

Afrobarometer
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News release

Support for democracy stays strong in Africa, but 'dissatisfied democrats' who will safeguard its future are few (Afrobarometer)

Most Africans still want democracy, but fewer than one in six qualify as "dissatisfied democrats" who will protect against authoritarian backsliding, a new Afrobarometer study reveals.



In the second of its Pan-Africa Profiles based on recent public-opinion surveys in 34 countries, Afrobarometer reports that contrary to fears of a democratic recession, large majorities of Africans continue to support democracy and reject authoritarian alternatives. But fewer Africans are getting the democracy they demand, the analysis shows, and even fewer – just 15% – are insistent enough on better democracy to form a bulwark against authoritarian encroachment.

The new report, available at www.afrobarometer.org, provide in-depth analysis tracking popular demand for democracy and perceived supply of democracy over time, identifying attitudes and trends that vary widely by country and demographic group.

Key findings

- Across 34 surveyed countries, the average African still prefers democratic rule. More than two-thirds (68%) say democracy is the best form of government, and more than seven in 10 reject abandoning multiparty elections in favour of strong-man rule (78%), a one-party state (74%), or military rule (72%) (Figure 1).
- But commitment to democracy varies greatly by individuals' characteristics, by country, and over time.
 - Support for democracy ranges from more than eight in 10 citizens in Sierra Leone, Senegal, Zambia, Ghana, and Uganda to only about half of respondents in South Africa, Lesotho, Madagascar, Tunisia, and eSwatini (Figure 2).
 - Over the past three years, demand for democracy declined in 14 countries and grew in only seven countries. But over a decade-long time frame, demand grew in eight countries and shrank in only four.
- Slightly more than half (51%) of all Africans surveyed say their country is a full democracy or a democracy with minor problems. But only 43% are satisfied with the way democracy works in their country. And just 34% both feel they live in a democracy *and* are satisfied, meaning they perceive what we call an adequate supply of democracy (Figure 3).
- Across Africa, the perceived supply of democracy is consistently lower than demand, meaning that many people get less democracy than they want. On average across 18 countries surveyed regularly since 2005, both popular demand and perceived supply of democracy remain above 2005 levels despite modest declines since 2011/2013 (Figure 4).

- Available evidence suggests that democracy is most secure against backsliding in countries where significant proportions of citizens are “dissatisfied democrats,” meaning they demand democracy yet remain discontented with its performance. Across Africa, fewer than one in six citizens (15%) currently qualify as “dissatisfied democrats.”

