AFRO BAROMETER
LET THE PEOPLE HAVE A SAY

Do Africans still want democracy?

By Robert Mattes and Michael Bratton

Introduction

Judging by media headlines, democracy appears to be under stress everywhere from leaders like Vladimir Putin in Russia, Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey, and Yoweri Museveni in Uganda. Yet social scientists know there is often a mismatch between what can be gleaned from news reports or social media and real, underlying trends. To take just one example, media attention to wars in Syria and Iraq suggests rising conflict around the world. Yet compared to previous centuries and especially since the end of the Cold War, both international and civil conflicts are at record lows (Human Security Report Project, 2014). A similar contrast exists between media-fueled perceptions and actual trends in global poverty. The common wisdom suggests worsening living conditions on an overpopulated planet, whereas evidence-based indicators demonstrate that, between 1990 and 2010, the global rate of extreme poverty was cut in half (Economist, 2013).

Afrobarometer Round 6
New data from across Africa

Might the same type of discrepancies exist with regard to democracy? Especially in Africa, where many presidents cling to power (as in Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Uganda, and Zimbabwe), manipulate elections (as in Burundi, Gabon, and Zambia), or ignore institutions of public accountability (as in South Africa), one might reasonably conclude that democracy in Africa is only a façade erected to please a credulous audience in the rest of the world.

Yet this viewpoint would miss the fact that more than half of all Africans today live in functioning multi-party electoral democracies that are demonstrably freer than the military or one-party regimes that previously dominated the continent. At the same time, the post-1990 gains that African countries registered in terms of civil liberties and political rights peaked in 2006, at least according to expert judgments offered by Freedom House (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Trends in democracy in Africa, 1990-2015 | inverted mean Freedom House scores | 49 sub-Saharan countries
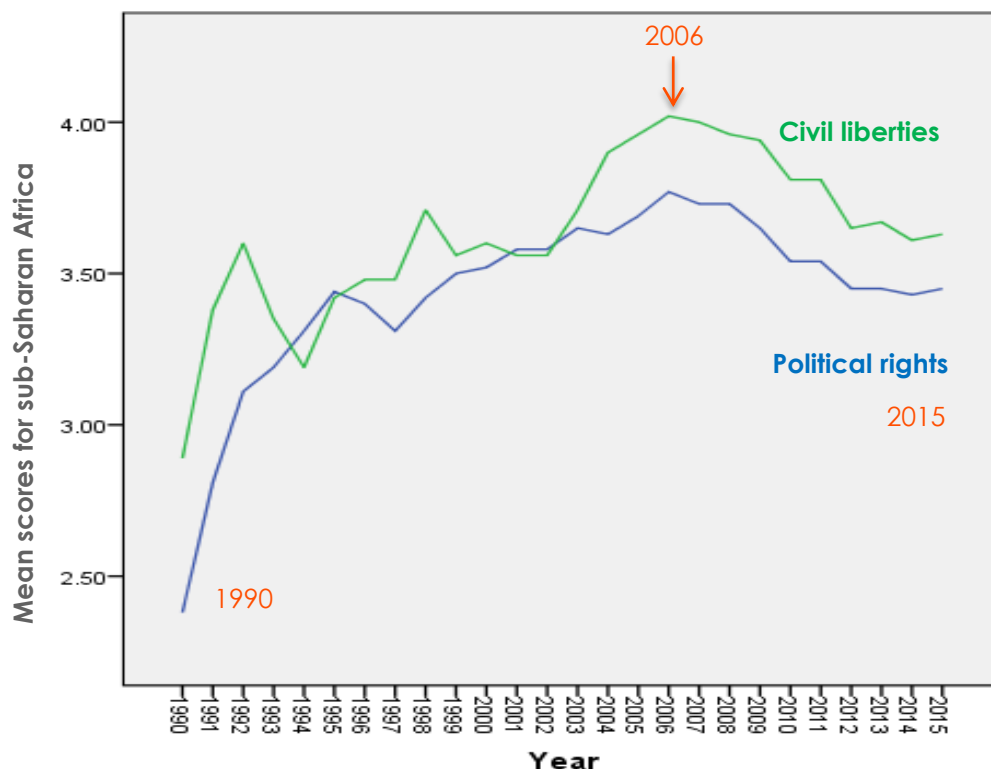
Trends of this sort around the world have led some analysts to conclude that Africa is currently part of a global democratic recession (Diamond, 2015). In other words, multiple things may be true. That is, democracy may seem to be declining when measured with a near-term yardstick. At the same time, democracy may be alive and well, since the continent is still far more democratic than it used to be when viewed from a longer-term perspective.

With these mixed possibilities in mind, this report emphasizes what ordinary citizens in 36 African countries think. Do they desire a democratic form of government, or what we call "demand for democracy"? By tracking 16 African countries that have had been surveyed over more than a decade, Afrobarometer has previously demonstrated a steady rise in popular demand for democracy (Bratton & Houessou, 2014). Yet large proportions of Africans remain skeptical that they are being "supplied" with democracy by their current political leaders. Under these conditions, do Africans continue to consider democracy to be the best available form of government? Or have global trends questioning the desirability of democracy begun to diffuse within Africa?

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, the economy, and related issues across 36 countries in Africa. Five rounds of surveys were implemented between 1999 and 2013, and results 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, which yield country-level results with a margin of sampling error of +/-2% (for a sample of 2,400) or +/-3% (for a sample of 1,200) at a 95% confidence level. Round 6 interviews with 53,935 citizens represent the views of more than three-fourths of the continent's population.
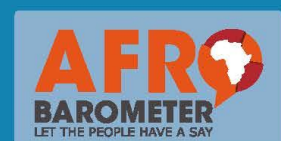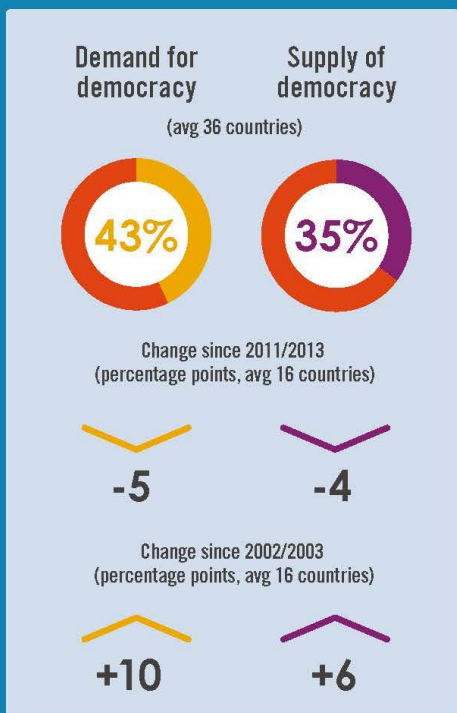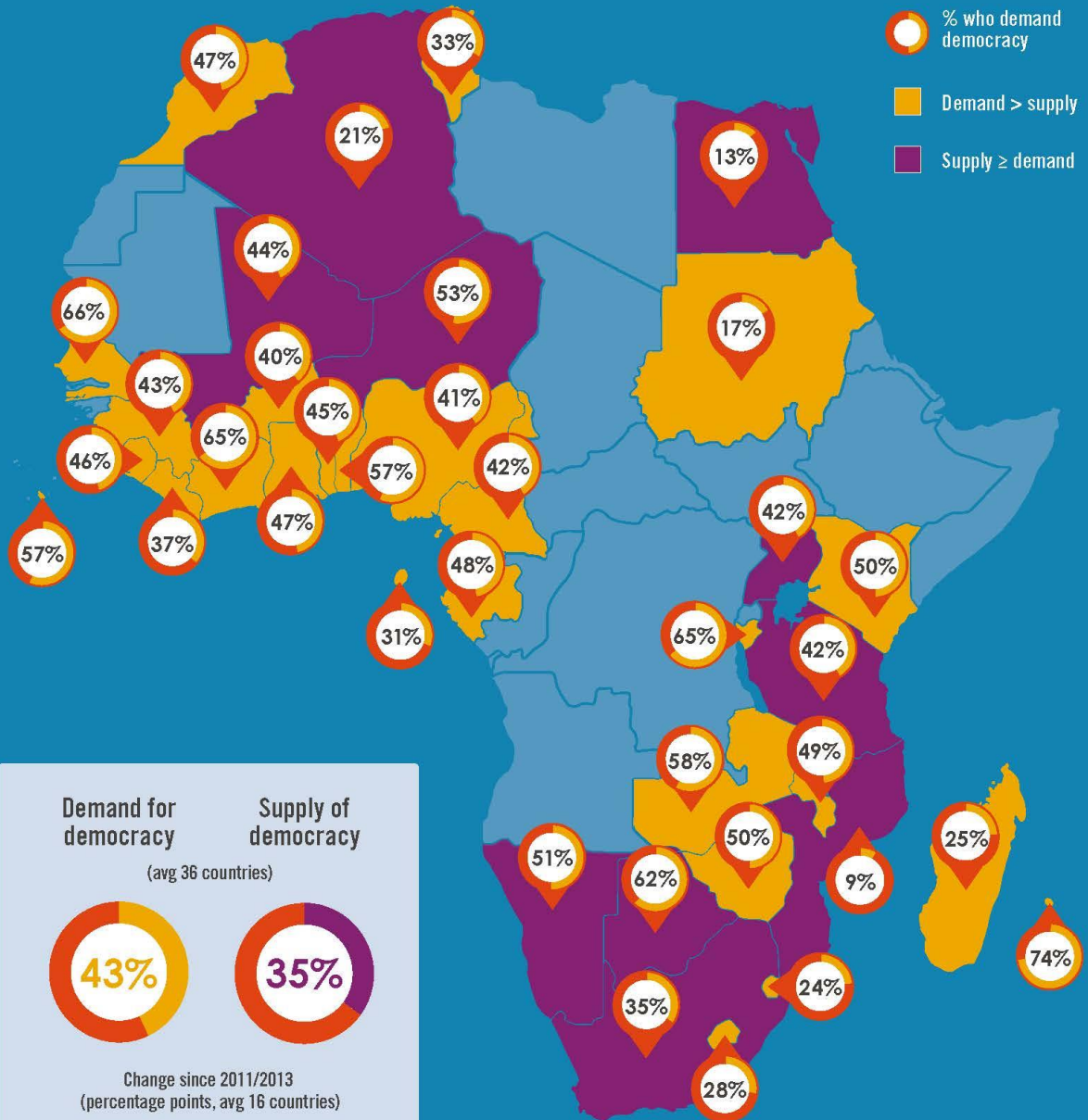
This policy paper draws mainly on Round 6 data, with over-time comparisons for 34 countries that were surveyed in both Round 5 and Round 6, as well as longer-period comparisons for 16 countries that have been tracked since Round 2 (2002/2003) (see the appendix for a list of countries and survey dates).
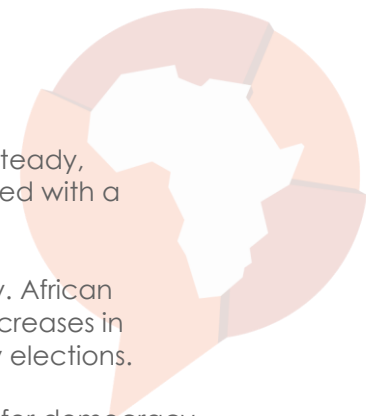
Key findings

- On average across the continent, Africans support democracy as a preferred type of political regime. Large majorities also reject alternative authoritarian regimes such as presidential dictatorship, military rule, and one-party government. Smaller proportions agree on *all four* of these aspects of democratic preference, an index we call "demand for democracy."

- Large cross-national differences exist in demand for democracy. For example, while three in four respondents in Mauritius are consistent, committed democrats, fewer than one in 10 Mozambicans merit the same description.

