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News release

Africans increasingly support multiparty democracy, but trust in political parties remains low

Public attitudes in Africa show increasing support for multiparty democracy, but both ruling and opposition parties still struggle to gain popular trust, Afrobarometer survey findings show.

A majority of Africans say they “feel close to” a political party and believe multiple parties are needed to give voters a genuine choice, but fewer than half trust parties even “somewhat.” These findings, based on 2014/2015 surveys in 36 African countries, were shared by Afrobarometer Executive Director E. Gyimah-Boadi at the Consultative Workshop of the Department of Political Affairs of the African Union Commission’s Political Party Program in Accra.

Political parties are an essential element of a well-functioning democracy, Gyimah-Boadi argued, but earning popular trust – and thus greater legitimacy and better prospects for a country’s democratic consolidation – remains a challenge.

Key findings

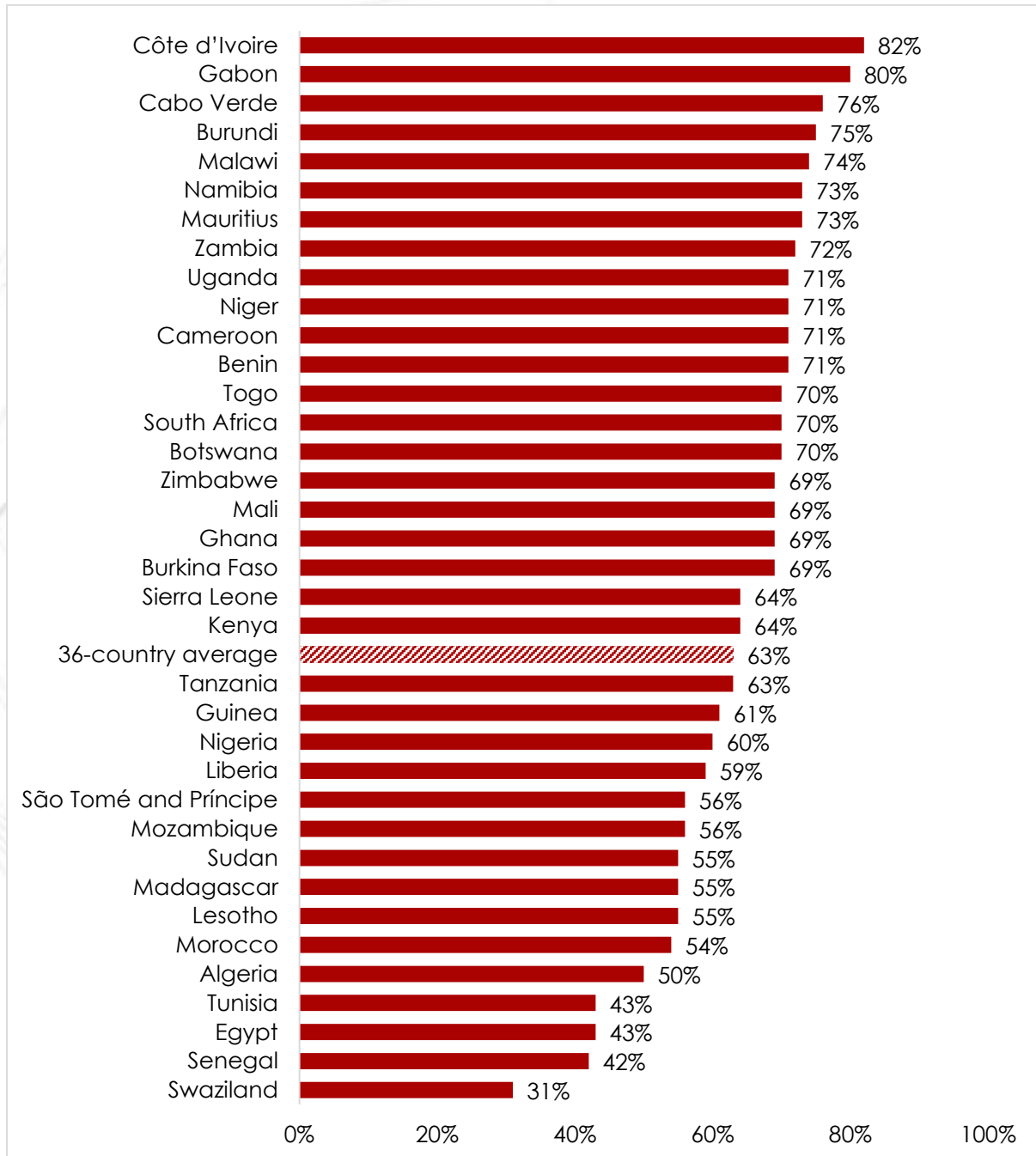
- Almost two-thirds (63%) of Africans endorse multiparty competition as essential to give citizens choices in who governs them (Figure 1). North Africa is the only sub-region where fewer than half (49%) of citizens hold this view.
- Across 16 countries tracked since 2002, support for multiparty democracy has increased by 11 percentage points (Figure 2).
- A majority (56%) of Africans say they “feel close to” a political party in their country. Across 16 countries tracked since 2002, this proportion increased by 7 percentage points between 2002 and 2015 (Figure 3).
- Fewer than half of Africans say they trust ruling parties (46%) and opposition parties (36%) “somewhat” or “a lot,” placing political parties at or near the bottom of a list of institutions and leaders in popular trust (Figure 4).
- Across 16 countries tracked since 2002, trust ratings improved by 18 percentage points for opposition parties but only marginally (4 points) for ruling parties (Figure 5).

