

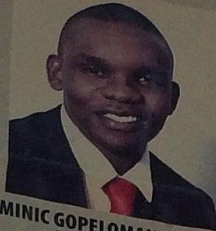
HIS EXCELLENCY LT. GEN. S.K.I. KHAMA  
PARTY PRESIDENT



Tsholetsa Domkrag



ATAMELANG PHISOA NGWAKO  
GOVERNMENT WARD



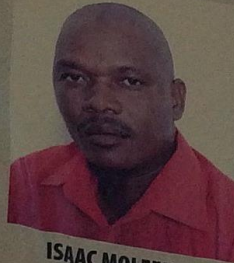
DOMINIC GOPELOMANG KWENA  
VILLAGE WARD



GLADYS SIBILO MALINDA  
BOIKHUTSO WARD



MALEBOGO MALUBA  
TSHOFOFELO WARD



ISAAC MOLEFHE  
NOTWANE WARD



JENAMISO MATHALAZA  
MARUAPULA WARD

**2014**  
ELECTIONS

**GABORONE CENTRAL**

Letsema le tsweletse

KNOW  
YOUR  
CANDIDATES

There is *still* no alternative  
Thopha BDP / **Vote BDP**

## Still no alternative?

Popular views of the opposition  
in Southern Africa's one-party dominant regimes

By Rorisang Lekalake



## Introduction

Following decades of authoritarian rule, multiparty democracy re-emerged in a “wave” of democratization in sub-Saharan Africa during the early 1990s. Twenty-nine countries in the region held founding elections – first competitive elections after an authoritarian period – between 1989 and 1994, of which 16 led to full democratic transitions (Bratton, 1997). Notable successes include Namibia (1989), Cape Verde (1991), Ghana (1992), and South Africa (1994), which a generation later are ranked among Africa’s politically “free” countries (Freedom House, 2016). While this period was initially classified as part of Huntington’s (1991) “third wave” of democratization, some political scientists consider it part of a distinct “fourth wave” of general regime change because most of these political openings did not result in full democratic transitions (see McFaul, 2002). Today, African political regimes vary widely, from the liberal democracies cited above to repressive autocracies (Diamond, 2015).

Given the importance of party competition to a healthy democracy, a major criticism of African political regimes concerns their relatively few electoral alternations. Although the number of political alternations in sub-Saharan Africa increased from three in 1961-1989 to 39 in 1990-2012, the latter number represents only 23% of election results during this period (Carbone, 2013). Even among multiparty democracies, many African countries have yet to experience a single peaceful alternation of power.

Such one-party dominance is distinct from one-party rule, which was widespread in Africa prior to the 1990s, because it at least provides a legal framework for the recognition of opposition parties. Dominant parties are characterized by their electoral strength and the endurance of this strength – *in spite of* the existence of a political opposition (de Jager & du Toit, 2013).

Duverger (1963) argues that public perceptions play a significant role in confirming and maintaining electoral dominance: “A party is dominant when it is identified with an epoch, when its doctrines, ideas, methods, its style, so to speak, coincide with those of the epoch. ... A dominant party is that which public opinion *believes* to be dominant” (p. 308). Furthermore, de Jager and du Toit (2013) highlight the importance of historical events in creating symbolic attachment to these parties in most developing countries: “Dominant parties tend to come into power on a wave of a significant historic event, be it a revolution, state-creation or liberation, and initially maintain this dominance by the continued referral to this event” (p. 16).

Five Southern African countries have democracies dominated by parties that emerged from liberation movements and have governed since independence: Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.<sup>1</sup> This paper uses Afrobarometer survey data to analyze popular attitudes toward political opposition parties in these countries. Do citizens support multiparty politics? What are the trends in levels of citizen support for the political opposition? Do citizens believe that opposition parties present a viable alternative to the ruling party? Given the importance of public opinion in maintaining party dominance, findings offer important insights for scholars of democracy in Africa as well as for opposition parties in these countries.

## Afrobarometer survey

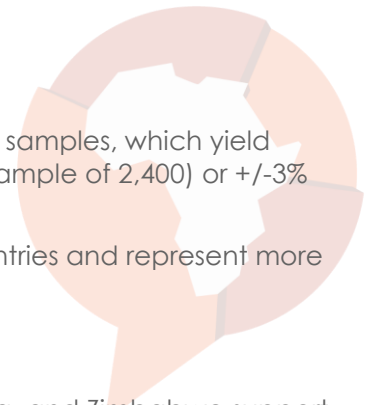
Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across Africa. Six rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2015, and Round 7 surveys are being conducted in 2016/2017. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the

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<sup>1</sup> Afrobarometer also conducts surveys in six other Southern African countries: Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Swaziland, and Zambia. Regional analyses in this paper include all except Swaziland, where political parties are banned.

language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples, which yield country-level results with a margin of sampling error of +/-2% (for a sample of 2,400) or +/-3% (for a sample of 1,200) at a 95% confidence level.

This paper draws mainly on Round 6 surveys, which covered 36 countries and represent more than three-fourths of the continent's population.



## Key findings

- About seven in 10 citizens in Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe support multiparty competition, compared to only a slim majority (56%) of Mozambicans. On average across all five countries, this support has increased from 55% in 2002/2003 to 67% in 2014/2015.
- However, only minorities endorse an opposition “watchdog” role in Parliament, ranging from 16% of Batswana to 32% of Mozambicans. Even citizens who self-identify as opposition supporters are more likely to say the opposition should collaborate with the government in order to develop the country.
- On average, trust in opposition parties increased significantly in the five countries between 2002 (16%) and 2015 (38%), although it remains well below the levels of trust in the ruling party (56% on average). Public trust in opposition parties is higher than average among citizens with post-secondary education and those living under secure material conditions (both 43%).
- The proportion of citizens who feel “close to” an opposition party is highest in Botswana (36%), followed by South Africa (34%), Zimbabwe (28%), Namibia (24%), and Mozambique (20%). Affiliation with opposition parties is higher among urban residents, men, citizens aged under 56 years, and those with at least a secondary education.
- While levels of trust in opposition parties are similar in Southern African countries with dominant party systems and those with competitive party systems, there is a significant difference in trust in the ruling party (56% vs. 40%). And citizens of countries with competitive party systems are significantly less likely to self-identify as ruling-party supporters (16% vs. 44% in dominant party systems).
- Among citizens in the five countries with dominant party systems, Namibians are most likely to believe that the opposition presents a viable alternative vision and plan for the country (52%), followed by Mozambicans (45%), Batswana (44%), South Africans (43%), and Zimbabweans (37%). On average, this perception is higher among urban, male, younger, and better-educated citizens.
- Only small minorities of Batswana, Mozambicans, Namibians, South Africans, and Zimbabweans believe that opposition parties are most able to address fighting corruption (24%), creating jobs (18%), controlling prices (16%), and improving health services (15%). And although six in 10 (60%) citizens across the five countries say their government is doing “fairly badly” or “very badly” at handling the most important problems facing their country, only 36% believe that another political party could do a better job of addressing them.

## One-party dominance

Pempel's (1990) seminal work on one-party dominant systems, which was published during the early stages of the African wave of democratization, identifies four dimensions of party dominance: a numerical advantage (at least a plurality of legislative seats); a strong bargaining position (a government is unlikely to form without this party's inclusion, even if it does not win an outright majority of seats); chronological dominance (at the core of government over a substantial period of time); and governmental dominance (in power





long enough to shape the public policy agenda). Although these systems were rare in industrialized democracies at the time, they were common elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

Party dominance is of concern to scholars of democracy because it gives ruling parties broad opportunities to create a cycle of dominance by using state resources and public policies to isolate and weaken the opposition: “Dominance therefore involves an interrelated set of mutually reinforcing processes that have the potential to beget even more dominance” (Pempel, 1990, p. 16).

Many analysts characterize one-party dominance in Africa as a “worrying trend” (Doorenspleet & Nijzink, 2013, p. 1), and de Jager and du Toit (2013) raise concerns about the implications of dominant party systems for democratization in the Southern African region in particular, going so far as to characterize these countries as “ostensibly democratic” regimes that meet only the minimal procedural threshold for democracy.

### *Party dominance in Southern Africa*

The literature on dominant party systems cites many factors that can promote the endurance of these systems, including electoral systems design, government performance, state-party relations, historical legacies (an association with nationalist or liberation movements), and a country’s political culture (Doorenspleet & Nijzink, 2013). In citing a “steady increase” in the number of dominant party regimes in Southern Africa, de Jager and du Toit (2013) present quantitative and qualitative data indicating that these systems are primarily maintained by the asymmetrical distribution of economic and political resources between ruling and opposition parties.<sup>3</sup> The authors argue that party dominance in the region is further supported by patronage networks, access to public and private funds, and illicit financial resources.

Suttner (2006) argues that academic “preoccupation” with party dominance in Africa, particularly in Southern African countries, is primarily driven by ideological rather than theoretical concerns. Few concerns were raised about dominant parties in Western European states, he notes, in contrast to the literature on the dominance of leftist African parties like the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa.

There is substantial variation in the quality of democracy in the five Southern African countries with one-party dominant systems: Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa are among the continent’s most highly regarded democracies, while Mozambique and Zimbabwe are hybrid regimes that combine electoral competition with elements of authoritarianism. Consequently, a conceptual distinction is generally made between the two groups of countries. Erdmann and Basedau (2013), for example, classify Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa as “dominant” and Mozambique and Zimbabwe as “dominant authoritarian” systems based on their respective Freedom House scores (p. 35).<sup>4</sup>

The most dominant party in the region, by share of seats in the National Assembly, is the SWAPO Party of Namibia (80% of seats), followed by the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF, 76%), the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP, 65%), South Africa’s African National Congress (ANC, 62%), and the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO, 58%) (Table 1).

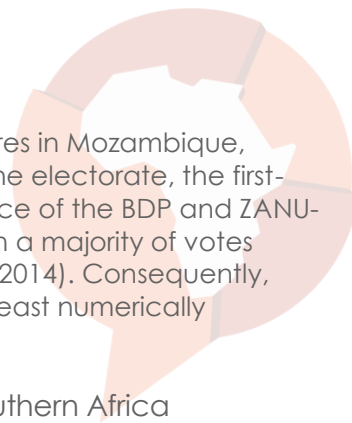
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<sup>2</sup> Notable examples of dominant party rule in advanced democracies include Norway (1935-1963), Sweden (1936-1976), Japan (1955-1993), and Israel (1948-1981).