- Demographically, demand is highest amongst those who live in urban settings, have a university education, and work in middle-class occupations. There is also an important gender gap, with women significantly less likely to demand democracy than men.

- Across 34 countries included in both of Afrobarometer's two most recent rounds of surveys, popular demand for democracy increased in 10 countries, decreased in 14 countries, and remained essentially unchanged in 10 countries.

Democracy in Africa: Demand and supply
36 African countries | 2014/2015

% who demand democracy

Demand > supply

Supply ≥ demand

47% 33% 21% 44% 53% 66% 40% 43% 45% 41% 65% 46% 57% 42% 48% 37% 47% 31% 13% 17% 42% 50% 65% 42% 58% 49% 25% 50% 51% 62% 9% 35% 24% 28% 74%

Demand for democracy
Supply of democracy
(avg 36 countries)

43%

35%

Change since 2011/2013
(percentage points, avg 16 countries)

-5

-4

Change since 2002/2003
(percentage points, avg 16 countries)

+10

+6

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- As for longer-term trends in 16 countries surveyed since 2002, a steady, decade-long upward trend in demand for democracy has ended with a downward turn since 2012.

- The quality of elections helps to explain demand for democracy. African countries with high-quality elections are more likely to register increases in popular demand for democracy than countries with low-quality elections.

- In a positive sign for the future of democracy, popular demand for democracy still exceeds citizen perceptions of the available supply of democracy in most African countries (26 out of 36 in 2015).

Measuring attitudes to democracy in Africa

Since 2000, Afrobarometer has asked respondents the same series of core questions to gauge their preferences with regard to political regimes. To assess the level of popular support for democracy, we ask:

Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?

1. *Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.*
2. *In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.*
3. *For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind government we have.*

More than 53,000 interviews with individual citizens in 36 African countries in 2014/2015 reveal a fairly high level of public agreement on democracy as a preferred type of regime. Some two-thirds of all respondents (67%) say that democracy is always preferable (Figure 2). Just 11% believe that a non-democratic regime can be preferable in some instances. The balance say that "it doesn't matter" what kind of political regime their country has (12%) or that they simply "don't know" (10%).

An apparent continent-wide consensus in favour of democracy begins to look quite different once we examine cross-national scores. Popular support for democracy is expressed by more than eight in 10 respondents in the continent's oldest functioning democracies (Botswana, Mauritius, and Senegal). But similarly high levels of support are also evident in societies striving to implant democratic practice (such as Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire). Support for democracy was even extremely high in Burundi (86%) in a 2014 survey conducted before the incumbent president seized an illegal third term in office.
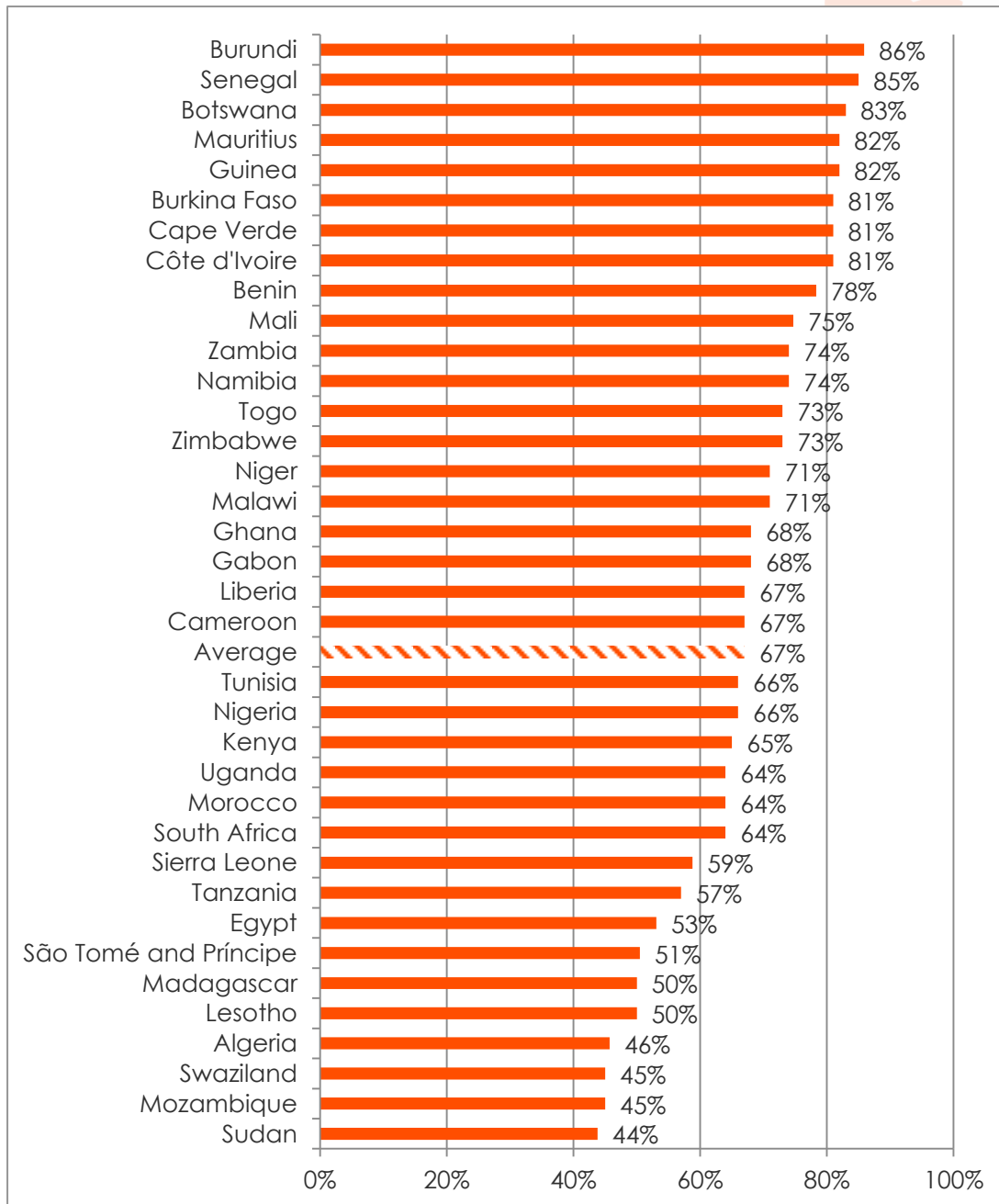
At the other end of the spectrum, fewer than half of all citizens share this sentiment in Algeria, Swaziland, Mozambique, and Sudan, none of which currently qualifies as a functioning electoral democracy. Swaziland's monarchy even lacks direct elections for political representatives, including the head of government.

Moreover, among professed supporters of democracy, some may be merely paying lip service. Thus, to probe the depth of popular democratic commitment, we also ask people to evaluate alternative types of non-democratic regime:

There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives?

- *Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office.*
- *The army comes in to govern the country.*
- *Elections and Parliament are abolished so that the president can decide everything.*

Figure 2: Support for democracy | 36 countries | 2014/2015

Country	Percentage
Burundi	86%
Senegal	85%
Botswana	83%
Mauritius	82%
Guinea	82%
Burkina Faso	81%
Cape Verde	81%
Côte d'Ivoire	81%
Benin	78%
Mali	75%
Zambia	74%
Namibia	74%
Togo	73%
Zimbabwe	73%
Niger	71%
Malawi	71%
Ghana	68%
Gabon	68%
Liberia	67%
Cameroon	67%
Average	67%
Tunisia	66%
Nigeria	66%
Kenya	65%
Uganda	64%
Morocco	64%
South Africa	64%
Sierra Leone	59%
Tanzania	57%
Egypt	53%
São Tomé and Príncipe	51%
Madagascar	50%
Lesotho	50%
Algeria	46%
Swaziland	45%
Mozambique	45%
Sudan	44%

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

We define committed democrats as those who not only say they support democracy, but who also consistently reject the kinds of authoritarian systems that African countries have experienced in the past. Approximately three in four respondents reject each alternative: On average, 78% reject presidential dictatorship and one-party rule and 73% reject military rule as viable options for governing their countries.
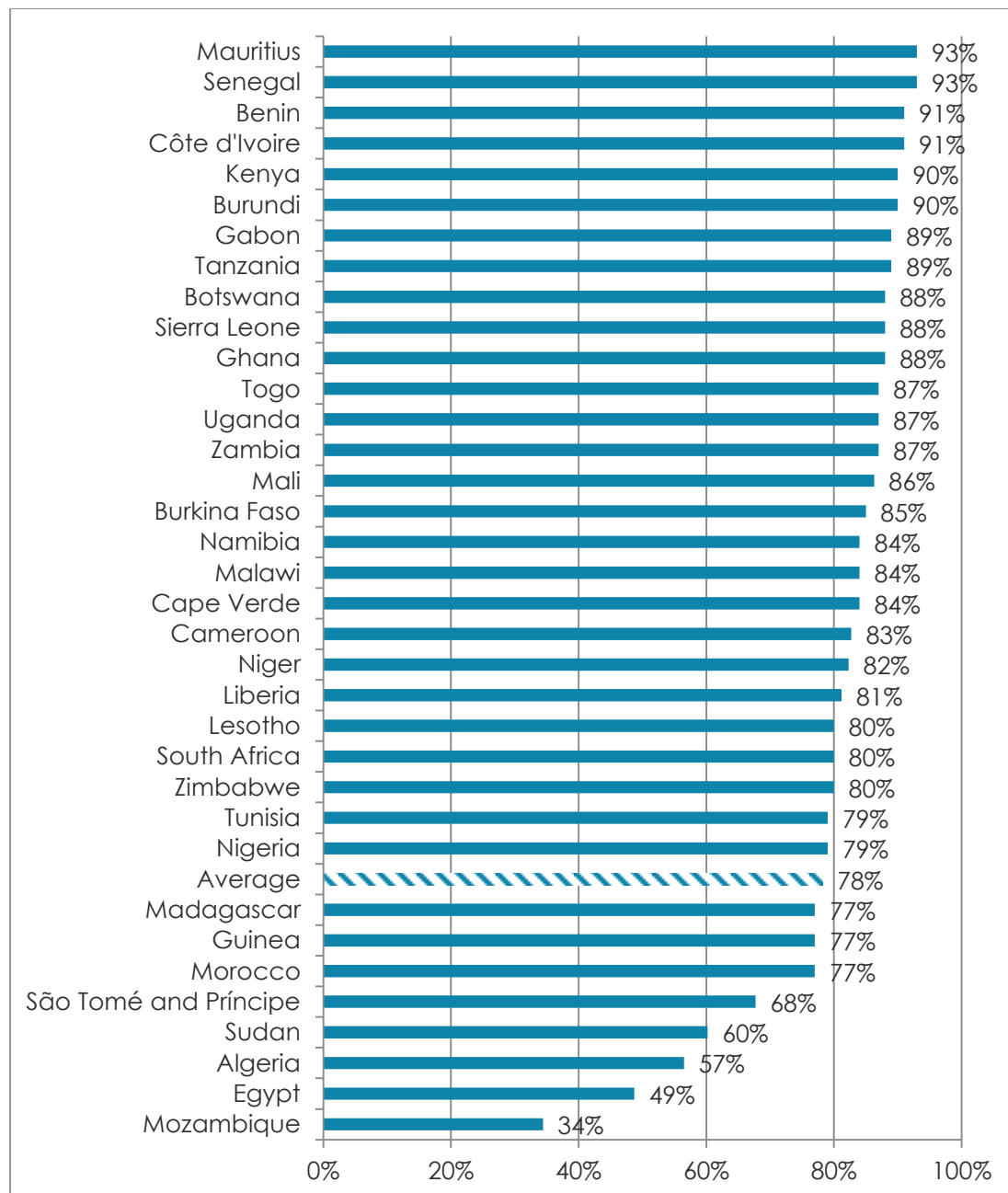
At the same time, significant pockets of approval for authoritarian practice remain: While just 10% favour one-man rule, 16% explicitly endorse a one-party system, and

fully 19% accept a military regime. The remaining responses consist of people who neither agree nor disagree or who say they "don't know."

