

## **Burkinabè preference for truth over forgetting put to test in ex-president's trial over 2014 uprising**

**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 155 | Thomas Isbell**

### **Summary**

While accountability is a cornerstone of democracy, it is rare that a former head of state is prosecuted in a national court for misconduct while in office. Burkina Faso is departing from the norm with its trials of former President Blaise Compaore and senior members of his government for allegedly authorizing the use of force against unarmed protesters during a popular uprising in October 2014 (Coulibaly, 2017; Al Jazeera, 2017). At least 24 people were killed during the uprising, which led Compaore to flee the country, ending his 27-year rule.

Burkina Faso moved past a period of instability to peaceful elections in 2015, but as these trials rekindle reflections on the events of October 2014, public-opinion data may shed some light on citizens' views about how the country should move forward. These data were collected about six months after the uprising, so they will not reflect possible changes in public perceptions since then.

Survey findings show that at the time, Burkinabè favoured the truth over forgetting and prosecution over amnesty, although they were more divided as to whether a former head of state should face prosecution. A majority of citizens also supported expropriation of ill-gotten by former government officials and compensation for people who lost property during the uprising.

### **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 Round 7 surveys (2016/2017) are currently underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of 1,200 or 2,400 respondents.

For its Round 6 survey in Burkina Faso, the national Afrobarometer team, led by the Centre pour la Gouvernance Démocratique, interviewed 1,200 adult Burkinabè in April and May 2015. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of sampling error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. Previous Afrobarometer surveys were conducted in Burkina Faso in 2008 and 2012.

### **Key findings**

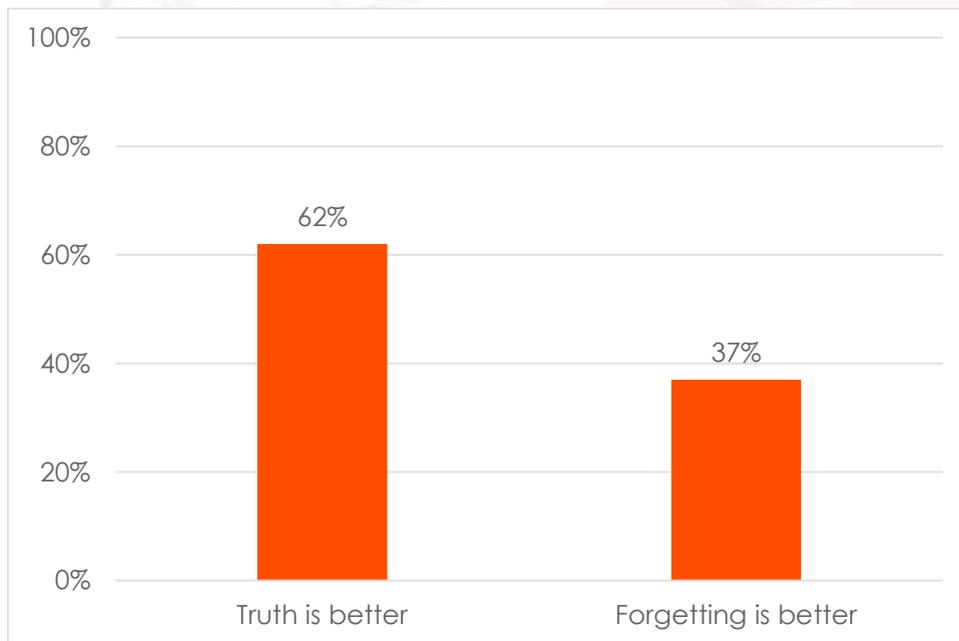
- A majority (62%) of Burkinabè said the truth is better than forgetting as a way for the country to move past the events of October 2014.
- By a 2-to-1 margin, respondents favoured prosecution for those suspected of crimes and human-rights violations during the 2014 uprising. But they were more narrowly split when it comes to amnesty (39%) vs. prosecution (49%) for a former head of state.

- Citizens overwhelmingly (86%) agreed that ill-gotten gains by former government officials should be expropriated, and a majority (58%) said people who lost property during the uprising should be compensated.
- The most popular idea for honoring victims of the uprising was to dedicate a national day in their memory (favoured by 38% of respondents).
- Burkinabè were evenly divided as to whether the October 2014 street protests were a good thing for their country's democracy and governance.

