



*Afrobarometer Briefing Paper No. 123*

## **Governance and Democracy Attitudes in Higher Performing African Countries**

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### **1. Introduction**

Namibia is usually regarded as one of the best performing democracies in Africa. Using the Afrobarometer Round 5 survey, this paper compares public attitudes that are central to democratic life across high performing countries in Africa. Several important survey questions pertaining to the demand for democracy, the supply of democracy, and the citizens' role in democratic life will help in the comparison of democratic attitudes. In addition to Namibia, other countries usually at the top of democracy ratings will be included in the comparison to judge the consolidation of democratic values. Small population democracies such as Mauritius, Cape Verde, and Botswana are the most comparable to Namibia, and the larger South Africa and Ghana are also included because of comparable democracy ratings.

In this comparison, preference for democracy, rejection of authoritarian alternatives, existence of free and fair elections, preference for elections, and the importance of inputs from voters are considered to gauge popular commitments to democratic values. The countries under consideration all have strong institutional features and reputations for democratic governance, but the critical element of public sentiment also plays a vital role in shaping and consolidating democratic governance.

### **2. Afrobarometer Surveys**

The Afrobarometer is a comparative series of public attitude surveys, now covering 35 African countries in Round 5 (2011-2013). It measures public attitudes on democracy and its alternatives, evaluations of the quality of governance, and economic performance. In addition, the survey assesses the views of the electorate on critical political issues in the surveyed countries. The Afrobarometer's main goal is to produce scientifically reliable data on public opinion in Africa while strengthening institutional capacities for survey research, and research findings to inform policy and practice. The Afrobarometer also provides comparisons over time, as five rounds of surveys have taken place from 1999 to 2012.

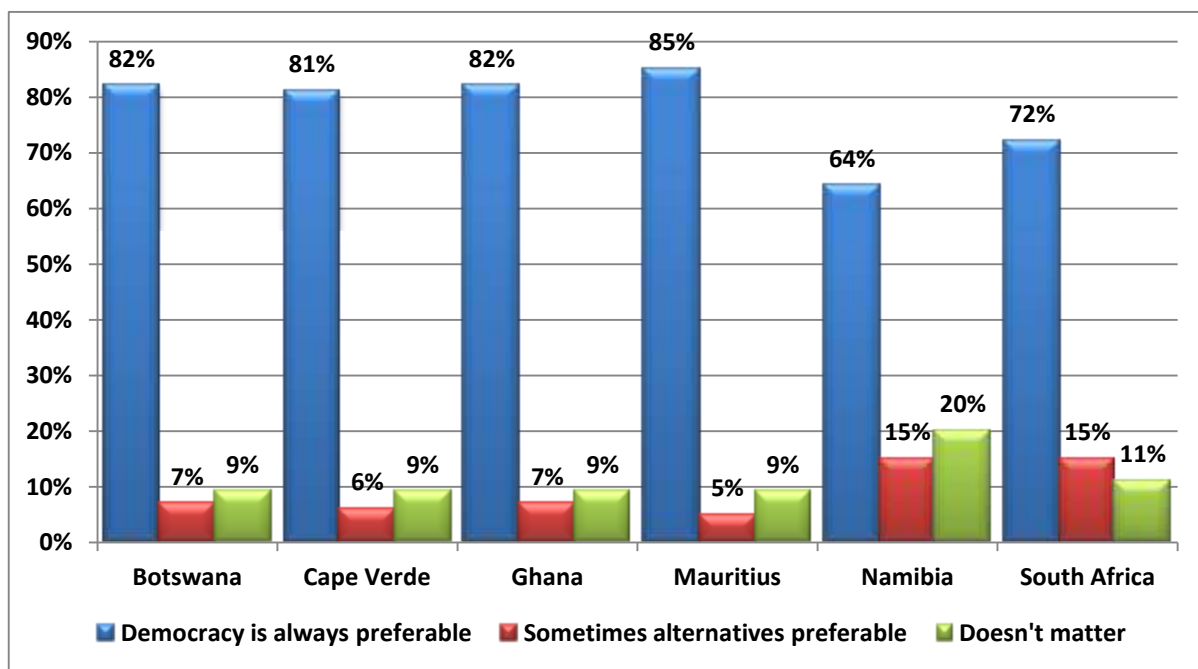
During Round 5, Afrobarometer surveys were conducted in 35 African countries using a common survey instrument and methodology. The instrument asks a standard set of questions that permits systematic comparison in public attitudes across countries over time. The methodology was based on a national probability sample of 1200 adult Namibians selected to represent all adult citizens of voting age, allowing for inferences with a sampling margin of error of +/- 3% at a 95% confidence level. The sample was drawn randomly based on Probability Proportionate to Population Size (PPPS), thus taking account of population distributions, gender as well as rural-urban divides. The sampling process ensured that every adult Namibian citizen had an equal and known chance of being selected in the sample. Fieldwork in Namibia was

conducted by the Survey Warehouse between 19 November and 18 December 2012, with the Institute for Public Policy Research providing some oversight role.

### 3. Demand Side of Democracy

One focus of the Afrobarometer survey is an individual’s preference for democracy. While a solid majority has supported democracy in the country, Namibia has usually been near the bottom of the Afrobarometer countries. This contrast is clearly visible when compared to higher performing democracies. Figure 1 shows the proportion of respondents saying that “democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government”.