At the country level, more than 90% reject presidential dictatorship in Mauritius, Senegal, Benin, and Côte d'Ivoire, whereas only 49% in Egypt and 34% in Mozambique do so (Figure 3). While more than 90% reject one-party rule in Sierra Leone, Benin, Mauritius, and Gabon, this view is shared by only 50% in Mozambique and 57% in Lesotho (Figure 4). Finally, with reference to military rule, more than 90% of Mauritians and Kenyans do not approve of the army "coming in to govern the country," yet mere minorities express this concern in Egypt (33%), Mozambique (43%), and Sudan (46%) (Figure 5).
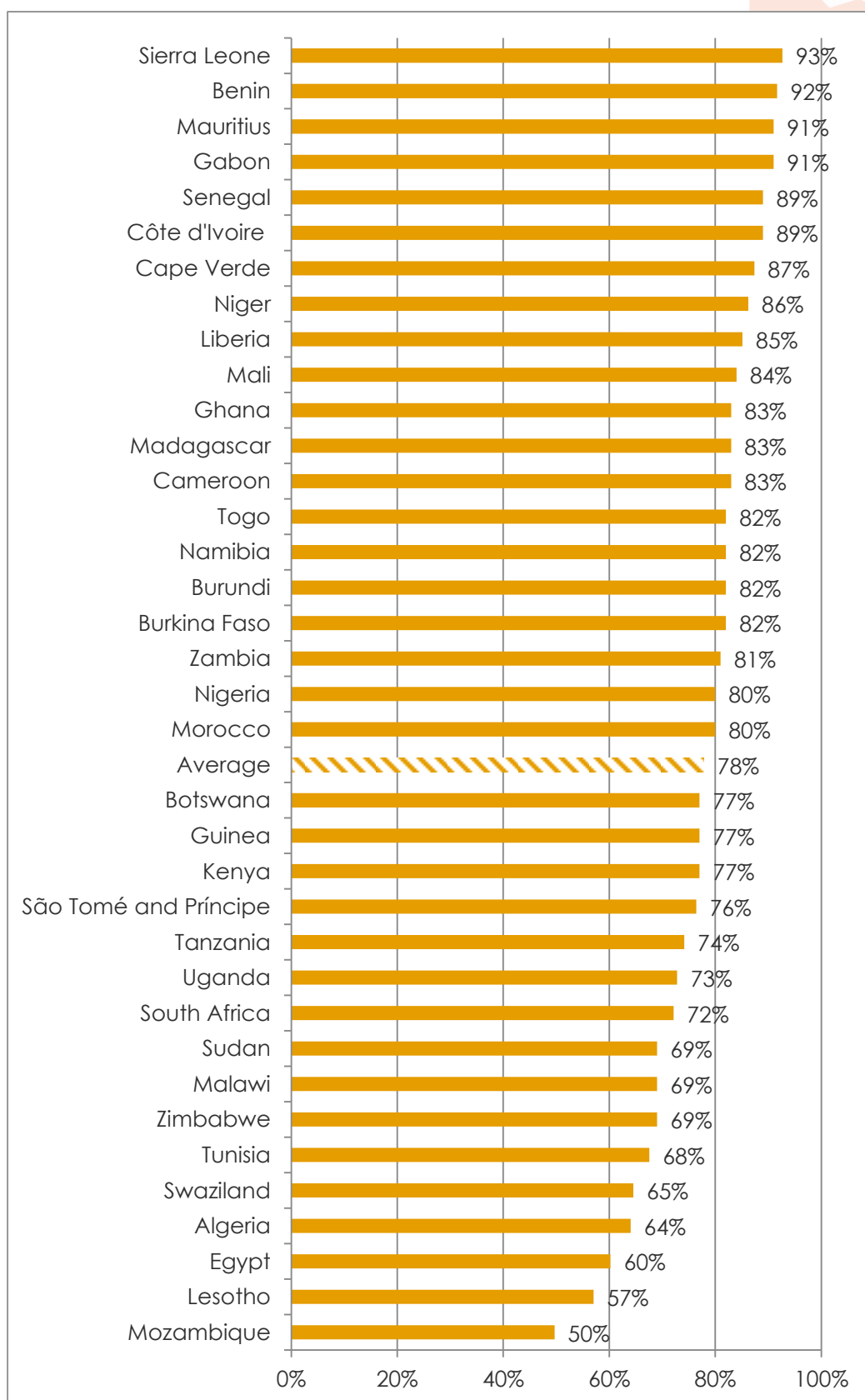
Figure 3: Rejection of presidential dictatorship | 36 countries | 2014/2015

Country	%
Mauritius	93%
Senegal	93%
Benin	91%
Côte d'Ivoire	91%
Kenya	90%
Burundi	90%
Gabon	89%
Tanzania	89%
Botswana	88%
Sierra Leone	88%
Ghana	88%
Togo	87%
Uganda	87%
Zambia	87%
Mali	86%
Burkina Faso	85%
Namibia	84%
Malawi	84%
Cape Verde	84%
Cameroon	83%
Niger	82%
Liberia	81%
Lesotho	80%
South Africa	80%
Zimbabwe	80%
Tunisia	79%
Nigeria	79%
Average	78%
Madagascar	77%
Guinea	77%
Morocco	77%
São Tomé and Príncipe	68%
Sudan	60%
Algeria	57%
Egypt	49%
Mozambique	34%

Respondents were asked: *There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternative: Elections and Parliament are abolished so that the president can decide everything?*
(% who "disapprove" or "strongly disapprove")

Figure 4: Rejection of one-party rule | 36 countries | 2014/2015

Country	Percentage
Sierra Leone	93%
Benin	92%
Mauritius	91%
Gabon	91%
Senegal	89%
Côte d'Ivoire	89%
Cape Verde	87%
Niger	86%
Liberia	85%
Mali	84%
Ghana	83%
Madagascar	83%
Cameroon	83%
Togo	82%
Namibia	82%
Burundi	82%
Burkina Faso	82%
Zambia	81%
Nigeria	80%
Morocco	80%
Average	78%
Botswana	77%
Guinea	77%
Kenya	77%
São Tomé and Príncipe	76%
Tanzania	74%
Uganda	73%
South Africa	72%
Sudan	69%
Malawi	69%
Zimbabwe	69%
Tunisia	68%
Swaziland	65%
Algeria	64%
Egypt	60%
Lesotho	57%
Mozambique	50%

Respondents were asked: *There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternative: Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office?*
(% who "disapprove" or "strongly disapprove")
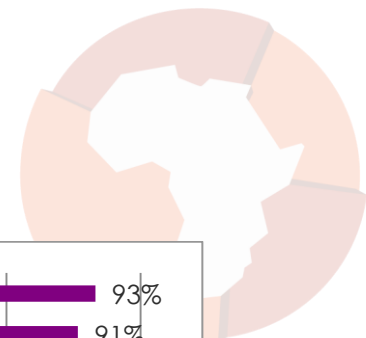
Figure 5: Rejection of military rule | 36 countries | 2014/2015
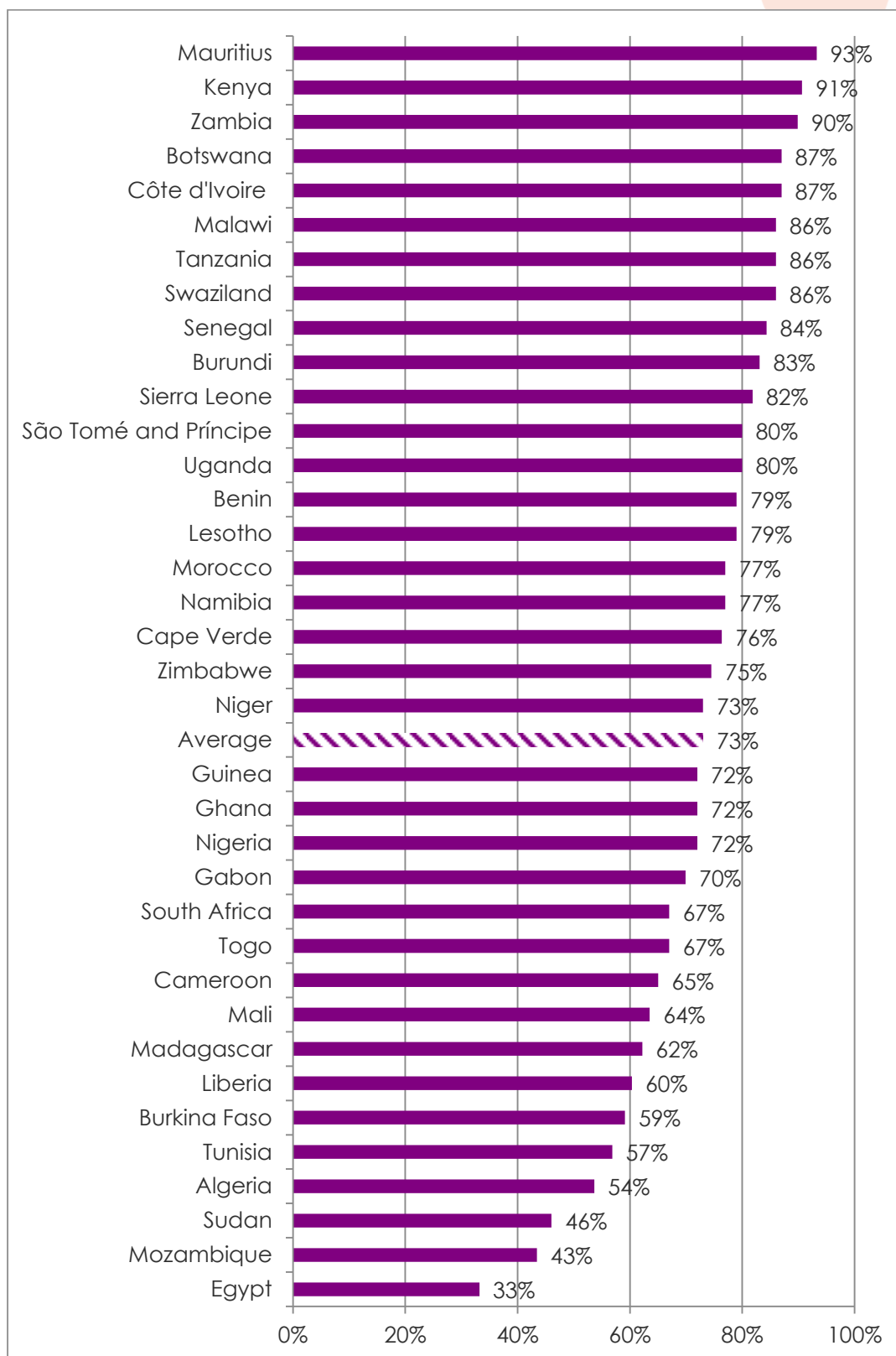
Country	%
Mauritius	93%
Kenya	91%
Zambia	90%
Botswana	87%
Côte d'Ivoire	87%
Malawi	86%
Tanzania	86%
Swaziland	86%
Senegal	84%
Burundi	83%
Sierra Leone	82%
São Tomé and Príncipe	80%
Uganda	80%
Benin	79%
Lesotho	79%
Morocco	77%
Namibia	77%
Cape Verde	76%
Zimbabwe	75%
Niger	73%
Average	73%
Guinea	72%
Ghana	72%
Nigeria	72%
Gabon	70%
South Africa	67%
Togo	67%
Cameroon	65%
Mali	64%
Madagascar	62%
Liberia	60%
Burkina Faso	59%
Tunisia	57%
Algeria	54%
Sudan	46%
Mozambique	43%
Egypt	33%

Respondents were asked: *There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternative: The army comes in to govern the country? (% who "disapprove" or "strongly disapprove")*
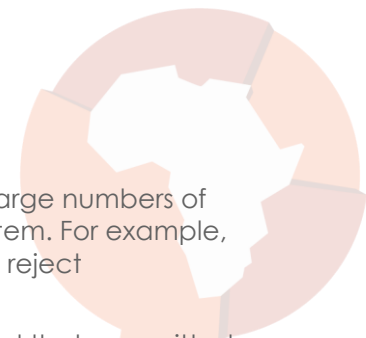
Demand for democracy

But how consistent are Africans in their pro-democratic attitudes? Large numbers of people may readily give a "pro-democratic" answer to any single item. For example, they may be able to say that they support democracy, *or* that they reject presidential dictatorship, *or* military rule, *or* one-party rule.

