

Reconciliation in Kenya: Partisan differences and common ground

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 201 | Mikhail Moosa

Summary

After a tense election period, a government crackdown on opposition supporters, and months of uncertainty, the leaders of Kenya's two major political coalitions came together in March to announce an end to their bitter fight (Wanga, 2018). With their "Harambee House handshake," President Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga portrayed their mutual commitment to bridging a partisan divide that had produced an acrimonious campaign, an annulled election, a repeat election boycotted by the opposition, presidential swearing-in ceremonies for both rivals, and more than 100 deaths and hundreds of arrests (Nyabola, 2017; Kisika, 2017; Wamai, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2018).

Even as many observers welcomed its calming effect, many are wondering how the two men's unprecedented diplomacy could translate into a sustained national reconciliation (Kahura, 2018; Cheeseman, 2018; Wanjohi, 2018).

The most recent Afrobarometer survey data from Kenya, collected in September-October 2016, shed some light on differences that have divided the support bases of the ruling Jubilee Alliance and the opposition Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) since before the 2017 elections. Different perceptions on the country's overall direction and level of democracy, the economy, and the president's performance represent potential challenges to successful realization of the Kenyatta-Odinga agreement.

However, the data also point to some common ground on key issues that may serve as a starting point for reconciliation, including shared support for democracy and presidential accountability and agreement on the main problems facing the country.

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 2016, 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 Kenya, led by the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Nairobi, interviewed 1,599 adult Kenyans in September-October 2016. 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 Kenya in 2003, 2005, 2008, 2011, and 2014.

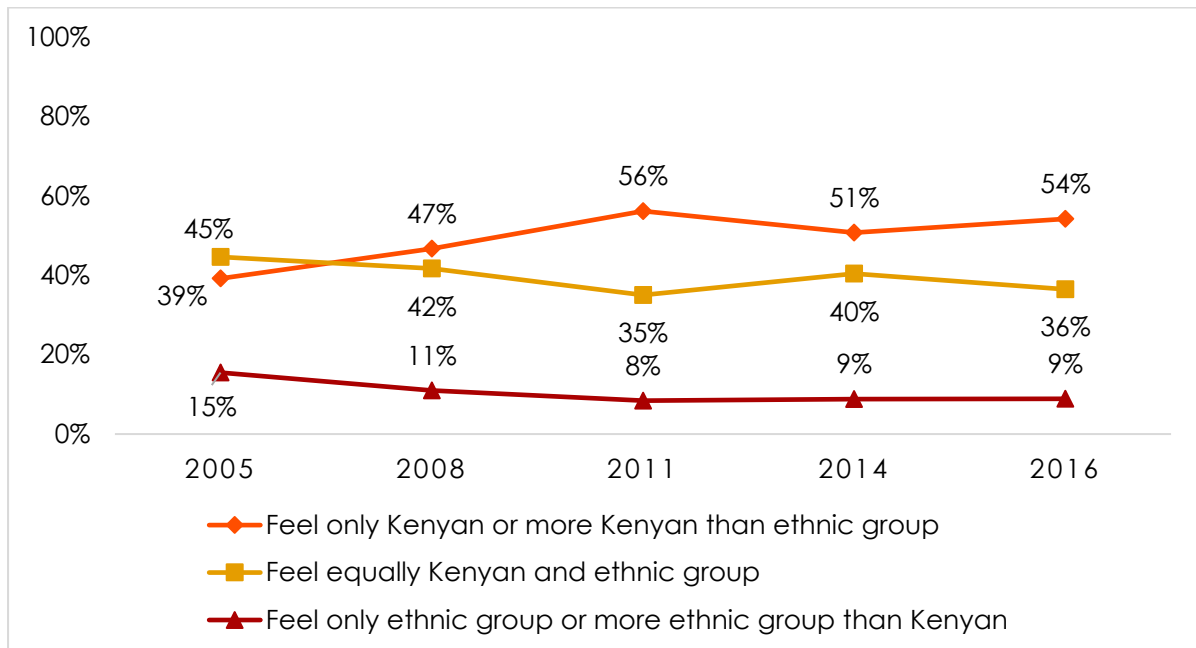
Key findings

- Kenyans expressed a strong sense of national identity: For nine out of 10, their identity as “Kenyan” was at least as strong as their ethnic identity, including more than half (54%) who said they feel “more Kenyan than (ethnic group).”
- However, political partisanship is relatively strong, too. Six in 10 Kenyans (61%) said in late 2016 that they felt “close to a particular party,” mainly the ruling Jubilee Alliance or the ODM.
- These partisan allegiances were reflected in significantly different perceptions of the nation and its leader:
 - ODM supporters were twice as likely as Jubilee adherents to say the country was “going in the wrong direction,” 75% vs. 35%.
 - ODM supporters were significantly more likely than Jubilee supporters to describe the economy as bad (66% vs. 51%) and to expect things to get worse over the next year (37% vs. 22%).
 - Majorities of ODM supporters expressed distrust of President Kenyatta and disapproved of his job performance – both strong contrasts to views held by Jubilee supporters and Kenyans as a whole.
 - Satisfaction with how Kenya's democracy was working was considerably lower among ODM supporters (49%) than among Jubilee supporters (69%).
- But on some key issues, ODM and Jubilee supporters were not that far apart prior to the 2017 elections:
 - Majorities in both camps assessed the extent of Kenya's democracy in favourable terms.
 - Majorities in both camps agreed it's more important to have a government that's accountable to citizens (64% ODM, 58% Jubilee) than to have a government that gets things done.
 - Both camps agreed that “democracy is preferable to any other kind of government” and that the president should be accountable to Parliament.
 - ODM and Jubilee supporters largely agreed on the most important problems the government must address, with corruption in the top spot.

