

Elections Burkina Faso: Citizens trust electoral institutions, incumbent leaders

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 61 | Peter Halley Penar

Summary

On 29 November 2015, Burkina Faso will conduct its first presidential and parliamentary elections since popular protests in October 2014 ousted long-serving President Blaise Compaoré. Initially planned for mid-October 2015, the elections were delayed by a coup in September, which was overturned amid street demonstrations and diplomatic pressure from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union, and the United Nations.

While political factions continue to debate whether Compaoré allies should be eligible to stand for election, results of an Afrobarometer survey in April-May 2015 offer encouraging evidence of broad public support underpinning the country's democratic process. Most Burkinabé embrace choosing leaders through regular elections and consider it the duty of good citizens to vote. A majority of citizens trust the National Independent Electoral Commission (CENI) and believe that the last legislative elections in 2012 were mostly or completely free and fair. Burkinabé are less likely to fear election-related intimidation or violence than citizens in most ECOWAS countries. Almost two-thirds of Burkinabé say their country is moving in the right direction.

On the other hand, almost half of citizens say that the national economy is doing "very" or "fairly" badly, and six in 10 believe that elections do not function well to remove underperforming leaders and have not incentivized politicians to serve the people rather than their own ambitions. Concerns about the election environment include bribery of voters, biased media coverage, the possibility of unfair vote counting, and the perception that voters are "never" or only "sometimes" offered a genuine choice (cited by 24% of survey respondents in April-May 2015, during the early stages of debate over which parties and candidates could contest the elections).

Interim President Michel Kafando enjoys strong approval ratings, and public trust in the president and Prime Minister Yacouba Isaac Zida is high. Trust in the former opposition – the parties that came to power after Compaoré was forced out – is somewhat lower, but far higher than trust in the parties associated with Compaore's allies.

As Burkina Faso, which ratified the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance in 2010, approaches this critical ballot, these survey 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 Burkina Faso, led by the Centre pour la Gouvernance Démocratique, interviewed 1,200 adult Burkinabé in April and May 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 Burkina Faso in 2012.

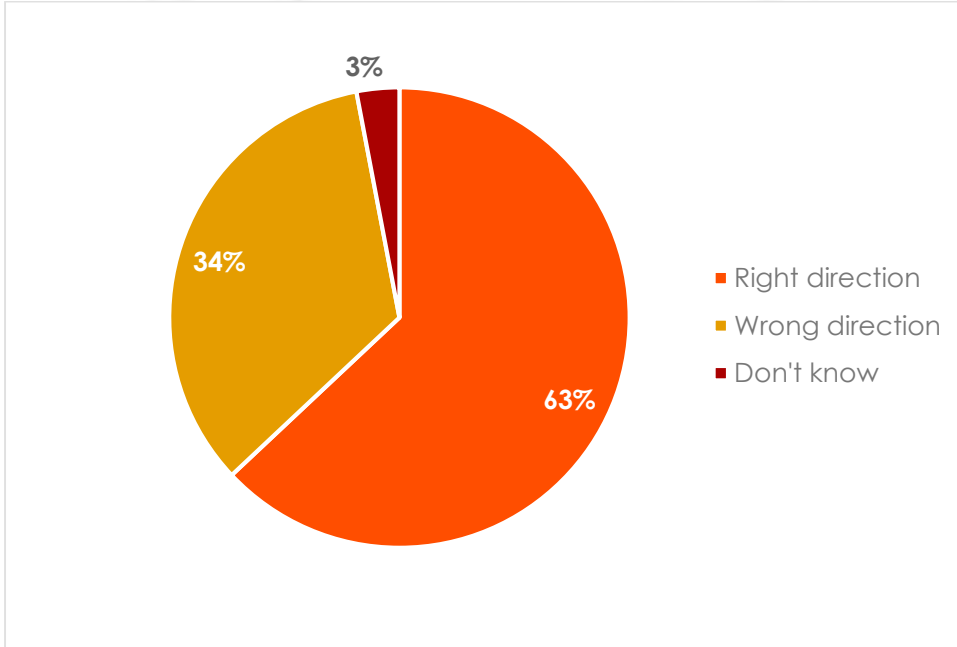
For other survey results related to democracy in Burkina Faso, please see Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 59, available at www.afrobarometer.org.

