



AFRO
BAROMETER
LET THE PEOPLE HAVE A SAY

Are Africans' freedoms slipping away?



**Pan-Africa
Profiles**

By Carolyn Logan and Peter Penar

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Introduction

Protection of individual rights and liberties has been on both the African continental agenda and the global agenda for decades, shaped especially by the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. But the reality on the ground is often a far cry from the high standards set forth in these documents.

In recent months, the world has watched as the governments of Algeria and Sudan have sought to stifle popular protests, often violently. And the past couple of years have witnessed a wide range of government attacks on civil liberties and individual freedoms. Cameroon shut down Internet service for months in the country's anglophone regions, and Zimbabwe did the same in an effort to short-circuit opposition efforts to organize protests.

Governments have responded with violence to protests in countries as diverse as Burundi, Senegal, Togo, and Zambia. Uganda now taxes social media use, while Tanzania requires expensive licenses for individuals who want to blog. In countries across the continent, government surveillance, restrictive media laws, and other freedom-limiting tactics appear to be on the rise. Freedom House's 2019 Freedom in the World report was subtitled "Democracy in Retreat," and the Africa section appeared under the heading "Historic openings [in Angola, Ethiopia, and the Gambia] offset by creeping restrictions elsewhere" [Freedom House, 2019].

How do African citizens perceive and interpret the state of political and civil liberties in their respective countries? This report takes the measure of popular demand for and government supply of basic individual rights and freedoms as captured in Afrobarometer Round 7 surveys, carried out in 34 countries between late 2016 and late 2018. It also looks at how attitudes, experiences, and perceptions have changed over the past decade.

We uncover two troubling trends. First, consistent with the alarms sounded by Freedom House and others, citizens generally recognize that civic and political space is indeed closing as governments' supply of freedom to citizens decreases. But the results also reveal a decline in popular demand for freedom, in particular the right to associate freely. Moreover, we find considerable willingness among citizens to accept government imposition of restrictions on individual freedoms in the name of protecting public security. In a context where violent extremists are perpetrating attacks in a growing number of countries, the public may acquiesce to governments' increasing circumscription of individual rights and collective freedoms. Fear of insecurity, instability, and/or violence may be leading citizens of at least some African countries to conclude that freedoms come with costs as well as benefits, and that there may be such a thing as too much freedom.

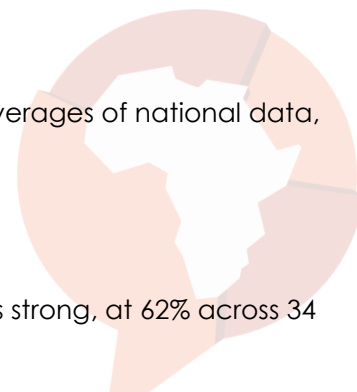
Afrobarometer survey

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. Six rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2015, and findings from Round 7 surveys (2016/2018) are currently being released. Interested readers may follow our releases, including our Pan-Africa Profiles series of Round 7 cross-country analyses, at #VoicesAfrica and sign up for our distribution list at www.afrobarometer.org.

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 to +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

This dispatch relies on data from 45,823 interviews completed in 34 countries between September 2016 and September 2018 (see Appendix Table A.1 for a list of countries and fieldwork dates). The countries covered are home to almost 80% of the continent's population. The data are weighted to ensure nationally representative samples. Each

country is weighted equally; the Africa-wide data below are thus averages of national data, without adjustment for the size of the national populations.



Key findings

On support (or demand) for individual freedoms:

- Support for the fundamental freedom of association remains strong, at 62% across 34 countries.
- Nonetheless, support for freedom of association has shown modest but steady declines: Across 20 countries measured over the past decade, support has dropped 5 percentage points, from 66% to 61%.
- Over the past seven to 10 years, only six countries report significant increases in support for the right to associate freely, compared to 20 countries that have shown substantial declines, led by Zimbabwe (-23 percentage points). Support has decreased even in several of the continent's leading democracies, including Tunisia (-20 points), Namibia (-18), Ghana (-9), Benin (-7), and South Africa (-7). São Tomé and Príncipe (+12 points) and Cabo Verde (+6) are the only democracies showing significant gains.

On willingness to trade freedom for security:

- While a slim majority (53%) stand for the right to private communications, 43% are instead willing to accept government monitoring in the interests of security.
- People are about evenly divided on freedom of religious speech, with 49% backing complete freedom and 47% willing to tolerate government limits on religious speech.
- Support for unrestricted freedom of movement is much lower, at just 35%, compared to 62% who are willing to countenance curfews, roadblocks, and other restrictions in the interests of greater security.

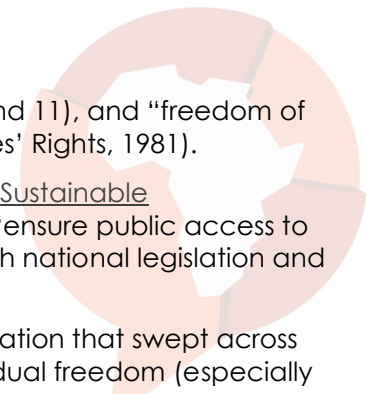
On the extent of freedom of expression in general, and political speech in particular:

- Two-thirds (67%) of Africans say they are "somewhat" or completely free to say what they think, but this represents a 7-percentage-point decline across 31 countries tracked since 2011/2013. Nearly all countries record declines, many of them substantial.
- And when it comes to political speech, a similar two-thirds majority (68%) say that people must "often" or "always" be careful of what they say about politics; across 20 countries, this figure has increased by 9 percentage points over the past decade.
- Similar proportions say that people must be careful about which organizations they join (63%) and about how they vote (68%).

The context: An international framework for protection of individual liberty

The UN's [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), adopted in 1948 by 48 member nations, including three from Africa (Egypt, Ethiopia, and Liberia), establishes a framework for member nations to ensure basic freedoms for their citizens. The declaration asserts the rights of all people to "freedom of thought, conscience and religion" (Article 18), "freedom of opinion and expression" (Article 19), "freedom of movement" (Article 13), and "freedom of peaceful assembly and association" (Article 20), among others (United Nations, 1948).

More recently, the 1981 [African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights](#), ratified by 53 of 54 African countries (South Sudan being the sole exception), also embraces the rights to "personal liberty" (Article 6), "freedom of conscience" (Article 8), "free expression" (Article 9),



“freedom of association” and “freedom of assembly” (Articles 10 and 11), and “freedom of movement” (Article 12) (African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, 1981).

And since they were adopted by all UN member states in 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have again called for governments to “ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements” (SDG16.10) (United Nations, 2019).

One of the most tangible outcomes of the wave of political liberalization that swept across most of Africa during the 1990s was the enjoyment of greater individual freedom (especially freedom of speech, assembly, and movement) as well as media freedom. Throughout the early days of Afrobarometer, large majorities of respondents consistently said that their freedom to say what they wanted, join any organization they chose, and vote as they pleased, as well as their freedom from unjust arrest, was far greater than it had been under previous authoritarian regimes (Bratton, Logan, Cho, & Bauer, 2004).

Yet despite ratification and affirmation of these fundamental rights by most governments, recent events have fueled growing fears of authoritarian-style backsliding. This regression has taken many forms, including closing down of political competition, manipulation of elections, increasing restrictions on press freedom, and restrictive requirements for civil-society registration and funding. It has also taken the form of new restrictions on individual freedoms of speech, assembly, movement, and privacy.

Freedom House’s (2019) Freedom in the World Report, for example, cites significant declines in Africa over the past 13 years in “freedom of expression and belief,” “associational and organizational rights,” and “personal autonomy and individual rights” (p. 7). While it notes substantial openings in Angola, Ethiopia, and the Gambia, it describes the overall trend in Africa in 2018 as one of “creeping restrictions” (p. 12).

In the sections that follow, we explore the extent to which ordinary Africans agree with these assessments about closing space, as well as the level of popular resistance to curtailment of basic freedoms by government.

Demand for freedom of association

We begin by examining popular demand for a basic freedom of liberal democracy, the right of citizens to associate freely. To what extent do Africans continue to demand that their governments protect their fundamental right to join organizations as they choose?

On balance, African citizens remain committed to protection of this basic freedom. Across the 34 countries surveyed in Round 7 (2016/2018), six in 10 Africans (62%) affirm that citizens

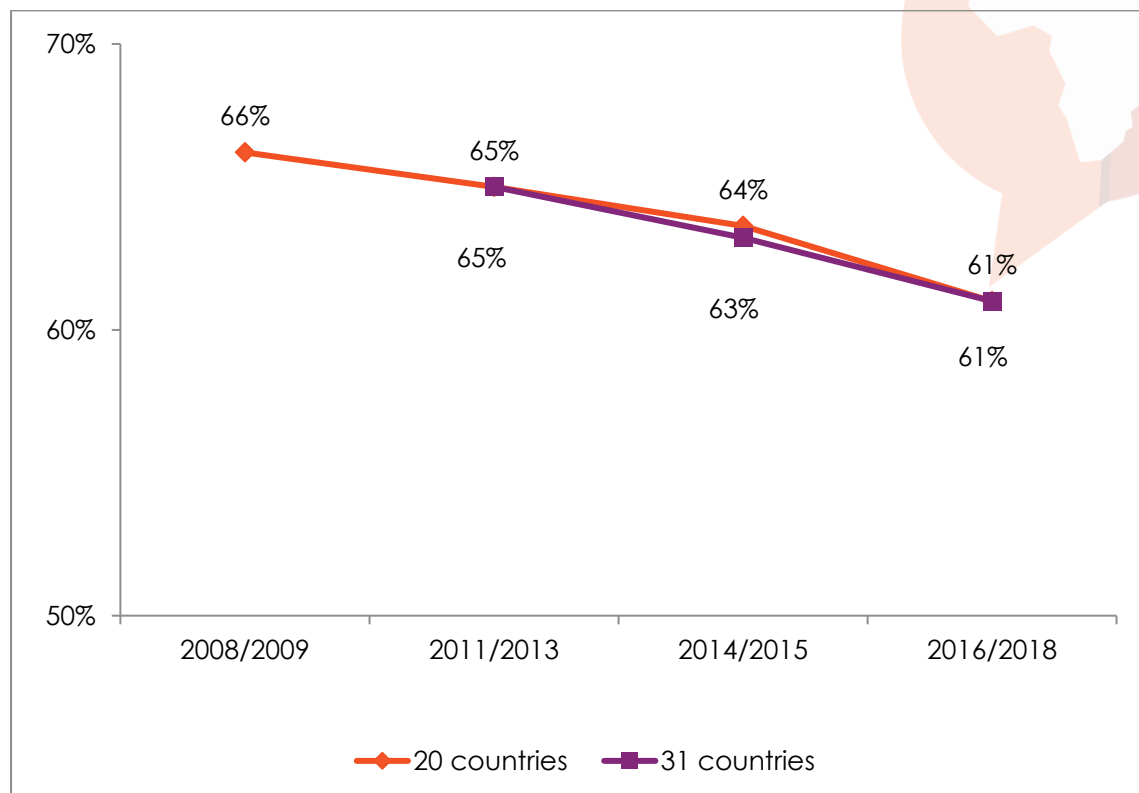
Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It’s easy and free at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

should be able to join any political organizations they like, while one in three (33%) instead think that governments should be able to ban organizations that go against their policies.

However, this support has declined modestly but steadily in recent years (Figure 1). Across 20 countries that have been tracked for a

decade or more, support has dropped by 5 percentage points, from 66% in Round 4 (2008/2009) to 61% in Round 7 (2016/2018). The numbers are almost identical when we look at a larger group of 31 countries that have been tracked continuously since Round 5 (2011/2013).

