



Nairobi, Kenya  
16 February 2021

## News release

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### **Kenyans embrace national and ethnic identities, but interpersonal trust is low, Afrobarometer survey shows**

Most Kenyans value both their national and ethnic identities and feel comfortable speaking their mother tongue and wearing traditional dress in public, according to the most recent Afrobarometer survey.

Most Kenyans also believe there's strength in diversity and express tolerant attitudes toward other ethnicities, as well as other religions, political views, and nationalities.

But even though a majority say there is more that unites Kenyans than divides them, very few think they can trust other people.

Ethnicity promises to continue to be an important factor in Kenyan politics after President Uhuru Kenyatta's recent indication of support for a successor from a different ethnic group after he leaves offices in 2022.

### **Key findings**

- More than nine out of 10 Kenyans (93%) identify at least as much with their nation as with their ethnic group. But while few Kenyans identify primarily with their ethnic group, about seven in 10 (69%) consider their ethnic group an important part of their identity (Figure 1).
- Eight in 10 citizens (81%) say they feel comfortable speaking their mother tongue in public, and a smaller majority (57%) say they have no problem wearing traditional or cultural dress in public (Figure 2).
- One in five Kenyans (19%) say their ethnic group is "often" or "always" treated unfairly by the government, while 29% say this happens "sometimes" (Figure 3).
- Similarly, almost one-fifth (18%) of respondents say other Kenyans treated them unfairly based on their ethnicity "several times" or "many times" during the previous year (Figure 4).
  - Fewer (11%) report being treated unfairly based on their religion, while more (25%) say their economic status was the basis of unfair treatment at least "several times."
- A large majority (82%) of Kenyans say that communities made up of different ethnic groups, races, and religions are stronger than more homogeneous communities. And almost two-thirds (64%) say there is more that unites Kenyans than divides them (Figure 5).

- Most Kenyans express tolerant attitudes toward people from different ethnic groups (91%) and religious backgrounds (89%), people who support different political parties (79%), and immigrants and foreign workers (70%). But few (10%) indicate tolerance toward people of a different sexual orientation (Figure 6).
- Only one in 20 Kenyans (4%) believe that “most people can be trusted”; most (96%) say that one must be very careful when dealing with others (Figure 7).

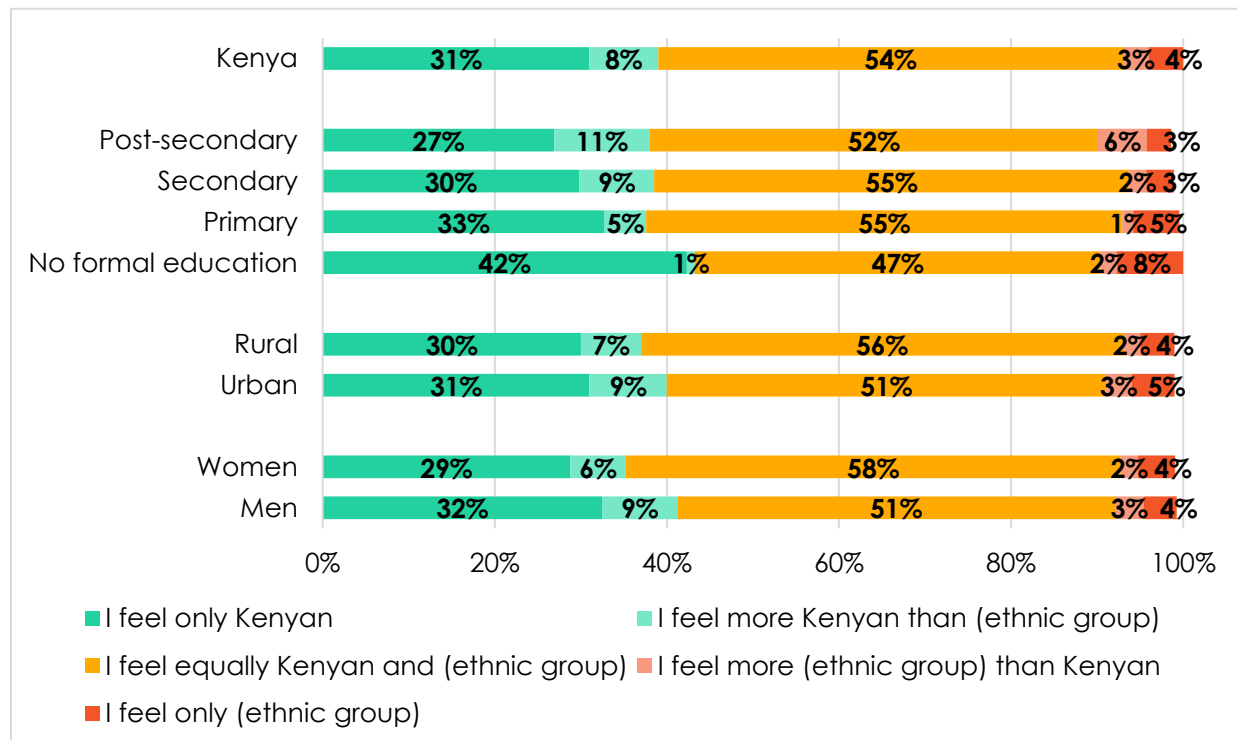
### Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Seven rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018, and Round 8 surveys are currently underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent’s choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Kenya, based at the Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi, interviewed 2,400 adult Kenyans in August-September 2019. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Kenya in 2003, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, and 2016.

