

Public trust in institutions, satisfaction with democracy decline in Mauritius

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 185 | Louis Amedee Darga

Summary

Mauritius' commitment to good governance is embodied in its Ministry of Financial Services and Good Governance, created after the Alliance Lepep came to power in 2014 (Fakun, 2016). The Ibrahim Index of African Governance vouches for the quality of Mauritius' democracy by ranking the country as the best-governed country in Africa in its 2017 report (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2017).

Similarly, the efficiency of Mauritius' institutions has long been credited as a major factor in the nation's development success. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, trust in institutions is important for the success of many government policies, programmes, and regulations that depend on cooperation and compliance by citizens (OECD, 2017).

According to the latest Afrobarometer survey, however, Mauritians are less satisfied with their democracy and have less trust in their institutions than they did just a few years ago. Support for democracy has declined, and while citizens overwhelmingly endorse multiparty competition and insist on government accountability, they increasingly believe they have to be careful in discussing politics, and they give their political leaders decidedly mixed performance reviews.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in African countries. Six rounds of surveys were conducted in up to 37 countries between 1999 and 2015, and Round 7 surveys are being conducted in 2016/2018. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Mauritius, led by StraConsult Ltd, interviewed 1200 adult Mauritians in October 2017. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Mauritius in 2012 and 2014.

Key findings

- About three-fourths of Mauritians prefer democracy over any other system (77%), consider multiparty competition necessary to give voters a real choice (75%), and favour a two-term limit for the prime minister (72%). Almost as many (69%) say it's more important for the government to be accountable than to be efficient.

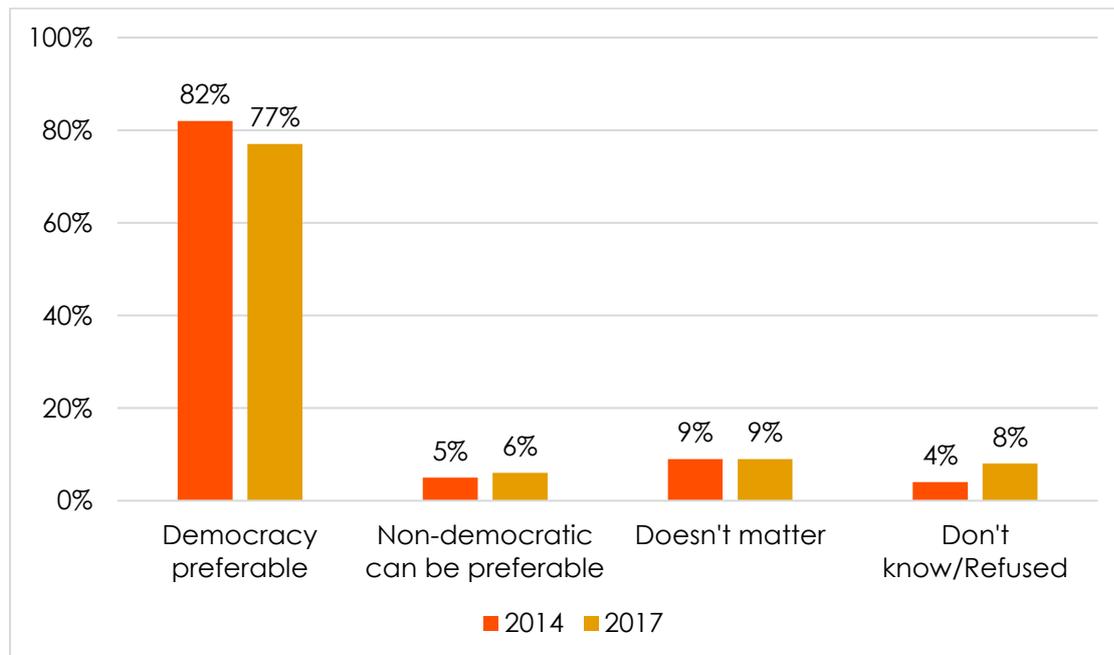
- But while two-thirds (68%) of Mauritians consider their country “a full democracy” or “a democracy with minor problems,” only half (51%) are satisfied with the way their democracy is working – a sharp decline from 66% in 2014.
- More than seven in 10 respondents say people “often” or “always” have to be careful about what they say about politics (71%) – a sharp increase from 57% in 2014 – as well as which political organizations they join (71%) and how they vote (73%).
- Popular trust in political institutions and leaders has declined sharply since 2014. Fewer than one in three Mauritians say they trust (“somewhat” or “a lot”) opposition political parties (23%), the ruling coalition parties (24%), the prime minister (27%), the National Assembly (27%), their local government councillors (29%), and the president (31%).
- Half (52%) of citizens “approve” or “strongly approve” of President Amina Gurib-Fakim’s job performance over the past year. Approval ratings are lower for Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth (46%) and members of the National Assembly (39%).