Key findings

- A majority (63%) of Burkinabé believe the country is heading in the right direction (Figure 1), but almost half (49%) describe the nation's economic conditions as "very bad" or "fairly bad" (Figure 2).
- Overwhelming majorities say that elections are the best way to select leaders (95%) (Figure 3) and that a good citizen in a democracy should always vote in elections (90%) (Figure 4).
- Even so, a majority of Burkinabé believe that elections do not work well in enabling voters to remove underperforming leaders from office (60%) (Figure 5) and that political leaders largely serve their own ambitions (65%) as opposed to serving the people (31%) (Figure 6).
- Almost two-thirds (64%) of citizens believe that the 2012 legislative elections were "completely free and fair" or "free and fair, but with minor problems" (Figure 7) – an average level of perceived election quality among 13 ECOWAS countries (Figure 8).
- A majority of Burkinabé say they trust the CENI "a lot" (37%) or "somewhat" (23%) (Figure 9). This high level of trust ranks third behind Niger and Mali among ECOWAS countries (Figure 10).
- More than half of Burkinabé think that bribery of voters occurs "always" or "often" (56%), and almost half (47%) say the media "never" or only "sometimes" covers election candidates fairly (Figure 11). Far fewer Burkinabé believe that votes are "never" or only "sometimes" counted fairly (25%).
- Most Burkinabé (75%) do not fear election-related intimidation or violence (Figure 12); at 10%, the proportion who fear intimidation or violence "somewhat" or "a lot" is one of the lowest in the ECOWAS region (Figure 13). At the same time, only 57% feel "completely free" to vote for the candidate of their choice (Figure 14).
- More than four out of five citizens (84%) approve of interim President Kafando's performance in office (Figure 15), and sizeable majorities say they trust the president and the prime minister "a lot" or "somewhat" (Figure 16). Citizens are evenly divided as to whether they trust the political parties in the interim government. In stark contrast, trust in parties associated with Compaoré is low.

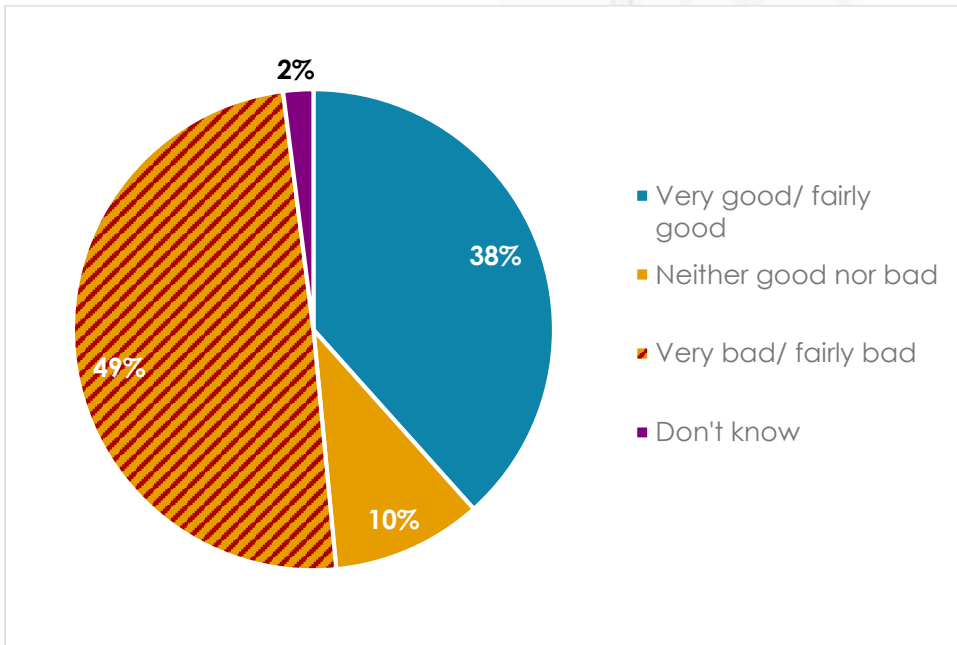
Charts

Figure 1: Overall direction of the country | Burkina Faso | 2015



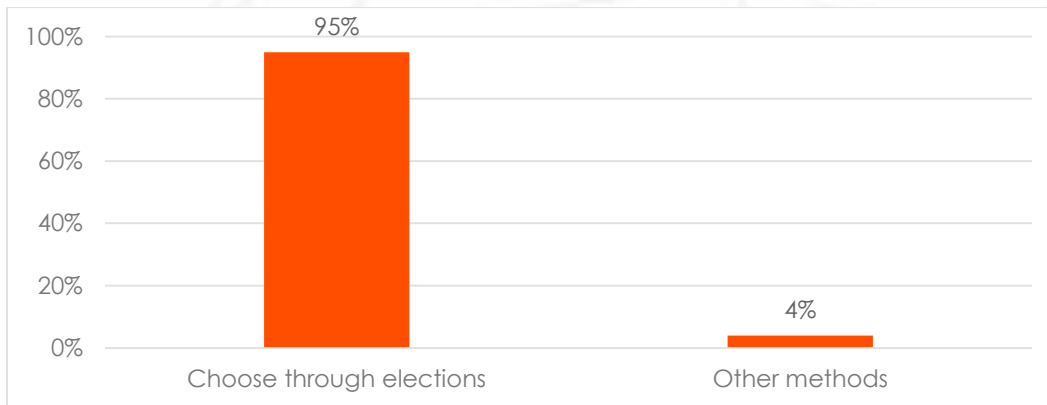
Respondents were asked: *Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction?*

