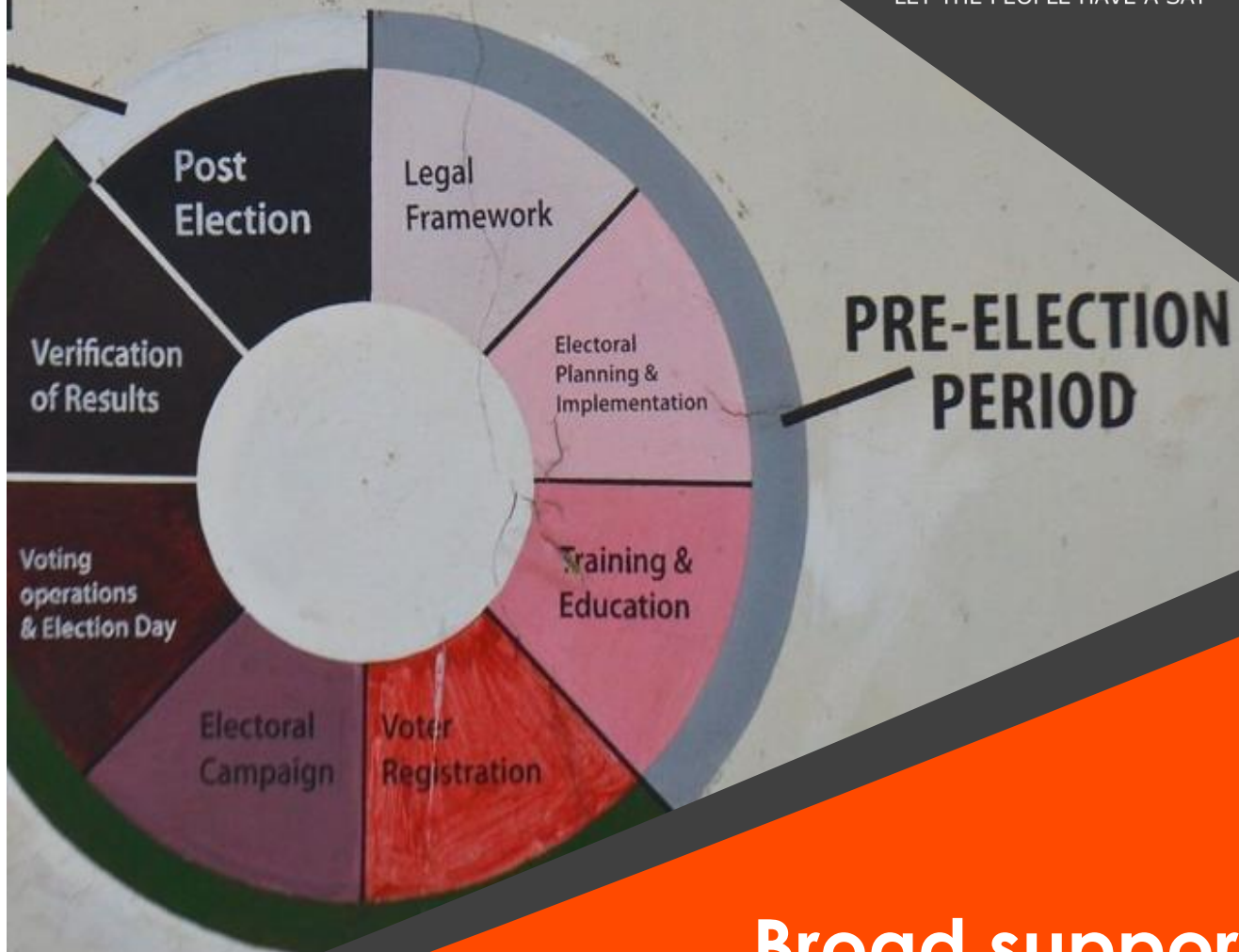


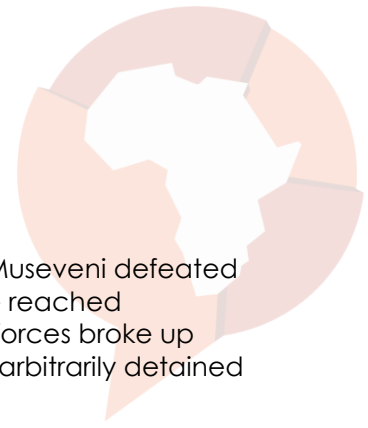
The Electoral Cycle



Broad support for multiparty elections, little faith in electoral institutions

Uganda in comparative perspective

By Matthias Krönke



Introduction

In the run-up to Uganda's 2021 election, in which President Yoweri Museveni defeated Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, aka Bobi Wine, to claim a sixth term, violence reached unprecedented levels. More than 50 people were killed as security forces broke up opposition party gatherings, and several opposition members were arbitrarily detained (Arinaitwe, 2021).

Although Election Day, 14 January, was relatively peaceful, more than 17.5 million Ugandans experienced a multiday Internet blackout, making social media platforms and news websites inaccessible at a time when they were in high demand (BBC, 2021; Moffat & Bennett, 2021). Election observers from the East African Community (EAC) noted malfunctioning biometric voter-verification machines and delays in the delivery of voting materials, among other issues, but joined domestic observers from the Citizens' Coalition for Electoral Democracy in Uganda in labeling the election largely free and fair.

The Electoral Commission (EC) ultimately declared Museveni the winner with 58% of the vote – a comfortable lead over Bobi Wine (35%) and his fellow challengers (Moffat & Bennett, 2021; Yiga, 2021).

Wine initially filed a court challenge in which he complained of soldiers stuffing ballot boxes, casting ballots for people, and chasing voters away from polling stations, but he later withdrew the case (Muhumuza, 2021). Court challenges after elections are commonplace in Uganda; since the country's adoption of the fourth constitution in 1995, the outcome of every presidential race except the 2011 poll has been contested in court. Yet the courts have never overturned the results, even when they have acknowledged irregularities (Atuhaire, 2021).

Beyond Museveni's victory, what are the implications of the 2021 election for a country that returned to multiparty competition just 15 years ago? Should Ugandans be enthusiastic about a strong opposition showing as a sign of a healthy democracy at work, or will the prospect of enduring National Resistance Movement rule lead to disillusionment with democracy and the institutions that are meant to safeguard it – the EC and the courts?

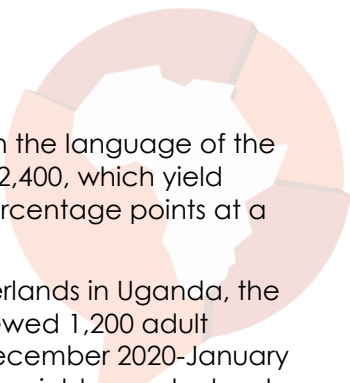
This policy paper aims to place the events of the 2021 election in perspective by examining public opinion data from Uganda over the past two decades. Despite a decade-long slide in Ugandans' satisfaction with democracy, this analysis supports previous findings that more and more citizens have become "committed democrats" and view multiparty elections as tools for holding non-performing leaders accountable (Isbell & Kibirige, 2017; Kakumba, 2020; Kibirige, 2018).

However, this investigation also points to decreasing trust in institutions that are meant to enforce the most basic of democratic processes – free and fair elections. Importantly, this negative trend cuts across the partisan divide.

The analysis also shows that EC performance – both in executing its technical tasks and in refereeing fairly between competing parties – plays a crucial role in citizens' evaluations of election quality. While public debate about reforming the EC is not new (Kibirige, 2016), the events of the 2021 election may provide impetus for intensifying efforts to increase transparency and improve communication on the part of the commission in order to enhance citizens' satisfaction with the electoral process.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Eight survey rounds in up to 39 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2022) are currently underway.



Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of 1,200-2,400, which yield country-level results with a margin of sampling error of +/-2 to +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

With financial support from the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda, the Afrobarometer team in Uganda, led by Hatchile Consult Ltd., interviewed 1,200 adult Ugandans in September-October 2019 and 2,400 adult Ugandans December 2020-January 2021 in 300 enumeration areas across 110 districts. A sample of this size yields country-level results with margins of error of +/-3 percentage points (for the sample of 1,200) and +/-2 percentage points (for the sample of 2,400) at a 95% confidence level. Afrobarometer has conducted nine previous surveys in Uganda dating back to 2000.

Key findings

- Over the past two decades, Ugandans have maintained a high level of support for regular, open, and honest elections as the best way to choose their leaders.
- Three out of four Ugandans say the country needs many political parties to ensure that voters have real choices – a high level of support for multiparty competition compared to other African countries.
- But Ugandans are skeptical regarding the quality of their elections. Citizens across the partisan divide have consistently expressed little faith in the Electoral Commission, while trust in the courts – the institution tasked with dealing with electoral disputes – has declined.
- A majority of Ugandans trust the EC to execute technocratic tasks such as providing information and managing voter registration, but not to enforce fair competition between parties.
- More educated citizens, urban residents, opposition party supporters and non-partisans, and committed democrats are less likely to trust the EC and courts to ensure free and fair elections.

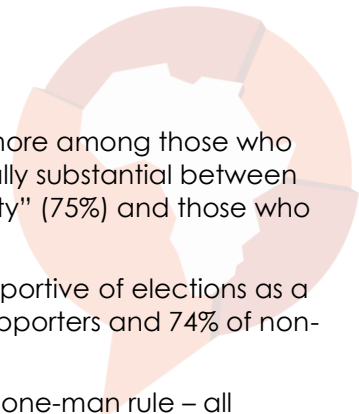
Support for the foundations of democracy

Support for elections

After a five-year-long civil war, Uganda's liberation movement-turned-ruling party, the National Resistance Movement (NRM), introduced an "individual merit" reform in 1986 with the aim of transforming elections into "a game played by individuals only, rather than by political organizations" (Carbone, 2003, p. 486). Under this so-called "Movement" system, party activities such as holding conferences and rallies, building local branches, and sponsoring candidates for election were prohibited. A new Constitution in 1995 inscribed these restrictions on political parties into law, and citizens had their first chance to elect the country's leader in no-party elections in 1996, in which Museveni secured 75% of the vote.

The public's view on how political leaders should be chosen has long been clear. In the 2002 Afrobarometer survey, more than four out of five Ugandans (83%) expressed a preference for choosing leaders through regular, open, and honest elections, rather than through other methods (Figure 1). Support for elections has remained strong even as Museveni has remained in power for 35 years. Despite a 10-percentage-point decline between 2011 and 2020, Ugandans' support for elections is still 3 percentage points above the average of 76% across 34 African countries surveyed by Afrobarometer in 2019/2021 (Figure 2).

Despite strong overall support for choosing a president via elections, there are meaningful group-based differences (Figure 3). In 2019, 74% of Ugandans aged 18-29 preferred to

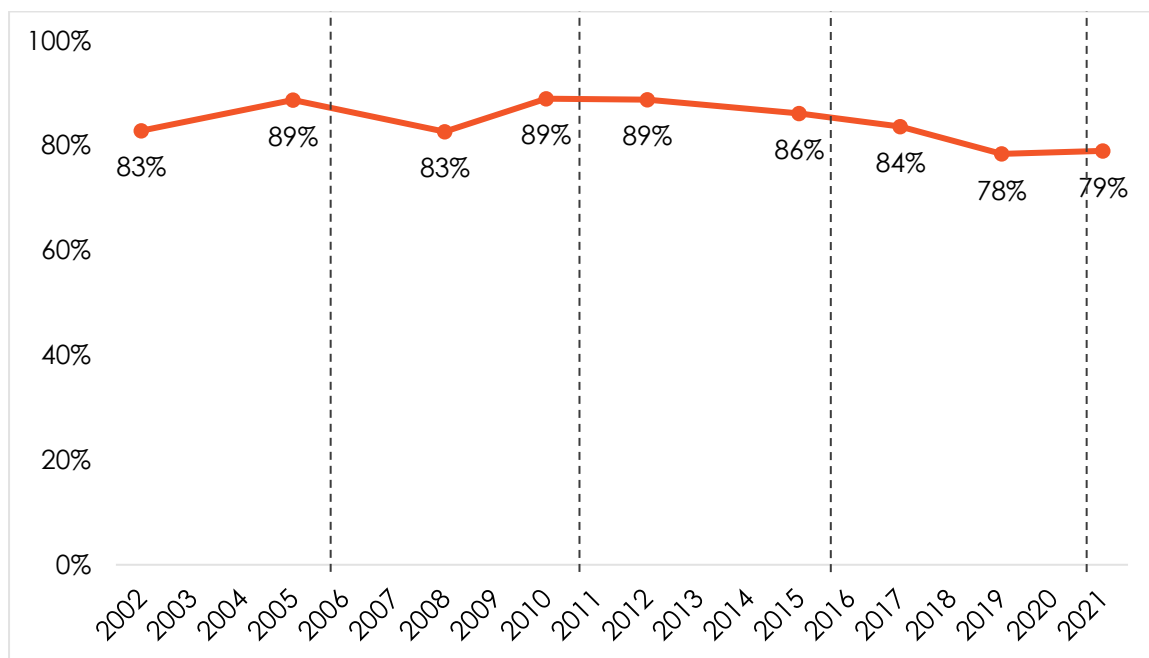


choose their head of state through elections, compared to 80% or more among those who were alive before Museveni was president. The differences are equally substantial between those who regularly experience material deprivation or “lived poverty” (75%) and those who do not (84%).