Figure 1: Support freedom to join any organization | 20 and 31 countries | 2008-2018



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

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

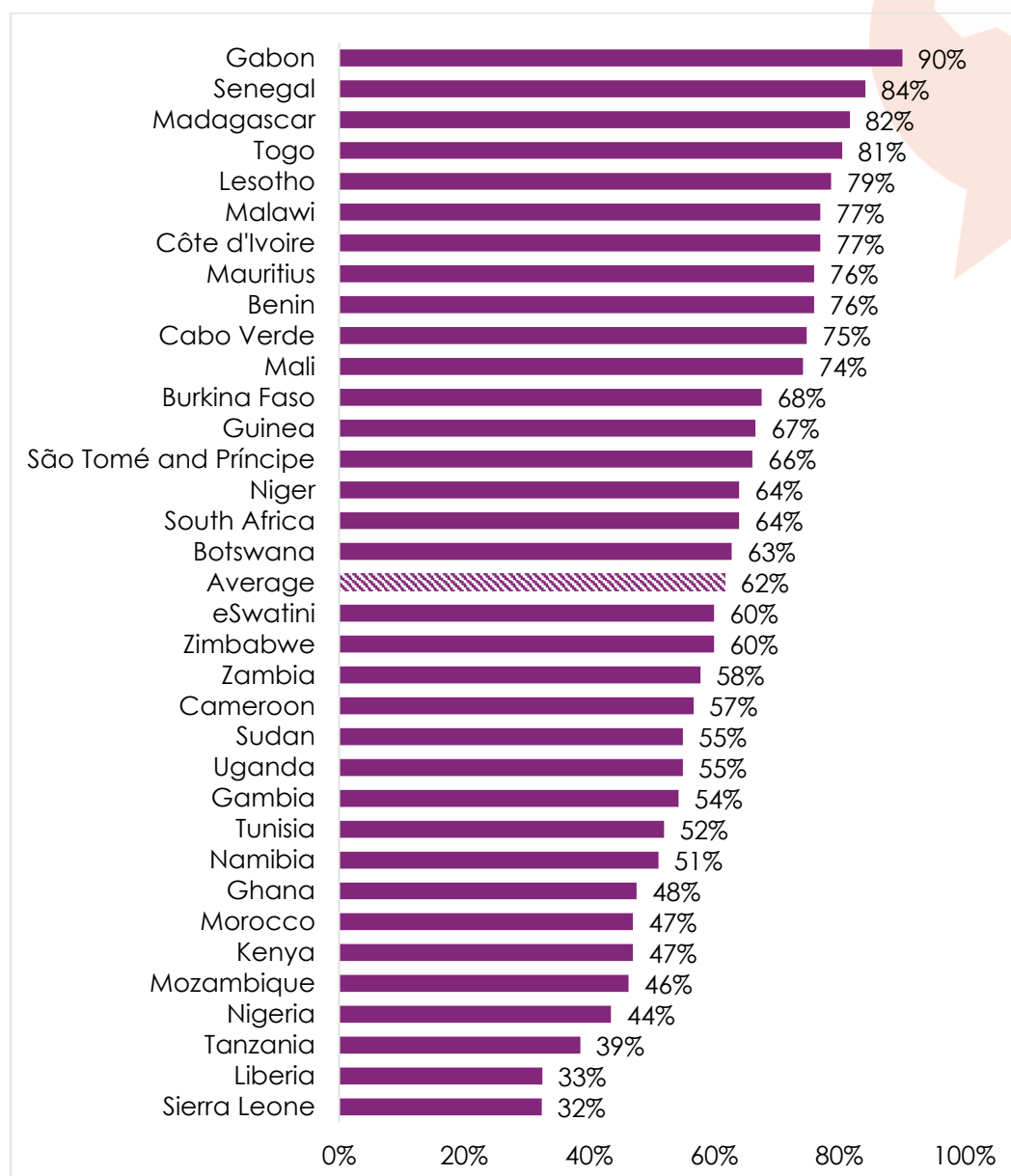
Statement 2: We should be able to join any organization whether or not the government approves of it.

(% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with Statement 2)

Behind these average numbers are significant cross-national differences (Figure 2). At the low end, only about one in three citizens in Sierra Leone (32%) and Liberia (33%) embrace full freedom of association. In Tanzania, where recent government steps to close political space have raised widespread concern, just 39% of citizens back full associational autonomy. This is in sharp contrast to Zambia, another country where the government has taken steps to close political space but where 58% support free association, indicating that further restrictions are likely to face stronger resistance from citizens. Three-quarters or more of citizens support full freedom of association in 10 countries, led by Gabon, where a resounding 90% reject government limits on civic organizations.

At the country level, we find no significant correlation between the level of popular support for freedom of association and either Freedom House (2018) scores for level of democracy or Afrobarometer's own measure of support for democracy. Some of the most democratic countries (i.e. those ranked as "free" by Freedom House in 2018) are found among the ranks of the strongest proponents of freedom of association, such as Senegal (84%), Mauritius (76%), Benin (76%), and Cabo Verde (75%). But others ranked as "free" barely even register majority support for free association, including Tunisia (52%), Namibia (51%), and Ghana (48%). Similarly, residents of authoritarian Gabon are the strongest advocates of associational freedom across all 34 countries (90%), while Sudanese, also encased in an authoritarian system, as of mid-2018 offer only relatively tepid support for free association (55%). In short, some residents of authoritarian countries seem to thirst for greater freedom, while some residents of democratic countries seem indifferent to the freedom they enjoy.

Figure 2: Support freedom to join any organization | 34 countries | 2016/2018



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

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

Statement 2: We should be able to join any organization, whether or not the government approves of it.

(% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with Statement 2)

Focusing on changes over time at the country level reveals a preponderance of negative trajectories across the continent. Among the 20 countries tracked since at least 2008/2009, only four show significant increases in support for associational freedom, led by Lesotho (+9 percentage points) and Malawi (+8) (Figure 3). Ten show declines of 5 percentage points or more, including again some of the continent's leading democracies: Namibia (-18 points), Ghana (-9 points), Benin (-7 points), South Africa (-7 points), and Senegal (-5 points). "Not free" Zimbabwe (-23 points) and "partly free" Liberia (-20 points) fare even worse. Among the continent's leading democracies, only Cabo Verde saw a gain (+6 points), while Botswana was unchanged.

Among 11 countries that joined Afrobarometer more recently and have been tracked since Round 5 (2011/2013), we observe a similar imbalance. Two countries realized substantial

increases – eSwatini (+18 percentage points) and Sudan (+10 points), perhaps reflecting growing discontent in both countries with their governments' policies of tightly regulating organizational life. But eight countries experienced declines of 5 percentage points or more. These are led by Tunisia, where a 20-point decline suggests that as the country continues to face major social and political challenges despite the 2011 transition to democracy, public commitment to democratic principles may be suffering.

In the short term, São Tomé and Príncipe experienced a 12-point gain between Round 6 (2014/2015) and Round 7 (2016/2018), while Gabon remained unchanged.

Figure 3: Changes in support for freedom to join any organization (percentage points) | 33 countries* | 2008-2018

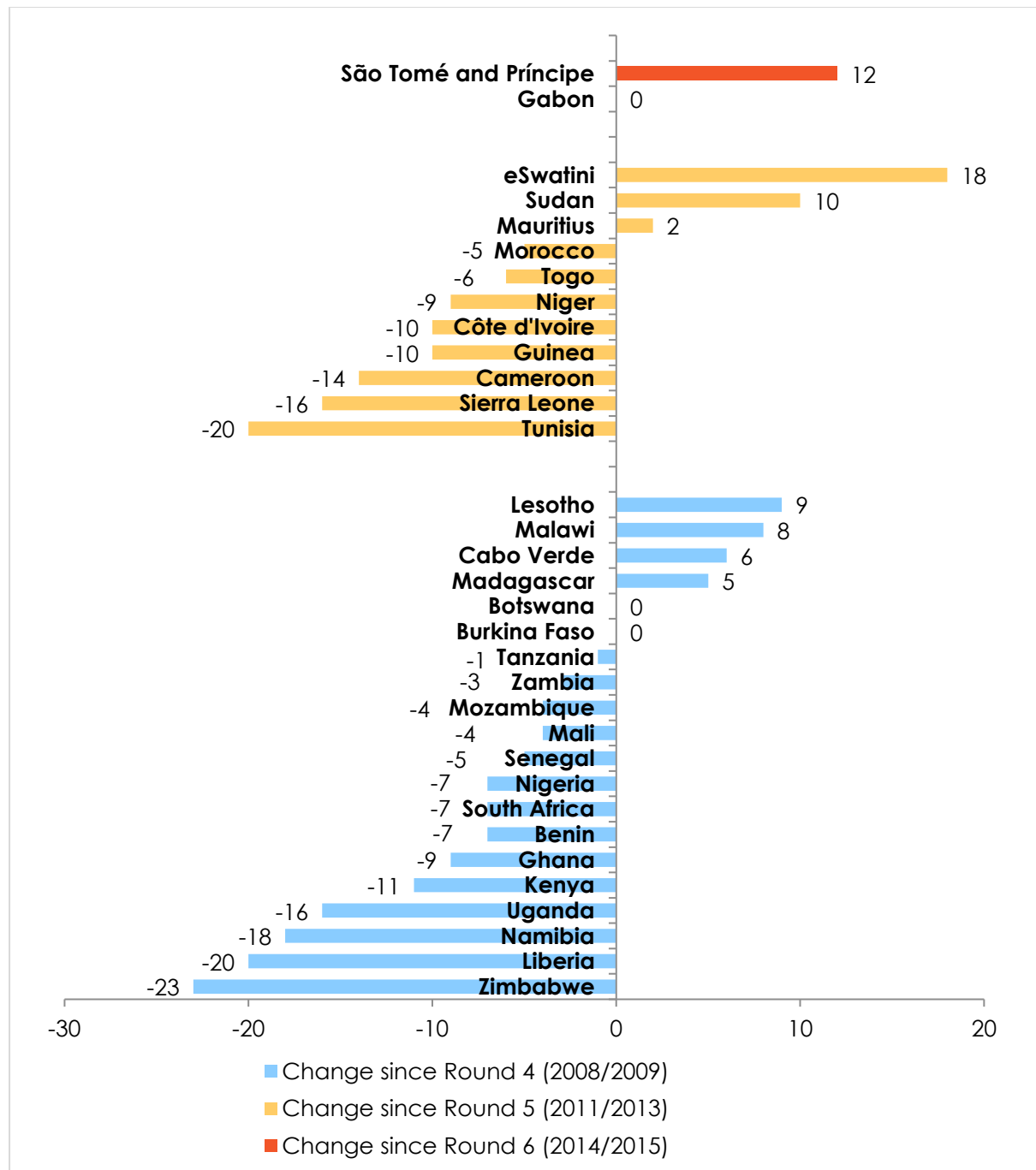


Figure shows change, in percentage points, since indicated survey round in % of respondents who "agree" or "agree very strongly" that people should be able to join any organization, whether or not the government approves of it. (* The Gambia is not shown because it was first surveyed in 2018.)

Thus, although there are exceptions where support for freedom of association is resilient or even growing, on average African publics appear to be somewhat less willing – and in some countries much less willing – to stand up for this right now than they might have been a few years ago. Are some of these societies concluding that “too much openness” is a danger to social stability or security, especially in a context of rising threats from extremist groups? We will explore these questions below.

Trading freedom for security?

One common government strategy for limiting freedoms is to claim that it is necessary to curtail individual liberties in order to protect public security. Of course, these measures may also be used – or even intended – primarily to monitor political opponents, restrict competition, and limit dissent and public voice expressed through protest or other collective action. But in the context of spreading threats from violent extremists on the continent, the security argument could become increasingly persuasive. How open are African publics to these claims? Are they inclined to accept governments' assertions that freedoms should sometimes be restricted in favour of greater security?

Survey responses indicate a significant willingness to trade freedom for security, though some kinds of restrictions appear more acceptable than others. Afrobarometer prefaced a set of three questions probing this trade-off by noting: “Some people say that, in order to enjoy security from violence in our society, we must limit the amount of freedom that citizens are allowed to enjoy. Others say that political liberty is too important to sacrifice and must always be maintained, even if it threatens the security of the country.” Respondents were then given three pairs of statements, each offering a choice between freedom and security, and for each pair asked to select the statement with which they most agreed.

In the first pairing, regarding privacy of communications, we find that a slim majority (53%) stand for people's right “to communicate in private without a government agency reading or listening to what they are saying.” However, a substantial minority (43%) are instead willing to accept that “government should be able to monitor private communications ... to make sure that people are not plotting violence” (Figure 4). More than two-thirds back the right to private communication in Zimbabwe (69%), Gabon (69%), and Sudan (67%), all countries where civil liberties are still contested, as well as in Zambia (67%), where growing restrictions have raised widespread apprehensions. But advocates of private communications are led by two of the continent's most democratic countries, São Tomé and Príncipe (75%) and Cabo Verde (70%).

