



Beyond 'no-party' system: Ugandans support multiparty politics, but trust in opposition weakens

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 86 | Ronald Makanga Kakumba

Summary

Multiparty politics has had an uphill struggle in Uganda, marked by a 19-year ban on party competition from 1986 to 2005. Voters overwhelmingly reinforced the "no-party system" in a 2000 referendum, then reversed themselves in a 2005 referendum that opened the field to political challengers.

According to the 2015 Afrobarometer survey in Uganda, public support for multiparty competition continues to grow: Seven in 10 Ugandans now say that many political parties are needed to ensure that voters have real choices in who governs the country. However, trust in opposition parties, which had been growing alongside popular support for multiparty politics, shows a significant decline in 2015. Further, only one-third of Ugandans say that the opposition "presents a viable alternative vision and plan" for the country, and most Ugandans believe that the ruling party is better able to address problems bedeviling the nation, such as fighting corruption, controlling prices, creating jobs, and improving health care. When asked what they consider the most important difference between the ruling and opposition parties, citizens are about as likely to say they "don't know" or see "no difference" as they are to cite economic and development policies and the integrity and experience of party leaders.

These findings reflect public attitudes expressed in May 2015, well before the February 2016 general elections, in which President Yoweri Museveni claimed a seventh term with about 61% of the vote against 39% for opposition candidates, who alleged fraud and a climate of voter intimidation.

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 35 countries in Africa. Six rounds of surveys have since been conducted between 1999 and 2015. 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.

The Afrobarometer team in Uganda, led by Hatchile Consult Limited, interviewed 2,400 adult Ugandans in May 2015. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Uganda in 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, and 2012.

Key findings

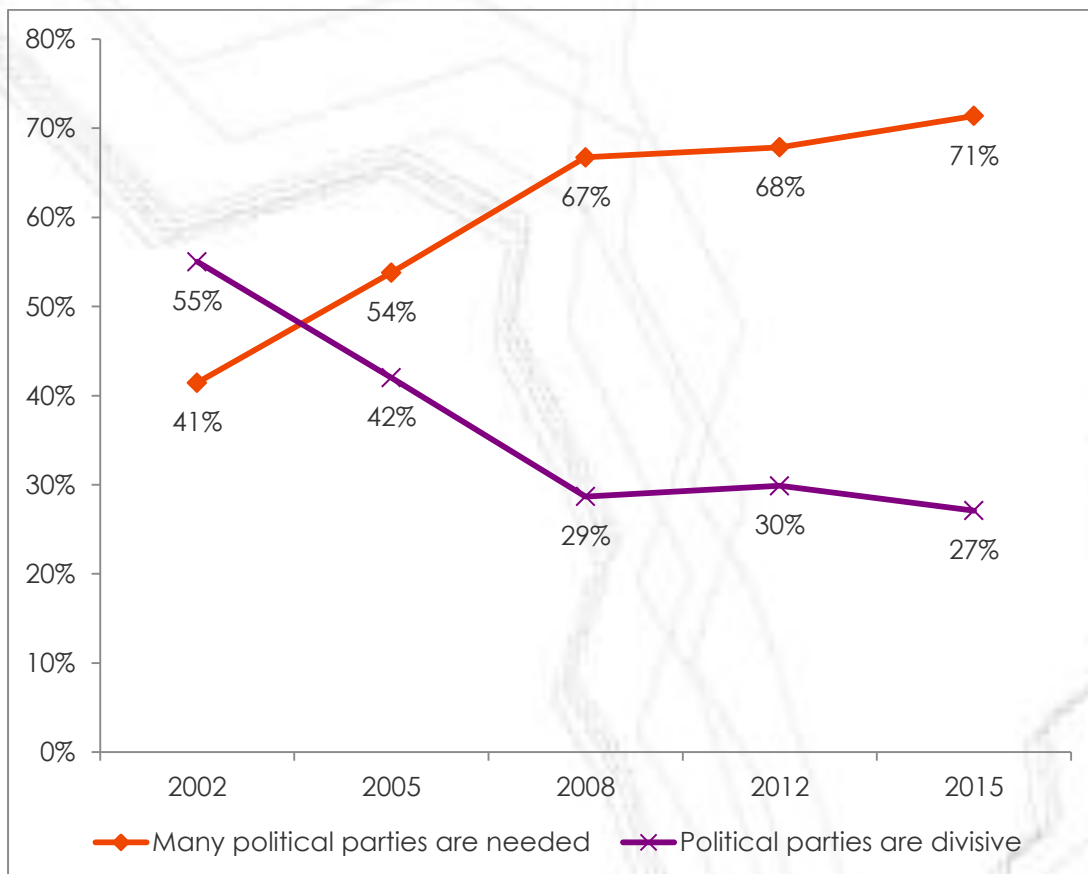
- Support for a multiparty political system in Uganda continued to increase: Seven in 10 respondents (71%) say that many political parties are needed to ensure that voters have real choices.