Moreover, those who do not support the ruling NRM are also less supportive of elections as a mechanism to select their president (only 65% of opposition party supporters and 74% of non-partisans, vs. 85% of NRM supporters).¹

Lastly, Ugandans who prefer democracy over military, one-party, or one-man rule – all alternatives that were tried in Uganda's recent past – are more supportive of choosing leaders through elections rather than through other methods.

Figure 1: Choose leaders through elections | Uganda | 2002-2021



Note: Vertical dashed lines represent presidential election years.

Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

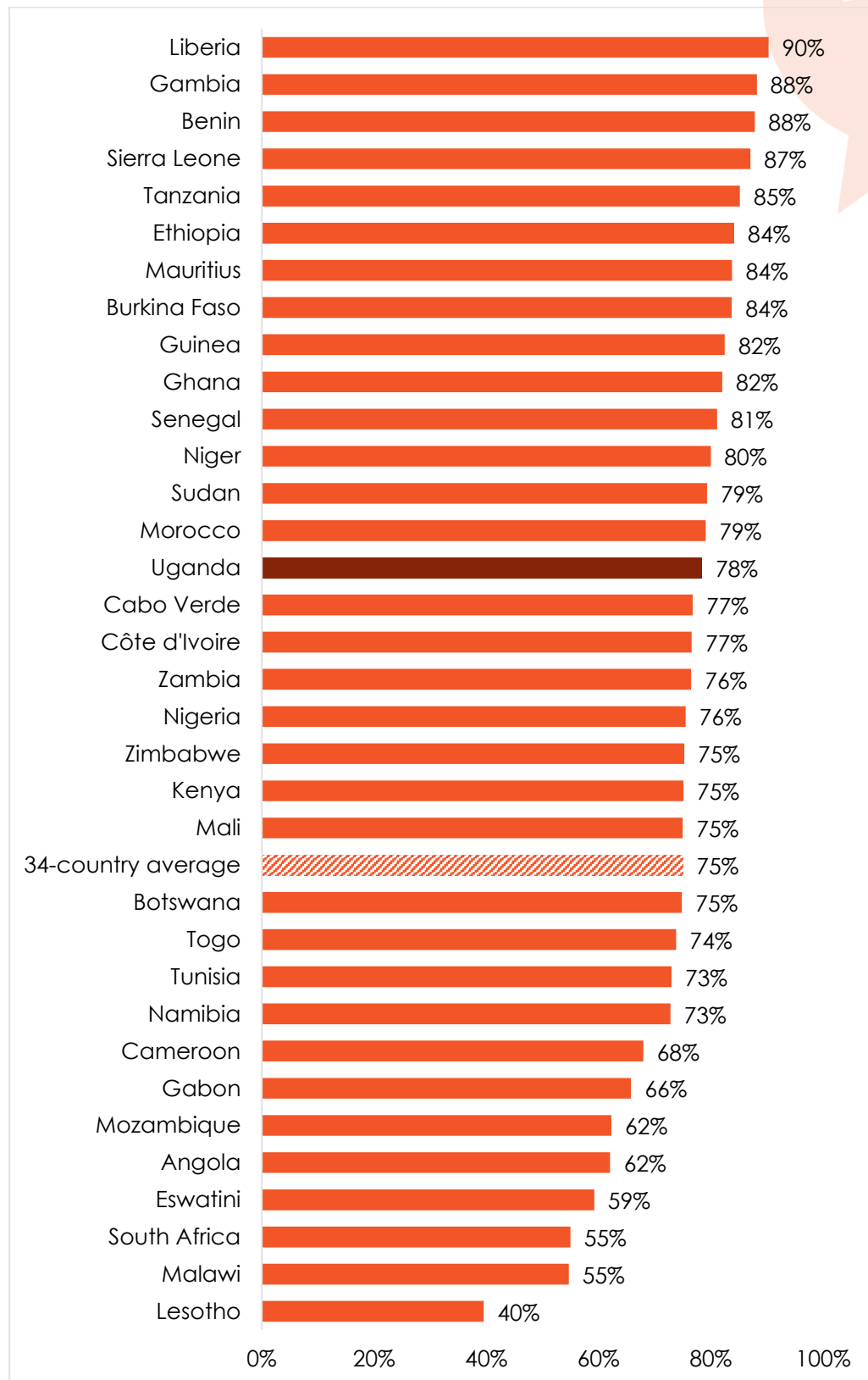
Statement 1: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open, and honest elections.

Statement 2: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country's leaders.

(% who “agree” or “strongly agree” that leaders should be chosen through elections)

¹ In Round 8, 48% of respondents said they “felt close to” the NRM, 17% identified with various opposition parties, and 30% did not identify with any party. The remaining respondents did not know or refused to answer this question.

Figure 2: Choose leaders through elections | 34 countries | 2019/2021



(% who “agree” or “strongly agree” that leaders should be chosen through elections)

Figure 3: Choose leaders through elections | Uganda | 2019

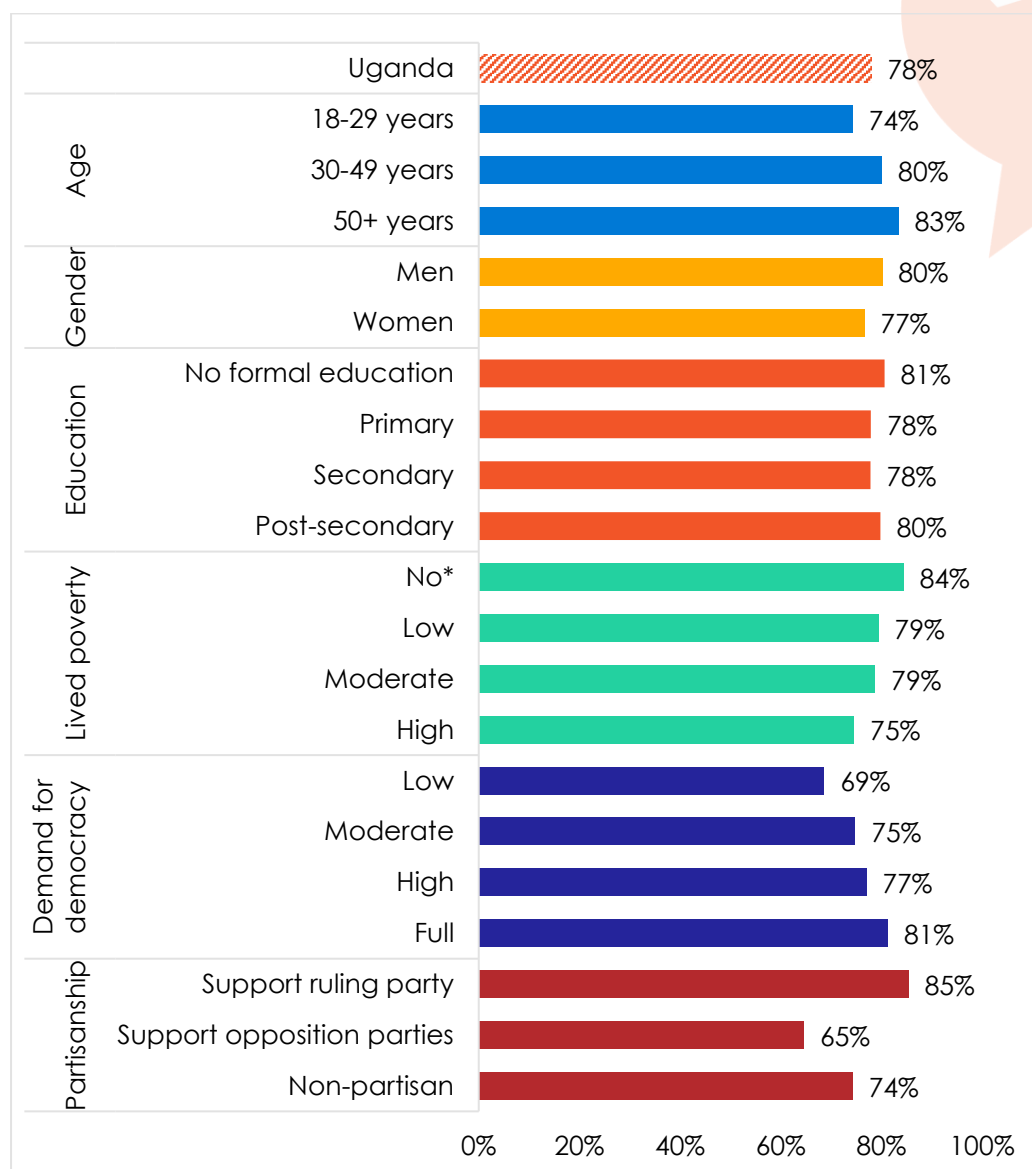


Figure shows % who “agree” or “strongly agree” that leaders should be chosen through elections.

Afrobarometer’s **Lived Poverty Index (LPI)** measures respondents’ levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year.

* N=45 for the “No lived poverty” category, resulting in a large margin of error.

Demand for democracy: This standard Afrobarometer index is constructed by combining the following questions:

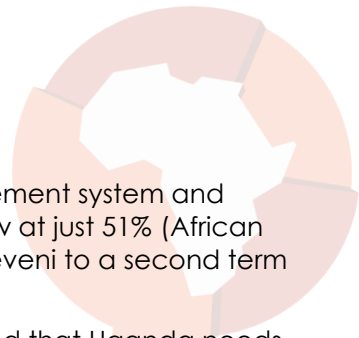
1. There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives? (% who “disapprove” or “strongly disapprove” of each alternative)
 - a. Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office.
 - b. The army comes in to govern the country.
 - c. Elections and the National Assembly are abolished so that the president can decide everything.
2. Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion? (% who choose Statement 1)

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.

Demand for democracy: % who prefer democracy and reject all three authoritarian alternatives. The category “No demand for democracy” was excluded from this and subsequent analyses because it only contained 12 respondents.



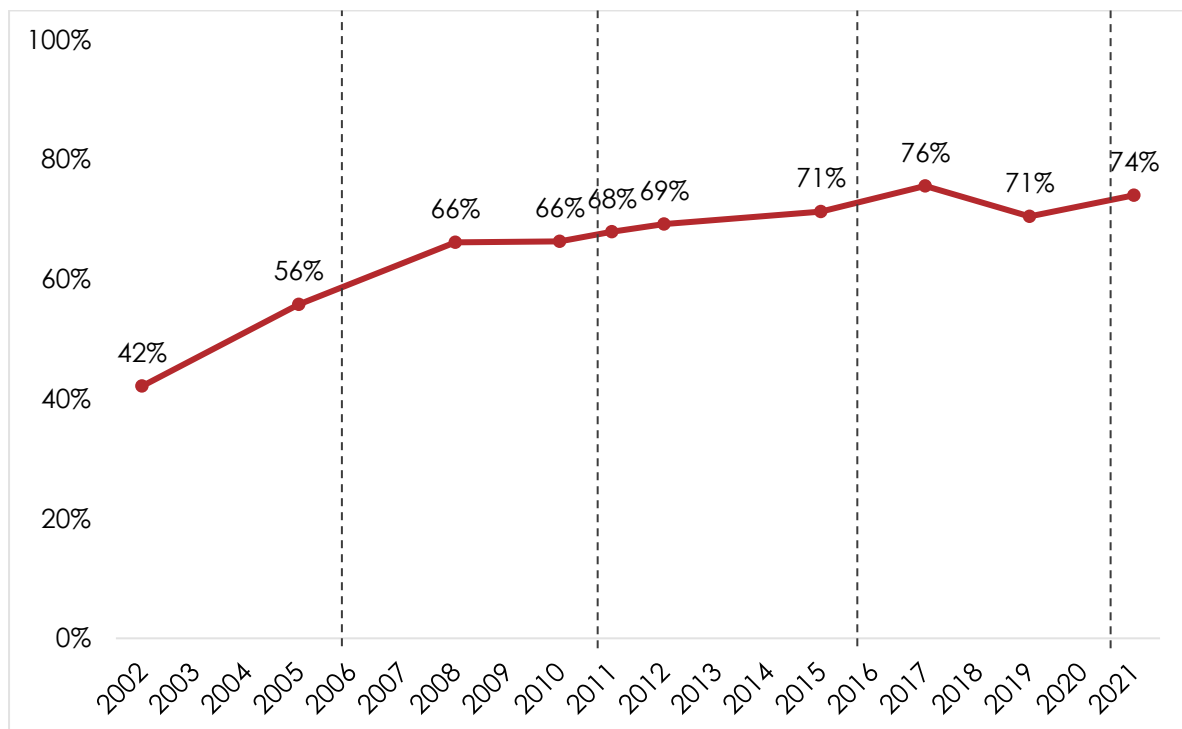
Support for multiparty competition

In a 2000 referendum, 91% of Ugandans voted in favour of the Movement system and rejected a multiparty political system, although voter turnout was low at just 51% (African Elections Database, 2011). A year later, the country re-elected Museveni to a second term under the Movement system.

The 2002 Afrobarometer survey found that only 42% of citizens agreed that Uganda needs many political parties to make sure that voters have a real choice in who governs them (Figure 4). But the public's view on how politicians should compete for votes soon started to shift. By 2005, a majority of Ugandans said they preferred multiparty politics. Only a few weeks later, a second referendum asking citizens whether they would prefer to "open up the political space to allow those who wish to join different organizations/parties to do so to compete for political power" formally ended the no-party era.²

Following the referendum, support for multiparty competition continued to grow, and since 2011, more than two-thirds of Ugandans have consistently supported party competition. This suggests that Ugandans have come to appreciate the benefits of multiparty races, even though they have yet to experience electoral turnover. Importantly, this trend may be encouraging to countries such as Angola, which only recently experienced a political opening and where today roughly the same percentage of citizens (47%) support multiparty competition as in Uganda in 2002. Of course, such an outcome cannot be taken for granted, as Lesotho illustrates: Support for multiparty competition there has dropped from 69% in 2012 (not shown) to a mere 35% in 2020 (Figure 5).