<sup>3</sup> Their study excluded Mozambique due to its distinct colonial legacy, and it excluded Malawi and Zambia in its conceptualization of the Southern Africa region.

<sup>4</sup> Although the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) has been in power since independence (1975), Angola does not meet the criteria of an institutionalized party system employed by Erdmann and Basedau (2013).

While use of list proportional representation means that the seat shares in Mozambique, Namibia, and South Africa reflect these parties' popularity among the electorate, the first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral system helps to maintain the dominance of the BDP and ZANU-PF. In 2014, for the first time since independence, the BDP did not win a majority of votes (46.7%), but it still holds 65% of National Assembly seats (Gabathuse, 2014). Consequently, although the BDP is the most enduring dominant party, it is also the least numerically dominant ruling party in terms of popular support.<sup>5</sup>



**Table 1: Party dominance in Southern Africa** | 5 countries in Southern Africa

Country and party	Independence year	First multiparty election	Electoral system*	Last election <sup>6</sup>	Seat share <sup>7</sup>	No. of opp. parties in Parliament	Freedom rating (2015) <sup>8</sup>
<b>Botswana</b> BDP	1966	1965	FPTP	Oct. 2014	65%	2	2.5
<b>Mozambique</b> FRELIMO	1975	1994	List PR	Oct. 2014	58%	2	4.0
<b>Namibia</b> SWAPO	1990	1989	List PR	Nov. 2014	80%	10	2.0
<b>South Africa</b> ANC	1994	1994	List PR	May 2014	62%	13	2.0
<b>Zimbabwe</b> ZANU-PF	1980	1980	FPTP	July 2013	76%	3	5.0

Source: Freedom House (2016), Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016), International IDEA (2016), and Doorenspleet & Nijzink (2013)

\* "List PR" = list proportional representation; "FPTP" = first past the post

The following sections will examine the extent to which citizens of these countries support multiparty democracy and opposition parties, as well as their perceptions of these parties' viability.

### Popular support for multiparty democracy

In outlining eight dimensions of democratic quality, Diamond and Morlino (2004) identify competition as a cornerstone of procedural democracy: "In order to be a democracy at all, a political system must have regular, free, and fair electoral competition between different political parties" (p. 24). Lindberg (2006) presents evidence that African countries that conduct successive elections – regardless of the quality of the elections themselves – experience improvements in democratic quality as measured by Freedom House's indicators of civil liberties and political rights. The author argues that this relationship between elections and democratic rights is driven by the role of elections as key opportunities for civic activism:

<sup>5</sup> The official Zimbabwe Election Commission report does not state the proportion of votes won by ZANU-PF candidates but states that President Robert Mugabe received 60.6% of votes cast in the presidential election (Zimbabwe Electoral Commission, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Round 6 surveys were conducted in the months preceding the 2014 elections in Botswana and Namibia, as well as Malawi and Mauritius, and one year after the most recent elections in Mozambique, South Africa, and Zimbabwe (see Appendix Table A.1 for fieldwork dates in all 11 Southern African countries).

<sup>7</sup> Share of directly elected seats in each country's National Assembly won in the last election.

<sup>8</sup> This is based on an average of ratings on civil liberties and political rights, ranging from 1 (the best possible score) to 7 (the worst) (Freedom House, 2016).

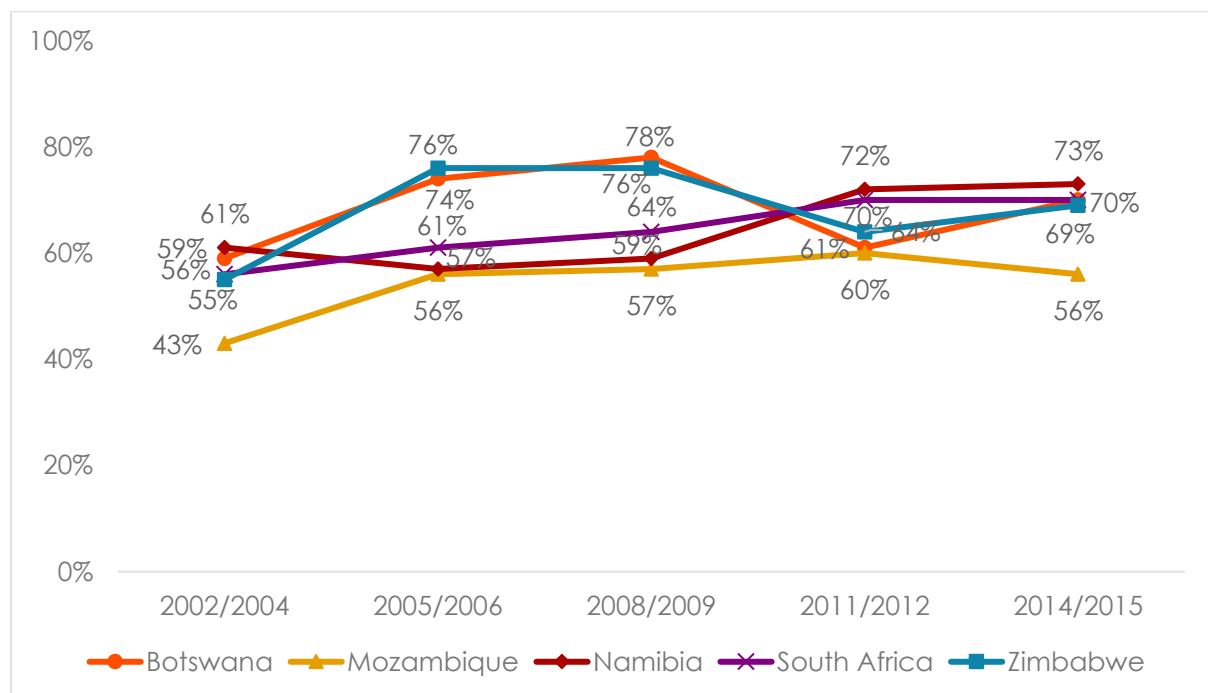
“The element of competition inherent in elections provides voters and organizations with a means to pressure incumbents and demand concessions from politicians” (p. 148).



### Support for multiparty competition

Two-thirds (67%) of citizens in Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe agree that multiparty competition is important to ensure that citizens have “real choices” in who governs their countries. This support ranges from 56% in Mozambique to 73% in Namibia (Figure 1), and on average across the five countries, endorsement of multipartism has increased since 2002/2003 (55%). These levels are below their peak, however, in Botswana, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. Endorsement of multiparty competition is slightly higher in the five countries than average levels in the 36 countries surveyed in 2014/2015 (63%).

**Figure 1: Support for multiparty competition | 5 countries in Southern Africa | 2002-2015**



**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 [country].

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

(% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with Statement 2)

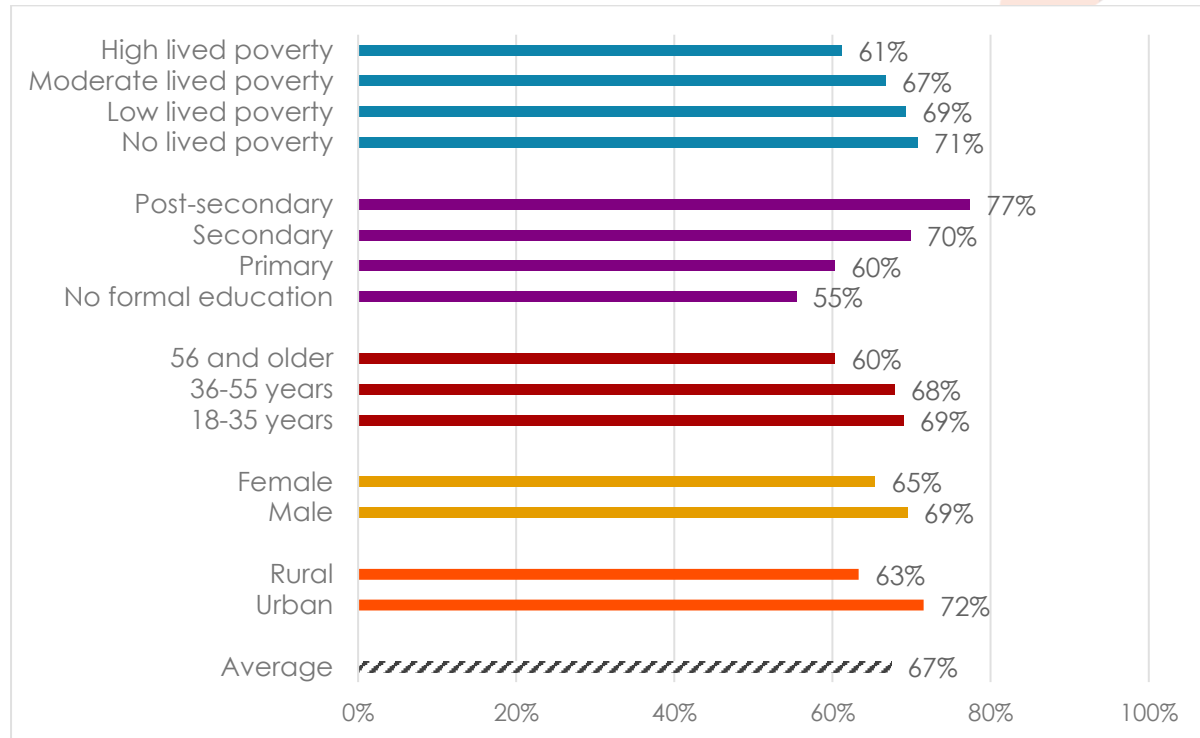
Support for multiparty competition is stronger among urban residents and men, as well as among respondents aged under 56 years (Figure 2). In addition, endorsement of multipartism increases with educational attainment and material security as measured by the Afrobarometer Lived Poverty Index.<sup>9</sup> Citizens who never lack basic goods and services (i.e.

<sup>9</sup> The Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents’ levels of material deprivation by asking them how often they or their family members went without enough food, enough clean water, medicines or medical treatment, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income during the previous year. “No lived poverty” refers to full access to all five basic necessities, while “high lived poverty” refers to regular shortages of these goods and services. (For more information on the LPI, see Afrobarometer Policy Paper No. 29, available at [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org)).