- However, trust in opposition political parties ended its decade-long growth: Only 31% of Ugandans say they trust the opposition “somewhat” or “a lot,” a decrease from 47% in 2012. Similarly, only 32% believe that the opposition “presents a viable alternative vision and plan” for the country.
- Meanwhile, trust in the ruling party continued to increase (to 71%), resulting in a 40-percentage-point gap in trust between ruling and opposition parties.
- Almost two-thirds (64%) of Ugandans believe that the ruling party is better able than the opposition to address key challenges such as job creation, inflation management, corruption control, and health-care improvement.

Increasing support for a multiparty system

Public support for multiparty politics in Uganda continues its upward trend. Over the past decade and a half, support for a system in which many political parties can compete has increased steadily, from 41% in 2002 to 71% in 2015 (Figure 1). Only about one in four Ugandans (27%) take the opposing view that political parties create division and are not needed.

Figure 1: Trends in support for a multiparty political system | Uganda | 2002-2015



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.

Statement 1: Political parties create division and confusion; it is therefore unnecessary to have many political parties in Uganda.

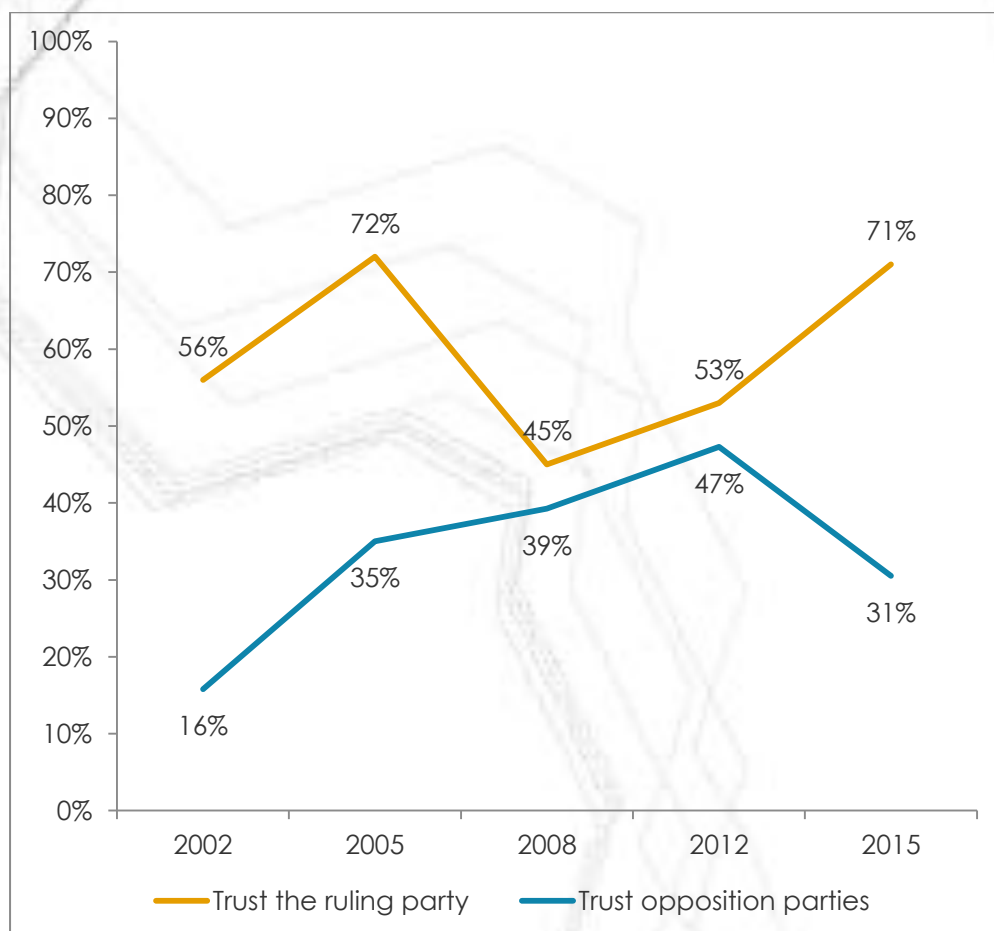
Statement 2: Many political parties are needed to make sure that Ugandans have real choices in who governs them.

