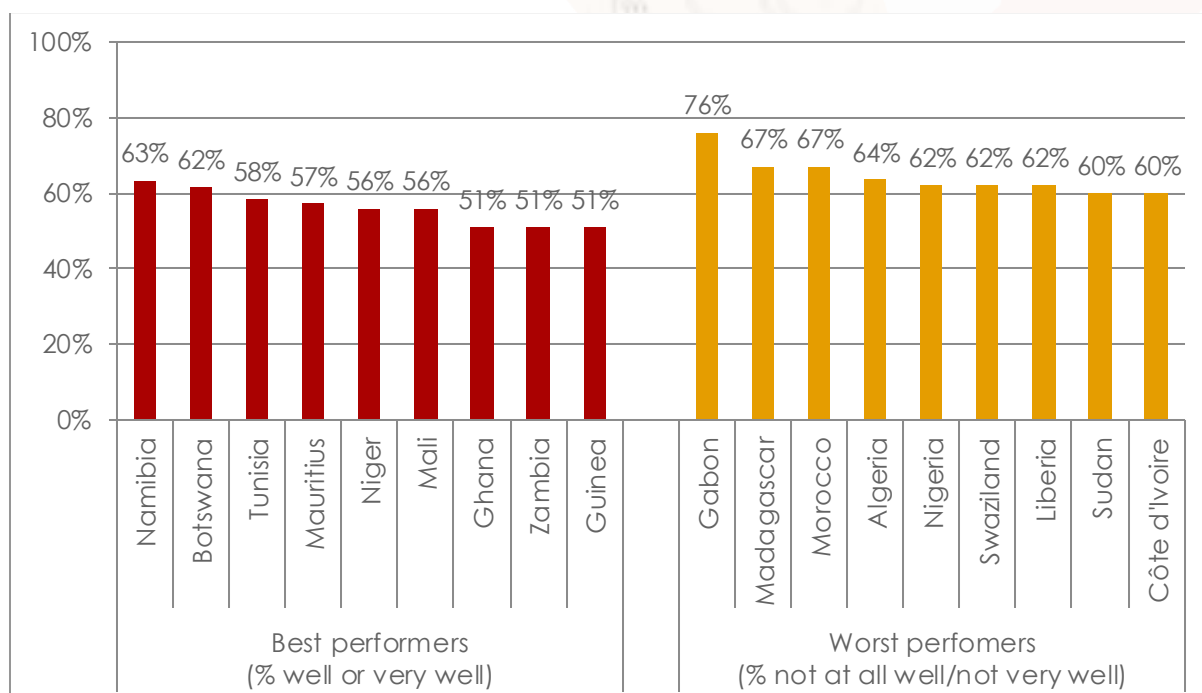


Respondents were asked: Think about how elections work in practice in this country. How well do elections:

1. Ensure that members of Parliament/National Assembly representatives reflect the views of voters?
2. Enable voters to remove from office leaders who do not do what the people want?

Namibians, Batswana, and Tunisians are most confident that elections can ensure that constituents' views are represented, while Gabonese, Malagasy, and Moroccans are most skeptical (Figure 23; see Appendix Table A.3 for details).

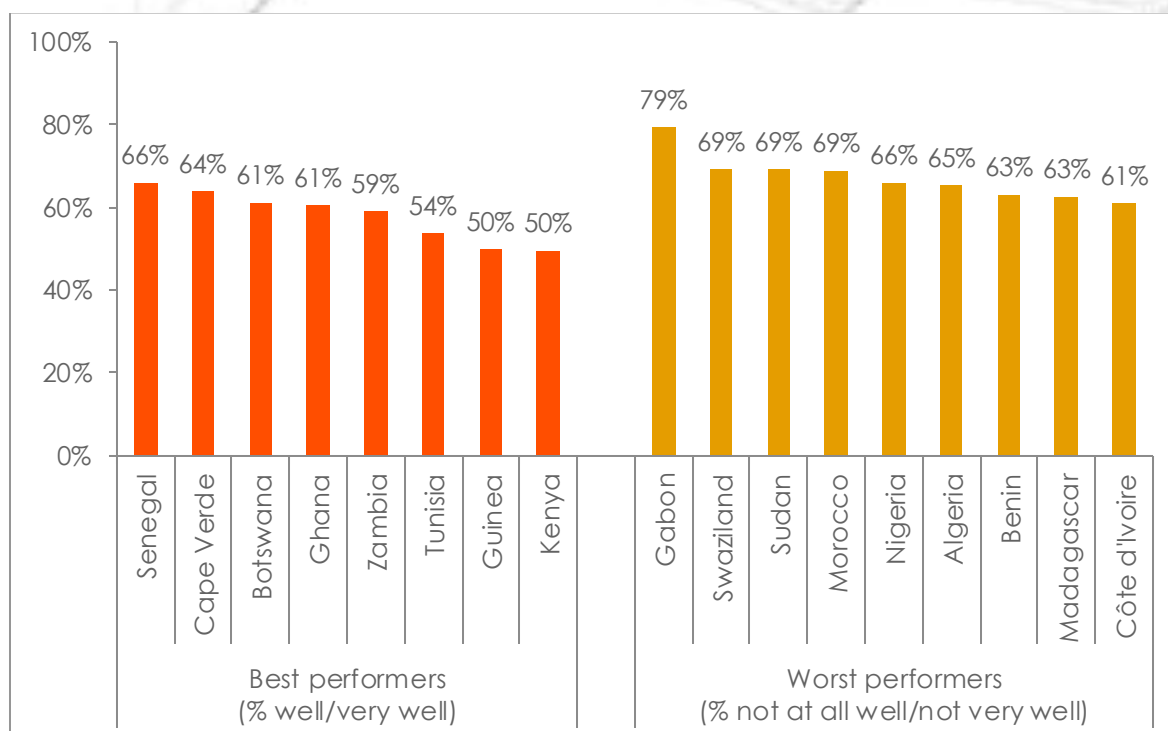
Figure 23: Representation function of elections | best- and worst-performing countries | 2014/2015