“no lived poverty”) are more likely to favour competition than those who frequently lack these necessities (“high lived poverty”) (71% vs. 61%).



**Figure 2: Support for multiparty competition** | by lived poverty, education, age, gender, and urban-rural residence | Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe | 2014/2015



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.

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

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

(% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with Statement 2)

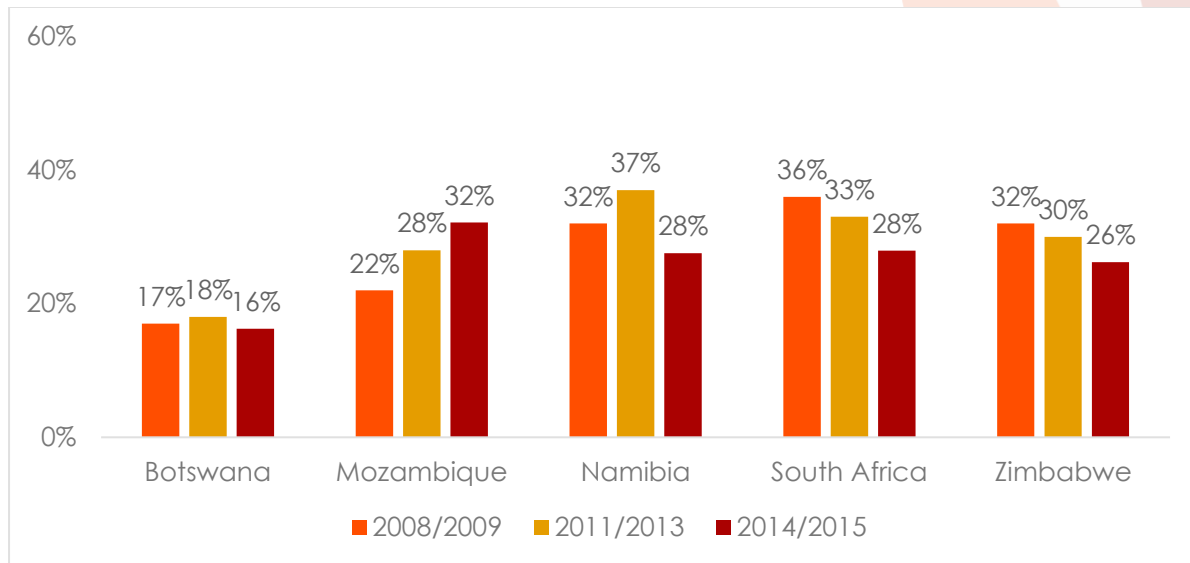
### Role of opposition parties

The opposition's role as a political “watchdog” is a key element of horizontal accountability, yet only three in 10 (28%) respondents in the 36 African countries surveyed by Afrobarometer say the opposition should work to hold government accountable rather than play a cooperative role. Similarly, only minorities of citizens in the five Southern African countries with dominant party systems agree that the opposition's primary role should be to “monitor and criticize the government in order to hold it accountable,” whereas majorities instead believe the opposition should “cooperate with the government to help it develop the country.” Preference for a watchdog role is lowest in Botswana (16%) and highest in Mozambique (32%) (Figure 3).

Despite Botswana's status as one of Africa's most enduring democracies, its citizens' support for this monitoring role for the opposition has been consistently lower than in the other four countries. Furthermore, while support levels have increased over time in Mozambique, they have declined in Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.

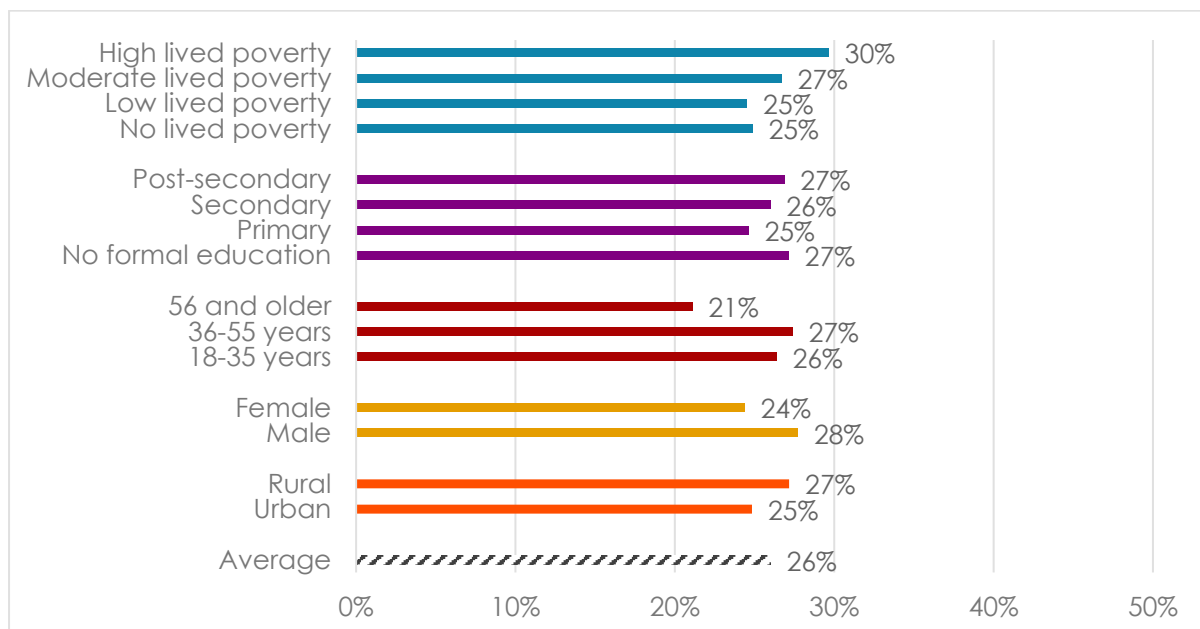
Men and citizens under age 56 are slightly more likely to endorse a watchdog role for the opposition, and this support increases modestly with levels of material deprivation (Figure 4).

**Figure 3: Support for opposition 'watchdog' role | 5 countries in Southern Africa | 2008-2015**



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: After losing an election, opposition parties should monitor and criticize the government in order to hold it accountable.  
 Statement 2: Once an election is over, opposition parties and politicians should accept defeat and cooperate with the government to help it develop the country.  
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with Statement 1)

**Figure 4: Support for opposition 'watchdog' role | by lived poverty, education, age, gender, and urban-rural residence | Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe | 2014/2015**



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: After losing an election, opposition parties should monitor and criticize the government in order to hold it accountable.  
 Statement 2: Once an election is over, opposition parties and politicians should accept defeat and cooperate with the government to help it develop the country.  
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with Statement 1)





Previous Afrobarometer studies offer evidence that support for a non-confrontational political opposition reflects a general preference for consensus politics in Africa (Bratton & Logan, 2015; Logan, 2008). In line with this argument, the survey question's alternative opposition role of cooperating "to help (the government) develop the country" may encourage a preference for collaboration over monitoring. Alternatively, this preference could be the result of the actions of opposition parties themselves. Lindberg (2006) argues that the conventional view of opposition parties as pro-democratic forces in Africa is "a common misconception" and cites the unwillingness of some opposition parties to accept, within a reasonable time frame, the results of elections that are generally deemed free and fair as an example of non-democratic behaviour (p. 149).

### Efficacy of elections

In addition to the questions about support for multiparty politics and the role that the opposition should play, Afrobarometer asks survey respondents about the efficacy of elections in their country. Although a majority (61%) of citizens in 36 countries say that elections "often" or "always" give voters a "genuine choice," only four in 10 say elections are effective at ensuring that voters' views are reflected (42%) or at enabling voters to remove underperforming leaders from office (40%) (Penar, Aiko, Bentley, & Han, 2016).

Given the lack of electoral turnover in countries with dominant party systems, one might expect to find more critical evaluations among these citizens.

On average, citizens in the five Southern African countries are slightly less likely to think that elections give voters a genuine choice than those in non-dominant party systems (62% vs. 70%), but this apparent confirmation of the hypothesis masks significant differences in opinion by country (Table 2).

**Table 2: Electoral performance** | 10 countries in Southern Africa | 2014/2015

	Elections give voters a genuine choice	Elections ensure voters' views reflected	Elections enable voters to remove leaders from office
<b>Botswana</b>	78%	62%	61%
<b>Lesotho</b>	74%	41%	46%
<b>Madagascar</b>	81%	33%	37%
<b>Malawi</b>	74%	38%	49%
<b>Mauritius</b>	74%	57%	44%
<b>Mozambique</b>	40%	42%	32%
<b>Namibia</b>	60%	63%	47%
<b>South Africa</b>	68%	44%	36%
<b>Zambia</b>	62%	51%	59%
<b>Zimbabwe</b>	46%	39%	38%
<b>Dominant party systems</b>	62%	51%	44%
<b>Non-dominant systems</b>	70%	42%	43%
<b>10-country average</b>	66%	47%	45%

#### Respondents were asked:

1. In your opinion, how often do the following things occur in this country's elections: Voters are offered a genuine choice in the elections? (% who say "often" or "always")
2. Think about how elections work in practice in this country. How well do elections:
  - Ensure that members of Parliament/National Assembly representatives reflect the views of voters?
  - Enable voters to remove from office leaders who do not do what the people want? (% who say "well" or "very well")

Mozambicans (40%) and Zimbabweans (46%) are significantly less likely to hold this view than their counterparts in Botswana (78%), South Africa (68%), and Namibia (60%). Similarly, there are large divergences in public evaluations of electoral efficacy in ensuring that voters' views are reflected and in enabling voters to remove underperforming leaders.



### Popular support for opposition parties

In addition to differences in ruling-party seat share and the number of effective parties in the five countries under analysis, there is considerable variation in the relative legislative strength of opposition parties. Mozambique's RENAMO holds the largest proportion of legislative seats at 36%, while Namibia's largest opposition party holds only 5% of seats (Table 3). Only two opposition parties hold seats in Mozambique's Assembly of the Republic, while there are relatively large numbers of effective parties in South Africa and Namibia. All three countries employ proportional representation, which tends to benefit small-party candidates.