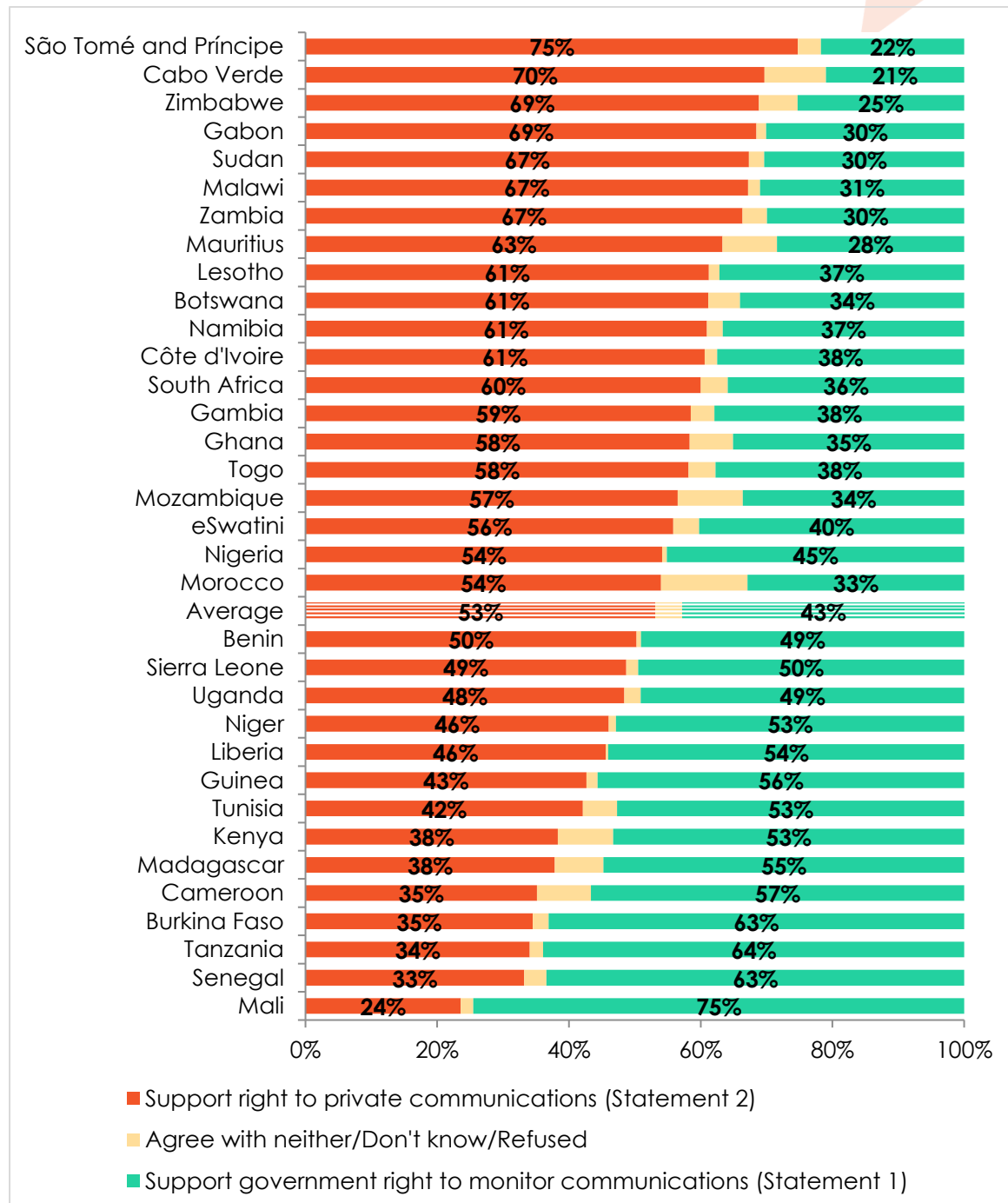
In contrast, only about one-third or less of citizens in Cameroon (35%), Burkina Faso (35%), Tanzania (34%), Senegal (33%), and Mali (24%) opt for freedom over security. Tanzania, like Zambia, has faced growing government restrictions on civil society and opposition, but it would appear that Tanzanians may be much less inclined to push back. Several of the other countries where support for freedom is below the average – including Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Kenya, and Mali – have faced the challenge of extremist violence, which may motivate citizens' preference for security over freedom. It is therefore notable that in both Nigeria, which has faced a long-term insurgency, and Mozambique, which has experienced a recent surge in terrorist incidents, support for freedom of private communications nonetheless remains a majority position (54% and 57%, respectively).

Support for freedom of movement, however, is much less robust. Only about one in three Africans (35%) say that even when their country is faced with security threats, “people should be free to move about the country at any time of day or night.” A solid majority (62%) would instead accept government-imposed curfews and roadblocks under these circumstances (Figure 5).

Slim majorities support free movement in only four countries: Zimbabwe (54%), South Africa (53%), Cabo Verde (52%), and Tanzania (50%). Tanzania is the only country where support for free movement is significantly higher than support for privacy of communications (a 16-percentage-point gap), although support for free movement is also 3 points higher in Kenya.

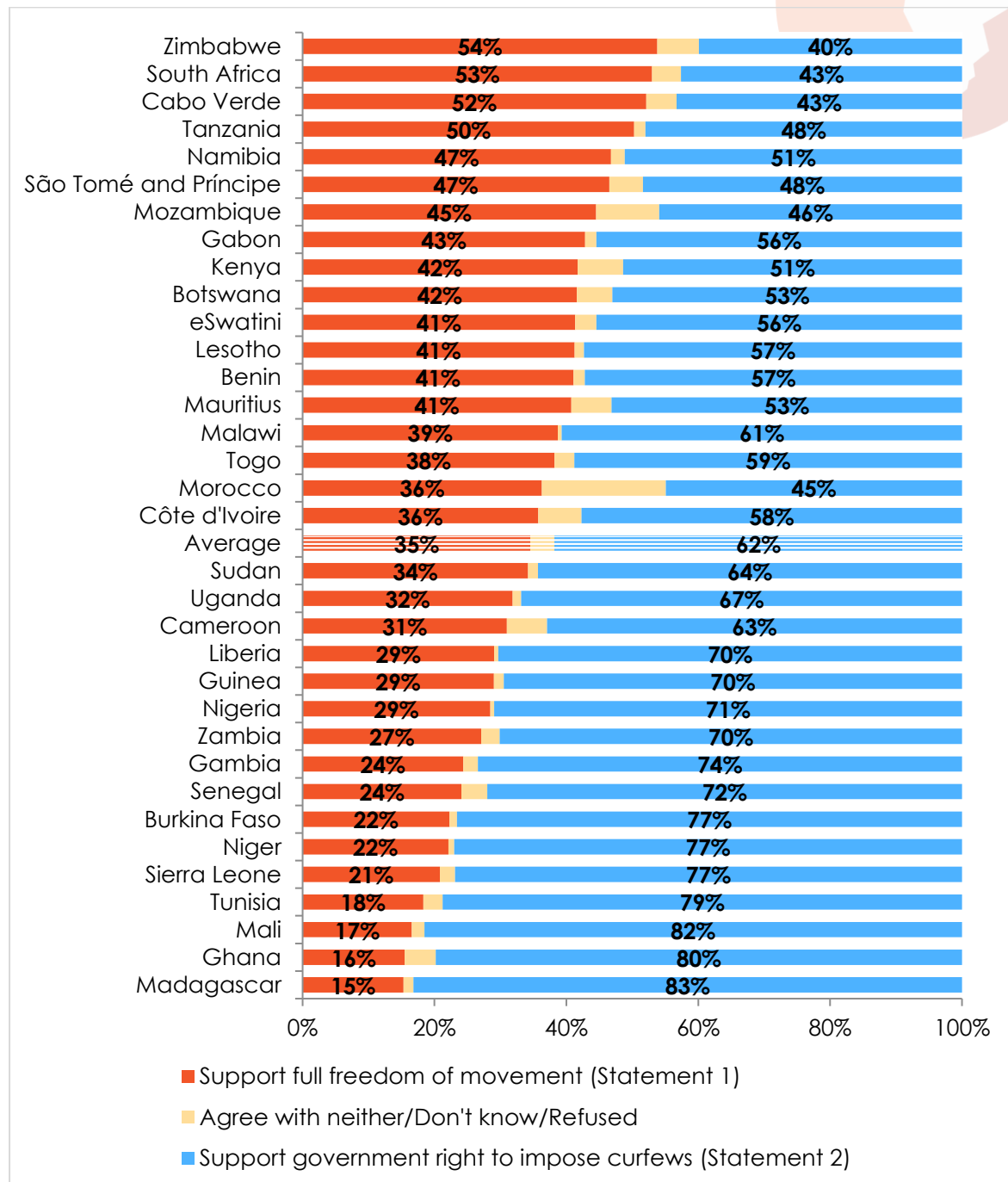
Fewer than one in five respondents prefer free movement to government restrictions in Tunisia (18%), Mali (17%), Ghana (16%), and Madagascar (15%). The high degree of tolerance for restrictions on basic freedoms even in Ghana, one of the most democratic countries on the continent, reveals the power of the security argument for restricting individual freedoms.

Figure 4: Support privacy of communication vs. government right to monitor communications | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Government should be able to monitor private communications, for example on mobile phones, to make sure that people are not plotting violence.
 Statement 2: People should have the right to communicate in private without a government agency reading or listening to what they are saying.
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

Figure 5: Support freedom of movement vs. government right to impose curfews
 | 34 countries | 2016/2018

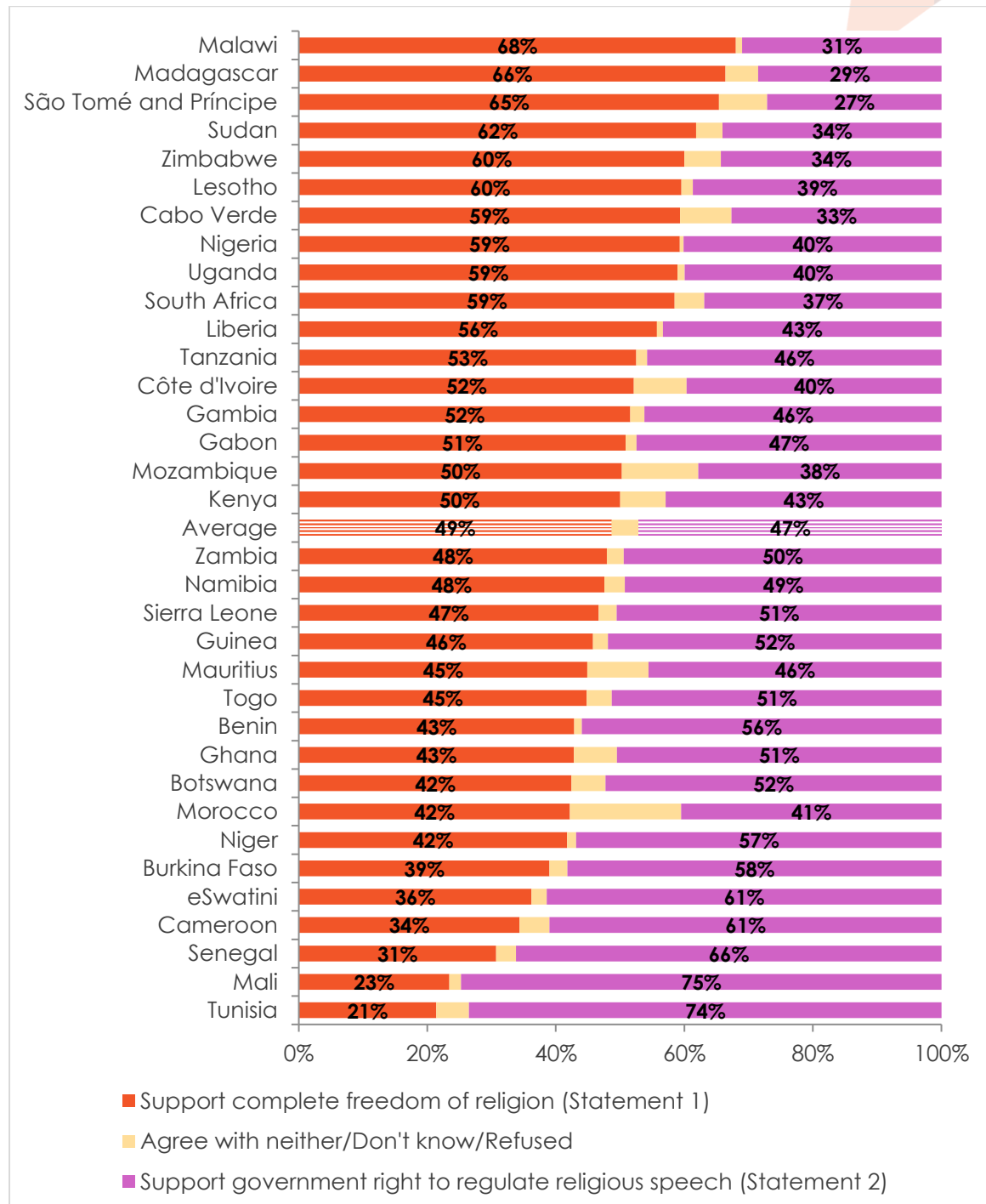


Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Even if faced with threats to public security, people should be free to move about the country at any time of day or night.
 Statement 2: When faced with threats to public security, the government should be able to impose curfews and set up special roadblocks to prevent people from moving around.
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