Respondents were asked: Think about how elections work in practice in this country. How well do elections ensure that members of Parliament/National Assembly representatives reflect the views of voters?

When it comes to holding elected officials accountable, Senegalese, Cape Verdeans, Batswana, and Ghanaians are most optimistic that elections enable voters to remove non-performing leaders (Figure 24; see Appendix Table A.4 for details). In contrast, Gabonese, Swazis, Sudanese, Moroccans, Nigerians, and Algerians are most skeptical that elections help ensure accountability. Four of these countries face significant barriers to the election accountability mechanism: Swaziland and Morocco are kingdoms with tight controls over who is able to compete in elections and limited power for those elected, and Sudan and Algeria have been de facto one-party states.

Figure 24: Accountability function of elections | best- and worst-performing countries | 2014/2015



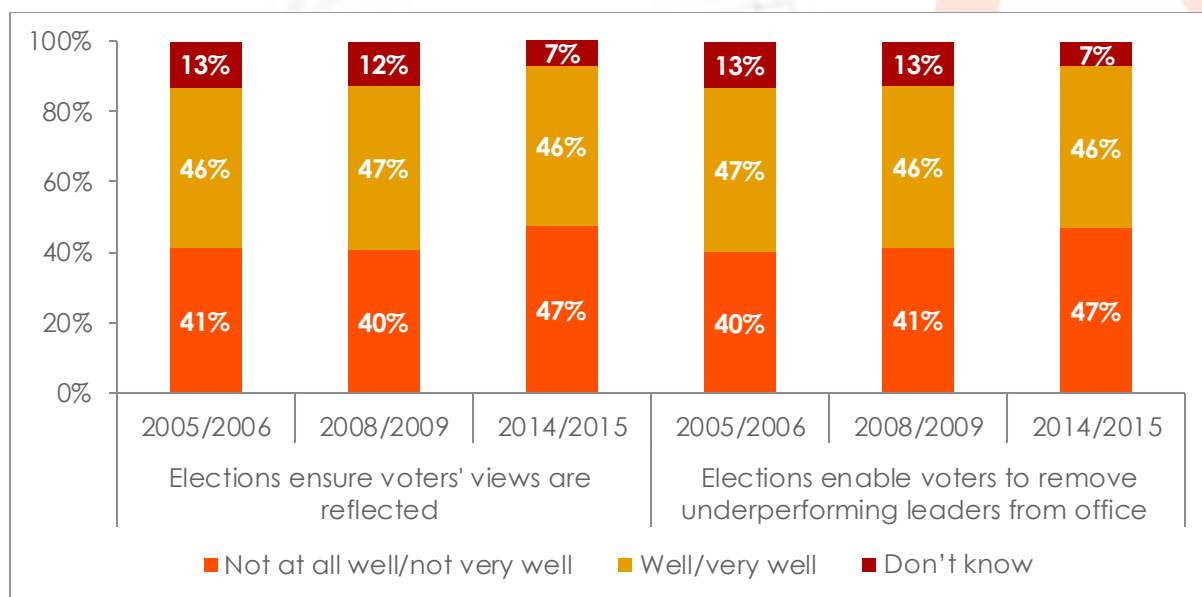
Respondents were asked: Think about how elections work in practice in this country: How well do elections enable voters to remove from office leaders who do not do what the people want?

