Guineans confident in their freedom to vote, but not in the fairness of the count

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 49 | Thomas Bentley, Kangwook Han, and Peter Halley Penar

Summary

Guineans are heading toward their second competitive presidential election since the end of Gen. Lansana Conté's 24-year reign in 2010. The election contest pits incumbent President Alpha Condé and his Rally of the Guinean People (RPG) against seven challengers, including opposition leader Cellou Dalein Diallo and his Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG). In the 2010 general election, President Condé narrowly won in the second round, 52.52% to Diallo's 47.48%.

Findings from the latest Afrobarometer survey, conducted in March 2015, suggest that the political polarisation revealed in the previous election has persisted. While Guineans overwhelmingly agree that regular and competitive elections are the best way to choose their leaders, they are divided in their views regarding the direction of the country, the fairness and security of the election environment, and trust in the electoral commission. They are split as to the likely reliability of the vote count, a central issue in deadly protests in the wake of legislative elections in 2013.

Despite these concerns, a large majority of Guineans say they feel "completely free" to vote as they choose.

As Guinea, which ratified the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance in 2011, approaches its second multiparty presidential election, these findings provide a window on how citizens think their government is delivering on its commitment to conduct secure, high-quality, and competitive elections.

Afrobarometer surveys

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. Five rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and Round 6 surveys are currently under way (2014-2015). 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 Guinea, led by Stat View International, interviewed 1,200 adult Guineans in March 2015. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. A previous survey was conducted in Guinea in 2013.

Key findings

- Guineans are evenly divided as to whether the country is going in the right direction (50%) or the wrong direction (49%) (Figure 1). There are pronounced regional differences on this question: The proportion of citizens who say the country is headed in the right direction ranges from 90% in the president's home region of Kankan (90%)

and 66% in neighbouring Faranah to lows of 24% in Labé, 36% in Conakry, and 38% in Kindia (Figure 2).

- There is near-consensus that elections are the best way to select leaders (84%) (Figure 3) and that a good citizen in a democracy should always vote in elections (88%) (Figure 4).

- But many Guineans have concerns about the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI). Although two-thirds (67%) say the 2013 legislative elections were "completely free and fair" or "free and fair with minor problems" (Figure 5), respondents are evenly divided between those who trust the commission "somewhat" or "a lot" (48%) and those who have little or no trust in it (48%) (Figure 6).

- Guineans' mixed views of the election environment (summarized in Figure 7) include serious concerns about the reliability of the vote count: Only 40% believe that votes are "always" counted fairly, while just as many think they are "never" (20%) or only "sometimes (21%) counted fairly. About half (52%) say voters are "never" bribed. Half (50%) say media coverage for different parties is "always" or "often" fair, and nearly three-fourths (73%) say that opposition parties are "never" prevented from competing freely. Seven in 10 (72%) respondents say that voters are "never" threatened.

- Half (50%) of Guineans have no fear of becoming a victim of election-related intimidation or violence, but 36% fear this "somewhat" or "a lot" (Figure 8). Nonetheless, three in four (77%) feel completely free to vote for the candidate of their choice (Figure 9).