Figure 4: Many political parties needed | Uganda | 2002-2021



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

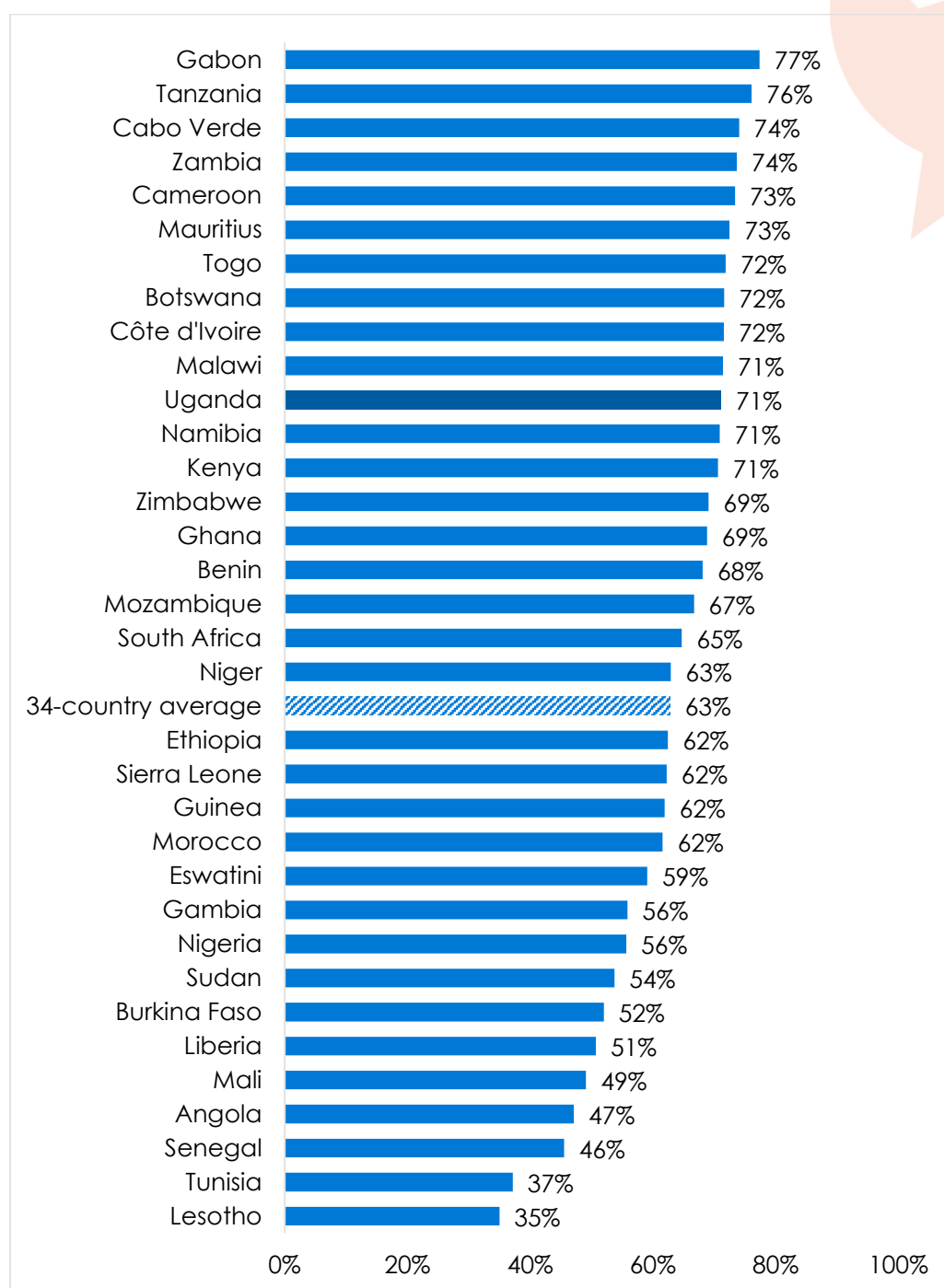
Statement 1: Political parties create division and confusion; it is therefore unnecessary to have many political parties in Uganda.

Statement 2: Many political parties are needed to make sure that Uganda's citizens have real choices in who governs them.

(% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" that many political parties are needed)

² In the referendum, 92% voted to end the Movement era. The turnout was 47% (African Elections Database, 2011).

Figure 5: Many political parties needed | 34 countries | 2019/2021



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 Uganda.

Statement 2: Many political parties are needed to make sure that Uganda's citizens have real choices in who governs them.

(% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" that many political parties are needed)

About 80% of Ugandans are under the age of 30, and a majority of young Ugandans are not part of the formal economy and are in many cases frustrated with the direction the country is taking (Akumu, 2020; Athumani & Bearak, 2021). An important question, therefore, is whether even those who are frustrated with the current situation want to find solutions within the multiparty system.

Comparing support for multiparty competition in 2019 among several groups in Uganda, we see that younger citizens, more educated citizens, and those who support opposition parties are more supportive of multiparty competition (Figure 6). Moreover, as expected, “committed democrats” (respondents who prefer democracy over any other form of government and consistently reject authoritarian rule) are far more likely to support this important feature of democracy.

Taken together, these findings suggest two important things. First, most Ugandans are committed to multiparty competition. Second, even among those for whom the system does not seem to yield the desired economic and political benefits – the less educated, the poor, and opposition supporters – a majority remain committed to multiparty competition.

Figure 6: Many political parties needed | Uganda | 2019

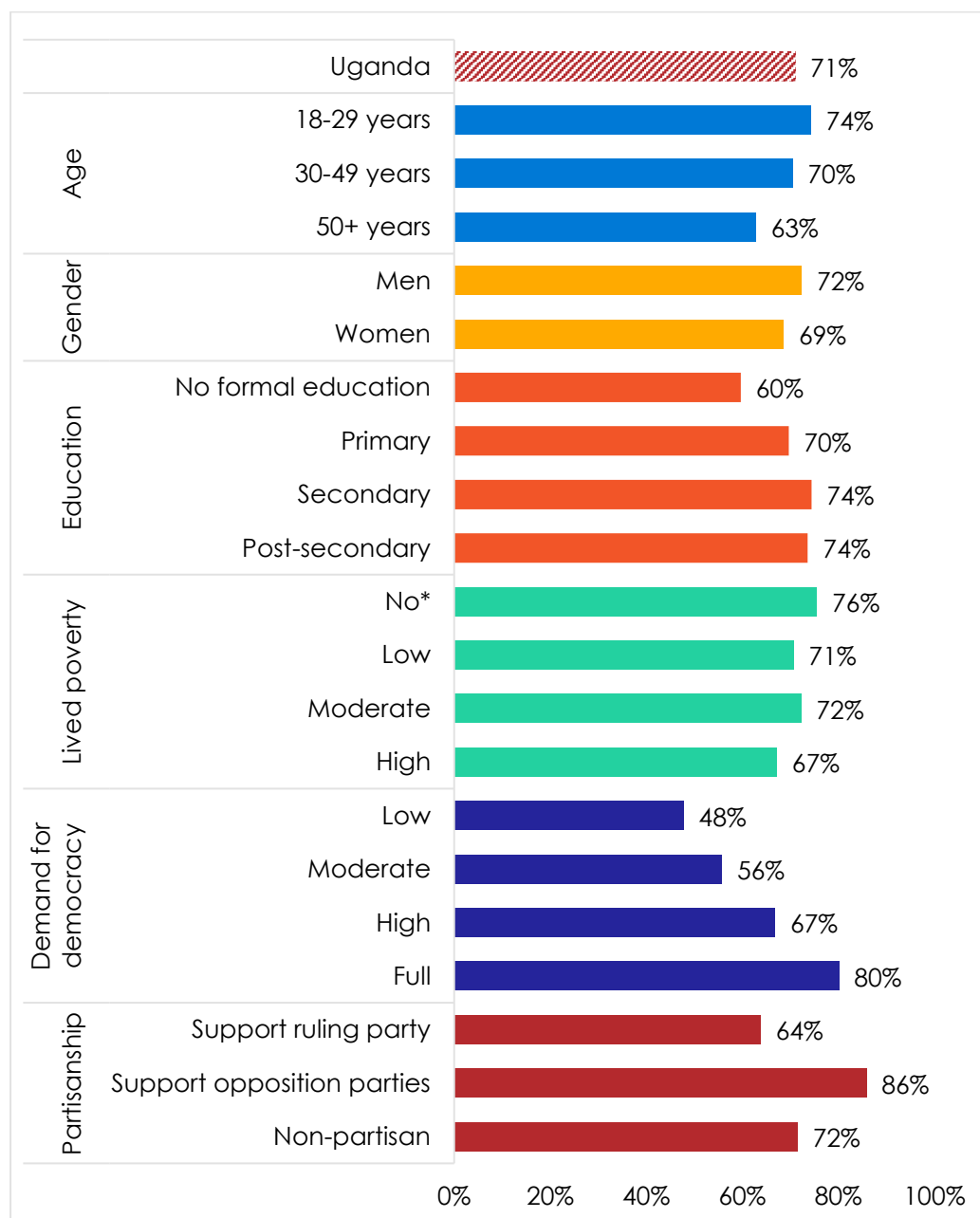


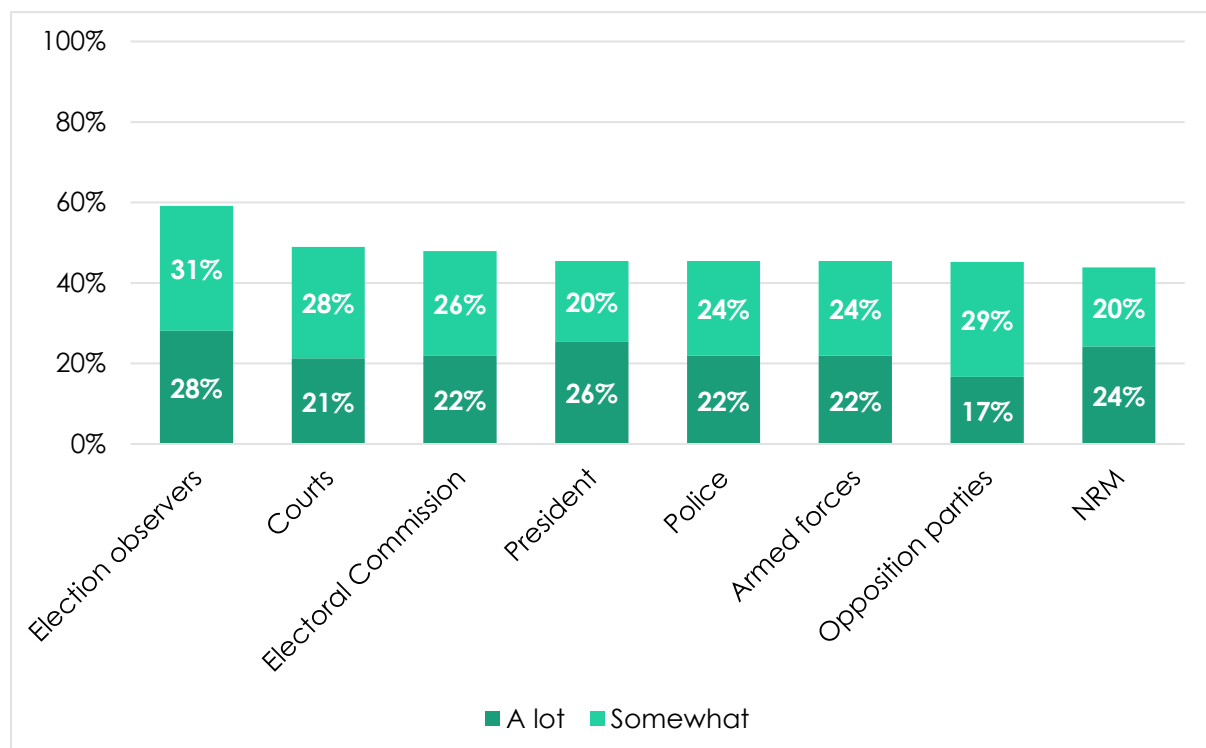
Figure shows % who “agree” or “agree very strongly” that many political parties are needed.
 * N=45 for the “No lived poverty” category, resulting in a high margin of error. For a description of the demand for democracy index, please see the note below Figure 3.

Trust in electoral institutions and political parties

Popular confidence in the conduct of elections is important for the consolidation of democracies (Birch, 2008; Kerr, 2013). While Uganda's Electoral Commission is the only institution that is directly mandated to run an election, other relevant actors such as political parties, courts, police, and election observers can all influence electoral processes as well as citizens' perceptions of the quality of elections. How confident are Ugandans that all the actors involved will ensure free and fair elections?

The Afrobarometer pre-election survey in December 2020-January 2021 found that with regard to most of these actors, fewer than half of Ugandans trusted them to ensure that the 2021 election would be free and fair (Figure 7). The only exception was election observers, who were trusted by 59% of respondents. This gap between demand for competitive elections and citizens' expectations regarding the performance of the key actors involved is substantial (more than 25 percentage points on average) and requires further exploration.