Across 18 countries tracked since 2005/2006, the proportion of citizens who say elections ensure that people's views are represented has remained stable; about 6% of respondents have moved out of the "don't know" column to say that elections do not perform this representation function well (Figure 25). A similar trend holds for the question on accountability.

Looking at over-time changes at the country level (Figure 26), Zambia, which has experienced several transfers of power between different political parties, registers the greatest improvement among 18 countries tracked over the past decade – a 22-percentage-point increase in the proportion of citizens who say that elections function well to ensure representation. Zimbabwe, Senegal, Malawi, and Mali are among countries that have seen more modest improvements.

Several countries with higher or recently increased levels of political competition exhibit decreases in the proportion of citizens who say that elections ensure representation: Ghana (a decrease of 19 percentage points), Mozambique (14 points), Benin (7 points), and South Africa (6 points). In some cases, this may reflect a public questioning of liberation-party hegemony (e.g. Mozambique, South Africa) and voters' growing expectations of what true representation should look like.

Figure 25: Changes in performance of elections | 18 countries | 2005-2015

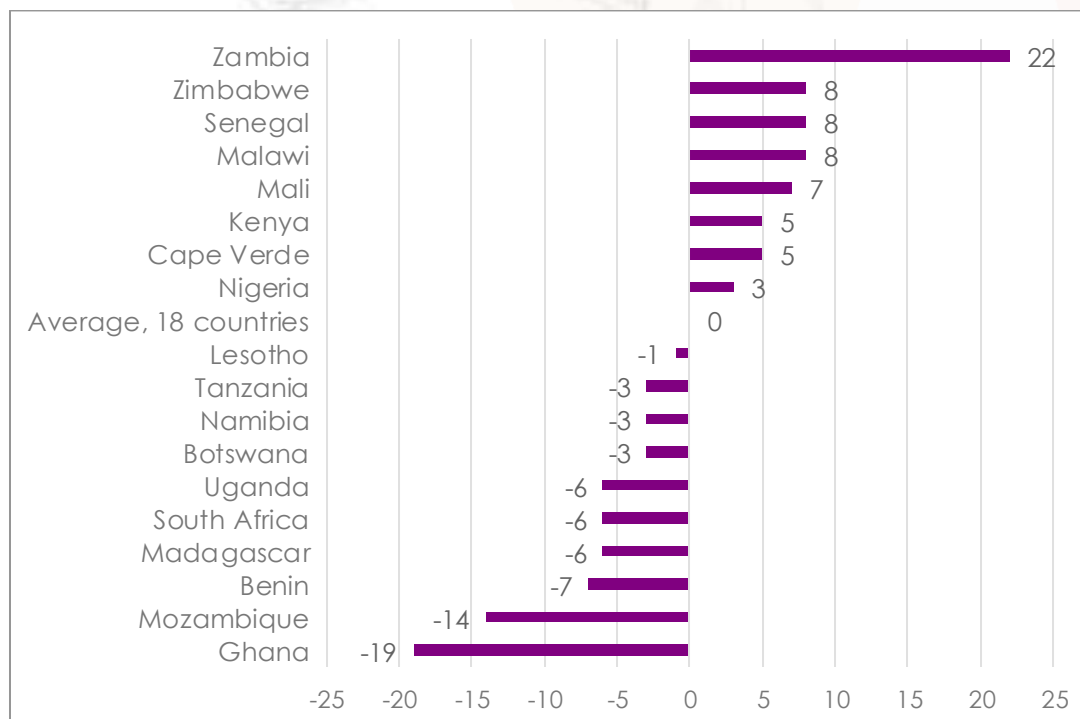


Respondents were asked: Think about how elections work in practice in this country. How well do elections:

1. Ensure that members of Parliament/National Assembly representatives reflect the views of voters?
2. Enable voters to remove from office leaders who do not do what the people want?

(Note: This question was not included in the 2011/2013 survey round.)

Figure 26: Changes in proportions who say elections perform 'well' or 'very well' in ensuring representation | 18 countries | 2005-2015