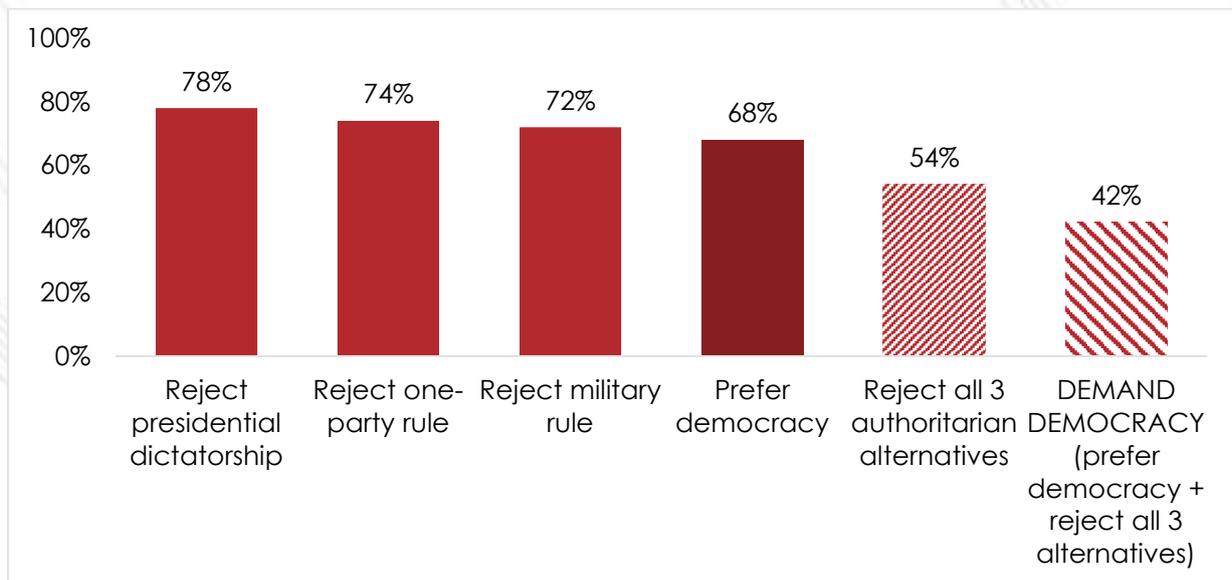
Afrobarometer surveys

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 between 1999 and 2015, and Round 7 survey findings in 34 countries are being released in 2018/2019. Interested readers may follow our releases, including our Pan-Africa Profiles series of Round 7 cross-country analyses, at #VoicesAfrica and sign up for our distribution list at www.afrobarometer.org.

Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent’s choice with nationally representative samples. Sample sizes of 1,200 or 2,400 yield country-level results with a margin of sampling error of +/-3 or 2 percentage points, respectively, at a 95% confidence level.

Charts

Figure 1: Key demand-side indicators of democracy | 34 countries | 2016/2018



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 government we have.

(% who say democracy is preferable)

There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives?

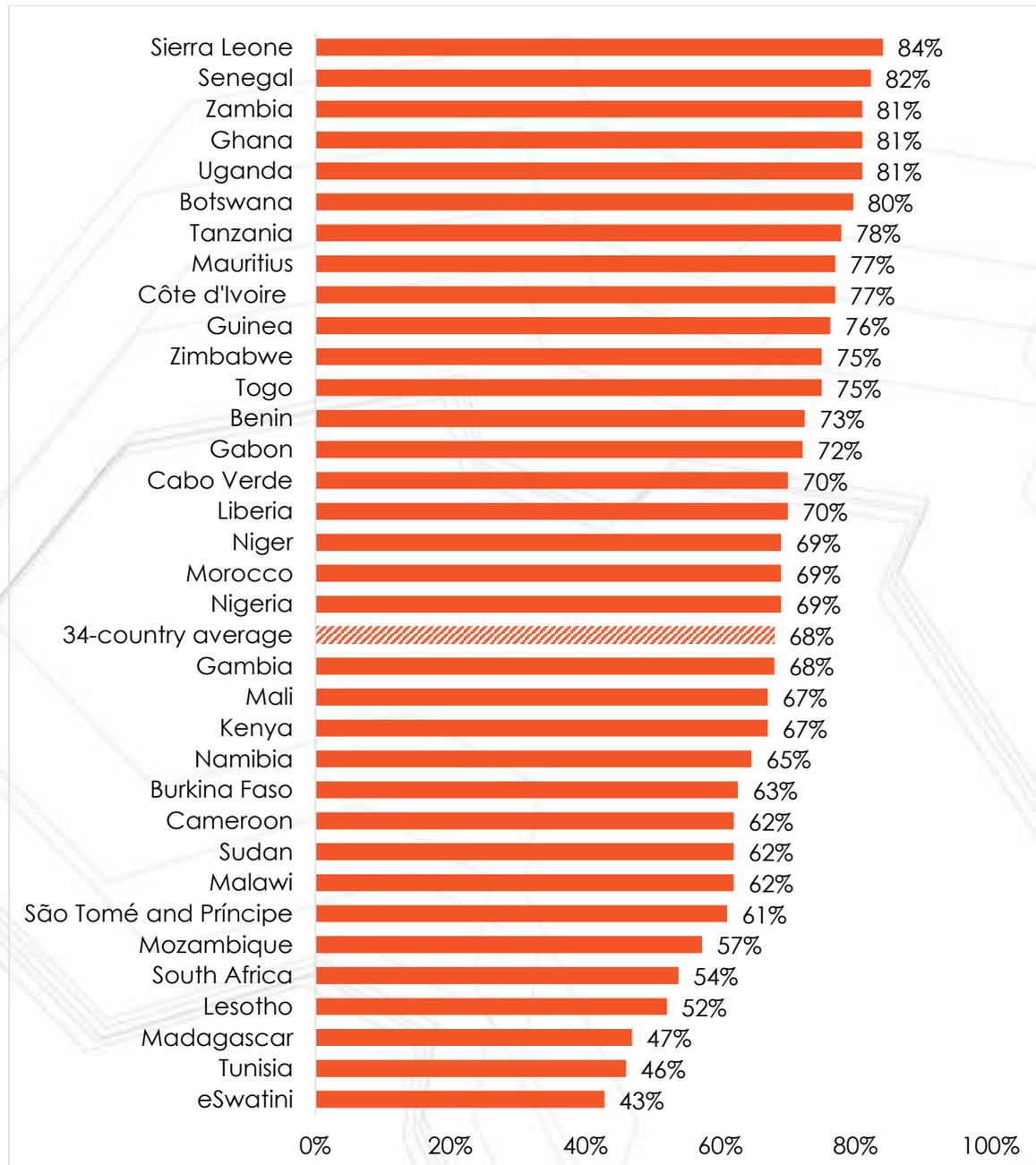
A. Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office.