Support for democracy

More than three-fourths (77%) of Mauritians say that democracy is preferable to any other system of government, a decline from 82% in 2014 (Figure 1). Only 6% believe that in some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable, while 9% say it doesn't matter what kind of political system governs the country.

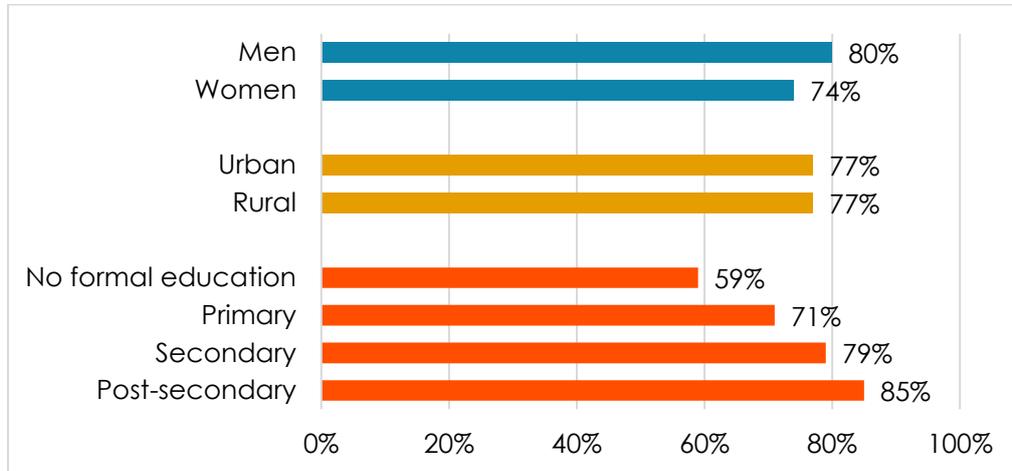
While urban and rural residents are equally strong in their support for democracy, men (80%) are somewhat more likely than women (74%) to prefer democracy over any other kind of political system (Figure 2). Support for democracy increases with respondents' education level, ranging from 59% among those with no formal education to 85% among those with post-secondary qualifications.

Figure 1: Support for democracy | Mauritius | 2014-2017



Respondents were asked: 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.

Figure 2: Support for democracy | by gender, location, and education | Mauritius | 2017

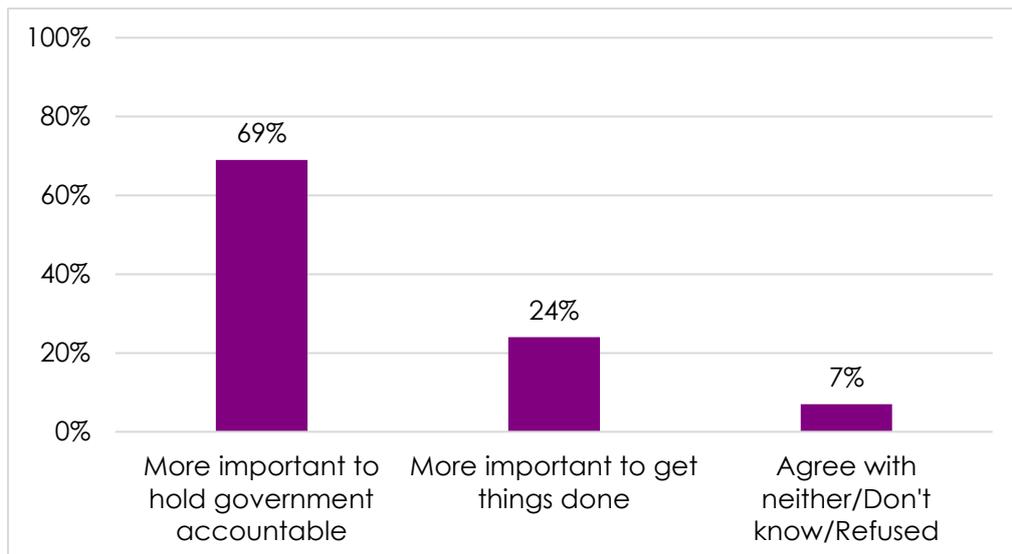


Respondents were asked: Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?
 Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.
 Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.
 Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.
 (% who say democracy is preferable)

Support for holding government accountable

Mauritians value accountability over efficiency in their government: More than two-thirds (69%) “agree” or “agree very strongly” that it is more important for citizens to be able to hold government accountable, even at the cost of slower decision-making, than it is to have a government that can get things done without citizen influence (Figure 3).