A united Kenya?

Contrary to assumptions about deep ethnic divisions, most Kenyans feel they share a common national identity. Across five rounds of Afrobarometer surveys, respondents have expressed an increasingly strong sense of national identity while placing decreasing emphasis on their ethnic identities. The proportion of respondents who feel “only Kenyan” or “more Kenyan than” their ethnic identity increased from 39% in 2005 to 54% in 2016, while fewer now say they feel “equally Kenyan and ethnic” (36%, down from 45% in 2005) or prefer to define themselves by their ethnic rather than their national identity (Figure 1). Only one in 10 Kenyans now identify “only” (5%) or “more” (4%) with their ethnic group.

Figure 1: National vs. ethnic identity | Kenya | 2005-2016

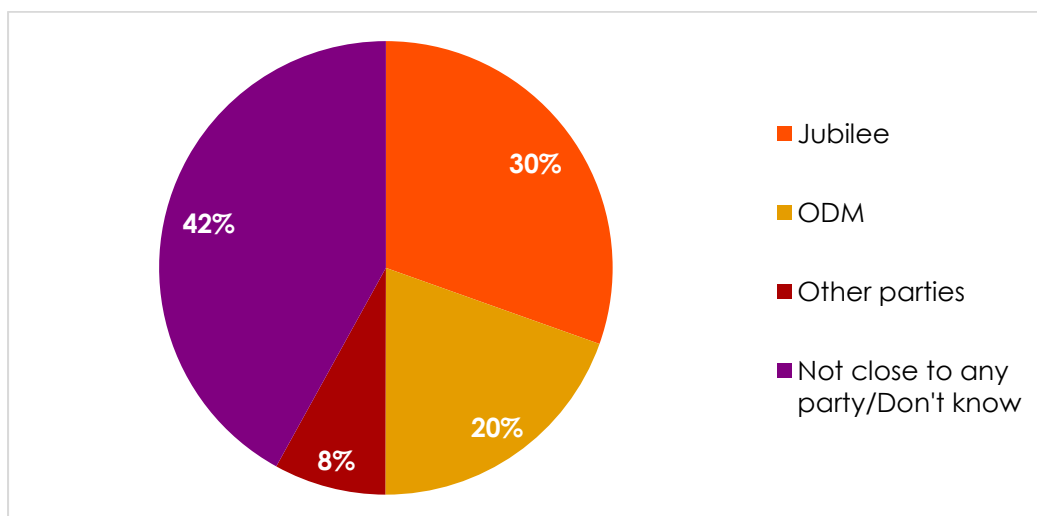


Respondents were asked: Let us suppose that you had to choose between being a Kenyan and being a _____ [respondent's ethnic group]. Which of the following statements best expresses your feelings?

- "I feel only Kenyan"
- "I feel more Kenyan than [ethnic group]"
- "I feel equally Kenyan and [ethnic group]"
- "I feel more [ethnic group] than Kenyan"
- "I feel only [ethnic group]"

While national identity is strong in Kenya, so are political affiliations. Six out of 10 Kenyans (58%) said in late 2016 that they felt "close to" a particular political party. Of the total population, 30% lined up with the Jubilee Alliance, 20% aligned themselves with the ODM, and 8% felt close to a smaller party. About four in 10 (42%) said they didn't feel close to any particular party (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Partisan affiliation | Kenya | 2016

