

Rejoining the AU, Moroccans bring decidedly mixed attitudes toward regional integration

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 137 | David Jacobs and Thomas Isbell

Summary

On January 31, 2017, the Kingdom of Morocco rejoined the African Union (AU) after a 33-year absence. The country had left the Organisation of African Unity in 1984 after the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) – to which Morocco lays claim – was acknowledged as an independent state and gained admittance to the continental body (Mohamed, 2017).

Rejoining the African Union comes with a commitment to help achieve the organisation's objectives, including to "... accelerate the political and socio-economic integration of the continent" (African Union, 2002). This aim is again highlighted in the AU's "Agenda 2063," which states that "... the political unity of Africa will be the culmination of the integration process, including the free movement of people, the establishment of continental institutions, and full economic integration" (African Union, 2014).

In the wake of Morocco's return to AU membership, we use Afrobarometer survey data to examine Moroccan attitudes toward regional integration and responsibilities. We find that as of November 2015, when the most recent data were collected, only a minority of Moroccans perceive the AU and the regional economic organisation, the Arab Maghreb Union (UMA), to be of much help to Morocco. Almost half of Moroccans report difficulties crossing borders, but support for freedom of cross-border movement is limited. Dislike of foreign workers is considerably higher in Morocco than on average across Africa, while support for regional intervention to protect democracy and prevent human-rights abuses is lower than the North African¹ and African averages.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African-led, 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 Round 7 surveys are underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of between 1,200 and 2,400 respondents.

The Afrobarometer team in Morocco interviewed 1,200 adult Moroccans in November 2015. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. One previous survey was conducted in Morocco in 2013.

¹ North African countries surveyed by Afrobarometer are Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia.

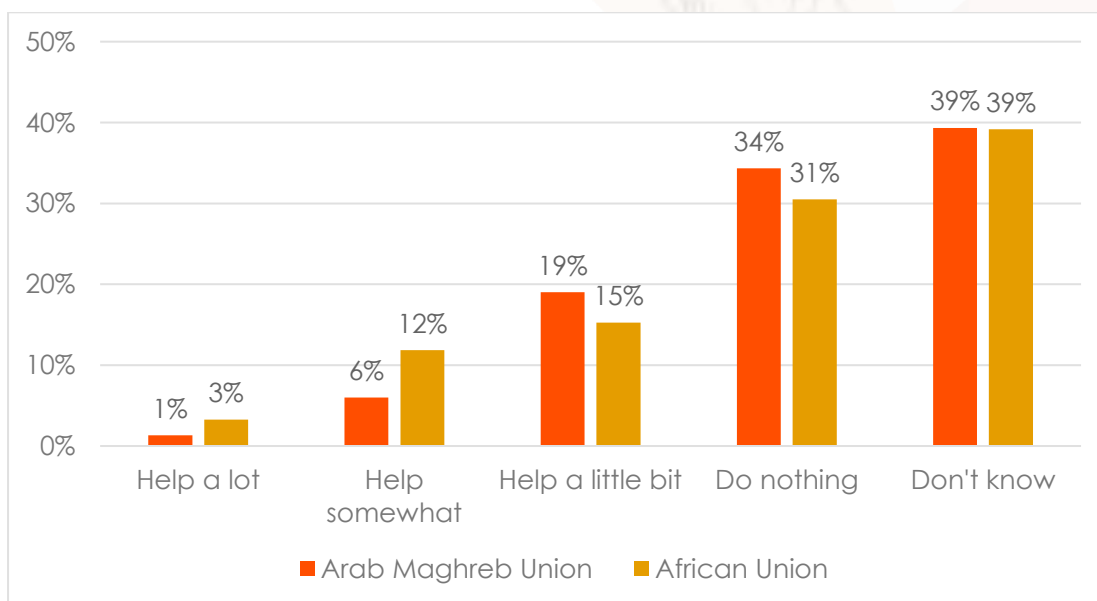
Key findings

- As of November 2015, few Moroccans see the AU and the Arab Maghreb Union as helpful to their country. About one in three citizens say the two organisations “do nothing” to help Morocco, while four in 10 say they “don't know.”
- Almost half (48%) of Moroccans say they find it “difficult” or “very difficult” to cross international borders.
- Only four in 10 Moroccans (40%) say they think North Africans should be able to “move freely across international borders in order to trade or work in other countries,” well below the average of 56% across 36 surveyed countries.
- Moroccans are less welcoming than most other Africans to people from different backgrounds. Significant minorities say they would “somewhat dislike” or “strongly dislike” living next-door to people of a different religion (33%), people of a different ethnicity (26%), and foreign workers and immigrants (33%) – about two to three times average levels of intolerance across surveyed countries.
- Only one in five Moroccans (20%) say governments have a duty to try to prevent election or human-rights abuses in other countries – a lower level of support for regional intervention than across 36 surveyed countries (34%).