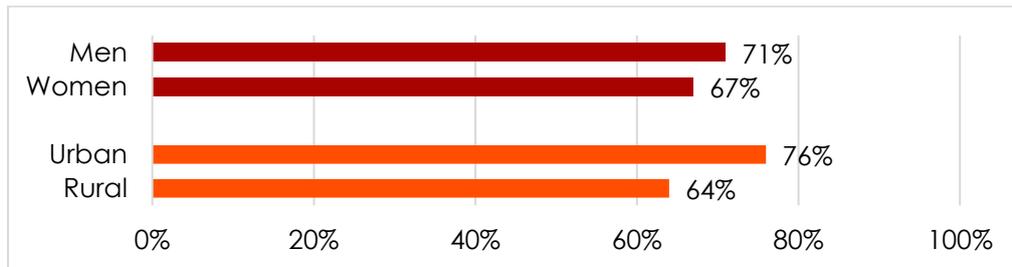
Figure 3: Government accountability vs. efficiency | Mauritius | 2017



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: It is more important to have a government that can get things done, even if we have no influence over what it does.
 Statement 2: It is more important for citizens to be able to hold government accountable, even if that means it makes decisions more slowly.
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with each statement)

Urban residents are more insistent on government accountability than their rural counterparts (76% vs. 64%), and men are somewhat more likely than women to prioritize accountability (71% vs. 67%) (Figure 4).

Figure 4: More important to hold government accountable | by gender and location | Mauritius | 2017



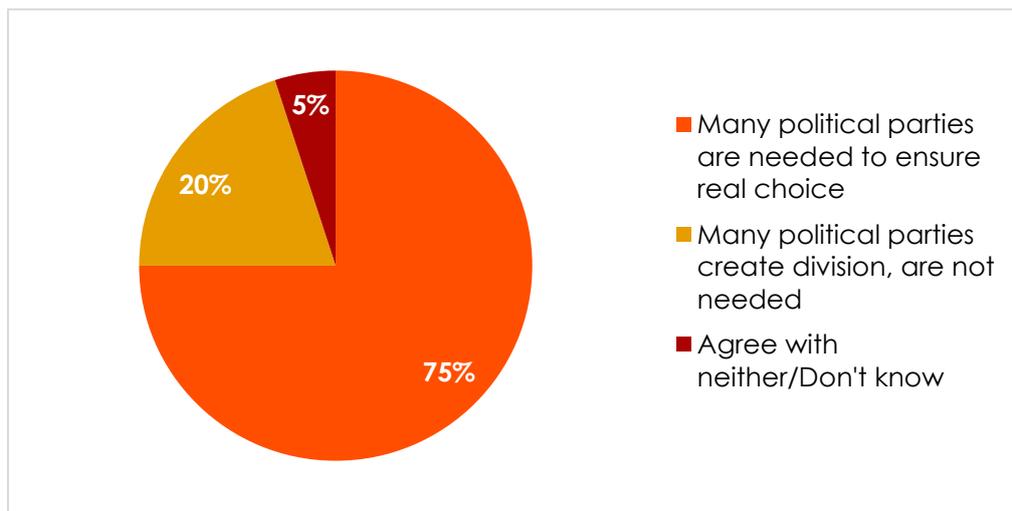
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: It is more important to have a government that can get things done, even if we have no influence over what it does.
 Statement 2: It is more important for citizens to be able to hold government accountable, even if that means it makes decisions more slowly.
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with Statement 2)

Support for multiparty politics

By a three-fourths majority (75%), Mauritians “agree” or “agree very strongly” that many political parties are needed to make sure that voters have real choices in who governs them. One in five respondents (20%) instead say that since political parties create division and confusion, it is not necessary to have many of them (Figure 5).

Men are slightly more likely than women to endorse multiparty competition (77% vs. 72%), but there are no major differences across urban-rural location and age groups.

