

# Beyond borders? Africans prefer self-reliant development, remain skeptical of free trade and open borders

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Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 492<sup>1</sup> | Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny and Jaynisha Patel

## Summary

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) opened for business on January 1, 2021, promising opportunities for people from all socio-economic strata to share in economic growth in the world's largest free-trade zone. Signed by 54 African countries and ratified by 28 (African Business, 2021), with a combined gross domestic product of about U.S. \$2.2 trillion, the AfCFTA is projected to generate increased cross-border trade, investment volumes, technology transfers, and income levels, lifting 30 million Africans out of extreme poverty by 2035 (Abrego et al., 2020; World Bank, 2020a).



Ambitious at the best of times, the AfCFTA faces a multitude of hurdles to effective implementation, from weaknesses in trade infrastructure, human capital, and information and communications technology to unresolved strategic and regulatory considerations, including the absence of a shared trading currency (Albert, 2019; Erasmus, 2020).

The hurdles – and the stakes – rise even higher as the COVID-19 pandemic shifts the patterns of interconnectedness for Africa and the world, highlighting the vulnerability of global supply chains (Chudik et al., 2020; World Bank, 2020a). According to the World Bank (2020b), every region across the world has been subject to growth downgrades. The World Economic Outlook estimates that sub-Saharan African economies contracted by 3% in 2020 (International Monetary Fund, 2020). For African economies dependent on the exploitation and exportation of natural resources through agriculture, mining, and forestry (Hawker, 2020), major supply-chain disruptions only heighten the need for self-sufficiency.

Meanwhile, development assistance to the continent has stagnated. According to the United Nations Development Programme's (2020) Human Development Data, development assistance as a percentage of gross national income has remained between 2.3% and 2.8% over the past decade and is expected to decline as developed nations reduce their aid budgets amid growing pressure from their populations to allocate resources internally (Wintour, 2021).

Successfully implementing the AfCFTA in the face of these pressures will require political will as well as the buy-in of ordinary Africans whose labor, capital, and knowledge will form the lifeblood of a single market.

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this dispatch, based on data from 18 countries surveyed before the COVID-19 pandemic forced a pause in Round 8 fieldwork, was published as Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 433.

Afrobarometer surveys conducted in 34 African countries in 2019/2021 suggest that many Africans are yet to be persuaded of the benefits of free trade. Sizeable proportions of the population – more than half in some countries – are skeptical of opening their borders to businesses and products from other countries or regions, preferring that their government protect domestic producers. In practice, most say that crossing international borders in their region for work or trade is difficult.

When it comes to development, a majority of Africans welcome the economic and political influence of the United States, China, and other international players. But they are more inclined toward self-reliance than toward external loans and global interdependence.

## Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Eight rounds of surveys have been completed in up to 39 countries since 1999. Round 8 surveys (2019/2021) cover 34 countries – 18 countries surveyed between July 2019 and April 2020 and 16 surveyed (after a hiatus due to COVID-19) between October 2020 and July 2021.

Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples that yield country-level results with margins of error of +/-2 to +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

This 34-country analysis is based on 48,084 interviews (see Appendix Table A.1 for a list of countries and fieldwork dates). The data are weighted to ensure nationally representative samples. When reporting multi-country averages, all countries are weighted equally (rather than in proportion to population size). Due to rounding, reported totals may differ by 1 percentage point from the sum of sub-categories.

## Key findings

### Free trade

- On average across 34 countries, Africans are almost evenly divided in their views on free trade: 46% support policies that protect domestic industries, while 51% prefer open borders.
  - Resistance to open borders is particularly strong in Senegal (71%), Tunisia (70%), Botswana (64%), and Lesotho (63%).
- But a majority (59%) want their governments to allow foreign-owned retail shops in order to ensure a wide selection of low-cost consumer goods.
- A majority (59%) of Africans also support the free movement of people and goods across international borders in their region. Botswana (68%), Gabon (52%), and South Africa (51%) are the only countries where more than half of citizens prefer limiting cross-border movement in the region.
  - Across countries, levels of support for free cross-border movement have changed considerably over time, including a 33-percentage-point increase in Morocco and a 27-point drop in Sierra Leone since 2014/2015.
- On average, West and East Africans favour trade openness more than Southern, Central, and North Africans.
- In practice, only two in 10 Africans (22%) say they find it easy to cross borders for work or trade.

- On average across 31 countries surveyed since 2014/2015, reports that crossing borders is difficult have increased by 14 percentage points.
- Nigeriens, Moroccans, and Ivoirians are much more likely to report difficulties crossing borders than they were in 2014/2015.

### Development assistance

- Two-thirds (65%) of Africans want their countries to finance their national development from their own resources rather than rely on external loans.
  - A preference for development without foreign aid is the majority view in all surveyed countries except Cabo Verde, Ethiopia, Angola, and Mauritius.
- Africans are divided as to whether foreign assistance and loans should come with conditionalities.
  - A slim majority (55%) oppose strict donor/lender requirements for how the funds can be used.
  - Slightly more than half (51%) do not want requirements that receiving countries must promote democracy and human rights. But almost as many (46%) welcome such conditionalities.
- Despite reservations about strings attached to foreign assistance, Africans generally welcome the economic and political influence of China (63%), the United States (60%), and other powers, as well as of the African Union, the United Nations, and regional bodies.

### Trade and cross-border movement

Understanding how Africans perceive economic integration is critical for implementation of the AfCFTA. This section unpacks popular views on free trade and free cross-border movement of people for work. What emerges is a deeply divided continent, with large variations across countries.

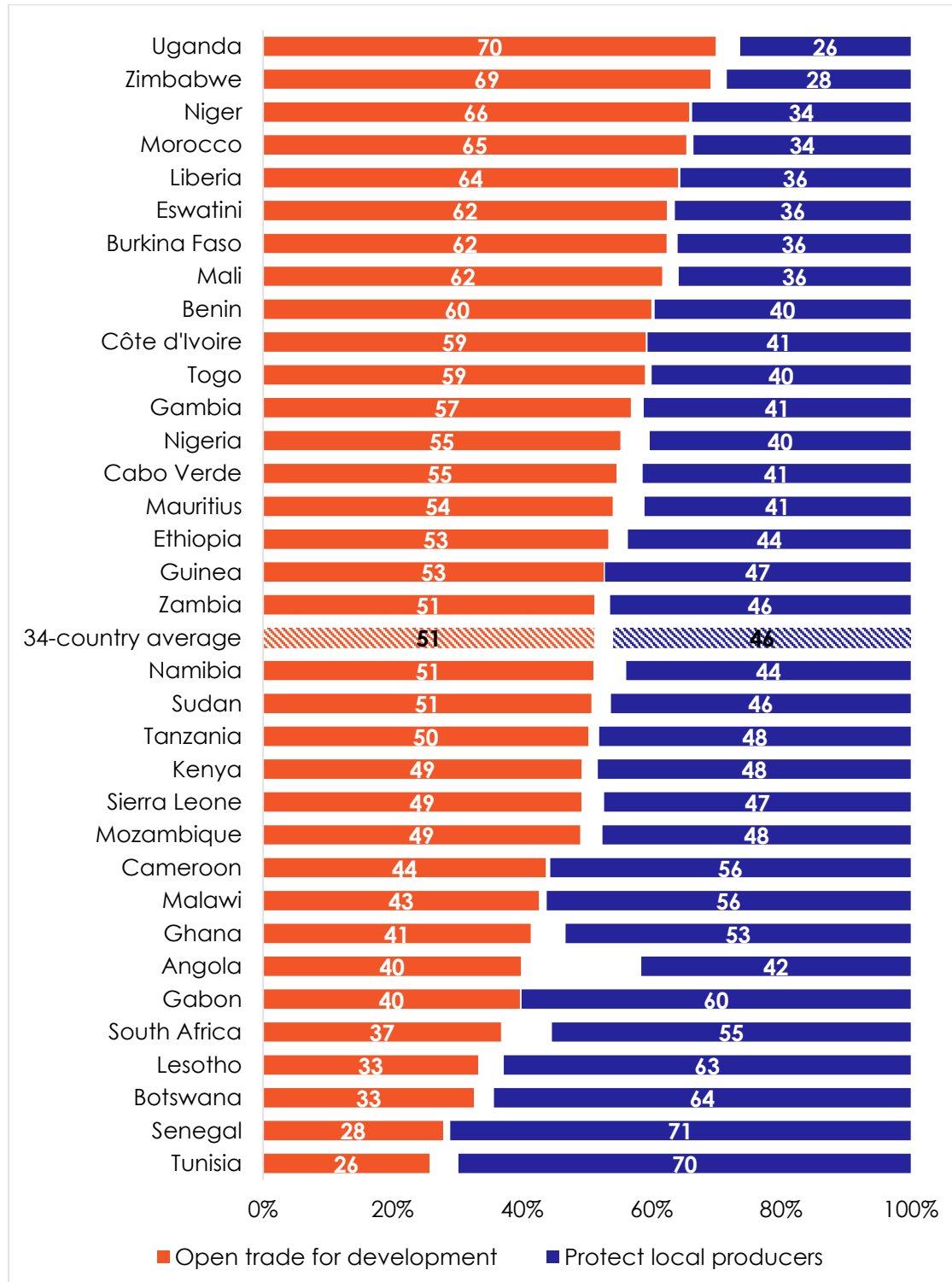
On average, Africans are almost evenly split in their views on free trade. Across the 34 surveyed countries, about half (51%) of respondents say their country must open its borders to imports in order to develop, but almost as many (46%) favour limiting international trade for the sake of protecting local producers (Figure 1).