But do they hold *all* of these attitudes *at the same time*? We contend that committed democrats should consistently express pro-democratic attitudes on *all four items*. We refer to an index that combines responses to these four items as popular "demand for democracy."

As it happens, fewer than half (43%) of all Africans interviewed across 36 countries can be considered committed democrats in the sense that that they consistently give pro-democratic responses to all four items on the index (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Key public attitudes toward democracy | 36 countries | 2014/2015

Respondents were asked:
1. There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives?
  A. Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office.
  B. The army comes in to govern the country.
  C. Elections and the National Assembly are abolished so that the president can decide everything.
(% who "disapprove" or "strongly disapprove" of each alternative)
2. Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?
  Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.
  Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.
  Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.
(% who say democracy is preferable)
Demand for democracy: % who prefer democracy and reject all three authoritarian alternatives

As might be expected, we find large cross-national differences in demand for democracy across the continent (Figure 7). At the most democratic end of the continuum, three in four Mauritians (74%) are consistent, committed democrats. Demand is also strong (above 60%) in Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Burundi, and Botswana.

By contrast, demand is low (between 20% and 40%) in Liberia, Lesotho, Madagascar, Swaziland, and Algeria. It is striking how many African democracies are in this group, including South Africa, Tunisia, and São Tomé and Príncipe, which implies a mismatch

between the presence of democratic institutions and the absence of democratic orientations among citizens.

Demand for democracy is very low (below 20%) in Sudan and Egypt. At the bottom end of the scale, fewer than one in 10 Mozambicans (9%) can currently be called committed democrats.

Presented in this way, findings on demand for democracy offer a sobering assessment of the political culture of democracy among ordinary Africans and a reminder that, from a bottom-up perspective, the construction of viable democratic regimes in Africa still has a long way to go.
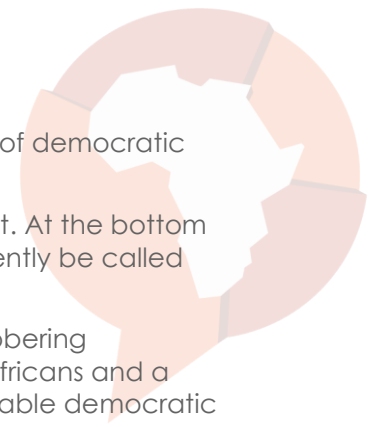
Figure 7: Demand for democracy | 36 countries | 2014/2015

Country	%
Mauritius	74%
Senegal	66%
Côte d'Ivoire	65%
Burundi	65%
Botswana	62%
Zambia	58%
Benin	57%
Cape Verde	57%
Niger	53%
Namibia	51%
Kenya	50%
Zimbabwe	50%
Malawi	49%
Gabon	48%
Morocco	47%
Ghana	47%
Sierra Leone	46%
Togo	45%
Mali	44%
Guinea	43%
Average	43%
Tanzania	42%
Cameroon	42%
Uganda	42%
Nigeria	41%
Burkina Faso	40%
Liberia	37%
South Africa	35%
Tunisia	33%
São Tomé and Príncipe	31%
Lesotho	28%
Madagascar	25%
Swaziland	24%
Algeria	21%
Sudan	17%
Egypt	13%
Mozambique	9%
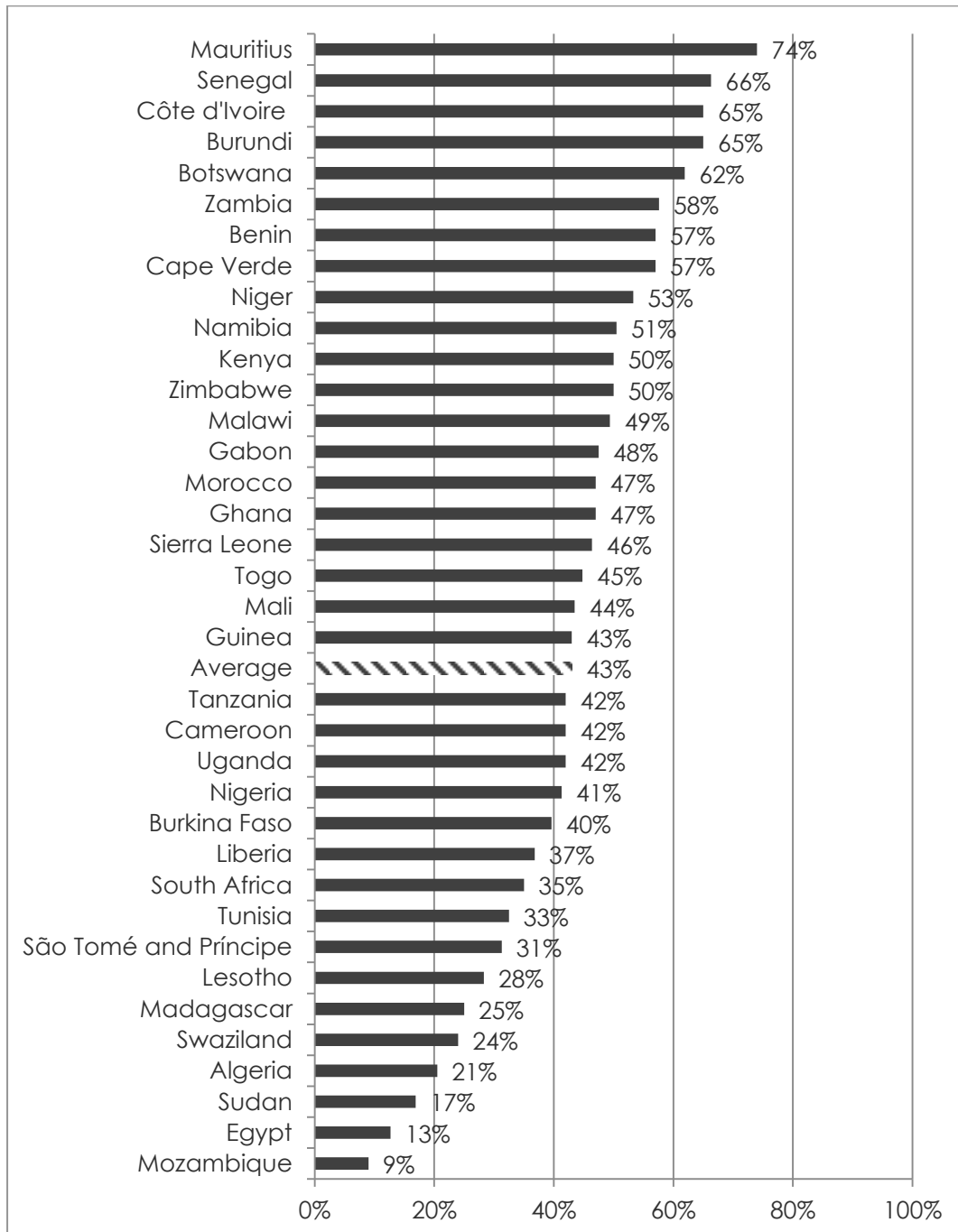
(% who demand democracy, i.e. who prefer democracy and reject all three authoritarian regimes)

Besides cross-national differences, there are also important regional and demographic patterns in demand for democracy. Demand is highest in East Africa (50%) and West Africa (49%) and lowest in North Africa (26%). And across the continent, demand for democracy is highest amongst those who live in urban settings (47%), have a university education (55%), and work in middle-class occupations (55%) (Figure 8). There is also an important gender gap, with women (39%) significantly *less* likely to demand democracy than men (49%).

Figure 8: Demand for democracy | by demographic indicators | 36 countries | 2014/2015
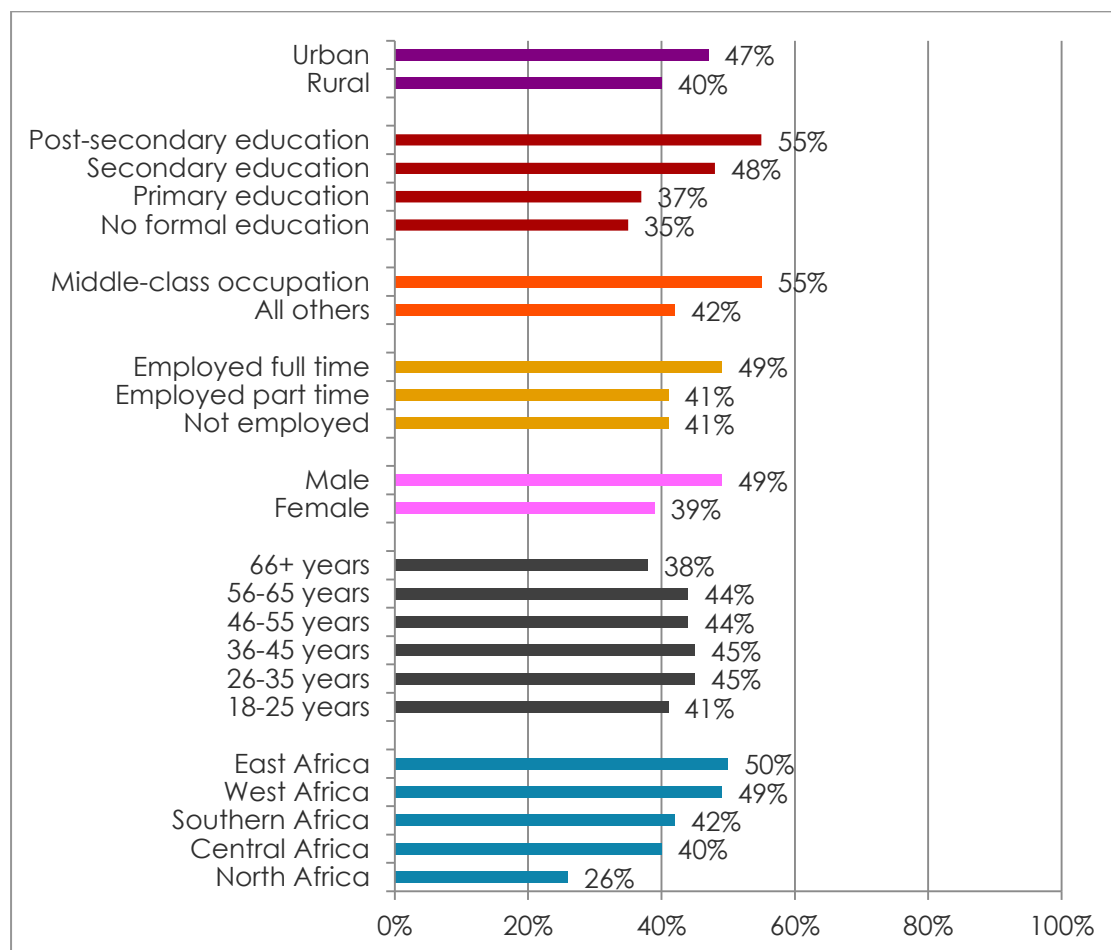
(% who demand democracy, i.e. who prefer democracy and reject all three authoritarian regimes)

Changes in demand for democracy

To summarize: About three-quarters of Africans reject authoritarian regimes, and about two-thirds say that democracy is always preferable. In other words, people are more certain about the kinds of political regimes they *don't* want (perhaps based on earlier experience with authoritarian rule) than the kind of regime they affirmatively *do* want (that is, something called "democracy").