Figure 5: Does Mauritius need many political parties? | Mauritius | 2017

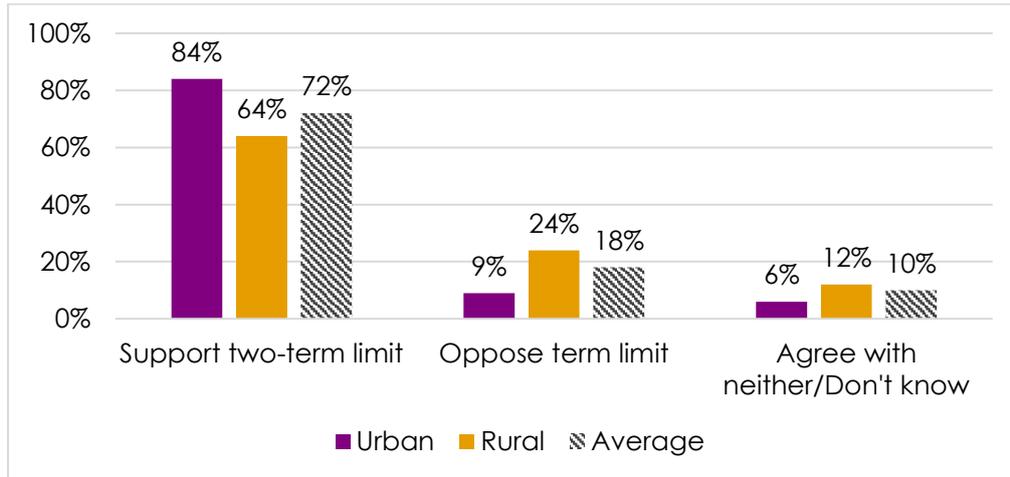


Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Political parties create division and confusion; it is therefore unnecessary to have many political parties in Mauritius.
 Statement 2: Many political parties are needed to make sure that Mauritians have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

Constitutional two-term limit for prime minister

Seven in 10 Mauritians (72%) say the Constitution should limit the prime minister to serving a maximum of two terms in office, while 18% oppose term limits (Figure 6). Urban residents are more likely than their rural counterparts to favour term limits for the prime minister (84% vs. 64%). Despite strong public support, the Constitution currently does not provide for term limits.

Figure 6: Should prime minister be limited to two terms? | by location | Mauritius | 2017

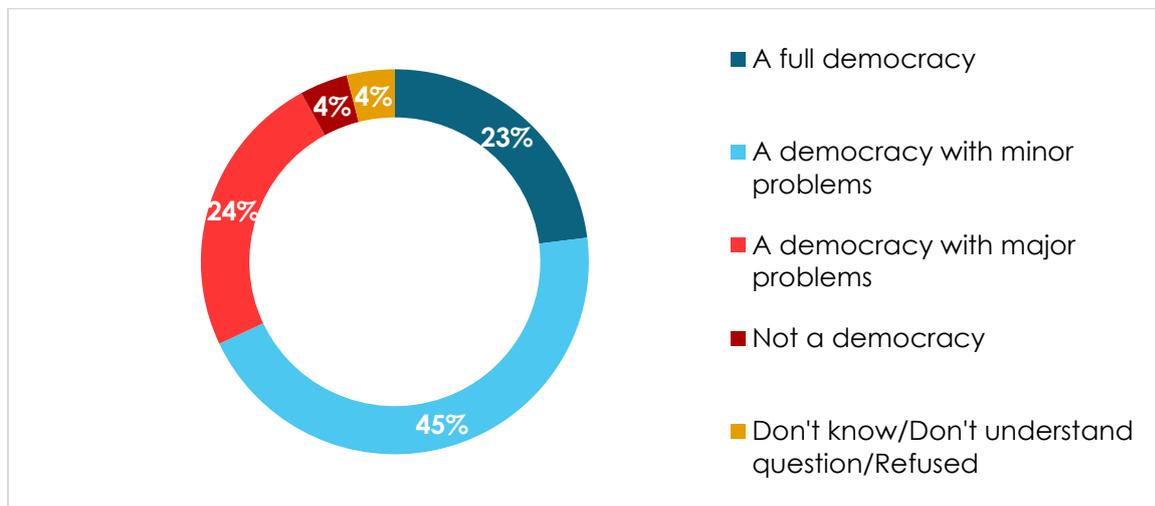


Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: The Constitution should limit the prime minister to serving a maximum of two terms in office.
 Statement 2: There should be no constitutional limit on how long the prime minister can serve.
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

Extent of democracy and satisfaction

Two-thirds of Mauritians see their country as either "a full democracy" (23%) or "a democracy with minor problems" (45%), while about three in 10 say it is "a democracy with major problems" (24%) or "not a democracy" at all (4%) (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Extent of democracy | Mauritius | 2017