### How should Burkina Faso deal with the 2014 revolt?

More than six in 10 Burkinabè (62%) said the country needs the truth about the 2014 revolt in order to move forward, while almost four in 10 (37%) argued it would be better to simply forget about these events (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Truth vs. forgetting about 2014 revolt | Burkina Faso | 2015**



**Respondents were asked:** Let's talk about the best way to handle the case of those suspected of crimes and human-rights violations during the events of late October 2014. Which of the following statements is closest to your opinion?

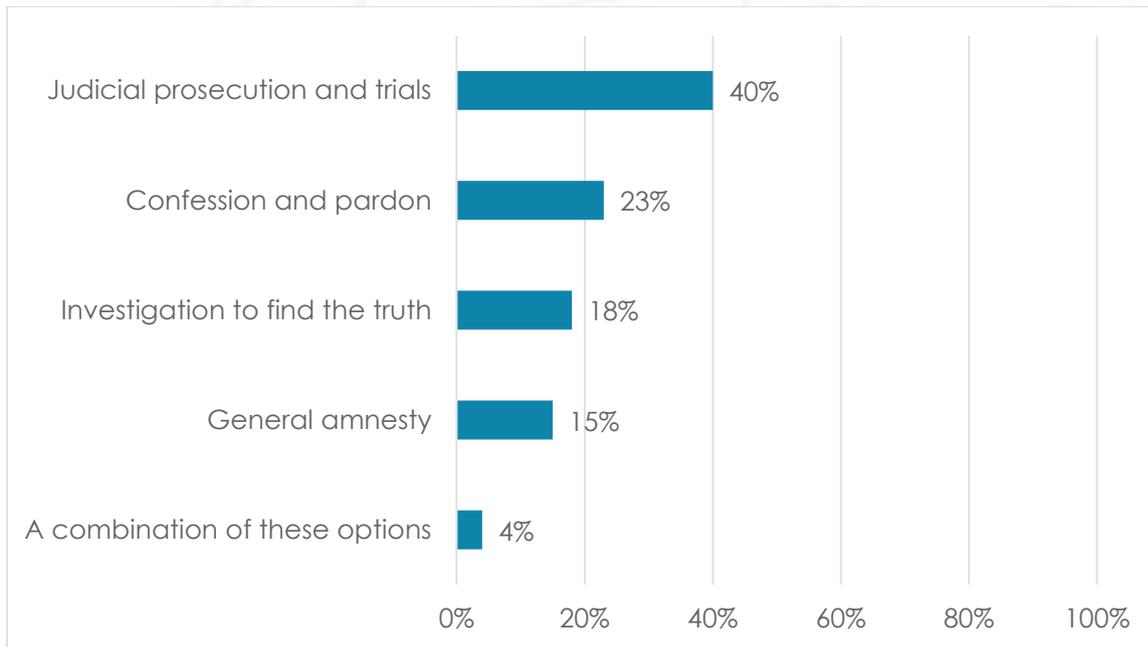
Statement 1: Uncovering the truth about what happened during the uprising in late October 2014 is necessary to allow Burkina Faso to move forward.

Statement 2: To allow our country to progress, it would be better to forget what happened during the uprising in late October 2014.

(% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

Asked which of several measures would be the best way to achieve lasting peace and reconciliation in Burkina Faso, respondents most commonly opted for judicial prosecution of suspected criminals (40%), followed by confession and pardon (23%). About one in six preferred investigations to determine the truth (18%) or a general amnesty (15%) (Figure 2).