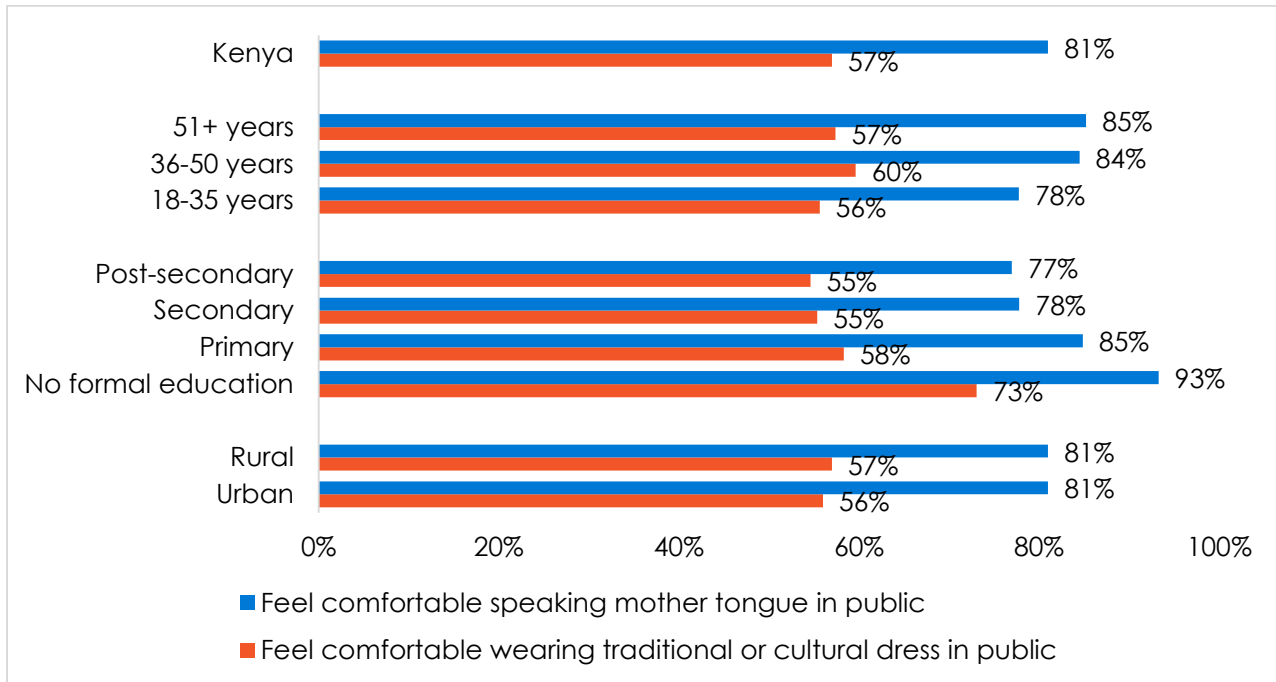
### Charts

**Figure 1: Choice of identity: ethnic vs. Kenyan** | by demographic group | Kenya | 2019



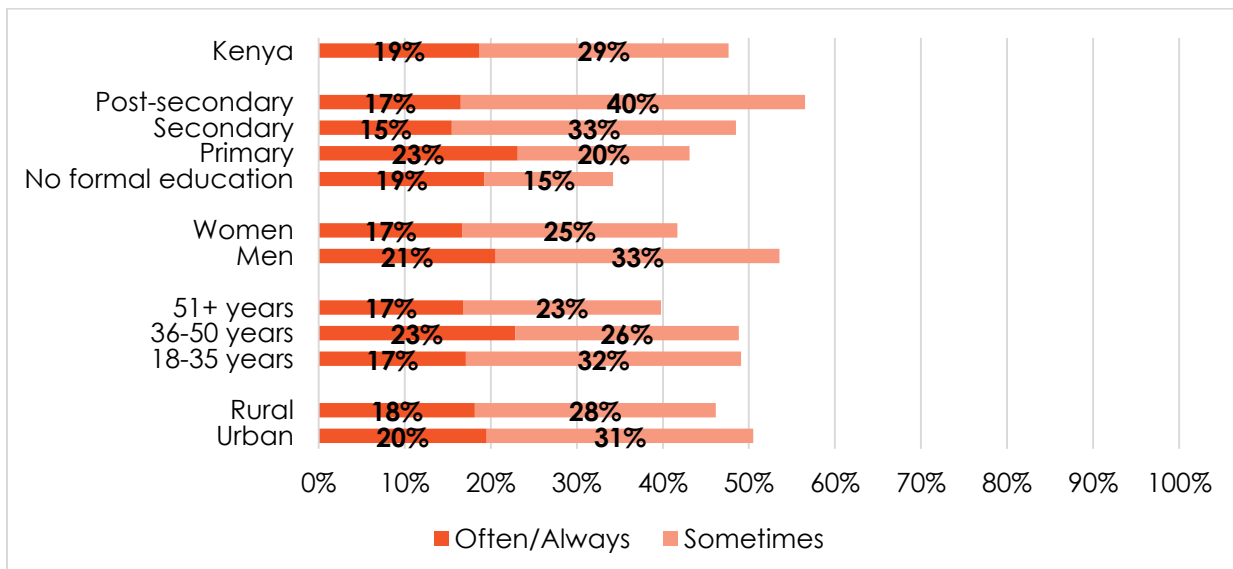
**Respondents were asked:** Let us suppose that you had to choose between being a Kenyan and being your ethnic group. Which of the following statements best expresses your feelings?