Charts

**Figure 1: Overall direction of the country** | 2015
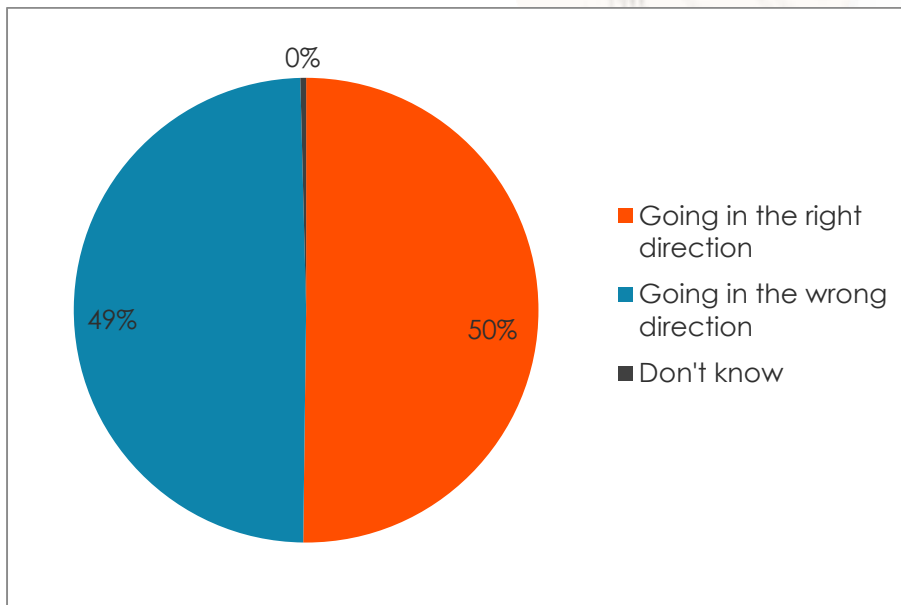
Respondents were asked: *Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction? (Note: Figures do not add to 100% due to rounding.)*

Figure 2: Geographic overview of overall direction of the country | by region | 2015


Numbers in parentheses show % by region who say the country is going in the right direction.
(Note: This map was made with Natural Earth and was organised using QGIS (v2.10).)

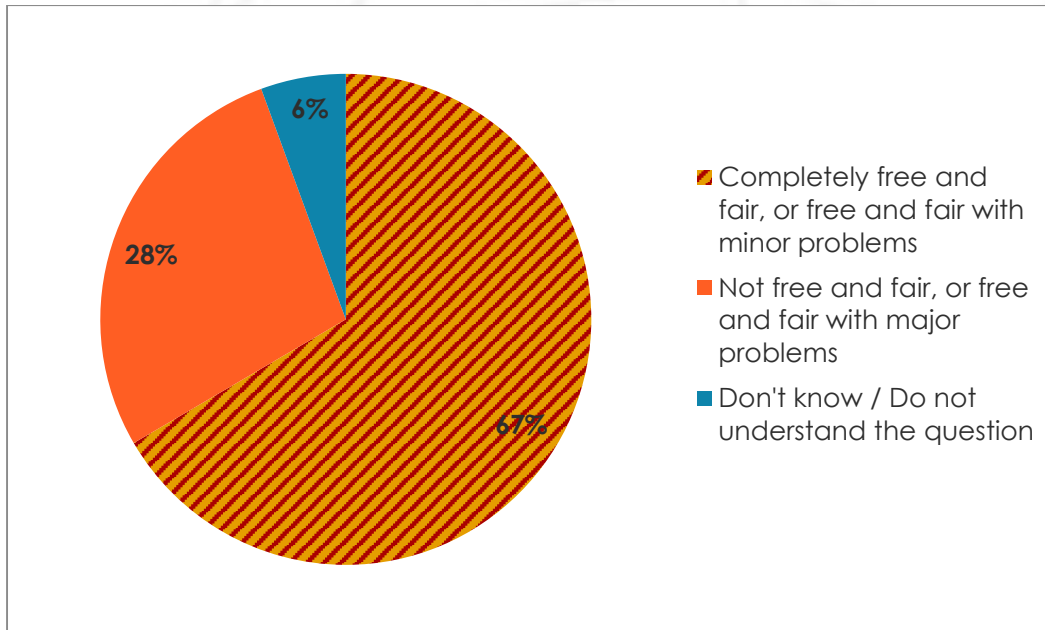**Figure 3: Choose leaders through elections vs. other methods** | 2015

Legend:
- Choose leaders through elections
- Choose leaders through other methods
- Agree with neither
- Don't know