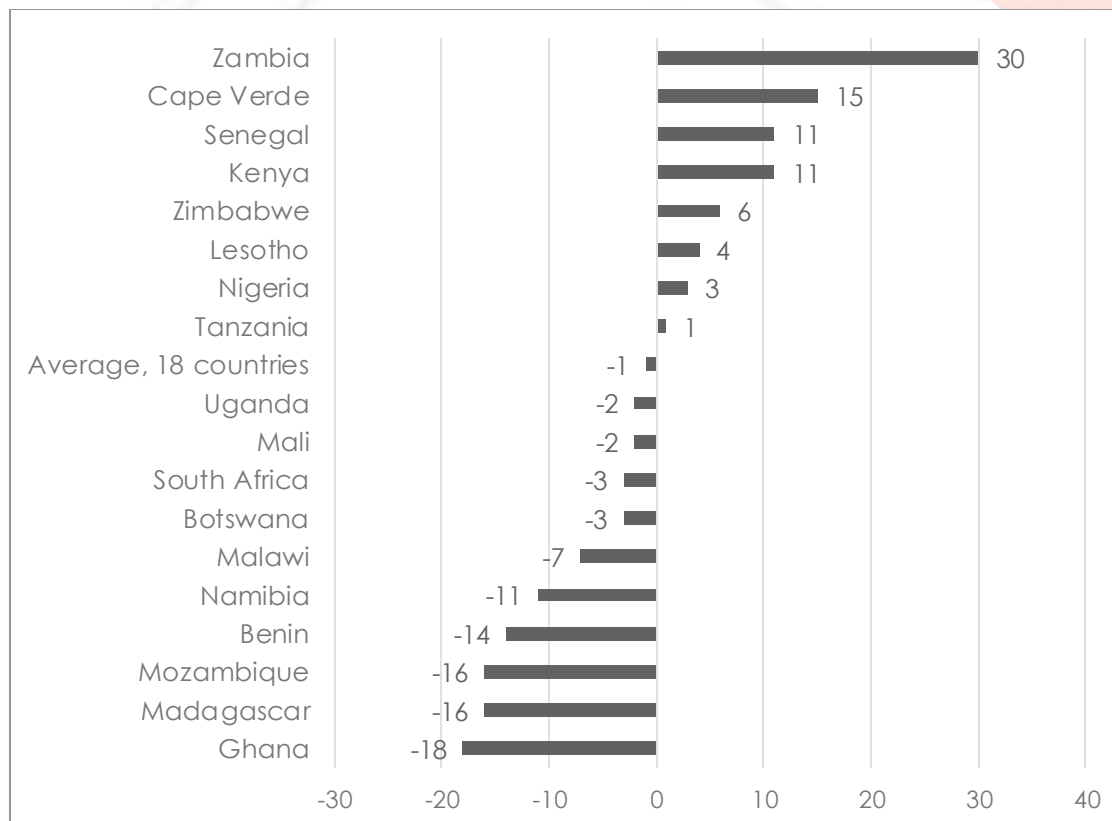


Respondents were asked: Think about how elections work in practice in this country. How well do elections ensure that members of Parliament/National Assembly representatives reflect the views of voters?

(Figure shows the difference, in percentage points, between surveys in 2005/2006 and 2014/2015 in the proportion of respondents who say that elections perform "well" or "very well" in ensuring that elected officials represent the views of citizens. Positive numbers indicate increasingly positive assessments.)

With respect to the accountability function of elections, citizens in Ghana, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Benin express increasing pessimism, whereas Zambia and Cape Verde experienced the greatest gains in public confidence (Figure 27).

Figure 27: Changes in proportions who say elections perform 'well' or 'very well' in enabling voters to remove non-performing leaders | 18 countries | 2005-2015



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? (Figure shows the difference, in percentage points, between surveys in 2005/2006 and 2014/2015 in the proportion of respondents who say that elections perform "well" or "very well" in enabling voters to remove underperforming leaders. Positive numbers reflect increasingly positive assessments.)*

Election quality and trust in electoral commission

As we have seen, two important concerns about African elections are the fairness of the vote count and the freedom that opposition parties have to contest elections. A vote count that lacks transparency is an easy place for leaders to manipulate election outcomes, and