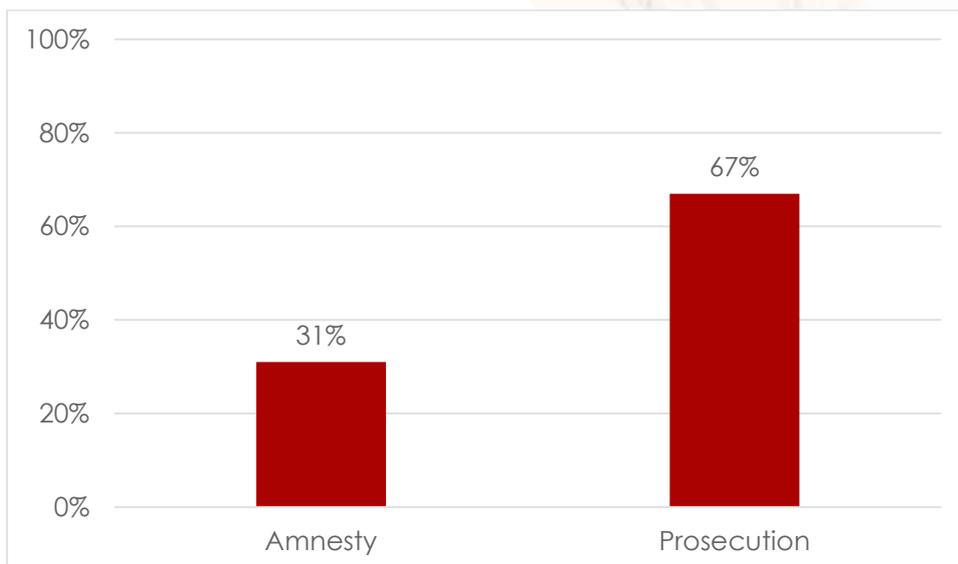
**Figure 2: Best option for peace and reconciliation** | Burkina Faso | 2015



**Respondents were asked:** *In your opinion, which of these options is best for durable peace and reconciliation in Burkina?*

Support for prosecution was even stronger when the question was posed directly. Asked to choose between amnesty and prosecution for those accused of crimes and human-rights violations during the uprising, more than two-thirds (67%) favoured prosecution (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Amnesty vs. prosecution for suspects** | Burkina Faso | 2015