Support for free trade is highest in Uganda (70%), Zimbabwe (69%) and Niger (66%). But similarly strong majorities support protectionism for domestic producers in Senegal (71%) and Tunisia (70%). (For a more detailed analysis of views in member countries of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), see Stuurman, 2020.)

Even though about half of Africans want to protect domestic producers, considerably fewer (38%) want to limit their choice of consumer goods to domestic products. Across 34 countries, a majority (59%) prefer that their government continue to permit foreigners to set up shops in the country to ensure a wide choice of low-cost consumer goods (Figure 2).

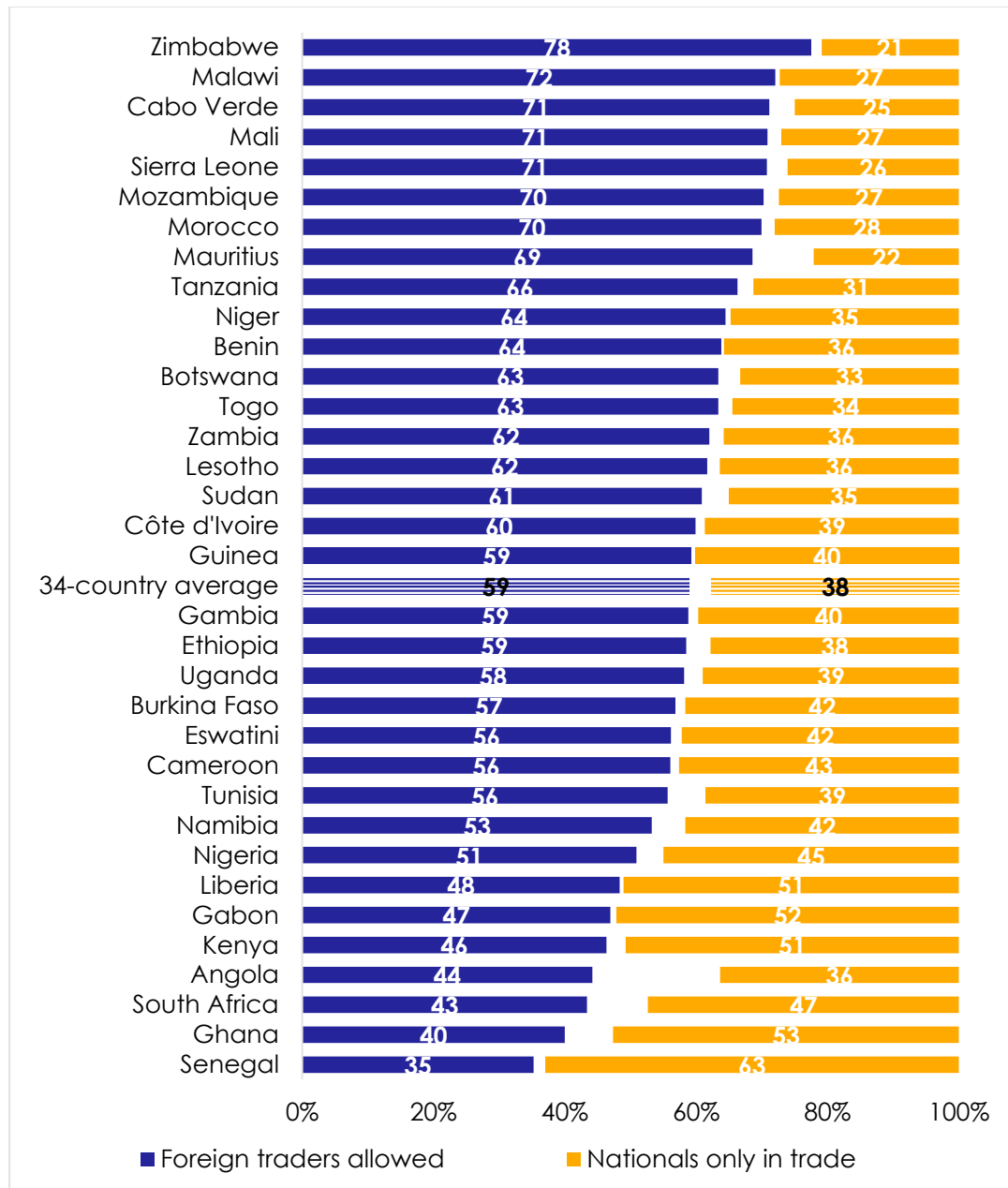
Only five countries record majorities in favour of limiting retail trade to their own citizens: Senegal (63%), Ghana (53%), Gabon (52%), Liberia (51%), and Kenya (51%). At the other end of the spectrum, more than seven in 10 respondents endorse allowing foreign traders in Zimbabwe (78%), Malawi (72%), Cabo Verde (71%), Sierra Leone (71%), and Mali (71%).

**Figure 1: Open trade vs. protection of local producers | 34 countries | 2019/2021**



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: In order to develop, our country must rely on trade with the rest of the world, including by opening our borders to foreign imports.  
 Statement 2: In order to develop, our country must rely on local production and protect local producers from foreign competition.  
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

**Figure 2: Trade by nationals only vs. foreigners allowed** | 34 countries | 2019/2021



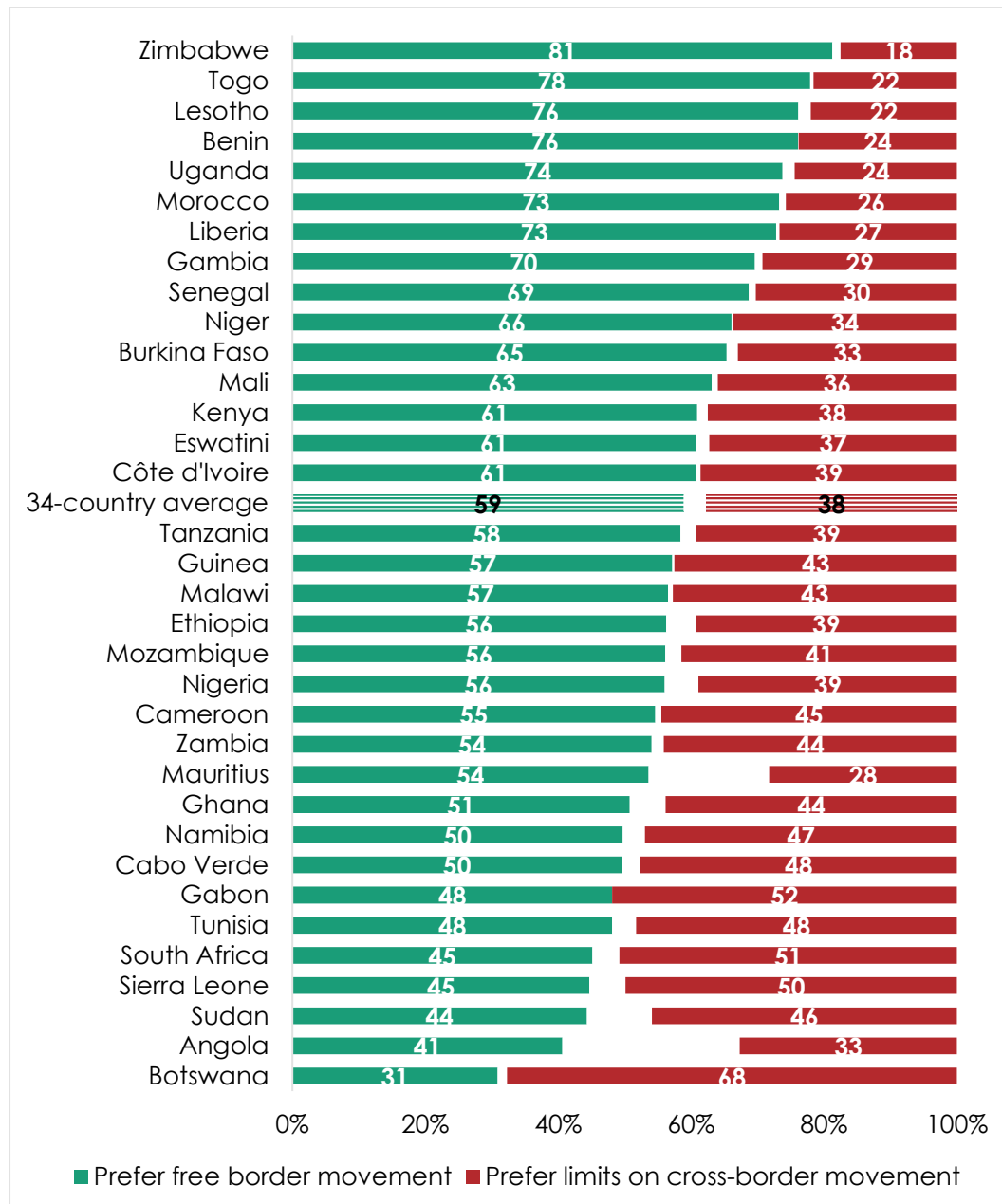
**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: The government should only allow citizens and companies of our own country to trade in consumer goods, even if this means we will have fewer goods or higher prices.  
 Statement 2: The government should continue to permit foreigners and foreign corporations to set up retail shops in this country to ensure we have a wide choice of low-cost consumer goods.  
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

The ability to cross international borders is important for many Africans who trade or work in neighbouring countries. Earlier Afrobarometer research has shown that the main reasons Africans cite for wanting to emigrate are to find work and escape economic hardship, and their most preferred destination is another country within their region (Sanny, Logan, & Gyimah-Boadi, 2019). In some countries, cross-border movement has fueled anti-immigrant and xenophobic attitudes (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Across the 34 countries surveyed in

2019/2021, a majority (59%) of respondents favour free movement of people across borders for work, while four in 10 (38%) prefer limiting the cross-border movement of people and goods (Figure 3).