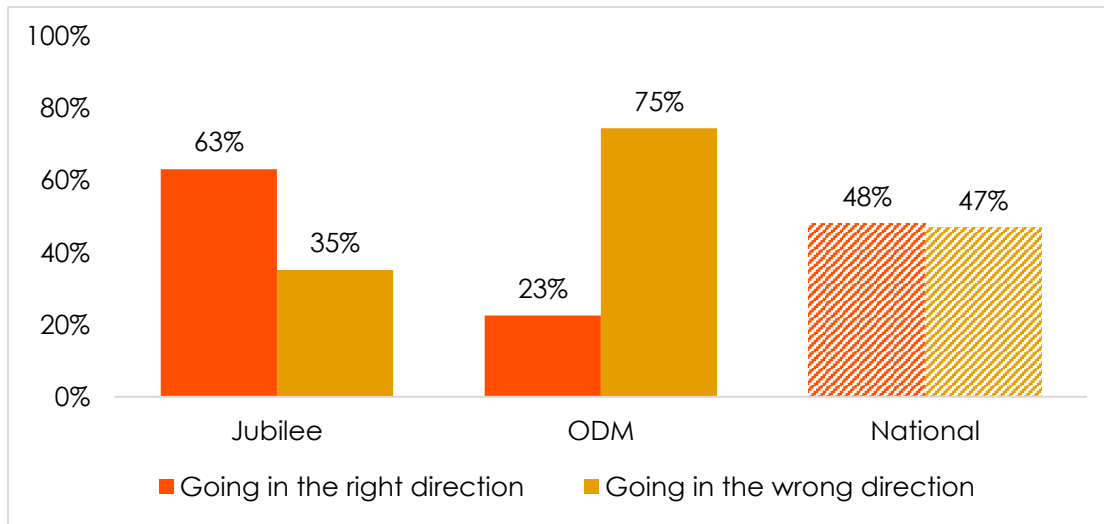


Respondents were asked: Do you feel close to any particular political party? If so, which party is that?

Partisan views on the state of the nation

Overall, Kenyans were evenly split in their assessments of where the country was headed: 48% saw it going in “the right direction, 47% in “the wrong direction.” Not surprisingly, ODM supporters were twice as likely as their Jubilee counterparts (75% vs. 35%) to say the country was headed down the wrong path (Figure 3). Thus, even before the traumatic election cycle of 2017, fewer than one in four ODM supporters thought the country was going in “the right direction.”

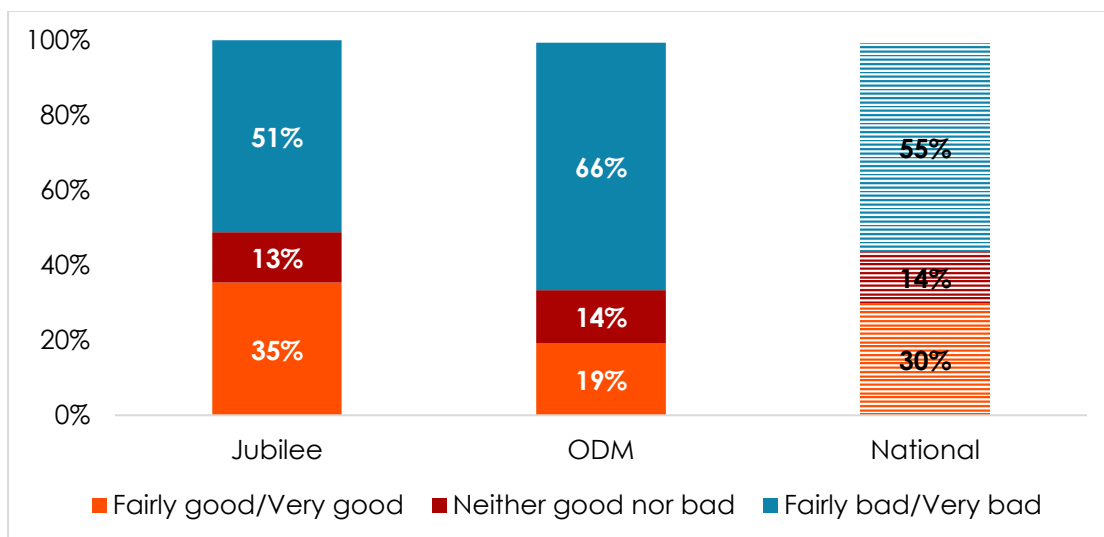
Figure 3: Direction of the country | by partisan affiliation | Kenya | 2016



Respondents were asked: Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction?

More specifically, on the issue of the national economy, the two camps also saw things differently – though not dramatically different. Two-thirds (66%) of ODM supporters described economic conditions in the country as “fairly bad” or “very bad,” compared to about half (51%) of Jubilee supporters (Figure 4).

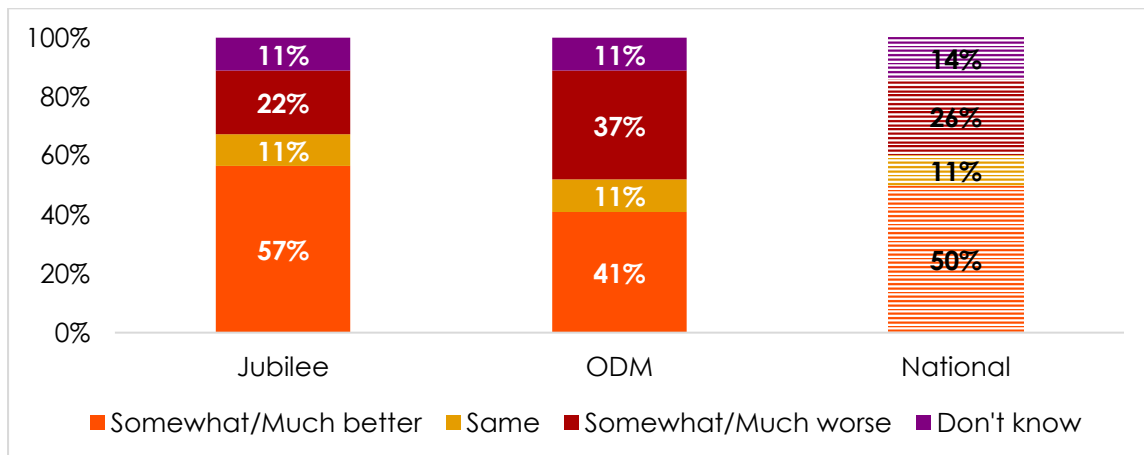
Figure 4: Country’s economic condition | by partisan affiliation | Kenya | 2016



Respondents were asked: How would you describe the present economic conditions in this country?