Figure 2: Economic conditions of the country | Burkina Faso | 2015



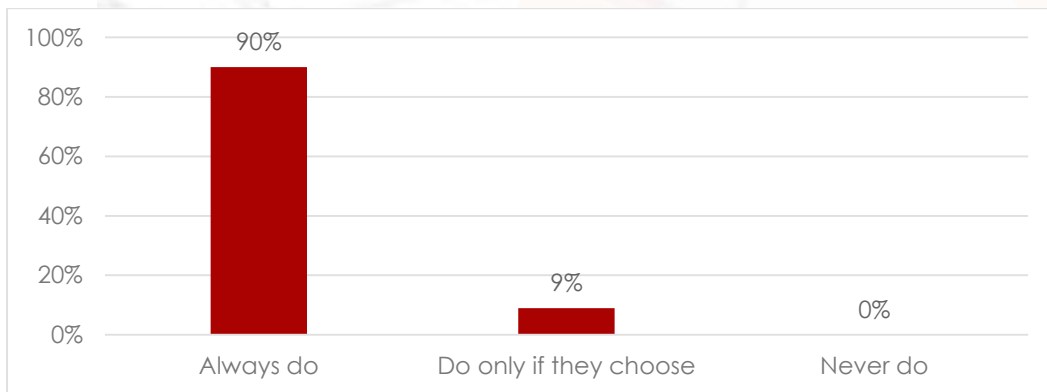
Respondents were asked: *In general, how would you describe the present economic conditions of this country?*

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



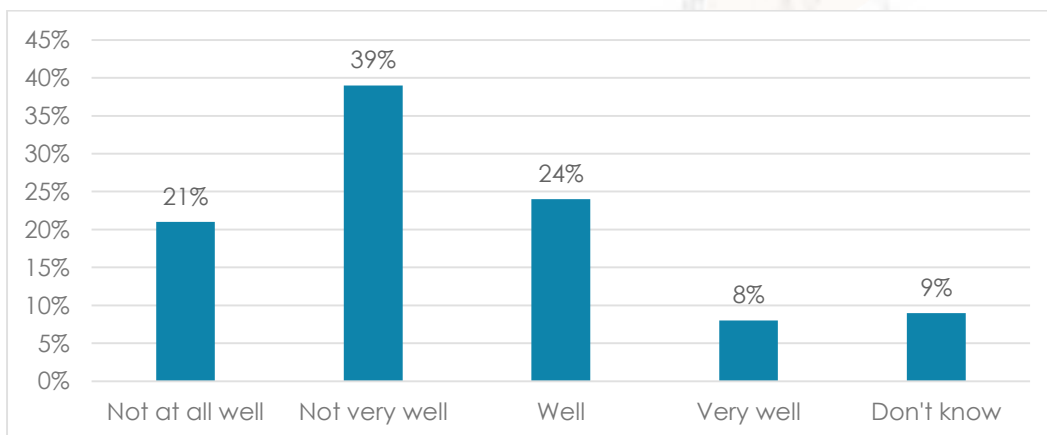
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? (1) We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open, and honest elections. (2) Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country's leaders. (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

Figure 4: Good citizens vote in elections | Burkina Faso | 2015



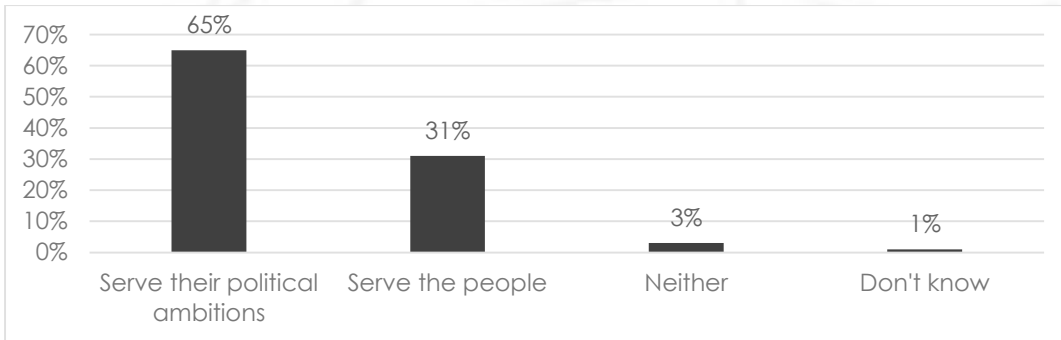
Respondents were asked: For each of the following actions, please tell me whether you think it is something a good citizen in a democracy should always do, never do, or do only if they choose: Vote in elections?