Most importantly, fewer than one-half of all citizens interviewed are committed democrats, that is, offering consistent pro-democratic responses across four key survey questions. Furthermore, the results display huge differences across countries.

This present-day snapshot, however, tells us nothing about whether popular demand for democracy is increasing or decreasing. To address this question, we begin by

reviewing the 34 countries covered in both Afrobarometer Round 5 (conducted in 2011/2013) and Round 6 (conducted in 2014/2015).[1]

In 2015 in these 34 countries, the average level of demand for democracy stands at 43%, which is slightly down from 46% in Round 5. As always, trends are much more drastic and diverse at the country level (Figure 9).
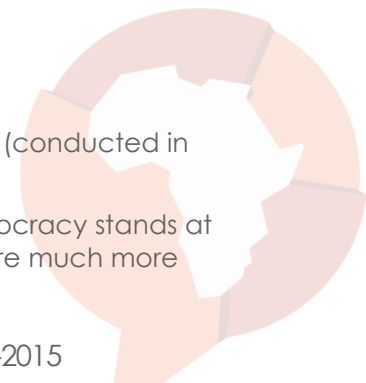
Figure 9: Changes in demand for democracy | 34 countries | 2011-2015
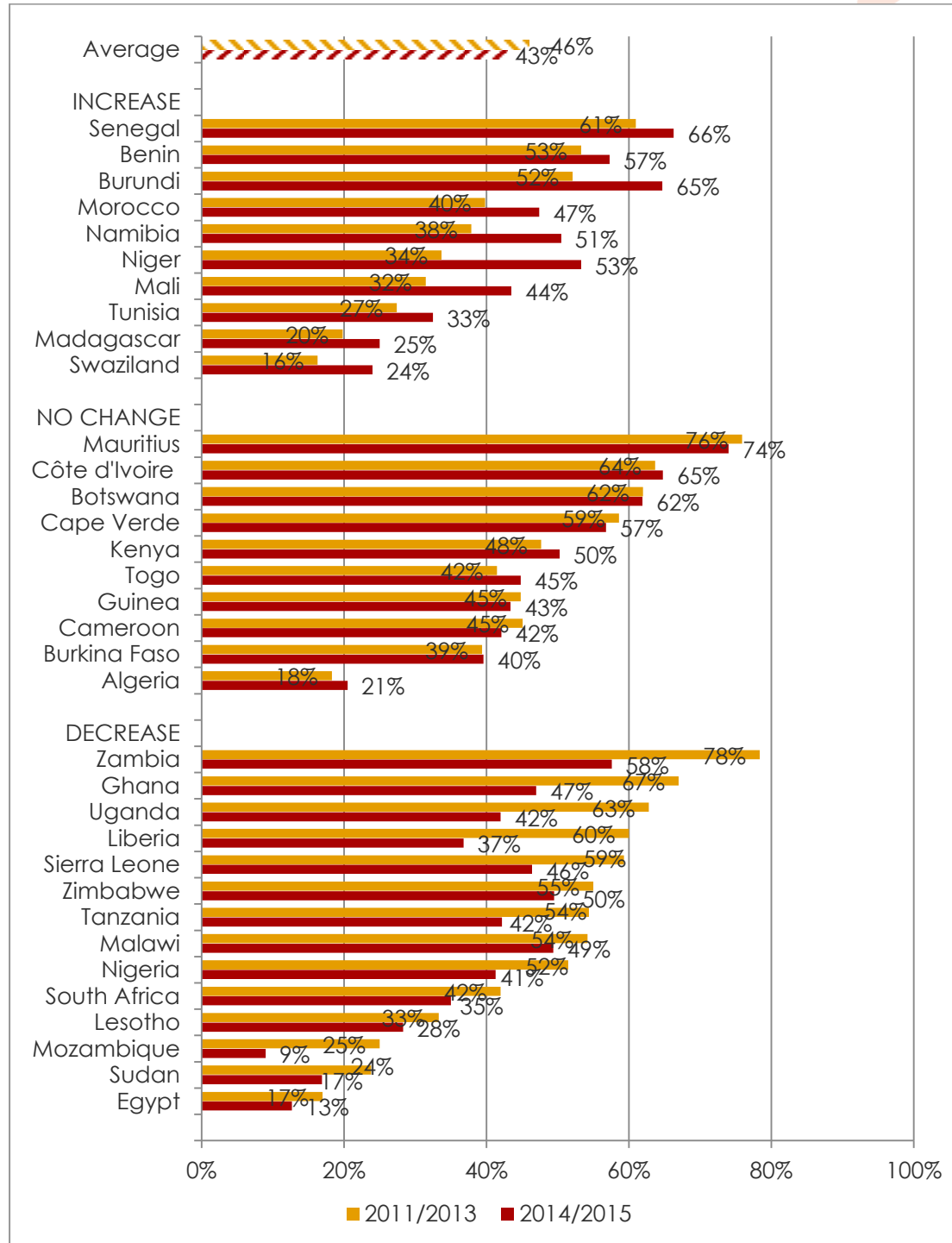
(% who demand democracy, i.e. who prefer democracy and reject all three authoritarian regimes)

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[1] Gabon and São Tomé and Príncipe were surveyed in Round 6 but not in Round 5.

On the positive side, popular demand for democracy *increased* in 10 countries, with very substantial gains in Niger (+20 percentage points), Burundi (+13 points), Namibia (+13 points), and Mali (+12 points). To take just one example, the citizens of Mali were apparently celebrating the restoration of elected civilian government in 2013 following an ethnic rebellion, *jihadi* insurgency, and military coup in 2012.

In 10 other countries, there were *no statistically significant changes*. This group includes both functioning liberal democracies where demand remained stable at very high levels (such as Mauritius) and non-democracies where demand remained at very low levels (such as Algeria). Notably, Algeria's competitive authoritarian regime (which includes involvement of the military in politics) escaped the mass popular awakenings of the Arab Spring that roiled its neighbours in 2011 and 2012.

On the negative side, demand for democracy *decreased* in 14 countries, including substantial drops in Liberia (-23 percentage points), Zambia (-21 points), Uganda (-21 points), Ghana (-20 points), and Mozambique (-16 points). In Mozambique, government and opposition supporters are increasingly polarized as evidenced by outbreaks of armed conflict.

Longer-term changes in demand for democracy

To obtain a longer-term perspective, we look at over-time changes in a smaller set of 16 countries in which Afrobarometer has conducted at least five surveys since 2002.[2]

Over this lengthier period, pro-democratic attitudes show a steady upward trend over the 10 years between 2002 and 2012, followed by a downward turn since 2012 (Figure 10). The index of demand for democracy and its four component attitudes all follow similar paths.

These trends echo at the individual level the pattern observed earlier at the country level (see Figure 1). In this instance, however, the inflection point at which positive attitudes turn negative occurs slightly later. Among the populace that judges democracy from the ground up, demand for democracy turns down after 2012, whereas among the experts who judge democratic performance for Freedom House, a downturn in the quality of democracy was already visible after 2006.

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.

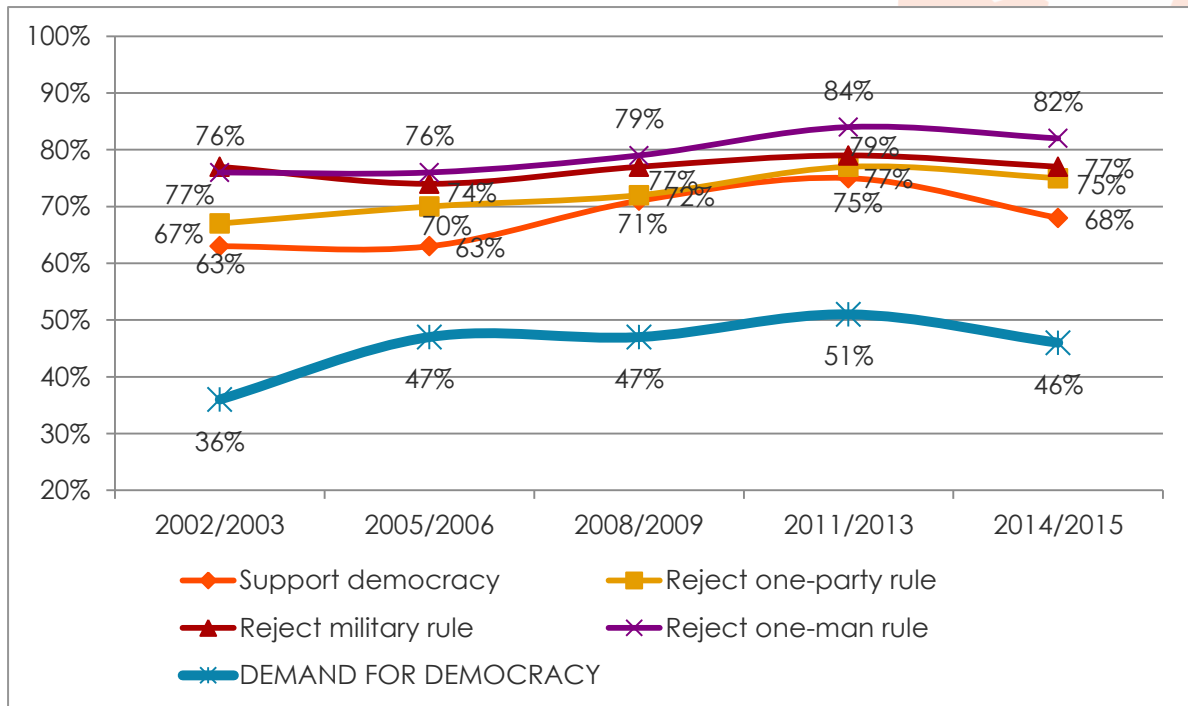One interpretation of this time lag is that outside experts, attuned to early warning signs of constitutional backsliding, may recognize a decline in the supply of democracy ahead of the time when it is reflected in a decline in popular demand. Another possibility is that the decade of 2000-2010 was a period of rapid economic growth in several African countries; relative prosperity may have masked gradual declines in civil liberties and political rights, which became apparent only after economic growth began to sputter. Alternatively, the rise of a small middle class with entrepreneurial, consumer, and cosmopolitan values, as well as a communications revolution led by cell phones and social media, may have only recently led to higher levels of critical citizenship.

The main point, however, is that a drop in popular demand for democracy after 2012 is consistent with an argument about the onset of a gradual democratic recession affecting the African continent as a whole.

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[2] Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Figure 10: Do Africans want democracy? Average trends | 16 countries | 2002-2015

Respondents were asked:

1. There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives?

   A. Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office.
   B. The army comes in to govern the country.
   C. Elections and the National Assembly are abolished so that the president can decide everything.

(% who "disapprove" or "strongly disapprove" of each alternative)

2. Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?

   Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.
   Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.
   Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.

(% who say democracy is preferable)

Demand for democracy: % who prefer democracy and reject all three authoritarian alternatives

Once again, however, African countries forge distinctive paths. To trace these routes in the most countries and over the longest time period possible, we examine 20 countries for which we have at least three survey observations since 2005/2006 (Round 3). We find that these countries divide into three categories, each of which displays a distinct trajectory in demand for democracy over the past decade or more.

1. Long-term increases. In the first set of eight countries, we see positive news: Demand for democracy has increased steadily over time, leaving each country with a much more substantial constituency for democracy than in the past (Figure 11).

