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News release

Poor quality elections erode support for democracy in Uganda, new Afrobarometer survey shows

More Ugandans say they prefer democracy over any other system, but fewer are satisfied with the way their democracy is actually working, a new Afrobarometer survey shows.

Popular preference for democracy has been remarkably cyclical, rising before and falling after presidential elections. But satisfaction has been on a 17-year slide.

Data show that this satisfaction gap (between the proportion of citizens who prefer democracy and those who are satisfied) is strongly and negatively related with the perceived quality of elections as well as public views on how well the government has performed on economic and political indicators. These findings suggest a dampening effect on popular support for democracy and perhaps vindicate the public call for better service delivery and for reforms to improve the quality of Uganda's elections.

Key findings

- Since the year 2000, the proportion of Ugandans who prefer democracy over any other system has been increasing but non-uniformly, with each increase before a general election being followed by a decrease after the election (Figure 1).
- During the period 2000-2017, popular satisfaction with the way democracy works in Uganda steadily declined, from 62% to 46%.
- Ugandans are consistently more likely to prefer democracy than they are to be satisfied with the way their democracy is actually working. The 5-percentage-point gap recorded in 2000 grew to 15 points after the 2001 elections; the 10-point difference in 2005 grew to 25 points after the 2006 elections; and the 14-point gap in 2015 grew to 34 points after the 2016 elections (Figure 2).
- Corresponding to this satisfaction gap, we see a drop in support for democratic values such as support for the rule of law, freedom of the press, parliamentary oversight, multipartism, and freedom of assembly and association (Figure 3).
- Similarly, we see a corresponding drop in the perceived quality of elections, especially trust in electoral commission, perceived freedom and fairness of the last national election, freedoms of assembly/association during elections, and increases in fear of violence/intimidation and in having to be careful about what one says or how one votes (Figure 4).

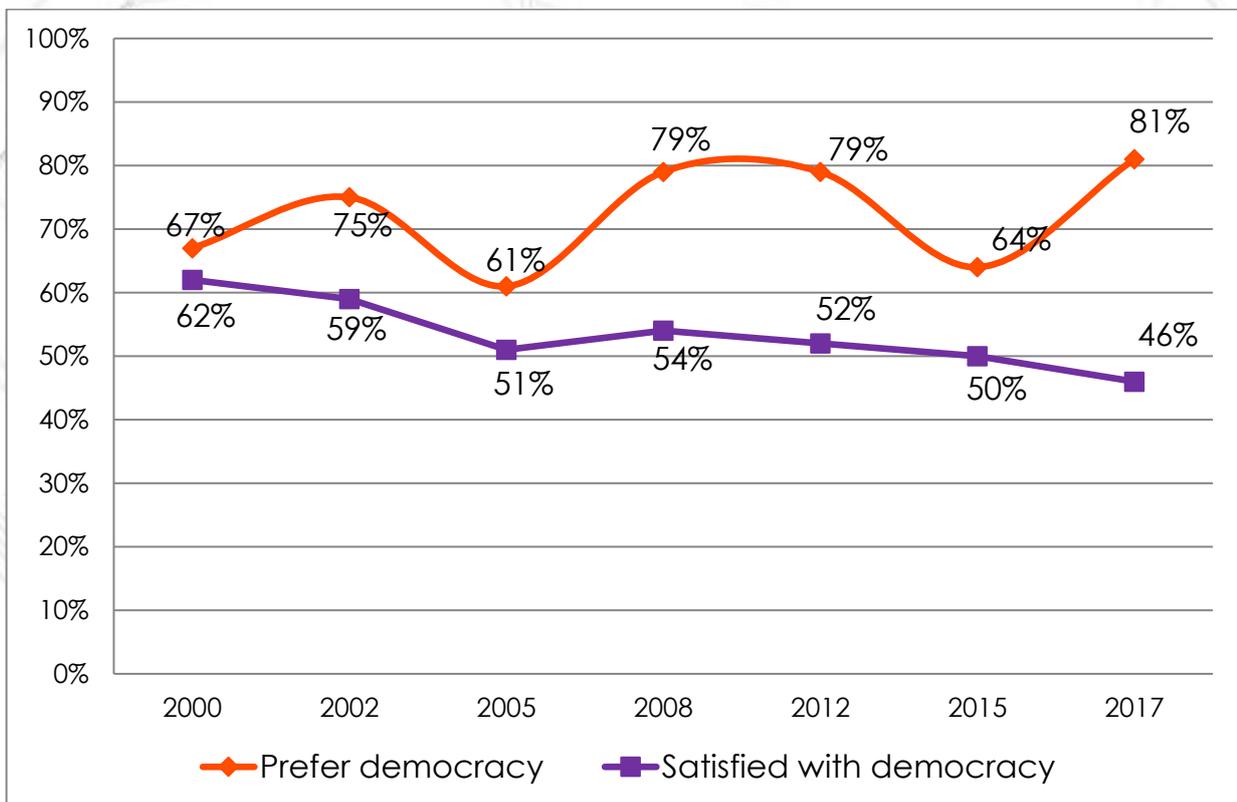
Afrobarometer

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in Africa. Six rounds of surveys were conducted in up to 37 African countries between 1999 and 2016, and Round 7 surveys (2016/2018) are currently underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Uganda, led by Hatchile Consult, interviewed 1,200 adult Ugandans between 26 December 2016 and 8 January 2017. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Uganda in 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, and 2015.