Afrobarometer

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 35 countries in Africa. Six rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2015, 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, which yield country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2% (for a sample of 2,400) or +/-3% (for a sample of 1,200) at a 95% confidence level.

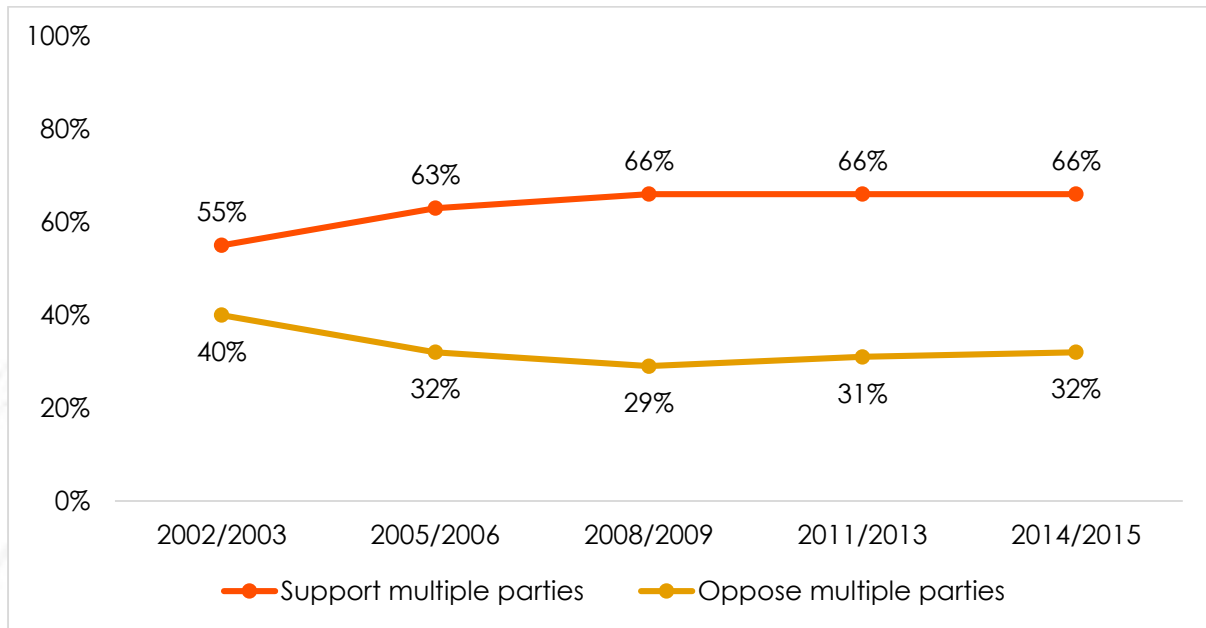
Charts

Figure 1: Popular support for multiparty democracy | 36 countries | 2014/2015



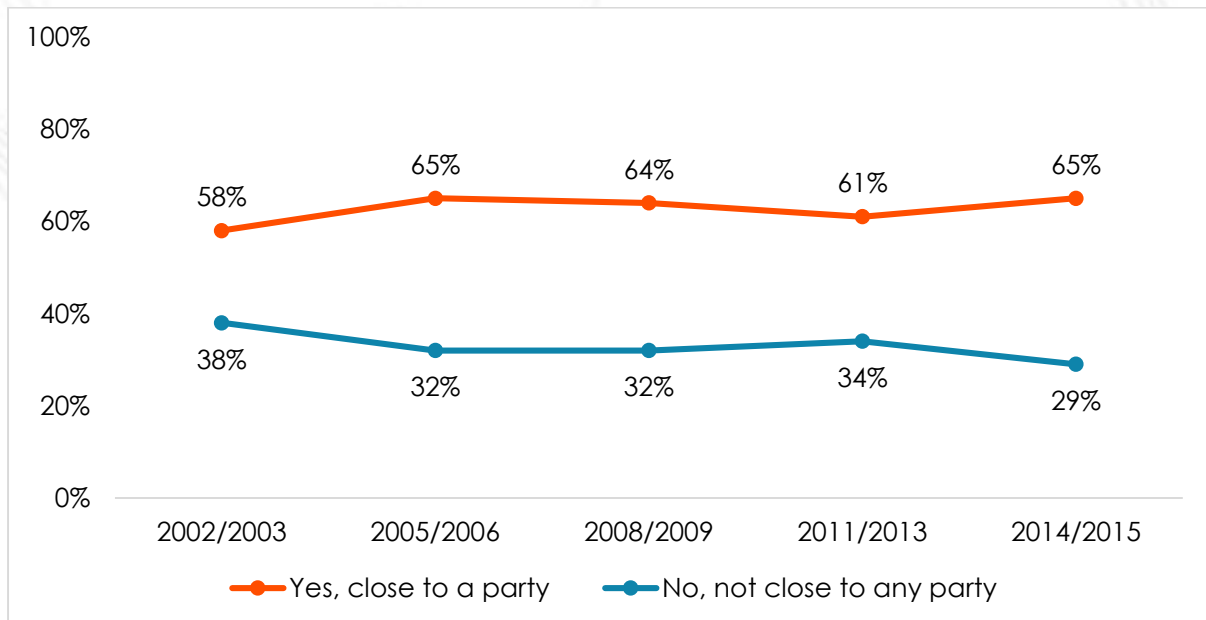
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Political parties create division and confusion; it is therefore unnecessary to have many political parties in this country.
 Statement 2: Many political parties are needed to make sure that voters have genuine choices in who governs them.
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with Statement 2)