**Figure 1. Preference for Democracy**



*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.*

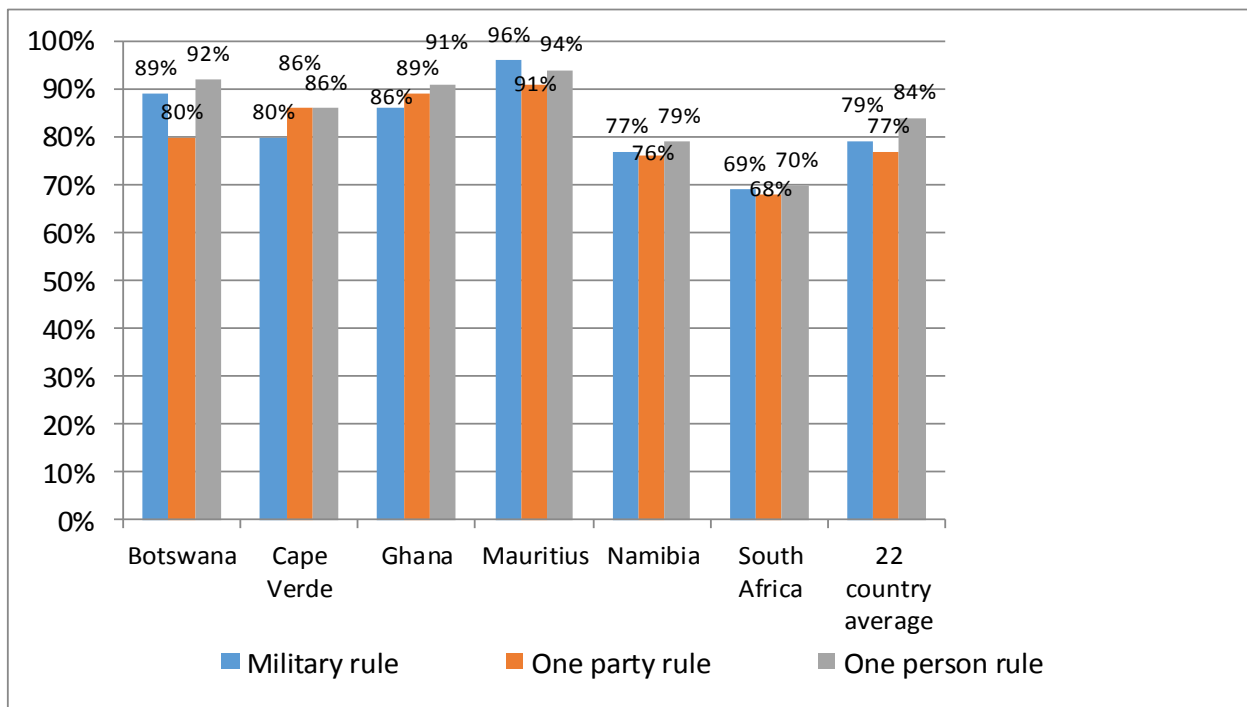
*Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.*

In comparison, Namibia (64%) is about 20% below the other countries (i.e. Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, and Mauritius) except for South Africa where 72% of respondents indicated that democracy is preferable to any other form of government. Perhaps the experience of alternative political regimes during post-independence period gives people in some countries (e.g. Ghana) a different perspective on democracy in relation to alternative political regimes (e.g. military, one-party). In contrast, Namibia and South Africa only have experience with their current form of government (a post-independence government) and the government of the pre-independence period.

In the Namibian case there is no difference between the opinions of males and females, and urban and rural dwellers. Namibians with the lowest unconditional preference for democracy are those with no formal schooling (51%), and the highest are those with only some primary schooling (74%). What is worrying is the finding that younger potential voters under 25 years of age (62%) prefer democracy less than those over 35 years (68%). Among language groups only Otjiherero speakers (58%) are below the average range. Looking at regional differences, the Kunene, Omusati, Oshana, and Oshikoto regions featured preferences in the upper 50% range, whereas Ohangwena was at 67% and the //Karas, Omaheke and Otjozondjupa regions were in the upper 70% range. In sum, Namibians' preference for democracy appears to be evenly spread within the population, with no specific group differing by a significant margin.

In addition to preferences for democracy, the Afrobarometer survey measures the extent to which respondents reject the common non-democratic, alternative political systems. Figure 2 shows how countries evaluated the options of army rule, one party rule and one person rule. Again, Namibia and South Africa fall below the other comparable countries in rejecting these alternatives (Figure 2). On average, South Africa has an 8% lower rejection rate than Namibia.