Kenyans were more optimistic about the country's economic prospects over the next year – 50% said they thought things would get “somewhat better” or “much better.” But here again, ODM supporters were more likely than Jubilee adherents to expect things to get “somewhat worse” or “much worse” (37% vs. 22%) (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Projected economic condition | nationally and by partisan affiliation | Kenya | 2016



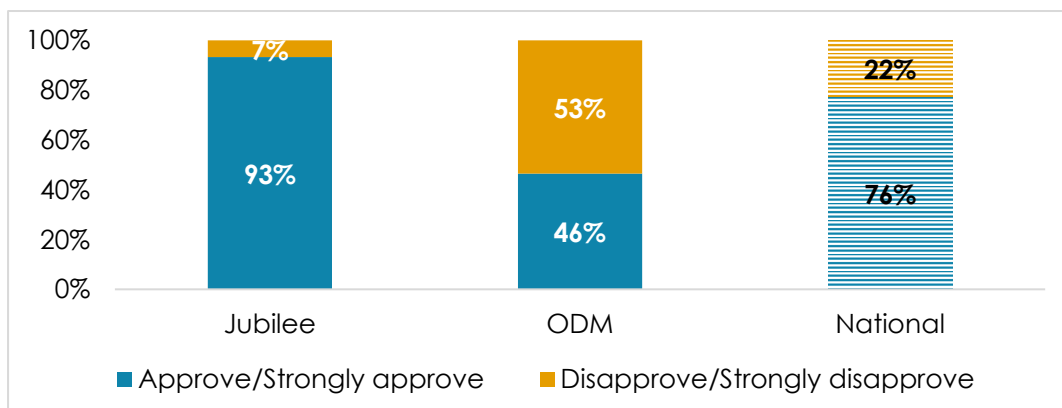
Respondents were asked: Looking ahead, do you expect economic conditions in this country to be better or worse in 12 months' time?

In sum, these responses show significant discrepancies in how the two camps viewed the state of affairs in Kenya, with ODM supporters consistently more negative and Jubilee supporters consistently more positive than Kenyans as a whole.

Partisan views on President Kenyatta

As of late 2016, three out of four Kenyans (76%) approved of President Kenyatta's job performance. Little surprise that while Jubilee supporters were almost unanimous in their approval (93%), a majority of ODM supporters (53%) “disapproved” or “strongly disapproved” (Figure 6).

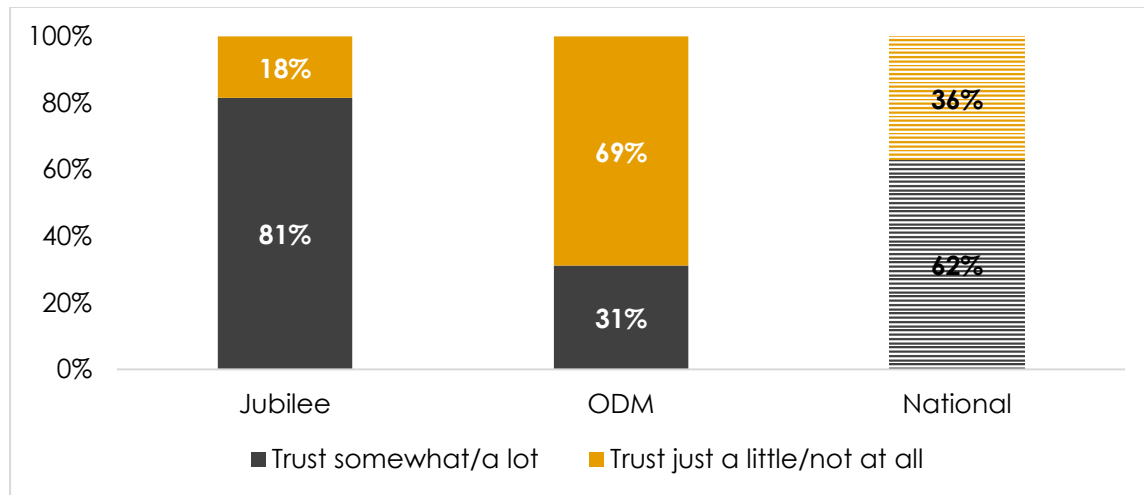
Figure 6: Job performance of President Kenyatta | by partisan affiliation | Kenya | 2016



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: President Uhuru Kenyatta?