Charts

Figure 1: Support for democracy | Uganda | 2000-2017



Respondents were asked:

1. 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.

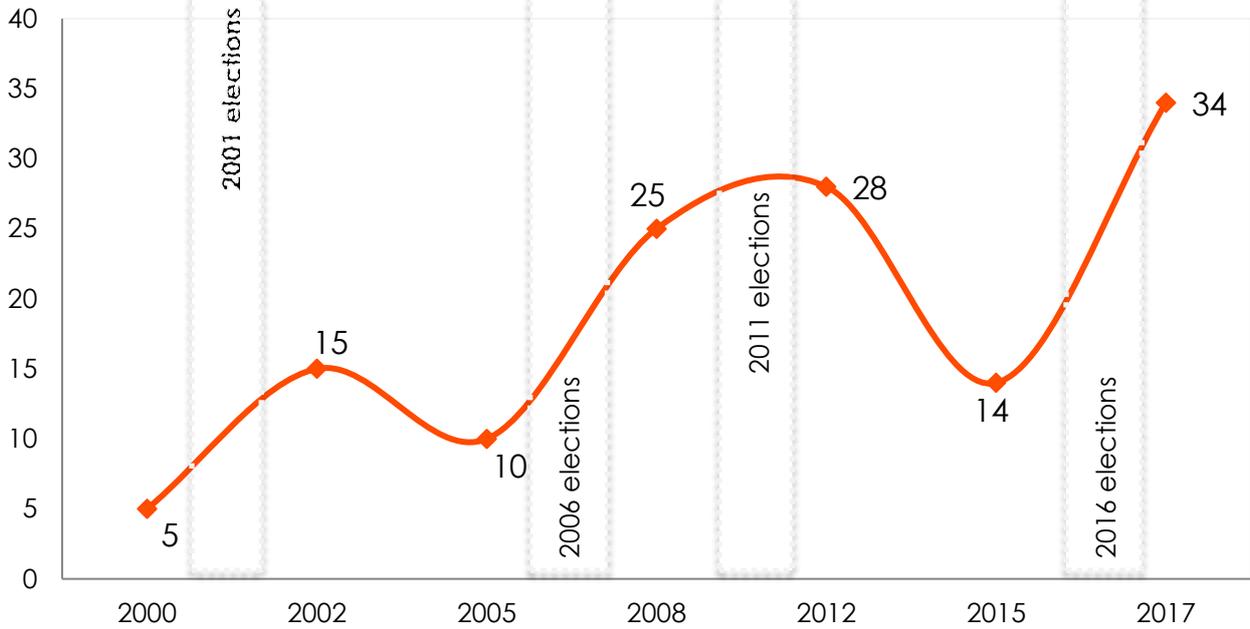
Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.

(% who select Statement 1)

2. Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Uganda?

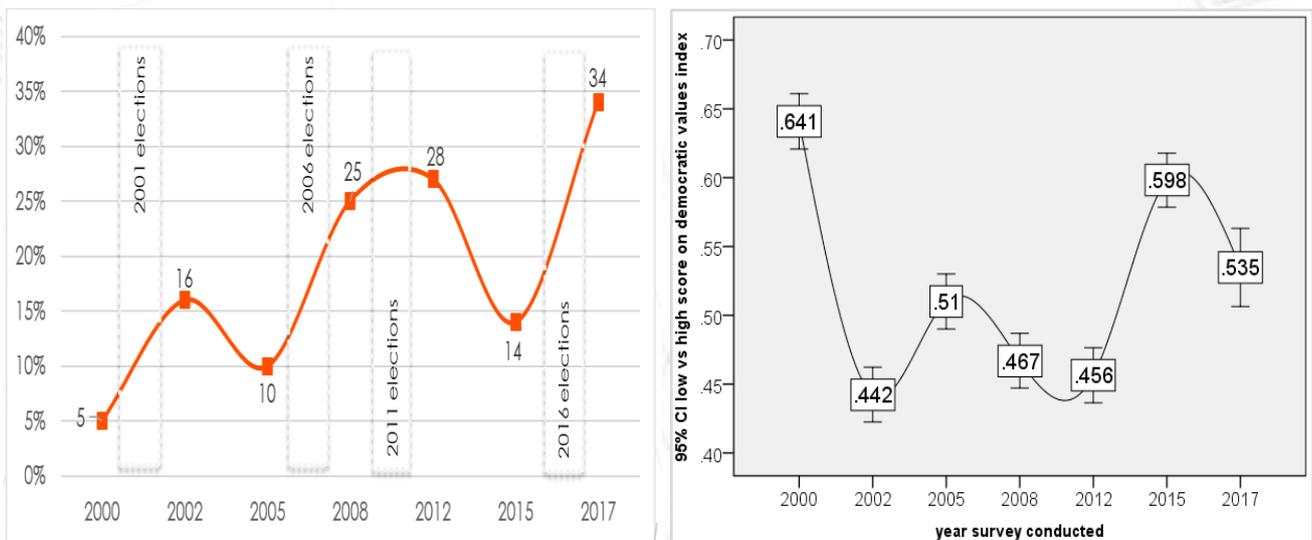
(% who are "very satisfied" or "fairly satisfied")