Values shown: 0%, 1%, 14%, 84%
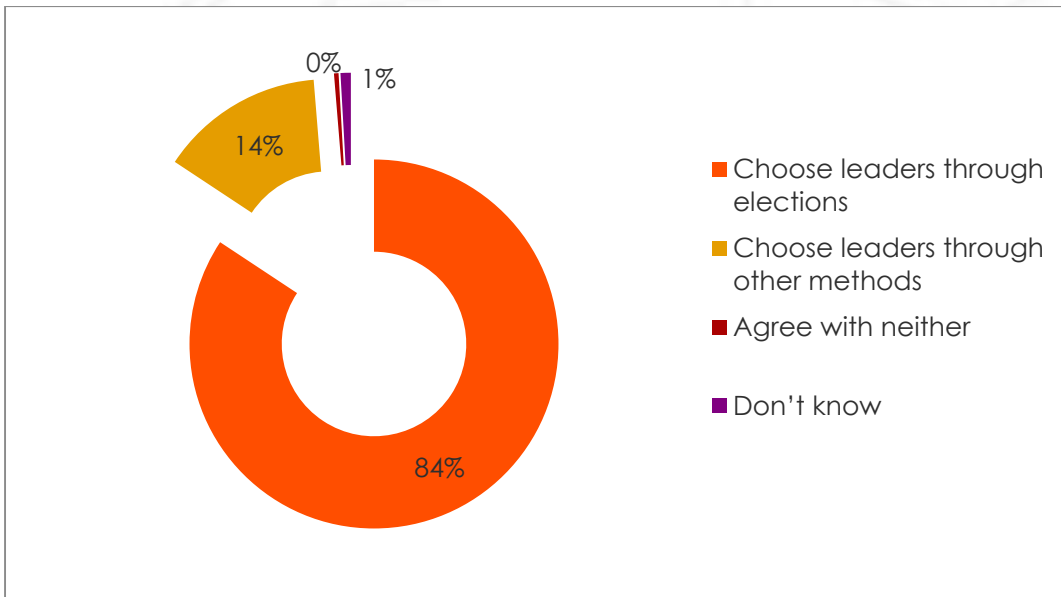
Respondents were asked: *Which of the following statements is closest to your view?*
Statement 1: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open, and honest elections.
Statement 2: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country's leaders.

Figure 4: Good citizens vote in elections | 2015

Legend:
- Always do
- Do only if they choose
- Never do
- Don't know

Values shown: 11%, 88%
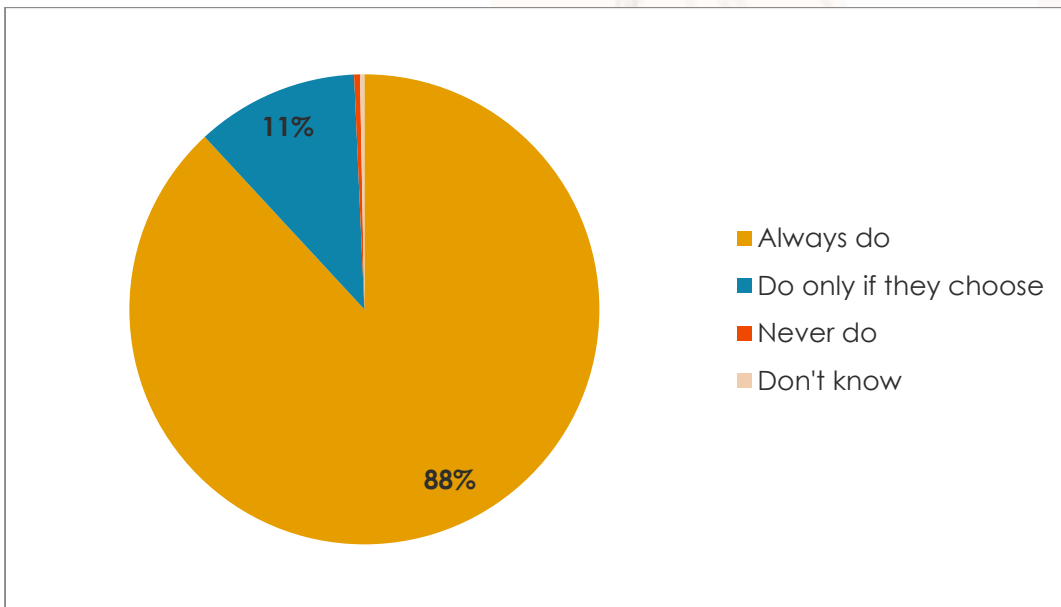
Respondents were asked: *For each of the following actions, please tell me whether you think it is something a good citizen in a democracy should always do, never do, or do only if they choose: Vote in elections?*