Finally, respondents were asked whether they support absolute freedom of religious speech or whether government should have the power to regulate what is said in places of worship. On this question, the public is much more closely divided: 49% back complete religious freedom of speech, while 47% would tolerate government regulation of religious speech (Figure 6). The lowest levels of support for religious freedom are expressed in Tunisia (21%),

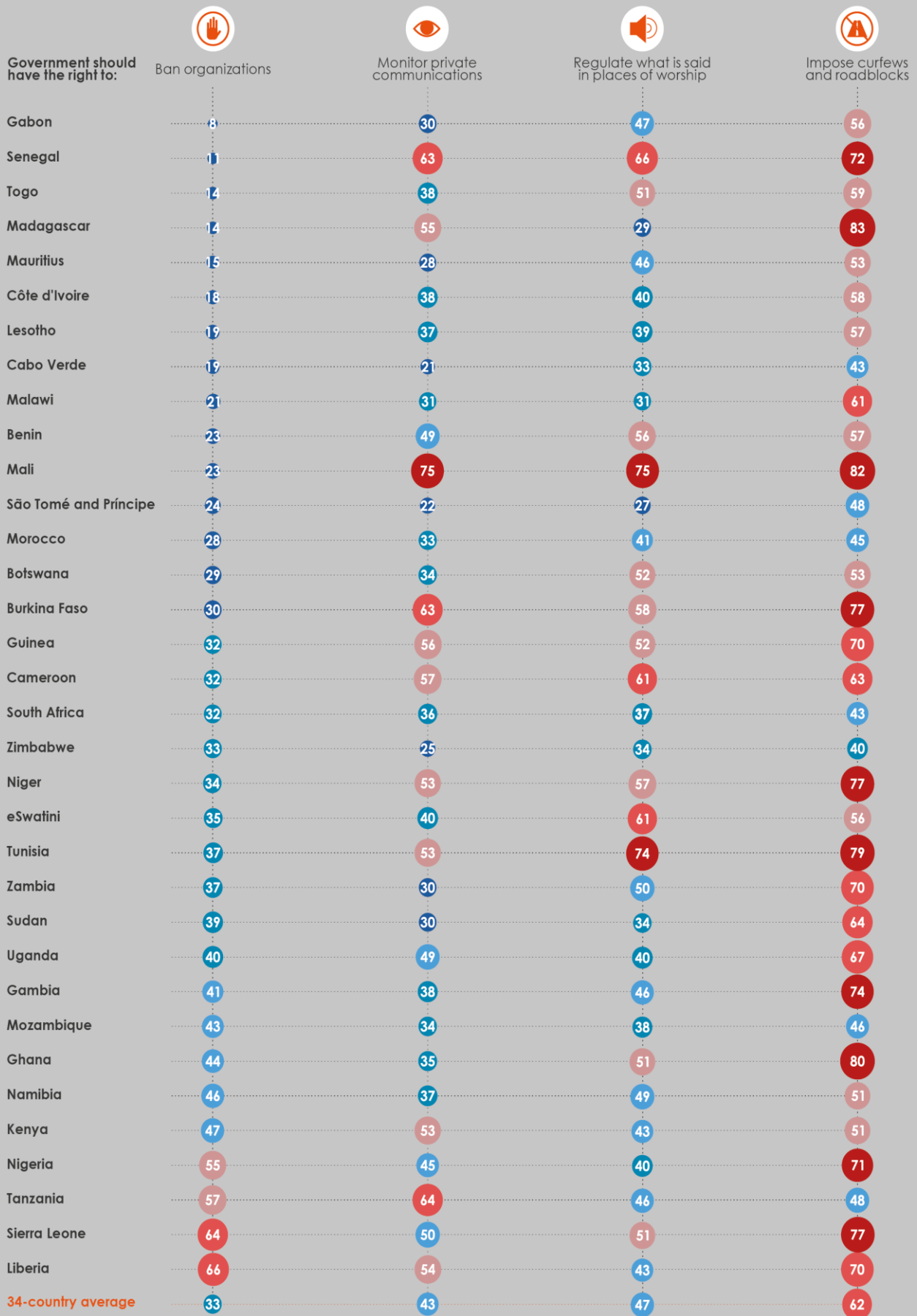
Mali (23%), and Senegal (31%) – all Muslim-majority countries, two of which have experienced major incidents of extremist violence. At the other extreme, two-thirds of Malawians (68%) and Malagasy (66%) embrace unregulated religious speech. Across all countries, 53% of Christians back complete freedom of worship, compared to 42% of Muslims.

Figure 6: Support absolute freedom of religious worship vs. government right to regulate religious speech | 34 countries | 2016/2018

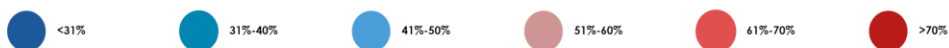



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Freedom of religion and worship are absolute, meaning that government should never limit what is said in a place of worship.
 Statement 2: Government should have the power to regulate what is said in places of worship, especially if preachers or congregants threaten public security.
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with each statement)

Table 1: Tolerance for government limits on freedoms | 34 African countries | 2016/2018



Key





Comparison of country-level responses across these four questions regarding freedom (of association) and freedom-vs.-security trade-offs helps to illuminate which countries are consistently for or against greater freedom (Table 1). The responses shown are the percentage of respondents who would support, or at least tolerate, limits on individual freedoms. Only a few countries consistently score low levels of support (50% or less) for all types of restriction, including Cabo Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, Morocco, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique. São Tomé and Príncipe is the only country where 30% or less of citizens support limits on freedoms on three of the four indicators.

At the other end of the spectrum, no country shows greater than 50% support (red) across all four indicators, but Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Cameroon, Niger, Tunisia, Sierra Leone, and Liberia all show majority support for restrictions on three of the four indicators. Responses in Mali are particularly revealing of the power of insecurity and insurgency to limit support for freedoms. While Malians score in the best category (dark blue, <31% support) with regard to general tolerance of government limits on freedom of association, when it comes to trade-offs between freedom and security, they are at the other end of the spectrum: After the upheavals of the past seven years, three-quarters or more of Malians consistently support security over freedom. Most of the other countries that are in the “three red scores” group have also experienced terrorist attacks by violent extremists, which may be taking a toll on popular commitment to individual liberties and civil rights.

Other countries present more mixed profiles, such as Zambia, where people express some of the highest levels of support for freedom of private communications but some of the lowest for freedom of movement, and Madagascar, where religious freedom receives overwhelming support but there is very little support for freedom of movement.

Overall, then, the most recent Afrobarometer data reveal that while a solid majority of Africans still support protection of individual freedom of association, this support has declined modestly over the past seven to 10 years, both on average across the continent and in most individual countries. Moreover, substantial numbers of citizens are willing to consider trading freedoms for greater security, especially in countries that have experienced or been under threat of extremist violence.

Supply of basic freedoms

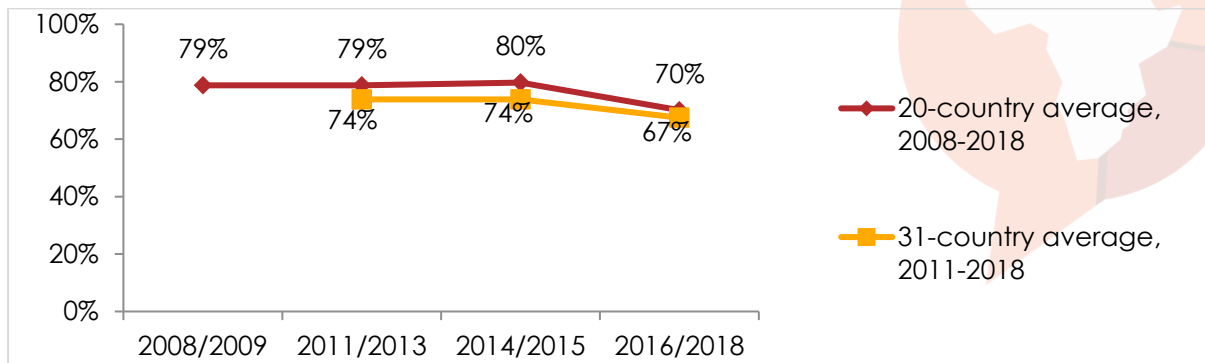
We now turn to the supply side, asking whether citizens believe their basic political and civil liberties are being adequately protected.

Freedom of expression

We begin by considering a question that Afrobarometer has tracked over many rounds of surveys: “*In this country, how free are you to say what you think?*” It seems encouraging that two-thirds (67%) of Africans across 34 countries in Round 7 (2016/2018) report that they are either “somewhat” or “completely” free to say what they think. However, this reflects a substantial decline from previous rounds (Figure 7). A comparison of findings from 31 countries where the question has been asked since Round 5 (2011/2013) shows a 7-percentage-point decline, from 74% to 67%. And across the 20 countries where Afrobarometer has data for a full decade, popular assessments of freedom of speech have dropped by 9 percentage points, from 79% to 70%. The experiences of ordinary Africans would, on average, appear to support the contention that political space is closing.

