



**KEY FINDINGS ABOUT  
PUBLIC OPINION  
IN AFRICA**

**What do Africans think about democracy and development?**

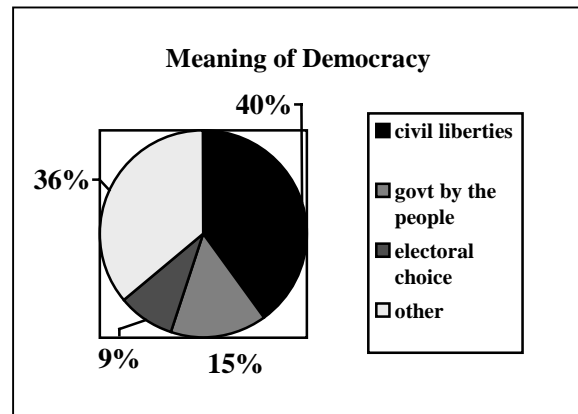
The Afrobarometer\* provides some answers. The Afrobarometer is a pioneering effort to systematically measure public opinion in a dozen African countries using survey research methods. This brochure summarizes **eleven key findings** from Round 1 surveys, completed in mid-2001.

The surveys cover the following **countries**: Botswana, Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The findings for each country are based on nationally representative samples (usually 1200 respondents) and a total of over 21,000 interviews. The survey does not represent Africa as a whole, but only countries that have introduced a measure of democratic and market reforms over the last decade. Thus, when we refer to “Africans,” we have in mind the citizens of these countries.

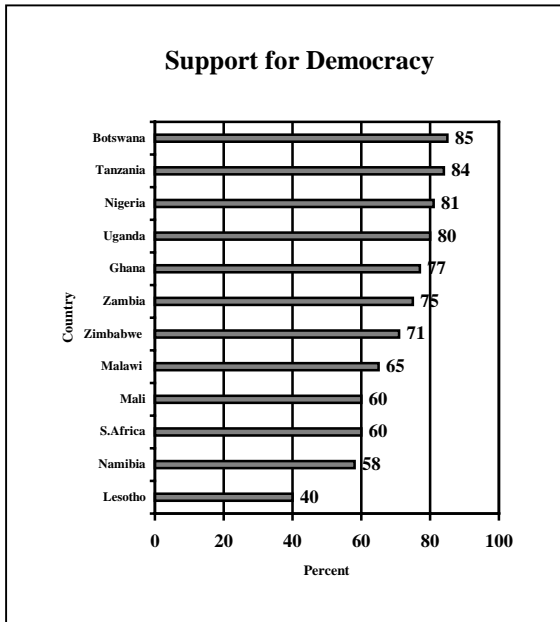
**Did you know?**

**1. For Africans, democracy means freedom**

When asked, “what, if anything, does democracy mean to you?” most Africans refer to civil liberties (40 percent of all responses), especially freedom of speech. They also see democracy as meaning “government by the people” (15 percent). Thus, Africans regard democracy mainly in terms of freedom, which is a liberal conception, though they also value opportunities for ordinary people to participate in politics, a more populist view. Interestingly, Africans rarely associate democracy with voting and elections (just 9 percent).



\* The Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from 15 African countries. It is coordinated by the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa), the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), and Michigan State University. Several donors support the Afrobarometer’s research, capacity-building and outreach activities, including the Swedish International Development Agency, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For more information, including reports with complete findings, see:

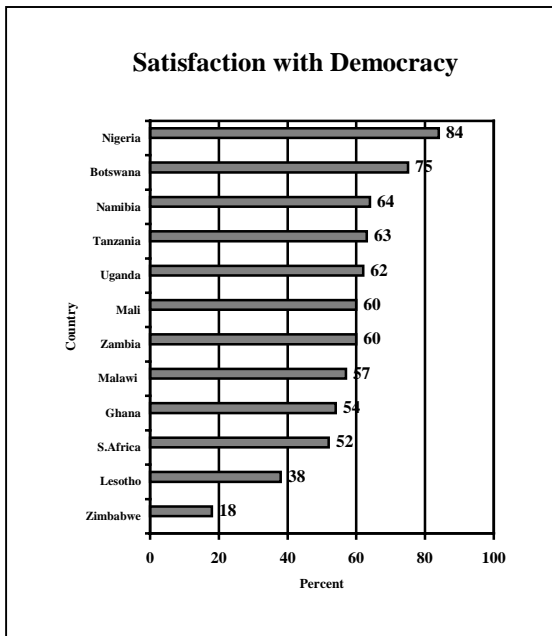


## 2. Support for democracy is widespread in Africa

Across 12 countries, more than two out of three Africans interviewed say that democracy is “always preferable” to non-democratic forms of government (69 percent). At the same time, clear majorities reject authoritarian alternatives like military rule (82 percent), one-man rule (80 percent), and one-party rule (69 percent). These findings suggest that experiments with multiparty democracy have a wide popular base and that dictators and military rulers have been roundly rejected. But popular support for democracy varies greatly between countries, from 85 percent in Botswana to 40 percent in Lesotho. And in Uganda, Tanzania and South Africa, many people remain attached to the idea of one-party rule.

## 3. Africans expect democracy to deliver basic welfare

When asked about the features of “a democratic society,” almost everyone (89 percent) thinks it important that citizens have access to the basic necessities of life (like food, water and shelter). In practice, people want democracy to deliver these benefits, including education, even more strongly than they insist on regular elections, majority rule, competing political parties, and



freedom to criticize the government (all about 75 percent). Thus, Africans are predisposed to judge the performance of democracy primarily in terms of its record at delivering improvements in the socioeconomic sphere.

## 4. People are not fully satisfied with democracy’s performance

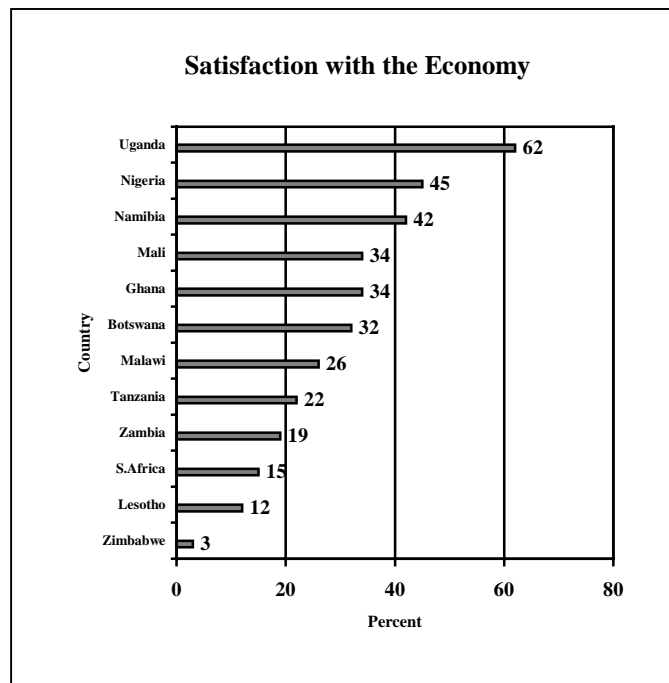
Asked whether they are “satisfied with the way democracy works” in their country, Afrobarometer respondents are lukewarm. The proportion expressing satisfaction with democracy’s performance (58 percent) lags behind the proportion that say they support democracy (69 percent, see above). And only 21 percent are “very satisfied.” The lowest levels are recorded in Zimbabwe, where only 18 percent are at all satisfied.

## 5. Unemployment is the top problem on the people's development agenda

Asked to name the most important problems facing their country, survey respondents cite economic problems (51 percent) more frequently than social (42 percent) or political problems (7 percent). The most prominent economic problem is defined as "unemployment" in the industrialized Southern African countries, but as "poverty" or "food shortages" in more rural places like Mali and Malawi. Except in Botswana, AIDS is rarely spontaneously mentioned (just 3 percent), though some who cite "health" (ranked second overall) may be referring to AIDS.

## 6. People are unsatisfied with economic conditions

Fewer than one out of three (29 percent) express any degree of satisfaction with the condition of the national economy. In addition, more people think that their living standards have worsened over the previous year than perceive improvements. The only exception is Uganda, where a majority is satisfied with overall economic conditions (62 percent). Interestingly, economic satisfaction is related to the recent growth in the national economy, but not to an individual's felt or actual living standards. Because economic satisfaction is far lower than satisfaction with democracy, the latter must be due in good part to non-economic considerations.