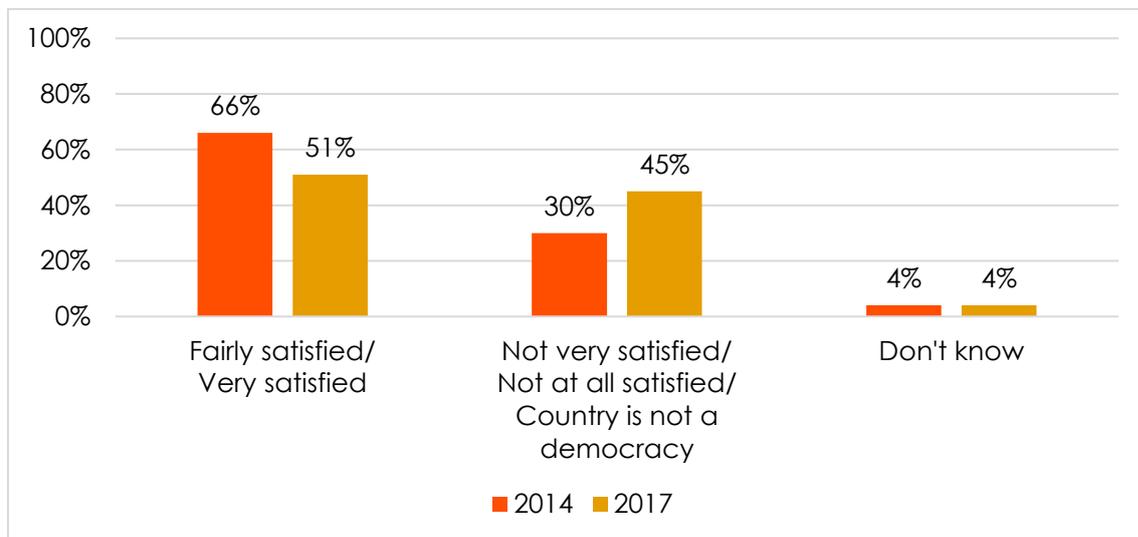


Respondents were asked: In your opinion how much of a democracy is Mauritius today?

But only half (51%) of Mauritians say they are “fairly satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the way democracy is working in their country – a decline of 15 percentage points from 2014 (Figure 8). Almost half (45%) instead say they are “not very satisfied” (31%) or “not at all satisfied” (14%) with their democracy’s functioning, while fewer than 1% assert that Mauritius is “not a democracy.”

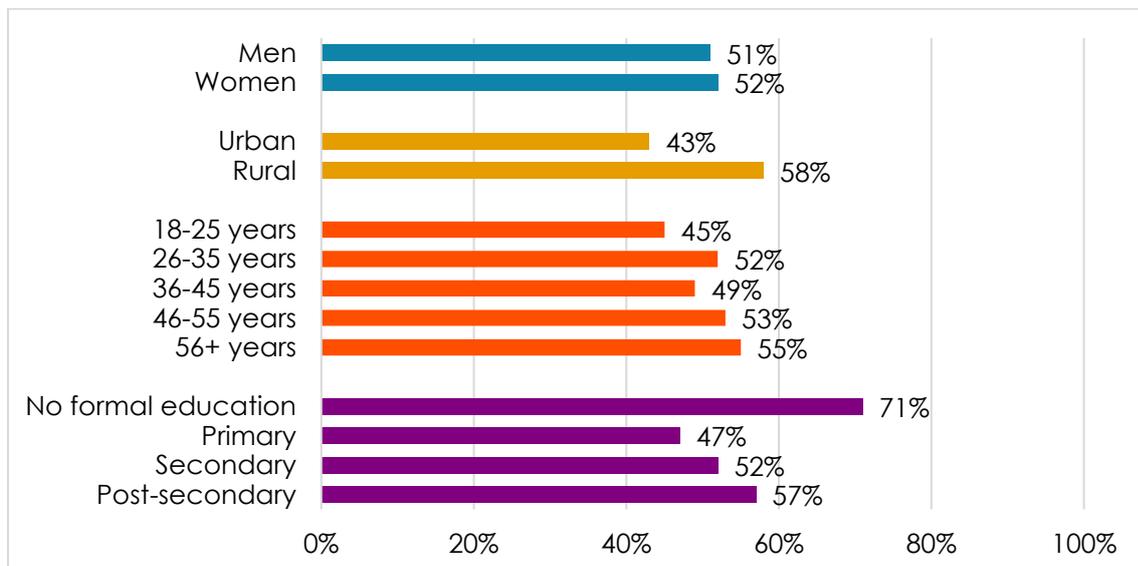
Rural residents are significantly more satisfied with their democracy than their urban counterparts (58% vs. 43% who say they are “fairly” or “very” satisfied) (Figure 9). The youngest respondents are less satisfied (45% of those aged 18-25 years) than their elders, while those with no formal education are more satisfied (71%) than their more-educated counterparts.

Figure 8: Satisfaction with democracy | Mauritius | 2014-2017



Respondents were asked: Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Mauritius?