The countries whose citizens are most open to free movement across borders are Zimbabwe (81%), Togo (78%), Lesotho (76%), and Benin (76%). Botswana are by far the most strongly in favour of limiting cross-border movement (68%), followed by Gabonese (52%), South Africans (51%), and Sierra Leoneans (50%).

**Figure 3: Free vs. limited movement across borders | 34 countries | 2019/2021**



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: People living in [your region] should be able to move freely across international borders in order to trade or work in other countries.  
 Statement 2: In order to protect their own citizens, governments should limit the cross-border movement of people and goods.  
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with each statement)

On average across 31 countries surveyed regularly since 2014/2015, the preference for free movement across borders remains virtually unchanged (Figure 4). However, we see double-digit declines in support for free movement in Sierra Leone (-27 percentage points), Burkina Faso (-16 points), Kenya (-15 points), and Guinea (-14 points). On the other hand, five countries show double-digit increases in support for free cross-border movement: Morocco (+33 percentage points), Lesotho (+28 points), Togo (+15 points), Namibia (+13 points), and Tanzania (+12 points).

**Figure 4: Change in support for free movement across borders (percentage points)**  
 | 31 countries | 2014-2021

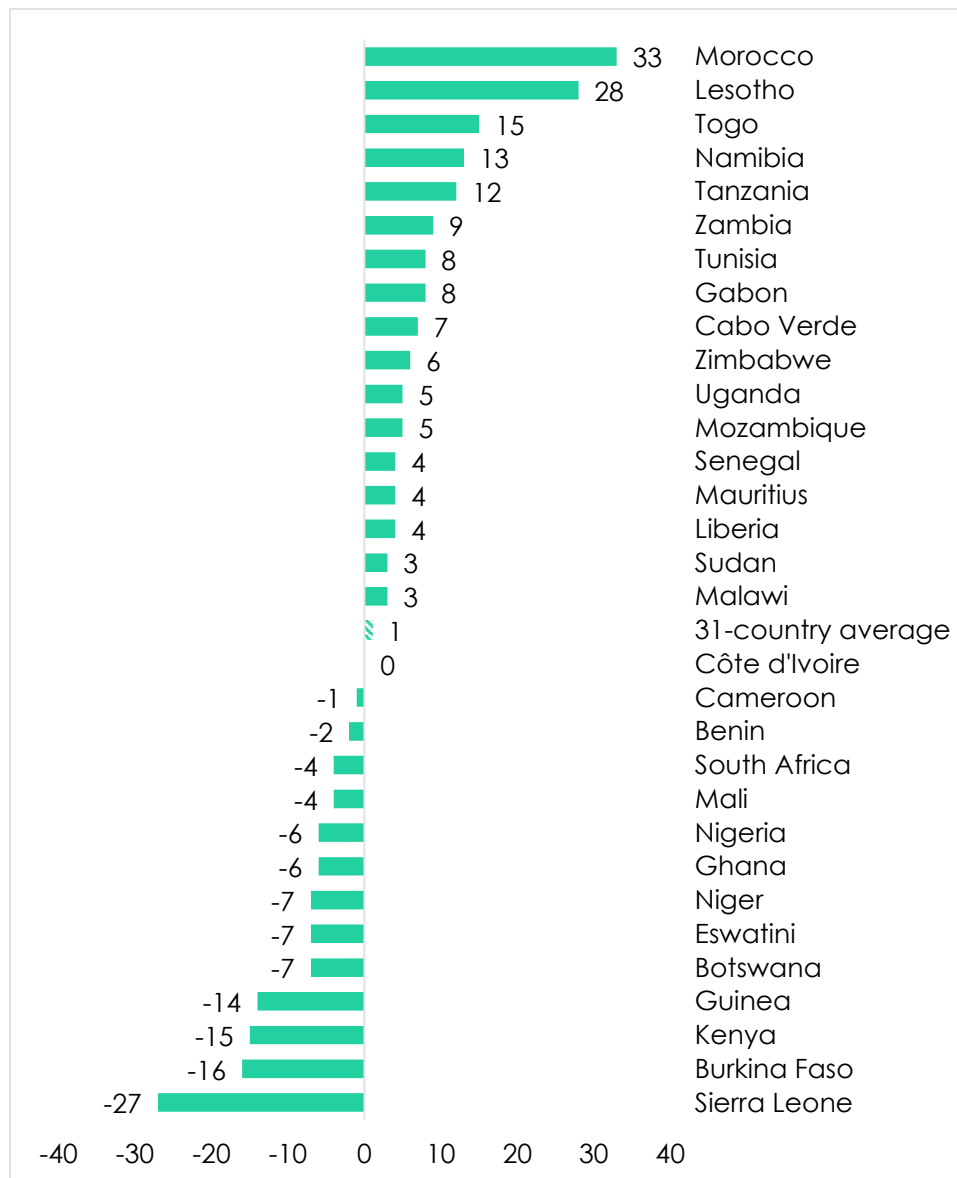
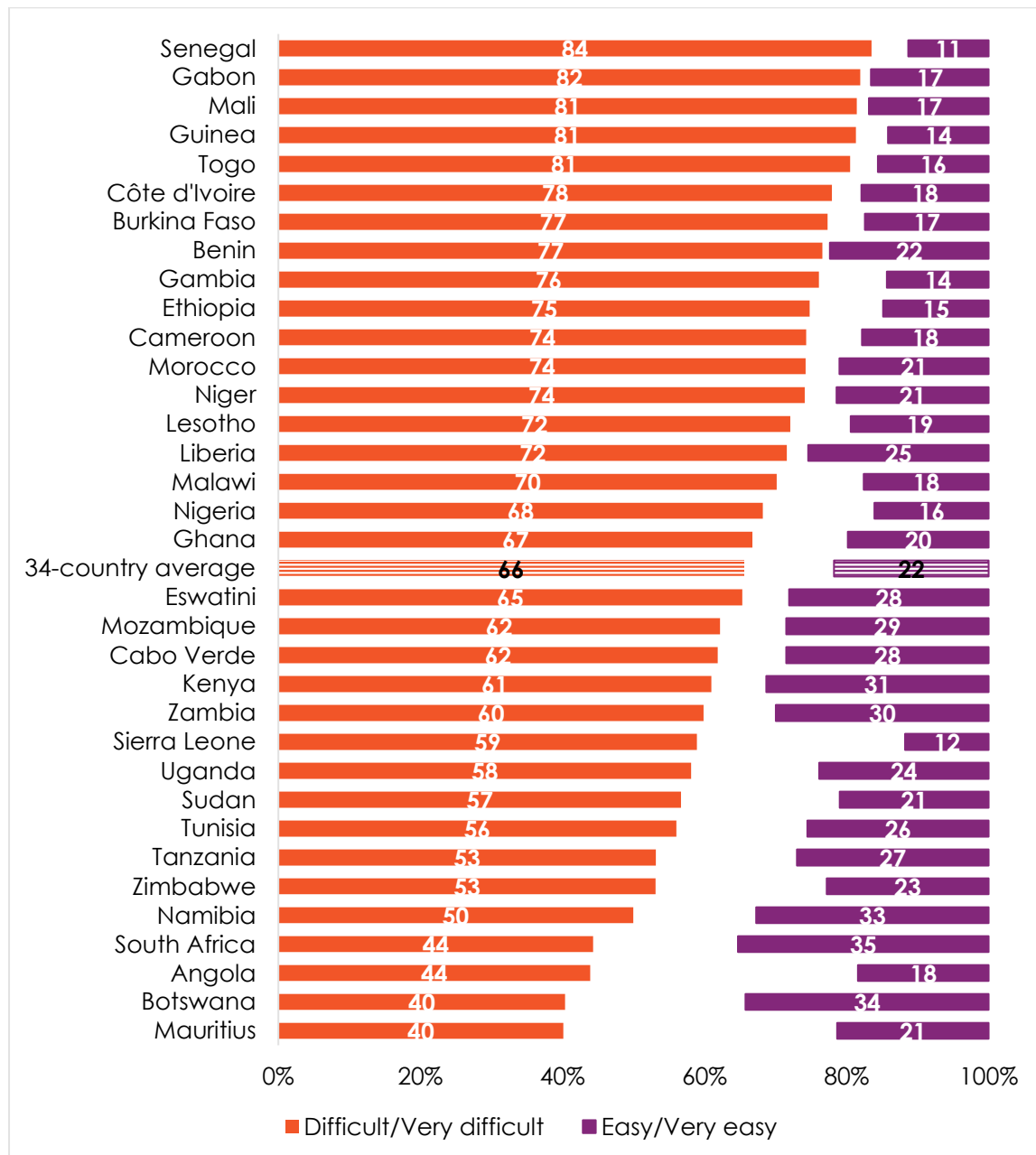


Figure shows change, in percentage points, between survey rounds in 2014/2015 and 2019/2021 in the proportion of respondents who “agree” or “agree very strongly” that people in their region should be able to move freely across international borders.