Figure 5: Do elections enable voters to remove underperforming leaders? | Burkina Faso | 2015



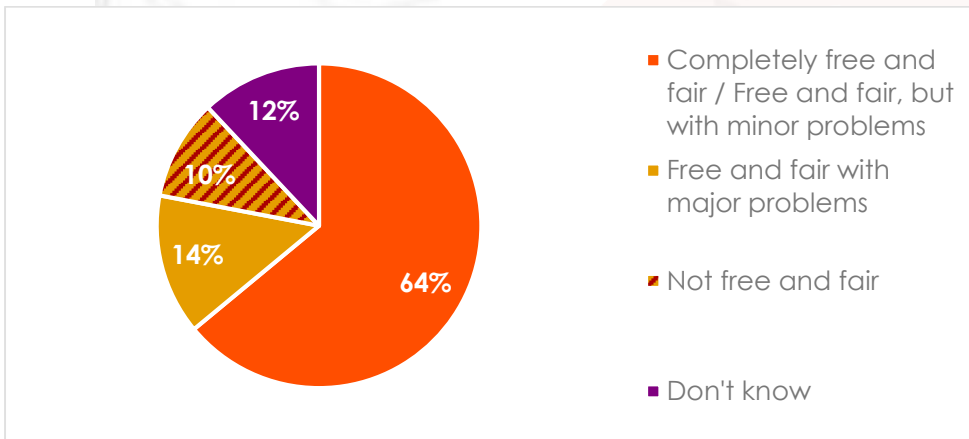
Respondents were asked: Think about how elections work in practice in this country. How well do elections enable voters to remove from office leaders who do not do what the people want?

Figure 6: Elected leaders serve the people or themselves? | Burkina Faso | 2015



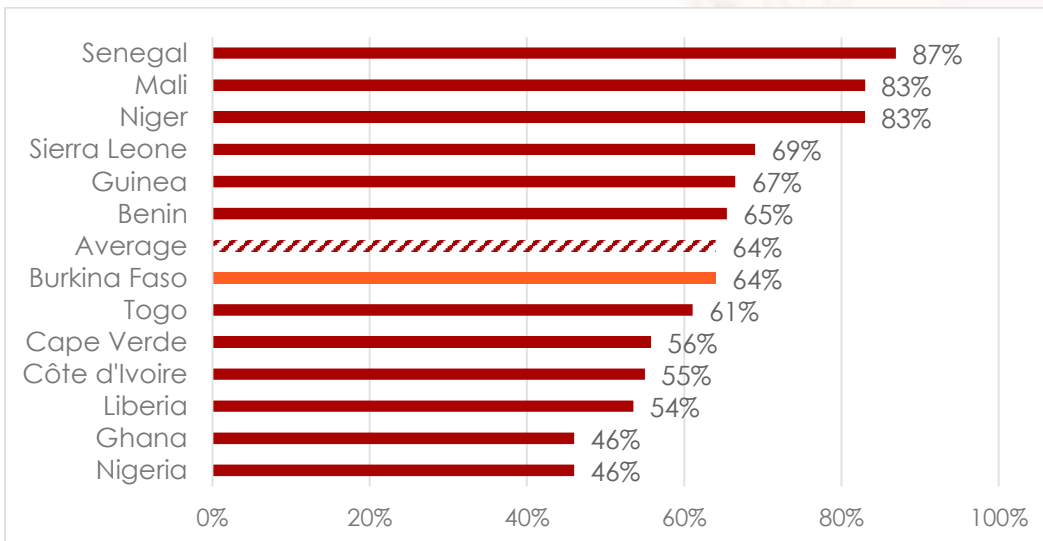
Respondents were asked: Do you think that leaders of political parties in this country are more concerned with serving the interests of the people, or more concerned with advancing their own political ambitions, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

Figure 7: Freeness and fairness of the 2012 elections | Burkina Faso | 2015



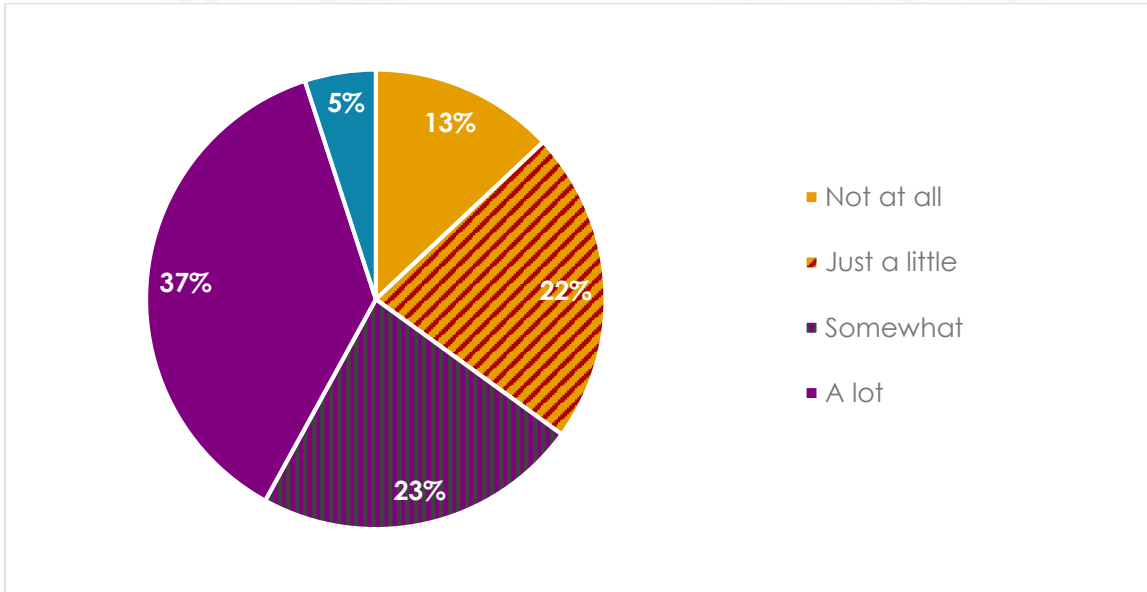
Respondents were asked: On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last legislative and municipal elections, held in December 2012?