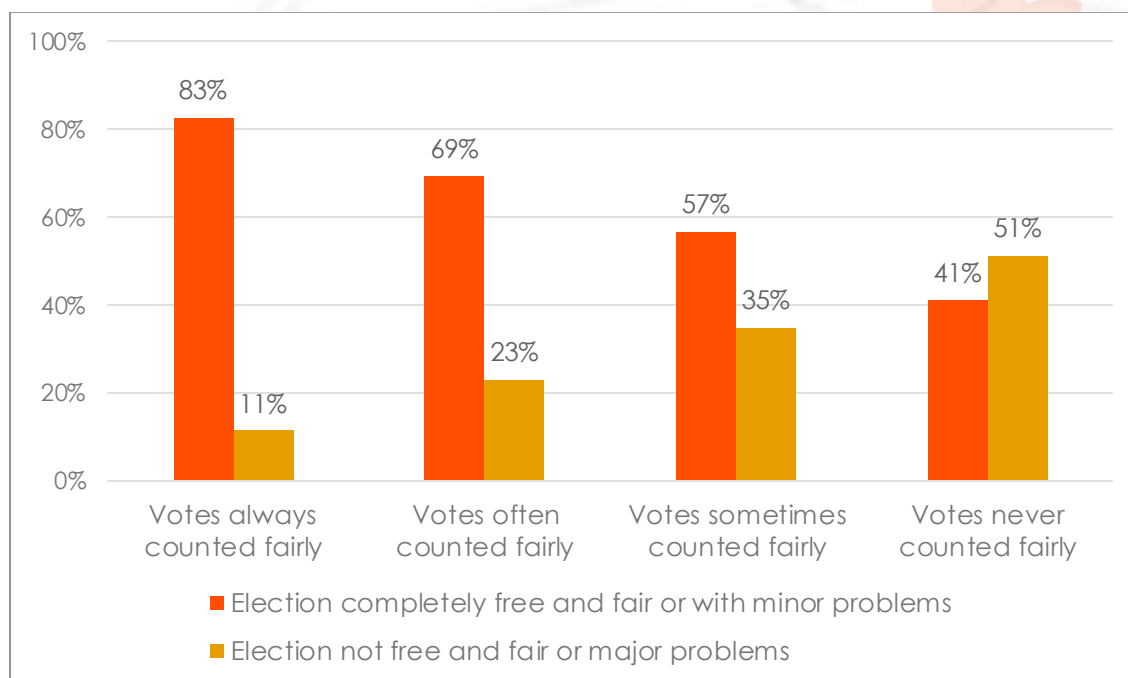
interference with the opposition is likely to slow even the strongest opposition parties from gaining momentum and expanding their reach.

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.

As might be expected, Afrobarometer results indicate that public perceptions of how fairly votes are counted and the opposition is treated affect citizens' overall

assessments of election quality as well as their trust in the electoral commission. Citizens who believe that votes are counted fairly are more likely to believe that elections are "completely free and fair" or "free and fair, but with minor problems" (Figure 28). The same is true for the relationship between opposition suppression and election quality (Figure 29).

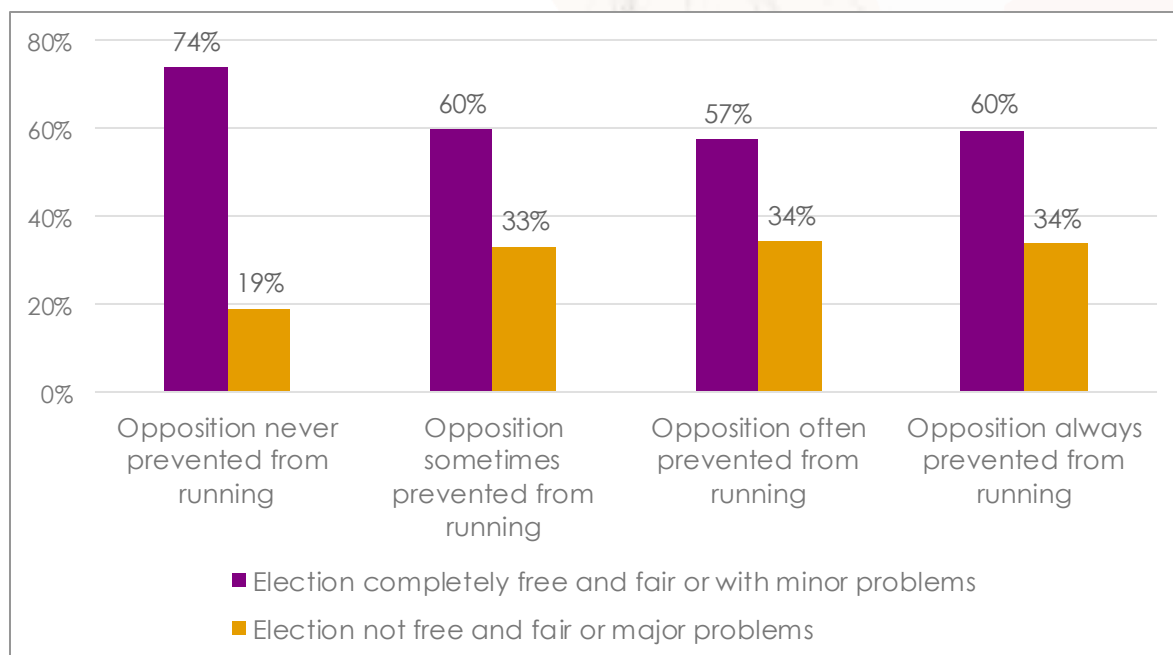
Figure 28: Votes counted fairly and overall election quality | 36 countries
| 2014/2015



Respondents were asked:

1. On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in [20xx]?
2. In your opinion, how often do the following things occur in this country's elections: Votes are counted fairly?