Despite mixed views on whether people should be able to cross international borders freely, most Africans are in agreement that in practice, it's not easy to do so. On average, two-thirds (66%) of respondents say it is “difficult” or “very difficult” to cross borders to work or trade, while only one in five (22%) describe it as easy (Figure 5).

Citizens in francophone West and Central African countries find it most challenging to cross borders to work or trade: Senegal (84%), Gabon (82%), Mali (81%), Guinea (81%), Togo (81%), Côte d'Ivoire (78%), Burkina Faso (77%), and Benin (77%). The perceived difficulty of cross-border movement is lowest in six Southern African countries – Mauritius (40%), Botswana (40%), Angola (44%), South Africa (44%), Namibia (50%), and Zimbabwe (53%) – although even in these countries, more people say it's difficult than say it's easy.

**Figure 5: Difficulty crossing borders | 34 countries | 2019/2021**



**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, how easy or difficult is it for people in [insert region] to cross international borders in order to work or trade in other countries, or haven't you heard enough to say?

Crossing borders for work or trade appears to be growing more difficult for many Africans. Across the 31 countries where this question was asked in both 2014/2015 and 2019/2021, the proportion who say that crossing borders is difficult has increased by 14 percentage points (Figure 6). Mauritius, an island, is the only country where this perception decreased (-6



percentage points). The largest increases are in Niger (+28 points), Morocco (+26 points), Côte d'Ivoire (+24 points), Mozambique (+23 points), Kenya (+22 points), and Zambia (+21 points).

The continent's most economically vulnerable are rendered most immobile when it comes to working or trading in other countries. Respondents experiencing high lived poverty<sup>2</sup> are 15 percentage points more likely than those with no lived poverty to say that crossing borders is difficult (71% vs. 56%) (Figure 7).

**Figure 6: Changes in perceived difficulty of crossing borders (percentage points)**  
 | 31 countries | 2014-2021

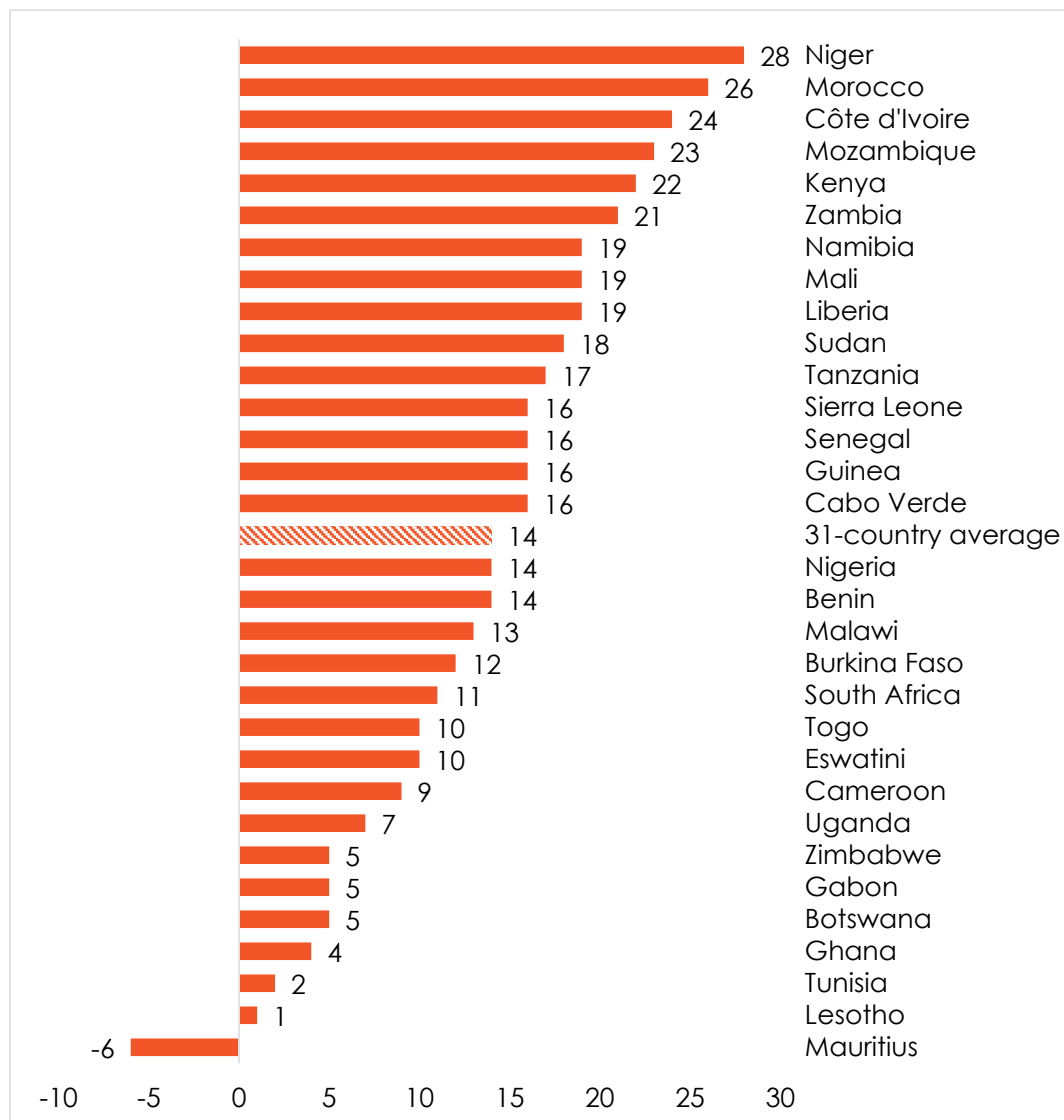
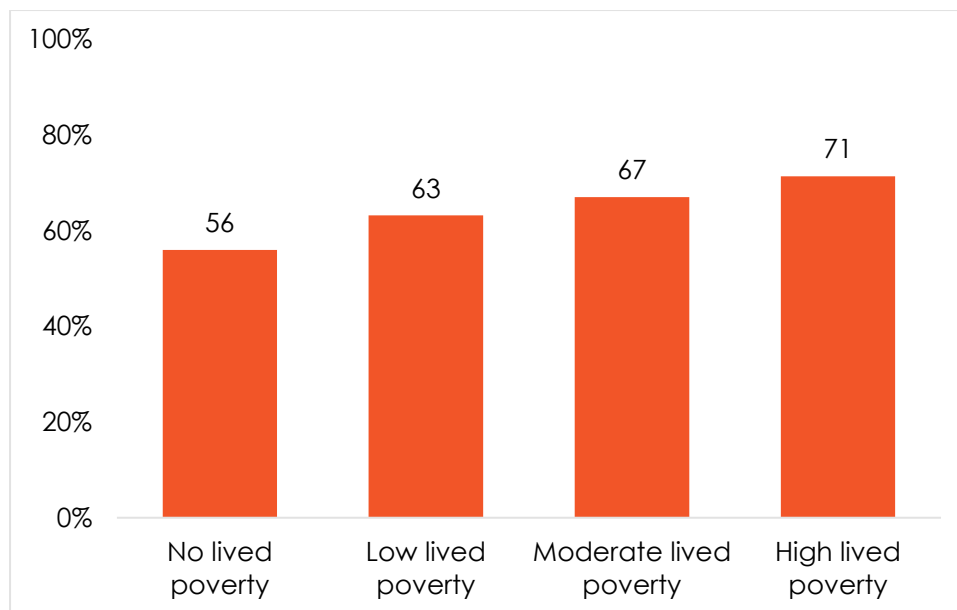


Figure shows change, in percentage points, between survey rounds in 2014/2015 and 2019/2021 in the proportion of respondents who say that crossing international borders is "difficult" or "very difficult." A positive number indicates that it has gotten more difficult to cross borders in the region.

<sup>2</sup> Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes (2020).

**Figure 7: Difficulty crossing borders** | by lived poverty | 34 countries | 2019/2021



**Respondents were asked:** *In your opinion, how easy or difficult is it for people in [your region] to cross international borders in order to work or trade in other countries, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "difficult" or "very difficult")*

Table 1 summarizes these indicators of openness to international trade/movement and the difficulty that people experience in crossing borders.

At the regional level, it is evident that support for openness to trade and movement – the first three columns – is considerably lower in Central Africa (represented by just two countries, Cameroon and Gabon) than in the other regions.

While East and West Africans offer relatively strong support across all three indicators of openness, Southern and North Africans are somewhat less inclined to endorse open trade (the first column).

Benin, Mali, Niger, Morocco, and Zimbabwe stand out as the only countries with high scores in support for openness on all three indicators. Uganda, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Togo, and Eswatini are not far behind, scoring in the highest category on two indicators and falling only slightly below this level on the third.

Angolans and Gabonese express only modest support for openness across all three indicators.

Botswana and Lesotho show more contradictory patterns. Botswana report some of the lowest levels of support for both trade and movement, alongside high support for allowing foreign traders to operate in their country. Large numbers of Basotho reject open trade but support both accepting foreign traders and open borders.