B. The army comes in to govern the country.

C. Elections and Parliament are abolished so that the president can decide everything.

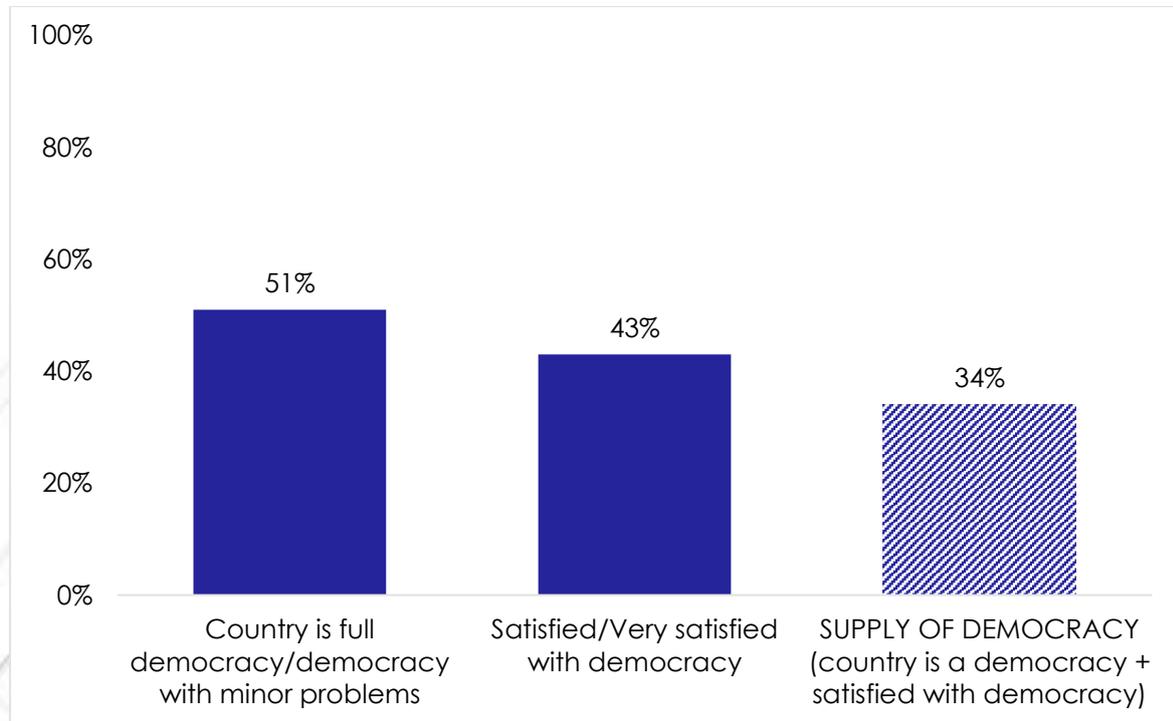
(% who “disagree” or “strongly disagree”)