Perhaps an even bigger obstacle to meaningful reconciliation is distrust: While a majority (62%) of Kenyans said they trusted the president “somewhat” or “a lot,” only half as many ODM supporters (31%) agreed, compared to 81% of Jubilee adherents (Figure 7). Fully two-thirds (69%) of ODM supporters said they trusted him “just a little” or “not at all” – a situation that is unlikely to have improved, and may well be worse, after the 2017 crisis.

Figure 7: Trust in the president | by partisan affiliation | Kenya | 2016

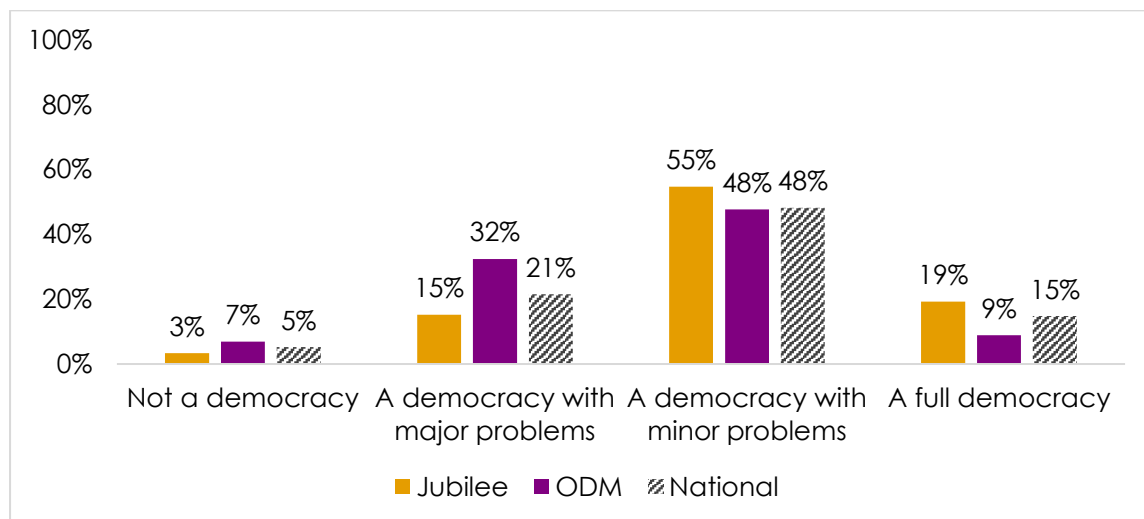


Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The president?

Views on Kenya's democracy

Beyond perceptions of the incumbent president, the rival camps expressed significant – but not necessarily irreconcilable – differences in how they perceive their democracy. When asked, “In your opinion, how much of a democracy is Kenya today?”, negative responses – “not a democracy” or “a democracy with major problems” – were considerably more common among ODM supporters (39%) than among Jubilee adherents (19%) or Kenyans as a whole (27%). Still, a majority (57%) of ODM supporters described their country as “a full democracy” (9%) or “a democracy with minor problems” (48%) (Figure 8).

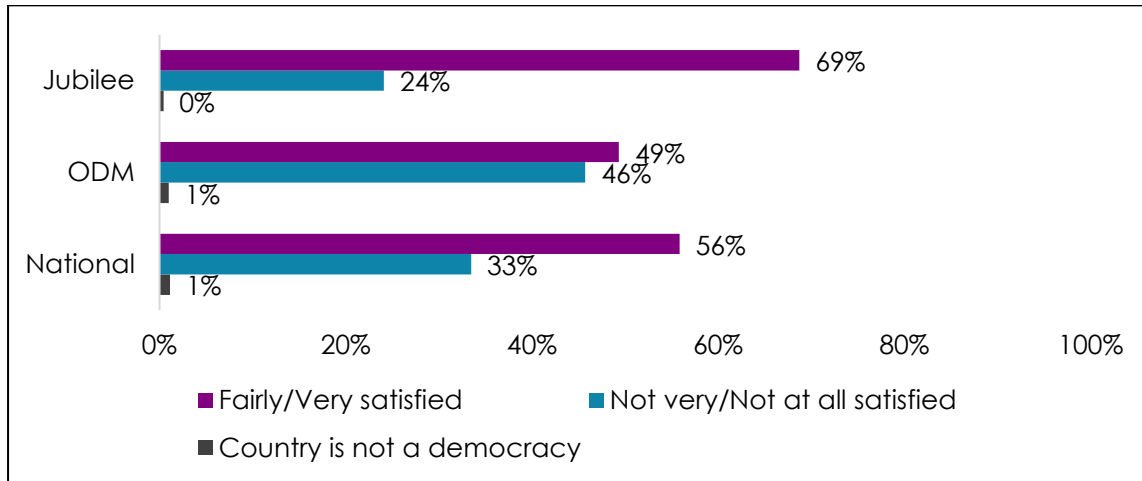
Figure 8: Extent of democracy | by partisan affiliation | Kenya | 2016