Conversely, Botswana and Zimbabwe employ first-past-the-post systems and have few effective parties. Botswana's UDC is a coalition of three opposition parties formed prior to the 2014 election, which led to less vote splitting within constituencies and a resultant decline in the ruling BDP's number of directly elected seats from 45 in 2009 to 37 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016).

**Table 3: Political opposition holding legislative seats in Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe**

Country	Opposition parties	% seats in national legislature
Mozambique	Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO)	35.6%
	Democratic Movement of Mozambique (MDM)	6.8%
South Africa	Democratic Alliance (DA)	22.3%
	Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF)	6.3%
	11 other parties	9.3%
Botswana	Umbrella for Democratic Change (UDC)	29.8%
	Botswana Congress Party (BCP)	5.3%
Zimbabwe <sup>10</sup>	Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-T)	23.3%
	Independent (1 seat)	0.05%
Namibia	Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA)	5.2%
	9 other parties	14.6%

Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016)

The following sections examine popular support for opposition parties as measured in public trust and self-reported affiliation.

### Trust in opposition parties

Previous Afrobarometer analysis has shown that among 12 types of institutions and leaders, opposition parties have the lowest levels of popular trust – substantially lower than ruling parties (36% vs. 46% who say they trust them “somewhat” or “a lot”) (Bratton & Gyimah-Boadi, 2016). In addition, Bratton and Logan's (2015) study of 21 countries for which data were available at the time indicates that the trust gap between ruling and opposition parties

<sup>10</sup> Figures reported are for the 210 directly elected seats.



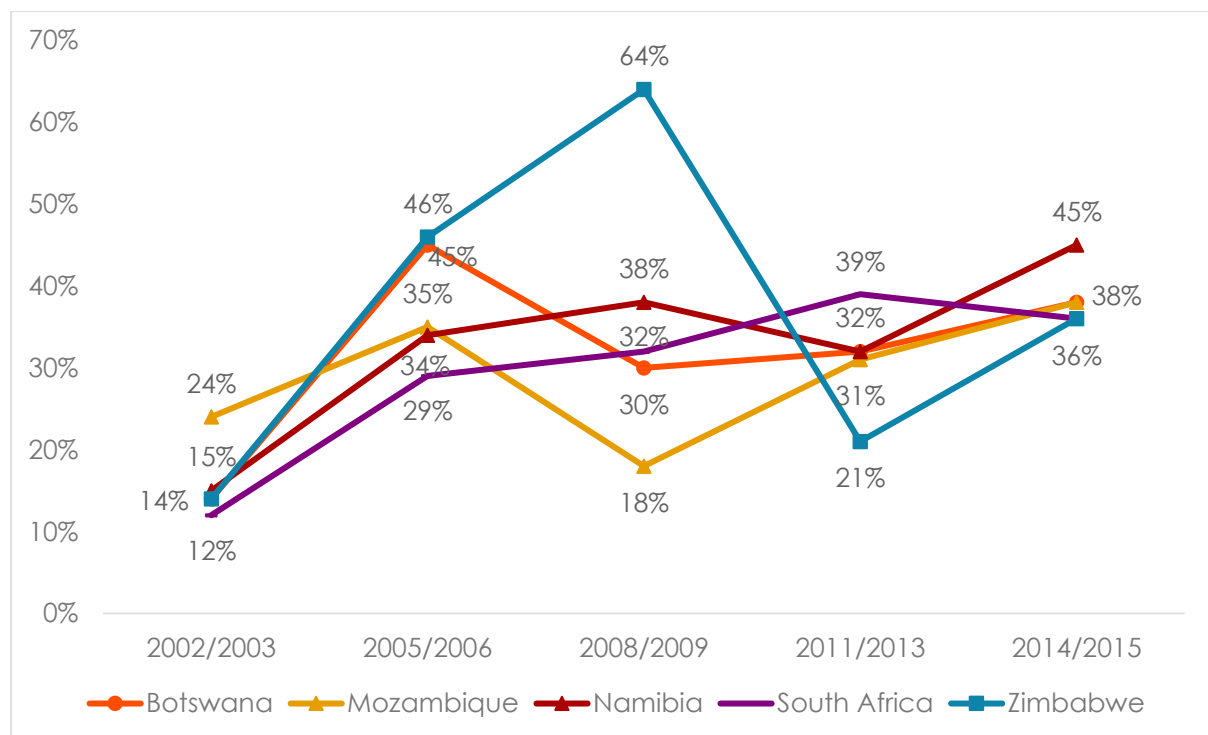
is higher in African countries that have not experienced a recent peaceful electoral turnover.

Similarly, trust in ruling parties tends to be higher than trust in opposition parties in Southern African countries (48% vs. 37%). The exception is Malawi, where data collected before the 2014 election (in which the incumbent party lost) show more citizens saying they trusted the opposition (see Appendix Table A.2 for details).

In the five Southern African countries with dominant party systems, trust in the political opposition increased significantly between 2002/2003 (16% on average) and 2014/2015 (38%) and is at its peak in Namibia and Mozambique (Figure 5). Zimbabweans reported the highest level of confidence in opposition parties among the five countries, a peak of 64% in 2009, but trust then declined sharply (see section below on partisanship in Zimbabwe). Average trust levels since 2002 have been lowest in Mozambique (29%), followed by South Africa (30%), Botswana (32%), Namibia (33%), and Zimbabwe (36%).

Although the average level of trust in opposition parties across these five countries does not differ substantially from that across Southern African countries with competitive party systems (38% vs. 35%), they record significantly more trust in the ruling party than do competitive party countries (56% vs. 40%) (see Appendix Table A.2). These findings provide support for Bratton and Logan's (2015) finding cited above, as the trust gap is higher among Southern African countries with dominant parties (17 percentage points) than the countries that have experienced electoral alternations (5 points).

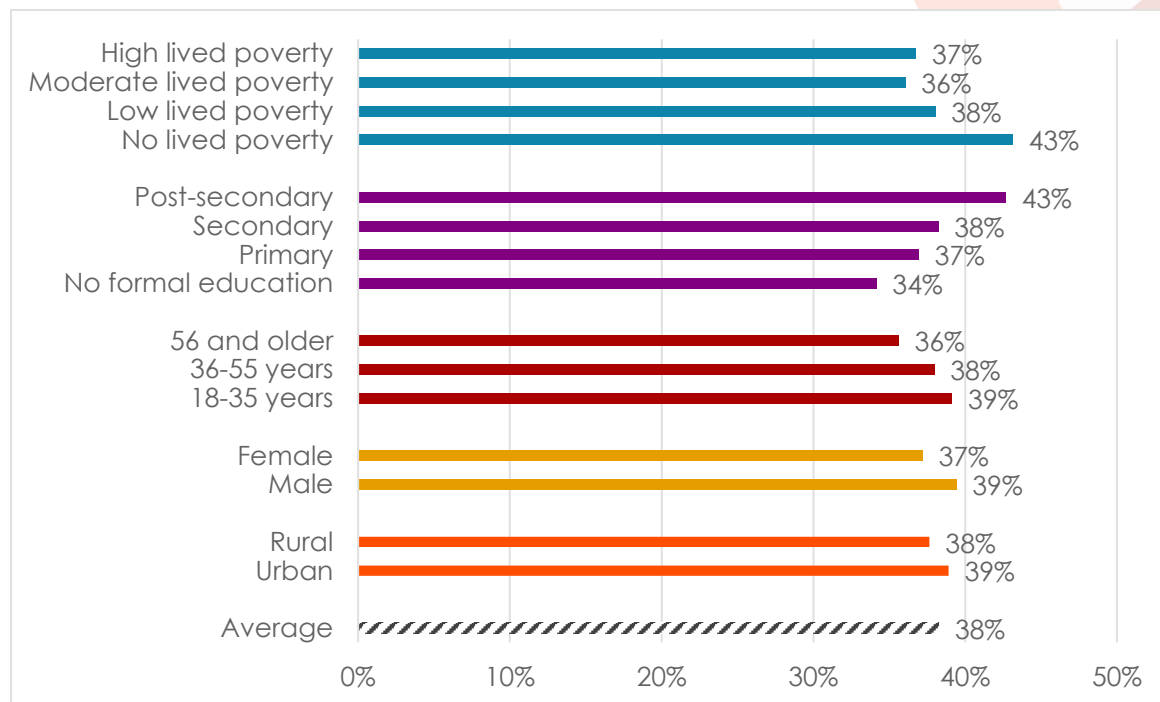
**Figure 5: Trust in opposition political parties | 5 countries in Southern Africa | 2014/2015**



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

Trust in the opposition increases with education and is higher among respondents with full access to basic goods and services (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Trust in opposition parties** | by lived poverty, education, age, gender, and urban-rural residence | Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe | 2014/2015



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

### Partisanship

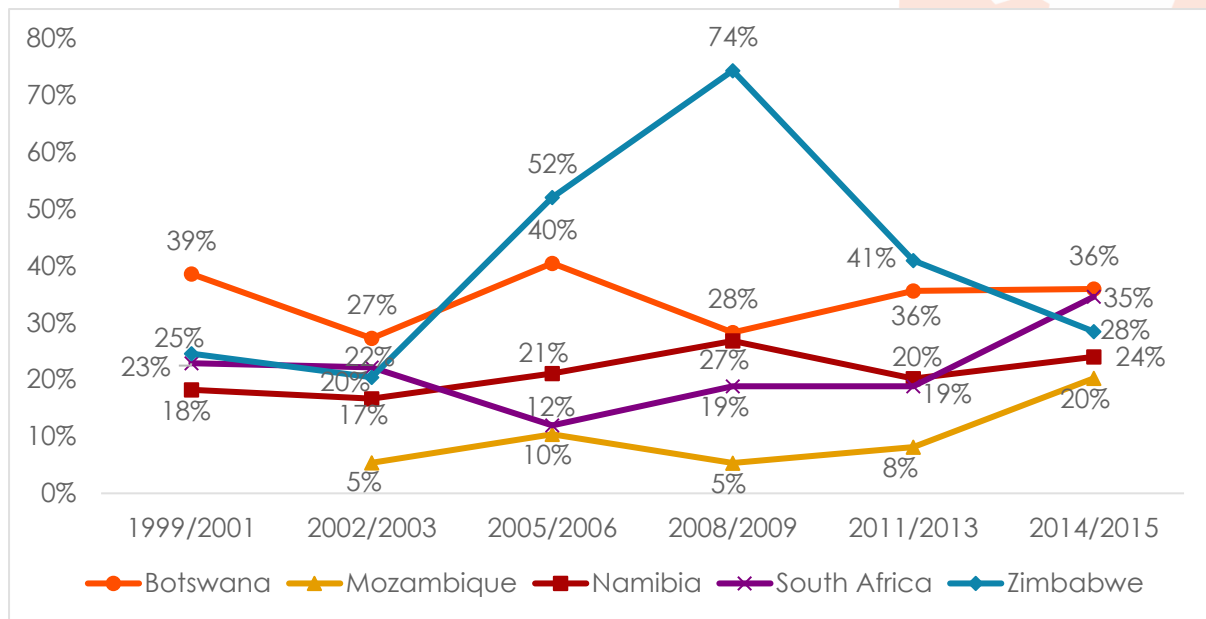
The Afrobarometer questionnaire provides two measures of partisanship: The first asks respondents which party, if any, they "feel close to," and the second asks for which candidate they would vote if elections were held the following day. This analysis employs the first measure due to high refusal rates for the question on voting intentions in Mozambique and Zimbabwe.