At the high end, some countries have seen slow and steady growth in a large cohort of committed democrats. Almost two-thirds of citizens now demand democracy in Senegal (66%, a gain of 23 percentage points since 2002/2003) and Botswana (62%, a gain of 20 points). This social bloc provides a supportive cultural base for deepening democratic institutions and practices.

Even at the low end, where only half or fewer citizens are committed democrats, some countries have made impressive recent gains in demand for democracy, as in

Namibia (+32 percentage points), Zimbabwe (+22 points), and Burkina Faso (+22 points). This set of countries is rounded out by Cape Verde (+19 points), Benin (+15 points), and Malawi (+10 points).
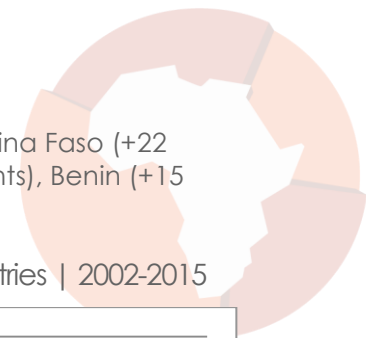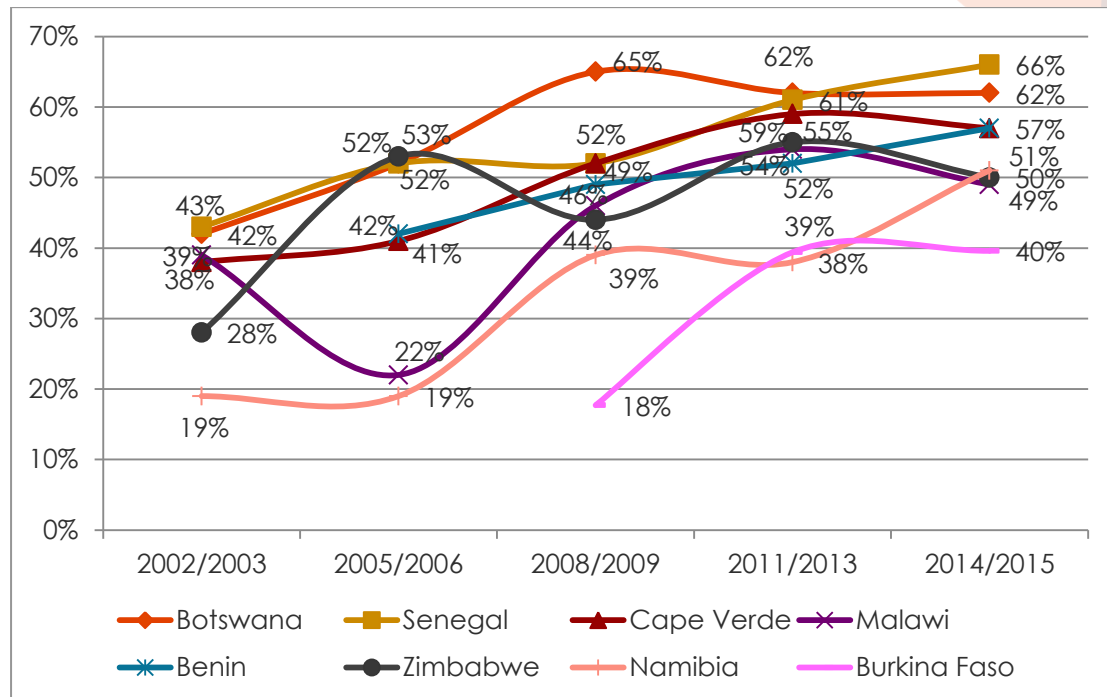
Figure 11: Long-term increases in demand for democracy | 8 countries | 2002-2015
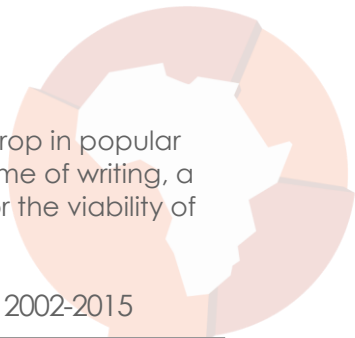

(% who demand democracy, i.e. who prefer democracy and reject all three authoritarian regimes)

2. Low and stagnant. The news is less positive in a second set of five countries where demand for democracy has never exceeded 45% and in which over-time fluctuations are generally trendless. This group includes South Africa, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mali, and Mozambique (Figure 12).

Perhaps the most surprising case in this group is South Africa, where little more than one-third of all adults (just 35% in 2015) have ever been committed democrats. One possible explanation is that, since 1994, South Africans have never been inoculated against an extreme authoritarian alternative, for example by experiencing military rule or personal dictatorship. That said, a consistently low level of popular democratic demand in South Africa leaves room for creeping elite corruption to undermine an otherwise sturdy set of democratic institutions.

3. Recent setbacks. A different type of discouraging news characterizes a third set of seven countries. Each of these countries registered early gains in demand for democracy, so that in all cases demand exceeded 50% (reaching 78% in Zambia!) by 2012. Thereafter, this trend reversed sharply, often settling below 50% demand for democracy by 2015 (Figure 13). Indeed, this common trend in this set of countries – which includes Uganda, Ghana, Tanzania, Nigeria, Liberia, Zambia, and Kenya – drives the overall continental downturn portrayed in Figure 10.

Ghana stands out in this group as an exemplar for recent popular disillusionment with democracy. Until 2012, Ghana was regarded as one of Africa's most promising electoral democracies with its two-party system, peaceful electoral alternations, well-run electoral commission, and court system capable of adjudicating election disputes. Even as these institutions remained formally in place, Afrobarometer surveys indicate that Ghanaian citizens have been losing confidence in the democratic

system. The country experienced a dramatic 20-percentage-point drop in popular demand for democracy between surveys in 2012 and 2014. At the time of writing, a national election scheduled for December 2016 poses a stress test for the viability of the country's previously promising democracy.

Figure 12: Low and stagnant demand for democracy | 5 countries | 2002-2015
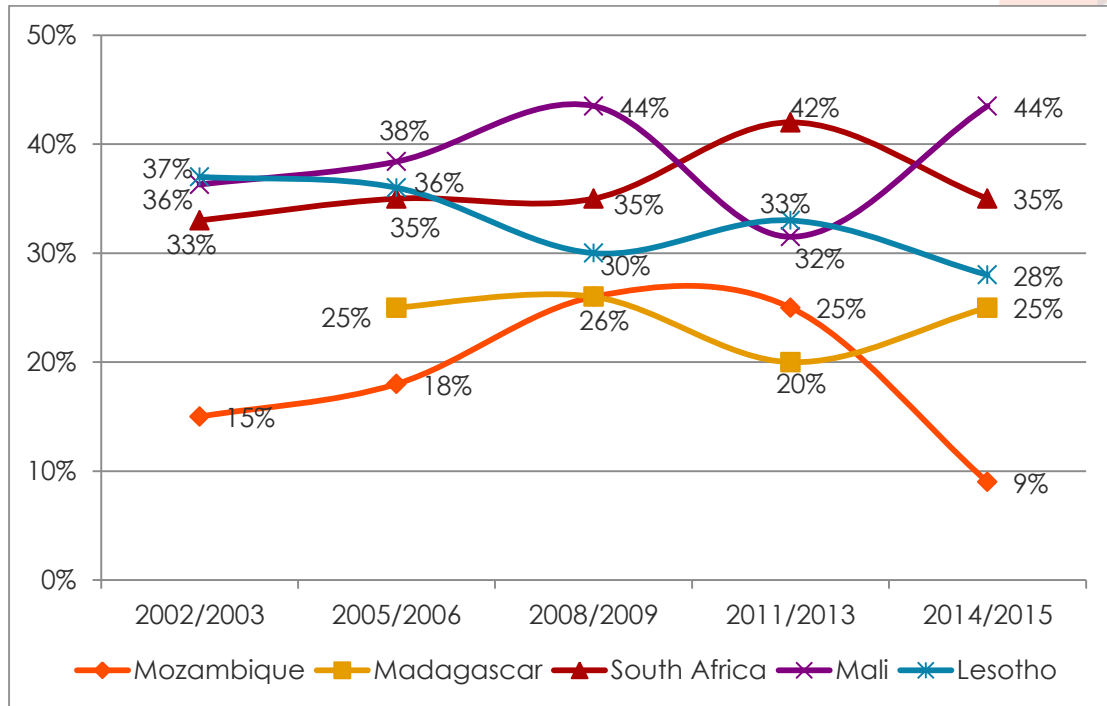
(% who demand democracy, i.e. who prefer democracy and reject all three authoritarian regimes)

Figure 13: Recent setbacks in demand for democracy | 7 countries | 2002-2015
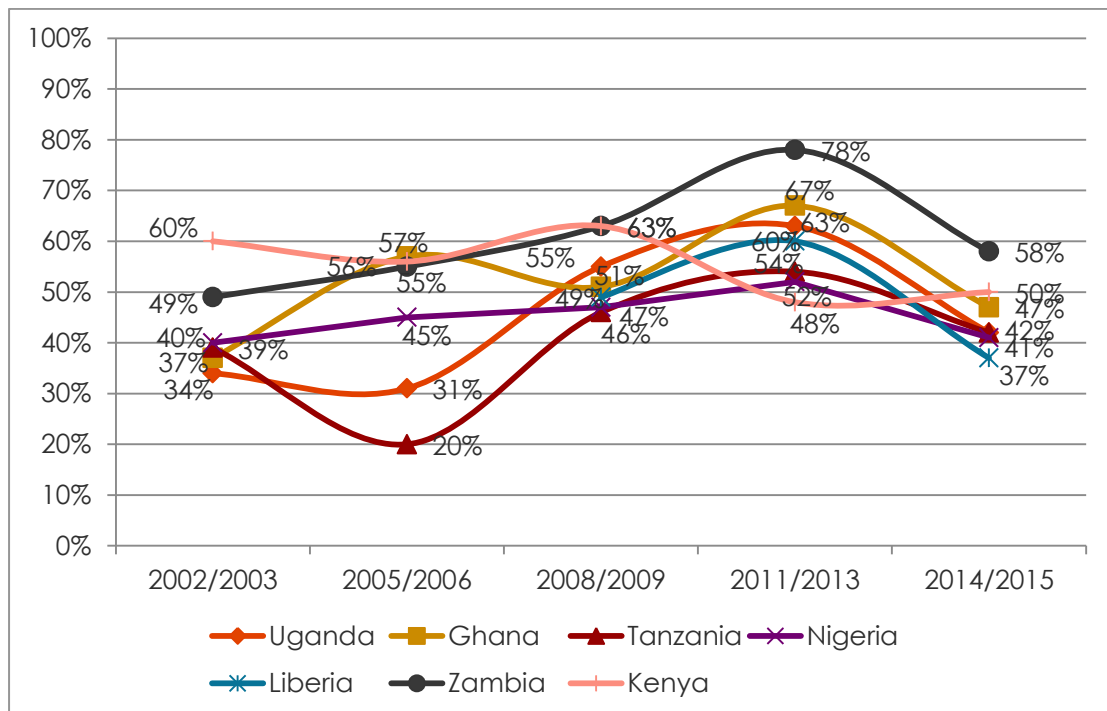
(% who demand democracy, i.e. who prefer democracy and reject all three authoritarian regimes)

Explaining demand for democracy

What drives demand for democracy? In this section, we turn to understanding the sources of popular preferences for various sorts of political regimes.

We know from previous research that Africans' demand for democracy has an *intrinsic* component (Bratton & Mattes, 2001), meaning an appreciation for democracy as a set of civil rights and political procedures. This understanding of democracy is concentrated among persons with cognitive skills acquired through formal education, exposure to news media, and engagement with the political process.