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

Similarly, ODM supporters were less satisfied with the way democracy was working in Kenya. Still, about half (49%) said – before the events of 2017 – that they were “fairly satisfied” or “very satisfied.” Jubilee supporters (69%) expressed greater satisfaction with Kenya’s democracy than did the national sample as a whole (56%) (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Satisfaction with democracy | by partisan affiliation | Kenya | 2016



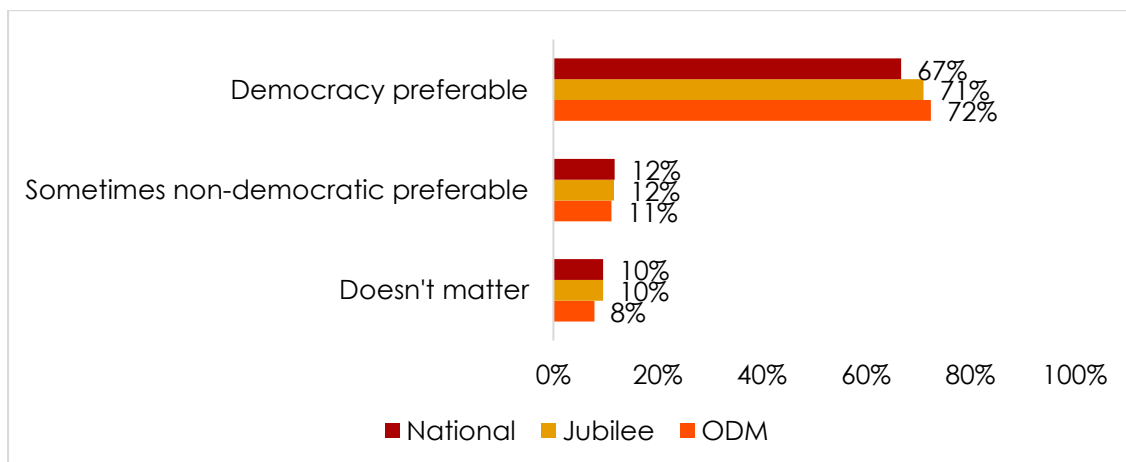
Respondents were asked: Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Kenya?

Common ground

Despite substantial gaps between supporters of the Jubilee Alliance and the ODM in their perceptions of Kenya’s economy and democracy, partisan differences diminish when it comes to fundamental questions of what kind of government they aspire to and what they consider priority issues that the government needs to address.

In both camps, more than seven in 10 agree that “democracy is preferable to any other kind of government” (Figure 10). Supporters of Jubilee (71%) and ODM (72%) actually express slightly greater support for democracy than Kenyans as a whole (67%).

Figure 10: Support for democracy | by partisan affiliation | Kenya | 2016



Respondents were asked: Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?

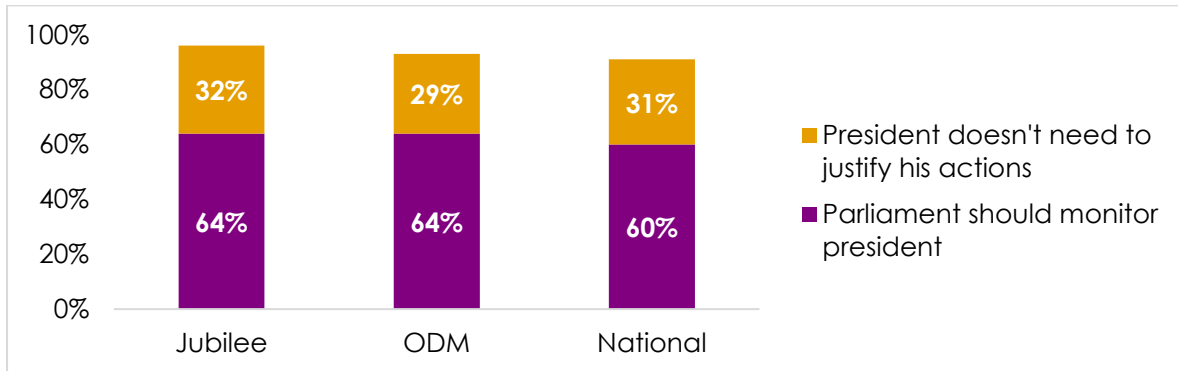
Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.

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.

They are also in agreement that they want a government in which the president must account to Parliament for how the government spends taxpayers' money. Almost two-thirds (64%) of each party's supporters demand such accountability, a slightly higher proportion than the national average (60%) (Figure 11).