Figure 7: Trust institution to ensure free and fair election in 2021 | Uganda | 2021

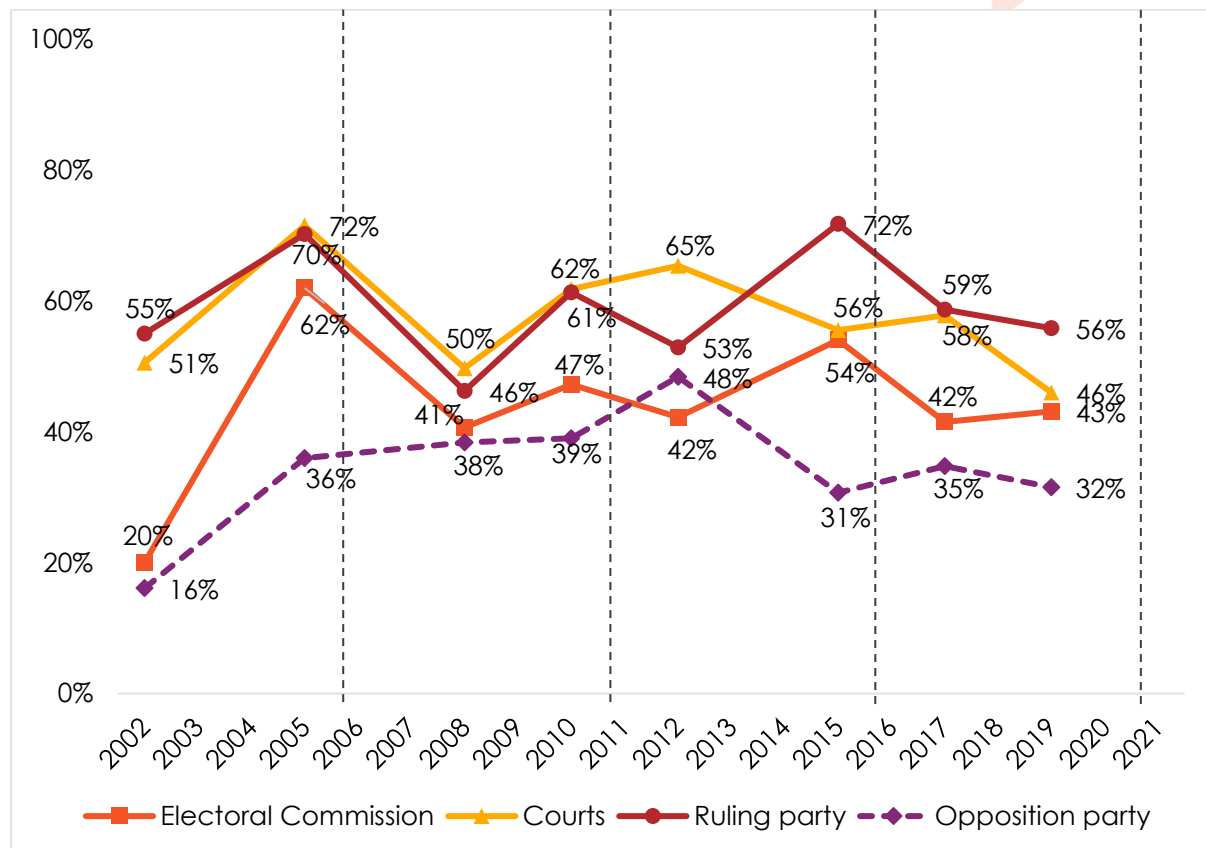


Respondents were asked: With respect to the upcoming 2021 general elections, how much do you trust each of the following institutions to do their best to ensure that the elections are free, fair, credible, and peaceful?

To begin with, it is worth tracing citizens' trust in some of the key institutions over time. Using the broader question of "How much do you trust [institution]" (asked in most Afrobarometer surveys, but not in the 2021 survey), it is possible to trace public confidence in the EC, the courts, the NRM, and opposition parties since 2002 (Figure 8). From 2002 to 2019, the only time a clear majority of Ugandans trusted the EC and the courts was in 2005 – when full multiparty competition was formally reintroduced. Public confidence in the two institutions has been substantially lower since then, however. While citizens' trust in the courts recovered in 2010 and 2011 after a sharp decline between 2005 and 2008, it has been on a downward trend since then. In comparison, trust in the EC has remained consistently low since 2008, rising above 50% only briefly in 2015. In 2019, for the first time, fewer than half of Ugandans expressed trust in both the EC (43%) and the courts (46%).

While public confidence in political parties has oscillated over time as well, the patterns are somewhat different. One in three Ugandans (32%) trusted opposition parties in 2019, up from just half that two decades ago (16% in 2002). However, public confidence has decreased somewhat from its peak in 2011 (48%). In comparison, the NRM has consistently had the trust of at least half of Ugandans over the same time period, with the exception of 2008, illustrating the former liberation movement's enduring popularity.

Figure 8: Trust in Electoral Commission, courts, and parties | Uganda | 2002-2019

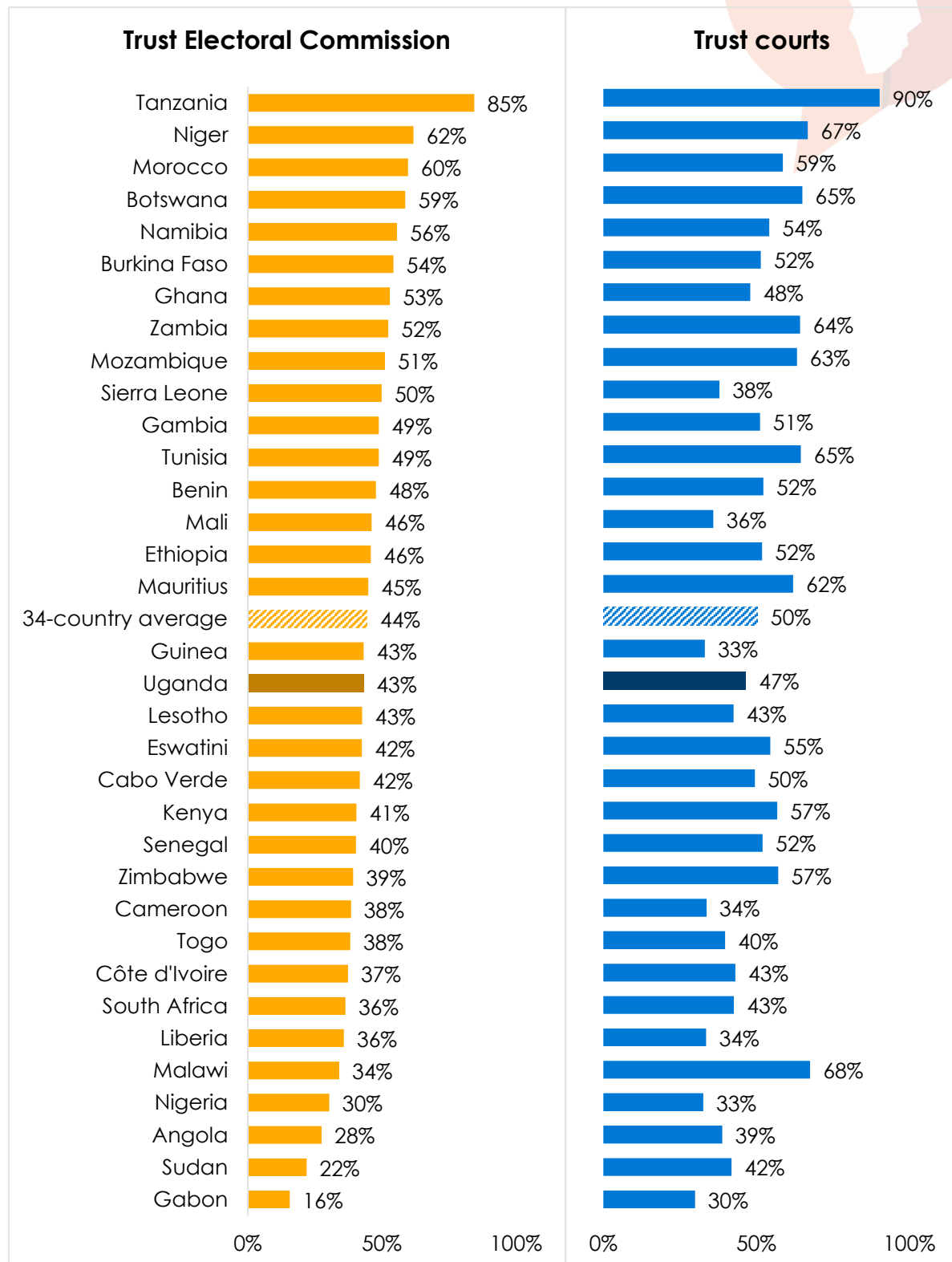


Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

These trends highlight a central problem in the country's political system. The independent state organs that are tasked with administering elections – and, if necessary, adjudicating contested outcomes – lack the necessary legitimizing public support. By way of comparison, Uganda's EC and courts enjoyed less public support than their counterparts in autocratic Zimbabwe prior to that country's 2018 election (Krönke, 2018). Moreover, when comparing Uganda against the other 33 countries surveyed in Afrobarometer Round 8, the country hovers around the average, while the more democratic countries in this sample (e.g. Botswana, Ghana, Malawi, and Namibia) all have at least one institution in which a majority of citizens have confidence (Figure 9).³

³ For more information on how democratic African countries are, please see [Freedom House](#) and [Varieties of Democracy](#). For a comparison of expert and citizen evaluations of the state of democracy in Africa, please see Mattes (2019).

Figure 9: Trust the Electoral Commission and courts of law somewhat/a lot
 | 34 countries | 2019/2021



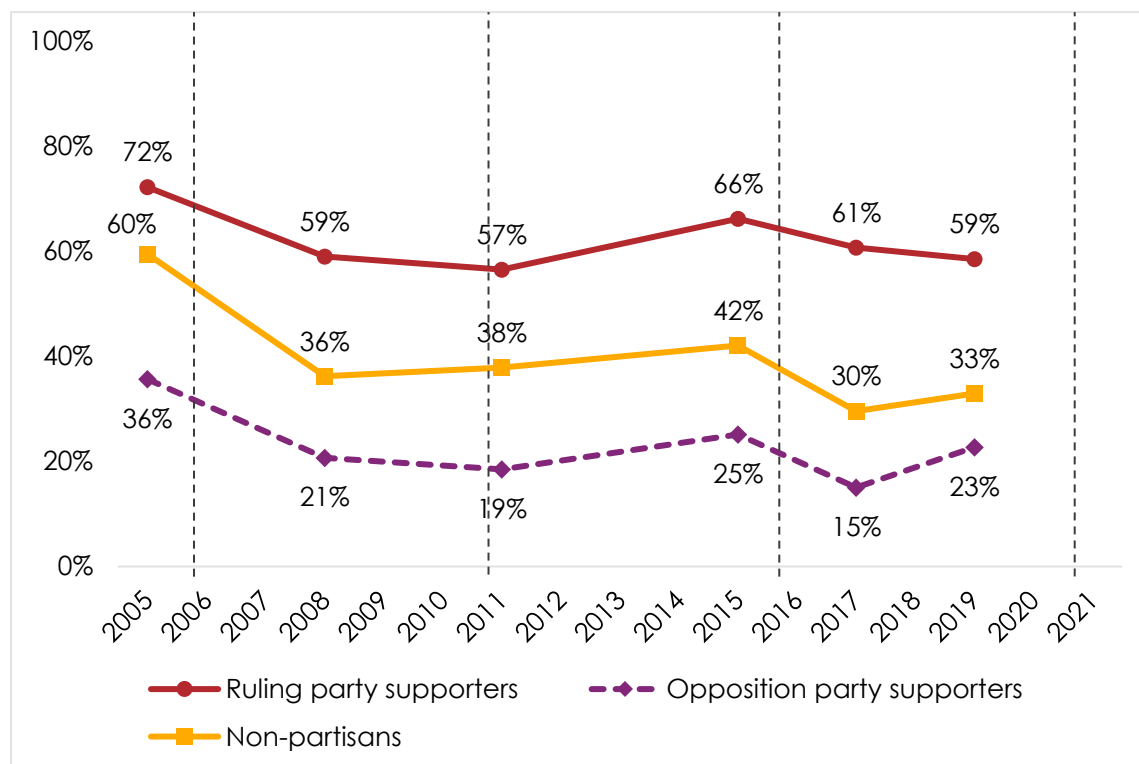
Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

Note: Data displayed for Uganda is from Afrobarometer Round 8 (2019).

Trust in the Electoral Commission and perceptions of partisan bias

Hallmarks of a well-functioning electoral commission are that it remains non-partisan in its administration of all its tasks and that it is perceived as such by citizens. But when we analyze citizens' views of Uganda's EC by partisan identification, we see substantial and consistent gaps between NRM and opposition party supporters as well as non-partisans (Figure 10). Even when the EC was most trusted (62% overall in 2005, Figure 8 above), only about one-third (36%) of opposition supporters trusted it, compared to 60% of non-partisans and 72% of NRM supporters. Confidence in the commission among opposition supporters has remained at around 20% since 2008. The trust gap between supporters of the ruling and opposition parties has remained fairly consistent over time, though it narrowed somewhat (to 36 percentage points) in 2019. And the fact that since 2008, trust among non-partisans has never exceeded 42%, and now stands at just 33%, is a real reason for concern.

Figure 10: Trust in the Electoral Commission | by political party identification
| Uganda | 2005-2019



Respondents were asked:

How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Electoral Commission? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")
Do you feel close to any particular political party? (If yes:) Which party is that?