Figure 9: Satisfaction with democracy | by gender, location, age, and education | Mauritius | 2017



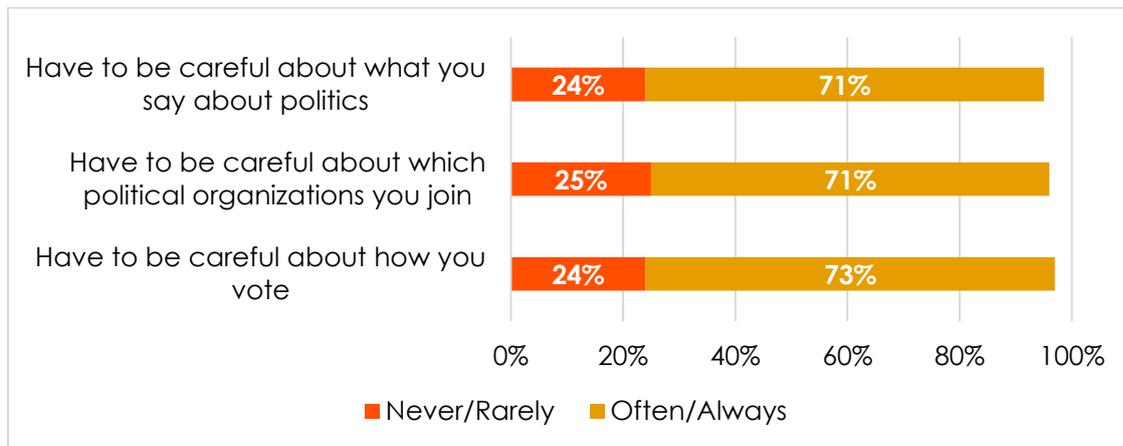
Respondents were asked: Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Mauritius? (% who say they are “fairly satisfied” or “very satisfied”)

Political freedoms

If satisfaction with the way democracy is working has declined in Mauritius, one reason may be a widespread feeling that political rights are constrained. More than seven in 10 respondents (71%) say that in their country, people “often” or “always” have to be careful about what they say about politics – a sharp increase from 57% in 2014. Similar proportions say that people must often/always be careful about which political organizations they join (71%) and how they vote (73%) (Figure 10).

A perceived need for caution about joining political organizations is most common among the youngest respondents (aged 18-25 years) and increases with education level, ranging from 59% among those with no formal education to more than 70% among those with at least a secondary education (Figure 11).

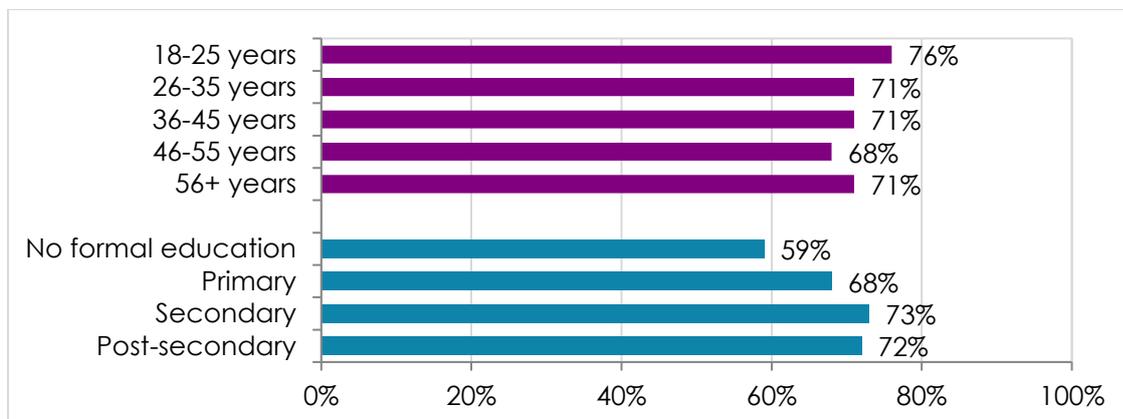
Figure 10: Political freedoms | Mauritius | 2017



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how often, in this country:

- Do people have to be careful of what they say about politics?
- Do people have to be careful about which political organizations they join?
- Do people have to be careful about how they vote in an election?

Figure 11: People have to be careful about which political organizations they join | by age and education | Mauritius | 2017



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how often, in this country:

- Do people have to be careful of what they say about politics?
- Do people have to be careful about which political organizations they join?
- Do people have to be careful about how they vote in an election?

(% who say “often” or “always”)