In the five countries under review, among the 70% of respondents who say they "feel close to" a political party, 29% identify an opposition political party (as of the survey date). Affiliation with opposition parties is highest in Botswana (36%), followed by South Africa (35%), Zimbabwe (28%), Namibia (24%), and Mozambique (20%) (Figure 7). As with trust in the opposition, affiliation with the opposition was significantly higher in Zimbabwe than in the other four countries between 2005/2006 and 2008/2009 before declining sharply to its current level.

As on the question of trust, citizens of these five countries are generally more likely to identify with the ruling party than those in the Southern African countries with competitive party systems (44% vs. 16%), while the latter are more likely to say they feel close to opposition parties (33% vs. 20%) or to report no affiliation (46% vs. 30%) (see Appendix Table A.3).

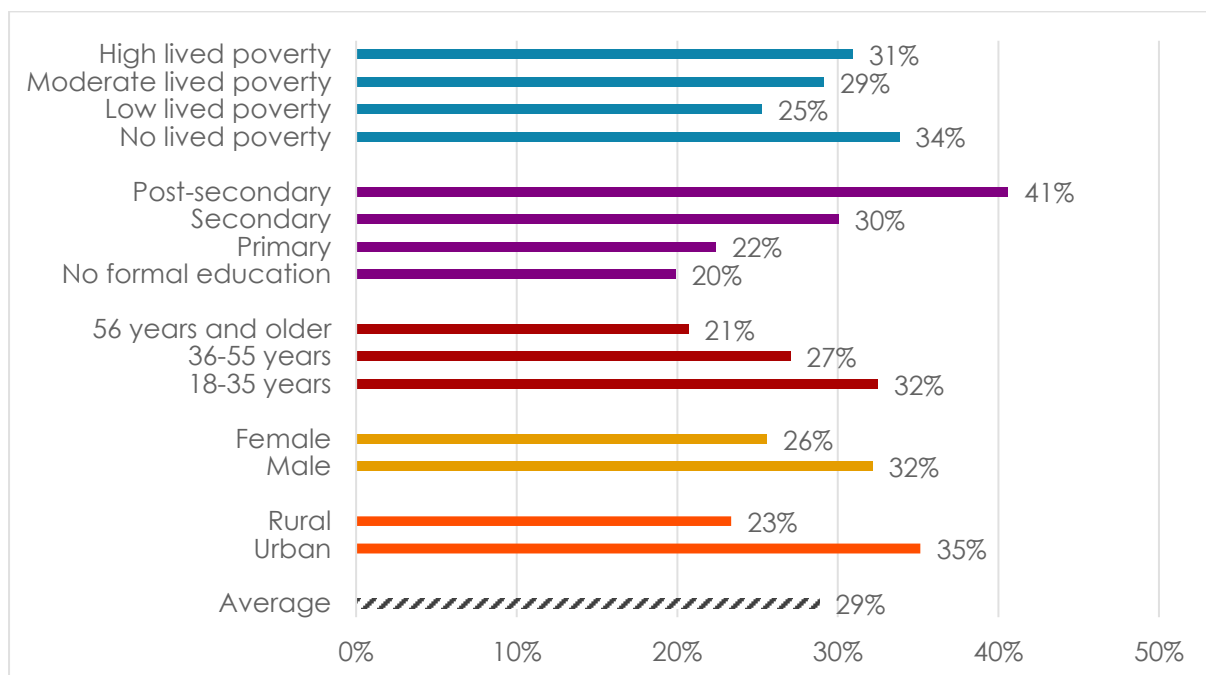
On average across the five countries, urban residents are more likely to identify with opposition parties than rural residents (35% vs. 23%), as are men compared to women (32% vs. 26%) and youth compared to elders (32% among ages 18-35 vs. 21% among ages 56 and older) (Figure 8). In addition, affiliation levels increase with educational attainment: Four in 10 (41%) of citizens with some form of post-secondary schooling feel close to an opposition party, compared to only 20% of those with no formal education. There is no clear pattern by poverty level.

**Figure 7: Affiliation with opposition parties | 5 countries in Southern Africa | 2000-2015**



**Respondents were asked:** Do you feel close to any particular political party? [If yes:] Which party is that? (% who say they feel close to an opposition party, as a proportion of respondents who feel close to any political party)

**Figure 8: Affiliation with opposition parties | by lived poverty, education, age, gender, and urban-rural residence | Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe | 2014/2015**



**Respondents were asked:** Do you feel close to any particular political party? [If yes:] Which party is that? (% who say they feel close to an opposition party, as a proportion of respondents who feel close to any political party)

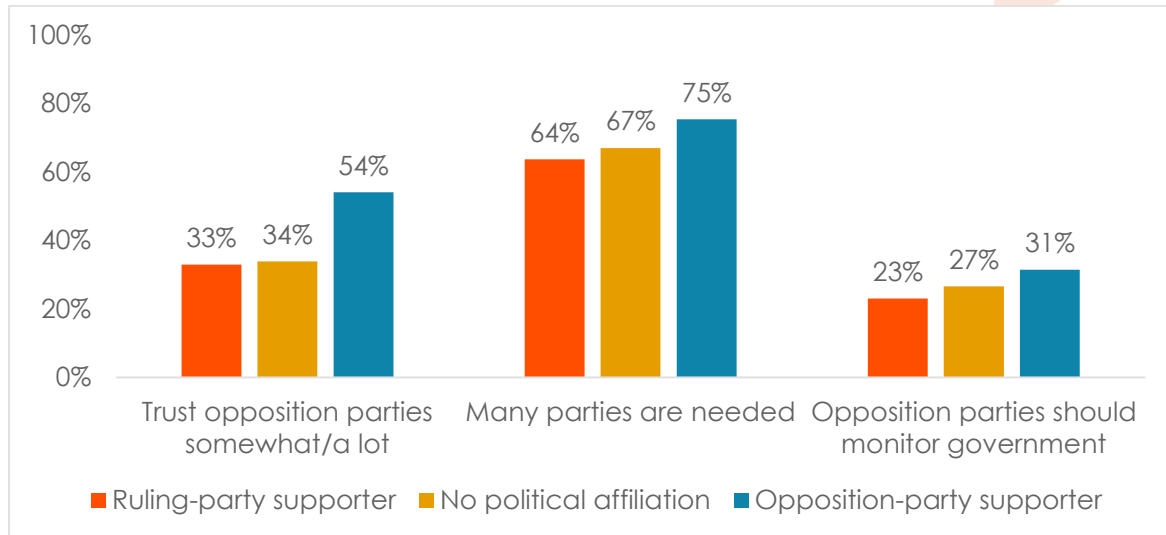
Unsurprisingly, citizens who say they feel close to an opposition party are more likely than ruling-party supporters and non-partisan citizens to trust opposition parties (54% vs. 33% who





trust them “somewhat” or “a lot”). Moreover, they are more likely to endorse multipartism (75% vs. 64%). However, only a minority of opposition supporters favour a “watchdog” role for the opposition (31%), although this proportion is larger than those for the other two groups (Figure 9).

**Figure 9: Attitudes toward political opposition** | by party affiliation | Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe | 2014/2015



**Respondents were asked:**

- How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Opposition political parties?
- 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 [country].

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

(% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with Statement 2)

- Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: After losing an election, opposition parties should monitor and criticize the government in order to hold it accountable.

Statement 2: Once an election is over, opposition parties and politicians should accept defeat and cooperate with the government to help it develop the country.

(% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with Statement 1)

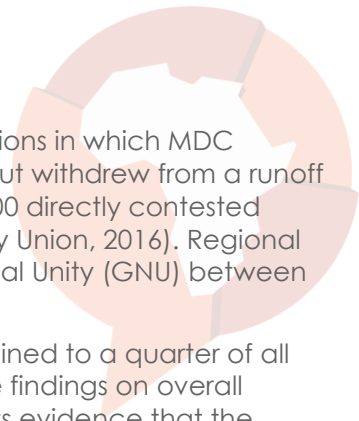
**Partisanship in Zimbabwe**

A closer examination of partisanship trends in Zimbabwe shows that the proportion of citizens who feel close to a political party has increased substantially over time, from 40% in 1999 to 58% in 2014. Stated support for opposition parties among all respondents peaked at 45% in 2009, while only 7% said they felt close to ZANU-PF that year (Table 4).

**Table 4: Party affiliation** | Zimbabwe | 1999-2014

	1999	2004	2005	2009	2012	2014
<b>Do not feel close to any party</b>	56%	51%	35%	49%	36%	33%
<b>ZANU-PF</b>	29%	30%	20%	7%	29%	39%
<b>Opposition party</b>	11%	10%	34%	45%	26%	19%
<b>Refused to answer</b>	4%	8%	11%	6%	9%	0%
<b>Don't know</b>	0%	1%	-	0%	-	9%

**Respondents were asked:** Do you feel close to any particular political party? [If yes:] Which party is that?



The 2009 survey in Zimbabwe took place a year after disputed elections in which MDC candidate Morgan Tsvangirai outpolled President Robert Mugabe but withdrew from a runoff amid heavy violence (Freedom House, 2009) and the MDC-T won 100 directly contested legislative seats compared to ZANU-PF's 99 seats (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016). Regional efforts led by South Africa eventually led to a Government of National Unity (GNU) between ZANU-PF and two opposition parties (MDC-T and MDC-M).