Limited positive experience with regional organisations

Asked whether they perceive the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) and the AU as helpful to their country, Moroccans' most frequent response is that they don't know (Figure 1). About one in three say the regional (34%) and continental (31%) organisations “do nothing.” Only about one in seven say the AU helps “a little bit” (15%), “somewhat” (12%), or “a lot” (3%), while perceptions of the AMU's helpfulness are even lower (19% a little bit, 6% somewhat, 1% a lot).

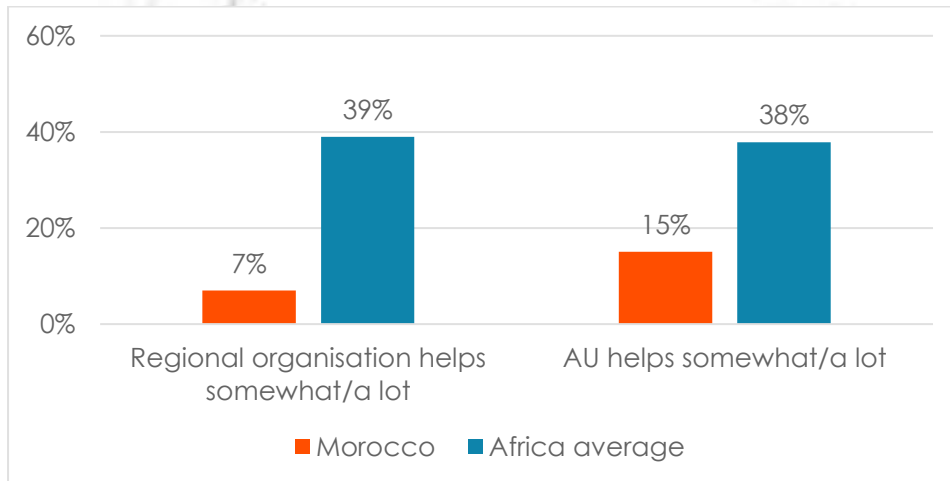
Figure 1: Perceived helpfulness of regional organisation and African Union
 | Morocco | 2015



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how much do each of the following do to help your country, or haven't you heard enough to say: Arab Maghreb Union? African Union?*

These perceptions of the utility of the AU and the regional organisation are the lowest among all African countries surveyed in 2014/2015, far below regional and continental averages. For example, while 7% of Moroccans say their regional organisation helps their country “somewhat” or “a lot,” more than five times as many respondents (39%) feel this way across the 34 countries in which this question was asked (Figure 2). Similarly, Moroccans are less than half as likely as other Africans to consider the AU at least “somewhat” helpful (15% vs. 38%).

Figure 2: Perceived helpfulness of regional organisations and AU | Morocco and 36-country average* | 2014/2015



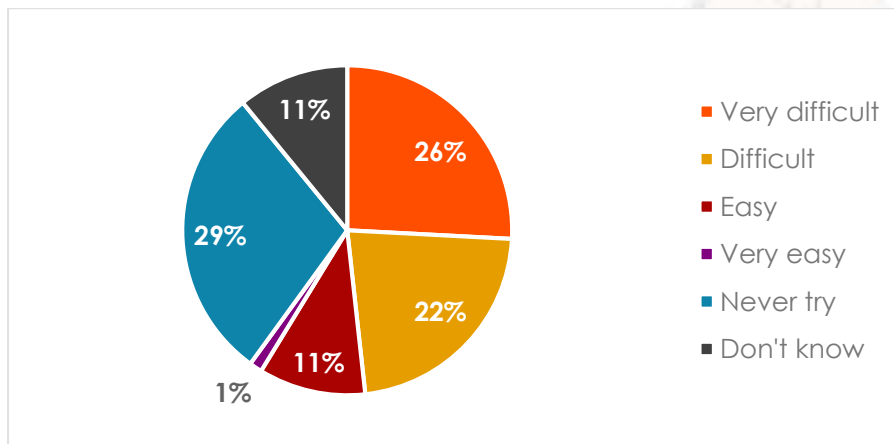
Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how much do each of the following do to help your country, or haven't you heard enough to say: [Regional economic organisation]? African Union? (% who says the organisations help “somewhat” or “a lot”)

*Note: Question on regional organisations was not asked in Egypt and Gabon.