Turning from support for openness to the experience of it – i.e. the reported ease of crossing borders – no region averages more than about one in four citizens who say it is easy: 27% in the South, 24% in the East, and 23% in the North. In West and Central Africa, fewer than one in five respondents (18% and 17%, respectively) report that it is easy to cross borders in the region.

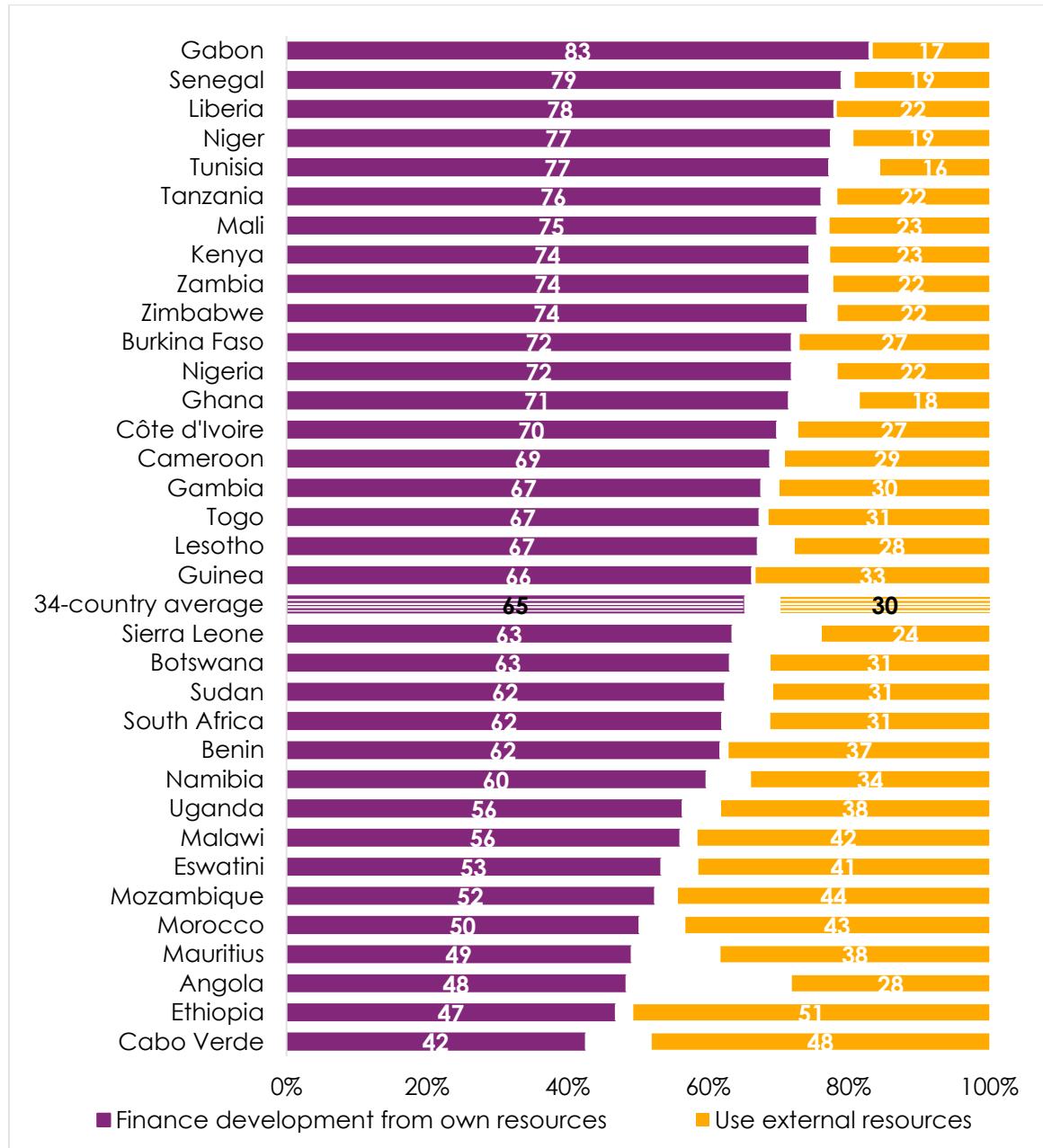
**Table 1: Summary of openness indicators | 34 countries | 2019/2021**

	Support open trade	Allow foreign traders	Support free movement across borders	Easy to move across borders
<b>East Africa</b>				
Ethiopia	53%	59%	56%	15%
Kenya	49%	46%	61%	31%
Malawi	43%	72%	57%	18%
Mauritius	54%	69%	54%	21%
Tanzania	50%	66%	58%	27%
Uganda	70%	58%	74%	24%
Zambia	51%	62%	54%	30%
<b>Average (7 countries)</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>24%</b>
<b>West Africa</b>				
Benin	60%	64%	76%	22%
Burkina Faso	62%	57%	65%	17%
Cabo Verde	55%	71%	50%	28%
Côte d'Ivoire	59%	60%	61%	18%
Gambia	57%	59%	70%	14%
Ghana	41%	40%	51%	20%
Guinea	53%	59%	57%	14%
Liberia	64%	48%	73%	25%
Mali	62%	71%	63%	17%
Niger	66%	64%	66%	21%
Nigeria	55%	51%	56%	16%
Senegal	28%	35%	69%	11%
Sierra Leone	49%	71%	45%	12%
Togo	59%	63%	78%	16%
<b>Average (14 countries)</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>58%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>Southern Africa</b>				
Angola	40%	44%	41%	18%
Botswana	33%	63%	31%	34%
Eswatini	62%	56%	61%	28%
Lesotho	33%	62%	76%	19%
Mozambique	49%	70%	56%	29%
Namibia	51%	53%	50%	33%
South Africa	37%	43%	45%	35%
Zimbabwe	69%	78%	81%	23%
<b>Average (8 countries)</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>Central Africa</b>				
Cameroon	44%	56%	55%	18%
Gabon	40%	47%	48%	17%
<b>Average (2 countries)</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>17%</b>
<b>North Africa</b>				
Morocco	65%	70%	73%	21%
Sudan	51%	61%	44%	21%
Tunisia	26%	56%	48%	26%
<b>Average (3 countries)</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>23%</b>
<b>34-country average</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>59%</b>	<b>22%</b>
	<b>&gt;=60%</b>	<b>50-59%</b>	<b>40-49%</b>	
	<b>30-39%</b>	<b>20-29%</b>	<b>&lt;20%</b>	

## Views on development cooperation

A majority of Africans want their countries to be self-reliant and control their own democratic and economic affairs. Two-thirds (65%) say their countries should finance their development from their own resources, even if it means paying more taxes. Only three in 10 (30%) want their governments to rely on external loans to finance national development (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Funding national development: own resources vs. reliance on external loans** | 34 countries | 2019/2021



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: It is important that as an independent nation, we finance development from our own resources, even if it means paying more taxes.  
 Statement 2: We should use external loans for the development of the country, even if it increases our indebtedness to foreign countries and institutions.  
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with each statement)

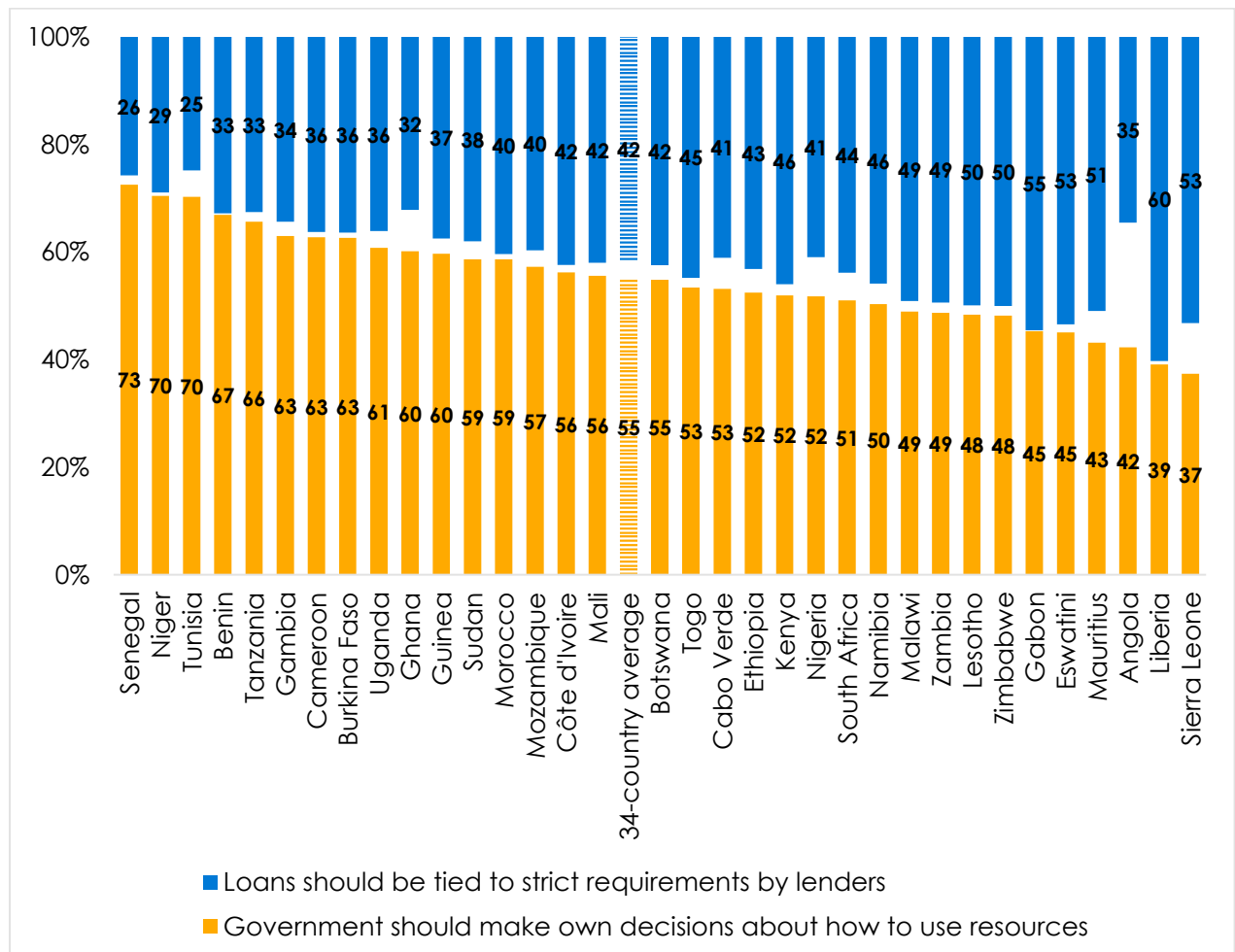
The desire for development without foreign aid is the majority view in 30 of the 34 surveyed countries, including more than three-fourths of citizens in Gabon (83%), Senegal (79%), Liberia (78%), Niger (77%), Tunisia (77%), and Tanzania (76%). The only countries where fewer than half of all citizens prefer self-reliance over external assistance are Cabo Verde (42%), Ethiopia (47%), Angola (48%), and Mauritius (49%).

