

Zambians gaining confidence in elections as tools for accountability

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 47 | Rhoda Chiwele

Summary

As one of the first post-independence countries in Africa to effect leadership change through peaceful and competitive elections, Zambia has a history of multiparty politics dating back to 1991, when the United National Independent Party (UNIP) party was removed from power by the Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD). After ruling for 20 years, the MMD lost the elections in 2011, and the Patriotic Front (PF) was ushered into power.

As elections for president, members of Parliament (MPs), and councillors continue to be conducted every five years, Zambians are becoming increasingly confident in their elections as tools for ensuring that voters' views are reflected and for holding non-performing officials accountable, a new Afrobarometer survey indicates.

Almost six of 10 Zambians say elections enable voters to remove leaders who do not do what the people want – almost twice the proportion who held this view in 2005. A majority say elections ensure that MPs reflect the views of voters – again a substantial increase from previous surveys. And more than three-fourths say the most recent national elections, in 2011, were “completely free and fair” or “free and fair, but with minor problems.”

Despite these positive assessments, substantial proportions of the population say that at least “sometimes,” Zambian elections are plagued by intimidation and bribery of voters and unfair counting of votes.

Afrobarometer survey

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 Zambia, led by RuralNet Associates Ltd., interviewed 1,200 adult Zambians in October 2014. A sample of this size yields results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Zambia in 1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, and 2013.

Key findings

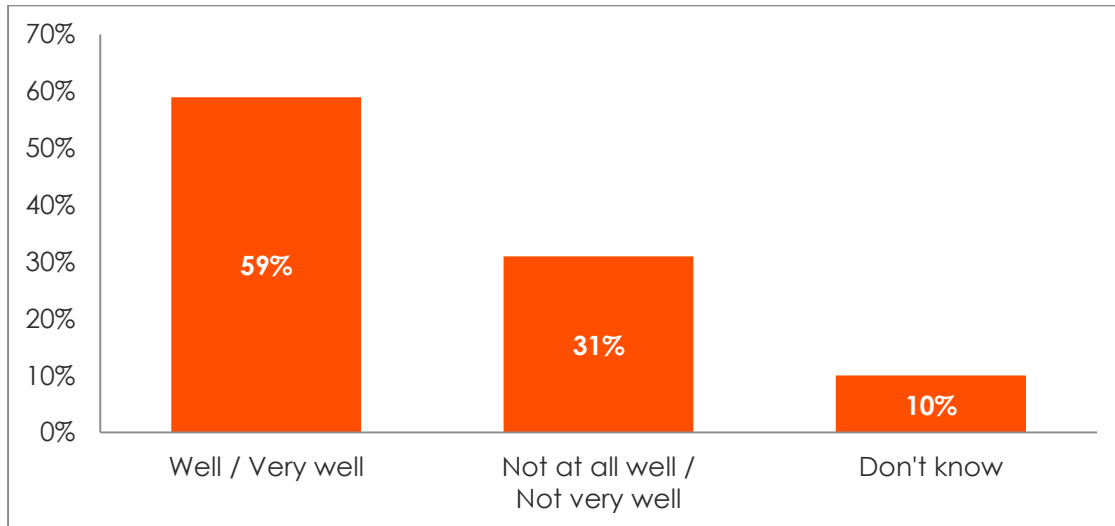
- Almost six of 10 Zambians (59%) say elections function well to enable voters to remove leaders who do not do what the people want. This proportion has nearly doubled from 30% in 2005.

- More than half (51%) say elections ensure that MPs reflect the views of voters, an increase from 29% in 2005.
- A majority (59%) perceive the 2011 elections as “completely free and fair,” and an additional 20% say they were “free and fair, but with minor problems.”
- However, only a minority of Zambians say that voters are never threatened with violence and never bribed and that votes are always counted fairly.

Elections as tools for accountability

A majority (59%) of Zambians say elections function “well” or “very well” to enable voters to remove from office leaders who do not do what the people want; 31% say they do not (Figure 1).