Trust in ruling and opposition political parties

Despite strong support for multiparty competition, citizens' trust in opposition political parties ended its decade-long growth. Between 2002 and 2012, the proportion of Ugandans who said they trusted opposition parties "somewhat" or "a lot" increased dramatically, tripling from 16% to 47%. However, in the 2015 survey, trust in opposition parties dropped by 16 percentage points, to 31% (Figure 2). This may in part be a response to internal competition and conflicts among opposition parties, whose coalition in the campaign for the 2016 elections failed to unite behind a single candidate to challenge the incumbent.

Trust in the ruling party, meanwhile, continued its upward path, recovering to nearly its high of 72% recorded in 2005.

Figure 2: Trends in trust in political parties | Uganda | 2002-2015

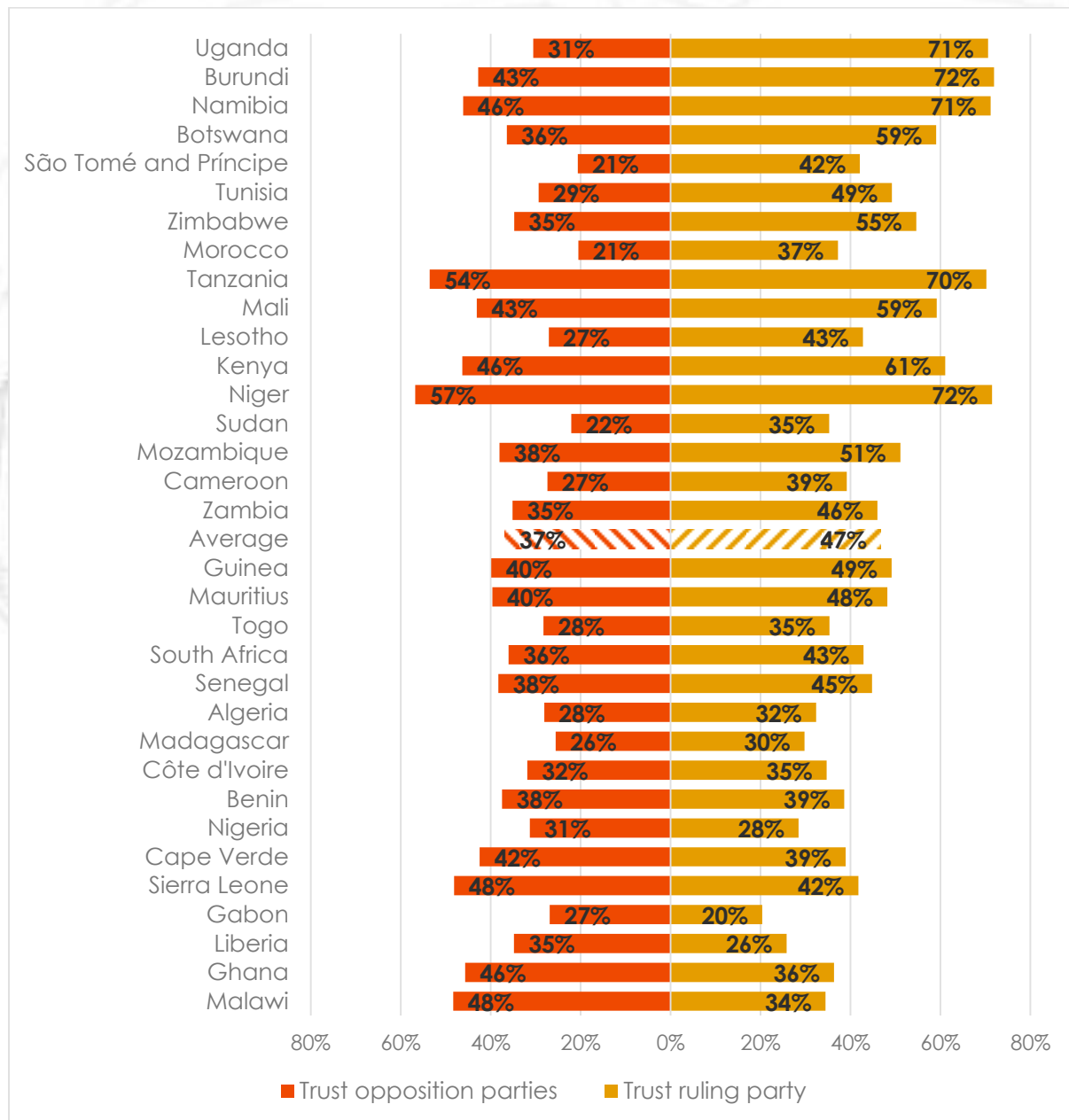


Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The ruling party, you know, the National Resistance Movement (NRM)? Opposition political parties? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

The gap in trust between the ruling party and opposition parties thus climbed back to its 2002 level of 40 percentage points, after shrinking to 6 percentage points in 2008 and 2012 through a combination of decreasing trust in the ruling party and increasing trust in opposition parties.

The 40-percentage-point gap is the largest among 33 countries surveyed on this question by Afrobarometer in 2014/2015 (Figure 3) and raises the question whether Uganda has moved beyond a one-party-dominant system.

Figure 3: Trust in ruling and opposition parties | 33 countries (ordered by size of trust gap) | 2014/2015



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The ruling party? Opposition political parties? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")
