



Popular Attitudes toward Democracy in Nigeria: A Summary of Afrobarometer Indicators, 2000-2008

6 May 2009

Nigeria became one of the first African countries to free itself from colonial rule when it secured independence in 1960. But following its first coup in 1966, the country spent most of the next three decades under a series of military dictatorships, experiencing numerous coups, and relieved by only brief episodes under civilian rule. It was not until 1999 that Nigeria made a euphoric and relatively peaceful transition back to sustained civilian rule with the election of President Olusegun Obasanjo. Nigeria has held two more multiparty elections since, in 2003 and 2007, but the euphoria of 1999 has clearly worn off, as corruption and ethnic and religious tensions have continued to plague the country. After a failed attempt to change the Constitution and run for a third term, President Obasanjo stepped down after a highly contested 2007 poll that international and domestic observers described as deeply flawed. The ruling People's Democratic Party ultimately held on to power under the leadership of Umaru Yar'Adua. In 2008, Nigeria had a Freedom House ranking of "partly free", with a political rights score of 4 and a civil liberties score of 4.

This document provides a summary of popular attitudes regarding the demand for and supply of democracy in Nigeria as revealed over the course of six Afrobarometer surveys conducted between 2000 and 2008 (Jan.-Feb. 2000, N=3603; Aug.-Sep. 2001, N=2210; Oct. 2003, N=2428; Aug.-Dec. 2005, N=2363; Jan.-Feb. 2007, N=2410; May 2008, N=2408). Samples of this size yield a margin of error of +/- 2 percent at a confidence level of 95 percent. The charts that follow capture perceptions of:

- The meaning of democracy;
- The demand for democracy (including individual support for democracy, patience with democracy and rejection of military rule, one-party rule, and one-man rule);
- Support for democratic institutions (including attitudes towards elections, term limits, multi-party rule, and checks on presidential powers); and
- The supply of democracy (including satisfaction with democracy and the perceived extent of democracy, quality of elections and the protection of key freedoms).

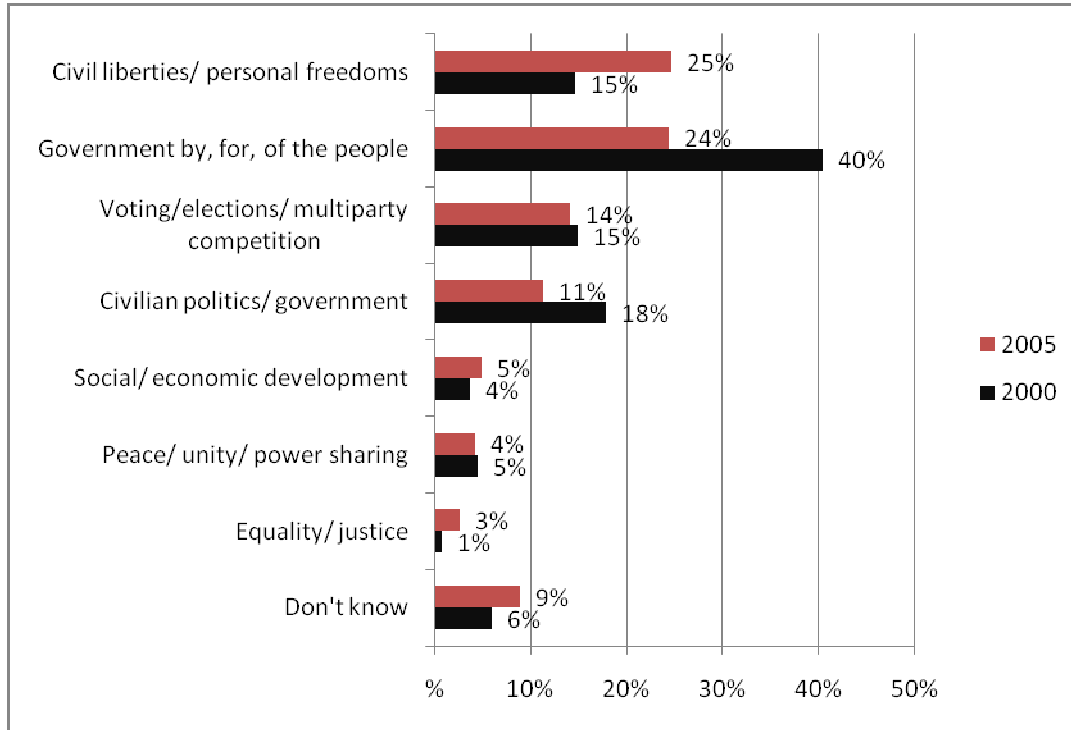
Points of Interest

- After initial euphoria captured in the first 2000 survey, Nigerians came down to earth, with most democratic indicators dropping at least somewhat between the first survey and the 2nd and 3rd.
- Most indicators of demand for democracy experienced a relatively modest initial drop, but have held relatively steady since then (2.1 – 2.4)
- Support for elections as a means of choosing leaders has been dropping relatively steadily (3.1)
- Support for term limits is down between 2003 and 2008 (3.2)
- Support for multiparty competition is climbing, but slowly (3.3)
- Evaluations of the extent of democracy in the country have rebounded somewhat after reaching a low in 2005 (4.1)
- Satisfaction with democracy, however, has not as clearly recovered (4.2)
- Evaluations of election quality collapsed after the 1999 polls (4.3)

MEANING OF DEMOCRACY

1.1 Variable: Meaning of democracy

Question: What if anything does democracy mean to you?



** In 2005 respondents could offer up to three meanings. In 1999, they could offer two. Figures shown are the percentage of all substantive responses offered.*

DEMAND FOR DEMOCRACY

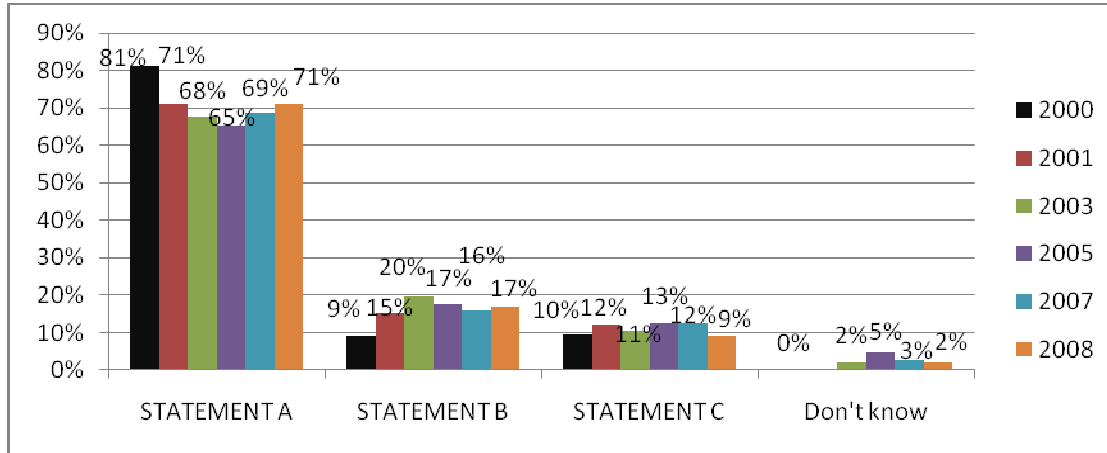
2.1 Variable: Support for democracy

Question: Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?