## 7. Africans support some economic reform policies, but not others

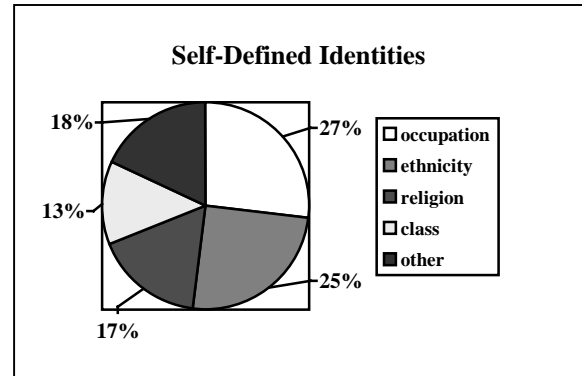
Reform programs to expand the role of the market in the economy meet with mixed reviews. On average, across twelve countries, majorities *accept price reforms* that have introduced user fees for social services (62 percent) and restored market pricing for consumer goods (54 percent). But, similar majorities *reject institutional reforms*, for example to privatize public corporations (58 percent) and to cut back the number of jobs in the civil service (60 percent). While Africans welcome looser regulation on trading, they still want the state to provide employment.

## 8. Corruption is seen as pervasive

Whereas about one-half of survey respondents think that corruption among public officials is common (52 percent), about one-third think it is rare (35 percent). Perceived corruption is highest in Ghana, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe, and lowest in Botswana, Lesotho and Namibia. Generally, however, people perceive more corruption than they themselves have personally experienced. Such perceptions, and the social inequalities they reflect, tend to corrode satisfaction with economic reform policies and with democracy.

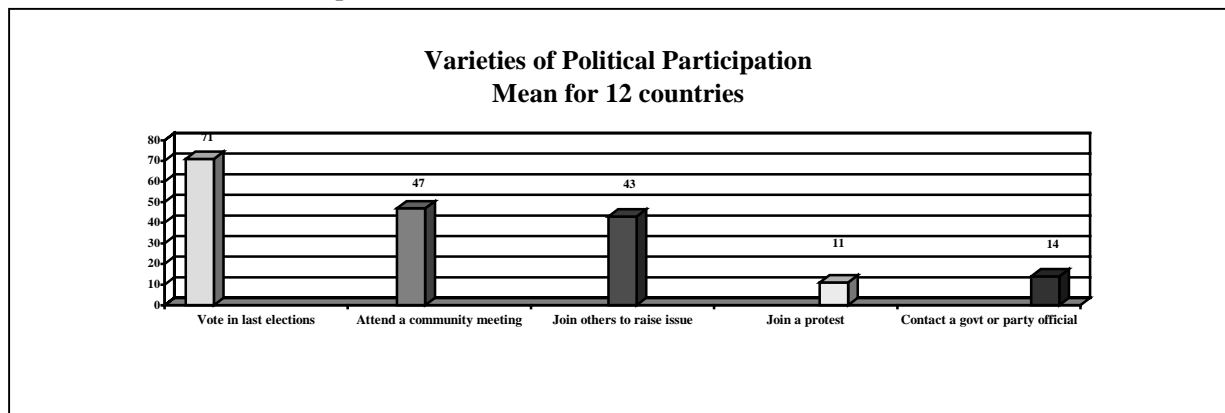
### 9. Africans do not always define themselves in ethnic terms

Asked “which group do you feel you belong to first and foremost?” Afrobarometer respondents cited occupations (e.g. farmer, trader, etc.) more often than ethnic identities (27 percent versus 25 percent). Overwhelmingly, people express pride in their self-defined group identity and do not consider that it conflicts with national identity. Countries vary considerably, however: whereas occupational identities predominate in Tanzania and Uganda, ethnicity remains the most important in Nigeria and Namibia. And in Zimbabwe, Zambia and South Africa, people are prone to think that the government treats their group unfairly.



### 10. Between elections, political participation is low

The Africans we interviewed claim high levels of electoral participation, with 71 percent saying they voted in the last national election. But participation between elections is lower, with 47 percent attending a community meeting, 43 percent joining with others to raise an issue, and 11 percent joining a protest. Notably, only 14 percent had contacted a government or political party official during the previous year. Indeed, respondents in Africa’s new democracies complain of a wide gap between citizens and their political representatives. Among elected leaders, parliamentary representatives have the lowest performance rating when compared with local councilors and the national president.



### 11. People know that African democracies are fragile

Most Africans interviewed (71 percent) think that their own countries are democratic, at least to some degree. But nowhere does public opinion hold that a full democracy has been attained. Instead democracy is seen as having either minor problems (especially among Zambians) or major problems (especially in Nigeria). Africans therefore seem to recognize that much work remains to be done to turn fragile multiparty regimes into consolidated democracies.