Figure 2: Democracy satisfaction gap and election-year cycle | percentage points
 | Uganda | 2000-2017



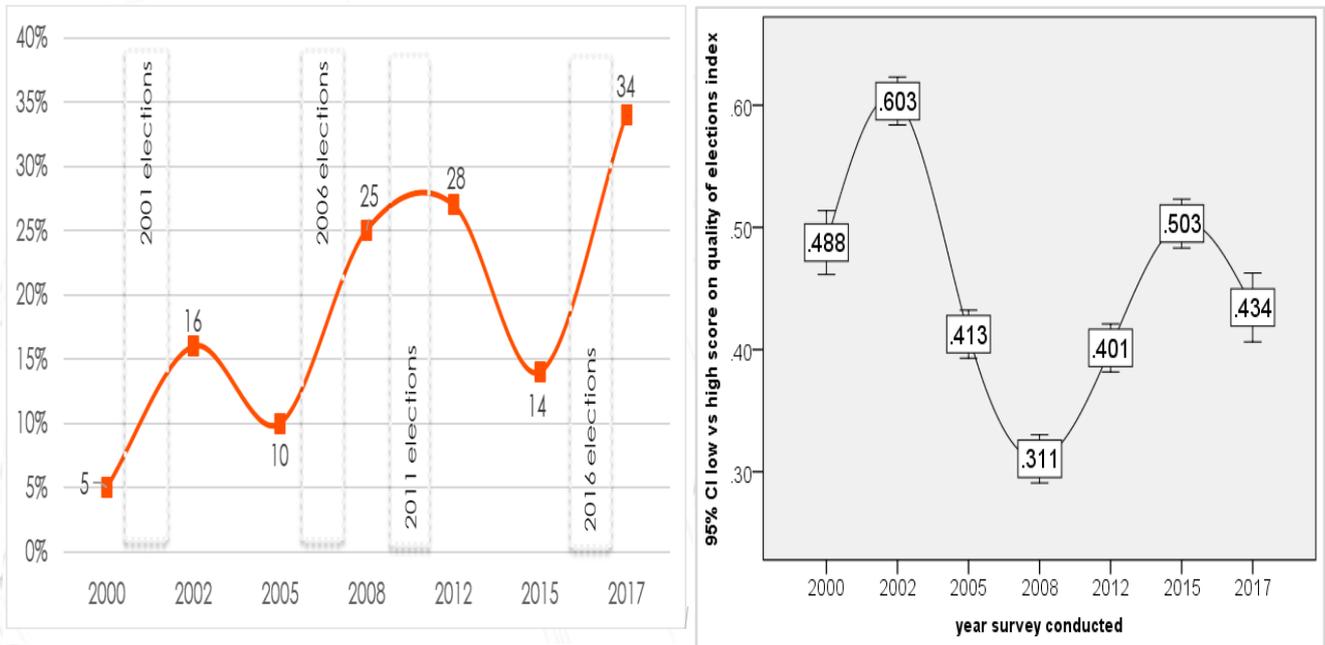
Graph shows the growing gap, in percentage points, between the proportion of Ugandans who prefer democracy and the proportion who are fairly/very satisfied with the way democracy is working (from Figure 1). Uganda's last four election years are plotted to illustrate the fluctuating nature of the growing gap with the election year.

Figure 3: Democracy satisfaction gap, elections, and democratic values | Uganda
 | 2000-2017



Graphic shows a side-by-side comparison of the fluctuating trajectories of Uganda's democracy satisfaction gap (the difference between support for and satisfaction with democracy) with election years, on the left, and of its belief in democratic values on the right.

Figure 4: Democracy satisfaction gap and election quality | Uganda | 2000-2017



Graph shows a side-by-side comparison of trajectories of Uganda's democracy satisfaction gap (the difference between support for and satisfaction with democracy), on the left, and the perceived quality of elections on the right. Uganda's last four election years are plotted to illustrate the fluctuating nature of the growing gap with each election year.

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