**Figure 2: Level of comfort speaking mother tongue and wearing traditional dress in public** | by demographic group | Kenya | 2019



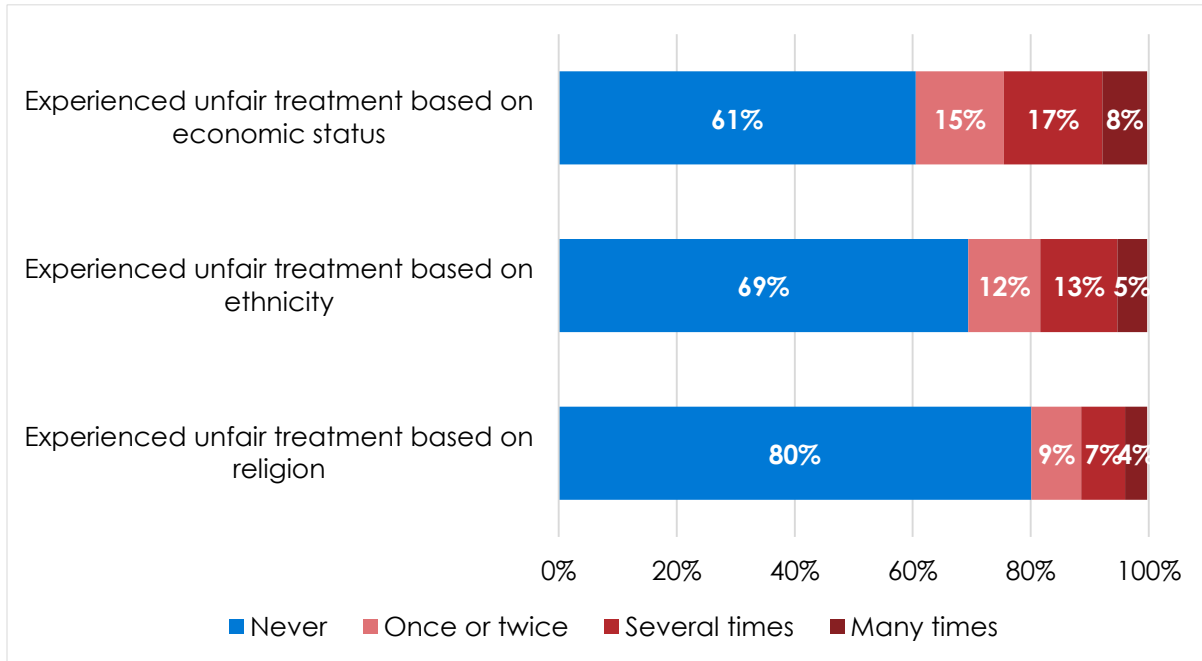
**Respondents were asked:** Do you feel comfortable: Speaking your mother tongue in public? Wearing your traditional or cultural dress in public?