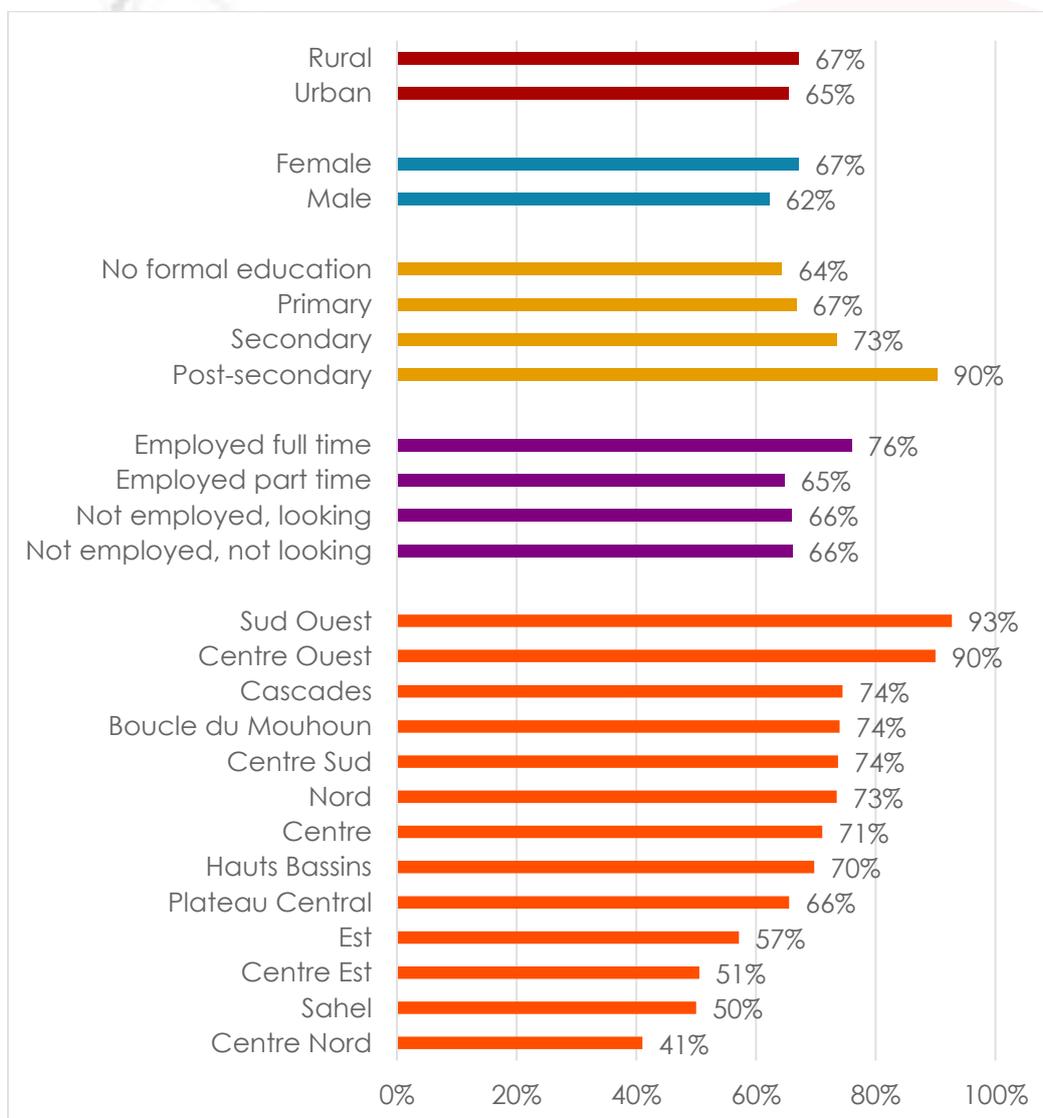


**Respondents were asked:** *Which of the following statements is closest to your opinion?*  
 Statement 1: *Those suspected of crimes and human-rights violations during the popular uprising of October 2014 should receive amnesty.*  
 Statement 2: *Those suspected of crimes and human-rights violations during the popular uprising of October 2014 should be held accountable and prosecuted for what they did.*  
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

Contrasting responses by socio-demographic factors reveals a number of differences. Urban residents were somewhat more often supportive of prosecuting suspects than rural dwellers (73% vs. 65%), as were men (72%) compared to women (62%). Burkinabè with higher levels of education were more often supportive of prosecution, ranging from 90% of those with post-secondary qualification to 64% of those with no formal schooling (Figure 4). Respondents with full-time jobs were most likely to favour prosecution, but respondents' level of lived poverty and age group showed no consistent patterns on this question.

Regional support for prosecution over amnesty varied from around nine in 10 respondents in Sud Ouest (93%) and Centre Ouest (90%) to half or fewer in Centre Est (51%), Sahel (50%), and Centre Nord (41%).

**Figure 4: Support for prosecution of suspects | by socio-demographic group**  
 | Burkina Faso | 2015

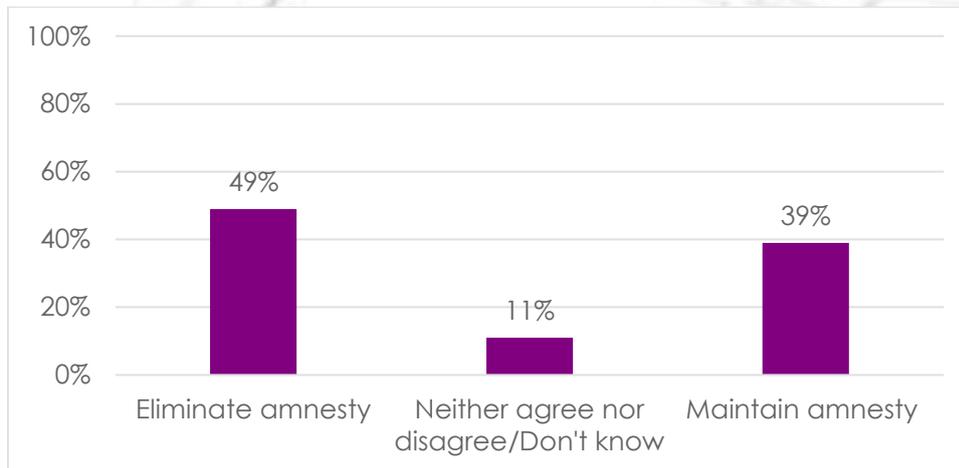


**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your opinion?  
 Statement 1: Those suspected of crimes and human-rights violations during the popular uprising of October 2014 should receive amnesty.  
 Statement 2: Those suspected of crimes and human-rights violations during the popular uprising of October 2014 should be held accountable and prosecuted for what they did.  
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