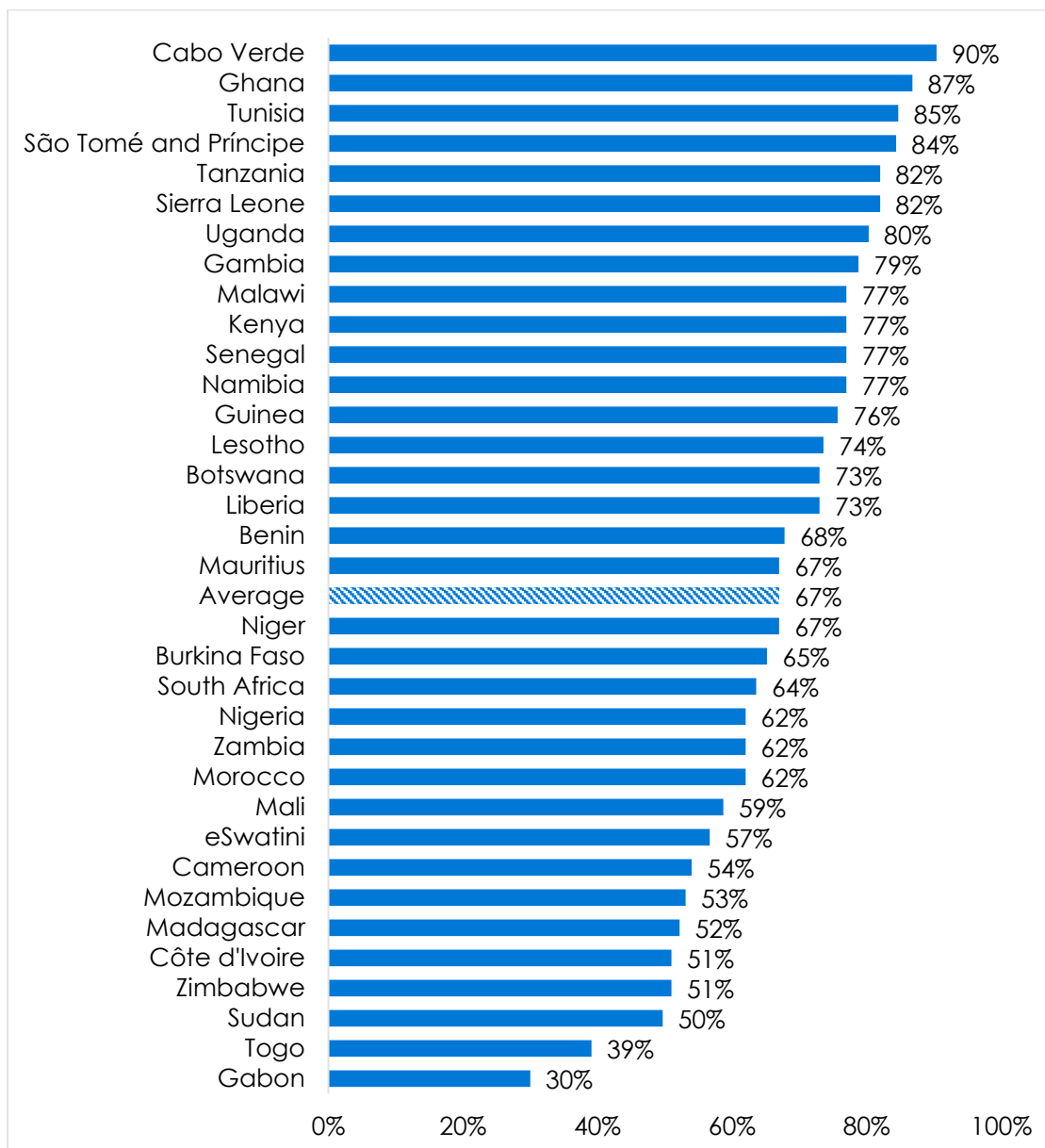
This pattern holds across the vast majority of individual countries as well. In 2016/2018, there is still a lot of positive news. For example, vast majorities in Cabo Verde (90%) and Ghana (87%) express confidence in their right to speak their minds. Majorities report that they enjoy this freedom in every country except Togo (39%) and Gabon (30%) (Figure 8).

Figure 7: Declining perceived freedom of expression | 31 countries | 2008-2018



Respondents were asked: *In this country, how free are you to say what you think? (% "somewhat free" or "completely free")*

Figure 8: Perceived freedom of expression | 34 countries | 2016/2018

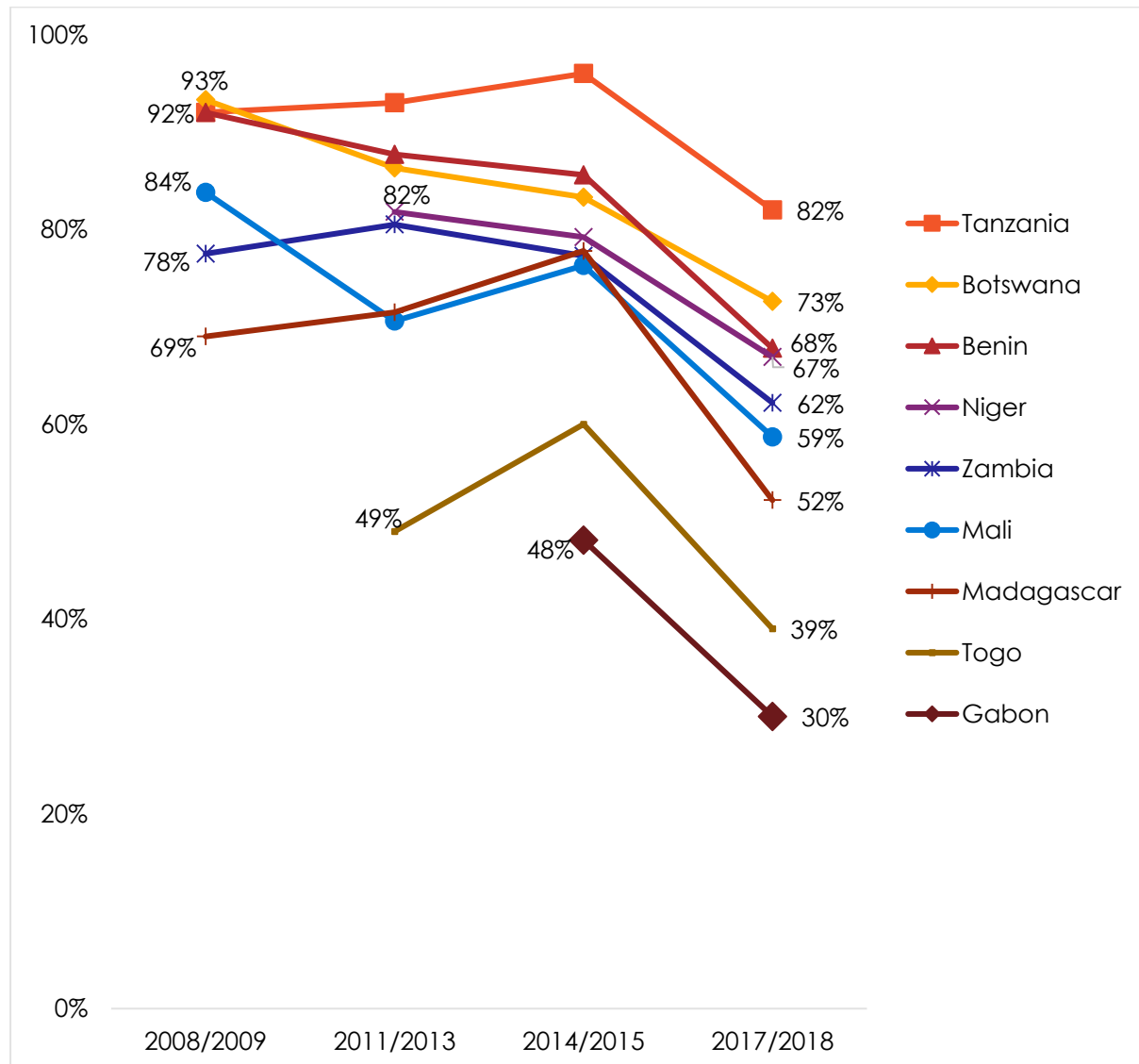


Respondents were asked: *In this country, how free are you to say what you think? (% who say "somewhat free" or "completely free")*

But when we turn to the country trajectories over the past seven to 10 years, we find that 24 countries have experienced declines of at least 4 percentage points, while just four countries have recorded gains of at least 4 points (Figure 9 and Figure 10). Countries experiencing the worst declines include Mali (-25 points), which has been embroiled in a political crisis since a 2012 coup, and Madagascar (-17 points), which is still trying to emerge from years of political turmoil and instability. But they also include some of the continent's highest-ranked democracies, such as Benin (-25 points) and Botswana (-21 points). We also see substantial declines in two countries closely watched due to increasingly authoritarian behaviour by their current governments, Zambia (-15 points) and Tanzania (-11 points). And Togo (-10 points) saw substantial declines from an already low starting point after mass protests in support of term limits were met with a sharp response from President Faure Gnassingbé. Gabon similarly lost substantial ground (-18 points just between 2015 and 2017) after President Ali Bongo's use of repression and censorship in response to protests that followed the severely flawed 2016 elections.

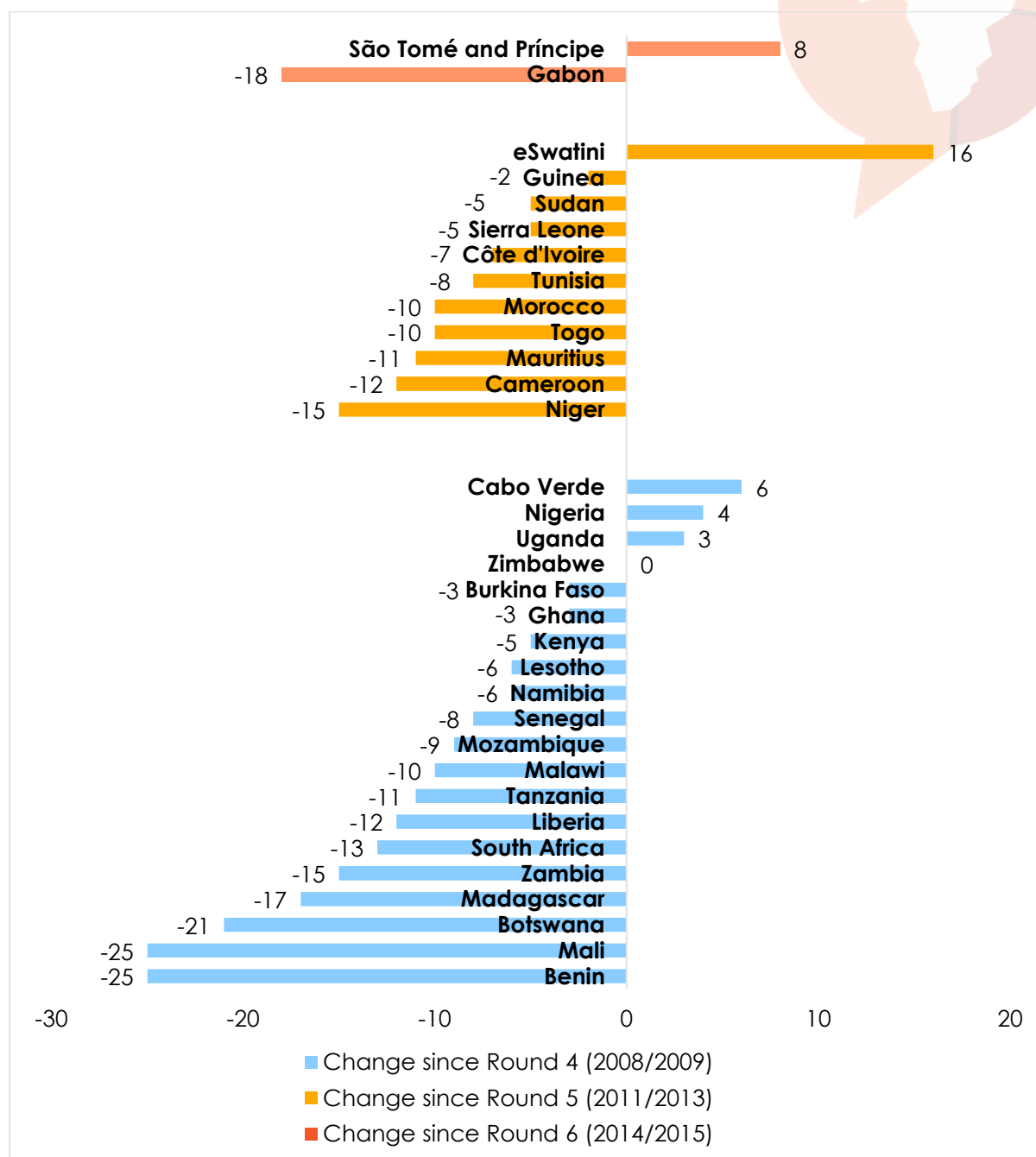
Among the few pieces of good news in these findings are substantial gains in eSwatini (+16 points) and São Tomé and Príncipe (+8 points), and smaller and much more erratic improvements in Cabo Verde (+6 points), Nigeria (+4 points), and Uganda (+3 points).