However, popular conceptions of democracy also have an important *instrumental* component, in which people understand democracy as a system for producing concrete outcomes. People demand democracy not only because of the way it works but also because of the benefits that it delivers. These outcomes may be a basket of economic goods (such as poverty reduction, paid employment, and material equality) or a basket of political goods (including law and order, good governance, and free and fair political competition).
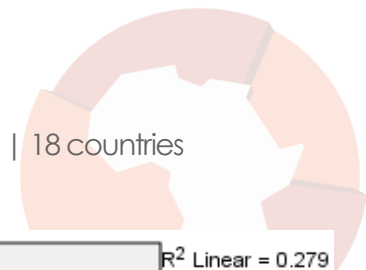
In contrast to the prevailing wisdom of the day, research has revealed that the availability of political goods is more important in shaping public demand for democracy than the delivery of economic goods (Evans & Whitefield, 1995; Rose, Mishler, & Haerpfer, 1998; Bratton, Mattes, & Gyimah-Boadi, 2005; Mattes & Bratton, 2007). Stated differently, popular attachment to democratic norms does not require an economic miracle; instead, the provision of responsive and accountable governance is often enough.

Within the basket of political goods, the conduct of elections stands out as a particularly important determinant of whether people think democracy is worth having (Bratton & Houessou, 2014; Mattes, Munjani, Liddle, Shi, & Chu, 2015). One study found that when any two Afrobarometer surveys are separated by a successful election that voters regarded as free and fair, both demand for democracy and perceptions of the supply of democracy (see below) increase modestly. However, when surveys are separated by a flawed election, both demand and supply decrease, with the negative impact of a flawed election being much more substantial than the positive effect of a successful one (Greenberg & Mattes, 2013). Thus, especially when repeated, free and fair elections demonstrate to people that the system is democratic and worthy of their support; flawed and illegitimate elections have the opposite effect.

Of the 34 countries surveyed by Afrobarometer in both Round 5 (2011/2013) and Round 6 (2014/2015), 18 held an intervening election. These countries are plotted in Figure 14, which displays the clear effect of the quality of elections on how Africans view democracy. On the X axis (along the bottom of the chart) is the proportion of respondents who see the election as flawed, that is, "not free and fair" or "free and fair, with major problems."[3] On the Y axis (left side of the chart) is the percentage-point change in demand for democracy between the two survey observations. The downward slope of the regression line suggests that for every 10-percentage-point increase in negative views of electoral quality, demand for democracy decreases by about 4 percentage points.

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[3] Respondents were asked: *On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in [20XX]? Was it: Completely free and fair? Free and fair, but with minor problems? Free and fair, with major problems? Not free and fair?*

Figure 14: Electoral quality and changes in demand for democracy | 18 countries | 2011-2015

% who say last election was "not free and fair" or had "major problems" (among countries with an election between Round 5 and Round 6 surveys)
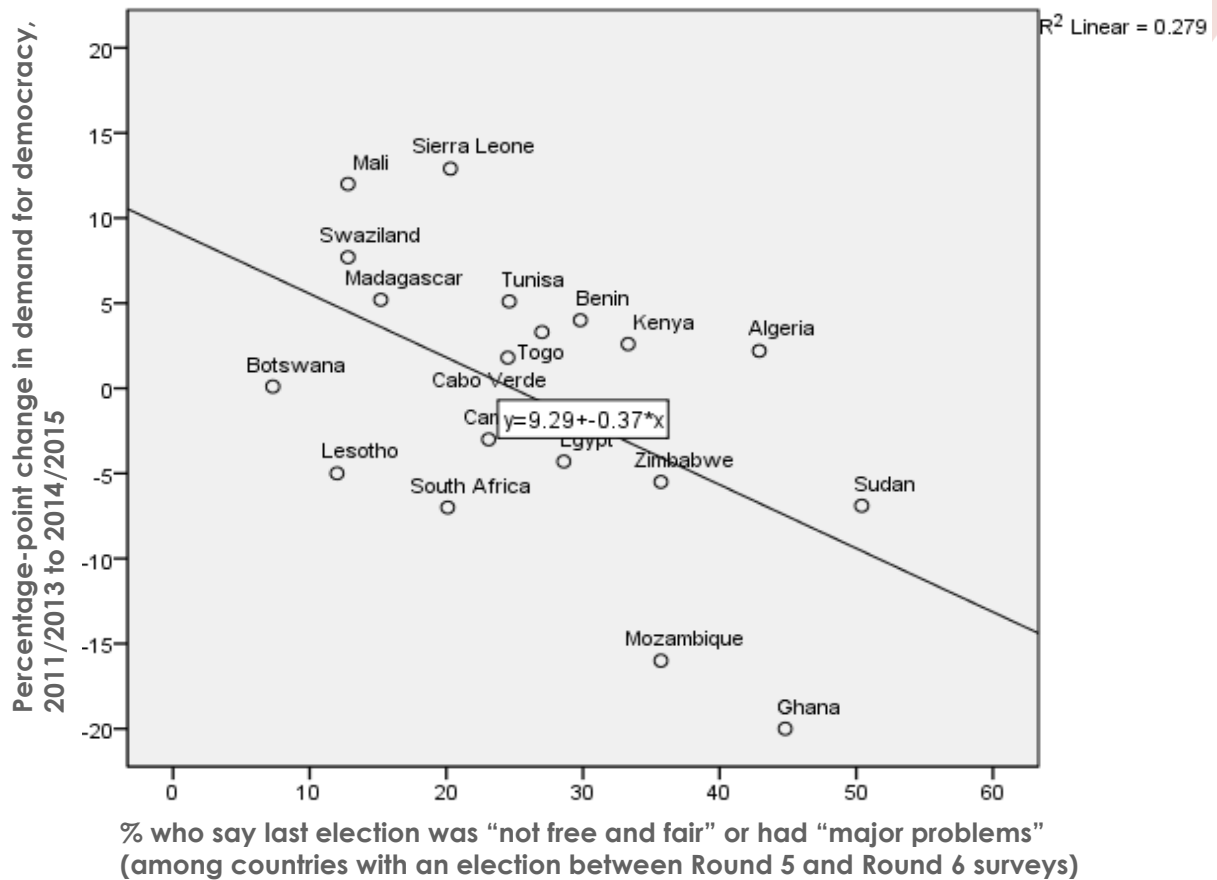
Again, Ghana provides a good example. Incumbent John Mahama of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) won the country's December 2012 presidential election by a razor-thin first-round majority of 50.7%. His main opponent, Nana Akufo-Addo of the New Patriotic Party (NPP), alleged in a petition to the Supreme Court that the Electoral Commission had tampered with the results. This dispute put the nation on tenterhooks for the eight months that it took the court to decide in the incumbent's favour. In this process, citizens came to doubt the quality of the election, with 45% giving poor ratings for election quality, a sentiment that probably contributed directly to the 20-point drop in demand for democracy in Ghana between 2012 and 2014.

Because elections were not held between Round 5 and Round 6 surveys in Liberia, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia, we need to search further for the cause of recent declines in popular demand. From a political-goods perspective, many of these countries experienced *narrowing political space*. A sharp increase in the proportion of people who felt they "always" have to be careful of what they say was detectable in Zambia (from 34% in 2013 to 44% in 2014) and Nigeria (from 28% in 2013 to 37% in 2015). And in Liberia and Zambia, there were significant increases in the belief that opposition parties are "always" silenced by government (from 7% to 15% and from 7% to 12%, respectively). There was also a growing concern about elite impunity. In Zambia, the feeling that the president "always ignores the courts and laws" rose from 8% to 18%, and the feeling that officials who commit crimes "always" go unpunished grew from 14% to 21%.

Notwithstanding the importance of political goods, economic considerations also probably play a part in a comprehensive explanation. All these countries (as well as Ghana) were hit by sharp economic contractions during this period (Rowden, 2015).

The proportions of respondents who say the national economy deteriorated in the previous 12 months doubled in Zambia (from 22% to 44%) and expanded sharply in Nigeria (from 37% to 52%) and Liberia (from 26% to 47%).
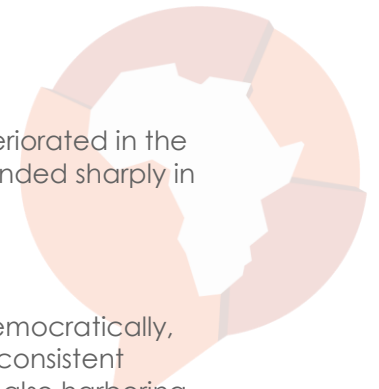
A demand-supply model

Overall, large proportions of Africans appear to want to be ruled democratically, though the picture varies greatly across countries. And many are inconsistent democrats, sometimes expressing pro-democratic sentiments while also harboring anti- or non-democratic attachments. In this last section, we examine whether committed (that is, consistent or "demanding") democrats get what they want. Are those who demand democracy being supplied with it?

In order to measure the perceived supply of democracy, Afrobarometer combines respondents' answers to two survey questions:

1. *In your opinion, how much of a democracy is [this country] today? Is it a full democracy, a democracy with minor problems, a democracy with major problems, or not a democracy?*
2. *Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [this country] today? Are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied? (*Note: Some respondents also respond that their country is not a democracy.)

Respondents are counted as perceiving a supply of democracy if they 1) say that their country is either "a full democracy" or "a democracy with minor problems" *and* 2) say that they are "very satisfied" or "fairly satisfied" with "the way democracy works." The index of the supply of democracy is constructed by combining these two indicators.

Since a previous Afrobarometer report is devoted to data about this construct (Bentley, Han, & Penar, 2015), we do not explore the supply side of democracy in the same detail as we have done on the demand side. Suffice it to say that – whether measured at the individual or country level, or as a current snapshot or a trend over time – the perceived supply of democracy generally falls short of the popular demand for democracy.
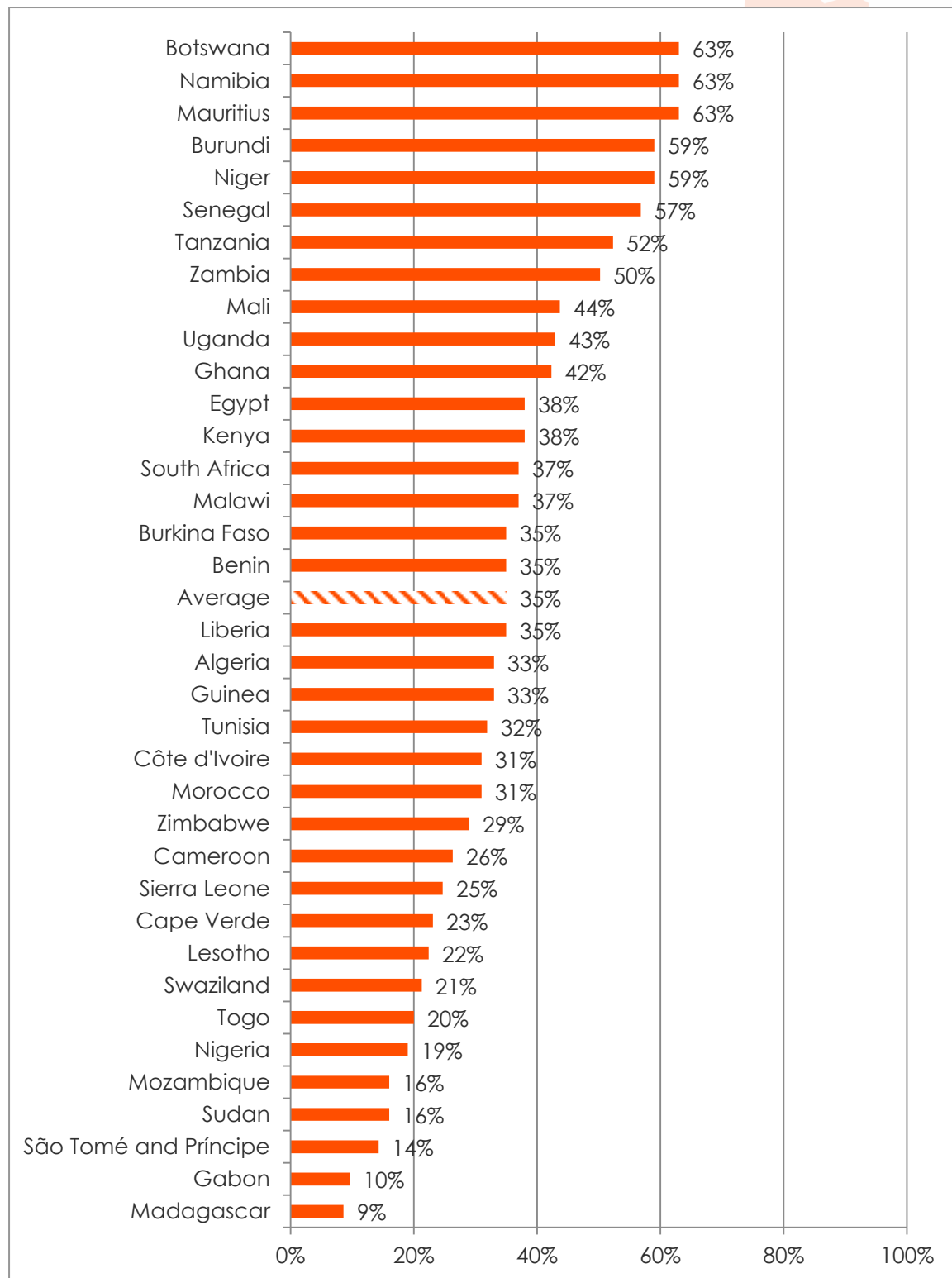
For example, on average for the 36 African countries in Afrobarometer Round 6 (2014-2015), barely more than one-third of African citizens (35%) perceive that incumbent rulers are supplying them with democracy (Figure 15). This proportion compares unfavourably with 43% of citizens who demand democracy.