**Figure 2. Rejection of Non-Democratic Alternatives, 2012**



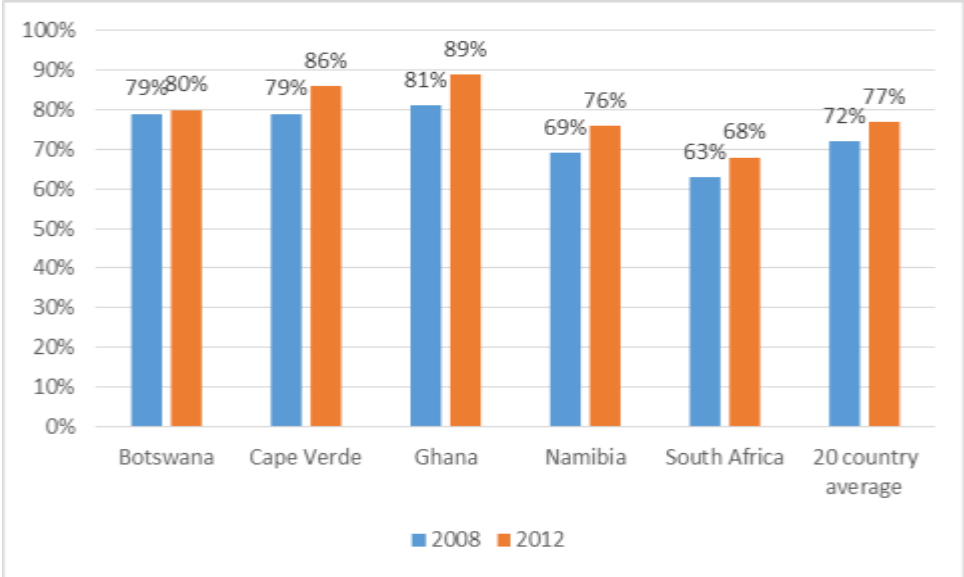
*Question: There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives? (% of respondents indicating disapprove or strongly disapprove reported for each statement)*

- A. Only one 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?

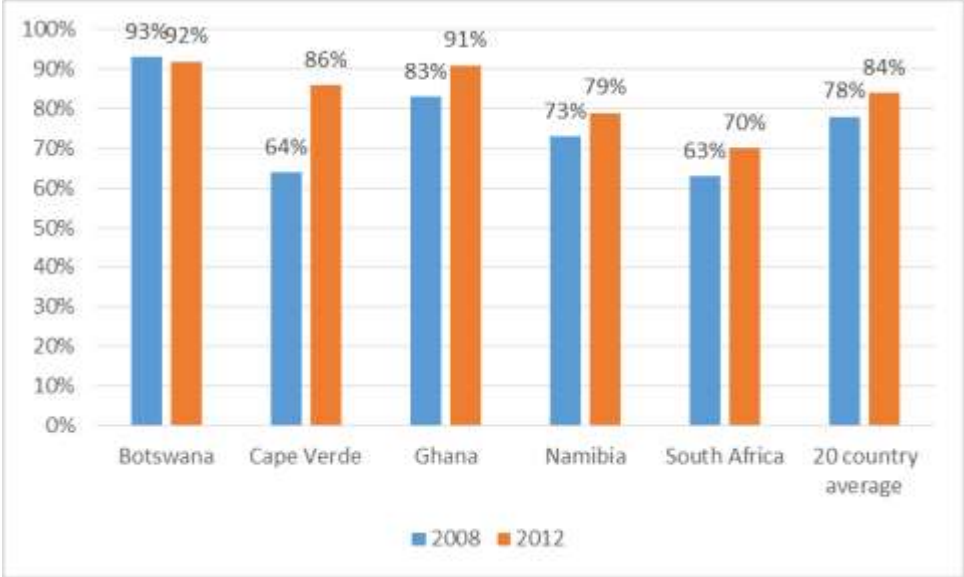
Figures 3-5 illustrate the change over time for the rejection of non-democratic alternatives. It is important to note that Namibian respondents have increased their rejection levels for these

alternative options since 2008 by around 6% to 10% for each (Figures 3-5). This encouraging trend is seen among the higher democratic performers except Botswana, which has maintained its overwhelming rejection of non-democratic alternatives. Notably, Namibians' increased rejection of alternatives is outpacing that of neighbouring South Africa (except for rejecting one man rule where the change is similar). Ultimately, the present trend in Namibia is encouraging, but it still amounts to a lesser rejection of non-democratic alternatives than comparable higher performing democracies in Africa.

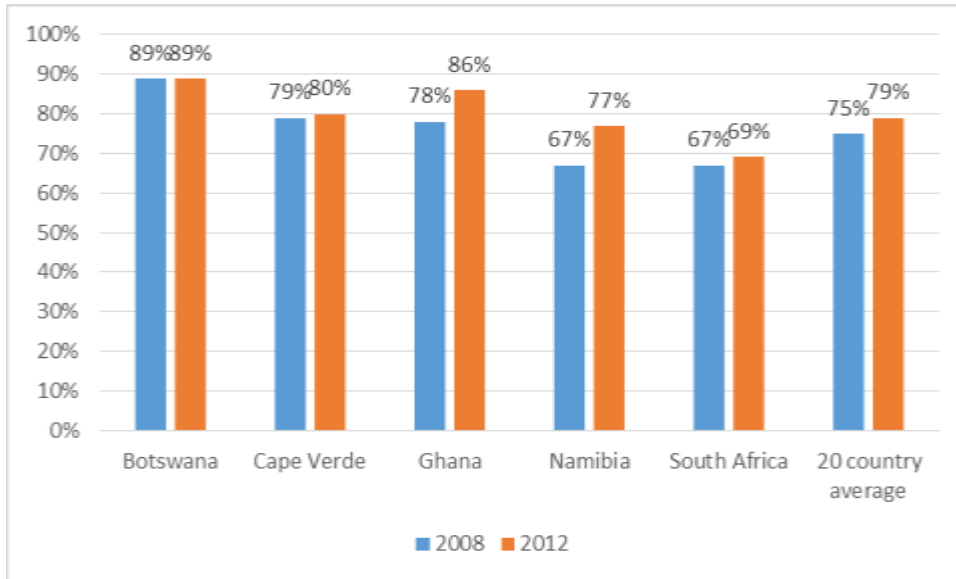
**Figure 3. Rejection of One Party Rule, 2008-2012**