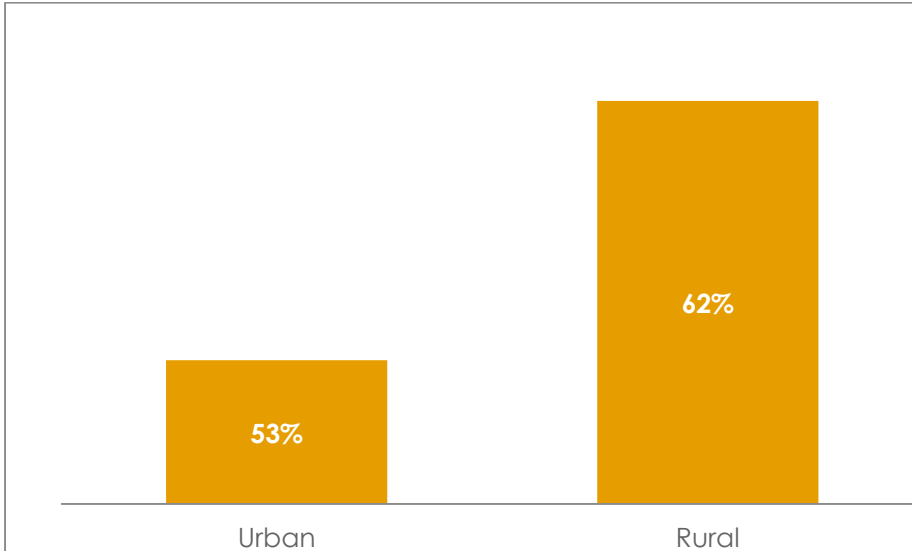
Figure 1: Elections enable voters to remove leaders from office | Zambia | 2014



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?*

Rural residents (62%) are more likely than urban residents (53%) to say that elections function “well” or “very well” to enable voters to remove poorly performing leaders from office (Figure 2). There is no significant difference between men (61%) and women (57%) on this issue.

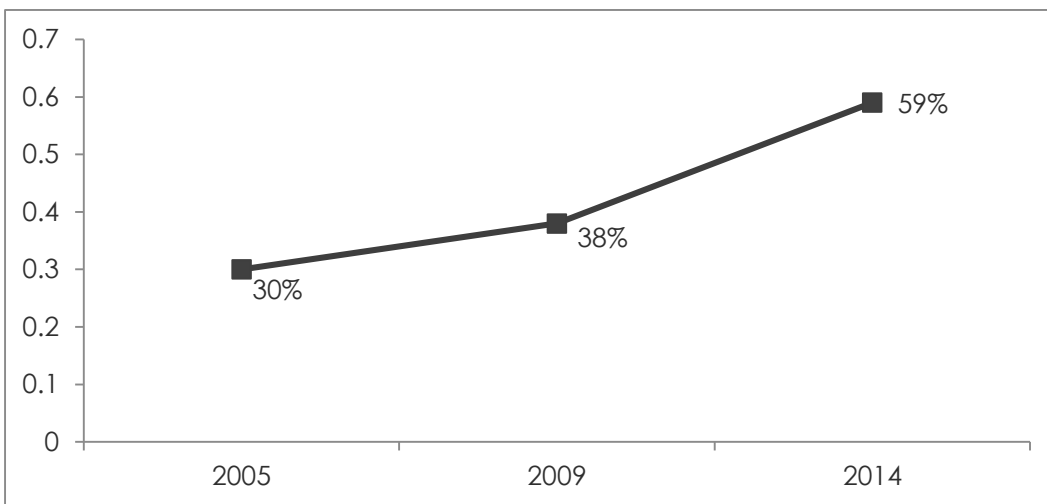
Figure 2: Elections enable voters to remove leaders from office | by respondent location | Zambia | 2014



(% who say “well” or “very well”)

As shown in Figure 3, the proportion of Zambians who say that elections enable voters to remove non-performing officials from office has nearly doubled since 2005. The substantial increase from 2009 (38%) to 2014 (59%) may be related to the fact that the 2011 elections resulted in a regime change after 20 years of MMD leadership.