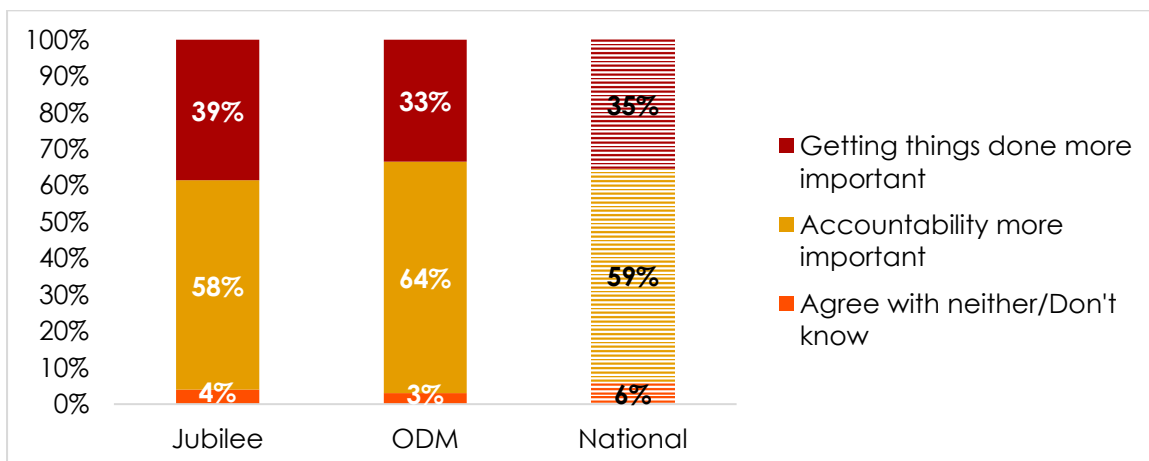
Figure 11: Should president have to account to Parliament? | Kenya | 2016



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Parliament should ensure that the president explains to it on a regular basis how his government spends taxpayers' money.
 Statement 2: The president should be able to devote his full attention to developing the country rather than wasting time justifying his actions.
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

Majorities on both sides also value accountability over efficiency in their government. Afrobarometer asked respondents which is more important: to have a government that can get things done, even if citizens have no influence over what it does, or to have a government that is accountable to its citizens, even if that means it makes decisions more slowly. In both partisan camps, around six in 10 prioritized accountability, with relatively small differences in the proportions: 64% of ODM supporters, 58% of Jubilee, 59% overall (Figure 12).

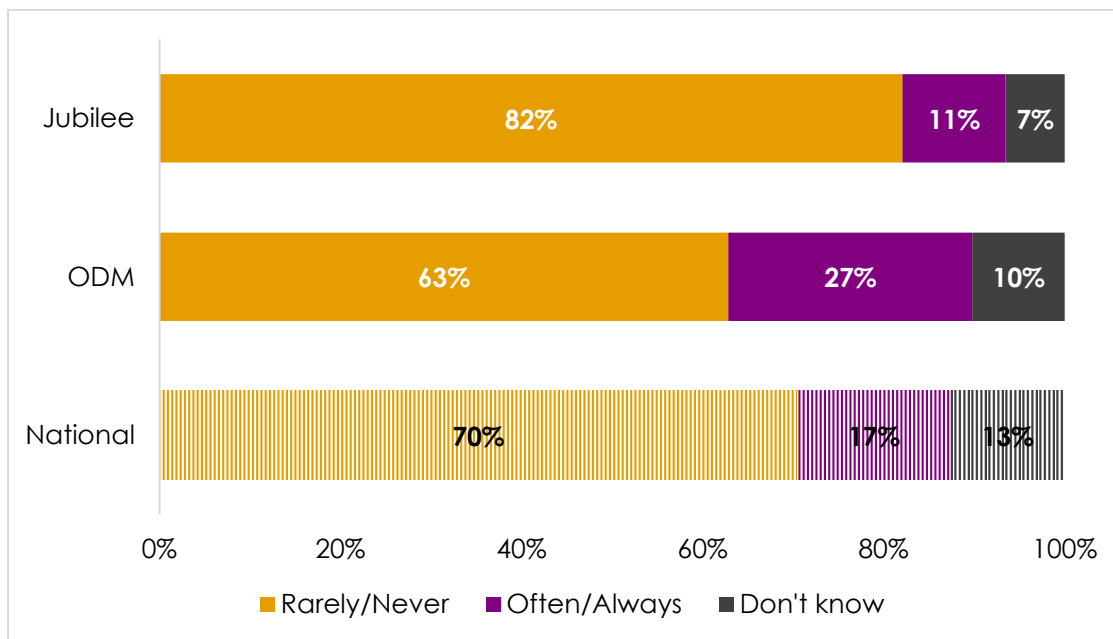
Figure 12: Efficiency vs. accountability in government | by partisan affiliation | Kenya | 2016



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)

Majorities on both sides also agreed that President Kenyatta in fact generally respects the law. Almost two-thirds of ODM supporters said the incumbent “rarely” or “never” ignores the courts and laws of the country (Figure 13). While this is lower than results for Jubilee supporters (82%) or the country as a whole (70%), it was still a clear stamp of approval by the opposition. Kenyatta may have reinforced this potential pillar of a reconciled nation when he acknowledged and respected the Supreme Court decision that annulled his first election victory. However, political statements by the president following the annulment that appeared to question the authority of the courts as well as decisions by members of the executive to ignore multiple court orders may have served to erode such gains.