A: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.

B: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.

C: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.



2.2 Variable: Reject military rule

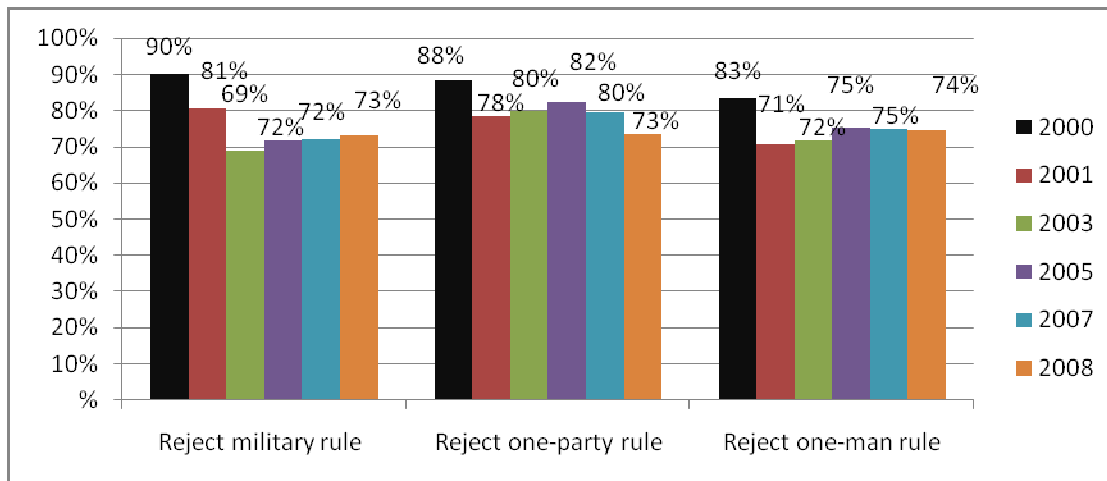
Question: There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives: The army comes in to govern the country?

2.3 Variable: Reject one-party rule

Question: There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives: Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office?

2.4 Variable: Reject one-man rule

Question: There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives: Elections and Parliament/National Assembly are abolished so that the President/Prime Minister can decide everything?



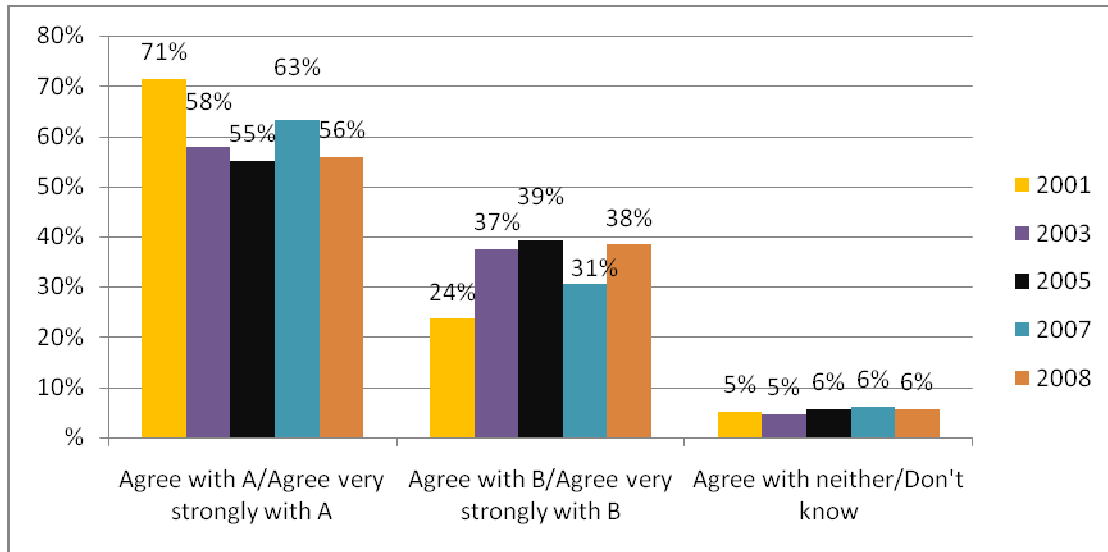
(Percent who disapprove/strongly disapprove of military rule, one-party rule and one-man rule)

2.5 Variable: Patience with democracy

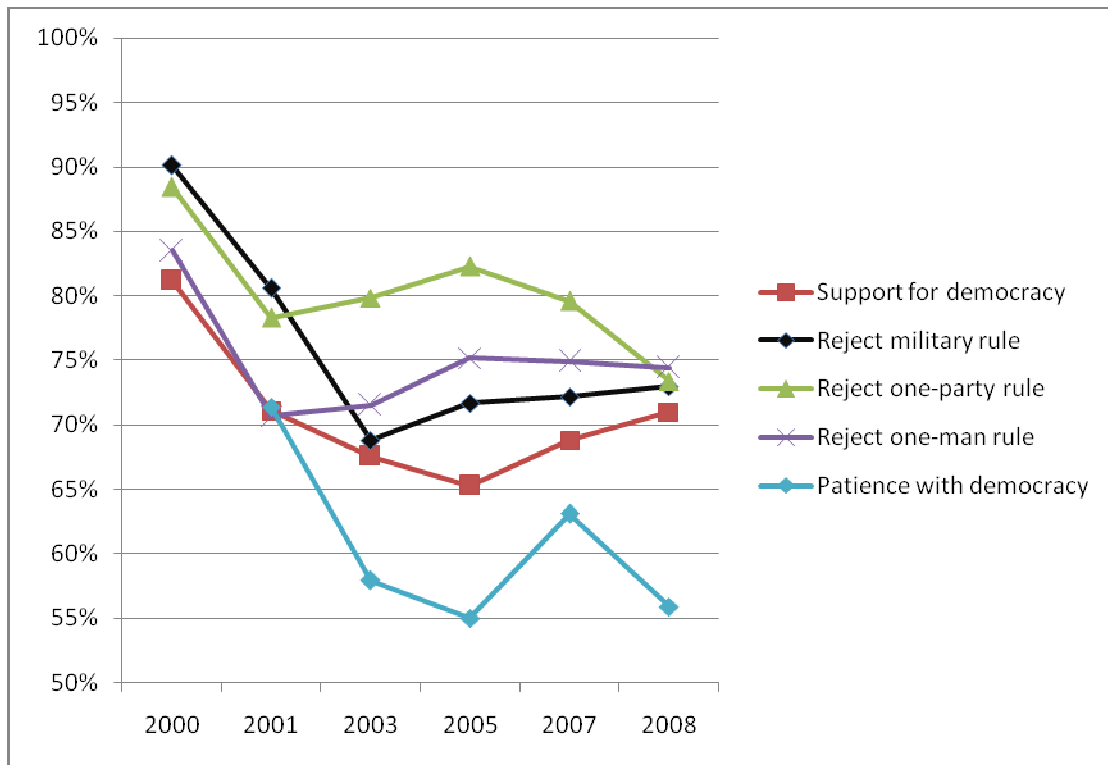
Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: Our present system of elected government should be given more time to deal with inherited problems.

B: If our present system cannot produce results soon, we should try another form of government.