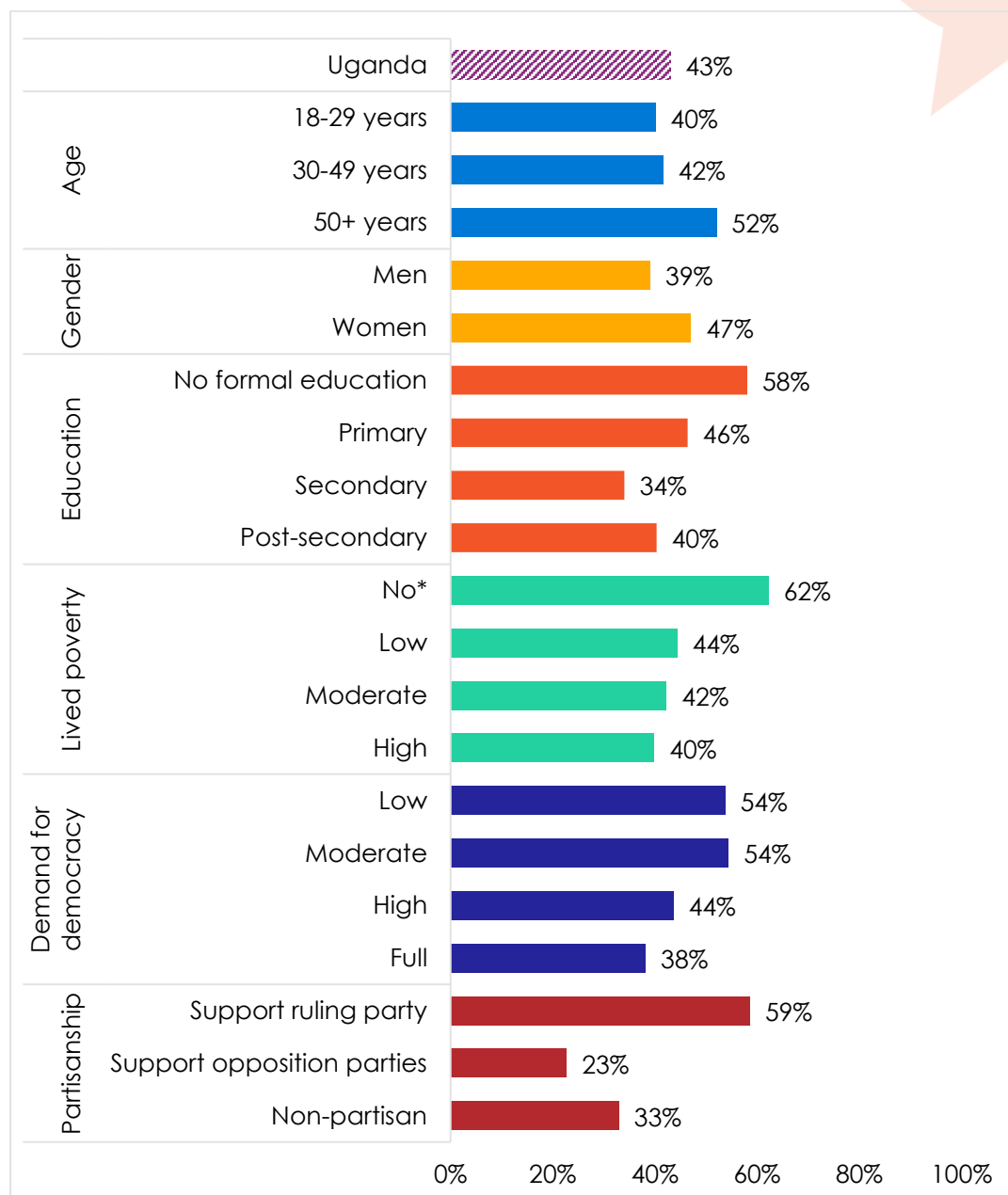
A breakdown of the 2019 survey results reinforces the severity of the partisan problem (Figure 11). Respondents' partisan identification appears to shape their trust in the EC (36 percentage points difference between opposition and ruling party supporters) more than their age, gender, education, or commitment to democracy.⁴ To better understand when and why the EC is perceived differently by different partisan groups, we can take advantage

⁴ We also see a substantial difference between Ugandans who do not experience basic material deprivation and those who do, but given the larger margin of error for the well-off group (because of the low number of respondents), we cannot draw strong conclusions from this result.

of the 2021 pre-election survey, which asked respondents to evaluate several specific aspects of the commission's work.



Figure 11: Trust in the Electoral Commission | by demographic group | Uganda | 2019

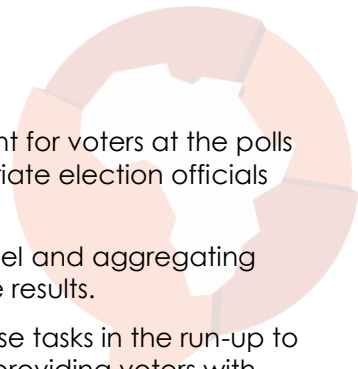


Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The Electoral Commission? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

* N=45 for the "No lived poverty" category, resulting in a high margin of error. For a description of the demand for democracy index, please see note below Figure 3.

The Electoral Commission and the 2021 election

The tasks of the Electoral Commission of Uganda across the electoral cycle can be categorized into three time periods. Prior to Election Day, the EC is responsible for educating and registering potential voters. It is also tasked with creating a level playing field for all candidates and parties so they can engage with voters freely.

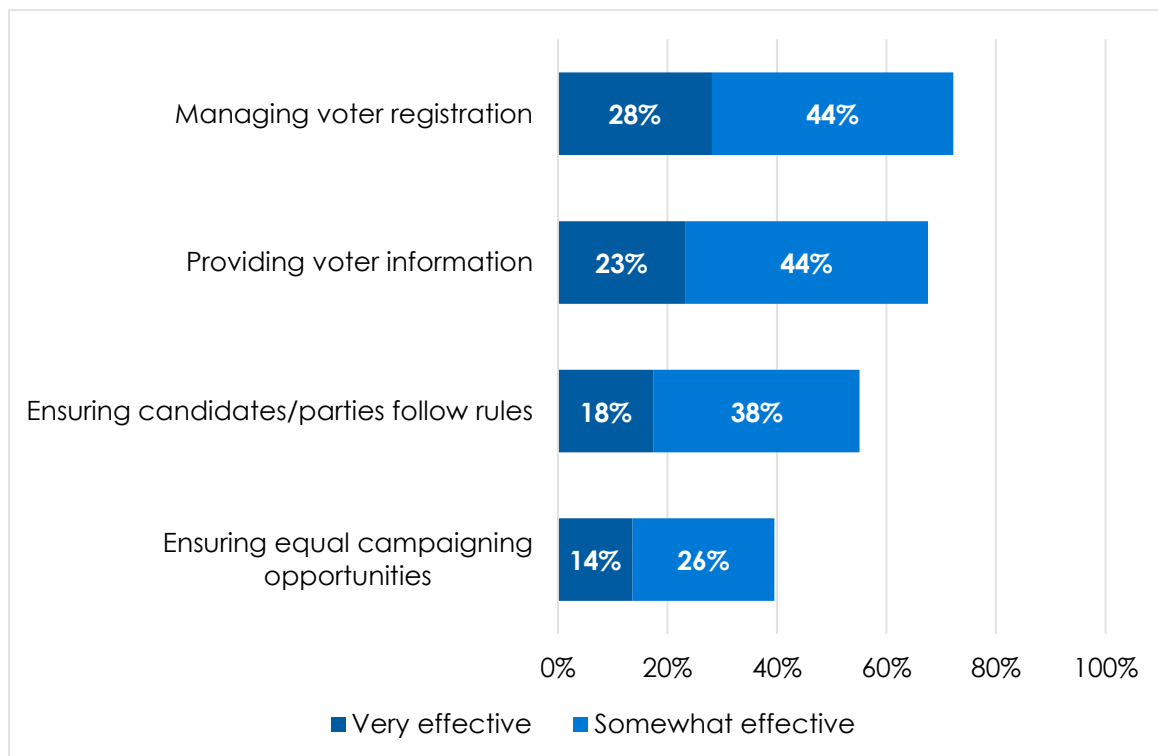


On Election Day, the commission needs to create a safe environment for voters at the polls and ensure that enough ballots are available and that only appropriate election officials have access to the ballots.

After the election, the EC is tasked with tallying votes at the local level and aggregating results country-wide in a transparent manner before announcing the results.

How did Ugandans evaluate the EC's ability to execute each of these tasks in the run-up to the 2021 elections? When asked how effective the EC had been in providing voters with necessary information (e.g. about how to register and when, where, and how to vote) and in managing voter registration, roughly seven out of 10 Ugandans described it as "somewhat" or "very" effective (Figure 12). In contrast to these administrative tasks, however, the EC's responsibility to act as an independent referee between parties and candidates was evaluated less favourably. Only 56% of Ugandans said the EC was effectively ensuring that all candidates and parties observed the rules and regulations regarding campaigning, and only 40% said it was adequately ensuring that all candidates and parties had an equal opportunity to meet with their supporters and conduct their campaigns. In the eyes of a clear majority of Ugandans, the EC was able to fulfill its technical and advocacy role of informing and registering potential voters. However, the country was decidedly more divided when evaluating its role as referee among political parties and candidates.

Figure 12: Evaluations of the Electoral Commission's pre-election performance
| Uganda | 2021



Respondents were asked: How effective do you think the Electoral Commission of Uganda has been in fulfilling each of the following responsibilities in preparation for the 2021 general election:

Managing the voter-registration process?

Providing voters with necessary information, for example about how to register, and when, where, and how to vote?

Ensuring that all candidates and parties observe rules and regulations regarding campaigning?

Ensuring that all candidates and parties have equal opportunity to meet with their supporters and conduct their campaigns?

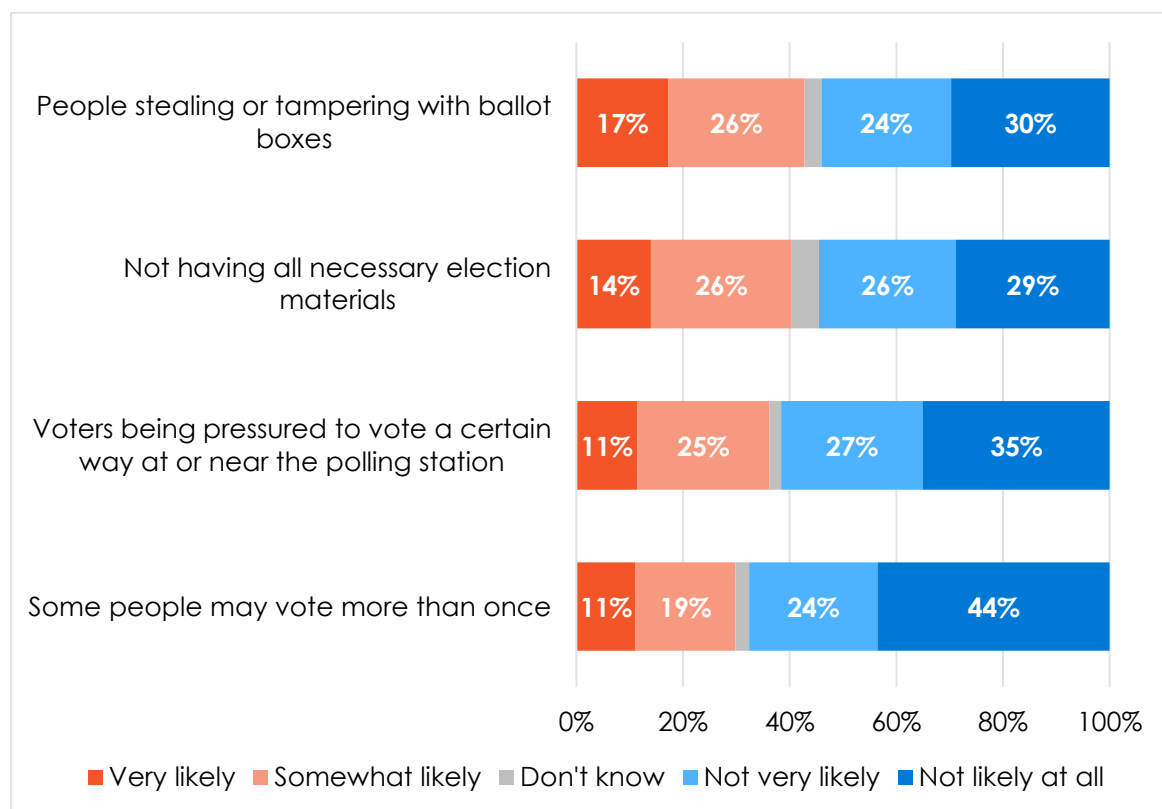
Afrobarometer also asked citizens about their expectations of how the commission would perform in executing its basic administrative functions and curbing unlawful behaviours on

Election Day and in the days thereafter. While four in 10 respondents saw it as likely that people would steal or tamper with ballot boxes (43%) and that there would be insufficient election materials at their polling station (40%), fewer respondents (30%) expected that the EC would have trouble restricting repeat voting (Figure 13). Still, this means that a large proportion of Ugandans were skeptical of the EC's ability to execute crucial functions on Election Day.

The picture was even grimmer with regard to tallying votes (Figure 14). Almost half (49%) of respondents considered it likely that not all votes would be accurately counted or fairly reflected in the results, and 63% feared there could be violence due to disagreements over the results. Taken together, these results point to substantive problems in the vote-counting process.