Difficulty crossing borders and support for free cross-border movement

A core objective of regional integration is to facilitate trade and growth by increasing the ease of intra-regional travel and work. Almost half (48%) of Moroccans say they have found it “difficult” or “very difficult” to cross international borders, on par with the 36-country average of 51% (Figure 3). Only about one in eight citizens (12%) say crossing borders is “easy” or “very easy,” while 29% say they never try and 11% say they “don't know.”

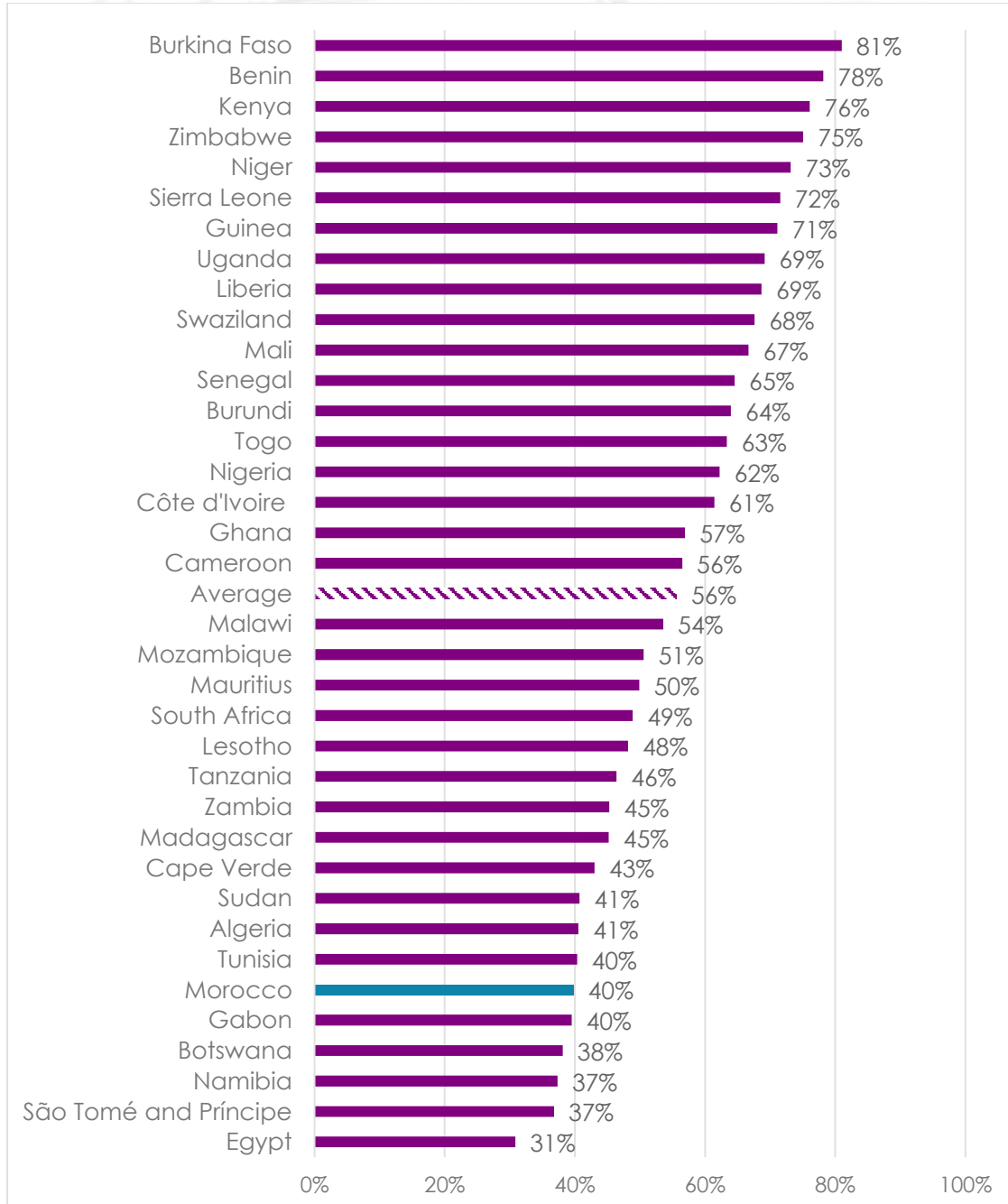
Figure 3: Difficulty crossing international borders | Morocco | 2015



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how easy or difficult is it for people in North Africa to cross international borders in order to work or trade in other countries, or haven't you heard enough to say?