Summary of Demand for Democracy



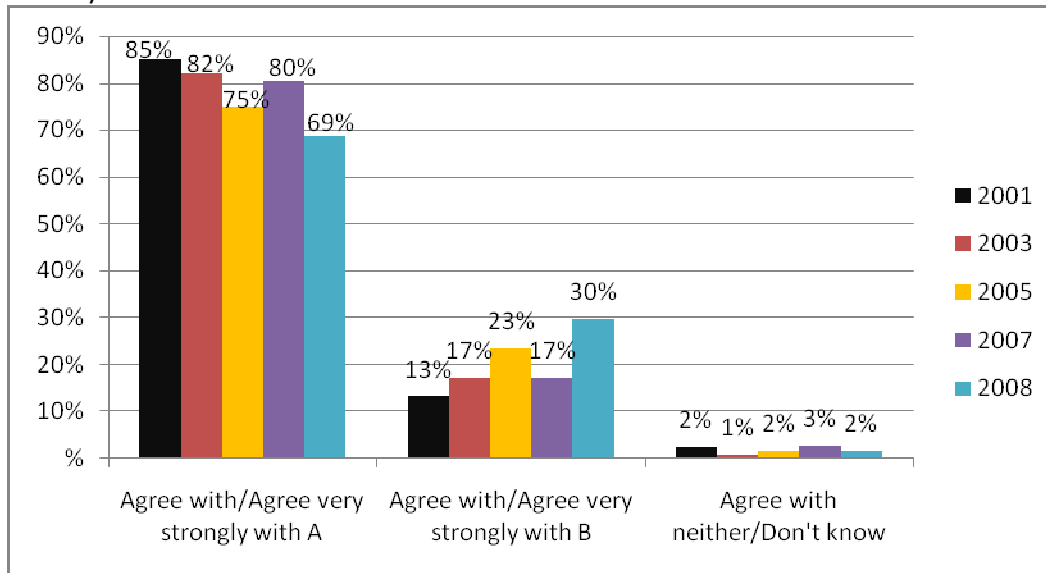
DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS

3.1 Variable: Choose leaders through elections vs. try another form

Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

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

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

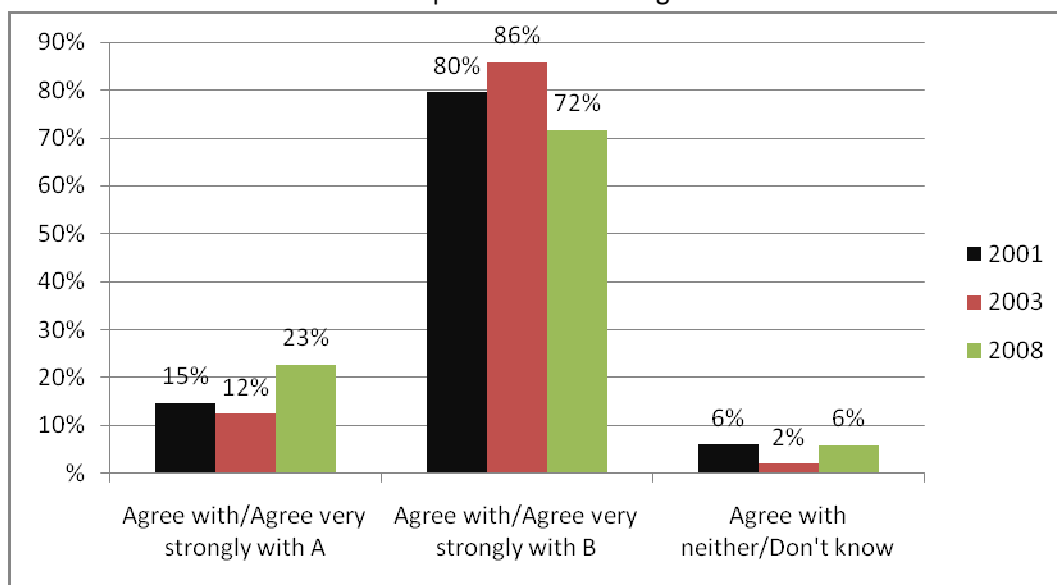


3.2 Variable: No term limits for the president vs. two terms only

Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: There should be no constitutional limit on how long the president can serve.

B: The constitution should limit the president to serving a maximum of two terms in office.

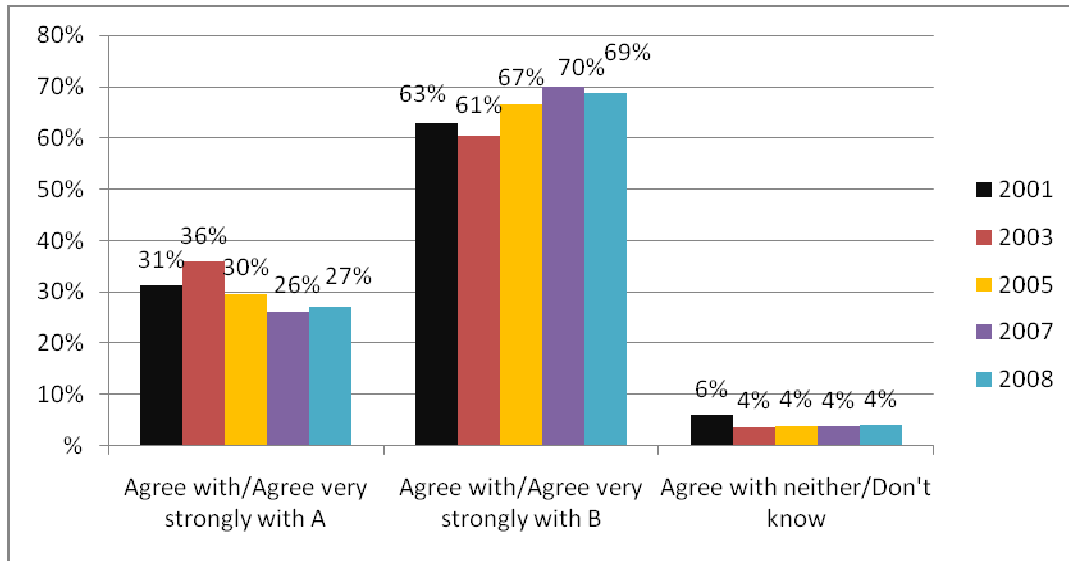


3.3 Variable: Political parties divisive vs. many parties needed

Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: Political parties create division and confusion; it is therefore unnecessary to have many political parties in Nigeria.

B: Many political parties are needed to make sure that Nigerians have real choices in who governs them.