To get a better understanding of where citizens suspect manipulation of the vote count, it is useful to consider the different levels at which votes are counted and aggregated. As can be seen in Figure 15, an overwhelming majority (78%) of Ugandans expected the vote count at the local polling-station level to be "fairly accurate" or "very accurate." In contrast, only 34% said the same about vote counting at the national tally center (with a further 16% indicating they "don't know"). Future efforts to improve the transparency of the electoral system must devote special attention to this lack of confidence in national (as opposed to community-level) processes.

Figure 13: Expected problems in Election Day performance | Uganda | 2021



Respondents were asked: How likely do you think it is that the following things could happen at your polling station on Election Day, or haven't you heard enough to say:

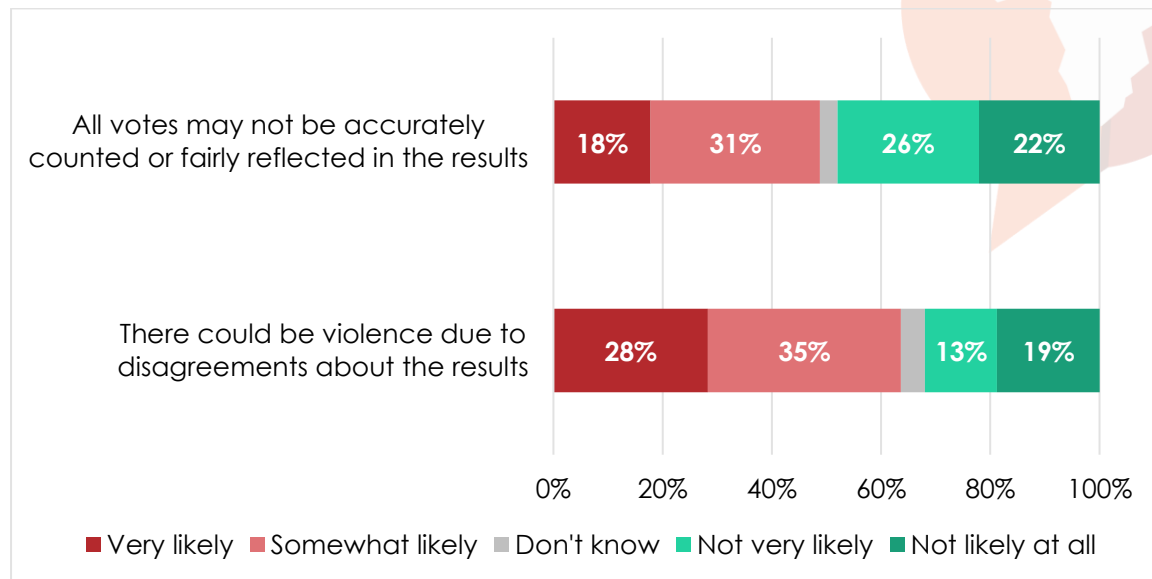
Not having all necessary election materials?

People stealing or tampering with ballot boxes?

Voters being pressured to vote a certain way at or near the polling station?

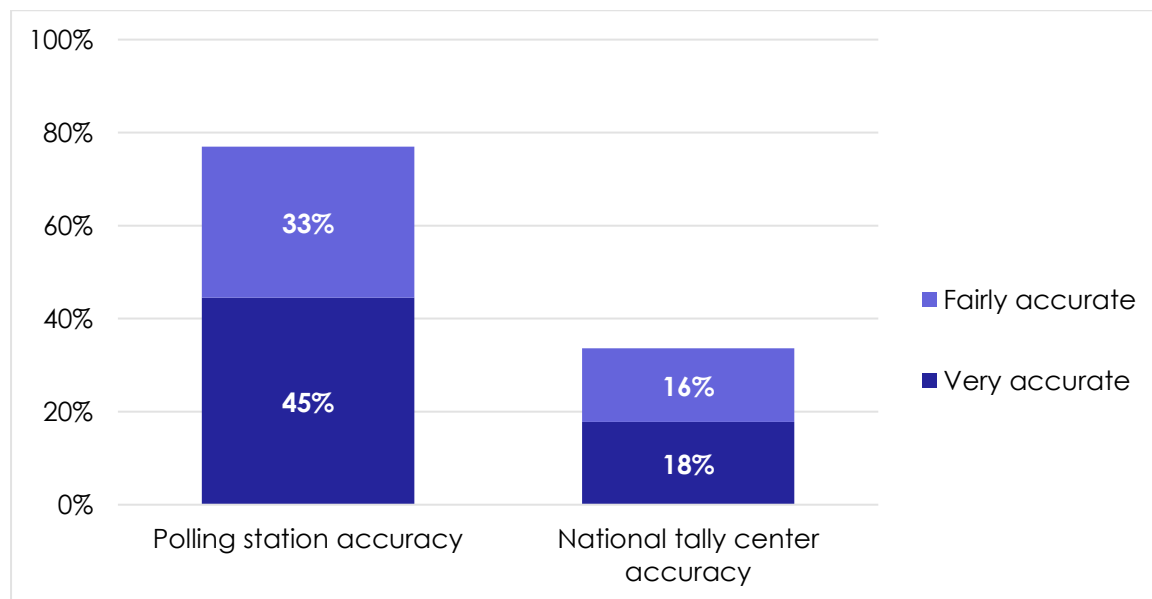
Some people may vote more than once?

Figure 14: Expected problems in post-Election Day performance | Uganda | 2021



Respondents were asked: How likely do you think it is that the following things could happen at your polling station on Election Day, or haven't you heard enough to say:
 All votes may not be accurately counted or fairly reflected in the results?
 There could be violence due to disagreements about the results?

Figure 15: Expected accuracy of 2021 election results | Uganda | 2021



Respondents were asked: How accurate or inaccurate do you expect the following counting and tallying of election results in the 2021 general elections to be at:
 Your own polling station
 The national tally center in Kampala

It is not surprising to see large differences between ruling and opposition party supporters' expectations of the EC's ability to effectively perform these tasks across each of the three phases of the election cycle (Table 1 and Table 2). What is instructive, however, is that the gaps between these groups are smaller for the more technical tasks (e.g. a 15-percentage-point gap for managing voter registration) than for the more challenging assignments of ensuring equal campaign opportunities (32 points) or the accurate counting of all votes (30 points). The gaps between NRM supporters and non-partisans are smaller and more consistent across tasks (9-16 percentage points). These findings, too, speak to the urgent

need to bolster the commission's reputation as a non-partisan institution – not only by improving its processes, but also by communicating any future improvements effectively.



Table 1: Electoral Commission's pre-election performance | by political party identification | Uganda | 2021

	Party identification	Somewhat/Very effective	Difference (NRM minus alternative)
Managing voter registration	NRM	79%	-
	Non-partisan	68%	-11%
	Opposition	64%	-15%
Ensuring equal campaigning opportunities	NRM	52%	-
	Non-partisan	36%	-16%
	Opposition	20%	-32%

Table 2: Electoral Commission's expected Election Day and post-election performance | by political party identification | Uganda | 2021

	Party identification	Somewhat/Very likely	Difference (NRM minus alternative)
People stealing or tampering with ballot boxes	NRM	35%	-
	Non-partisan	43%	9%
	Opposition	59%	24%
There could be violence due to disagreements about the results	NRM	53%	-
	Non-partisan	68%	15%
	Opposition	80%	28%
All votes may not be accurately counted or fairly reflected in the results	NRM	37%	-
	Non-partisan	53%	15%
	Opposition	67%	30%

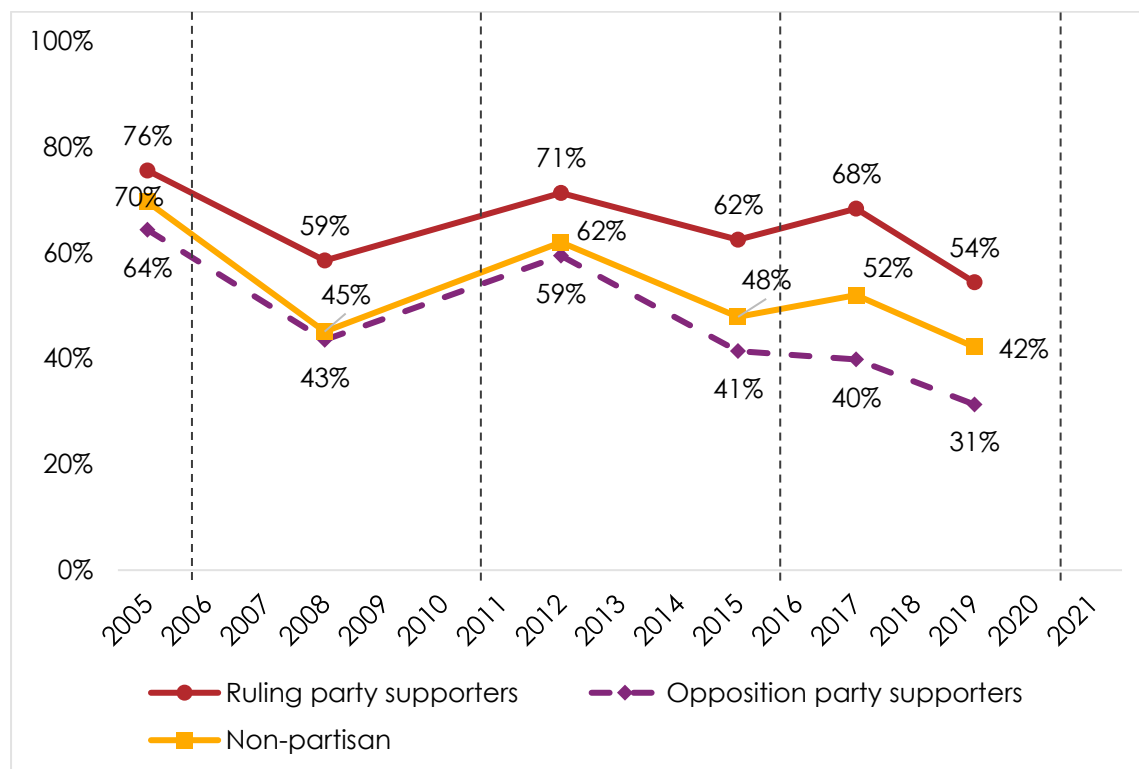
While the 2021 election was eventually deemed largely free and fair by the EAC and domestic election observers, the large share of Ugandans who anticipated poor performance of the EC on Election Day and immediately thereafter (e.g. during the vote count at the national level) can become problematic in an environment of uncertainty. If left unaddressed, this high level of citizen skepticism vis-à-vis the EC can become dangerous when combined with close electoral margins and a government-initiated shutdown of the Internet – the very situation in which public confidence in an independent arbiter of the process is most valuable. While Museveni's comfortable lead in the 2021 election limited pressure on the EC and the courts to manage the post-election environment, a future election with closer margins might pose a substantially higher threat to the legitimacy of the electoral process.

The courts

Although Bobi Wine ultimately withdrew his court challenge of the 2021 election results and the courts were not asked to hand down a judgment on any alleged election irregularities, this might change in future elections. Thus, it is worth taking a more in-depth look at Ugandans' views of the courts.

As in their evaluations of the EC, citizens were less confident in the courts in 2019 compared to 2005. A further similarity is that this decline is evident across partisan lines (Figure 16). While trust in the institution decreased by about 30 percentage points for both non-partisans and opposition party supporters between 2005 and 2019, it also dropped by 22 percentage points for NRM supporters.

Figure 16: Trust in the courts | by political party identification | Uganda | 2019



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

In 2019, women, less educated citizens, wealthier citizens, rural residents, and ruling party supporters expressed more trust in the courts than their counterparts (Figure 17). This pattern broadly mirrors that of Ugandans' trust in the Electoral Commission.