Figure 2: Support for democracy | 34 countries | 2016/2018



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)

Figure 3: Key supply-side indicators of democracy | 34 countries | 2016/2018

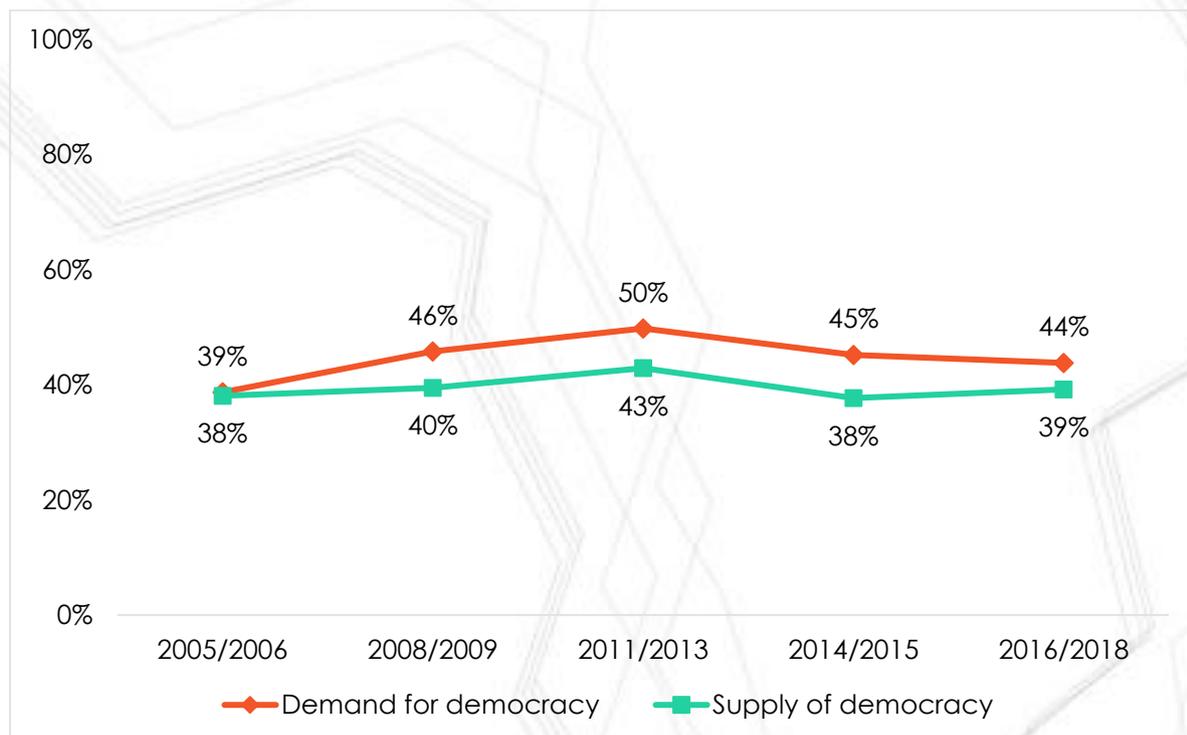


Respondents were asked:

In your opinion, how much of a democracy is [this country] today?

Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [this country] today?

Figure 4: Longer-term trends in democratic demand and supply | 18 countries | 2005-2018



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