Figure 8: Freeness and fairness of the last election | 13 ECOWAS countries | 2014/2015



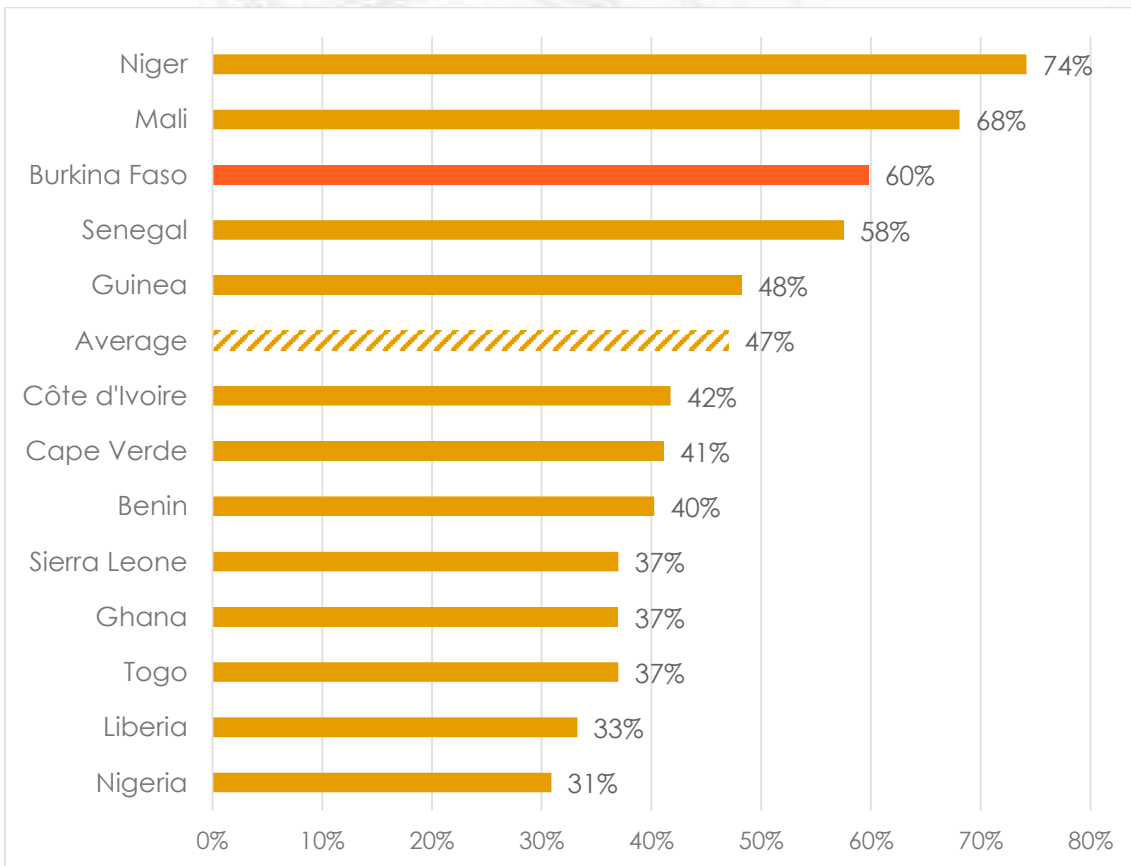
Respondents were asked: On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election? (% who say "completely free" or "free and fair, but with minor problems")

Figure 9: Trust in the National Independent Election Commission (CENI)
 | Burkina Faso | 2015