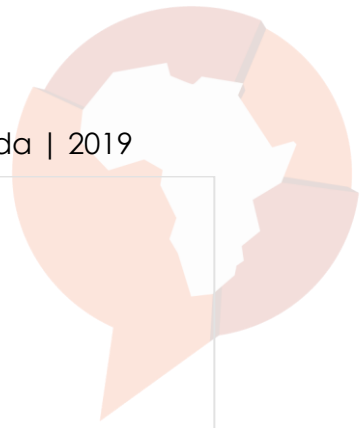
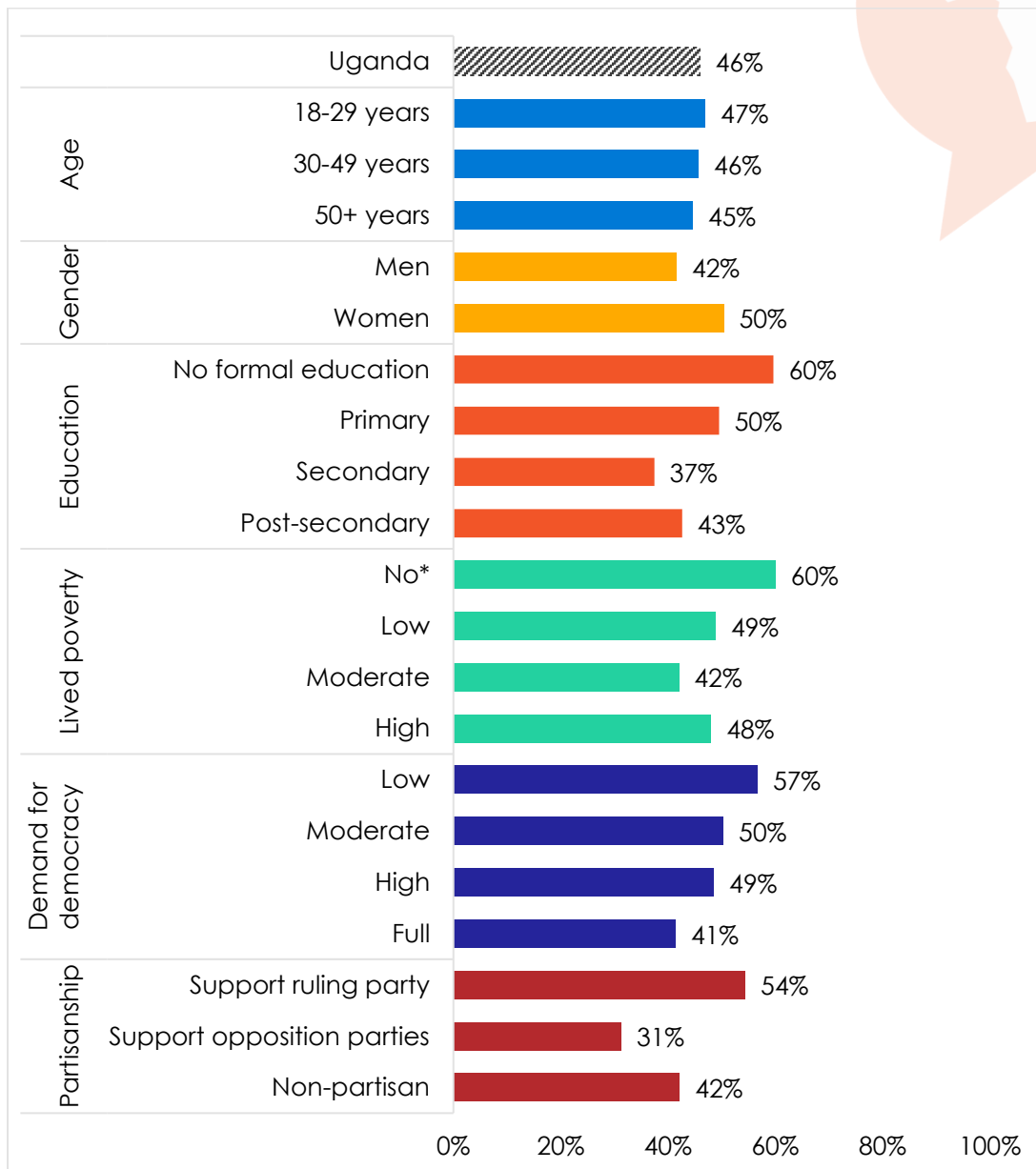


Figure 17: Trust in the courts | by demographic group | Uganda | 2019



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

* N=45 for the "No lived poverty" category, resulting in a high margin of error. For a description of the demand for democracy index, please see note below Figure 3.

Quality of elections

How have Ugandans viewed the quality of their elections over time? Following elections in 2006, 2011, and 2016, Afrobarometer asked respondents the following question: "On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in [year]?" Response options included "Not free and fair," "free and fair with major problems," "free and fair with minor problems," and "completely free and fair." In the 2021 pre-election survey, respondents were asked to predict the quality of the upcoming election, with the same response options.

As shown in Figure 18, perceived election quality peaked for the election of 2011; when asked in 2012, nearly two-thirds (64%) of citizens said it did not have major problems. Nearly as many (60%) rated the 2016 election positively in 2017. But when looking ahead to assess

the prospects of having a free and fair election in 2021, only a minority (43%) of Ugandans were optimistic. Declining perceptions of election quality match the trends in trust in key institutions described above.

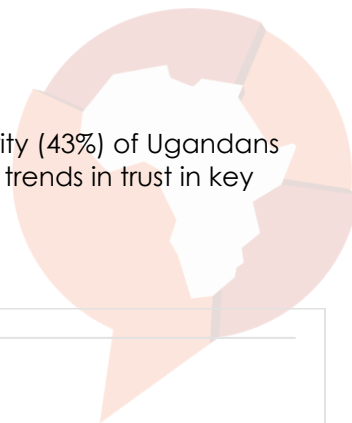
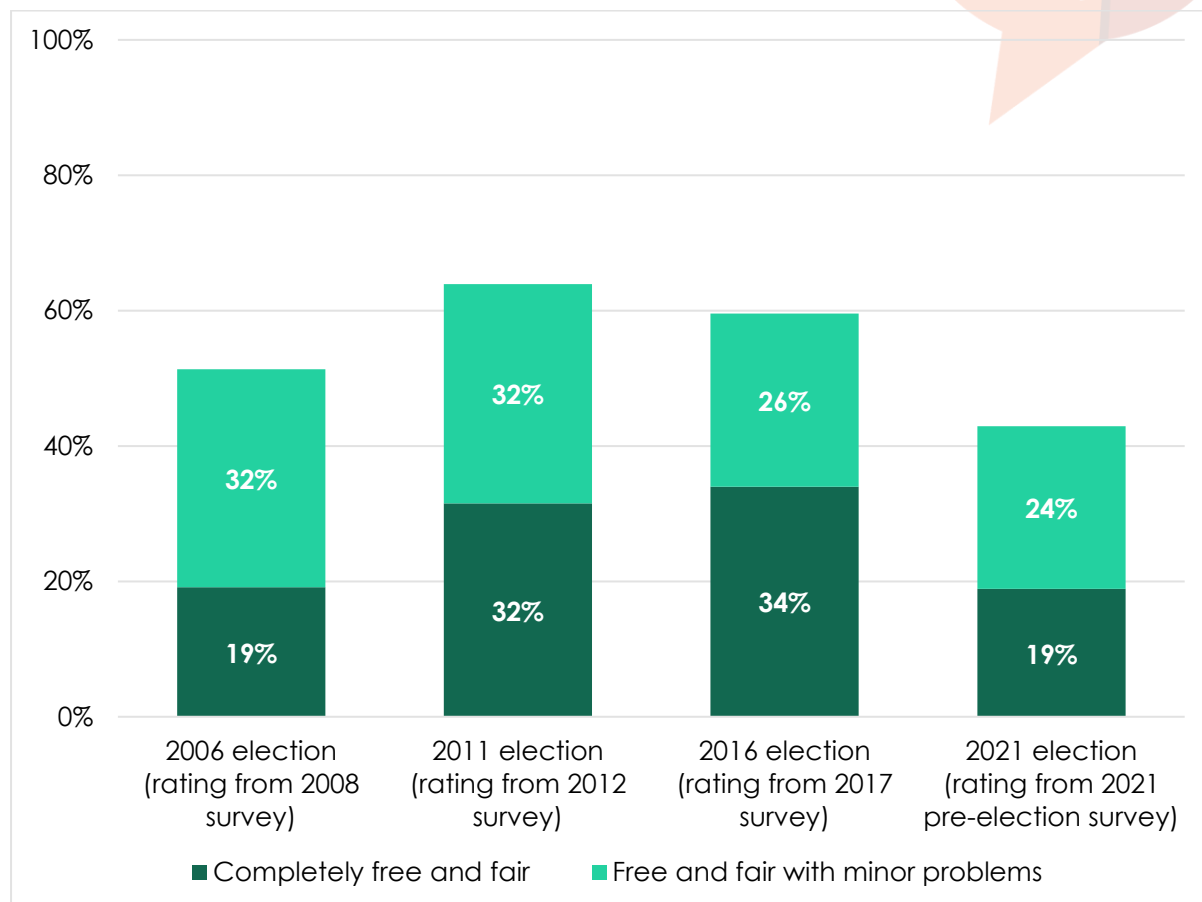


Figure 18: Quality of national election | Uganda | 2008-2021



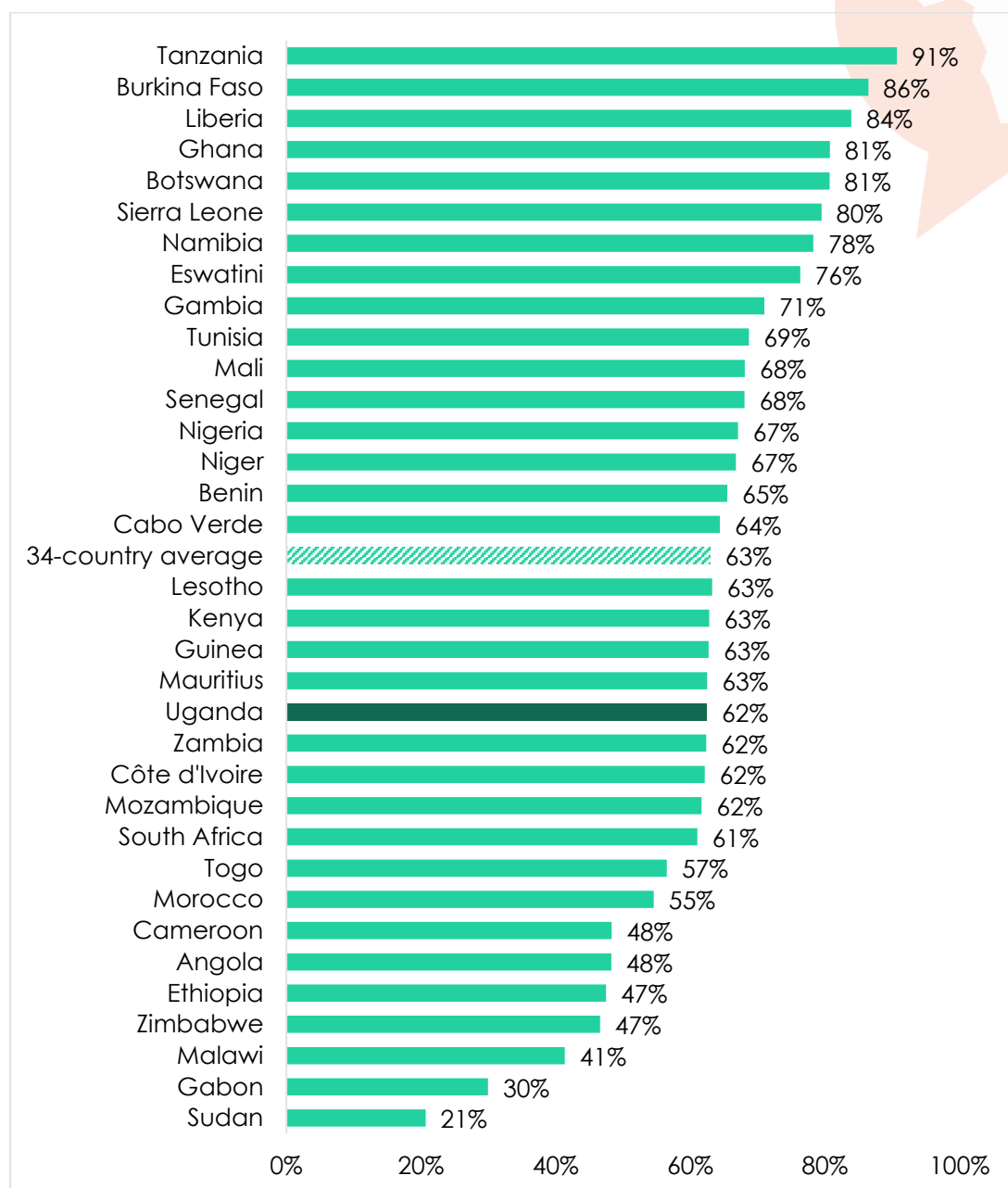
In 2006, 2011, and 2016, respondents were asked: *On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in [year]?*

In the 2021 pre-election survey, respondents were asked: *On the whole, how free and fair do you expect the forthcoming 2021 general elections to be?*

When asked in the 2019 survey about the 2016 election, only 62% of Ugandans remembered it as mostly or completely free and fair, about average among the 34 countries surveyed in 2019/2021 (63%) but far below more democratic countries such as Ghana (81%), Botswana (81%), and Namibia (78%) and even falling behind less democratic countries such as Mali (68%) and Nigeria (67%) (Figure 19). Among countries in East Africa, Uganda trails Tanzania, where almost everyone (91%) considered the 2020 election largely free and fair,⁵ while matching Kenyans' assessments of their 2017 election (63%). Ethiopia's 2015 election (47%) and Sudan's 2015 election (21%) score lowest in the region.

⁵ This high level of public confidence in Tanzania's electoral process is somewhat surprising, however, given the exclusion of international observers and criticism from several stakeholders, including Tanzania Election Watch (Minde, Kwayu, & Deus, 2021; Tanzania Election Watch, 2021).

Figure 19: Quality of most recent national election | 34 countries | 2019/2021



Respondents were asked: *On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in [year]? (% who say "free and fair with minor problems" or "completely free and fair")*

Looking ahead in the months prior to the 2021 election, Ugandans in different socio-demographic groups had very different expectations of the quality of the election (Figure 20). Older citizens, less educated citizens, rural residents, and those who were materially better off were more optimistic about the quality of the upcoming election than their peers. Though we can see a clear generational gap between less-optimistic youth and their elders, the differences are even wider across the dimensions of education, commitment to democracy, and partisanship.

How did democrats evaluate the prospects of a free and fair 2021 election? As mentioned earlier, in the weeks leading up to the pre-election survey (conducted in December 2020 and January 2021), more than 50 people were killed in mid-November as security forces broke up opposition party gatherings. Government actions like this, and other less severe

forms of intimidation, seem likely to affect opposition supporters the most, and indeed only 16% of them expected a free and fair election. But it also seems plausible that citizens committed to democracy would be less optimistic about the quality of the 2021 election. As can be seen in Figure 20, among Ugandans who support democracy and reject authoritarian alternatives, the expected quality of the elections was substantially lower (36%) than among their peers (45%-64%).