**Figure 4. Rejection of One Man Rule, 2008-2012**



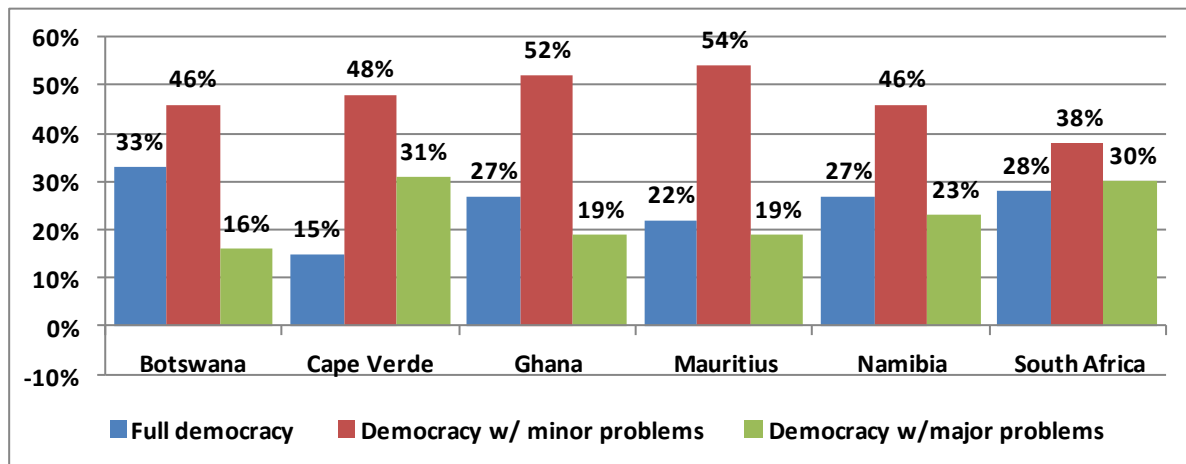
**Figure 5. Rejection of Military Rule, 2008-2012**



#### 4. Supply of Democracy

In addition to the demand for democracy, Afrobarometer considers the supply of democracy in terms of how citizens judge the democracy that they experience in their countries. In this section of the paper the extent of democracy, satisfaction with democracy, the perceived feeling about whether people can speak freely about politics and free and fair elections will be considered as important elements of the supply of democracy.

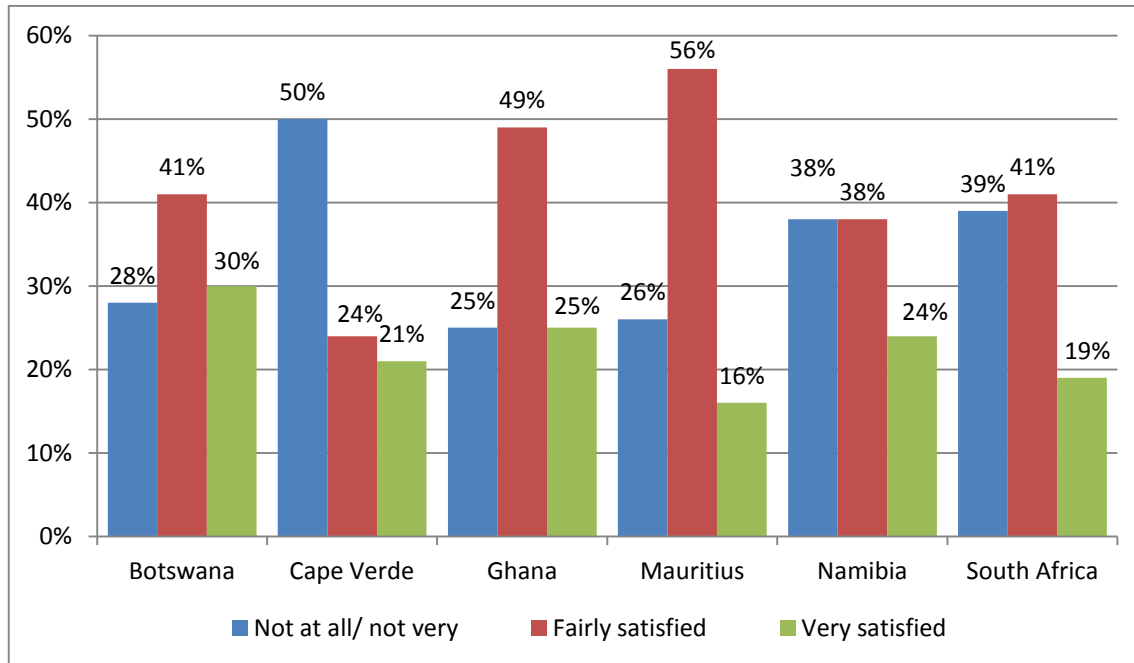
**Figure 6. Extent of Democracy**



*Question: In your opinion how much of a democracy is Namibia today?*

The largest number of respondents for each country indicated that their country was a democracy with minor problems. Botswana (33%) has the highest full democracy evaluation whereas Cape Verde (15%) has the lowest. Namibia, Ghana and South Africa all cluster around 27% of people suggesting that their respective country is a full democracy. Cape Verde and South Africa record the highest responses of democracy with major problems at around 30%. Very few people thought that any of these countries were not democracies (not shown on Figure 6).