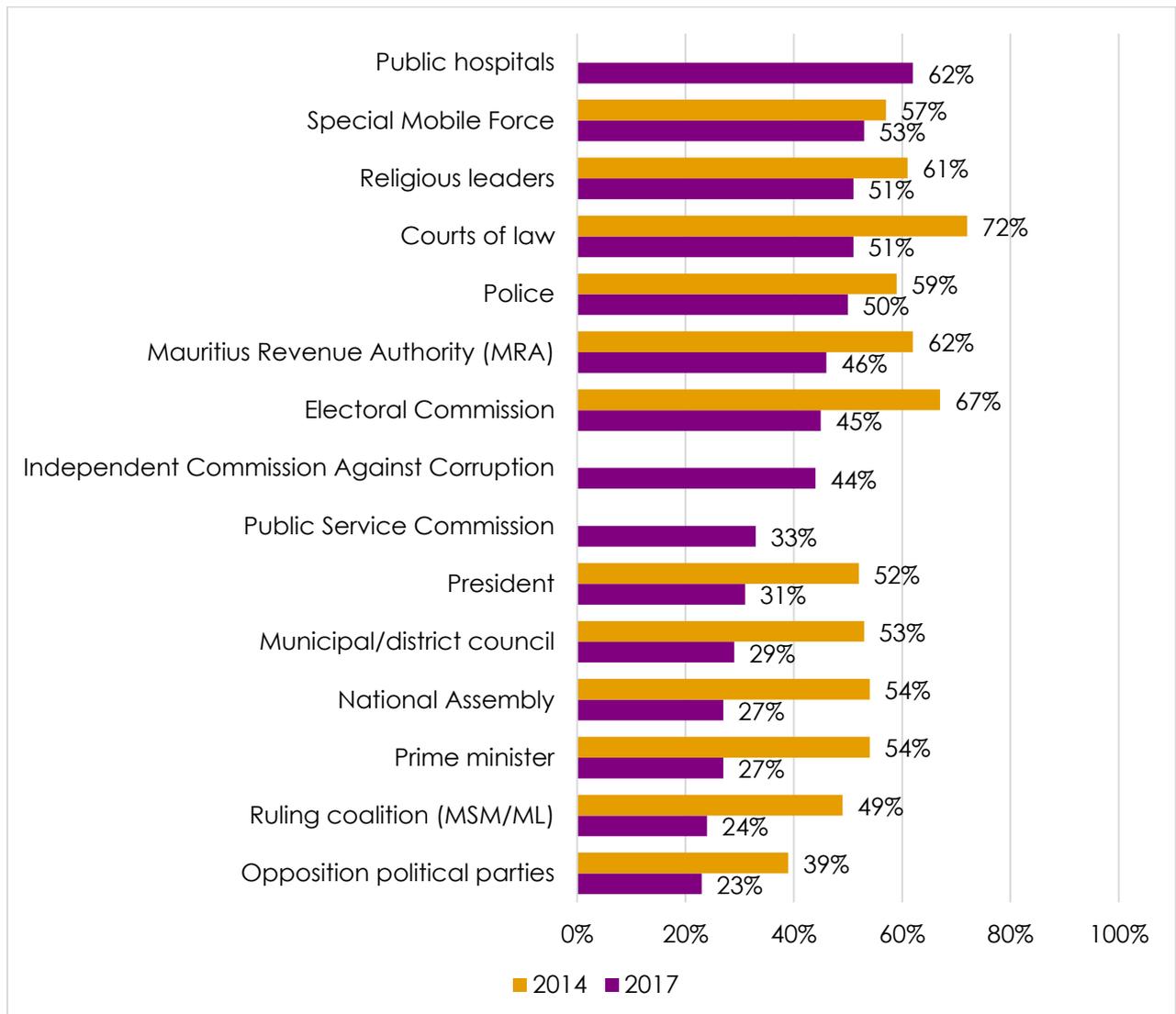
Declining trust in institutions and leaders

Along with decreasing satisfaction with democracy, Mauritians express sharply declining trust in their main public institutions and leaders (Figure 12). Political bodies and leaders earn the lowest levels of popular trust, and all experienced double-digit declines since 2014 in the proportion of citizens who say they trust them “somewhat” or “a lot.”

Only about one-fourth of respondents say they trust opposition (23%) and ruling political parties (24%), the prime minister (27%), and the National Assembly (27%) – down by roughly half from 2014. Local government councillors (29%) and the president (31%) fare only slightly better. Fewer than half (45%) of respondents trust the Electoral Commission, a drop from 67% in 2014.

Among institutions that enjoy a higher level of trust than political leaders are the police (50%) and the courts (51%), though their ratings, too, declined sharply from 2014.