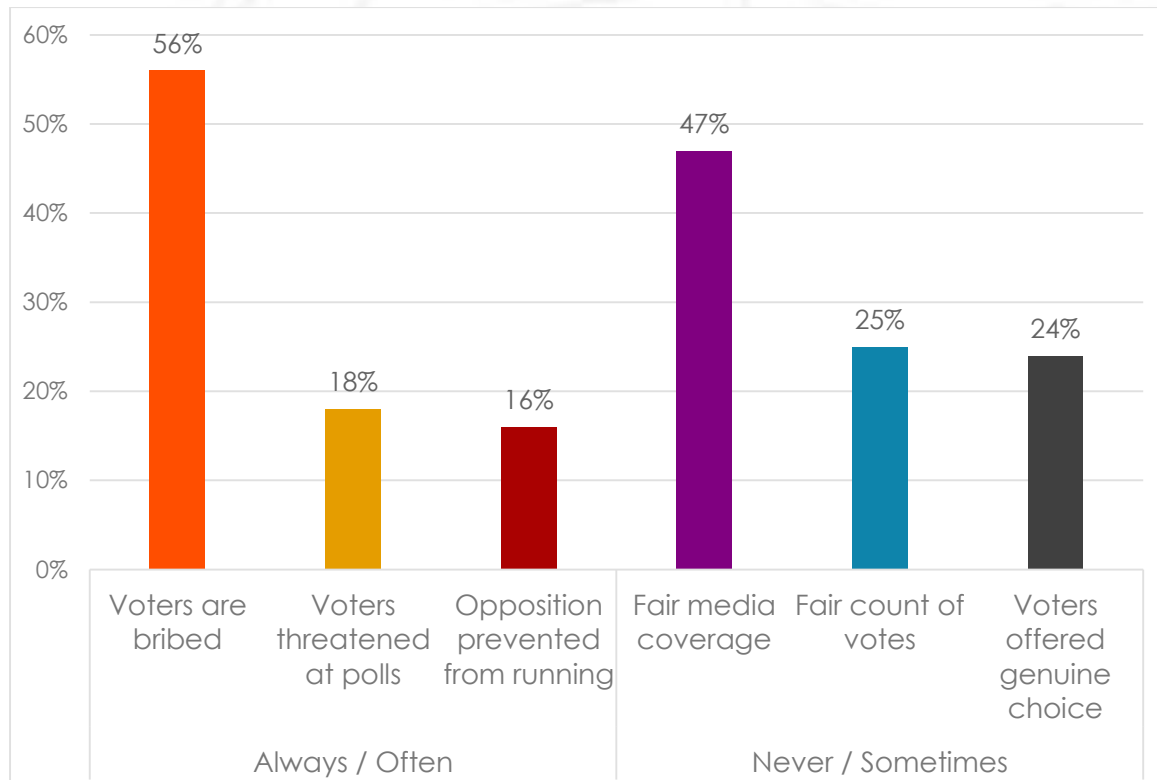
Respondents were asked: How much do you trust the National Independent Election Commission (CENI)?

Figure 10: Trust in the electoral commission | 13 ECOWAS countries | 2014/2015



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust the [national election commission]? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

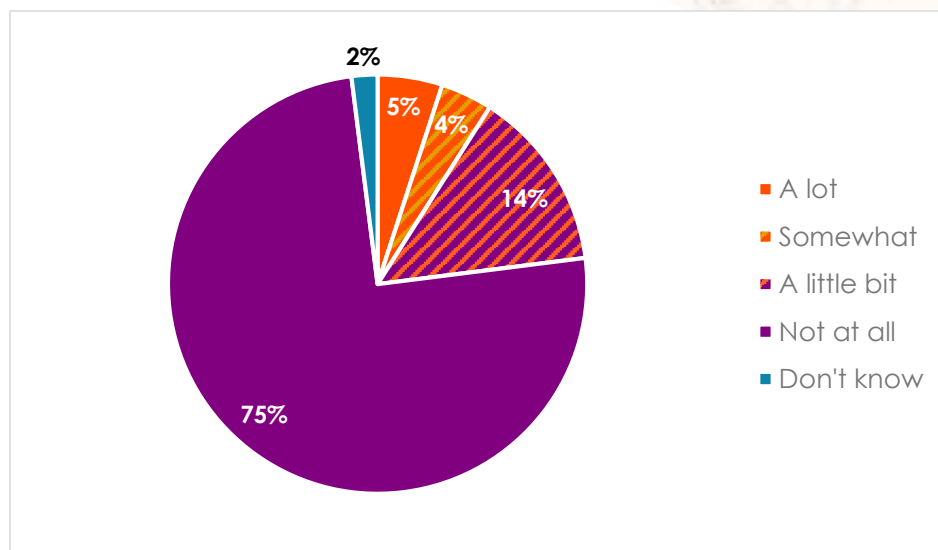
Figure 11: Perceptions of the election environment | Burkina Faso | 2015



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often do the following things occur in this country's elections:*