**Figure 7. Satisfaction with Democracy**

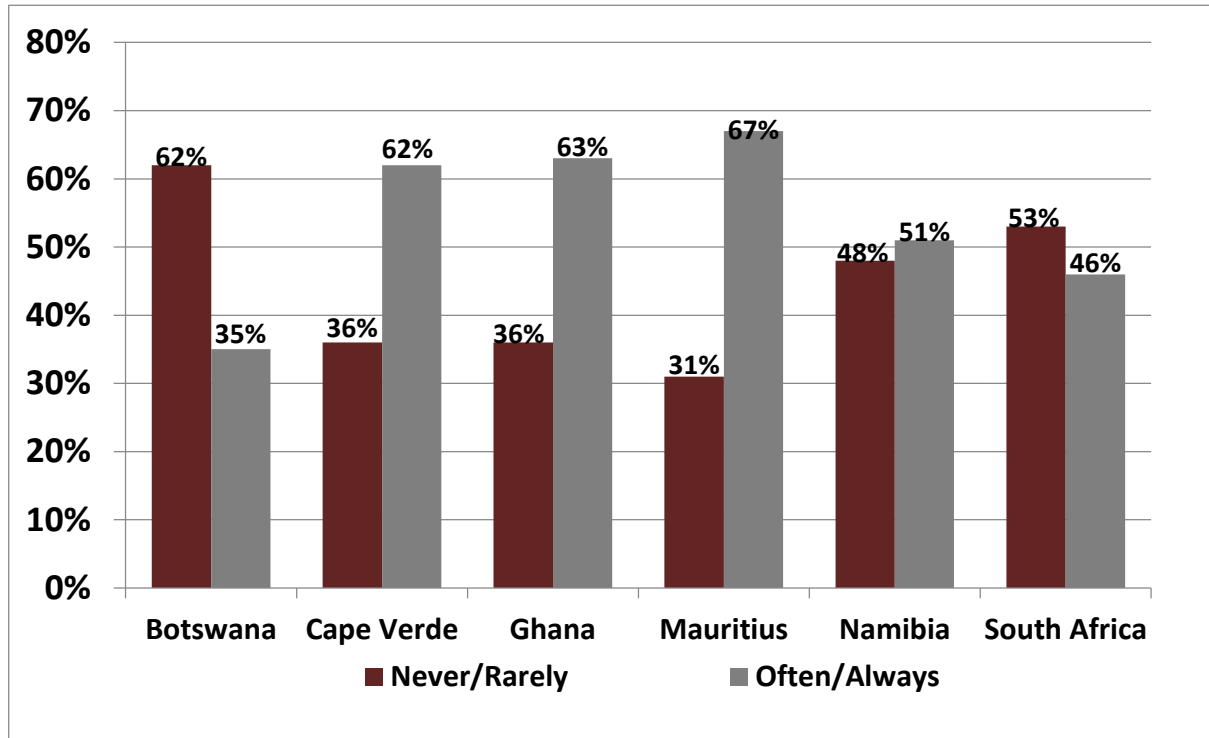


*Question: Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Namibia?*

The vast majority of respondents in each country were fairly or very satisfied with their country’s democracy, except in Cape Verde, where a majority (50%) were not at all or not very satisfied. Again, Namibia falls in the middle (Figure 7).

This peer group contains respected democratic countries, which feature political freedoms (speech, media, group membership and voting) at least in form. The Afrobarometer survey asks whether people feel the need to be careful of what they say. This helps reveal whether citizens fear exercising their political rights. The assumption is that people may fear retaliation or other consequences if they deviate from the official “doctrine”. In African countries where the state is the largest employer and customer, exercising freedoms comes with perceived risks. Interestingly, only Botswana (62%) and South Africa (53%) feature a majority indicating that they never or rarely need to be careful. Figure 8 illustrates the country results, with Namibia ranking in the middle.