Figure 5: Freeness and fairness of the 2013 legislative elections | 2015

- Completely free and fair, or free and fair with minor problems
- Not free and fair, or free and fair with major problems
- Don't know / Do not understand the question

Respondents were asked: *On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the legislative elections held in 2013?*

**Figure 6: Trust in the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI)** | 2015

- Not at all
- Just a little
- Somewhat
- A lot
- Don't know/ Haven't heard enough
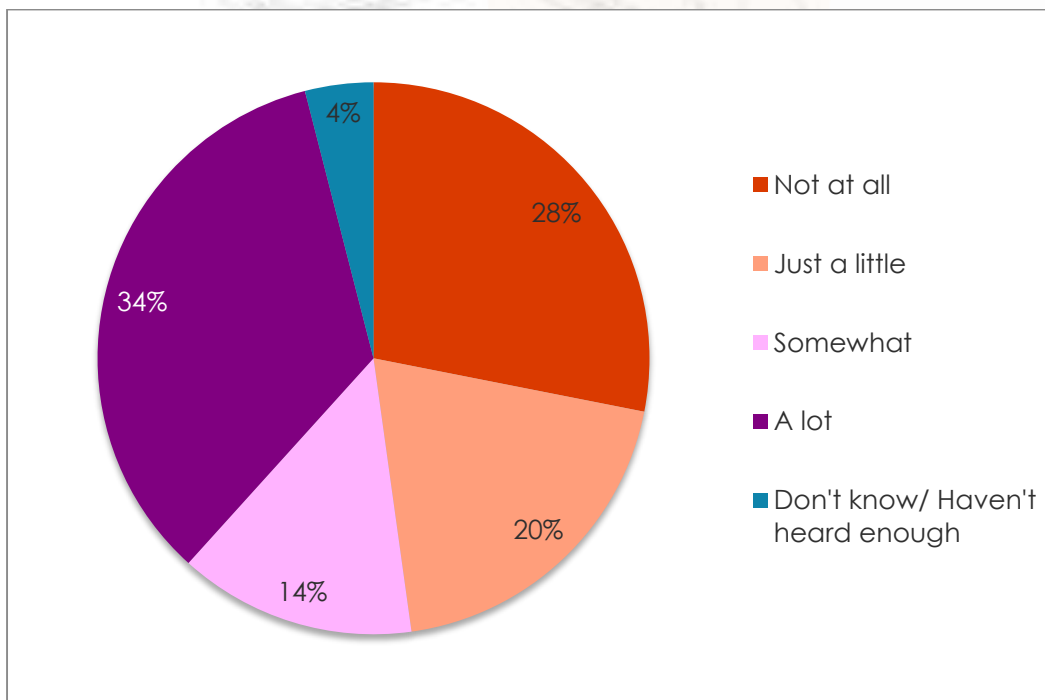
Respondents were asked: *How much do you trust the National Independent Electoral Commission?*