Figure 12: Trust in institutions | Mauritius | 2014-2017



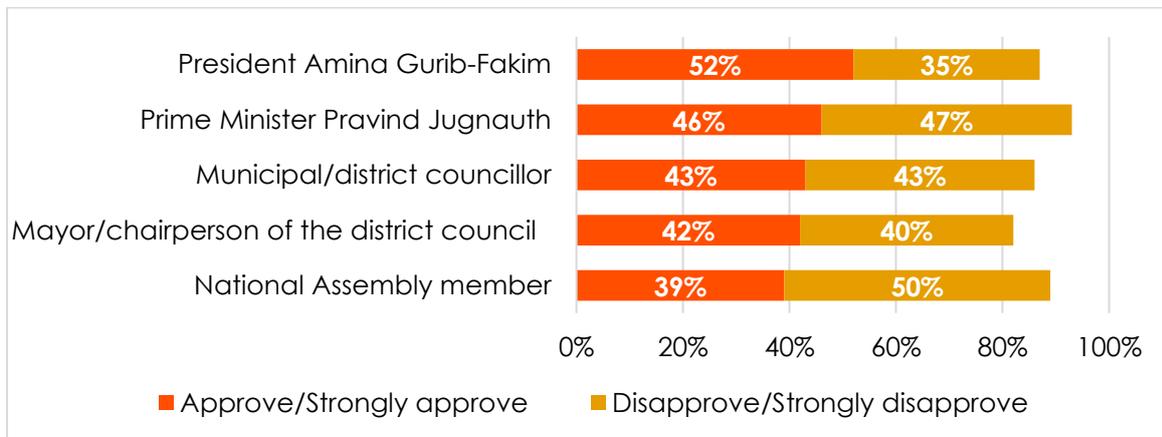
Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say they trust “somewhat” or “a lot”)

Job performance of leaders

When it comes to popular appraisals of their leaders' job performance, Mauritians' views are quite mixed (Figure 13). President Gurib-Fakim receives the highest rating, but still only a slim majority (52%) say they approve of her performance over the past 12 months, including just 5% who "strongly approve." Fewer than half "approve" or "strongly approve" of the way Prime Minister Jugnauth (46%) and the National Assembly (39%) have done their jobs.

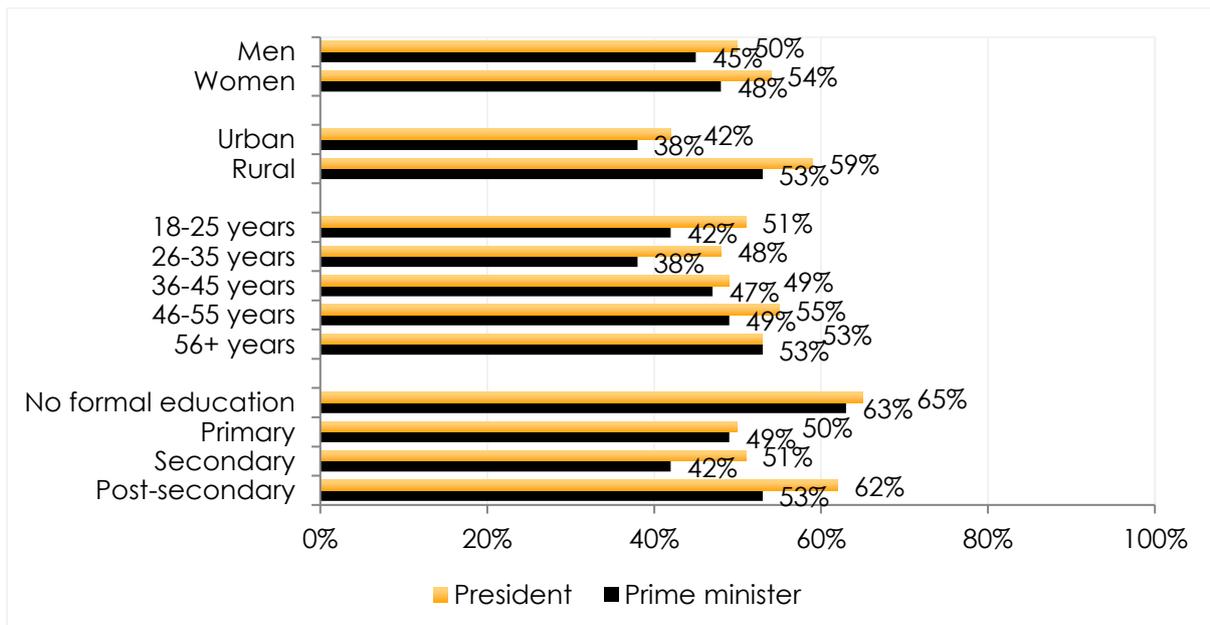
Approval ratings for the prime minister and president are substantially higher in rural than in urban areas, tend to increase with age, and are higher among the least- and most-educated than among other groups (Figure 14).

Figure 13: Job performance of political leaders | Mauritius | 2017



Respondents were asked: Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past 12 months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

Figure 14: Performance of president and prime minister | by gender, location, age, and education | Mauritius | 2017



Respondents were asked: Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past 12 months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say they "approve" or "strongly approve")

Conclusion

Mauritians clearly prefer democracy over any other system and consider their country a democracy. Afrobarometer's latest survey findings, however, may raise some red flags for the country's political leaders and democrats, showing less popular satisfaction with the way democracy is working, less trust in major institutions, less unfettered political speech, and mediocre performance ratings for elected leaders.

Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question,
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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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