Figure 13: Does the president ignore the law? | by partisan affiliation | Kenya | 2016



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often, in this country does the president ignore the courts and laws of this country?*

In addition to common ground regarding government systems, the two camps also largely saw eye to eye as to which issues need urgent government action. When asked to identify the most important problems facing the country, Jubilee and ODM supporters cited the same top 10 priorities and differed only moderately in how they ranked them (Figure 14). Corruption came out on top among both Jubilee (36%) and ODM (39%) supporters. Crime/security was No. 2 for Jubilee supporters and No. 4 for ODM adherents, while unemployment was No. 3 for Jubilee and No. 2 for ODM.

Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It’s easy and free at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

Compared to Jubilee adherents, ODM supporters placed a somewhat greater emphasis on management of the economy, poverty/destitution, and food insecurity, and slightly less emphasis on education. Still, the two lists were remarkably similar, and quite close to the priorities of Kenyans as a whole.

Figure 14: Most important problems | by partisan affiliation | Kenya | 2016

	National	Jubilee	ODM	
Corruption	35%	36%	39%	No. 1
Unemployment	27%	28%	31%	No. 2
Crime and security	27%	31%	26%	No. 3
Health	25%	25%	20%	
Water supply	24%	23%	23%	
Management of the economy	23%	19%	29%	
Education	18%	20%	13%	
Poverty	15%	11%	20%	
Infrastructure/roads	15%	20%	19%	
Food shortage	14%	13%	19%	

Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Note: Up to three responses were recorded for each respondent. Figure shows % who cited each problem as one of their responses)*

Conclusion

While Kenyatta and Odinga have publicly put aside their differences in the interest of a common good, significant differences that separated the two camps before the 2017 elections may still present obstacles to a sustainable political reconciliation. ODM supporters were unhappy about the country's overall direction, economic conditions, and the president's performance, and it seems unlikely that months of electoral strife would have improved these negative perceptions. Indeed, the procedural twists and one-sided outcome of the electoral process may have exacerbated ODM supporters' distrust of Kenyatta and skepticism about how democracy functions in Kenya. Whatever compromises Odinga and Kenyatta made, the president will have to work to win the trust of Odinga supporters, and of other Kenyans troubled by electoral violence and media silencing, during his second term.

Importantly, Jubilee and ODM supporters fundamentally agreed on the kind of government they want and the major issues that government needs to tackle. If meaningful post-election reconciliation is to take place, Kenya's political leaders will need to build on this common ground.

References

- Cheeseman, N. (2018). The covert reasons behind Kenyatta-Odinga ceasefire. *Daily Nation*. 17 March. <https://www.nation.co.ke/oped/opinion/The-covert-reasons-behind-Uhuru-Odinga-ceasefire/440808-4345728-qwip9x/index.html>.
- International Crisis Group. (2018). Kenya: Averting an avoidable crisis. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/kenya/kenya-averting-avoidable-crisis>.
- Kahura, D. (2018). Shaking hands with the devil: Kenyans' views on the Raila-Uhuru pact. *The Elephant*. 31 March. <https://www.theelephant.info/features/2018/03/31/shaking-hands-with-the-devil-kenyans-views-on-the-raila-uhuru-pact/>.
- Kisika, S. (2017). 92 killed by cops and civilians in August, October poll violence – KNCHR. *Star*. 20 December. https://www.the-star.co.ke/news/2017/12/20/92-killed-by-cops-and-civilians-in-august-october-poll-violence-kenchr_c1687912.
- Nyabola, N. (2017). Why did Kenya's Supreme Court annul the elections? Al Jazeera. 2 September. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2017/09/kenya-supreme-court-annul-elections-170902115641244.html>.
- Wamai, N. (2018). 'People's president' gambit reignites power struggle as old as Kenya. *Conversation*. 6 February. <https://theconversation.com/peoples-president-gambit-reignites-power-struggle-as-old-as-kenya-91158>.
- Wanga, J. (2018). The golden handshake that calmed political storm in Kenya. *Daily Nation*. 16 March. <https://www.nation.co.ke/news/politics/Uhuru-Raila-handshake-calmed-political-storm/1064-4344940-x5abbuz/index.html>.
- Wanjohi, J. (2018). Five key issues discussed during Uhuru-Raila meeting at Harambee House. *Mwakilishi*. 9 March. <https://www.mwakilishi.com/article/kenya-news/2018-03-09/five-main-issues-discussed-during-uhuru-raila-meeting-at-harambee-house>.

Mikhail Moosa is a research intern in the research and policy program of the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, the Afrobarometer core partner for Southern Africa in Cape Town. Email: paintern1@ijr.org.za.

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.

Financial support for Afrobarometer Round 7 has been provided by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Open Society Foundations, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the U.S. State Department, the National Endowment for Democracy, and Transparency International.

Donations help the Afrobarometer Project give voice to African citizens. Please consider making a contribution (at www.afrobarometer.org) or contact Aba Kittoe (akittoe@afrobarometer.org) to discuss institutional funding.

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



Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 201 | 27 April 2018