Figure 7: Perceptions of the election environment | 2015
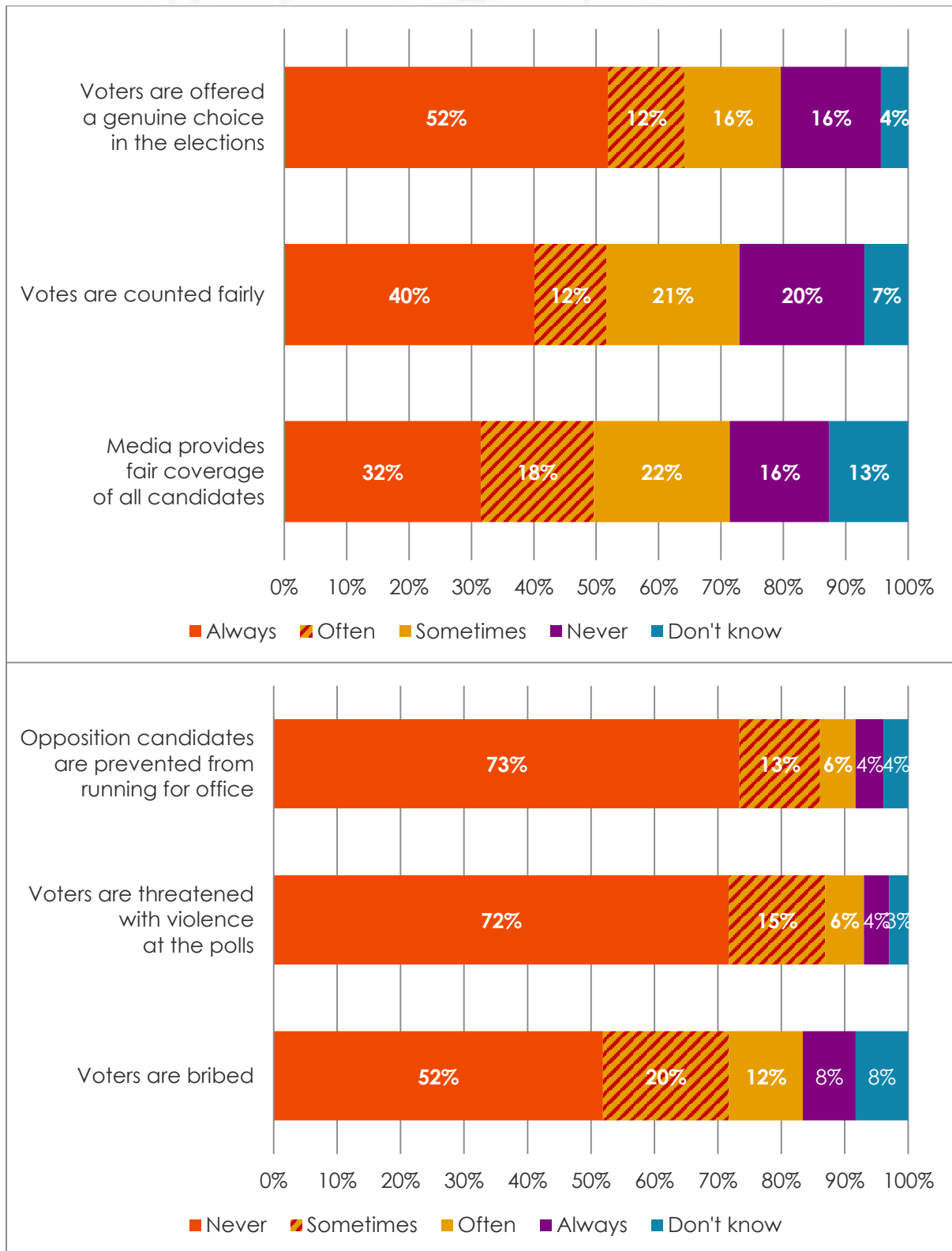
Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often do the following things occur in this country's elections?*