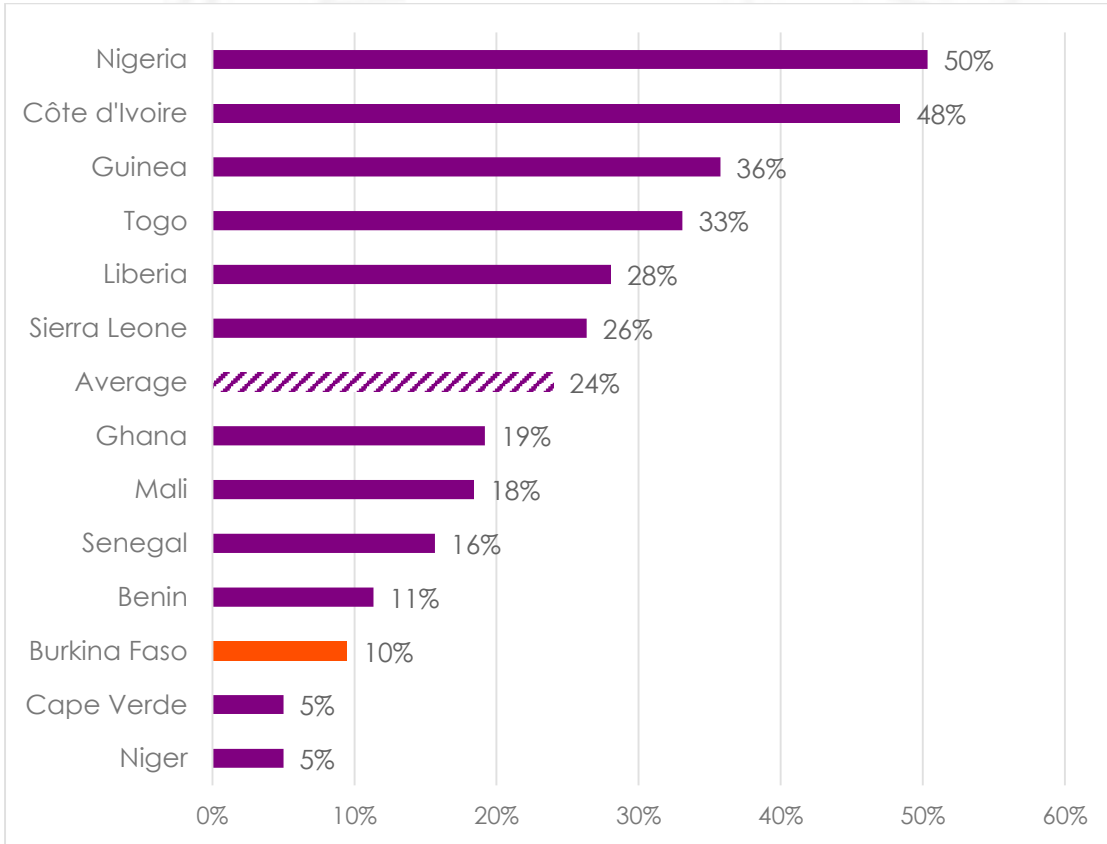
- Voters are bribed?*
- Voters are threatened with violence at the polls?*
- Opposition candidates are prevented from running for office?*
- The media provides fair coverage of all candidates?*
- Votes are counted fairly?*
- Voters are offered a genuine choice in the elections?*

Figure 12: Fear of election-related intimidation or violence | Burkina Faso | 2015



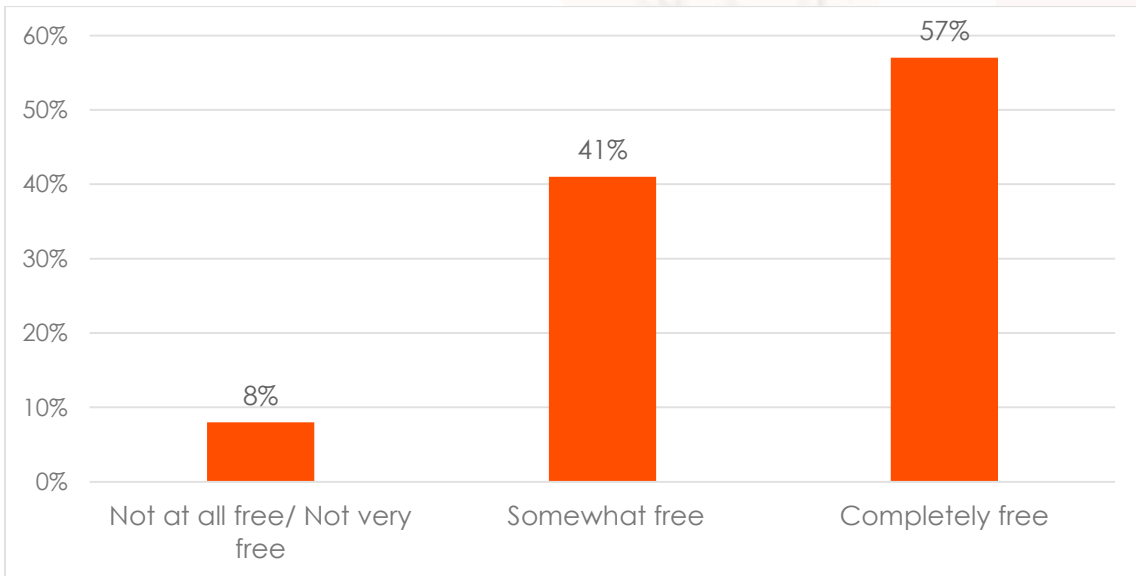
Respondents were asked: *During election campaigns in this country, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence?*