Despite the reported difficulty of crossing borders, only four in 10 Moroccans (40%) say they think North Africans should be able to “move freely across international borders in order to trade or work in other countries.” This is one of the lowest levels of support for free movement among 36 surveyed countries, well below the average of 56% (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Support for free cross-border movement | 36 countries | 2014/2015

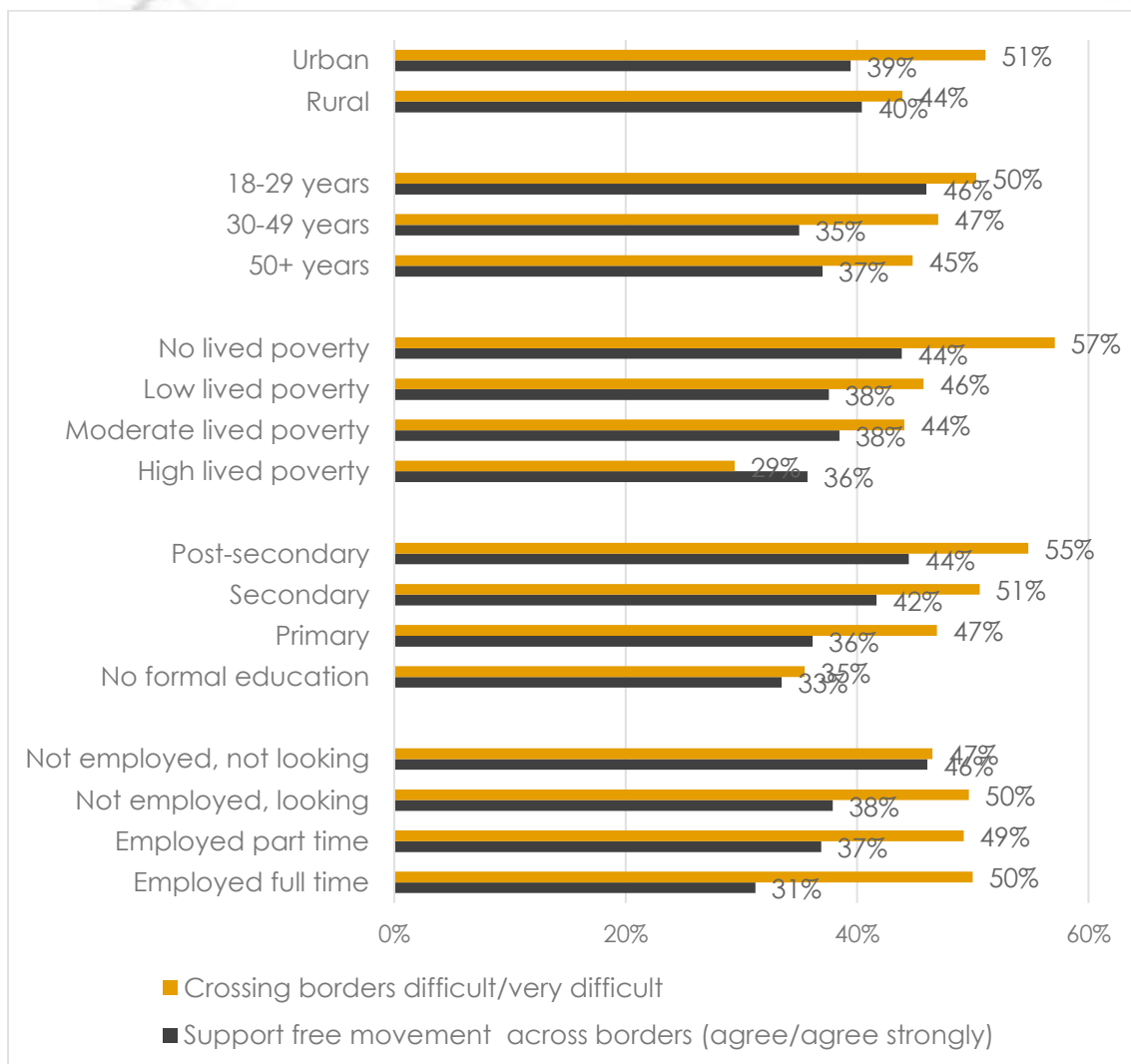


Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: People living in North Africa should be able to move freely across international borders in order to trade or work in other countries.
 Statement 2: Because foreign migrants take away jobs, and foreign traders sell their goods at very cheap prices, governments should protect their own citizens and limit the cross-border movement of people and goods.
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with free cross-border movement)

Difficulties crossing borders are most commonly reported by urban, young, economically better off, and educated respondents (Figure 5) – groups that are likely to be able to afford or need to travel internationally. In particular, the wealthiest respondents (no lived poverty) are twice as likely as the poorest citizens (high lived poverty) to report problems crossing borders.