Since then, support for an increasingly fractured opposition has declined to a quarter of all survey respondents in 2012 and only 19% in 2014. In addition to these findings on overall support for opposition parties, a recent Afrobarometer study presents evidence that the ZANU-PF electoral victory in 2013 is at least partly due to the MDC-T's inability to leverage its role in stabilizing the country during the GNU period (Ndoma, 2015).

### Viability of the political opposition

Bratton and Logan (2015) find that public opinion about differences between ruling and opposition parties contradicts the conventional view that African political parties are primarily shaped by patronage networks rather than specific policies. A plurality (23%) of citizens in the 20 countries included in the study say that economic and development policies are the most important differences between parties in their country, although there is significant variation in these responses between countries.

Across the five countries under review in the present analysis, factors related to party leadership are seen as the most significant differences between parties (40%), followed by policy differences (23%) and issues related to religious, ethnic, or regional identity (11%) (Table 5). One in seven citizens (14%) say there is no difference between parties; this perception is particularly strong in South Africa (26%). South Africans and Mozambicans are least likely to cite differences in economic and development policies. However, a substantial proportion of Mozambicans (25%) say they "don't know," indicating that the two results are not directly comparable.

**Table 5: Perceived differences between ruling and opposition parties | 5 countries in Southern Africa | 2014/2015**

	Bots- wana	Mozam- bique	Namibia	South Africa	Zimbab- we	Avg
<b>Party leadership</b>	43%	32%	42%	43%	40%	40%
<b>Econ./development policies</b>	34%	14%	23%	14%	29%	23%
<b>There is no difference</b>	11%	9%	12%	26%	14%	14%
<b>Identity</b>	5%	17%	18%	9%	5%	11%
<b>Other</b>	1%	3%	3%	3%	2%	2%
<b>Don't know</b>	5%	25%	2%	5%	10%	10%

**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following do you see as the most important difference between the ruling party and opposition parties in [your country]?

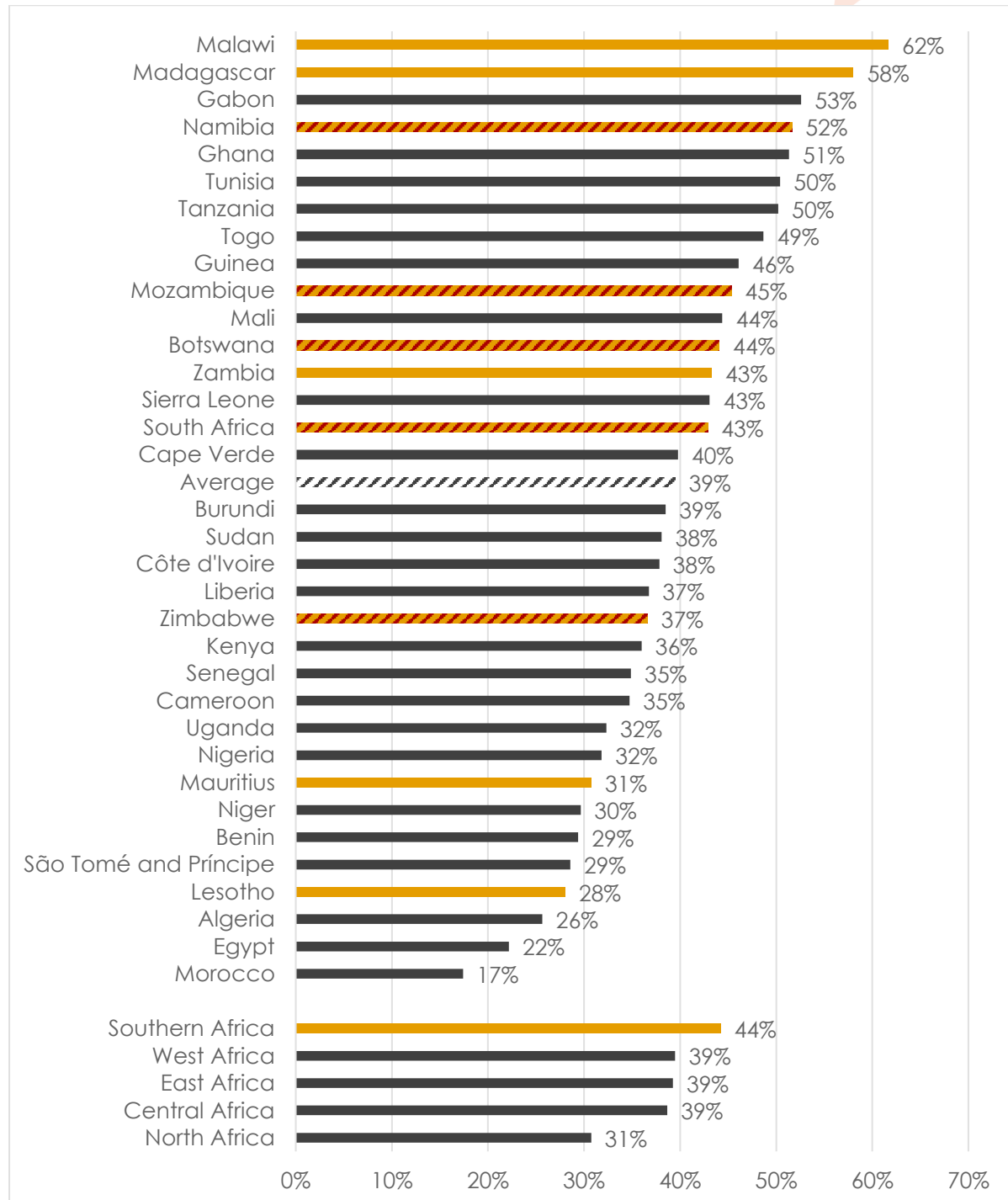
(Note: This table groups response options by differences in terms of leadership traits (honesty/integrity, experience, personality), economic and development policies, the identity of party leaders or members (religious, ethnic, regional), and other responses. See Appendix Table A.4 for full frequencies.)

Given these results, do citizens in these countries see the political opposition as a viable alternative to the dominant party?

On average, Southern Africans are more likely than citizens in other regions to say that the political opposition in their countries presents a viable alternative vision and plan (44% vs. 39% on average across 35 surveyed countries) (Figure 10). This view is most common among Malawians (62% before the 2014 election) and Malagasy (58%) and least frequent in Morocco (17%), Egypt (22%), Algeria (26%), and Lesotho (28%).

Among the five Southern African countries with dominant party systems, perceptions of opposition viability are highest in Namibia (52%), followed by Mozambique (45%), Botswana (44%), and South Africa (43%). Interestingly, the weakest perception of opposition viability in this group is in Zimbabwe (37%), the only country with experience of governance under an opposition party – further evidence that the coalition government between ZANU-PF and MDC (2009-2013) had a detrimental effect on citizens' perceptions of the opposition.

**Figure 10: Perceptions of opposition viability | 35 countries | 2014/2015**

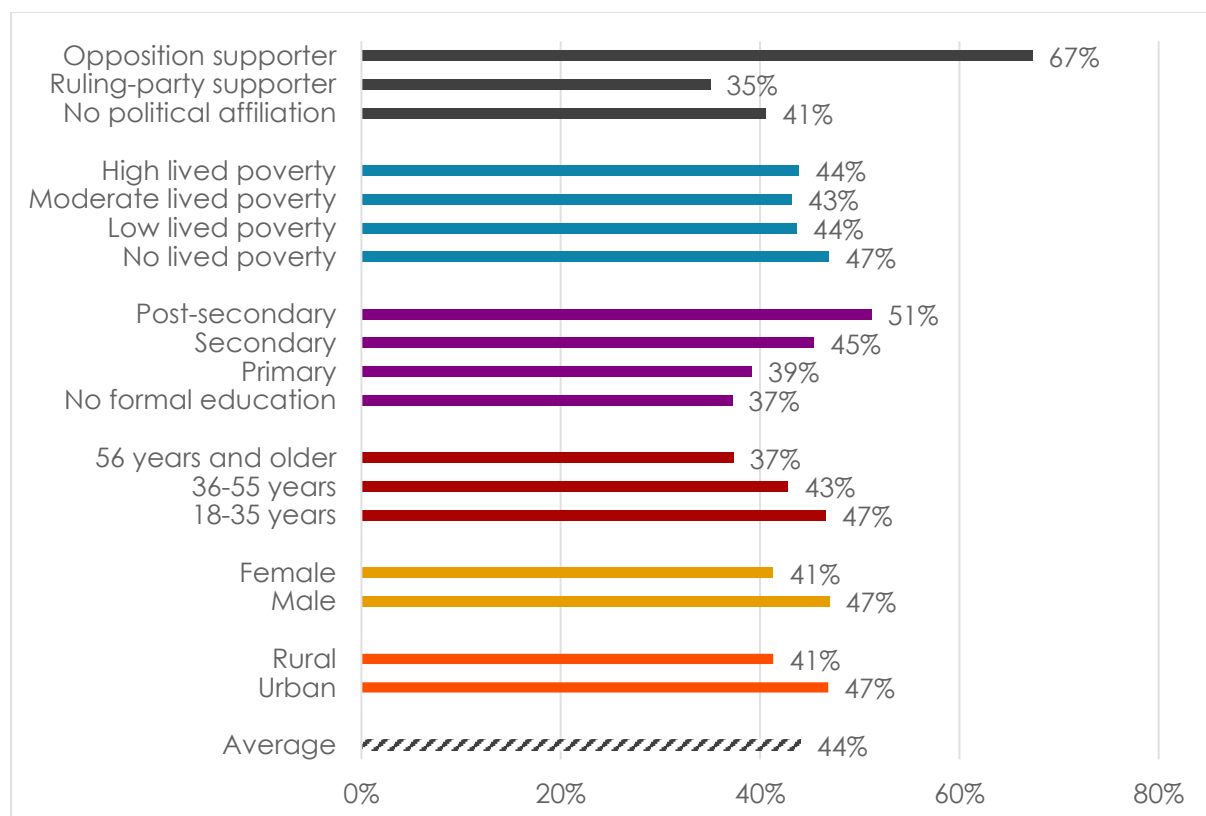


**Respondents were asked:** Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: The political opposition in [your country] presents a viable alternative vision and plan for the country? (% who "agree" or "strongly agree"). (Note: This question was not asked in Swaziland.)