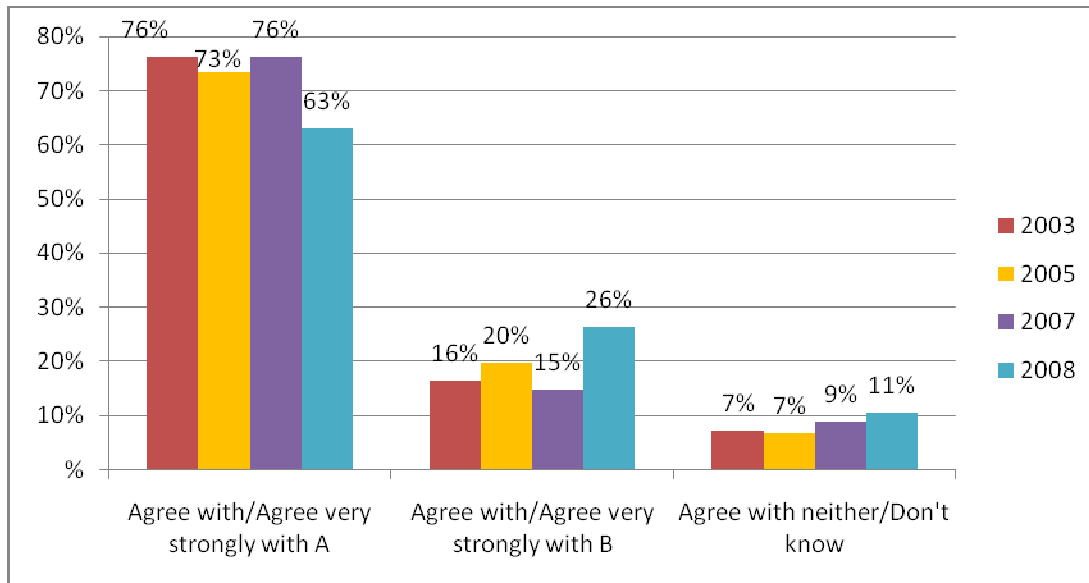


3.4 Variable: Parliament makes laws vs. President does

Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: The members of Parliament/National Assembly represent the people; therefore they should make laws for this country, even if the President/Prime Minister does not agree.

B: Since the President/Prime Minister represents all of us, he should pass laws without worrying about what the Parliament/National Assembly thinks.

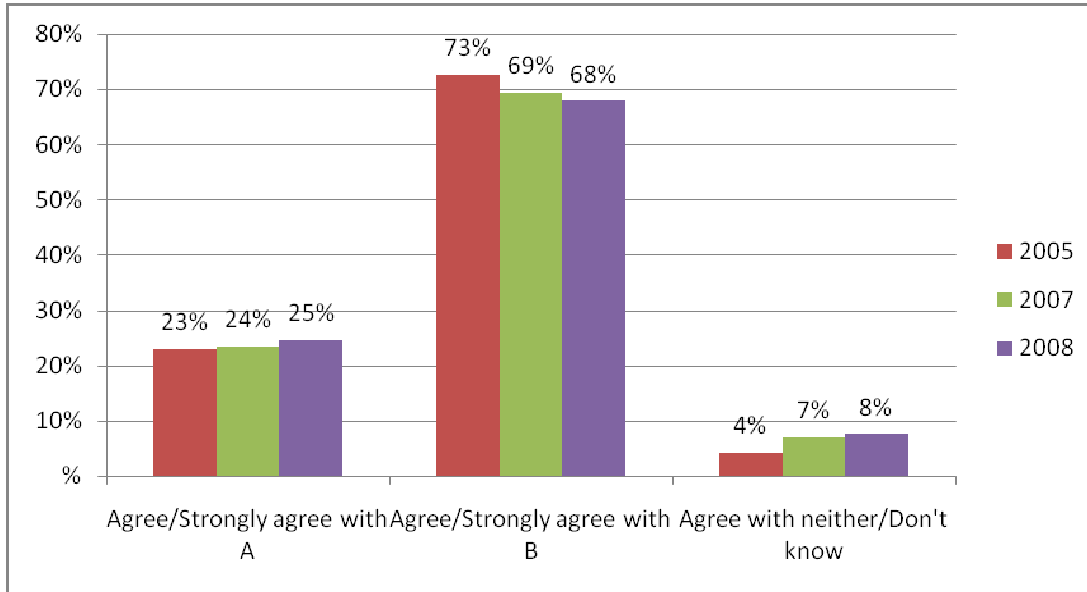


3.5 Variable: President free to act vs. obey the laws and courts

Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: Since the President/Prime Minister was elected to lead the country, he should not be bound by laws or court decisions that he thinks are wrong.

B: The President/Prime Minister must always obey the laws and the courts, even if he thinks they are wrong.

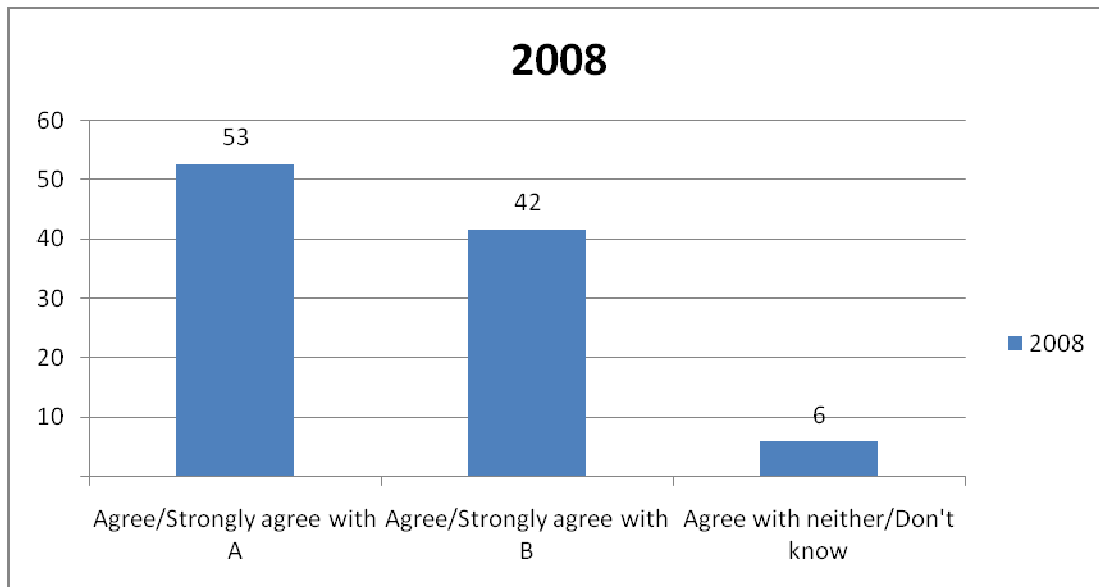


3.6 Variable: Parliament monitors President vs. cooperate

Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: Parliament should ensure that the president explains to it on a regular basis how his government spends the taxpayers' money.

B: The President should be able to devote his full attention to developing the country rather than wasting time justifying his actions.

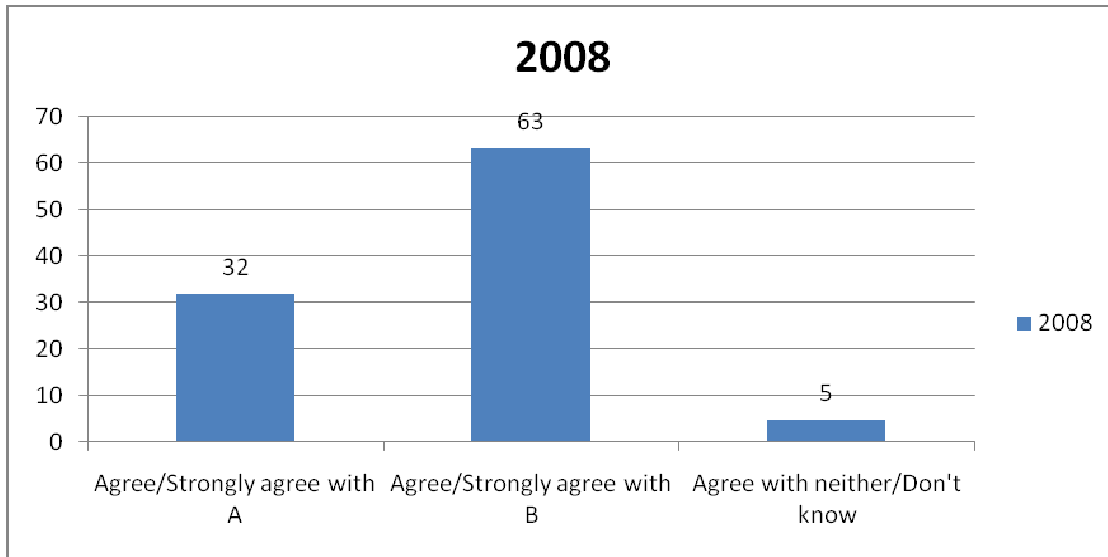


3.7 Variable: Opposition parties examine government vs. cooperate

Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: Opposition parties should regularly examine and criticize government policies and actions.