Similarly, support for free movement is strongest among younger, more educated, and economically better-off Moroccans. Interestingly, Moroccans who are not employed and not seeking employment are considerably more often supportive of free movement than Moroccans who are either employed or looking for work.

Figure 5: Experience and attitudes regarding cross-border movement
 | by socio-demographic group | Morocco | 2015



Respondents were asked:

- In your opinion, how easy or difficult is it for people in North Africa to cross international borders in order to work or trade in other countries, or haven't you heard enough to say?
- Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: People living in North Africa should be able to move freely across international borders in order to trade or work in other countries.

Statement 2: Because foreign migrants take away jobs, and foreign traders sell their goods at very cheap prices, governments should protect their own citizens and limit the cross-border movement of people and goods.

Attitudes toward people of different backgrounds

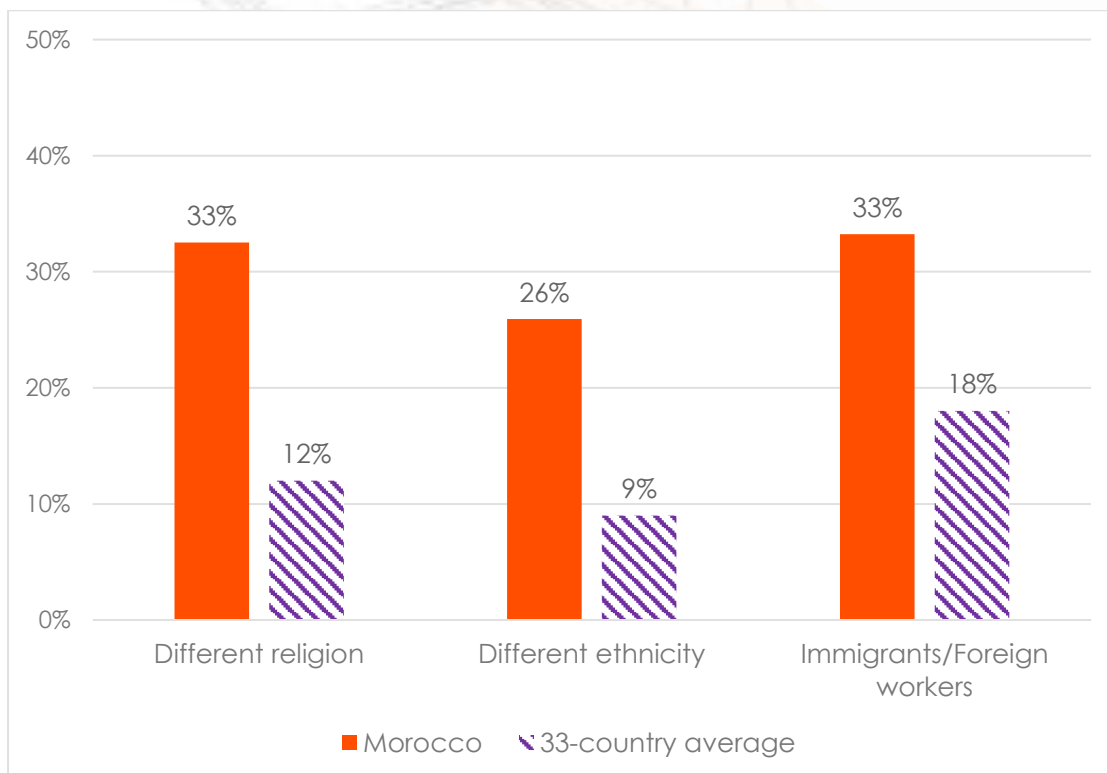
Greater freedom of movement and integration generally mean greater contact with people from different backgrounds and cultures. In this respect, Moroccans appear to be considerably less welcoming than most other Africans. When asked whether they would like or dislike having neighbours of different religions, different ethnic groups, or different nationalities (immigrants or foreign workers), Moroccans are among the top four among 36 surveyed countries in terms of dislike in all three categories.

About one in three Moroccans (33%) say they would “somewhat dislike” or “strongly dislike” having people of a different religion as neighbours, compared to only 12%, on average, across 33 African countries where this question was asked (Figure 6).

One in four Moroccans (26%) say they would somewhat/strongly dislike living next to people of different ethnicities – almost three times the African average (9%). And one-third of Moroccans (33%) say the same about foreign workers and immigrants – almost twice as many as the African average of 18%.

Even among those who do not have a negative attitude toward people of different backgrounds, Moroccans are considerably less welcoming than most other Africans. For example, only one in 10 Moroccans (10%) say they would actually like (somewhat or strongly) to have immigrants or foreign workers as neighbours, compared to 42% on average across 33 countries, while a majority (56%) say they “would not care” (vs. 39% across 33 countries).