**Figure 3: Unfair treatment of ethnic groups by government** | by demographic group | Kenya | 2019



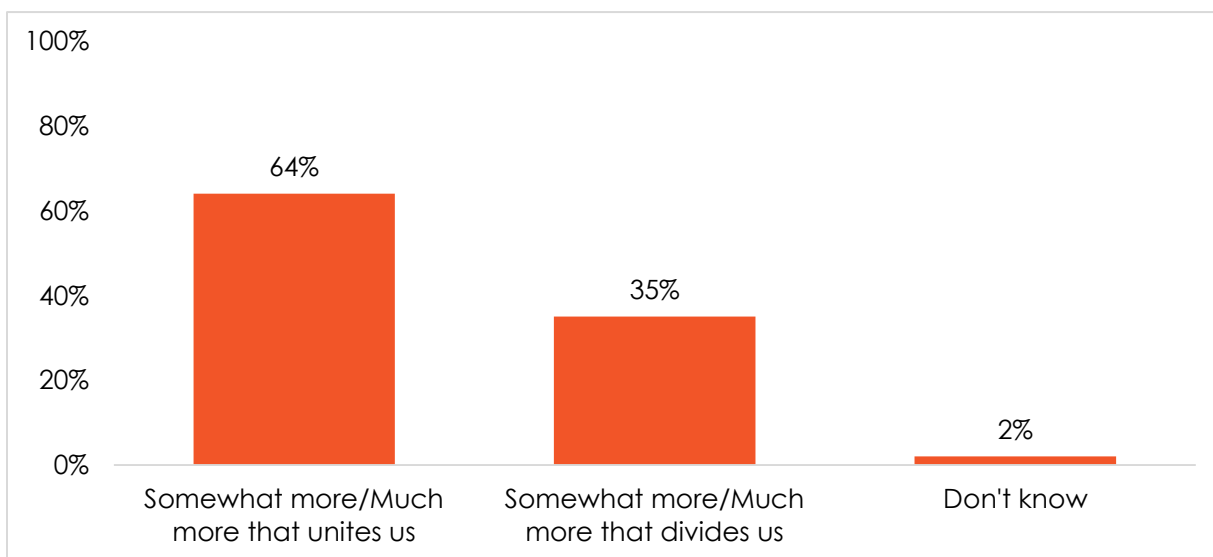
**Respondents were asked:** How often, if ever, are [members of your ethnic group] treated unfairly by the government? (% who say "often" or "always")