Figure 3: Elections enable voters to remove leaders from office | Zambia | 2005-2014



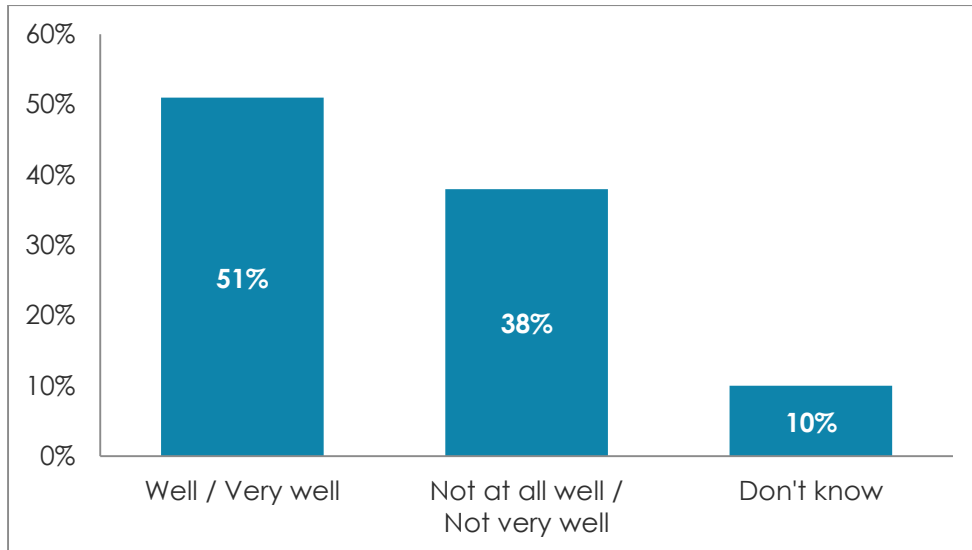
(% who say “well” or “very well”)

A slim majority (51%) of Zambians also believe that elections function “well” or “very well” to ensure that MPs reflect the views of voters, while 38% say they do not (Figure 4).

There is a marked urban-rural difference: Urban residents (43%) are less likely than rural dwellers (57%) to say elections function “well” or “very well” to ensure that MPs reflect the

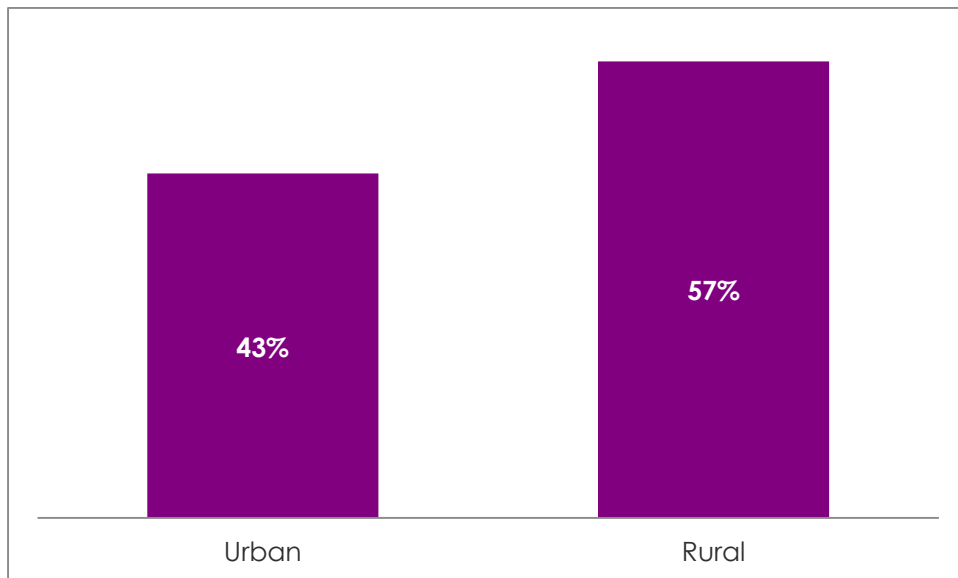
views of voters (Figure 5). Again, the difference between men (52%) and women (50%) is negligible.