On average, a majority (55%) say foreign donors or lenders should allow governments to make their own decisions about how to use the resources. But a significant minority (42%) prefer strict requirements for how the resources may be used (Figure 9).

Half or more of citizens reject strict requirements from lenders in 24 of the 34 countries, including large majorities in Senegal (73%), Niger (70%), and Tunisia (70%). Malawians and Zambians are evenly split on the question (49% each).

Support for loan conditionalities is strongest in Liberia (60%), followed by Gabon (55%), Eswatini (53%), Sierra Leone (53%), and Mauritius (51%). While Angola is among the countries with the least support for the government to take its own decisions (42%), it also records the largest proportion of citizens who agree with neither of the views or “don't know” (23%).

**Figure 9: Loan conditionalities on how funds are spent | 34 countries | 2019/2021**

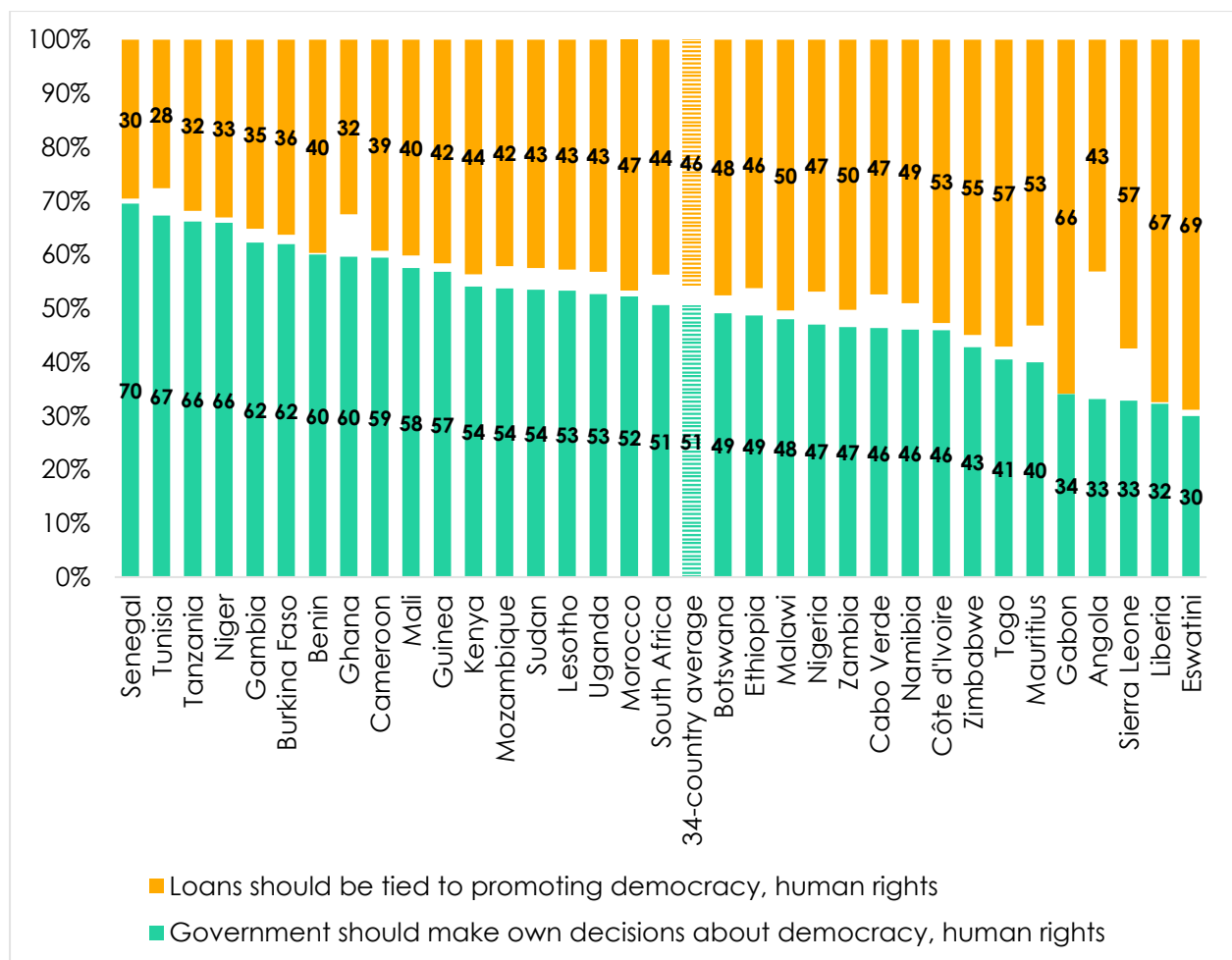


**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your views?  
 Statement 1: When other countries give loans or development assistance to [this country], they should enforce strict requirements on how the funds are spent.  
 Statement 2: When other countries give [this country] loans or development assistance, they should allow our government to make its own decisions about how to use the resources.  
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with each statement)

Africans are more closely divided on whether donors and lenders should make sure that countries receiving assistance promote democracy and respect human rights. On average, slightly more than half (51%) want their governments to be free to make their own decisions about democracy and human rights. But almost as many (46%) want assistance to come with these strings attached (Figure 10).

As on the question of conditionalities for how resources are used, Senegalese (70%) and Tunisians (67%) are most insistent on letting their governments take their own political decisions. In contrast, two-thirds of respondents in Eswatini (69%), Liberia (67%), and Gabon (66%) prefer democracy/human rights-based conditionalities, as do majorities in Togo (57%), Sierra Leone (57%), Zimbabwe (55%), Mauritius (53%), and Côte d'Ivoire (53%).

**Figure 10: Should loans be tied to the promotion of democracy and respect for human rights?** | 34 countries | 2019/2021



**Respondents were asked:** Which of these statements is closest to your views?  
 Statement 1: When other countries give loans or development assistance to [this country], they should enforce strict requirements to make sure our government promotes democracy and respects human rights.  
 Statement 2: Even if other countries give [this country] loans or development assistance, our government should make its own decisions about democracy and human rights.  
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

Table 2 summarizes the findings by country across all three indicators of attitudes toward development assistance. It is evident that there is little connection between support for

conditionality (last two columns) and overall preference for financing development with external loans (first column). For example, Eswatini has some of the highest support for conditionality and also relatively strong preference for using external loans, while in Gabon, high support for conditionality contrasts with very weak support for using external loans.

Most citizens in Tunisia, Senegal, Ghana, and Niger opt for self-reliance across the board, with low support for using external development assistance and widespread rejection of conditions on those resources.

**Table 2: Summary of attitudes to development assistance** | 34 countries | 2019/2021

	Use external loans	Loans should be tied to strict limits on use	Loans should be tied to promoting democracy, human rights
Eswatini	41%	53%	69%
Liberia	22%	60%	67%
Gabon	17%	55%	66%
Sierra Leone	24%	53%	57%
Togo	31%	45%	57%
Zimbabwe	22%	50%	55%
Mauritius	38%	51%	53%
Côte d'Ivoire	27%	42%	53%
Malawi	42%	49%	50%
Zambia	22%	49%	50%
Namibia	34%	46%	49%
Botswana	31%	42%	48%
Cabo Verde	48%	41%	47%
Nigeria	22%	41%	47%
Morocco	43%	40%	47%
Ethiopia	51%	43%	46%
South Africa	31%	44%	44%
Kenya	23%	46%	44%
Uganda	38%	36%	43%
Angola	28%	35%	43%
Lesotho	28%	50%	43%
Sudan	31%	38%	43%
Mozambique	44%	40%	42%
Guinea	33%	37%	42%
Mali	23%	42%	40%
Benin	37%	33%	40%
Cameroon	29%	36%	39%
Burkina Faso	27%	36%	36%
Gambia	30%	34%	35%
Niger	19%	29%	33%
Ghana	18%	32%	32%
Tanzania	22%	33%	32%
Senegal	19%	26%	30%
Tunisia	16%	25%	28%
34-country average	30%	42%	46%
	<20%	20-29%	30-39%
	40-49%	>=50%	

## Whose influence is welcome?

International organizations and foreign powers may exert influence in Africa not just through loans or development assistance, but also through other types of economic and political engagement. Do Africans appreciate the influence of these external actors, or resist it?