**Figure 4: Unfair treatment by other Kenyans | Kenya | 2019**



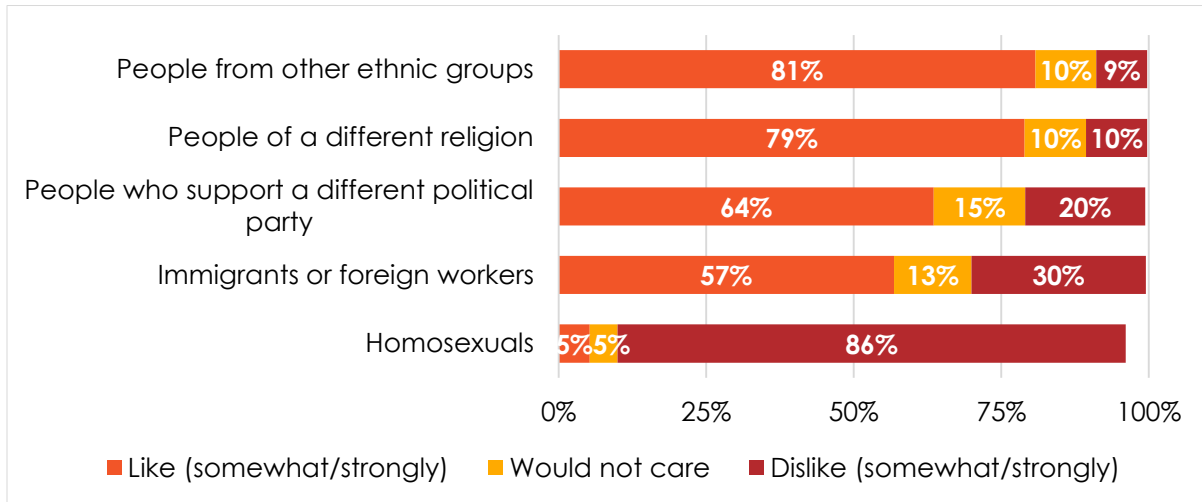
**Respondents were asked:** In the past year, how often, if ever, have you personally been treated unfairly by other Kenyans based on: Your economic status, that is, how rich or poor you are? Your religion? Your ethnicity?

**Figure 5: More that unites or divides Kenyans? | Kenya | 2019**



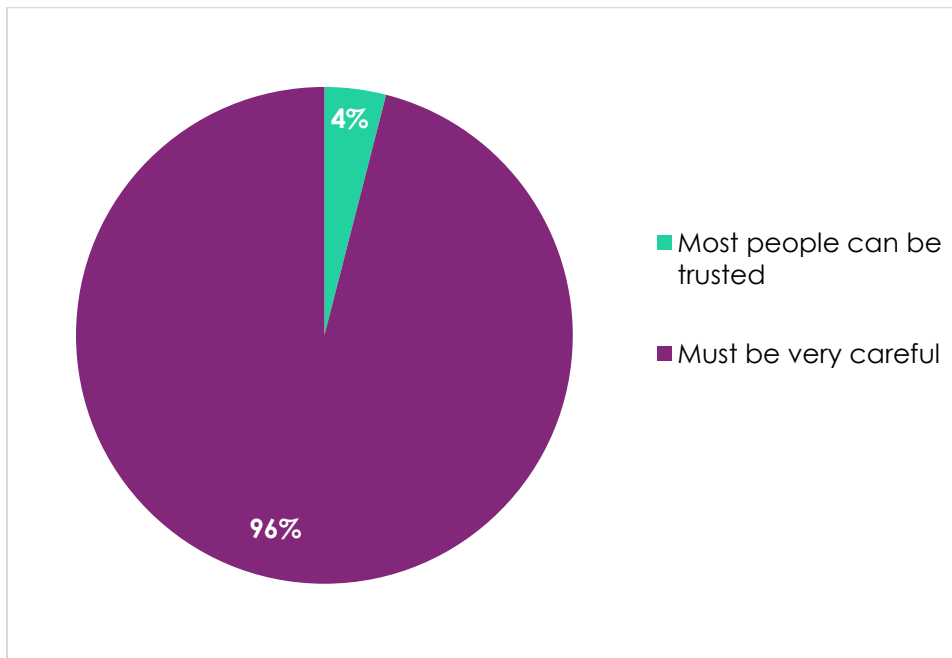
**Respondents were asked:** Overall, would you say that there is more that unites all Kenyans as one people, or more that divides them?

**Figure 6: Social tolerance** | Kenya | 2019



**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbors, dislike it, or not care.

**Figure 7: Can you trust other people?** | Kenya | 2019



**Respondents were asked:** Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you must be very careful in dealing with people?



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