**Figure 8. Feeling Careful About What to Say?**

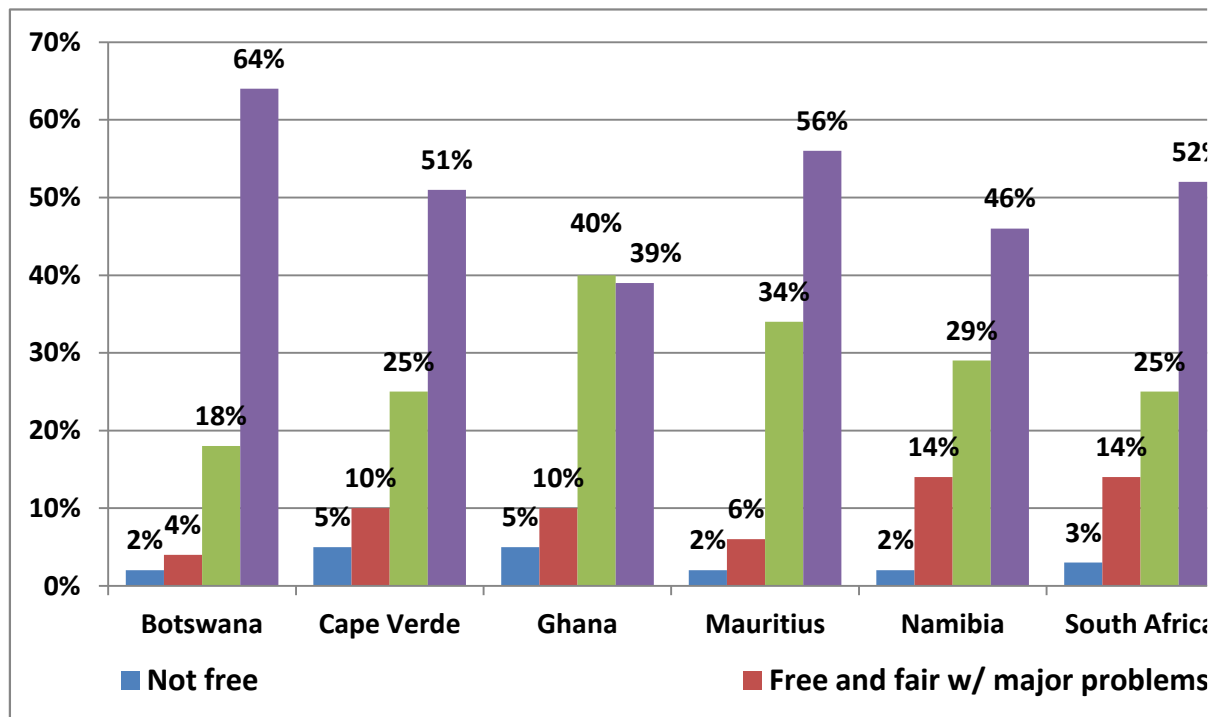


*Question: Do people have to be careful of what they say about politics?*

For stable democracies this feeling of censorship regarding politics is surprising, but it is common in African countries in previous surveys. The “never or rarely” average for Afrobarometer countries has always been under 50% and only 29% in 1999. Namibia has ranged from a low of 31% (1999) to a one-time high of 56% (2002) over the past surveys.

Elections are often seen as the most critical aspect of democratic life. Sustained and successful elections are important elements in the consolidation of democratic values. Four of the countries- Botswana, Cape Verde, Mauritius and South Africa- in this comparison featured majority views that their elections were completely free and fair (Figure 9). All of the countries gave above 75% response rates for fully free and fair or only minor problems. This is a strong endorsement for sentiment that elections are free and fair.

**Figure 9. Free and Fair Elections**



*Question: On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election?*

Namibia ranked relatively well in the respondents' views, despite the contested outcome of the 2009 election. In November 2009, national parliamentary and presidential elections were held for the fifth time. Turnout was recorded at 69%. SWAPO won 74.29% of the votes and gained 54 (out of 72) seats. The RDP received 11% of the vote (eight seats) and hence forms the official opposition in the National Assembly. Although international election observation missions from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and African Union (AU) considered the elections to have been "free and fair", the opposition parties felt that the conduct of the 2009 national and presidential elections fell short of international standards of transparency, freedom and fairness. The opposition parties criticised the performance of the ECN (Electoral Commission of Namibia), the late introduction of amendments to the Electoral Act, problems with the voters' roll, short-notice changes to the system of counting, slow counting of ballots, and irregularities due to the high number of tendered ballots (those cast in a different location to the voter's registration).<sup>1</sup> Surprisingly, Ghana had the lowest completely free and fair rating,

<sup>1</sup> Consequently, nine opposition parties filed an urgent application to challenge the election results at the Windhoek High Court and many refused to take up their parliamentary seats. However, the appeal was effectively thrown out of court on 4 March 2010. The case was rejected by the High Court on a technicality based on the fact that the application challenging the National Assembly election was lodged too late - 90 minutes after the deadline. In response, the opposition parties mounted a legal appeal to the Supreme Court. In a judgment on 6 September 2010, Chief Justice Peter Sam Shivute said that the application could not be rejected on the grounds that it was delivered outside office hours. He emphasized the importance of election-related court applications in a constitutional democracy and supported the opposition parties' claim that exceptional circumstances could be applied in this case. Appeals in the case bounced between the courts, until it finally failed for lack of evidence of fraud. Nevertheless, the Court questioned, in a more than 100 pages long statement, the electoral governance in the country by criticising that the electoral laws were "too prone to manipulation". Subsequently, the Law Reform Commission undertook an

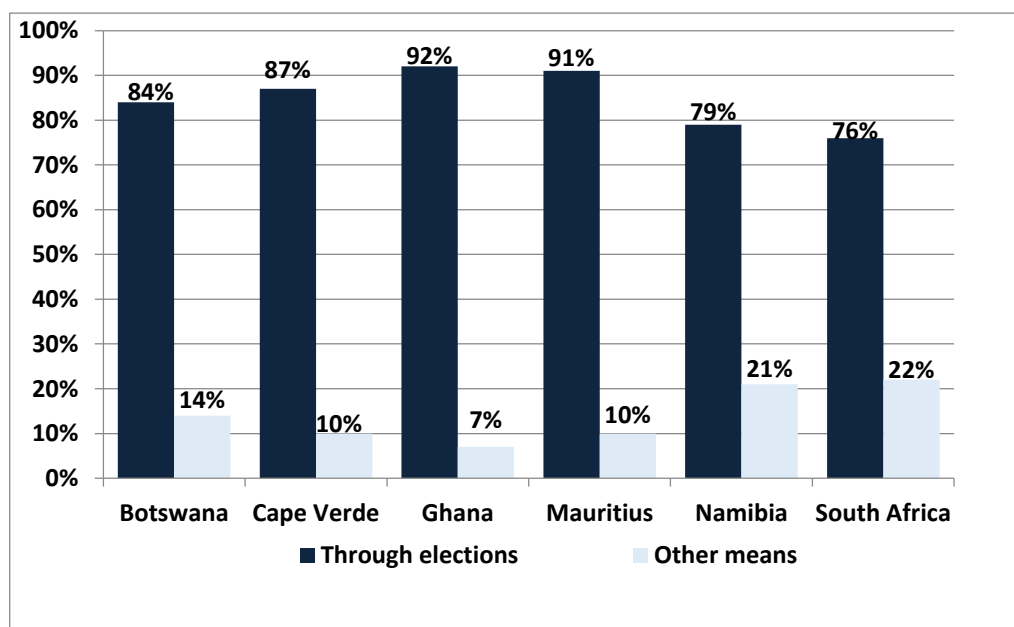


even though the very close election held recently in that country was accepted by the voters without popular protest.