Figure 9: Perceived freedom of expression over time | selected countries | 2008-2018



Respondents were asked: *In this country, how free are you to say what you think? (% "completely free" or "somewhat free")*

Figure 10: Changes in perceived freedom of expression over time (percentage points)
 | 33 countries* | 2008-2018



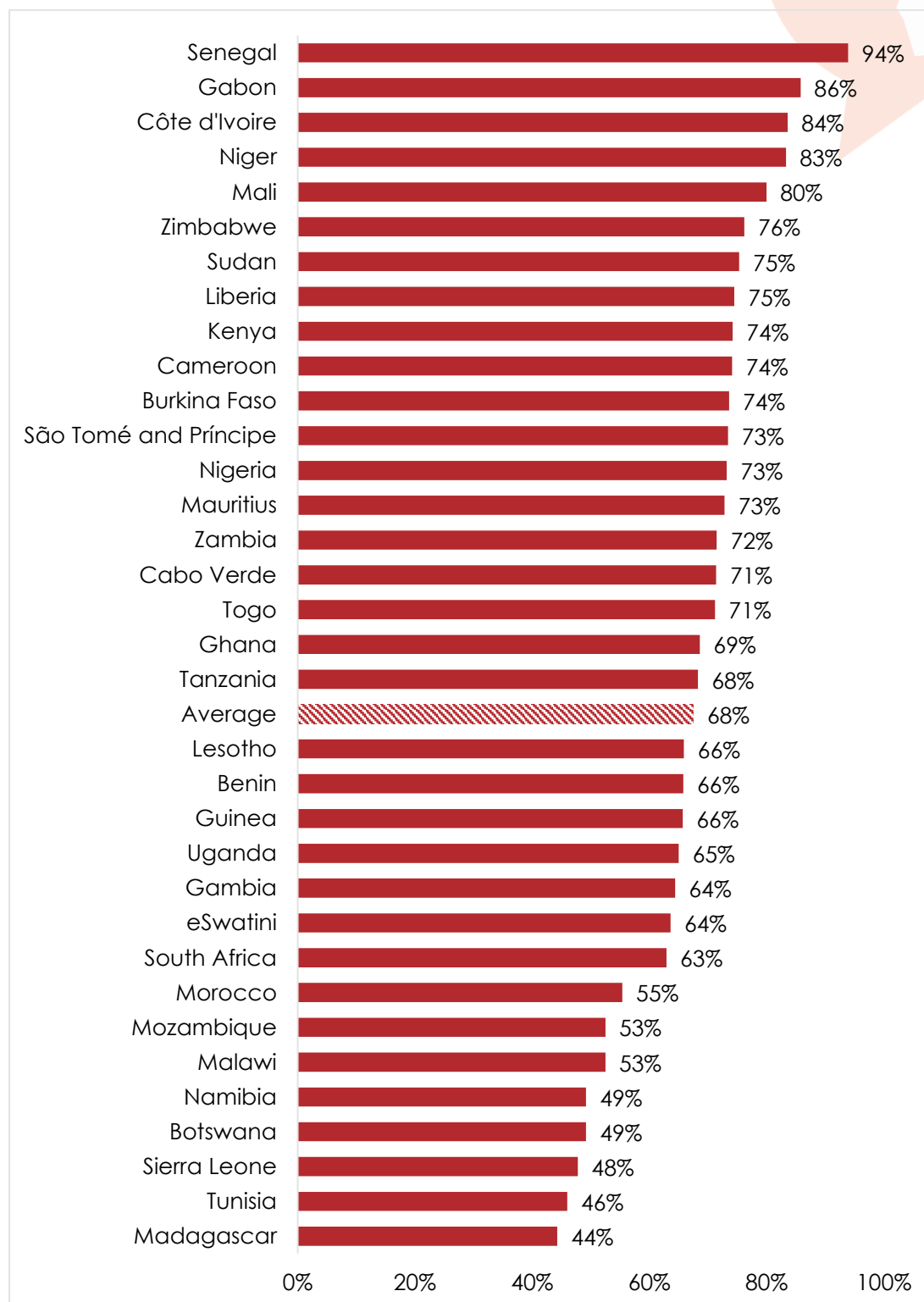
Respondents were asked: *In this country, how free are you to say what you think? (% "completely free" or "somewhat free")* (* The Gambia was first surveyed in 2016/2018.)

Free speech vs. free political speech

Afrobarometer probes further into the question of free speech by asking respondents specifically about political speech: *"In your opinion, how often, in this country, do people have to be careful of what they say about politics?"* Findings reinforce the concerns raised above about closing space. Publics are much less confident about their freedom to engage in political speech than in other kinds of speech. In fact, while 67% say they feel "somewhat" or "completely" free to speak their minds in general, almost the same proportion (68%) say the opposite about political speech, reporting that people "often" or "always" have to be careful about what they say (Figure 11). Moreover, in 20 countries tracked over the past

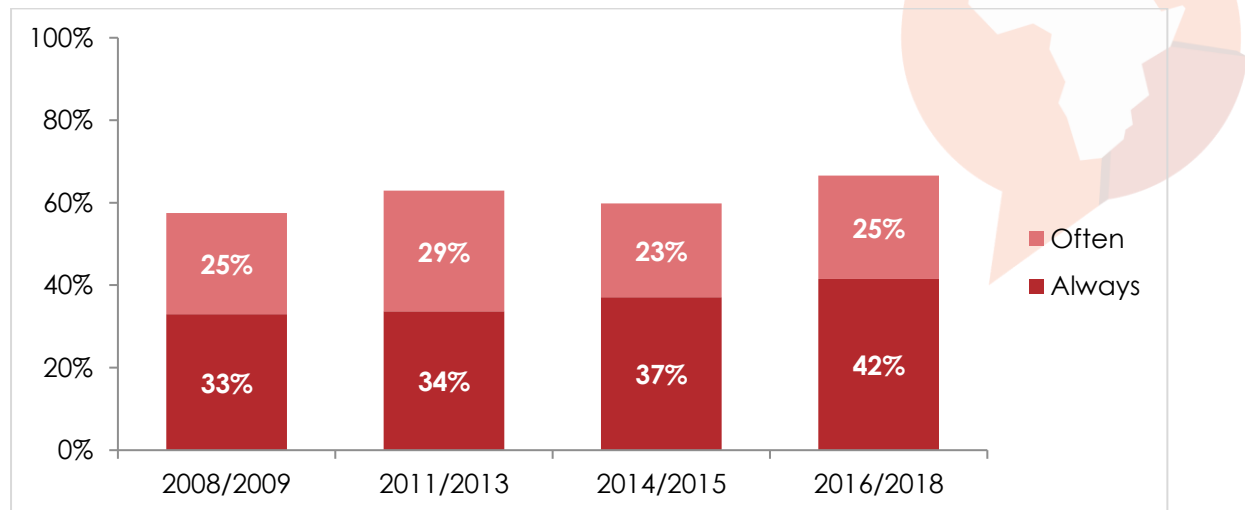
decade, expressions of caution have increased by 9 points, from 58% to 67% – and all of this increase comes in the “always” category, which grew from 33% to 42% (Figure 12).

Figure 11: Need for caution in talking about politics | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often, in this country, do people have to be careful of what they say about politics? (% who say “often” or “always”)*

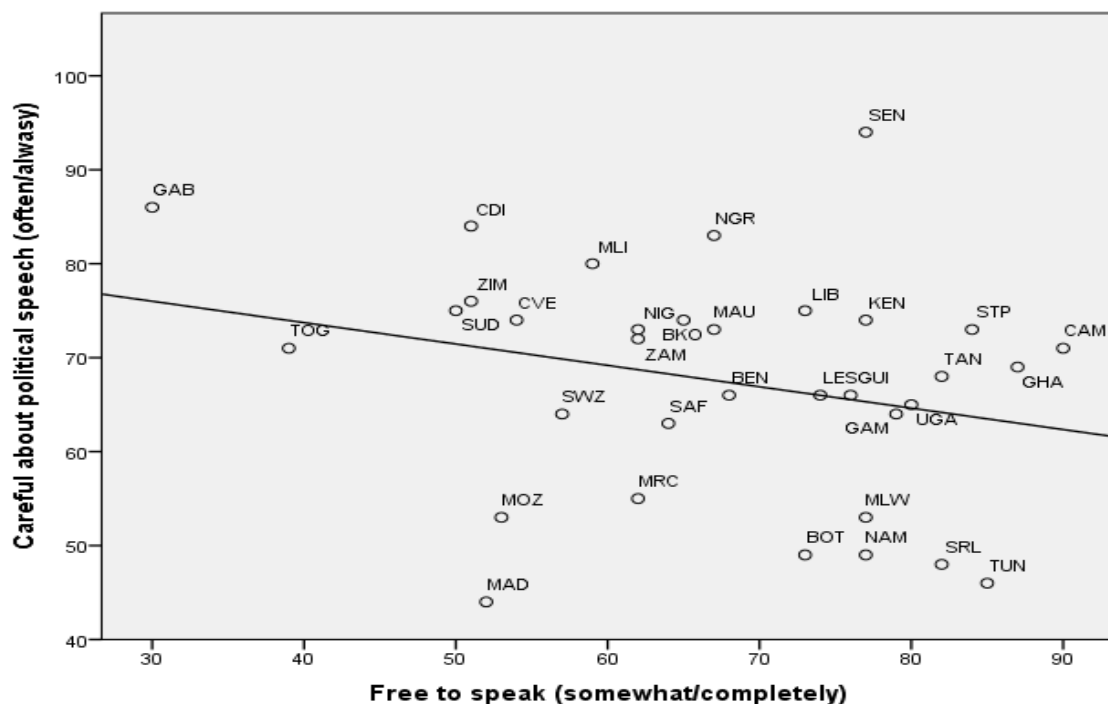
Figure 12: Increasing caution in political speech | 20 countries | 2008-2018



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often, in this country, do people have to be careful of what they say about politics? (% who say "often" or "always")*

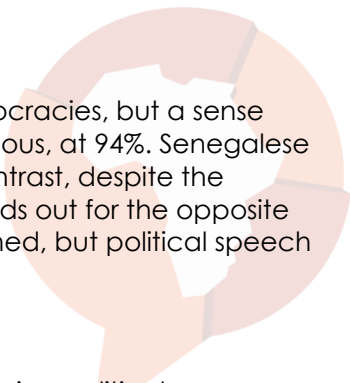
We would expect that as freedom of general speech improves, concerns about political speech would decline, and a direct comparison of the two partially confirms this (Figure 13); the relationship between the two is negative, although it is not statistically significant. This plot also reveals some important cross-country differences.

Figure 13: General ratings of freedom of expression vs. freedom of political speech | 34 countries | 2016/2018



For example, even among the continent's most democratic countries there are wide disparities. On the one hand, Botswana, Namibia, and Tunisia report some of the highest levels of general freedom of speech and some of the lowest levels (though still almost half the population) of caution about political speech. They are joined by "partly free" Sierra Leone and Malawi. On the other hand, in Senegal, also a highly rated democracy, general

freedom of speech is reported to be just as high as in the other democracies, but a sense that people must be cautious about political speech is nearly ubiquitous, at 94%. Senegalese apparently feel free to speak about anything – except politics. In contrast, despite the extended period of political turmoil in the country, Madagascar stands out for the opposite reason: Freedom of speech still appears to be considerably constrained, but political speech is at least no more constrained than ordinary speech.



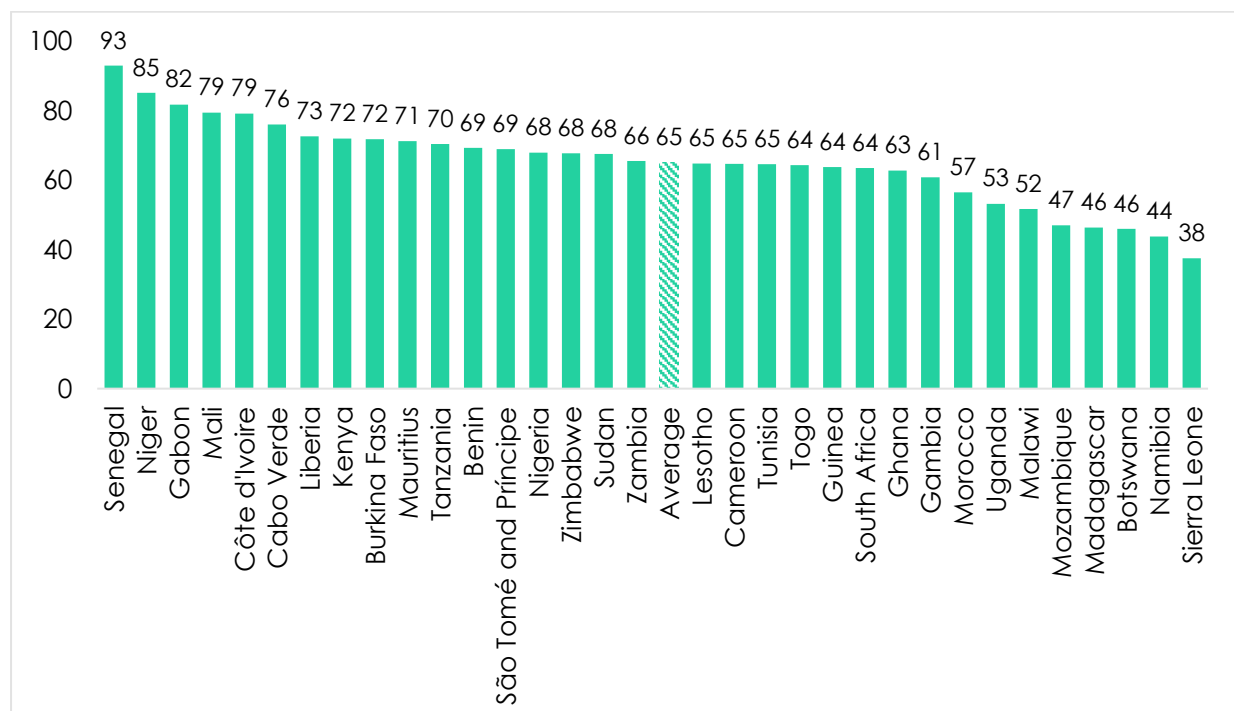
Other freedoms, other cautions

Additional questions about how careful people need to be about joining political organizations and voting elicited similarly cautious responses: On average, about two-thirds say people must “often” or “always” be careful in joining organizations (65%) (Figure 14) and see a need for caution in voting (68%) (Figure 15).