Figure 6: Intolerance of people of different backgrounds | Morocco and 33-country average* | 2014/2015



Respondents were asked:

For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care: People of a different religion? People from other ethnic groups? -Immigrants or foreign workers?

(% who say they would “somewhat dislike” or “strongly dislike” having such people as neighbours)

** These questions were not asked in Algeria, Egypt, or Sudan.*

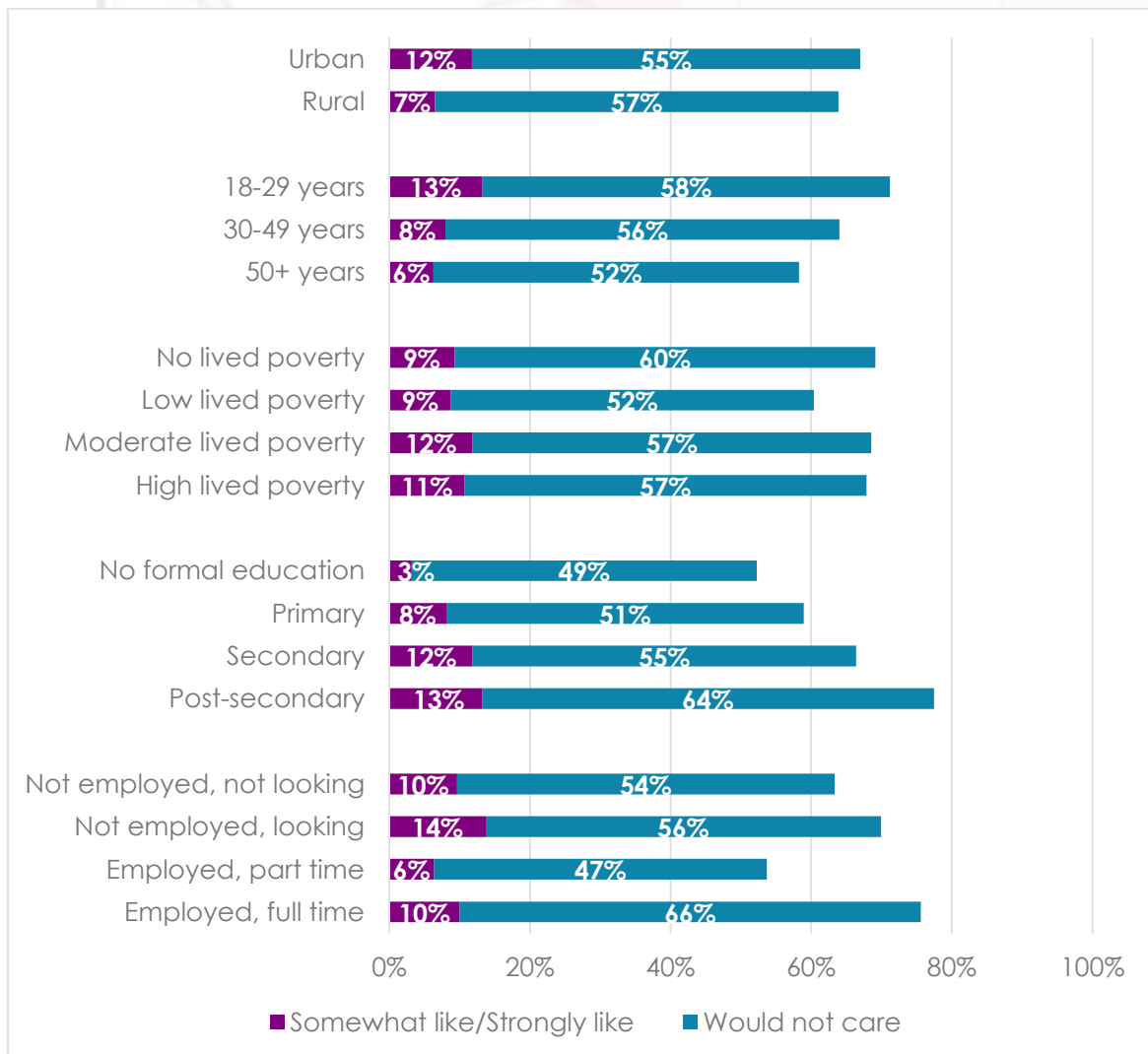
Given that free cross-border movement is intended to facilitate economic growth and intra-regional trade, we look deeper into attitudes of Moroccans toward immigrants and foreign workers, as these are most likely to increase in numbers with deepening integration. Young Moroccans (aged 18-29) are more likely than their elders to express tolerant attitudes toward

immigrants (71% who say they would somewhat/strongly like or would not care, vs. 64% of respondents aged 30-49 and 58% of those over 49) (Figure 7). Similarly, better-educated respondents are more likely to be welcoming, ranging from 77% of those with post-secondary qualification to 52% of those with no formal education.