The usual caveat applies about cross-country diversity. More than six in 10 Batswana (63%), Namibians (63%), and Mauritians (63%) say they both live in a democracy and are satisfied with how it works. At the other end of the spectrum, democratic supply is seen by fewer than two in 10 citizens in Nigeria (19%), Mozambique (16%), Sudan (16%), São Tomé and Príncipe (14%), Gabon (10%), and Madagascar (9%).

Still, as shown in Figure 16, demand outpaces supply in 26 of the 36 countries.

Trends over time in the perceived supply of democracy (and its two component indicators) adhere to a now-familiar pattern. For the 16 countries with data available over more than a decade (2002-2015), the supply of democracy first trends strongly upward but then turns sharply downward after 2012 (Figure 17). Thus, just as African citizens are demanding less democracy in the most recent Afrobarometer surveys, so they also consider that ruling elites are less willing or able to meet their demands.

Figure 15: Perceived supply of democracy | 36 countries | 2014/2015

Country	%
Botswana	63%
Namibia	63%
Mauritius	63%
Burundi	59%
Niger	59%
Senegal	57%
Tanzania	52%
Zambia	50%
Mali	44%
Uganda	43%
Ghana	42%
Egypt	38%
Kenya	38%
South Africa	37%
Malawi	37%
Burkina Faso	35%
Benin	35%
Average	35%
Liberia	35%
Algeria	33%
Guinea	33%
Tunisia	32%
Côte d'Ivoire	31%
Morocco	31%
Zimbabwe	29%
Cameroon	26%
Sierra Leone	25%
Cape Verde	23%
Lesotho	22%
Swaziland	21%
Togo	20%
Nigeria	19%
Mozambique	16%
Sudan	16%
São Tomé and Príncipe	14%
Gabon	10%
Madagascar	9%

(% who perceive a supply of democracy, i.e. who say that their country is "a full democracy" or "a democracy with minor problems" and that they are "very satisfied" or "fairly satisfied" with the way democracy works)

Figure 16: Status of political regimes in Africa: Demand and supply | 36 countries | 2014/2015
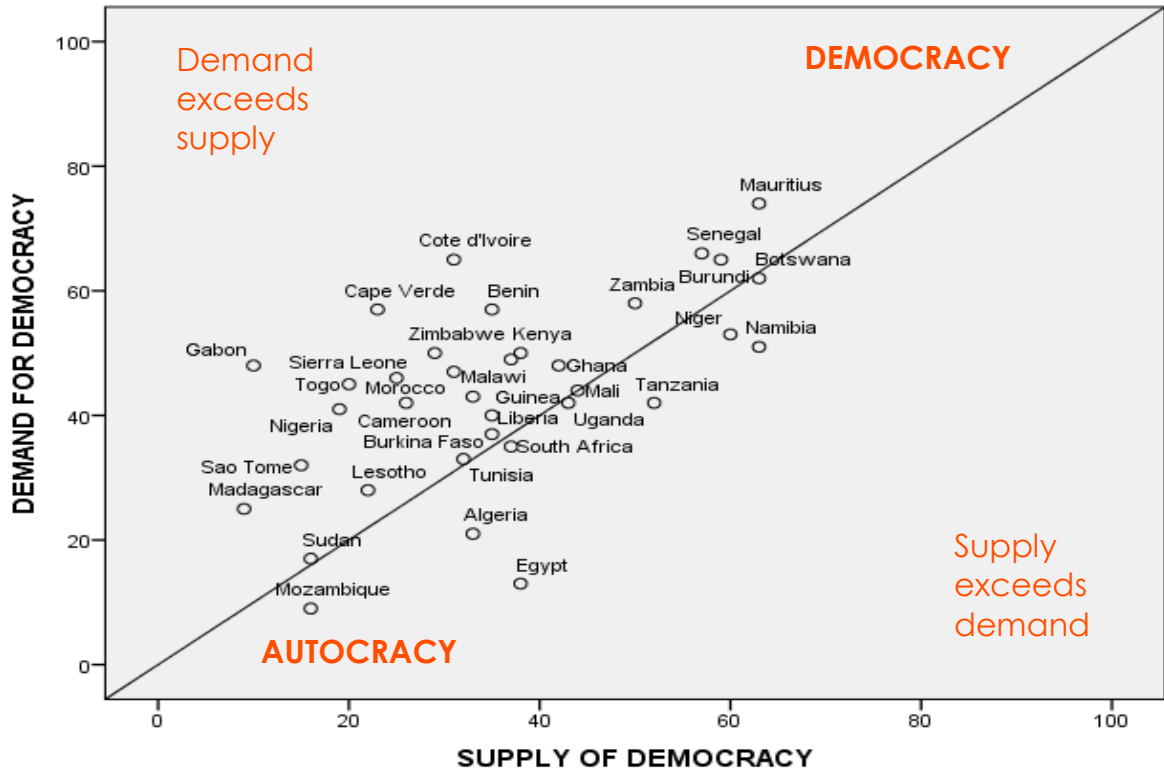
Figure 17: Do Africans think they are getting democracy? Average trends | 16 countries | 2002-2015
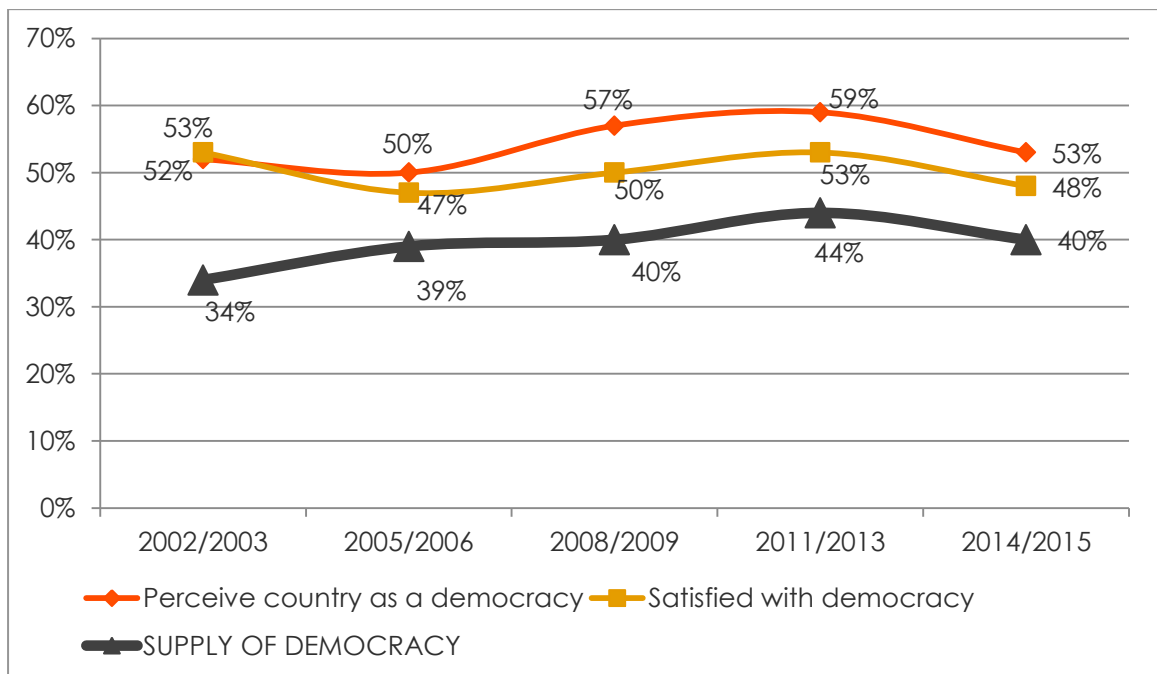
Percentages:
1) Perceive country as "a full democracy" or "a democracy with minor problems"
2) "Very satisfied" or "fairly satisfied" with the way democracy works
*3) Both 1 and 2*

Conclusion

While the results of this analysis provide evidence for a narrative of democratic recession in Africa, we end on two positive notes that are rarely seen in the headlines.

First, the choice of a point of comparison for trend analysis can have a large effect on results. Consider Figures 10 and 17. Over the short term (since 2012), Afrobarometer data seem to suggest that both demand for democracy and the perceived supply of democracy are in decline. Yet from a longer-term perspective (since 2002), both demand and supply are *higher than before*. For this reason, *recent setbacks in popular democratic attitudes should be viewed in the broader context of generally positive long-term gains*.

Second, the balance between demand and supply may actually be quite favourable for *future* democratic gains. Consider Figure 16: In the 36 countries surveyed in 2014/2015, *demand exceeds supply* in a clear majority of 26 countries. Especially in places like Gabon, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Benin, and Zimbabwe, *people want much more democracy than they say they are getting*. This imbalance in favour of popular demand strongly suggests that *citizens in these places are likely to keep pressing their rulers for more democracy*.

Thus, while recent Afrobarometer findings on public attitudes toward democracy offer important warnings, they also point to ways ahead in the consolidation of democracy in Africa.
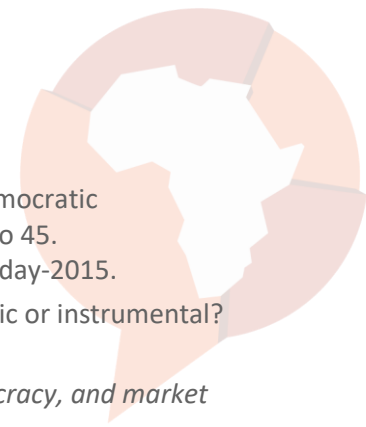
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Appendix

Table A.1: Afrobarometer Round 6 fieldwork dates and previous survey rounds

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

Country	Months when Round 6 fieldwork was conducted	Previous survey rounds
Togo	October 2014	2012
Tunisia	April-May 2015	2013
Uganda	May 2015	2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012
Zambia	October 2014	1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013
Zimbabwe	November 2014	1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012

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