When we take these three questions about freedom vs. caution in exercising rights as a whole, it is evident that the environment for exercising individual rights leaves a lot to be desired (Table 2). There are only six countries where majorities do not express caution with regard to all three activities, and only three countries score 50% or less (i.e. blue) for caution on all three measures: Madagascar, Sierra Leone, and Namibia. And recalling that Sierra Leone was the country reporting the lowest level of demand for freedom of association, its relatively high self-ratings for supply of freedoms (figures 11, 14, and 15) may actually reflect citizens’ low expectations rather than success in achieving high levels of freedom.

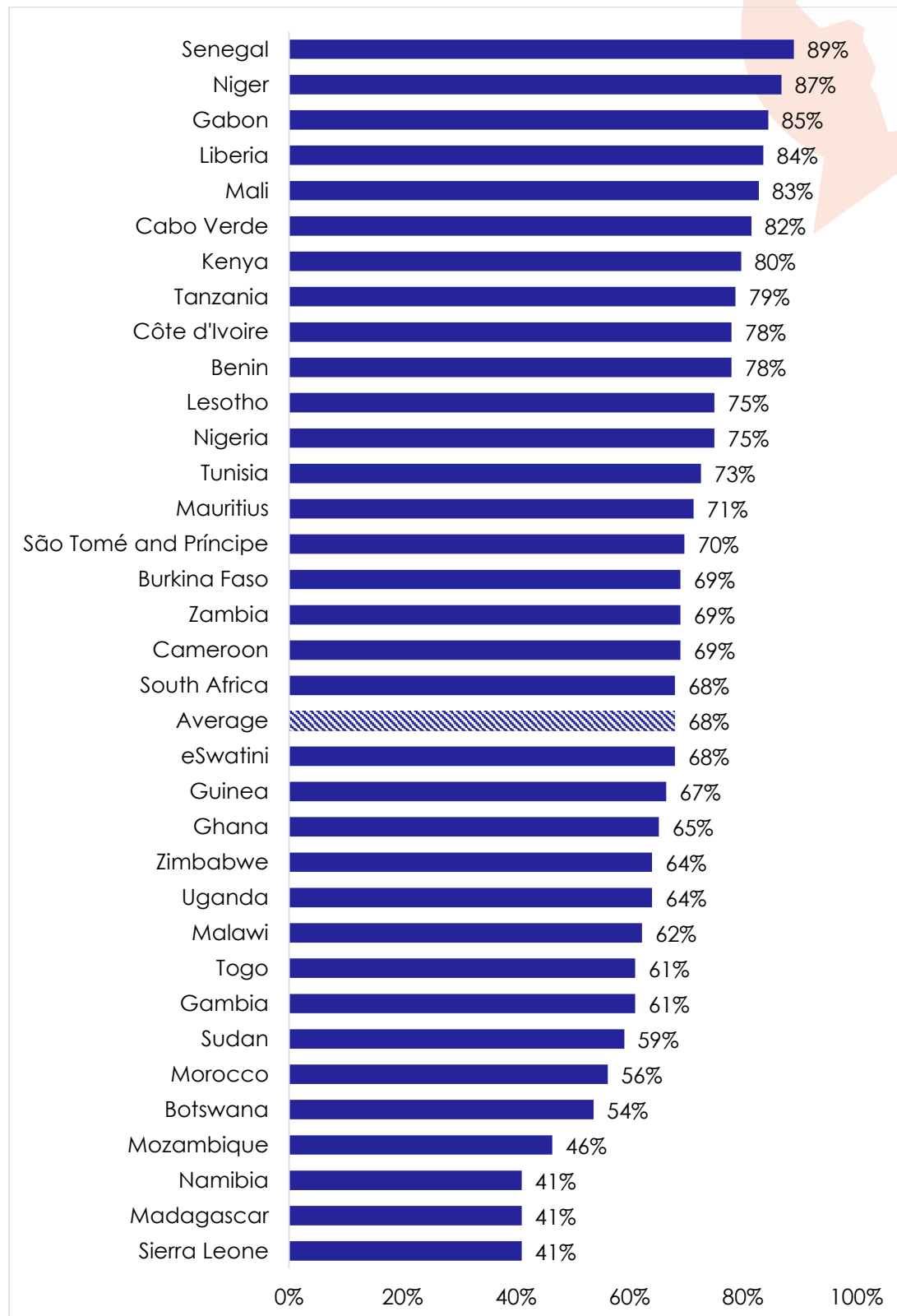
Botswana and Mozambique each score less than 50% on two indicators and just over 50% on a third. But Tunisia, where only 46% report caution about political speech, simultaneously reveals nearly three-quarters (73%) feeling cautious about how they vote. Meanwhile, fully nine countries score above 70% for feeling cautious on all three indicators, led again by Senegal, where at least nine out of 10 citizens report caution with respect to all three measures. This disconnect between Senegal’s high expert ratings with regard to the level of democracy and citizens’ exceedingly low rating of their own enjoyment of freedoms clearly warrants further examination.

Figure 14: Need for caution in joining political organizations | 33 countries* | 2016/2018



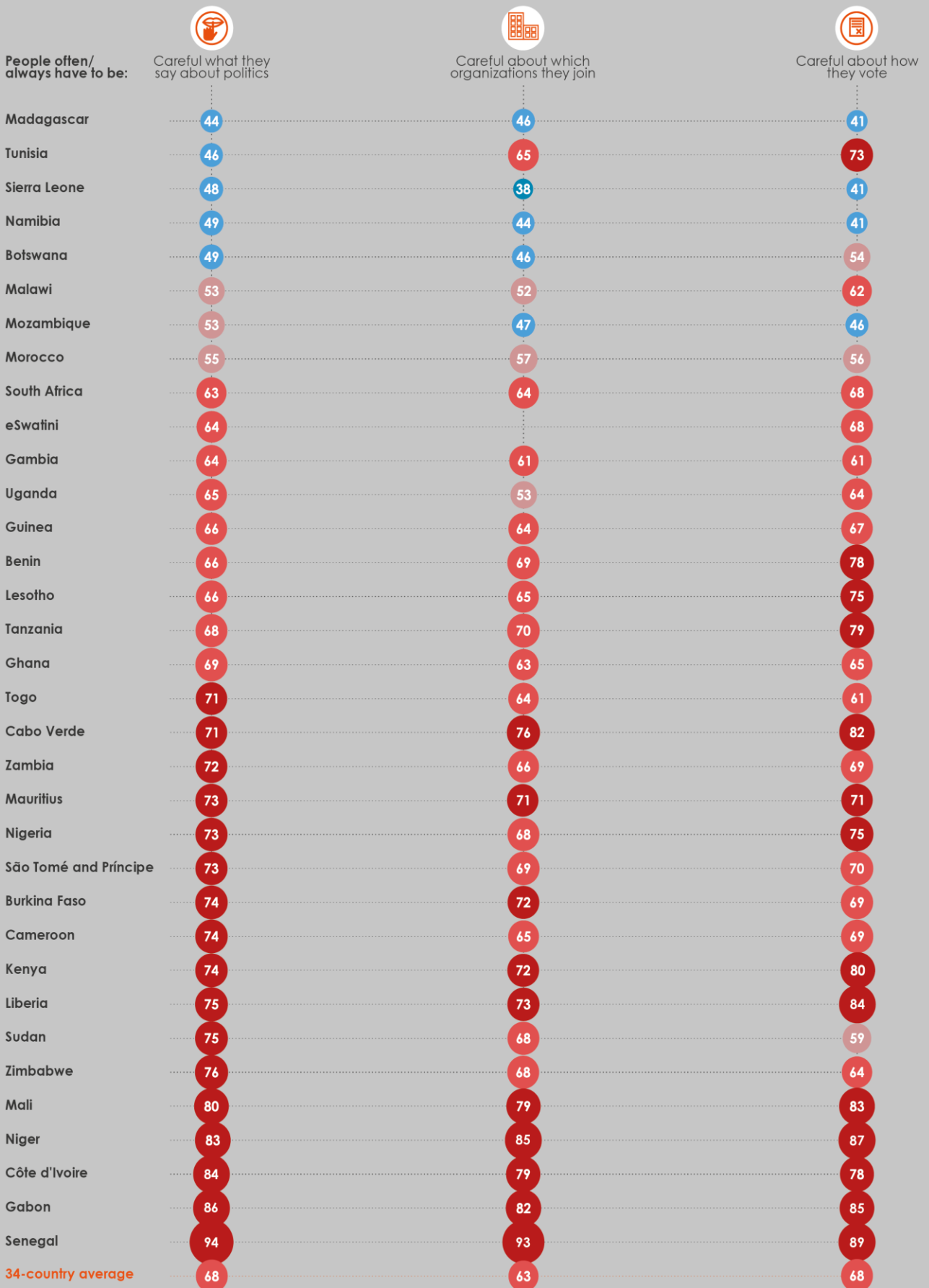
Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how often, in this country, do people have to be careful about which political organizations they join? (% who say “often” or “always”)
 (* Question was not asked in eSwatini.)

Figure 15: Need for caution in voting | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often, in this country, do people have to be careful about how they vote in an election? (% who say "often" or "always")*

Table 2: Levels of caution in exercising rights, compared | 34 African countries | 2016/2018



Key



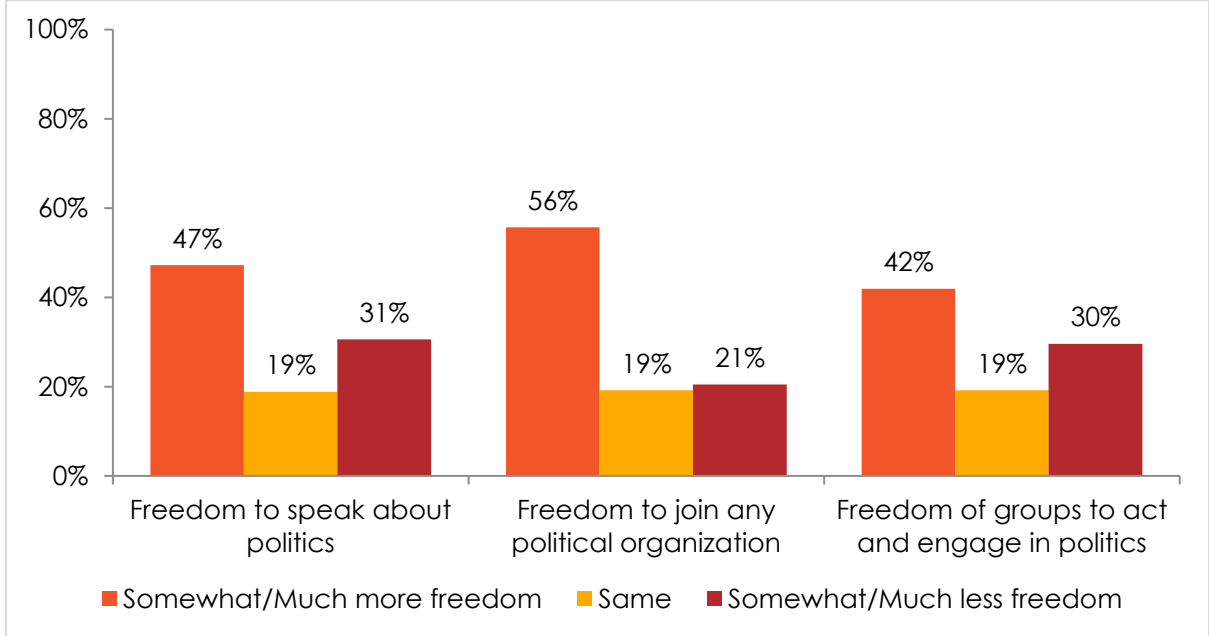


Perceived trends in basic freedoms?