## 5. Attitudes Toward Popular Empowerment

Another Afrobarometer question asked about respondents' opinions on whether elections or other methods should be used to choose leaders. Again, all six countries featured agree or agree very strongly (76% and above) responses affirming the need for elections in selecting leaders (Figure 10). However, Namibia and South Africa were slightly lower than the other countries by 5% to 16%.

**Figure 10. Choosing Leaders Through Elections vs Other Methods**



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

*Statement 1: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open and honest elections. (% of respondents indicating agree or agree very strongly)*

*Statement 2: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing the country's leaders. (% of respondents indicating agree or agree very strongly)*

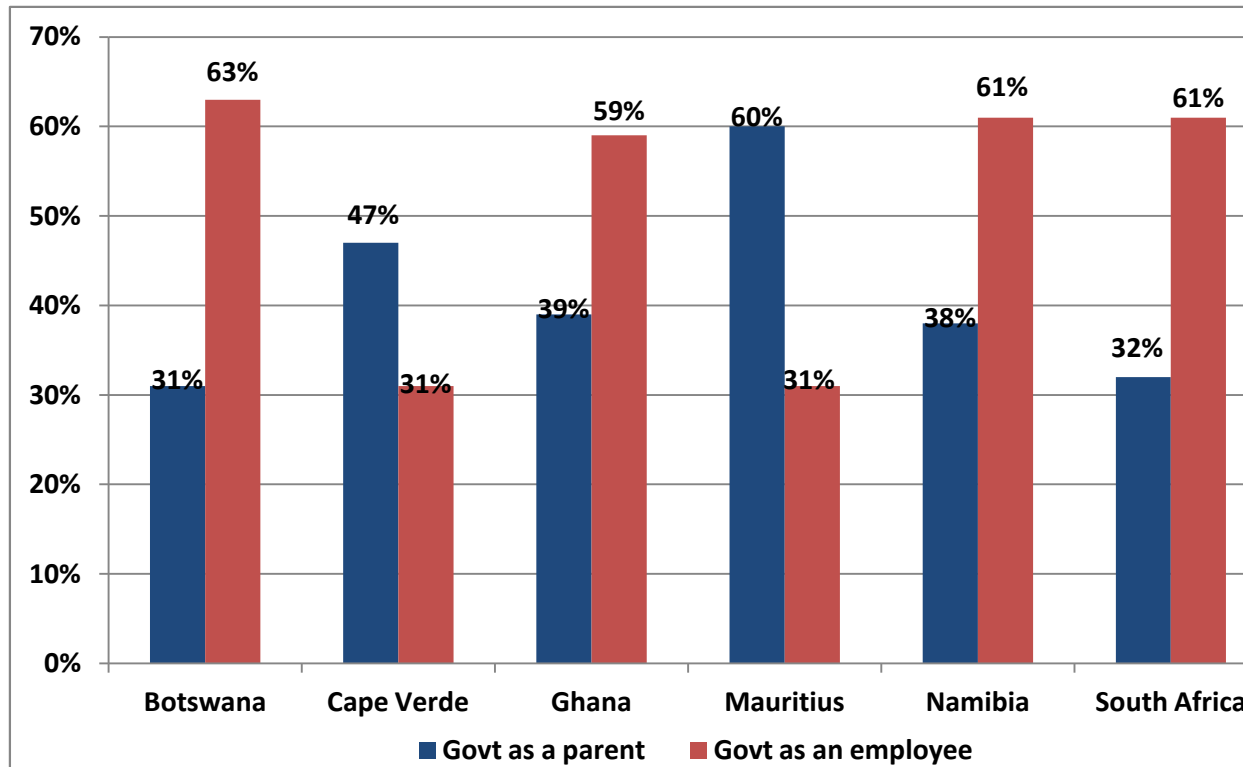
One of the important trends in Round 5 of the survey is the apparent increase in voters' desire to exercise more power over the government. Around 60% of respondents in each country (except in Cape Verde and Mauritius) perceive the government as an employee rather than as a parent. With 61% seeing government as an employee who should be monitored by citizens as the bosses in 2012, Namibia has increased from 47% on this question in 2008 – a significant increase

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extensive review and public consultation that is still underway ahead of the 2014 elections.

(Figure 11). Similar changes in attitudes have been experienced in other countries and on other questions related to popular accountability and participation (Logan and Bratton 2013).