To further explore this data, please visit Afrobarometer's online data analysis facility at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

Moroccans holding full-time jobs are most likely to express tolerance for foreign workers and immigrants (76%), while those in part-time employment – perhaps more vulnerable to competition – are least tolerant (53%).

Figure 7: Tolerance toward foreign workers and immigrants | by socio-demographic group | Morocco | 2015



Respondents were asked: For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care: Immigrants or foreign workers?

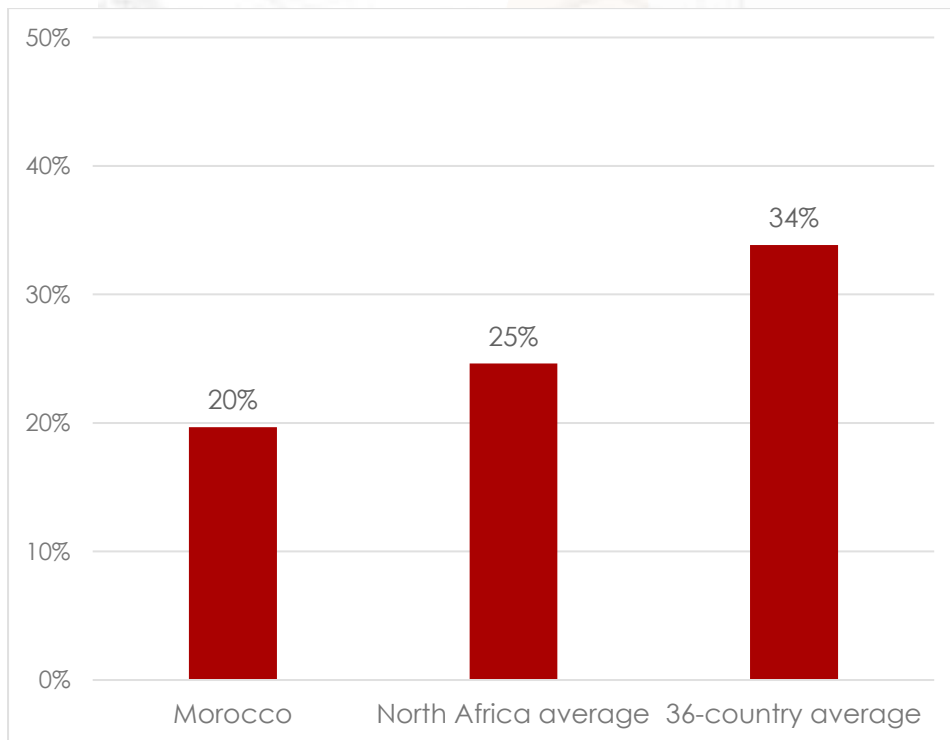
Regional intervention vs. national sovereignty

As Cohen and O'Neill note (2006, p. 52), "The AU is the world's only regional or international organisation that explicitly recognizes the right to intervene in a member state on humanitarian and human rights grounds." One Afrobarometer question asks citizens whether they think governments have a duty to try to protect democracy and human rights in other countries in the region, "for example by using political pressure, economic sanctions, or military force," or whether they should "respect the independence of other countries and allow them to make their own decisions."

Only one in five Moroccans (20%) "agree" or "agree very strongly" that governments must try to prevent abuses in other countries – a lower level of support for regional intervention than across North African countries (25%) and across 36 surveyed countries (34%) (Figure 8). Two-thirds (67%) of Moroccans instead say respect for national sovereignty is more important than trying to protect free elections and human rights.

Urban residents and respondents aged 18-49 are somewhat more supportive of regional intervention than rural and older respondents (Figure 9). Other socio-demographic patterns are less clear.

Figure 8: Support for regional responsibility to protect democracy and human rights
 | Morocco, North Africa, and 36-country average | 2014/2015