B: Opposition parties should concentrate on cooperating with government and helping it develop the country.

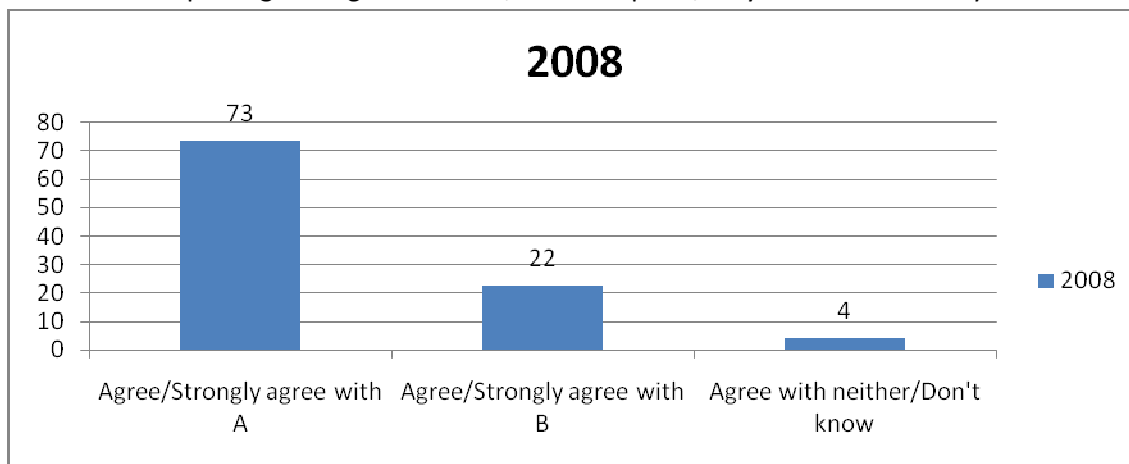


3.8 Variable: Media examines government vs. cooperate

Question: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement A or Statement B.

A: The news media should constantly investigate and report on corruption and the mistakes made by the government.

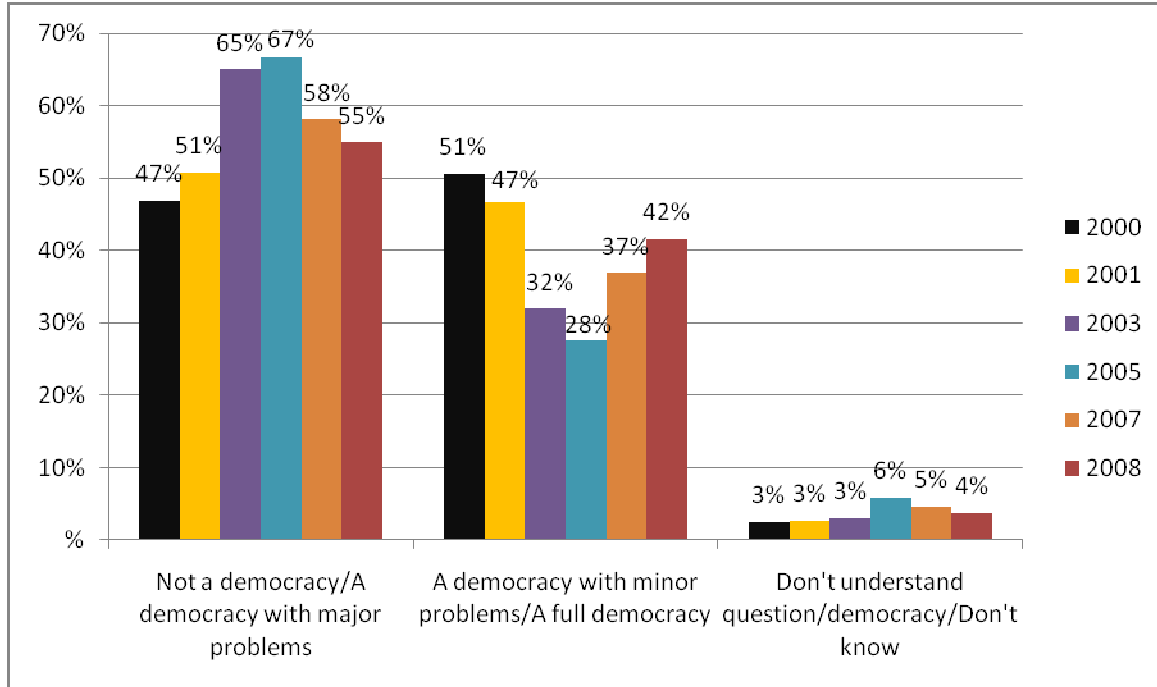
B: Too much reporting on negative events, like corruption, only harms the country.



SUPPLY OF DEMOCRACY

4.1 Variable: Extent of Democracy

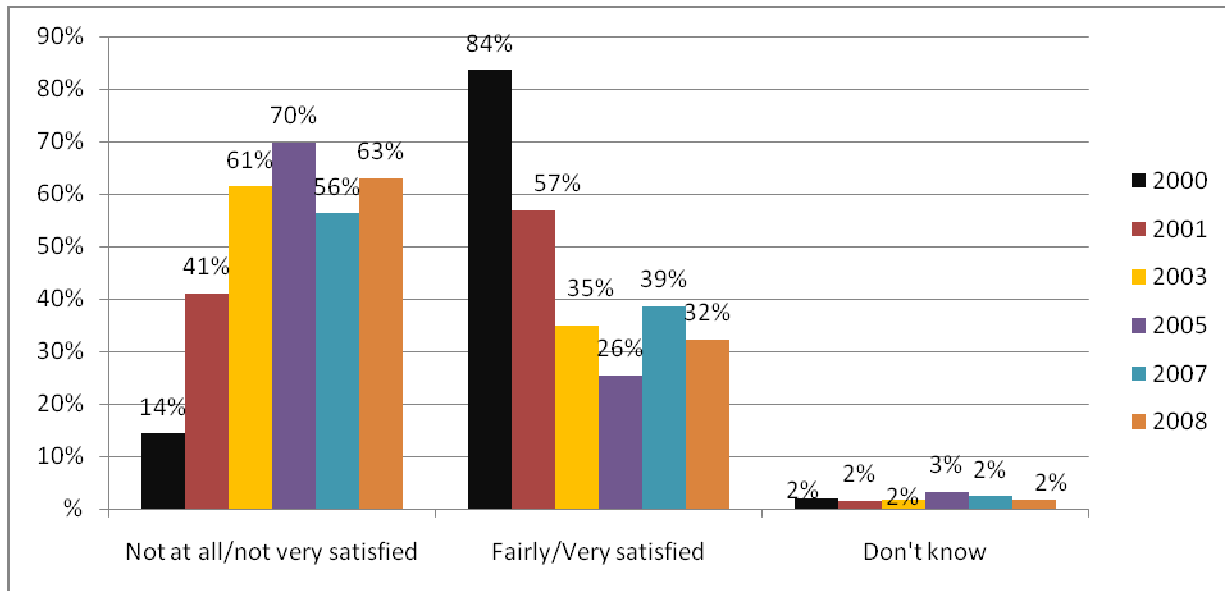
Questions: In your opinion how much of a democracy is Nigeria today?