## Dealing with former leaders

Burkinabè were divided as to whether former leaders should face prosecution: 49% said they should be held legally accountable, while 39% said that in the interest of national reconciliation, the amnesty clause covering former heads of state should be maintained (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Maintaining amnesty for former heads of state | Burkina Faso | 2015**

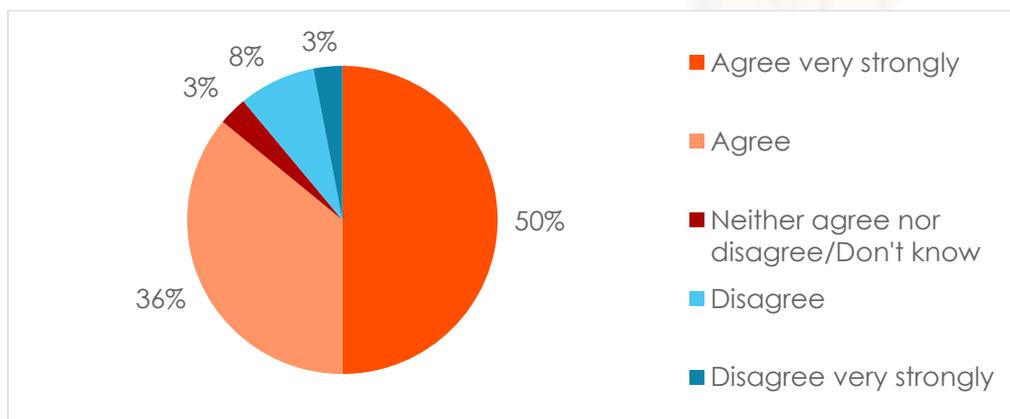


**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you agree or disagree: To strengthen national reconciliation, the amnesty clause for former heads of state should be maintained. (% who “agree/disagree” or “agree/disagree very strongly”)

Analyzed by demographic group, results show the same pattern as support for prosecution of suspected criminals and human-rights violators in general discussed above: A preference for eliminating the amnesty clause was more common among urban residents, men, and citizens who are better educated and/or hold full-time jobs.

In contrast to the amnesty question, Burkinabè were far more united in their views on what should be done with ill-gotten gains by officials of the previous regime: Fully half (50%) “agreed very strongly” and an additional 36% “agreed” that they should be expropriated for the benefit of the state (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Expropriating gains by former state officials | Burkina Faso | 2015**