 Note: The questions about trust in the ruling and opposition parties were not asked in Burkina Faso and Swaziland. The question about trust in the ruling party was not asked in Egypt.

When we examine trust in political parties across different demographic factors, results indicate that rural residents (74%) are significantly more likely than urban dwellers (57%) to express trust in the ruling party.

Trust in opposition parties is somewhat higher among men (34%) than women (27%), among younger than older respondents, and among better-educated citizens than their less-educated counterparts.

Across the regions, trust in opposition parties is lowest in the West (20%) (where the incumbent president is deeply rooted in terms of ethnic identity) and highest in Kampala (39%) as well as in the North region (39%) (where trust in the ruling party is also exceptionally high, at 80%).

As expected, respondents who say they “feel close to” a particular political party overwhelmingly express trust for that side. Respondents who don’t “feel close to” a particular party are more likely to express trust in the ruling party (57%) than in opposition parties (31%).

Table 1: Trust in political parties | by demographic factors | Uganda | 2015

		Trust the ruling party	Trust opposition parties
Place of residence	Urban	57%	35%
	Rural	74%	29%
Sex	Male	68%	34%
	Female	73%	27%
Age group	18-30	65%	33%
	31-49	73%	29%
	50+	78%	27%
Education level	No formal schooling	75%	24%
	Primary	79%	28%
	Secondary	65%	34%
	Post-secondary	48%	39%
Region	Central	50%	35%
	West	84%	20%
	North	80%	39%
	East	74%	29%
	Kampala	36%	39%
Party identity	Feel close to NRM	88%	21%
	Feel close to opposition	27%	69%
	Not close to any party	57%	31%
Average		71%	31%

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

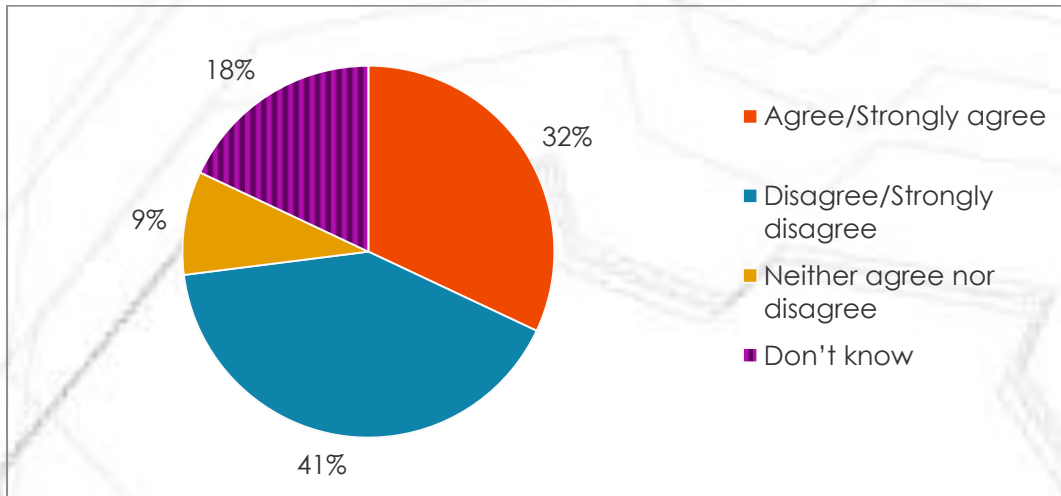
Do opposition parties have an alternative vision and plan?