*The response categories for this question consisted of "yes" and "no" only in 1999

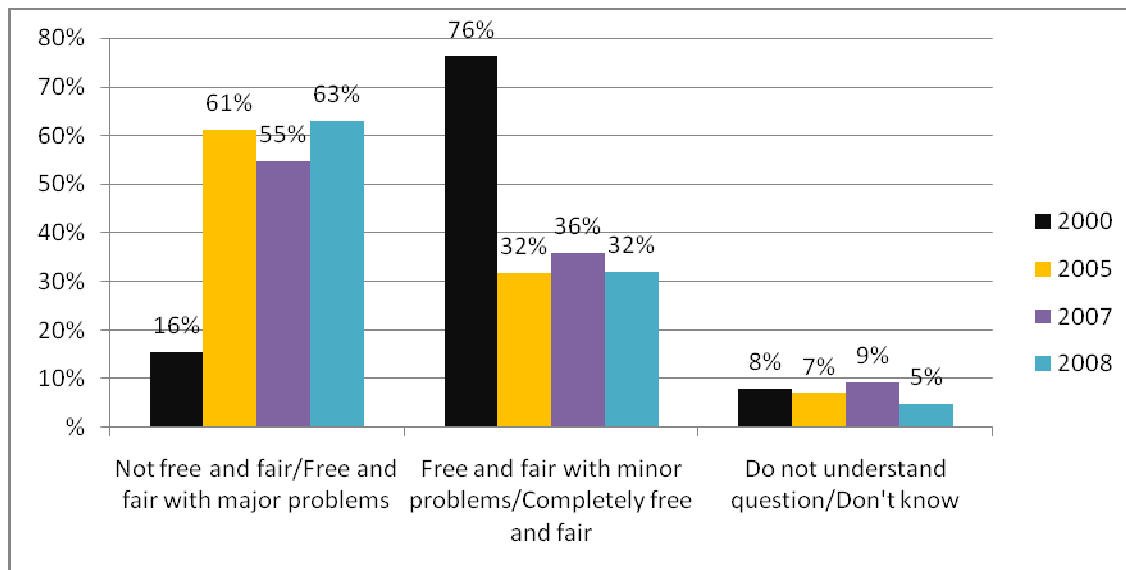
4.2 Variable: Satisfaction with democracy

Question: Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Nigeria?



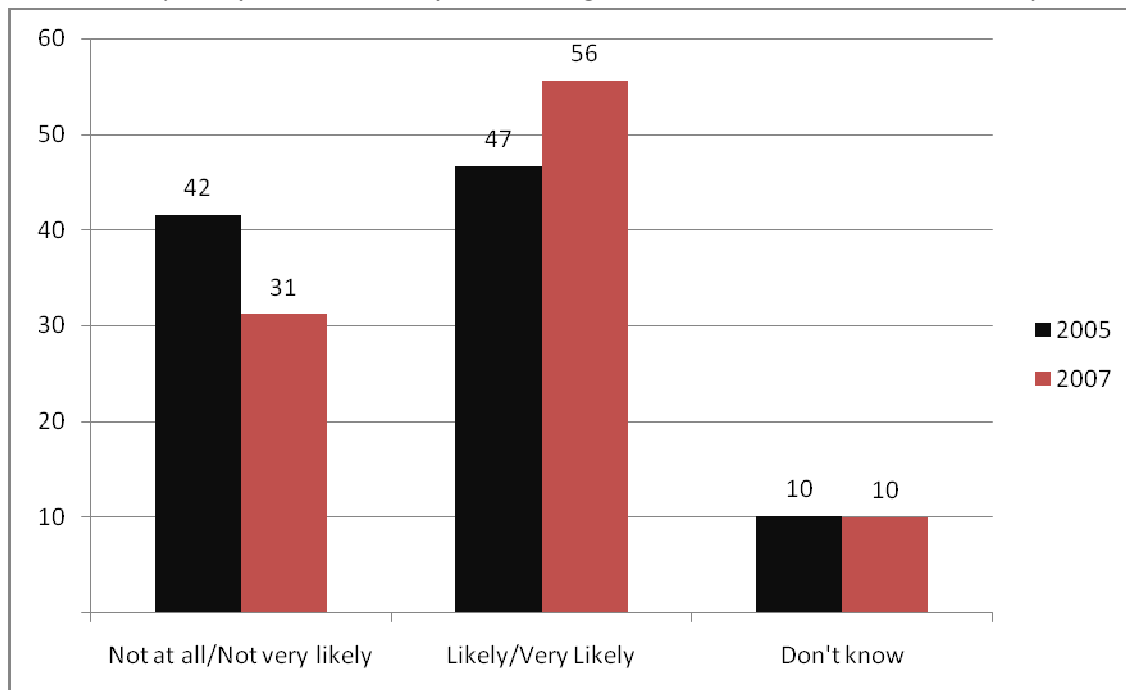
4.3 Variable: Elections free and fair

Question: On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in [20xx]. Was it:



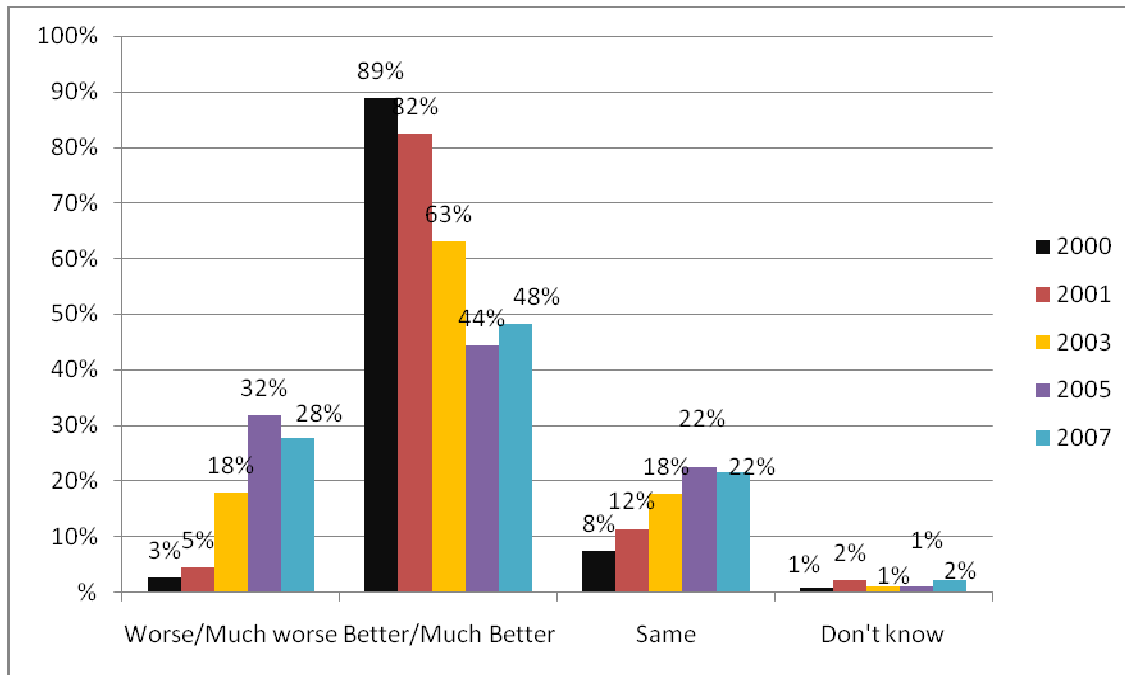
4.4 Variable: Future of democracy

Question: In your opinion, how likely is it that Nigeria will remain a democratic country?