Figure 29: Opposition party suppression and overall election quality | 36 countries
| 2014/2015

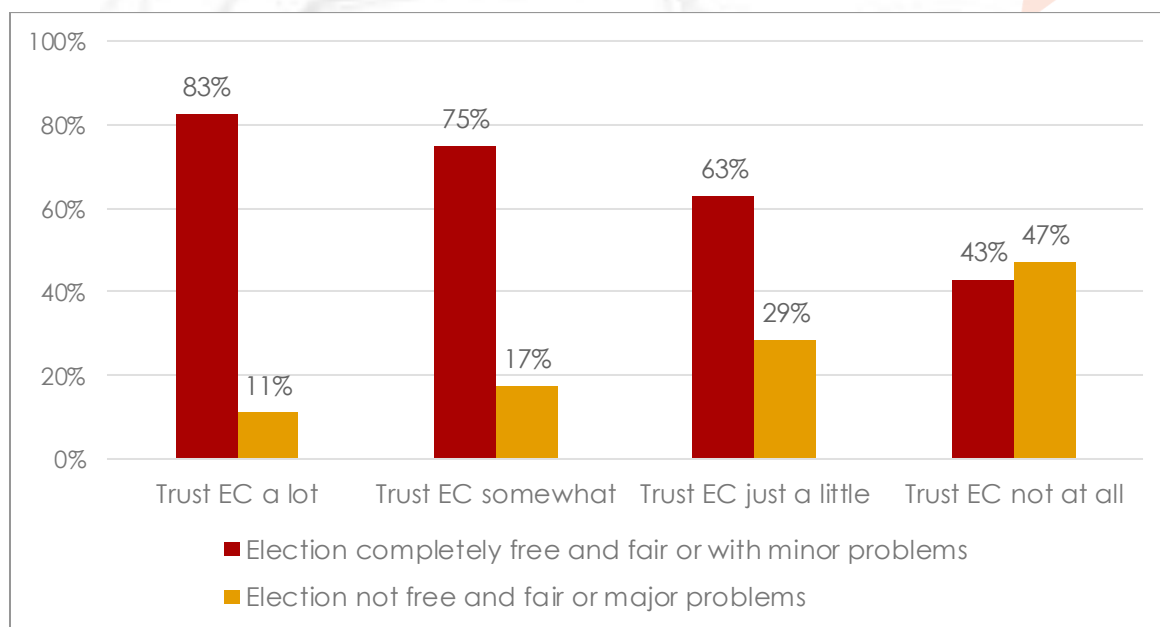


Respondents were asked:

1. On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in [20xx]?
2. In your opinion, how often do the following things occur in this country's elections: Opposition candidates are prevented from running for office?

Since electoral commissions are responsible for managing elections, one would expect that citizens' assessments of election quality influence their trust in the commission. Survey findings confirm that citizens who view elections as free and fair are more likely to have higher levels of trust in their electoral commissions (Figure 30). Similarly, respondents who hold favourable views of the fairness of the vote count and the treatment of the opposition are also more likely to express trust in the electoral commission.

Figure 30: Overall election quality and trust in electoral commissions | 35 countries* | 2014/2015



Respondents were asked:

1. On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in [20xx]?
2. How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: National Electoral Commission? (* Question was not asked in Morocco.)

Conclusion

The past decade has seen significant investments by civil society, international organisations, and some national electoral commissions in facilitating dialogue and reforms in election management in Africa. Despite these efforts, citizens continue to hold mixed views of the quality of elections and of how well they ultimately perform their functions of ensuring that voters' views are represented and officeholders are accountable. By and large, citizens' views on the state of election quality align with assessments by country experts.

Fears of voter intimidation, perceptions of unfair treatment of opposition parties, and concerns about the manipulation of election processes and results persist in many countries, and countries with upcoming elections (2016-2018) have some of the lowest levels of trust in their national electoral commissions. Such concerns have the potential to influence whether the people's will is expressed on Election Day, since fear or a perception of unfairness can cause voices to remain silent.

These findings suggest that additional reforms and greater transparency are needed to ensure free and fair elections. Increasing public trust in electoral commissions will depend on better management of components of the election process, from voter rolls to vote counts. Election assistance should be sustained, rather than focused only on early pre-election and Election Day activities, and should be accompanied by public sensitization efforts to ensure that steps forward are matched by gains in public perceptions and trust.