Figure 8: Fear of intimidation or violence during election campaigns | 2015
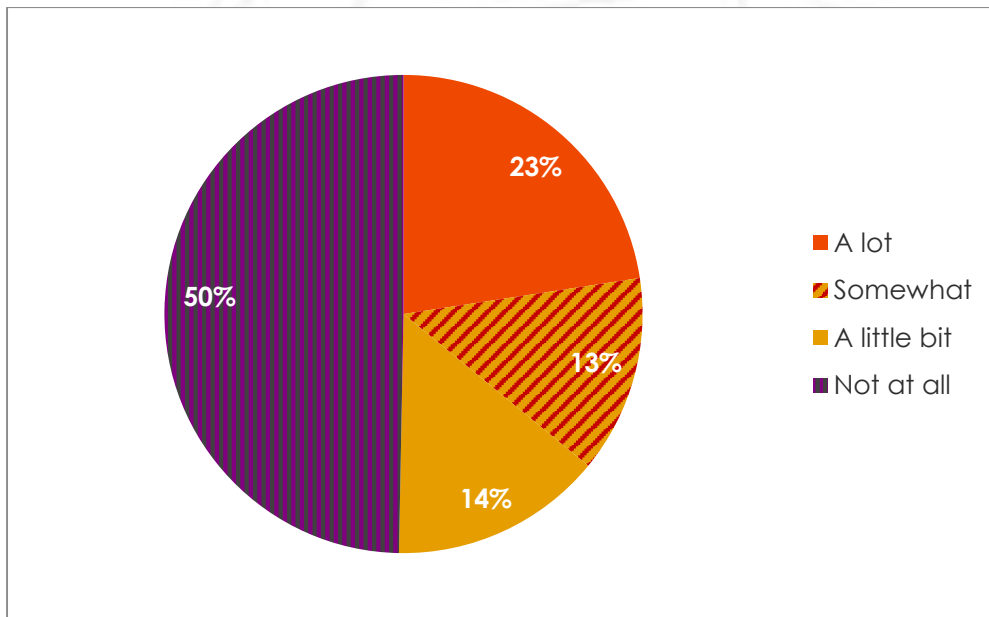
Respondents were asked: *During election campaigns in this country, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence?*

Figure 9: Freedom to vote for candidate of one's choice | 2015
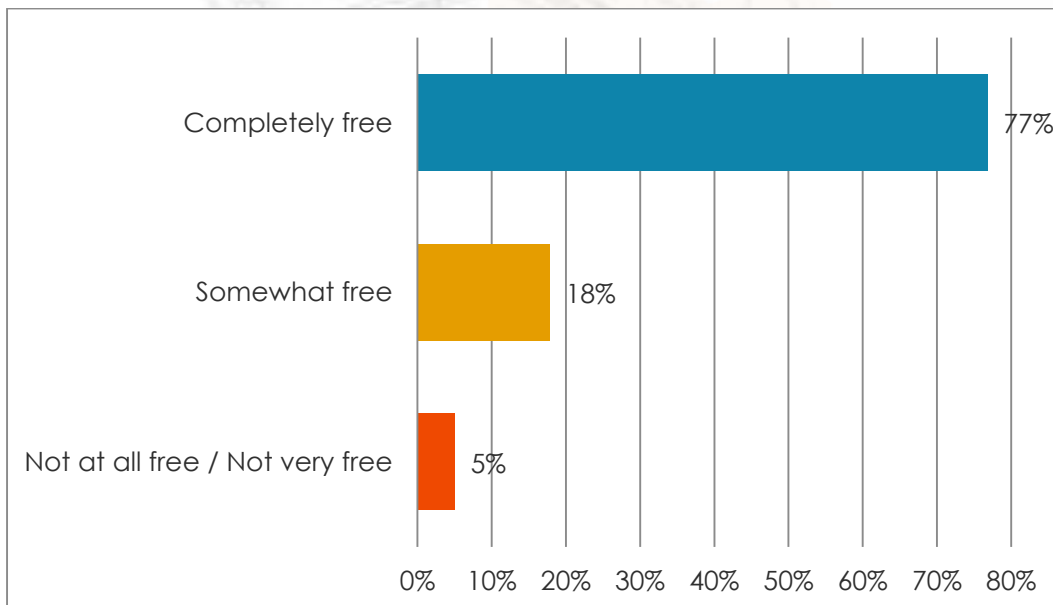
Respondents were asked: *In this country, how free are you: To choose who to vote for without feeling pressured?*

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