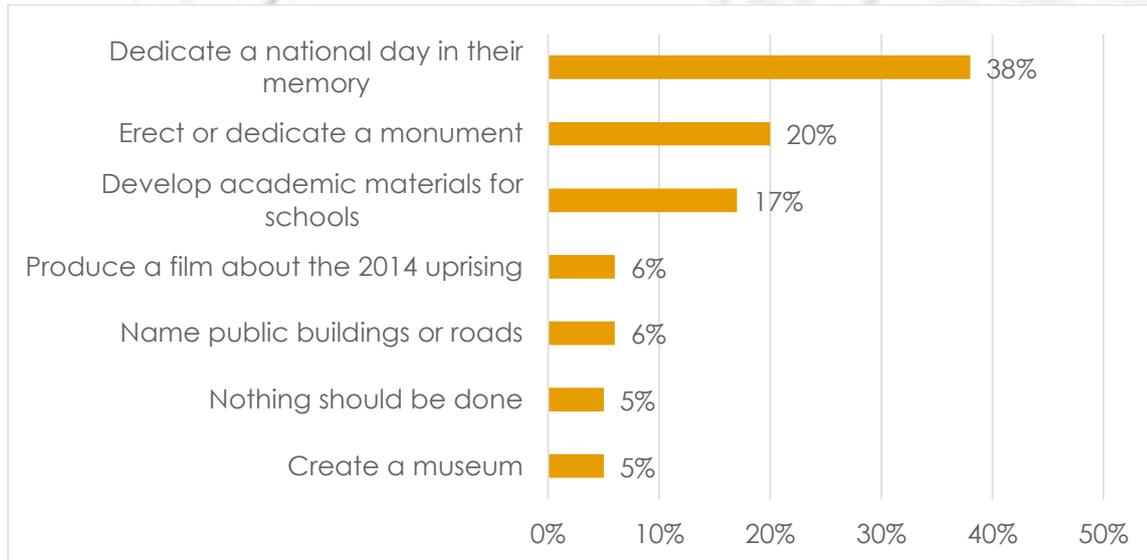


**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you agree or disagree: Ill-gotten gains by officials of the previous regime should be expropriated for the benefit of the state?

### Honoring and compensating victims

When Afrobarometer asked Burkinabè what would be the best way to immortalize victims of the 2014 unrest, the most frequent preference was for a dedicated national day in their memory (cited by 38% of respondents), followed by erecting or dedicating a monument in their memory (20%) and developing academic materials for schools (17%) (Figure 7).

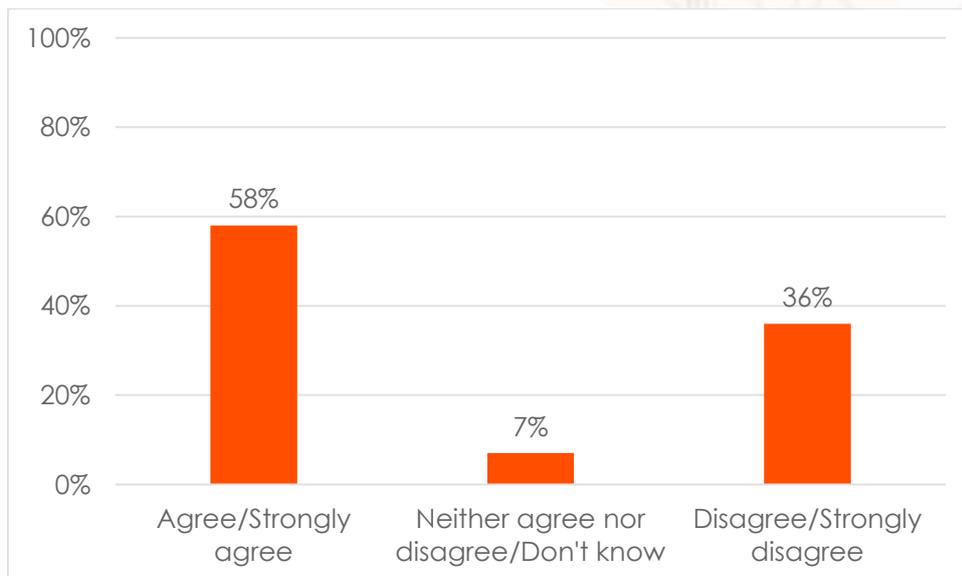
**Figure 7: Best way to honor victims of 2014 revolt | Burkina Faso | 2015**



**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, which of the following options would be the best to immortalize the memory of the victims of the popular uprising in October 2014?

Almost six in 10 Burkinabè said they “agree” or “strongly agree” that those who lost property during the revolt should be compensated (58%), while 36% disagreed (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Compensation for property lost during revolt | Burkina Faso | 2015**



**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you agree or disagree: People whose goods and property were burned, plundered, or vandalized during the popular uprising of October 2014 should be compensated without discriminating among victims.