In Southern Africa, the five countries with dominant party systems are no less likely to see the opposition as a viable alternative than countries with competitive party systems (both 44% on average). This suggests that these views are reflective of specific party platforms, rather than the party system as a whole. Mauritius, for example, has experienced numerous electoral alternations, but in 2014 only 31% of citizens felt that the opposition presented a viable alternative vision at the time.

In the five countries with dominant parties, this perception is higher among urban, male, younger, and better-educated citizens (Figure 11). Two-thirds (67%) of opposition supporters hold this view, which is significantly higher than the average levels among ruling-party supporters and respondents with no political affiliation.

**Figure 11: Perceptions of opposition viability** | by party affiliation, lived poverty, education, age, gender, and urban-rural residence | Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe | 2014/2015



**Respondents were asked:** Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: The political opposition in [your country] presents a viable alternative vision and plan for the country? (% who “agree” or “strongly agree”)

## Opposition policy capacity

One of the major impacts of sustained party dominance is its effect on shaping the policy agenda through what Pempel (1990) terms a “historical project,” which refers to “a series of interrelated and mutually-supportive public policies that give a particular shape to the national political agenda” (p. 4). Even in dominant party systems, in which electoral alternation is generally unlikely, government performance on these issues is important to ensure votes during elections (de Jager & du Toit, 2013). In 2014/2015, Afrobarometer asked survey respondents which parties they thought are most able to address four key policy priorities: controlling prices, creating jobs, improving basic health services, and fighting corruption in government.

On average, only small minorities of Southern Africans say opposition parties are most capable of addressing these priorities, ranging from 16% for health services to 23% for fighting corruption (Table 6). As with perceptions of opposition viability in general, Malawians were most likely to see the opposition (before the 2014 election) as more able than the ruling party to address these four priorities.



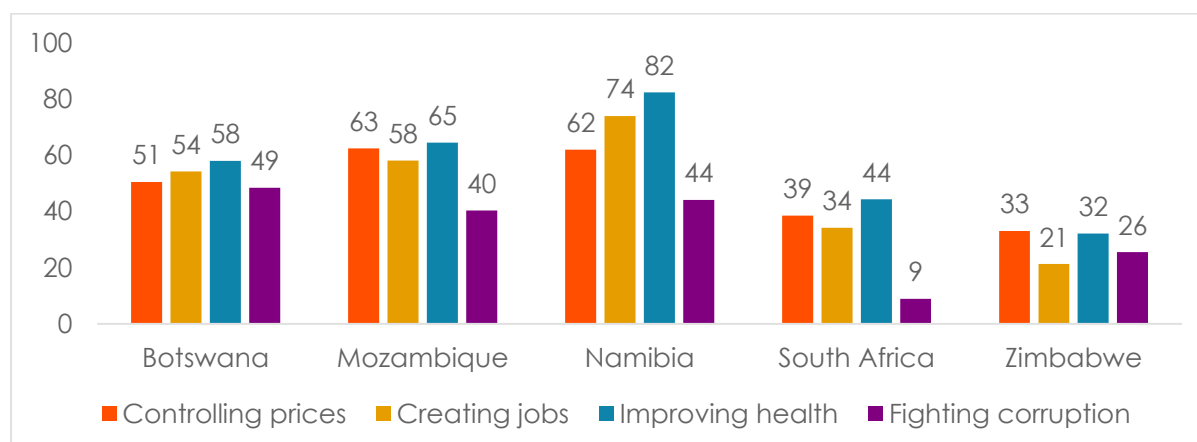
**Table 6: Opposition most able to address policy priorities** | Southern Africa | 2014/2015

	Controlling prices	Creating jobs	Improving health care	Fighting corruption
Malawi	44%	36%	36%	42%
Zimbabwe	24%	30%	25%	25%
Mauritius	24%	22%	18%	34%
South Africa	18%	22%	19%	32%
Average	18%	18%	16%	23%
Botswana	18%	18%	17%	21%
Madagascar	13%	15%	12%	17%
Mozambique	11%	14%	11%	21%
Namibia	10%	7%	5%	21%
Lesotho	9%	10%	9%	10%
Zambia	6%	5%	5%	10%

**Respondents were asked:** Looking at the ruling and opposition political parties in this country, which would you say is most able to address each of the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "opposition party or parties")

As might be expected, in the five countries with dominant parties, citizens are far more likely to see the ruling parties than opposition parties as most able to address these policy issues (Figure 12). The smallest gap (9 percentage points) concerns the fight against corruption in South Africa; most gaps are more than 30 points, ranging up to 82 points (for improving health services in Namibia). On average, these gaps are smallest among Zimbabweans and largest in Namibia.

**Figure 12: Differences in perceived ability to address policy priorities** | ruling party advantage over opposition | 5 countries in Southern Africa | 2014/2015

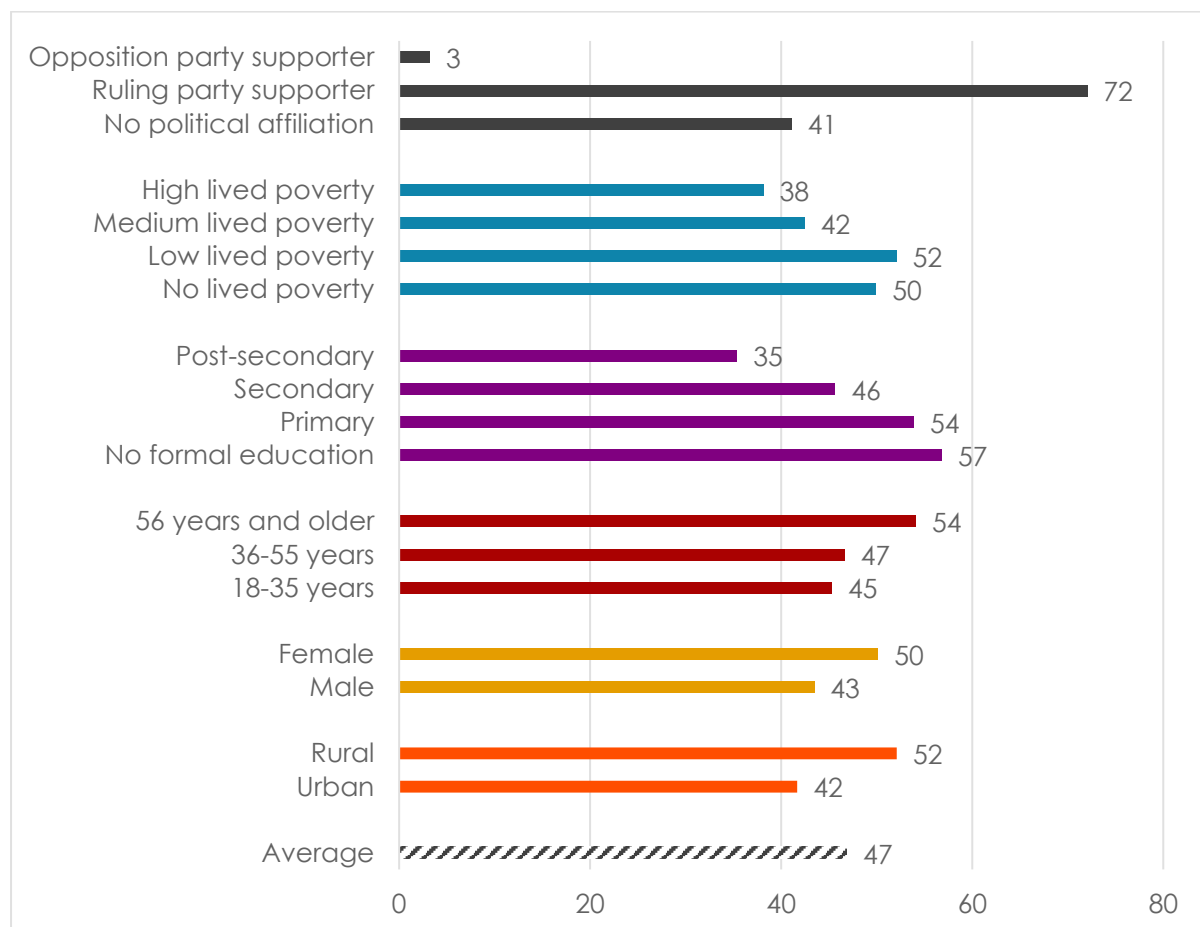


(Figure shows the percentage-point difference, in favour of the ruling party, between those who identify the ruling party as most able to address a policy priority and those who identify opposition parties.)



Unsurprisingly, perceptions of which party is most able to address key policy issues differ greatly by party affiliation. On average across the five countries and four policy areas, opposition supporters are slightly more likely (3 percentage points) to see the ruling party as most able to address these issues, while among ruling-party supporters, the gap favours the ruling party by 72 percentage points (Figure 13). This gap is also larger among rural residents, women, older citizens, citizens with lower levels of educational attainment, and those living with lower levels of material deprivation (see Appendix Table A.4 for full frequencies by policy area).

**Figure 13: Differences in perceived ability to address policy priorities** | ruling party vs. opposition | by party affiliation, lived poverty, education, age, gender, and urban-rural residence | Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe | 2014/2015



(Figure shows average percentage-point difference across four policy priorities between “ruling party” and “opposition party or parties” responses)

It is conceivable that some respondents may interpret the phrase “most able to address” key policy issues to refer to greater access to opportunities and/or resources to take on certain problems. This would naturally favour the ruling party in any country – particularly in dominant party systems, given their even greater asymmetry in power and resources between ruling and opposition parties.

In that case, one would expect lower public confidence in opposition parties’ abilities in countries with dominant party systems. However, these five countries differ only marginally from Southern African countries with competitive systems when it comes to perceptions of the opposition’s ability to take on policy issues (Table 7).