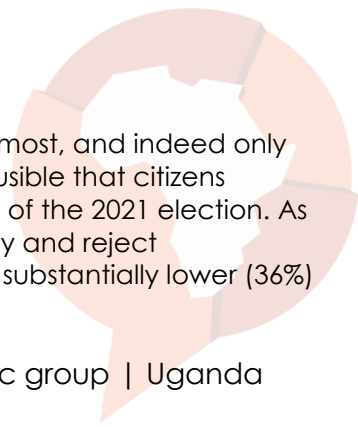
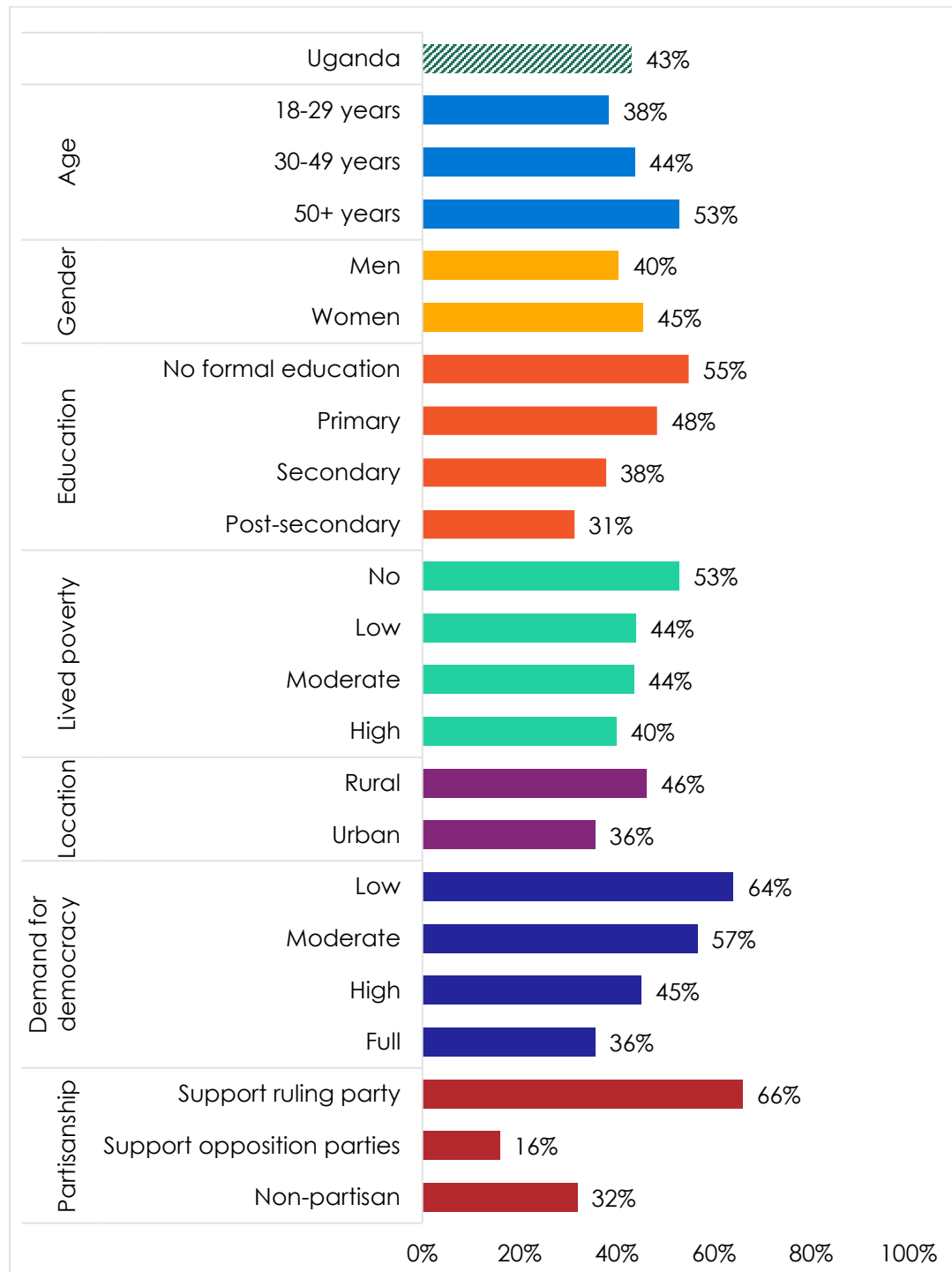


Figure 20: Expected quality of 2021 election | by demographic group | Uganda | 2021



Respondents were asked: On the whole, how free and fair do you expect the forthcoming 2021 general elections to be? (% who said "completely free and fair" or "free and fair with minor problems") For a description of the demand for democracy index, please see note below Figure 3.



Electoral institutions and quality of elections

As we have seen, Ugandans' support for elections has remained remarkably high over the past two decades even though Museveni is the only president that a majority of citizens have known. Another important step toward a more democratic Uganda is the increase in support for multipartyism since 2011 to at least seven out of 10 citizens.

Yet we have also seen that Ugandans have little trust in their Electoral Commission and continue to lose trust in the courts – two key electoral institutions. In 2019, fewer than half of Ugandans had confidence in the EC and the courts, the lowest levels in a decade. But citizens differ in their evaluations of these electoral institutions along several dimensions. This section aims to assess the relative importance of these factors.

Using the questions from our analysis above as well as several control variables, we construct a regression model that will allow us to understand which factors are related to our dependent variables – trust in the EC and courts, as well as anticipated quality of election – and to explore the strength of these relationships. We use the 2021 pre-election survey because it includes a detailed assessment of actual and expected EC performance.

Electoral Commission performance indices: We combine the questions outlined above into three indices separating the EC's work according to the time in the election cycle – pre-Election Day, Election Day, and post-Election Day. To keep the scoring of the indices consistent with the descriptive accounts above, a higher score on the pre-election index reflects better performance, while higher scores on the Election Day and post-Election Day indices reflect poorer (expected) performance.

Media consumption and fear of intimidation and violence: Previous research has shown that in addition to the performance of election-related institutions, several other factors are related to citizens' perceptions of election quality (Kerr, 2013). Therefore, in our last model (Table 4, Model 4), we include several variables to account for alternative explanations. First, citizens are likely to rate the quality of elections lower if they fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence during the campaign period (which is different from the expectation of post-election violence included in the post-election index). Second, citizens with greater media exposure might be politically more informed, and thus more critical of election quality (Kerr, 2013). Media exposure is proxied by how often respondents get news via radio and TV, still the two most prominent sources of news for Ugandans (Kakumba & Sanny, 2021).

Results

The results of the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis are reported separately for the two types of dependent variables (trust in institutions and anticipated election quality). For ease of interpretation, each model includes the standardized beta coefficients, which allow for a comparison of the relative weight of the independent variables within each model.

First, we focus on whether Ugandans trust the EC and the courts to do their best to ensure that elections are free, fair, credible, and peaceful (Table 3, Model 1 and Model 2). In a second set of regressions, we estimate the anticipated quality of elections, first using the same predictors (Table 4, Model 3) and then including citizens' expected performance of the EC as independent variables (Table 4, Model 4).

The results in Table 3 build on several of the descriptive findings from previous sections by parsing out the independent effects of each variable on the level of confidence in the EC and the courts to ensure high-quality elections. The findings in models 1 and 2 confirm that rural residents, less educated Ugandans, and those not committed to democracy were more likely to express trust in the EC and the courts. By contrast, age and gender are weaker predictors of respondents' views on these matters. As expected, opposition party supporters and non-partisans were significantly less likely to trust these key institutions.

Table 3: Trust in institutions and expectation of quality of upcoming election

| OLS regression | Uganda | 2021

	Trust in EC to ensure free and fair election		Trust in courts to ensure free and fair election	
	Model 1		Model 2	
	Unstd. coeff. (std. error)	Std. coeff. beta	Unstd. coeff. (std. error)	Std. coeff. beta
(Constant)	1.909*** (.143)		2.326*** (.149)	
Age	.086** (.029)	.054	.004 (.030)	.003
Gender (ref.=male)	.094* (.038)	.043	.018 (.040)	.008
Location (ref.=urban)	.221*** (.043)	.093	.107* (.045)	.046
Education	-.110*** (.022)	-.094	-.128*** (.023)	-.110
Lived Poverty Index	-.029 (.024)	-.021	-.034 (.025)	-.025
Opposition supporter (ref.=NRM supporter)	-.982*** (.051)	-.378	-.827*** (.053)	-.323
Non-partisan (ref.=NRM supporter)	-.608*** (.044)	-.257	-.488*** (.046)	-.208
Demand for democracy	-.124*** (.019)	-.112	-.125*** (.020)	-.115
Adj. R ²		.234		.163
Observations		2,605		2,543

Note: Cells report unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors (in brackets). *** $p \leq 0.001$ level; ** $p \leq 0.01$ level; * $p \leq 0.05$. Significant correlations are highlighted in bold.

The Model 3 results in Table 4 reveal very similar patterns. All else being equal, older Ugandans were more likely than their younger peers to expect a high-quality 2021 election. Additionally, more educated respondents and materially less well-off respondents, as well as non-partisans and opposition party supporters, were significantly less likely to expect a credible election. And in line with previous results, Ugandans who are more committed to democracy also had lower expectations regarding the quality of the election.

To further unpack how the EC's performance affects citizens' perceptions of election quality, Model 4 includes the three EC performance indices as well as the additional control variables for media exposure and fear of political intimidation and violence. An important take-away message from this more comprehensive model is that while respondents' partisan identification plays a significant role in expectations of election quality, the EC's handling of its various tasks prior to the election, as well as expectations of its performance on and after Election Day, are almost as important when viewed separately, and their combined effect is even greater than that of partisanship. Put differently, the commission's actions matter, even if they are viewed through a partisan lens.

Table 4: Expectation of quality of upcoming election | OLS regression | Uganda
| 2021

	Quality of elections Model 3		Quality of elections Model 4	
	Unstd. coeff. (std. error)	Std. coeff. beta	Unstd. coeff. (std. error)	Std. coeff. beta
(Constant)	3.426*** (.145)		2.809*** (.197)	
Age	.067* (.029)	.041	.040 (.030)	.024
Gender (ref.=male)	.012 (.039)	.006	.032 (.040)	.014
Location (ref.=urban)	.026 (.043)	.011	-.025 (.045)	-.010
Education	-.113*** (.023)	-.093	-.071** (.024)	-.058
Lived Poverty Index	-.080*** (.024)	-.057	-.056* (.025)	-.041
Opposition supporter (ref.=NRM supporter)	-1.124*** (.051)	-.425	-.796*** (.055)	-.308
Non-partisan (ref.=NRM supporter)	-.711*** (.045)	-.293	-.513*** (.048)	-.212
Demand for democracy	-.131*** (.020)	-.117	-.111*** (.020)	-.098
EC pre-Election Day index [†]			.307*** (.029)	.198
EC Election Day index [‡]			-.120*** (.033)	-.083
EC Post-Election Day index [‡]			-.159*** (.029)	-.126
Media exposure			-.036 (.019)	-.037
Fear political intimidation or violence			.049** (.016)	.055
Adj. R ²	.249			.335
Observations	2574			2209

Note: Cells report unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors (in brackets). *** $p \leq 0.001$ level; ** $p \leq 0.01$ level; * $p \leq 0.05$. Significant correlations are highlighted in bold. †=A higher score on this index reflects better performance (more effective); ‡= A higher score on this index reflects poorer performance.



Conclusion

Over the past two decades, Ugandans have maintained their commitment to elections as the best means to choose their president, and their preference for multiparty competition has grown substantially. Indeed, their commitment to both is high compared to other countries in the region and reflects a growing demand for democracy (Mattes, 2019).

Despite these positive trends, however, the country also suffers from consistently low public trust in the Electoral Commission since 2008 and has experienced an erosion of trust in the courts since 2011. This negative trend cuts across the partisan divide even though partisanship plays an important role in shaping Ugandans' views of these institutions.

Although international and domestic election observers assessed Uganda's 2021 election as largely free and fair, they noted several problems, including malfunctioning biometric voter-verification machines and delays in the delivery of voting materials. As the results of our statistical analysis suggest, these are not merely inconsequential technical glitches. How citizens assess the EC's pre-election performance is an important factor in whether they expect a high-quality election.

Moreover, while a majority of Ugandans believe that the EC can fulfill its technical and advocacy role of informing and registering potential voters, the country is decidedly more divided – especially by political party identification – when evaluating the commission's performance as referee among political parties and candidates. The EC's perceived failure to act as an effective arbiter during the campaign season and citizens' widespread skepticism about the accuracy of the vote count at the national level are real reasons for concern.

These challenges will increase if the EC has to execute its role in an election with a smaller margin of victory (and thus more pressure) and another Internet blackout, as in the days after the 2021 election. They require substantial changes prior to the next election if the EC wants to live up to its mandate of independence and gain the trust of all Ugandans.

Although the courts were not asked to adjudicate the quality of the most recent election, legal challenges to election results have been routine practice in the past, and given weak public trust in the EC, the courts may well have an important role to play in the future. Thus, declining public trust in the courts represents another risk factor for Ugandans' hopes of choosing their president and elected representatives through free and fair elections.

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Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, non-partisan research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 35 countries is provided by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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