In a multiparty system, opposition political parties present themselves as alternatives that can address citizen interests better than the incumbent government. Given Uganda’s history with a “no-party system” in which opposition political parties were portrayed as divisive and unnecessary, it is essential to understand whether opposition parties are seen as a viable alternative in Uganda.

In the 2015 survey, only one-third (32%) of respondents “agree” or “strongly agree” that opposition political parties “present a viable alternative vision and plan” for the country, while 41% “disagree” or “strongly disagree” (Figure 4). More than one in four respondents take neither side (9%) or say they “don’t know” (18%).

Unsurprisingly, respondents who trust the ruling party are significantly less likely to see the opposition as being a viable alternative (Pearson’s $r = -.363$, $p=.000$), while those who trust opposition parties are significantly more likely to consider their vision and plan as a viable alternative (Pearson’s $r = .316$, $p=.000$).

Figure 4: Do opposition parties present a viable alternative? | Uganda | 2015

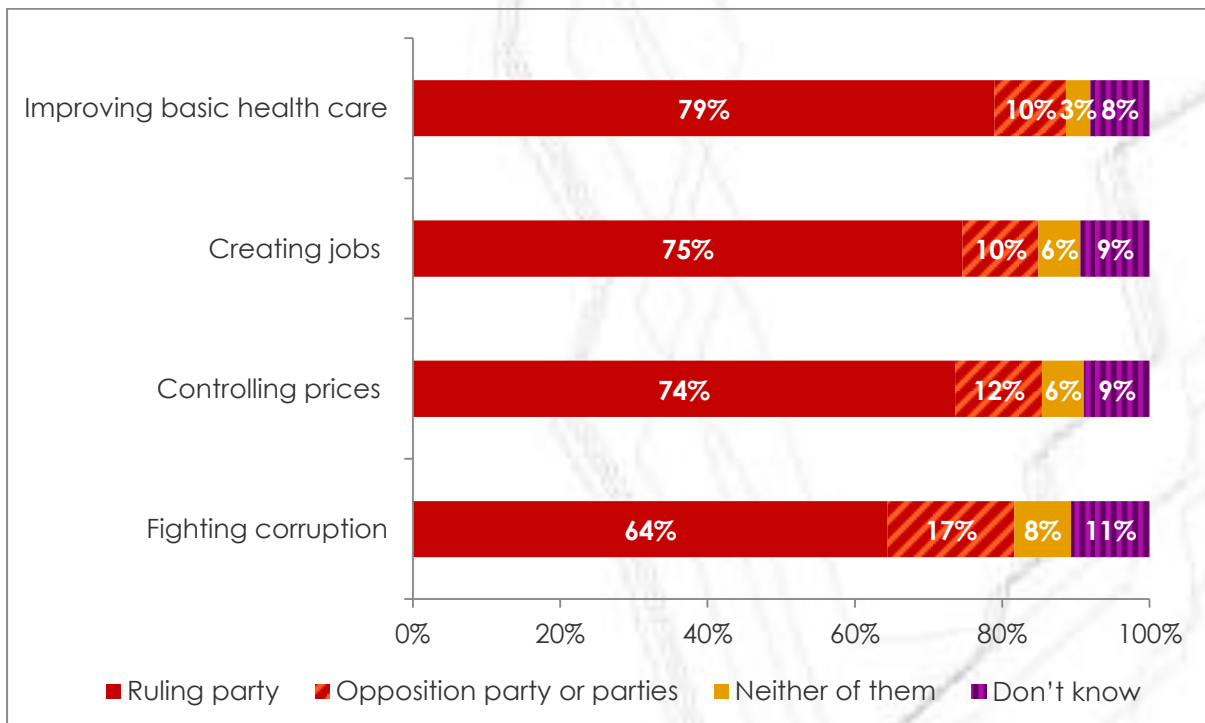


Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: The political opposition in Uganda presents a viable alternative vision and plan for the country?