Figure 4: Elections ensure that voters' views are reflected | Zambia | 2014



Respondents were asked: Think about how elections work in practice in this country. How well do elections ensure that the members of Parliament reflect the views of voters?

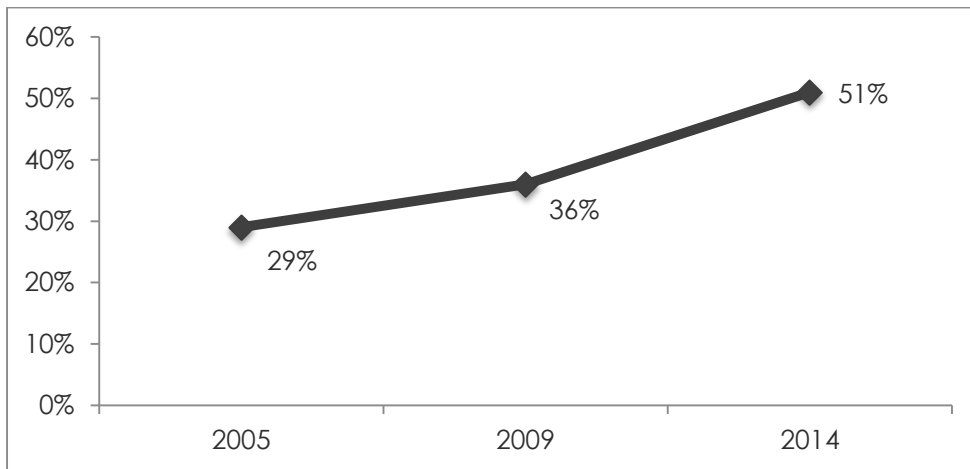
Figure 5: Elections ensure that voters' views are reflected | by respondent location | Zambia | 2014



(% who say "well" or "very well")

As on the question of enabling voters to remove non-performing leaders from office, the proportion of Zambians who say elections are effective in ensuring that MPs reflect voters' views has been increasing, from 29% in 2005 to 36% in 2009 and 51% in 2014 (Figure 6). This upward trend suggests that elections in Zambia give the electorate an increasingly broad spectrum of powers to shape the reality in which they live.

Figure 6: Elections ensure that voters' views are reflected | Zambia | 2005-2014

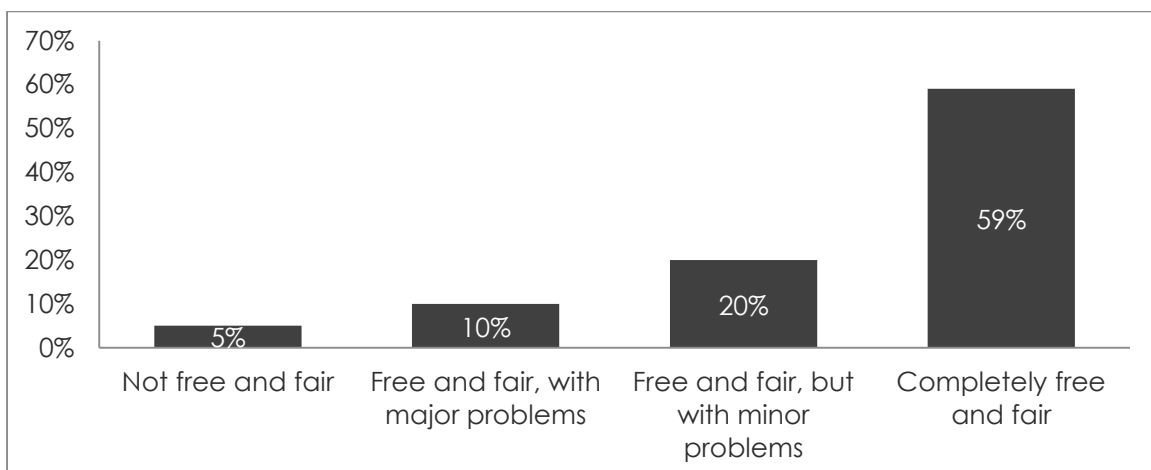


(% who say "well" or "very well")