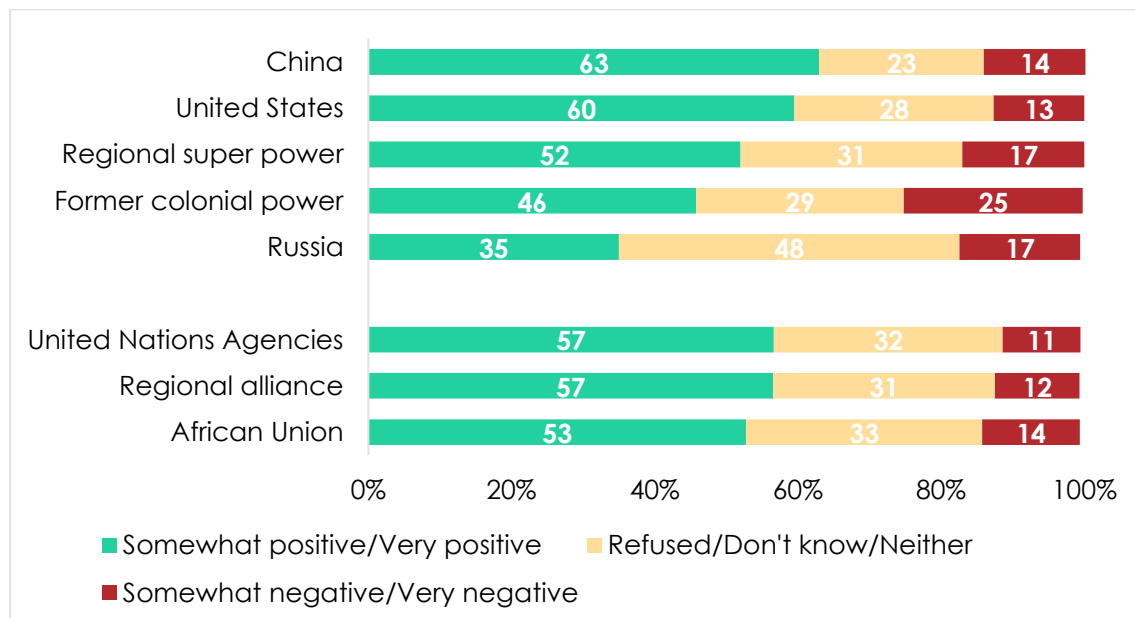
Africans' perceptions of external powers are far more often positive than negative. About six in 10 value the influence of China (63%) and the United States (60%), vs. just 14% and 13%, respectively, who see it as negative (Figure 11) (see also Sanny & Selormey, 2020).

Around half welcome the influence of their country's regional superpower (South Africa, Nigeria,<sup>3</sup> Kenya, or Algeria) (52%) and former colonial power (Britain, France, Portugal, or Germany) (46%). Russia's influence is less often seen in a favourable light (35%), although almost half (48%) do not offer an opinion in either direction and only a small minority (17%) express a negative view.

Perceptions of development agencies and regional bodies are also predominantly positive: 53% positive vs. 14% negative for the African Union (AU), 57% vs. 11% for United Nations agencies, and 57% vs. 12% for the primary regional organizations (Southern African Development Community (SADC), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), East African Community (EAC), Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), and Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS)).

Substantial proportions (ranging from 23% to 48%) of respondents did not provide a positive or negative assessment of these external influences, saying "Neither positive nor negative" or "Don't know" or refusing to answer the question.

**Figure 11: Rating external influencers** | 34 countries\* | 2019/2021



**Respondents were asked:** In general, do you think that the economic and political influence of each of the following organizations/countries on [this country] is mostly positive, mostly negative, or haven't you heard enough to say?

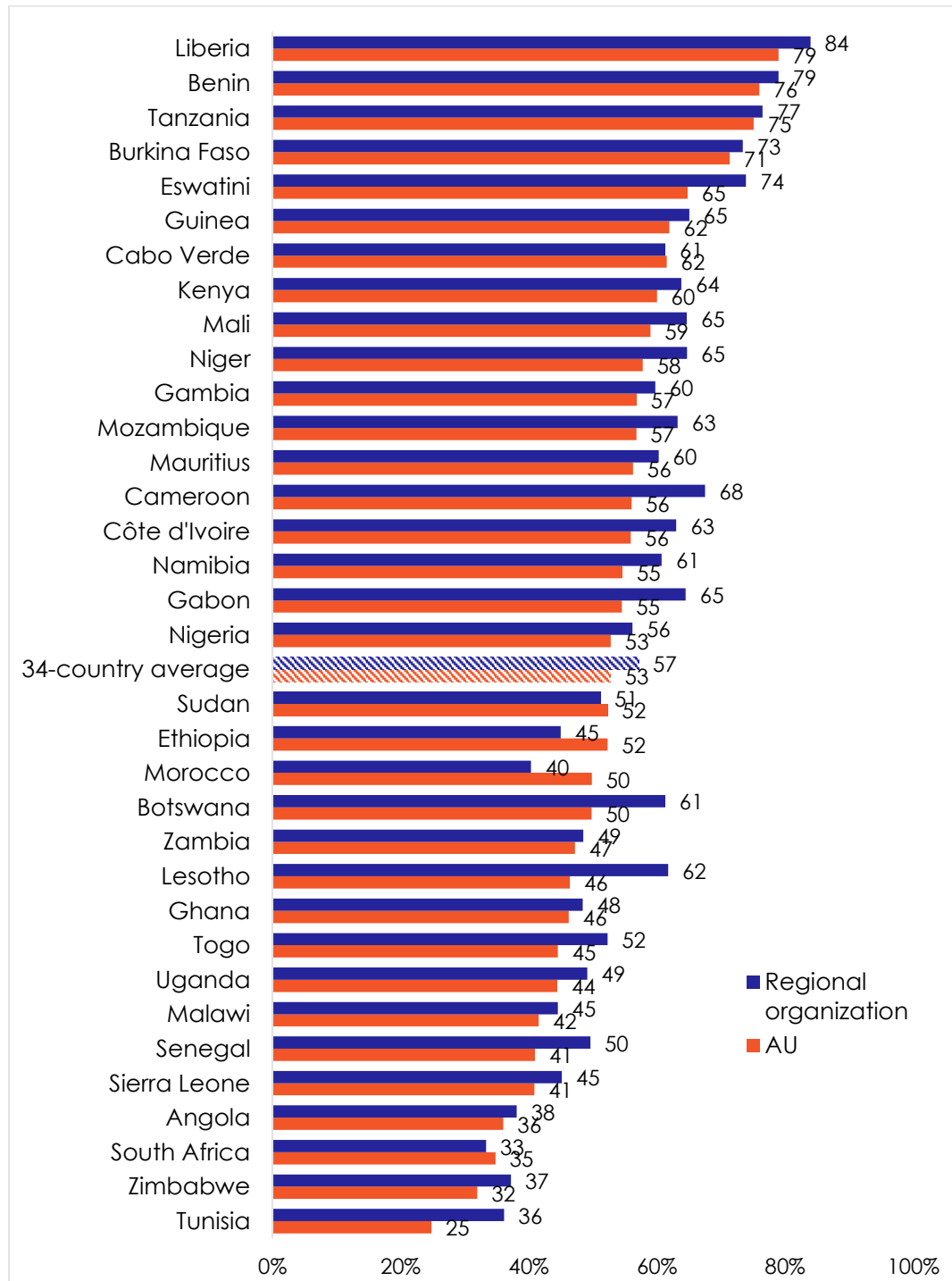
\*Note: Question on influence of regional superpower was not asked in Kenya. Question on influence of former colonial power was not asked in Ethiopia. Question on influence of Russia was not asked in Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, and Uganda.

<sup>3</sup> Nigerians were asked about Ghana.



Most countries rate the influence of their regional organizations more positively than that of the AU, with the largest gaps recorded in Lesotho (15 percentage points), Botswana (12 points), Tunisia (11 points), and Cameroon (11 points). Ethiopia and Morocco are exceptions where the influence of the AU outranks that of the regional organization (52% vs. 45% and 50% vs. 40%, respectively) (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Influence of AU and regional organizations | 34 countries | 2019/2021**



**Respondents were asked:** In general, do you think that the economic and political influence of each of the following organizations/countries on [this country] is mostly positive, mostly negative, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "somewhat positive" or "very positive")

Views on the influence of superpowers and former colonial powers vary greatly across countries. China's influence gets its most positive ratings in Benin (88%), Cabo Verde (85%), Eswatini (82%), and Mali (81%), while the United States is most welcome in Liberia (88%), Cabo Verde (85%), and Morocco (85%) (Figure 13).