As we have seen, findings from consecutive series of Afrobarometer surveys indicate a modest decline in popular demand for governments to protect freedom of association and a more substantial decrease in the perceived extent to which governments actually do protect or supply individual freedoms.

In Round 7, Afrobarometer also asked respondents directly whether they think they enjoy more or less freedom of speech, freedom of association, and freedom of collective action by civic groups “compared to a few years ago.” At first glance, responses paint a somewhat more positive picture (Figure 16). Across 34 countries, pluralities say that they enjoy more freedom to speak about politics now than they did “a few years ago” (47%) and that “the freedom of independent groups or nongovernmental organizations to speak, hold meetings, or advocate their views freely, including criticizing the government if they choose” has improved (42%). And a majority (56%) say their freedom to join any political organization has improved.

Figure 16: Recent trends in protection of freedoms | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: Please tell me if there is more or less freedom now for each of the following things compared to a few years ago, or are things about the same:
Your own freedom to say what you think about politics?
Your own freedom to join any political organization you want?
The freedom of independent groups or nongovernmental organizations to speak, hold meetings, or advocate their views freely, including criticizing the government if they choose?

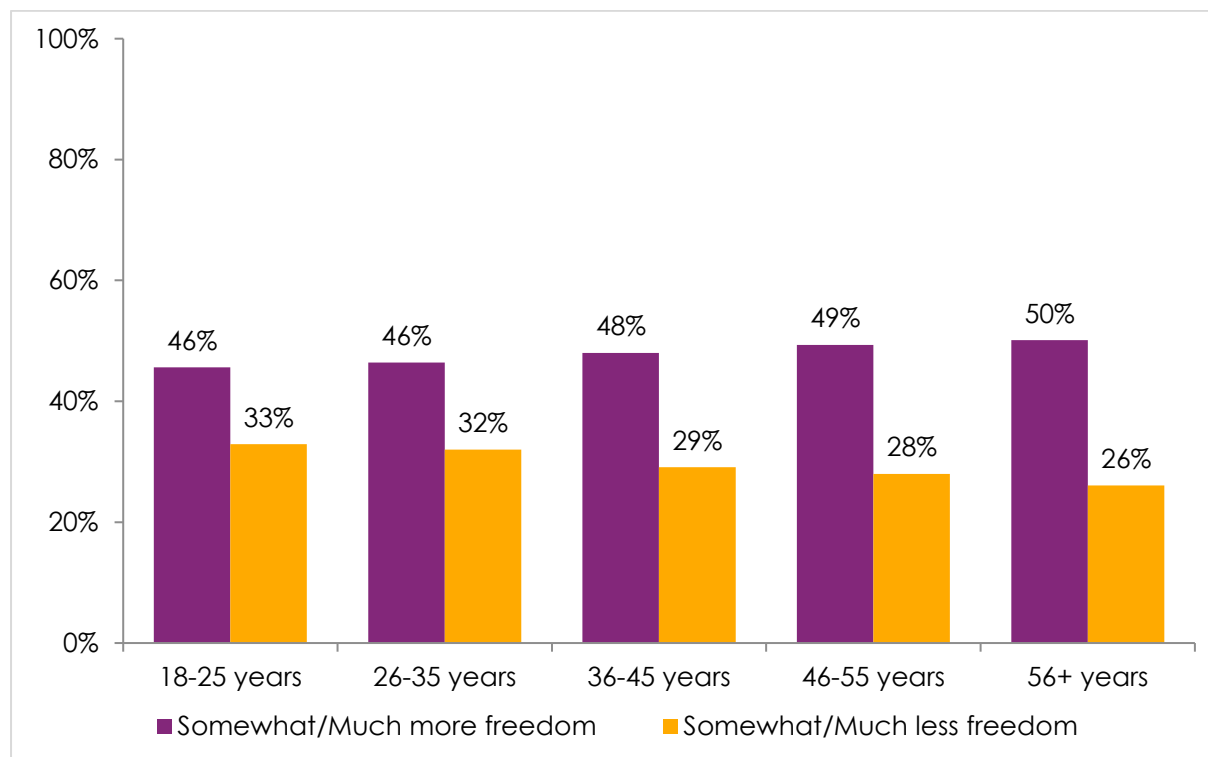
It is not clear whether this somewhat more positive outlook reflects actual recent gains or perhaps some lack of specificity about the time frame of this question series. There is little question that in most countries, individual rights and liberties are far better protected now than they were a generation ago, even if these protections may have partially eroded in recent years. If some respondents adopted a longer-term perspective, in a context characterized by long-term gains and short-term losses, they may be more likely to report improvements rather than declines.

Age differences in the responses reinforce this interpretation. Older respondents, who have directly experienced these long-term gains, are twice as likely to report that things are better (50%) rather than worse (26%), whereas for those aged 18-25, the gap is much narrower: One

in three (33%) see things getting worse, compared to 46% who say they are better (Figure 17). Thus, we consider the indicators described in the previous section, measured across several recent rounds of surveys and revealing steady declines in protection of individual freedoms, to be more reliable indicators of recent trends.

Despite the lack of clarity about the time horizon that shaped responses, it is worth noting that several countries stand out for particularly widespread reports of declining freedoms. Most notable among them is Gabon, where a sizeable majority (64%) report declining space for collective action and 58% report declining freedom of political speech. Pluralities also report declining space for freedom of speech in Madagascar, Sudan, Côte d'Ivoire, and Zimbabwe; for associational freedom in eSwatini, Sudan, and Zimbabwe; and for collective action in Côte d'Ivoire, eSwatini, Madagascar, Niger, Sudan, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe. (For details by country, see Table A.2 in the Appendix).

Figure 17: Recent trends in protection of freedom of speech | by age | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: Please tell me if there is more or less freedom now for each of the following things compared to a few years ago, or are things about the same: Your own freedom to say what you think about politics?

Conclusion

One of the great achievements of the early transition era of the 1990s, when political liberalization and democratic openings reshaped politics across much of Africa, was the major expansion of protections for the civil rights and liberties of ordinary citizens. Throughout the first decade of Afrobarometer (1999-2009), large majorities of citizens in most countries consistently reported that protection of these liberties was “better” or “much better” than it had been under previous authoritarian regimes (Bratton, Logan, Cho, & Bauer, 2004). In fact, when asked what democracy means, the most common response was protection of civil liberties, especially freedom of expression (Bratton, 2002).

Two decades later, growing concerns about threats to democracy focus in part on “creeping restrictions” on individual rights and the exercise of basic freedoms. An ever-

expanding array of tools and tactics, including suspension of Internet access, surveillance systems, licensing requirements, prohibitive fees, and even raids, arrests, and government violence, have been used to stifle freedoms of speech, assembly, and movement, as well as media freedom.

Africans have taken note of these changes. In most countries – even in countries regarded as leading democratic lights on the continent – citizens' assessments of how free they are, and of how cautious they must be in exercising their rights, have worsened considerably over the past decade.

Alongside this, we observe a modest but steady decline in popular demand for freedom and, perhaps even more significantly, a widespread willingness to give up at least some freedoms in exchange for increased security. In a context where attacks by violent extremists have been spreading to new regions, and where governments often appear quite willing to use these events to entrench their own interests, the potential threat to liberty for ordinary citizens is clear.

In short, troubling continental trends point toward both greater government constraints on freedom and greater public tolerance for these constraints. Perhaps the current emphasis on the UN Sustainable Development Goals, including SDG 16.10 calling for governments to protect fundamental freedoms, can be used by human-rights advocates as a tool to push back against these creeping infringements and once again make the protection of basic freedoms a cornerstone of Africa's more liberal political systems.

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Appendix

Table A.1: Afrobarometer Round 7 fieldwork dates and previous survey rounds

Country	Months when Round 7 fieldwork was conducted	Previous survey rounds
Benin	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
Botswana	June-July 2017	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Burkina Faso	Oct 2017	2008, 2012, 2015
Cameroon	May 2018	2013, 2015
Cape Verde	Nov-Dec 2017	2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
Côte d'Ivoire	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	2013, 2014
eSwatini	March 2018	2013, 2015
Gabon	Nov 2017	2015
Gambia	July-August 2018	N/A
Ghana	Sept 2017	1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Guinea	May 2017	2013, 2015
Kenya	Sept-Oct 2016	2003, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
Lesotho	Nov-Dec 2017	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Liberia	June-July 2018	2008, 2012, 2015
Madagascar	Jan-Feb 2018	2005, 2008, 2013, 2015
Malawi	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Mali	Feb 2017	2001, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014
Mauritius	Oct-Nov 2017	2012, 2014
Morocco	May 2018	2013, 2015
Mozambique	July-August 2018	2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015
Namibia	Nov 2017	1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2014
Niger	April-May 2018	2013, 2015
Nigeria	April-May 2017	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2015
São Tomé and Príncipe	July 2018	2015
Senegal	Dec 2017	2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014
Sierra Leone	July 2018	2012, 2015
South Africa	August-Sept 2018	2000, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2015
Sudan	July-August 2018	2013, 2015
Tanzania	April-June 2017	2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Togo	Nov 2017	2012, 2014
Tunisia	April-May 2018	2013, 2015
Uganda	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015
Zambia	April 2017	1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2014
Zimbabwe	Jan-Feb 2017	1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2014

Table A.2: Reports of declining freedoms | 34 countries | 2016/2018

	Less freedom to speak about politics	Less freedom to join any political organization	Less freedom of groups to act and engage in politics
Benin	29%	24%	31%
Botswana	31%	14%	33%
Burkina Faso	18%	15%	18%
Cabo Verde	11%	11%	12%
Cameroon	32%	20%	32%
Côte d'Ivoire	41%	29%	36%
eSwatini	30%	42%	42%
Gabon	58%	40%	64%
Gambia	10%	8%	9%
Ghana	13%	9%	11%
Guinea	26%	20%	24%
Kenya	21%	12%	24%
Lesotho	32%	18%	20%
Liberia	31%	18%	34%
Madagascar	33%	25%	39%
Malawi	43%	18%	31%
Mali	22%	11%	19%
Mauritius	32%	26%	24%
Morocco	21%	17%	19%
Mozambique	33%	26%	27%
Namibia	26%	15%	22%
Niger	37%	20%	45%
Nigeria	37%	20%	37%
São Tomé and Príncipe	36%	26%	36%
Senegal	25%	11%	23%
Sierra Leone	27%	15%	22%
South Africa	34%	20%	26%
Sudan	44%	37%	41%
Tanzania	39%	11%	47%
Togo	34%	27%	29%
Tunisia	16%	16%	18%
Uganda	33%	17%	40%
Zambia	42%	23%	39%
Zimbabwe	47%	39%	37%
34-country average	31%	21%	30%

Respondents were asked: Please tell me if there is more or less freedom now for each of the following things compared to a few years ago, or are things about the same:

Your own freedom to say what you think about politics?

Your own freedom to join any political organization you want?

The freedom of independent groups or non-governmental organizations to speak, hold meetings or advocate their views freely, including criticizing the government if they choose?

(% who say "somewhat less freedom" or "much less freedom")

AFRO BAROMETER

LET THE PEOPLE HAVE A SAY



Carolyn Logan is deputy director of Afrobarometer and associate professor in the Department of Political Science at Michigan State University.

Peter Penar is assistant professor at Michigan State University.

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.

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Contact: clogan@afrobarometer.org

ppenar@msu.edu