Credibility of elections

The 2011 tripartite elections for president, MPs, and local councillors are perceived as having been "completely free and fair" by more than half of respondents (59%), and an additional 20% think the elections were "free and fair, but with minor problems." Only 15% say the elections were "free and fair with major problems" (10%) or "not free and fair" (5%) (Figure 7).

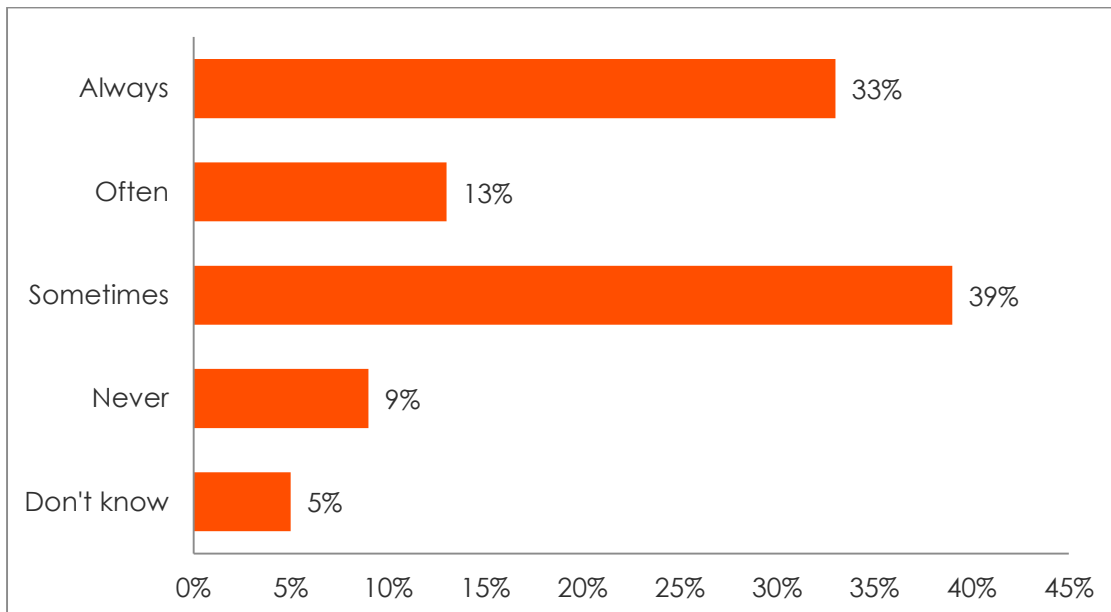
Figure 7: Freeness and fairness of the last national election | Zambia | 2014



Respondents were asked: *On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in September 2011?*

Despite this overwhelmingly positive assessment of the elections, respondents signal some concerns about the credibility of their elections. Only one-third (33%) believe that votes are "always" counted fairly, while 39% say they are only "sometimes" counted fairly and 9% say they are "never" counted fairly (Figure 8).