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Appendix

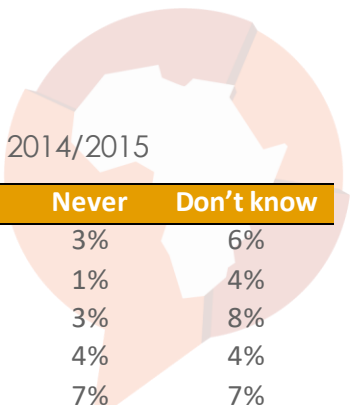
Table A.1: Surveyed countries, election years, and survey fieldwork dates

Country	Last national election preceding Round 6 survey	Months when Round 6 fieldwork was conducted	Previous survey rounds
Algeria	2014	May-June 2015	2013
Benin	2011	May-June 2014	2005, 2008, 2011
Botswana	2009	June-July 2014	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012
Burkina Faso	2012	April-May 2015	2008, 2012
Burundi	2010	September-October 2014	2012
Cameroon	2013	January-February 2015	2013
Cape Verde	2011	November-December 2014	2002, 2005, 2008, 2011
Côte d'Ivoire	2011	August-September 2014	2013
Egypt	2014	June-July 2015	2013
Gabon	2011	September-October 2015	N/A
Ghana	2012	May-June 2014	1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012
Guinea	2013	March-April 2015	2013
Kenya	2013	November-December 2014	2003, 2005, 2008, 2011
Lesotho	2012	May 2014	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012
Liberia	2011	May 2015	2008, 2012
Madagascar	2013	December 2015-January 2015	2005, 2008, 2013
Malawi	2009	March-April 2014	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012
Mali	2013	December 2014	2001, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2013
Mauritius	2010	June-July 2014	2012
Morocco	2011	November 2015	2013
Mozambique	2014	June-August 2015	2002, 2005, 2008, 2012
Namibia	2009	August-September 2014	1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012
Niger	2011	April 2015	2013
Nigeria	2011	December 2014-January 2015	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013
São Tomé and Príncipe	2014	July-August 2015	N/A
Senegal	2012	November-December 2014	2002, 2005, 2008, 2013



Country	Last national election preceding Round 6 survey	Months when Round 6 fieldwork was conducted	Previous survey rounds
Sierra Leone	2012	May-June 2015	2012
South Africa	2014	August-September 2015	2000, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2011
Sudan	2015	June 2015	2013
Swaziland	2013	April 2015	2013
Tanzania	2010	August-November 2014	2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012
Togo	2013	October 2014	2012
Tunisia	2014	April-May 2015	2013
Uganda	2011	May 2015	2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012
Zambia	2011	October 2014	1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013
Zimbabwe	2013	November 2014	1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012

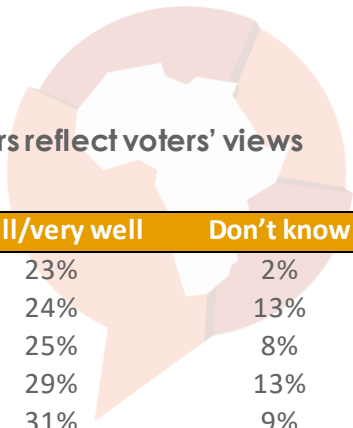
Table A.2: Perceived fairness of the vote count | 36 countries | 2014/2015



	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never	Don't know
Niger	69%	14%	9%	3%	6%
Mauritius	67%	22%	6%	1%	4%
Senegal	63%	17%	9%	3%	8%
Namibia	59%	20%	13%	4%	4%
Botswana	57%	16%	13%	7%	7%
São Tomé and Príncipe	56%	9%	16%	5%	13%
South Africa	47%	19%	21%	7%	7%
Swaziland	45%	22%	20%	5%	9%
Mali	41%	31%	17%	9%	3%
Guinea	40%	12%	21%	20%	7%
Burundi	38%	26%	23%	7%	6%
Lesotho	38%	21%	22%	7%	13%
Madagascar	37%	27%	22%	13%	1%
Uganda	37%	14%	26%	15%	8%
Sierra Leone	36%	9%	21%	14%	21%
Burkina Faso	36%	33%	14%	11%	7%
Benin	34%	31%	25%	7%	2%
Average	34%	19%	25%	13%	8%
Zambia	33%	13%	39%	9%	6%
Mozambique	32%	9%	32%	15%	11%
Togo	31%	13%	18%	27%	11%
Côte d'Ivoire	30%	27%	23%	17%	3%
Cape Verde	30%	13%	28%	11%	18%
Ghana	28%	14%	33%	15%	9%
Tanzania	27%	29%	33%	6%	5%
Kenya	26%	17%	35%	18%	4%
Tunisia	26%	24%	25%	12%	13%
Malawi	24%	12%	34%	23%	8%
Zimbabwe	22%	17%	33%	20%	7%
Liberia	22%	15%	49%	12%	2%
Egypt	20%	25%	35%	8%	12%
Cameroon	19%	25%	21%	21%	14%
Sudan	16%	17%	27%	25%	14%
Algeria	16%	19%	31%	23%	12%
Gabon	15%	12%	31%	41%	2%
Morocco	15%	27%	33%	10%	16%
Nigeria	6%	17%	52%	23%	3%

Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often do the following things occur in this country's elections: Votes are counted fairly?*

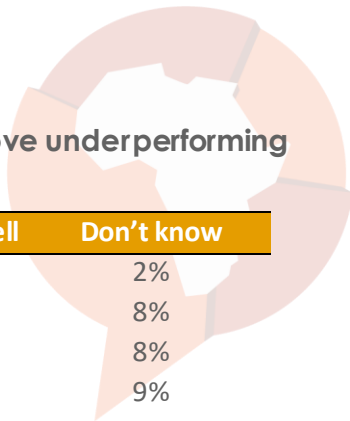
Table A.3: Performance of elections in ensuring elected leaders reflect voters' views
 | 36 countries | 2014/2015



	Not at all well/not very well	Well/very well	Don't know
Gabon	76%	23%	2%
Algeria	64%	24%	13%
Morocco	67%	25%	8%
Cameroon	57%	29%	13%
Côte d'Ivoire	60%	31%	9%
Togo	59%	32%	10%
Swaziland	62%	32%	6%
Sierra Leone	51%	32%	17%
Liberia	62%	33%	5%
Madagascar	67%	33%	0%
Sudan	60%	33%	7%
Nigeria	62%	34%	4%
São Tomé and Príncipe	45%	36%	19%
Egypt	49%	38%	13%
Tanzania	57%	38%	5%
Malawi	58%	38%	3%
Zimbabwe	56%	39%	5%
Burkina Faso	54%	40%	6%
Lesotho	41%	41%	18%
Mozambique	42%	42%	17%
Average	50%	42%	8%
Benin	53%	43%	4%
South Africa	50%	44%	6%
Burundi	51%	44%	5%
Cape Verde	39%	45%	15%
Kenya	47%	47%	6%
Senegal	46%	48%	6%
Uganda	44%	49%	7%
Guinea	42%	51%	7%
Zambia	38%	51%	11%
Ghana	41%	51%	7%
Niger	34%	56%	10%
Mali	43%	56%	1%
Mauritius	34%	57%	8%
Tunisia	34%	58%	8%
Botswana	31%	62%	7%
Namibia	34%	63%	3%

Respondents were asked: *Think about how elections work in practice in this country. How well do elections ensure that members of Parliament/Nation Assembly representatives reflect the views of voters?*

Table A.4: Performance of elections in enabling voters to remove underperforming leaders from office | 36 countries | 2014/2015



	Not at all well/not very well	Well/very well	Don't know
Gabon	79%	19%	2%
Swaziland	69%	23%	8%
Sudan	69%	23%	8%
Morocco	69%	22%	9%
Nigeria	66%	29%	5%
Algeria	65%	20%	15%
Benin	63%	32%	4%
Madagascar	63%	37%	0%
Côte d'Ivoire	61%	30%	9%
Burkina Faso	60%	32%	9%
Togo	59%	32%	9%
Mali	57%	42%	0%
South Africa	57%	36%	7%
Tanzania	56%	39%	5%
Cameroon	56%	28%	15%
Zimbabwe	56%	38%	6%
Egypt	54%	30%	15%
Average	51%	40%	9%
São Tomé and Príncipe	50%	31%	18%
Mozambique	50%	32%	18%
Namibia	50%	47%	3%
Malawi	48%	49%	3%
Burundi	47%	48%	5%
Uganda	47%	45%	8%
Liberia	47%	47%	6%
Kenya	46%	50%	4%
Niger	46%	43%	11%
Mauritius	44%	44%	11%
Guinea	42%	50%	8%
Sierra Leone	38%	44%	18%
Tunisia	36%	54%	11%
Lesotho	35%	46%	18%
Ghana	33%	61%	6%
Botswana	31%	61%	8%
Zambia	31%	59%	10%
Senegal	28%	66%	6%
Cape Verde	24%	64%	12%

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?*

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LET THE PEOPLE HAVE A SAY



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Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in 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 the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

Core support for Afrobarometer Rounds 5 and 6 has been provided by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank.

Donations help the Afrobarometer Project give voice to African citizens. Please consider making a contribution (at www.afrobarometer.org) or contact Aba Kittoe (akitoe@afrobarometer.org) to discuss institutional funding.

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