Figure 13: Fear of election-related intimidation or violence | 13 ECOWAS countries
 | 2014/2015



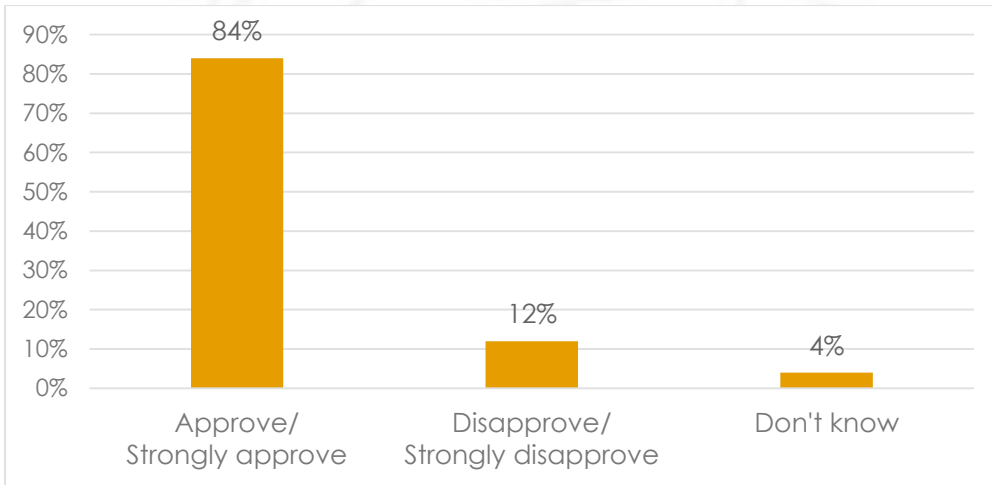
(% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

Figure 14: Freedom to vote for candidate of one's choice | Burkina Faso | 2015



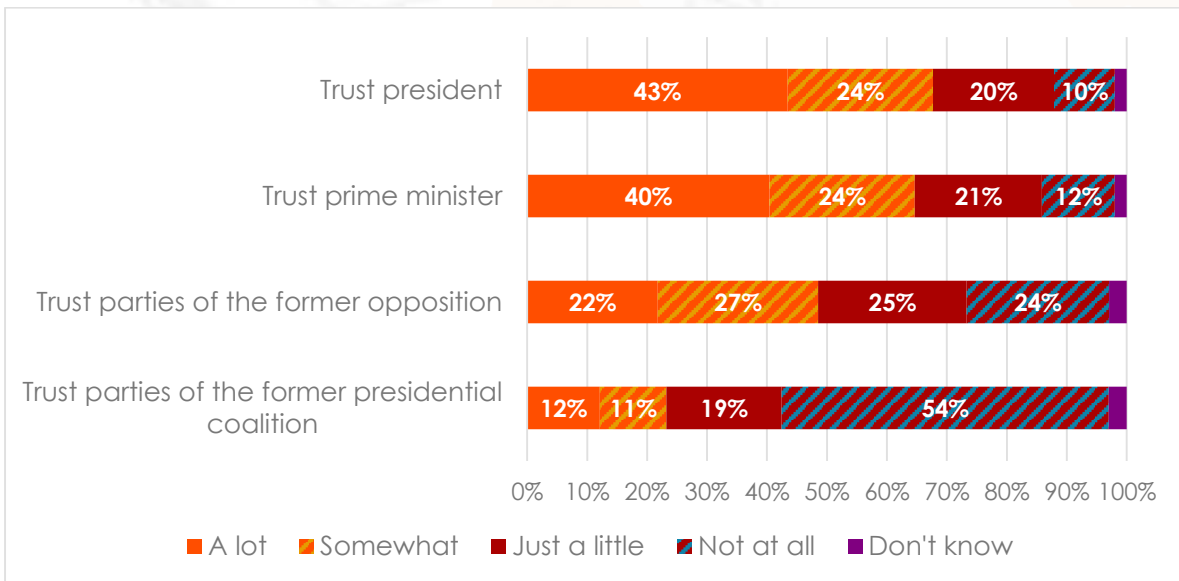
Respondents were asked: *In this country, how free are you to choose who to vote for without feeling pressured?*

Figure 15: Assessment of presidential performance | Burkina Faso | 2015



Respondents were asked: Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs since taking office, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: President Michel Kafando?

Figure 16: Trust in the president, prime minister, ruling parties, and opposition parties | Burkina Faso | 2015



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The president? The prime minister? The parties of the former presidential coalition? The political parties of the former opposition?

To further explore this data, please visit Afrobarometer's online data analysis facility at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

Peter Halley Penar is a research assistant for Afrobarometer and PhD student in the Department of Political Science at Michigan State University. Email: ppenar@msu.edu; Twitter: @PPenar

Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

Core support for Afrobarometer Rounds 5 and 6 has been provided by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank.

For more information, please visit www.afrobarometer.org.

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 61 | 19 November 2015