**Figure 11. Government is Like a Parent vs an Employee**



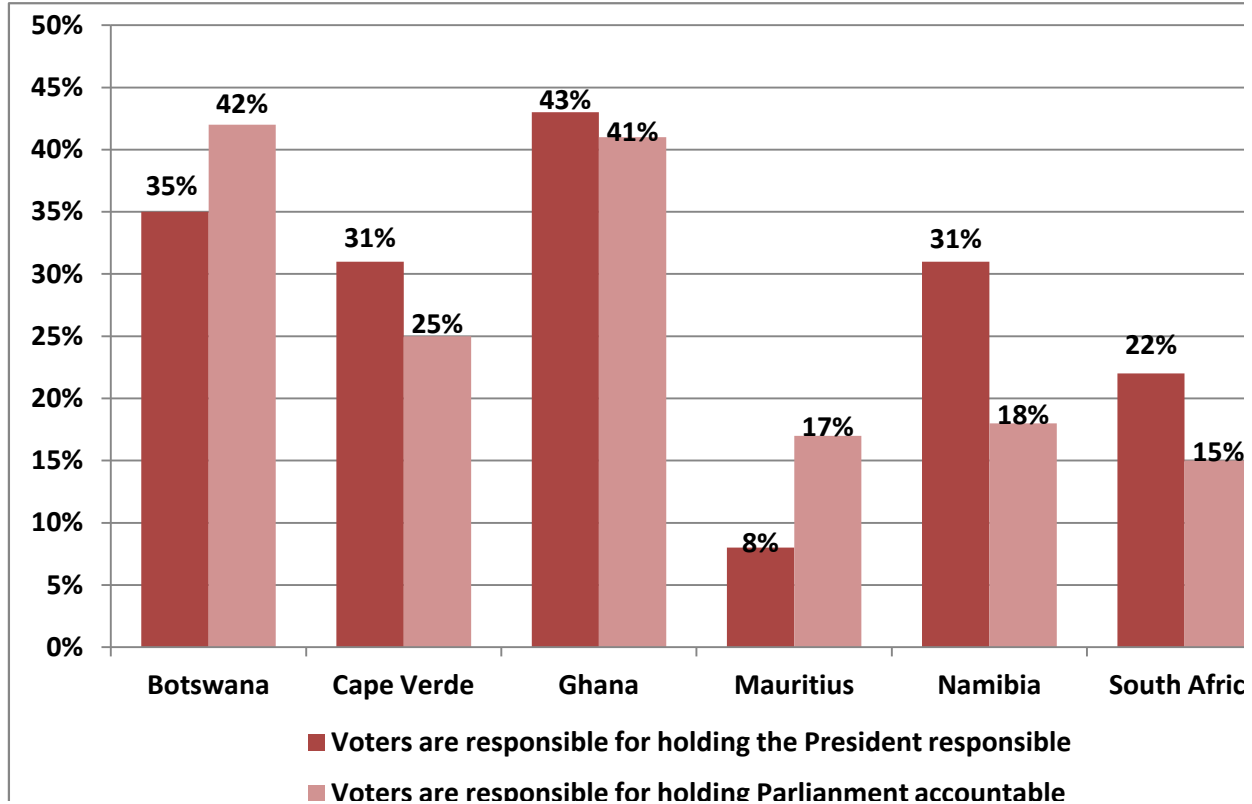
*Question: Which of following statements is closest to your view?*

*Statement 1: The government is a like a parent. It should decide what is good for us. (% of respondents indicating agree or agree very strongly)*

*Statement 2: The government is like our employee. We are the bosses and should tell the government what to do. (% of respondents indicating agree or agree very strongly)*

A similar set of questions relates to holding elected officials accountable. Figure 12 shows comparisons for voters being the main actors. Although presidential responsibility continues to be the most important aspect of holding others to account, the share of respondents saying that voters should play this role has increased over this latest round. Namibia posts the highest levels of voter participation for the offices that they actually vote for, but less for the National Assembly, which is conducted on a party list basis.

**Figure 12. Holding the President and Parliament Accountable After Elections**



*Question: Who should be responsible for:*

*A. Making sure that, once elected, Representatives to the National Assembly do their jobs? (% of respondents indicating “the voters”)*

*C. Making sure that, once elected, the president does his job? (% of respondents indicating “the voters”)*

In Namibia respondents gave accountability responsibilities to voters in the two institutions where they actually vote: 31% indicated that voters should be responsible for presidential and regional councillor accountability. By contrast, the party list electoral system for the National Assembly only attracted 18% who believe that voters should be responsible. In comparison, Namibia falls in the middle of the grouping on this question.

None of the countries featured have majority support for the voters as the main mechanism for accountability. For the larger comparison of countries, the twenty in Round 4 and the 30 countries reporting thus far in Round 5, the voters are chosen by 38% of respondents as responsible for holding the president accountable, but with wide variation from highly performing democracies as indicated in Figure 12 above to weaker ones such as Madagascar with 60% and Nigeria at 15%. There are similar averages in previous survey rounds (36% in Round 4 and 38% in Round 5) and great variation (66%-15%) are found in a question on the accountability of local officials. Although Namibia is below average on these questions with low 20% preferences, it is not the lowest among the high performing group discussed here or the larger grouping of Afrobarometer survey countries.

## 6. Conclusion

Namibia and South Africa trail the other peer countries on several of the democracy questions discussed in this paper. It appears that the liberation struggle and dominant party rule experiences may influence opinions about democracy and alternative forms of political governance in comparison to other African democracies with more diverse, post-independence political experiences. It also seems that the electoral system (i.e. the party list system) used in Namibia may distance voters from a more active accountability role. Nonetheless, Namibians have increasingly registered a more participatory and accountable role for voters than in previous Afrobarometer rounds. Democratic values do seem to be gaining among Namibians as captured by responses to many Afrobarometer questions considered in this paper.

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