**Table 7: Perceptions of the opposition's ability to address policy priorities** | by party system | 10 Southern African countries | 2014/2015

	Controlling prices	Creating jobs	Improving health care	Fighting corruption	Other party could solve problem
<b>Countries with competitive party systems (n=5)</b>	16%	18%	15%	24%	35%
<b>Countries with dominant party systems (n=5)</b>	19%	17%	16%	23%	33%

**Respondents were asked:**

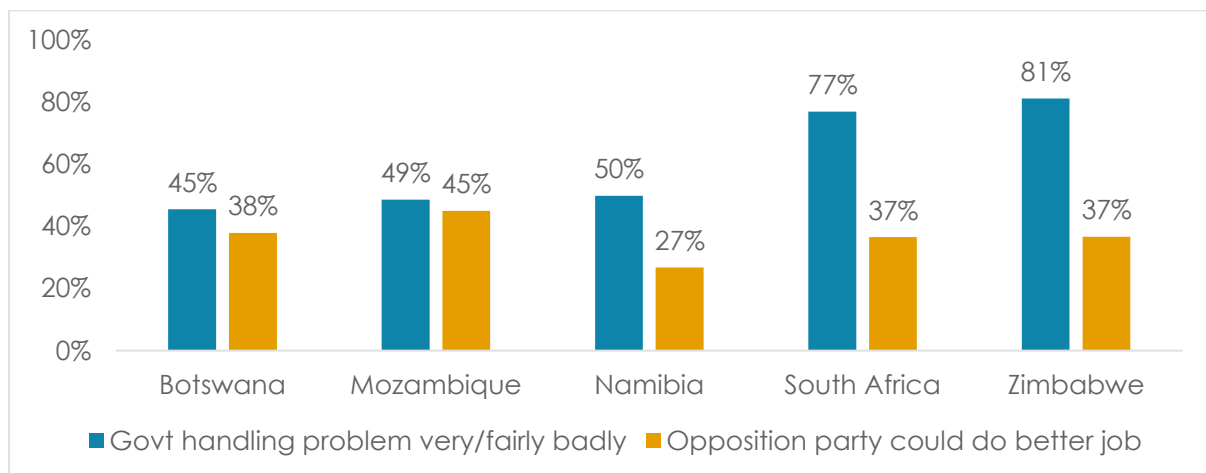
1. Looking at the ruling and opposition political parties in this country, which would you say is most able to address each of the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "opposition party or parties")
2. Thinking of the problem you mentioned first, in your opinion, is there any other political party that could do a better job in solving this problem? (% who say "yes")

### Opposition's ability to solve most important problems

In addition to the questions discussed above, Afrobarometer asked respondents about the government's handling of the most important problems facing their country and whether another party could do a better job of resolving these issues (see Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 67 for a detailed study of these priorities). These questions provide an additional measure of public perceptions of the opposition's ability to address key policy priorities.

On average across the five dominant party countries, six in 10 citizens say their government is handling the most important problems facing their country "fairly badly" or "very badly," but only 36% believe that another political party could do a better job (Figure 14). There is a fairly close match on these two questions in Mozambique and Botswana. But in Zimbabwe and South Africa, while about eight in 10 citizens report poor government performance on their top policy priority, only 37% say that another political party could solve the problem.

**Figure 14: Poor government performance on most important problem and opposition ability to solve problem** | 5 countries in Southern Africa | 2014/2015



**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address?

- Thinking of the problem you mentioned first, in your opinion, how well or badly would you say the current government is handling this problem, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "very badly" or "fairly badly")

- Thinking of the problem you mentioned first, in your opinion, is there any other political party that could do a better job in solving this problem? (% who say "yes")

## Conclusion

Dominant party systems in Southern Africa differ widely in the extent and nature of this dominance, in their overall democratic quality, as well as in public attitudes toward the political opposition. But while there is widespread support for multiparty politics, opposition parties clearly face major obstacles to obtaining majority support in the near future.

As elsewhere on the continent, citizens in Southern Africa's dominant party systems trust the ruling parties significantly more than the opposition, particularly in Namibia, Botswana, and Zimbabwe. However, trust in opposition parties has increased since 2002. And affiliation with opposition parties is stronger than average among urban residents, men, citizens aged under 56 years, and the better-educated, suggesting that opposition affiliation is likely to grow along with these demographic groups. But more work is needed to gain women's confidence.

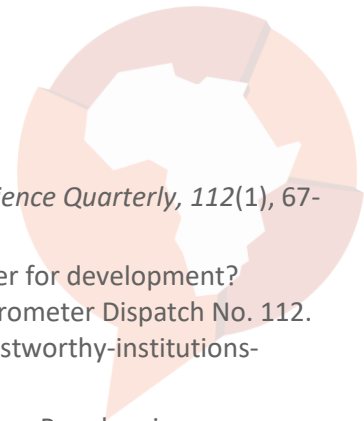
Zimbabwe's experience provides an important lesson for opposition parties in the region: Both trust and opposition affiliation levels peaked in the wake of the 2008 election but then dropped dramatically during the Government of National Unity. And trust in the MDC-T leader declined substantially between 2010 and 2012, while that in the president increased. This suggests that the MDC's association with the policies of the time may have damaged the party's credibility, as did infighting following its electoral defeat in 2013.

Overall, a plurality of citizens in Southern Africa's dominant party states believe that opposition parties present a viable alternative vision and plan for their respective countries, but only minorities believe that these parties are most able to address specific policy priorities. Given the large asymmetry in resources between dominant and opposition parties, it is crucial that opposition parties in these countries focus on gaining citizen confidence in their plans and capabilities. However, a lack of public support for a "watchdog" parliamentary role for the opposition suggests that these parties may repel potential voters if they are seen to be constantly criticizing the ruling party – as opposed to contributing to the country's development. This is a crucial insight for African opposition parties, as it runs counter to the opposition's conventional role in Western democracies.

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Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It's easy and free at [www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis](http://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis).

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## Appendix

**Table A.1: Afrobarometer Round 6 fieldwork dates and previous survey rounds in Southern Africa**

Country	Months when Round 6 fieldwork was conducted	Previous survey rounds
Botswana	June-July 2014	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012
Lesotho	May 2014	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012
Madagascar	December 2015-January 2015	2005, 2008, 2013
Malawi	March-April 2014	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012
Mauritius	June-July 2014	2012
Mozambique	June-August 2015	2002, 2005, 2008, 2012
Namibia	August-September 2014	1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012
South Africa	August-September 2015	2000, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2011
Swaziland	April 2015	2013
Zambia	October 2014	1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013
Zimbabwe	November 2014	1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012

**Table A.2: Trust in political parties | 10 countries in Southern Africa | 2014/2015**

	Ruling party	Opposition parties	Percentage-point difference
Malawi	35%	48%	-14
Madagascar	30%	26%	4
South Africa	43%	36%	7
Mauritius	48%	40%	9
Zambia	46%	35%	11
Mozambique	51%	38%	13
Lesotho	43%	27%	16
Zimbabwe	55%	35%	20
Botswana	59%	36%	23
Namibia	71%	46%	25
<b>Dominant party</b>	56%	38%	17
<b>Non-dominant party</b>	40%	35%	5
<b>10-country average</b>	48%	37%	11

**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")

**Table A.3: Party affiliation** | 10 countries in Southern Africa | 2014/2015

Country	No affiliation	Ruling party	Opposition parties	Refused
Botswana	27%	44%	26%	2%
Lesotho	32%	20%	41%	6%
Madagascar	48%	11%	38%	3%
Malawi	26%	16%	57%	2%
Mauritius	78%	10%	8%	4%
Mozambique	41%	41%	12%	6%
Namibia	24%	53%	18%	5%
South Africa	27%	45%	25%	3%
Zambia	47%	24%	24%	4%
Zimbabwe	33%	39%	19%	9%
<b>Dominant party systems</b>	30%	44%	20%	5%
<b>Non-dominant party systems</b>	46%	16%	33%	4%
<b>10-country average</b>	38%	30%	27%	4%

Respondents were asked: *Do you feel close to any particular political party? [If yes:] Which party is that?*

**Table A.4: Main difference between political parties** | 5 countries in Southern Africa | 2014/2015

	Botswana	Mozambique	Namibia	South Africa	Zimbabwe	Avg
<b>Economic and development policies</b>	34%	14%	23%	14%	29%	23%
<b>Honesty or integrity of party leaders</b>	18%	19%	14%	24%	16%	18%
<b>Experience of party leaders</b>	20%	8%	19%	14%	15%	15%
<b>There is no difference</b>	11%	9%	12%	26%	14%	14%
<b>Personalities of party leaders</b>	5%	5%	9%	6%	9%	7%
<b>Religion of party leaders or members</b>	3%	10%	8%	5%	1%	5%
<b>Ethnicity of party leaders or members</b>	2%	5%	7%	3%	2%	4%
<b>Regional identity of party leaders or members</b>	0%	2%	4%	1%	1%	2%
<b>None of these / Some other answer</b>	1%	3%	3%	3%	2%	2%
<b>Don't know</b>	5%	25%	2%	5%	10%	10%

Respondents were asked: *Which of the following do you see as the most important difference between the ruling party and opposition parties in [your country]?*



**Table A.5: Ruling party vs. opposition ability to address policy priorities (percentage points) | by urban-rural residence, gender, age, education, lived poverty, and party affiliation | Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, and Zimbabwe | 2014/2015**

	Controlling prices	Creating jobs	Improving health	Fighting corruption	Average
<b>Urban</b>	44	44	51	27	42
<b>Rural</b>	55	53	61	40	52
<b>Male</b>	45	45	53	30	43
<b>Female</b>	53	52	59	36	50
<b>18-35 years</b>	48	47	56	31	45
<b>36-55 years</b>	50	48	55	33	47
<b>56 years and older</b>	55	54	61	46	54
<b>No formal education</b>	59	58	62	48	57
<b>Primary</b>	56	55	62	43	54
<b>Secondary</b>	49	47	56	31	46
<b>Post-secondary</b>	37	38	47	20	35
<b>No lived poverty</b>	53	54	59	34	50
<b>Low lived poverty</b>	55	54	63	37	52
<b>Medium lived poverty</b>	44	44	52	30	42
<b>High lived poverty</b>	40	36	43	33	38
<b>No political affiliation</b>	44	42	50	28	41
<b>Ruling-party supporter</b>	73	75	81	59	72
<b>Opposition supporter</b>	6	5	13	-10	3
<b>Average</b>	49	48	56	34	47

**Respondents were asked:** Looking at the ruling and opposition political parties in this country, which would you say is most able to address each of the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say? (Figure shows average percentage-point difference between "ruling party" and "opposition party or parties" responses)

# AFRO BAROMETER

LET THE PEOPLE HAVE A SAY



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