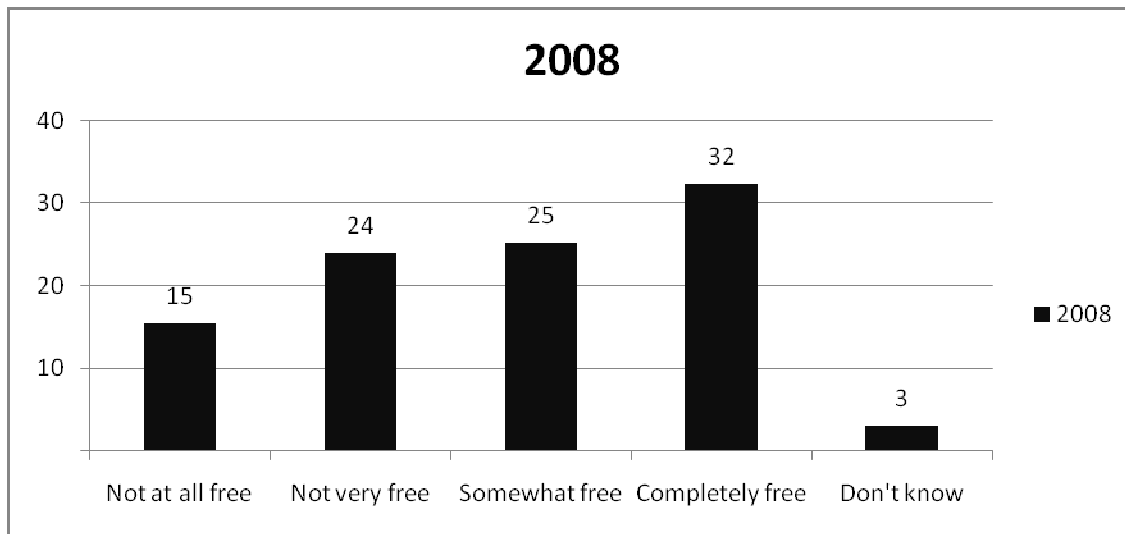
4.5 Variable: Freedom of speech (2000-2007)

Question: Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same: Freedom to say what you think?



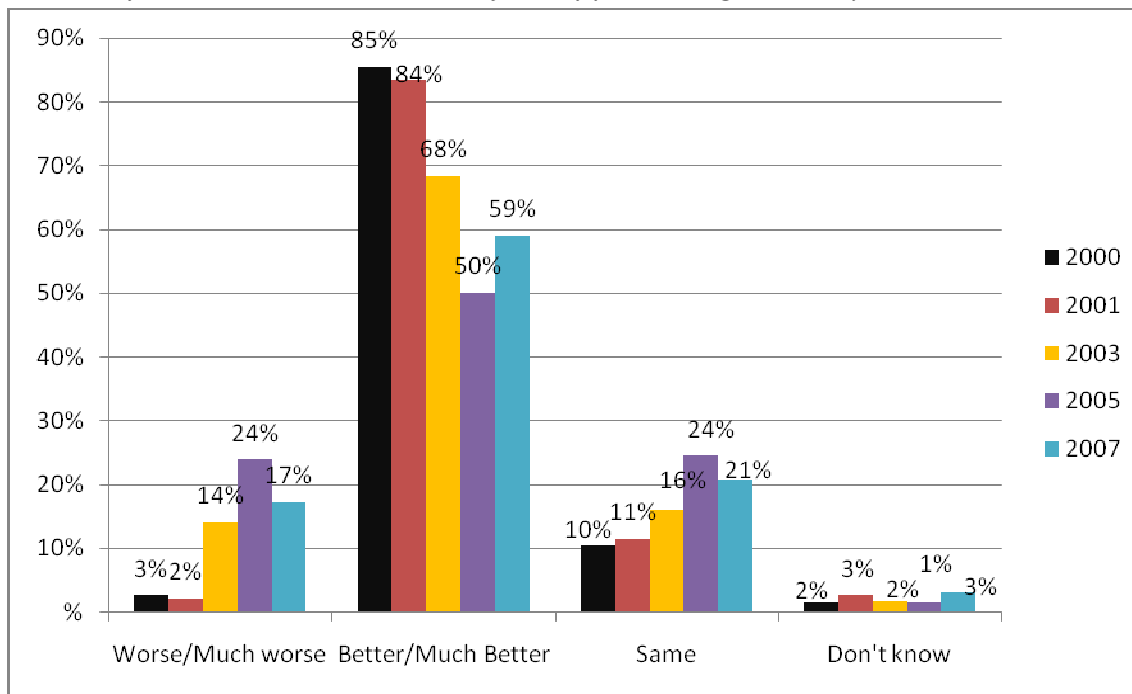
4.6 Variable: Freedom of speech (2008)

Question: In this country, how free are you: to say what you think?



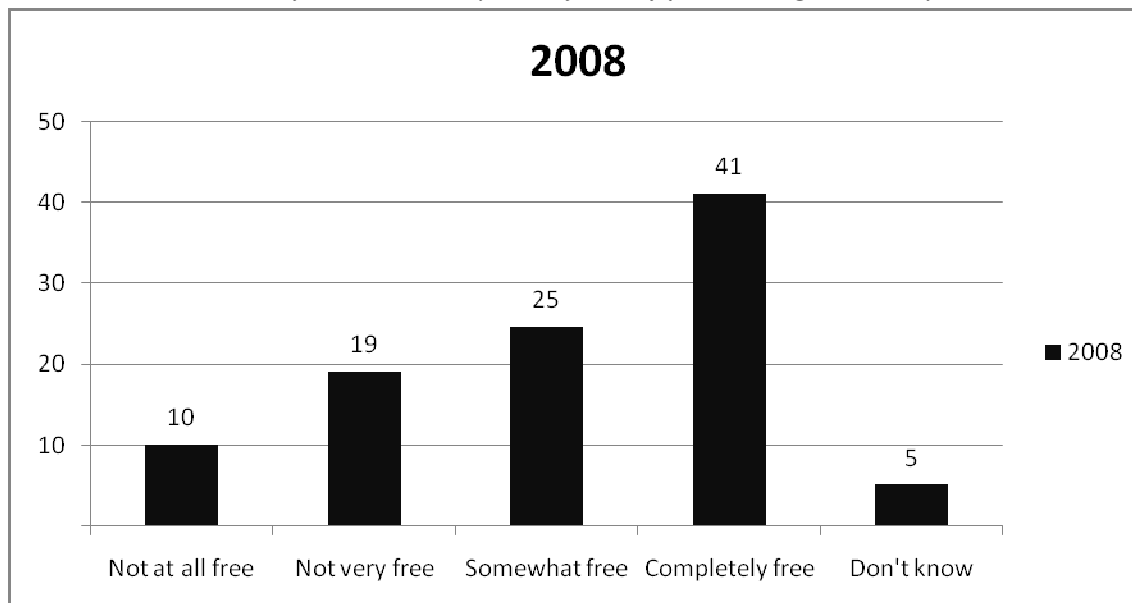
4.7 Variable: Freedom of association (2000-2007)

Question: Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same: Freedom to join any political organization you want?