Figure 2: Support for multiparty democracy | 16 countries | 2002-2015



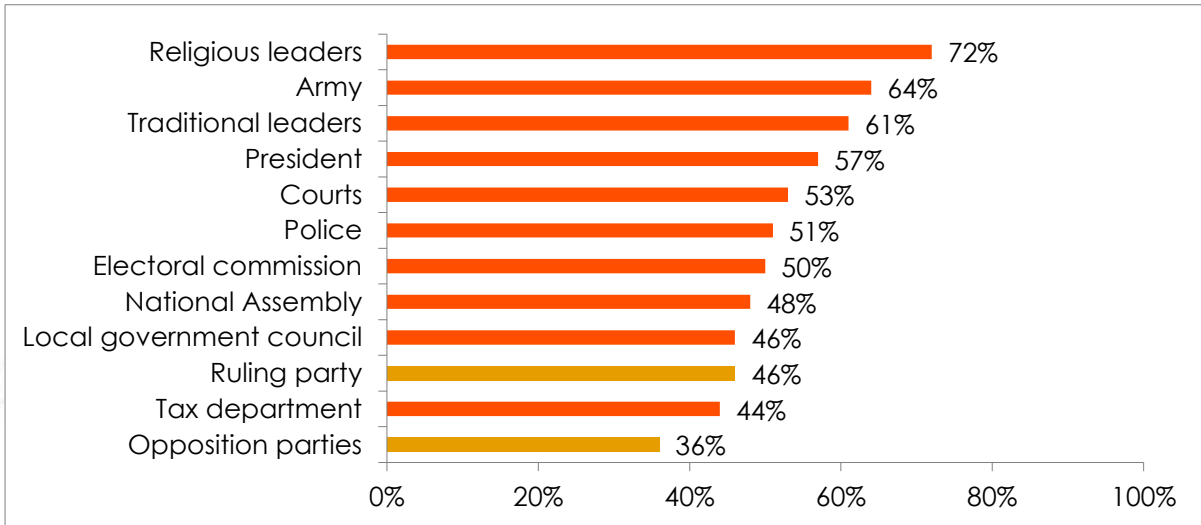
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Political parties create division and confusion; it is therefore unnecessary to have many political parties in this country.
 Statement 2: Many political parties are needed to make sure that voters have genuine choices in who governs them.
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

Figure 3: Close to a political party | 16 countries | 2002-2015



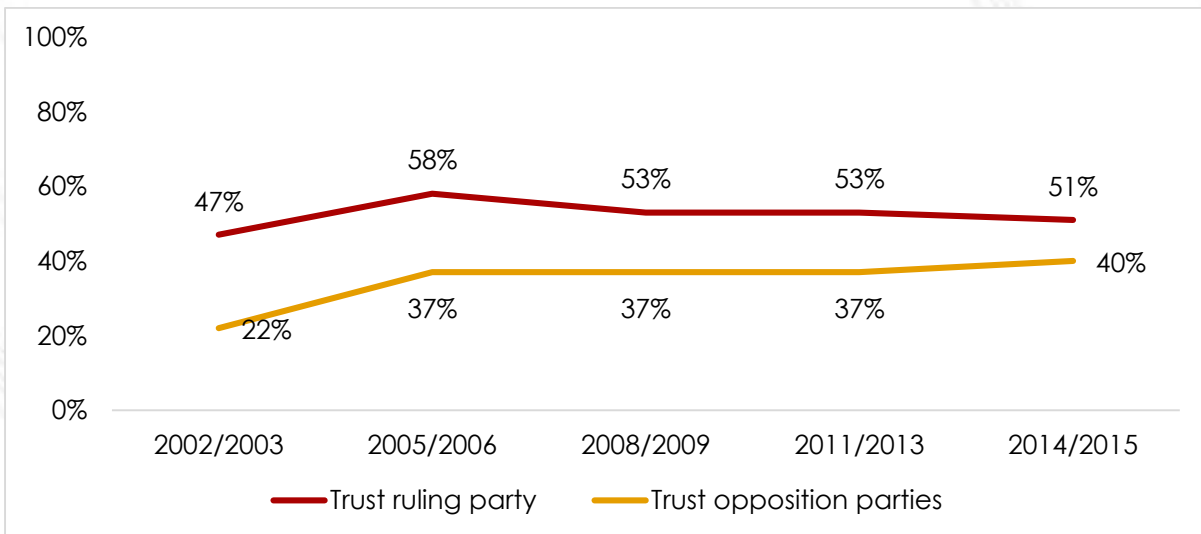
Respondents were asked: Do you feel close to any particular political party?

Figure 4: Trust in public institutions | 36 countries | 2014/2015



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

Figure 5: Trust in ruling vs. opposition parties | 16 countries | 2002-2015



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

For more information, please contact:

Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye
 Afrobarometer communications coordinator for anglophone West Africa
 +233 243240933
 Email: jappiah@afrobarometer.org

Visit us online at www.afrobarometer.org.