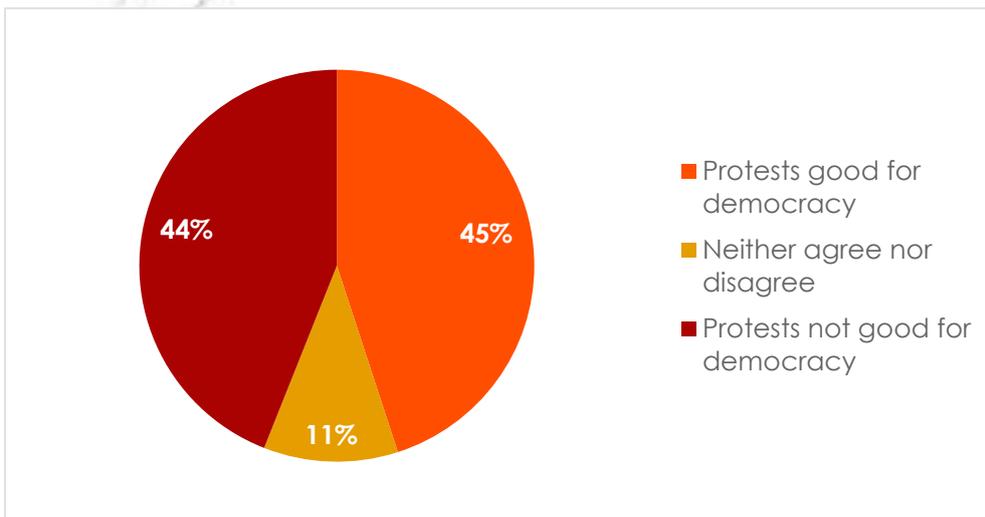
### Were street protests good for democracy?

Burkinabè were evenly divided as to whether the street protests following the October 2014 uprising were a good thing for the country's democracy and good governance (Figure 9).

Urban residents, men, citizens with post-secondary education, and those holding full- or part-time jobs were more likely to see the protests as beneficial than rural residents, women, the less-educated and the unemployed (Figure 10).

**Figure 9: Were street protests following 2014 revolt good for democracy?**

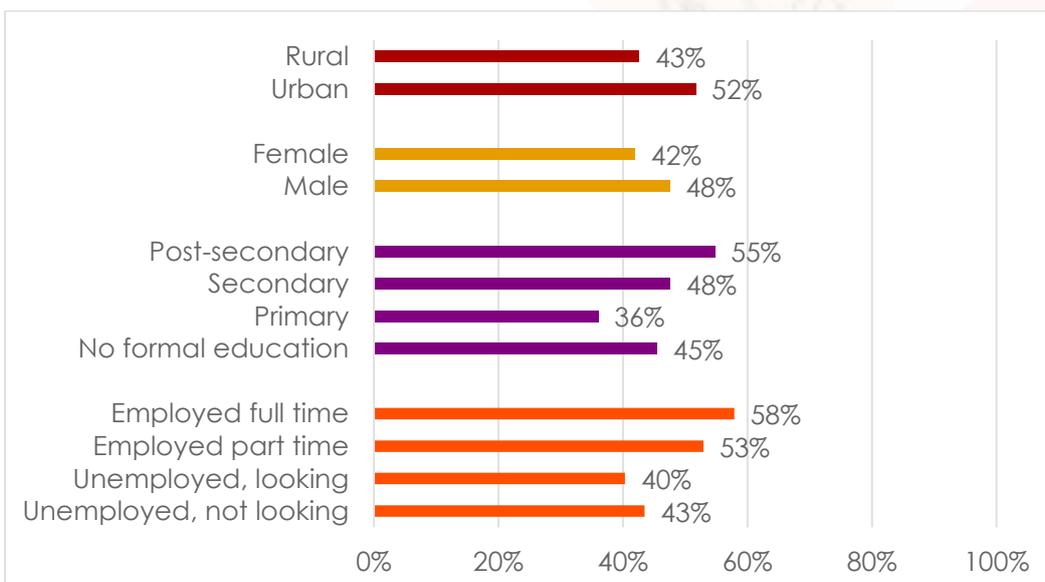
| Burkina Faso | 2015



**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you agree or disagree: Street protests following the October 2014 revolt are good for democracy and good governance in our country.

**Figure 10: Street protests following 2014 revolt were good for democracy**

| by socio-demographic group | Burkina Faso | 2015



**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you agree or disagree: Street protests following the October 2014 revolt are good for democracy and good governance in our country. (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

## Conclusion

As the trials of former President Compaore and senior members of his government renew public debate about the events of October 2014, data collected in the aftermath of the uprising indicate that a majority of Burkinabè preferred the truth, prosecution, and compensation for losses rather than forgetting as a path toward national reconciliation.

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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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