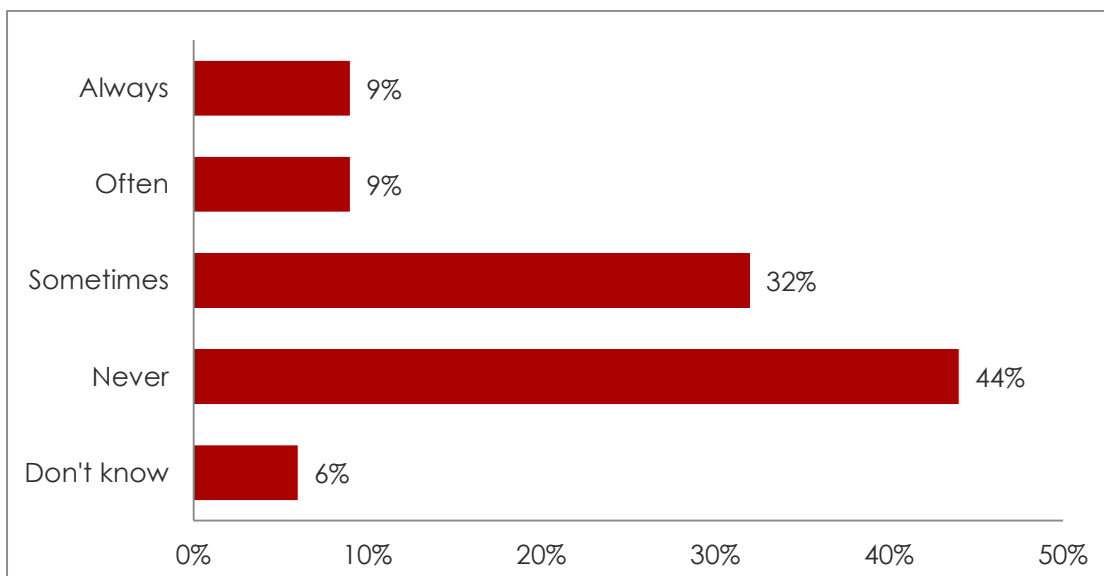
Figure 8: How often votes are counted fairly | Zambia | 2014



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

While a plurality (44%) say voters are “never” threatened with violence at the polls, one-third (32%) say this occurs “sometimes,” and one in five (18%) say it occurs “often” or “always” (Figure 9).

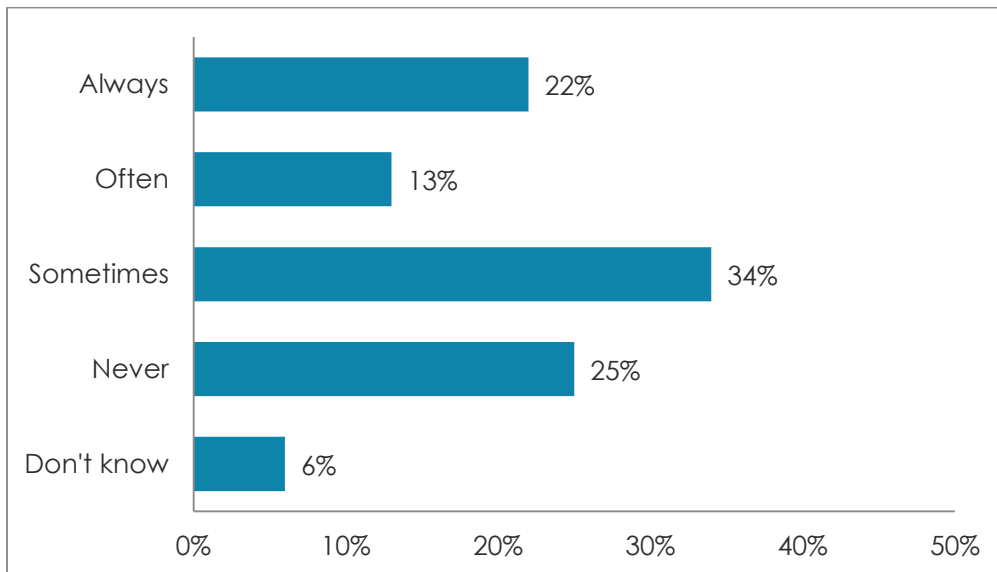
Figure 9: How often voters are threatened | Zambia | 2014



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often do the following things occur in this country's elections: Voters are threatened with violence at the polls?*

As for whether voters are bribed to support particular candidates, one-fourth (25%) of Zambians say this “never” happens. But one-third (34%) say it “sometimes” happens, and another one-third say it “often” (13%) or “always” (22%) occurs (Figure 10).

Figure 10: How often voters are bribed | Zambia | 2014



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

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

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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.

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

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