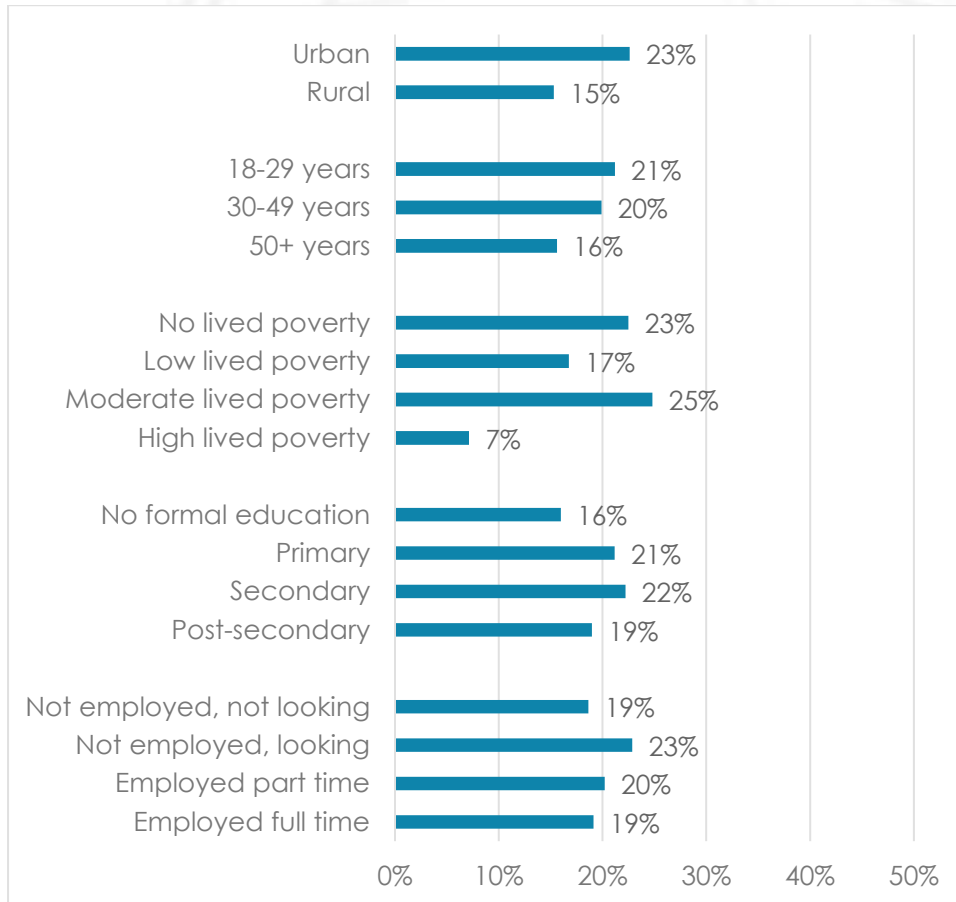
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: The governments of each country in North Africa have a duty to try to guarantee free elections and prevent human rights abuses in other countries in the region, for example by using political pressure, economic sanctions or military force.

Statement 2: Each country in this region should respect the independence of other countries and allow them to make their own decisions about how their country should be governed.

(% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with responsibility to protect democracy and human rights in other countries)

Figure 9: Support for regional responsibility to protect democracy and human rights
 | by socio-demographic group | Morocco | 2015



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: The governments of each country in North Africa have a duty to try to guarantee free elections and prevent human rights abuses in other countries in the region, for example by using political pressure, economic sanctions or military force.
 Statement 2: Each country in this region should respect the independence of other countries and allow them to make their own decisions about how their country should be governed.
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with responsibility to protect democracy and human rights in other countries)

Conclusion

Morocco's return to AU membership opens new possibilities for Moroccan business across the continent but may also open the country to the consequences of greater regional integration. Moroccans have limited positive experiences with the AU and the Arab Maghreb Union; the largest group of respondents in Morocco say they don't know whether the continental and regional organisations help their country or not. While many report difficulties in crossing borders, Moroccans are significantly less supportive than most Africans of free cross-border movement. Moroccans are also considerably less welcoming than most other Africans to people of other religions, ethnicities, or nationalities, as well as less supportive of regional intervention to protect democracy and human rights.

References

- African Union. (2002). Constitutive Act. www.lawschool.cornell.edu/.../upload/AU-Constitutive-Act-of-the-African-Union.pdf.
- African Union. (2014). Agenda 2063. archive.au.int/assets/images/agenda2063.pdf.
- Cohen, R., & O'Neill, W. G. (2006). Last stand in Sudan? *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 62(2), 51-58.
- Mohamed, H. (2017). Morocco rejoins the African Union after 33 years. Al Jazeera. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/01/morocco-rejoins-african-union-33-years-170131084926023.html>.

David Jacobs is an assistant director in the Department of Economic Development and Tourism in the Western Cape, South Africa. Email: david.jacobs2@westerncape.gov.za.

Thomas Isbell is a PhD student at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. Email: tisbell@afrobarometer.org.

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.

Core support for Afrobarometer Rounds 5 and 6 has been provided by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank.

For more information, please visit www.afrobarometer.org.

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 137 | 27 March 2017