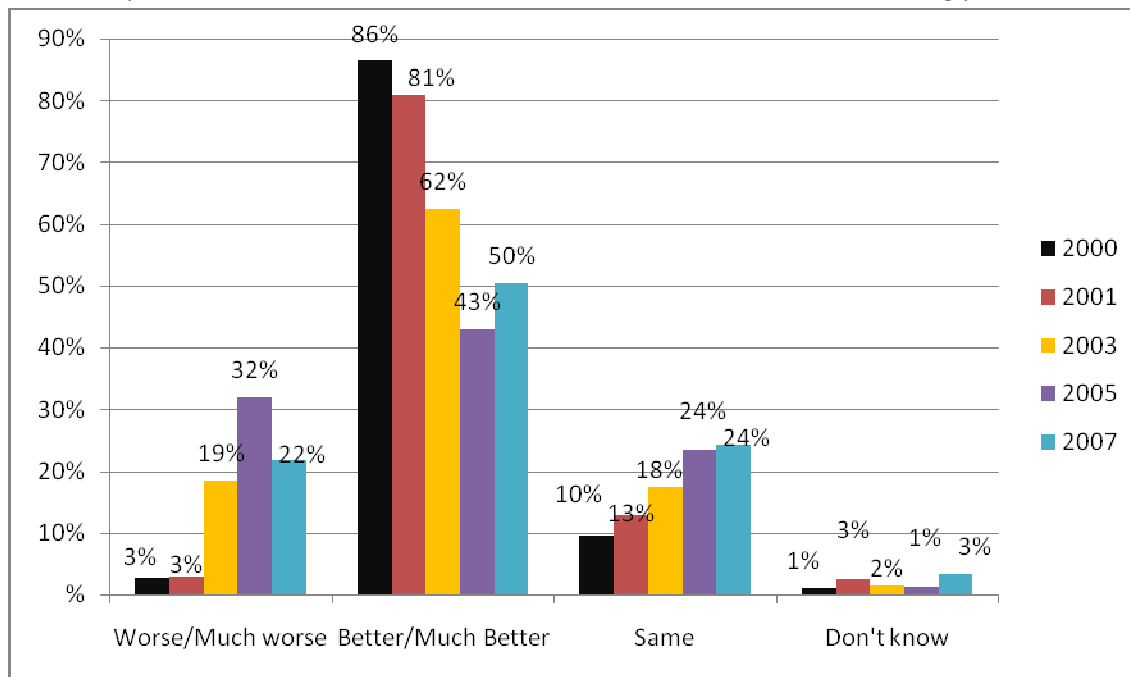
4.8 Variable: Freedom of association (2008)

Question: In this country, how free are you: to join any political organization you want?



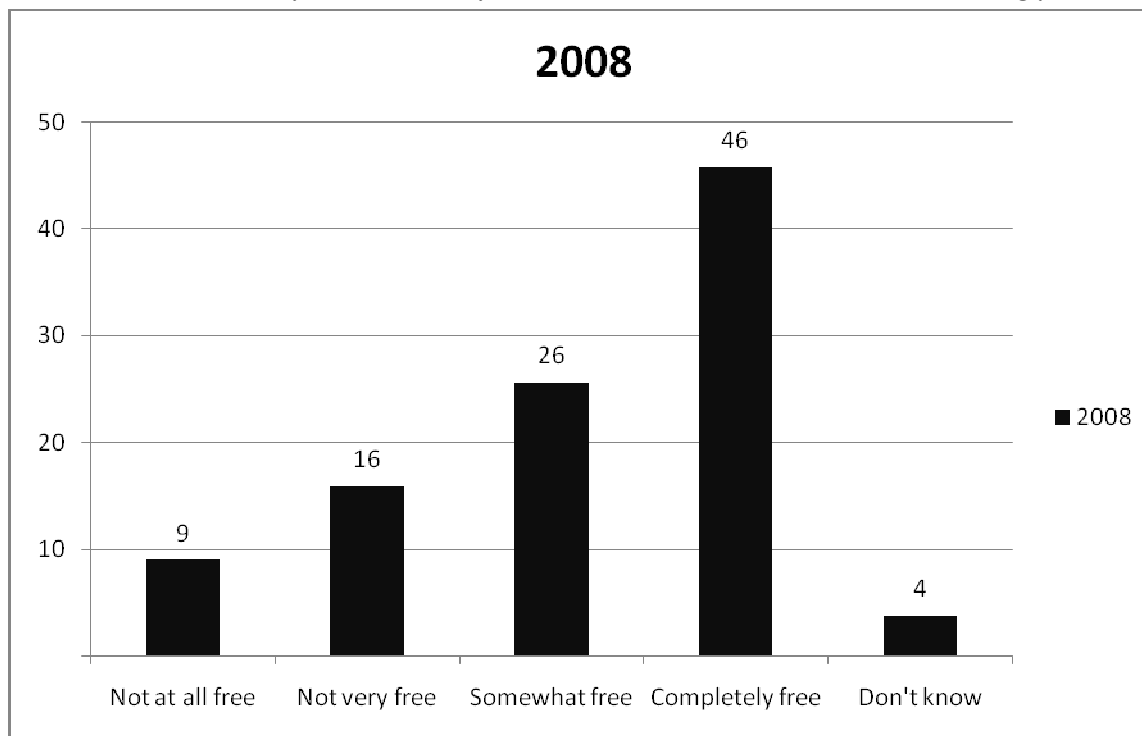
4.9 Variable: Voting freedom (2000-2007)

Question: Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same: Freedom to choose who to vote for without feeling pressured?



4.10 Variable: Voting freedom (2008)

Question: In this country, how free are you: to choose who to vote for without feeling pressured?



The Afrobarometer, a cross-national survey research project, is conducted collaboratively by social scientists from 20 African countries. Coordination is provided by three Core Partners: the Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA), and the Institute for Research in Empirical Political Economy (IREEP, Benin). Michigan State University and the University of Cape Town serve as Support Units to the project. In addition, National Partners in each country directly manage survey fieldwork and data management.

Over the course of four rounds of surveys between 1999 and 2009, many donors have supported the Afrobarometer's research, capacity building and outreach activities. We are grateful to the the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the Department for International Development (DfID-UK), the Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (RDMFA/DANIDA), the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) for the support that they have provided to Round 4 of the Afrobarometer. Previous support was also provided by the African Development Bank (ADB), the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Michigan State University (MSU), the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA), the Norwegian International Development Agency (Norad), and the World Bank.

For more information, see: www.afrobarometer.org