Ability of political parties to address citizens' concerns

Citizens also have fairly low confidence in the ability of opposition political parties to address key problems in the country. Strong majorities say that the ruling party is better able than opposition parties to improve health care, create jobs, control prices, and fight corruption (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Confidence in ability of political parties to address citizens' concerns | Uganda | 2015

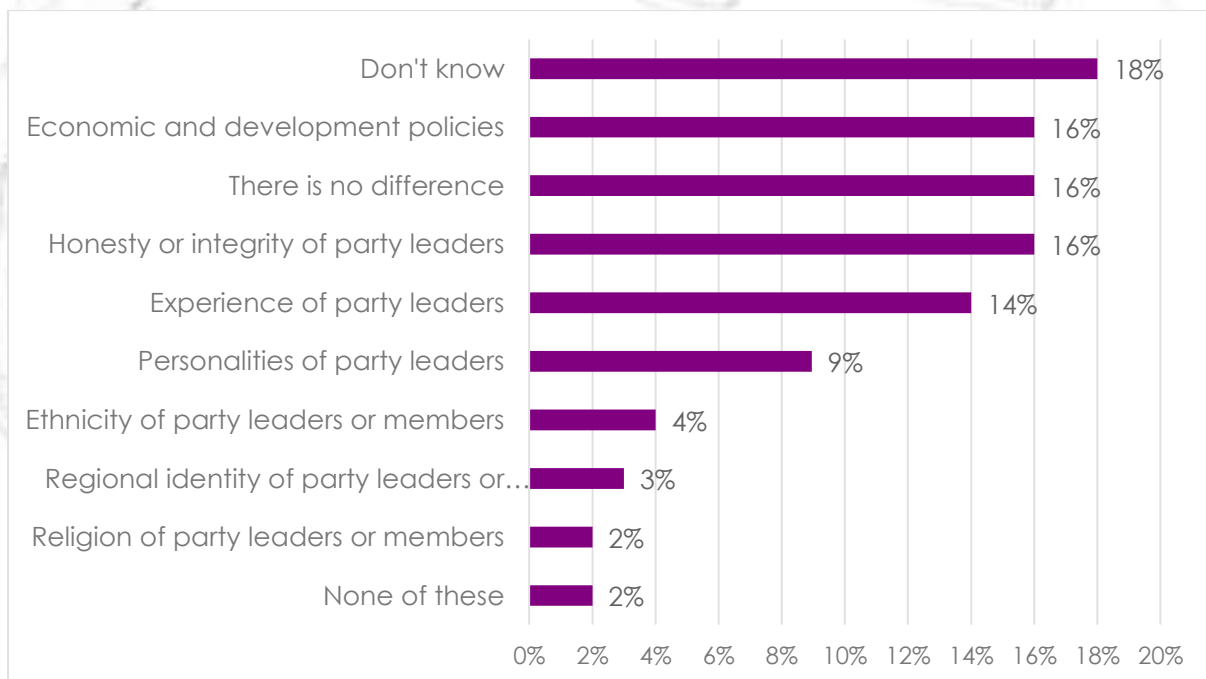


Respondents were asked: Looking at the ruling and opposition political parties in this country, which would you say is most able to address each of the following matters, or haven't heard enough to say?

Difference between ruling and opposition parties

When asked what they consider the most important difference between the ruling and opposition parties, citizens are about as likely to say they “don’t know” (18%) or see “no difference” (16%) as they are to cite economic and development policies (16%) or party leaders’ integrity (16%) or experience (14%) (Figure 6). Very few respondents cite the ethnicity (4%), regional identity (3%), or religion (2%) of party leaders or members as the most important issues distinguishing the parties.

Figure 6: Citizens’ views about difference between ruling and opposition parties
 | Uganda | 2015



Respondents were asked: Which of the following do you see as the most important difference between the ruling party and opposition parties in Uganda?

Conclusion

Since the restoration of a multiparty system in 2005, Ugandans have increasingly expressed support for having many political parties to make sure that voters have real choices in who governs them. However, opposition political parties appear to have stalled in their efforts to win citizens’ trust and support as a viable alternative to the ruling party.

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

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

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