Russia gets majority favourable assessments in just three countries – Guinea (63%), Mali (56%), and Burkina Faso (55%) – while majorities in most countries are neutral rather than negative.

The influence of the regional superpower is most welcome in Niger (89%), Benin (86%), Eswatini (73% referring to South Africa), and Tunisia (73%, referring to Algeria).

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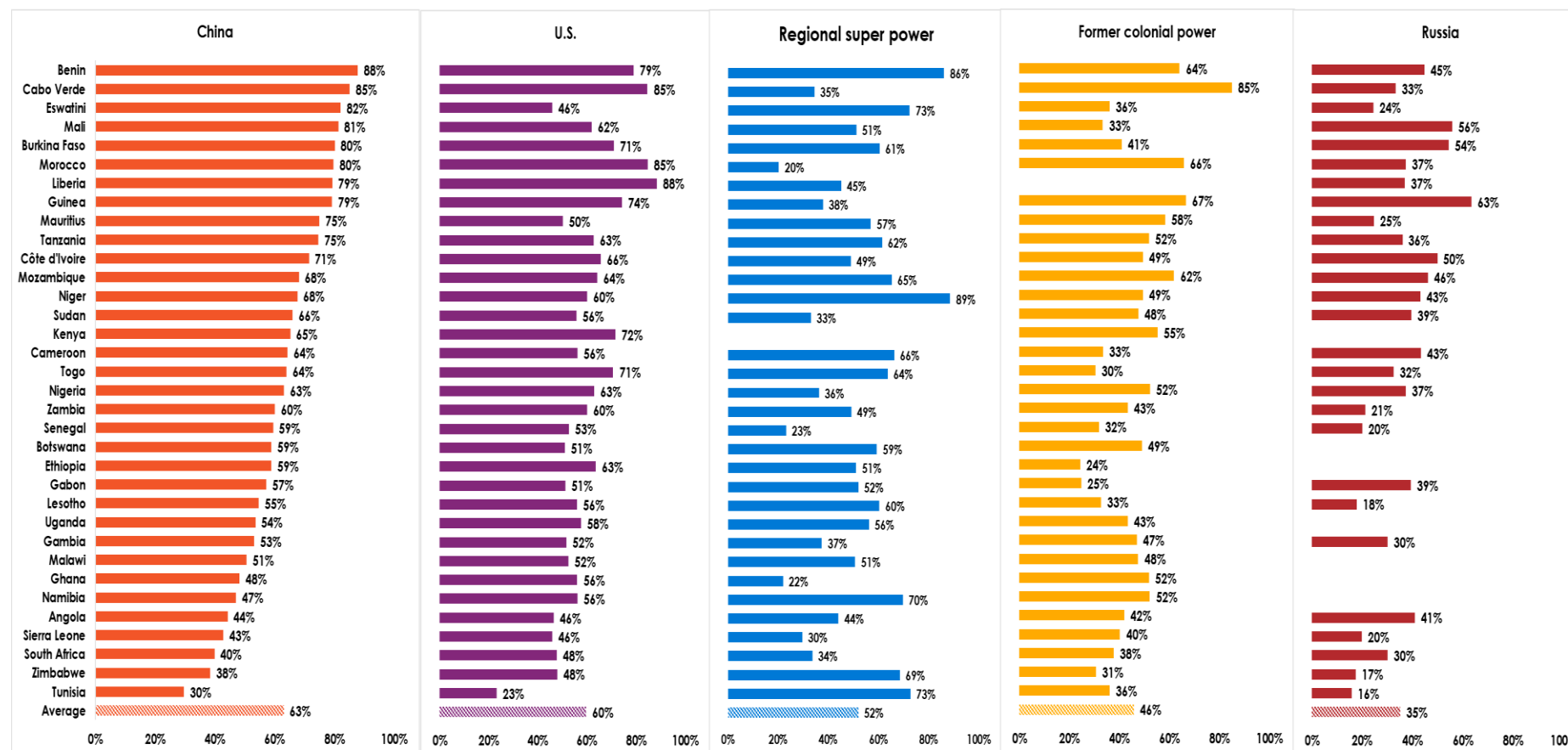
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More than eight in 10 Cabo Verdeans (85%) see the influence of their former colonial power as positive, but only one in four Ethiopians (24%) and Gabonese (25%) share this view.

The survey also shows interesting country patterns. Generally, Benin and Cabo Verde have high regard for external powers, but in the latter this excludes their regional superpower (Nigeria) and Russia. None of the external influences receive high positive ratings in Angola, Sierra Leone, or South Africa. Tunisians offer low positive ratings (16%-36%) for all external influences except Algeria as the regional superpower (73%). In Ghana, Malawi, Uganda, and Ethiopia, positive assessments of external influences generally range from low to moderate.

**Figure 13: Rating influence of superpowers | 34 countries\* | 2019/2021**

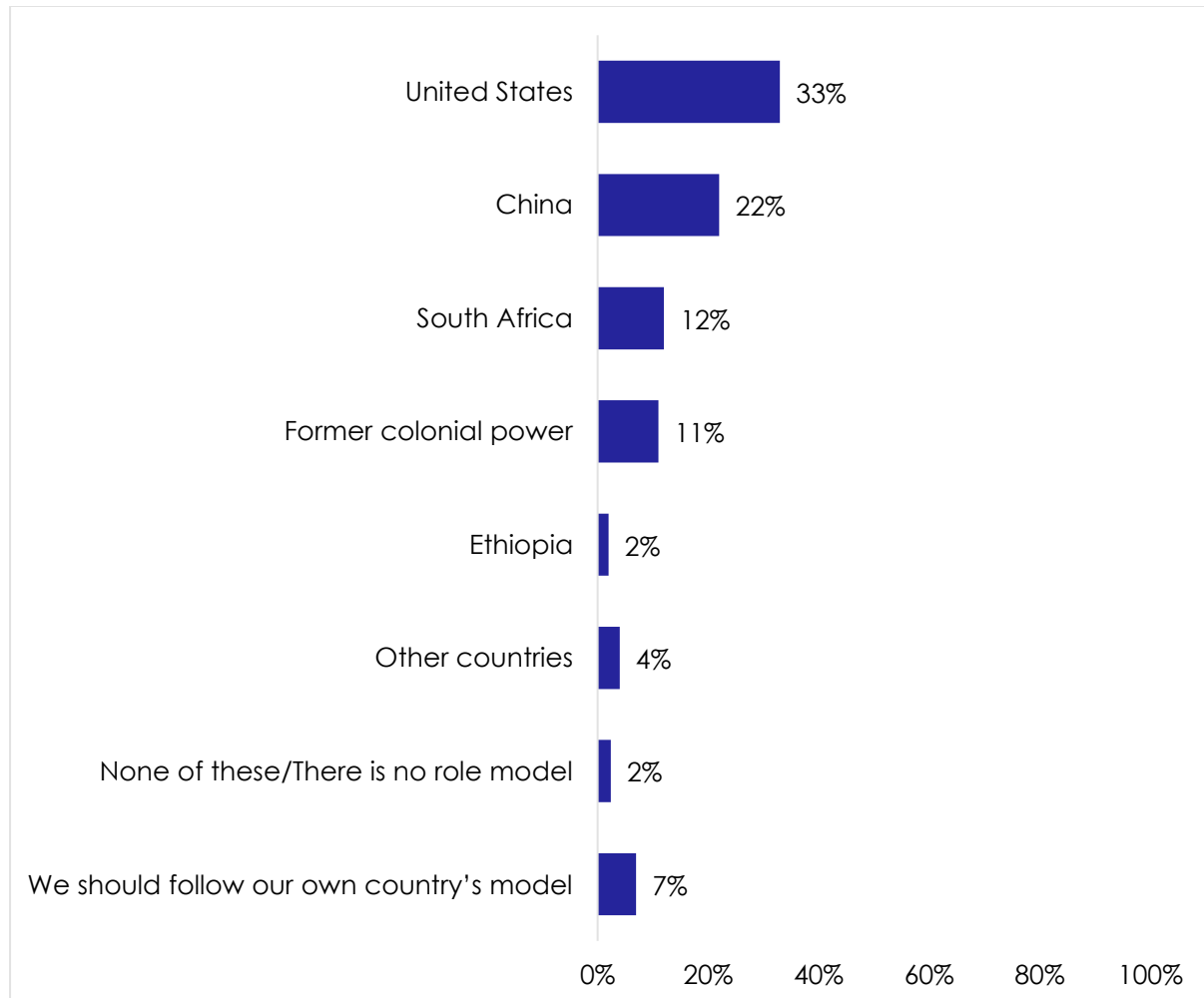


**Respondents were asked:** In general, do you think that the economic and political influence of each of the following organizations/countries on [this country] is mostly positive, mostly negative, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "somewhat positive" or "very positive")

\*Note: Question on influence of regional superpower was not asked in Kenya. Question on influence of Russia was not asked in Botswana, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, and Uganda.

When it comes to the best development model for their countries, Africans are most likely to cite the United States (33%) (Figure 14). China is second (22%), while far fewer prefer South Africa (12%) or their former colonial power (11%), and 7% say their country should follow its own model.

**Figure 14: Best model for development** | 34 countries | 2019/2021

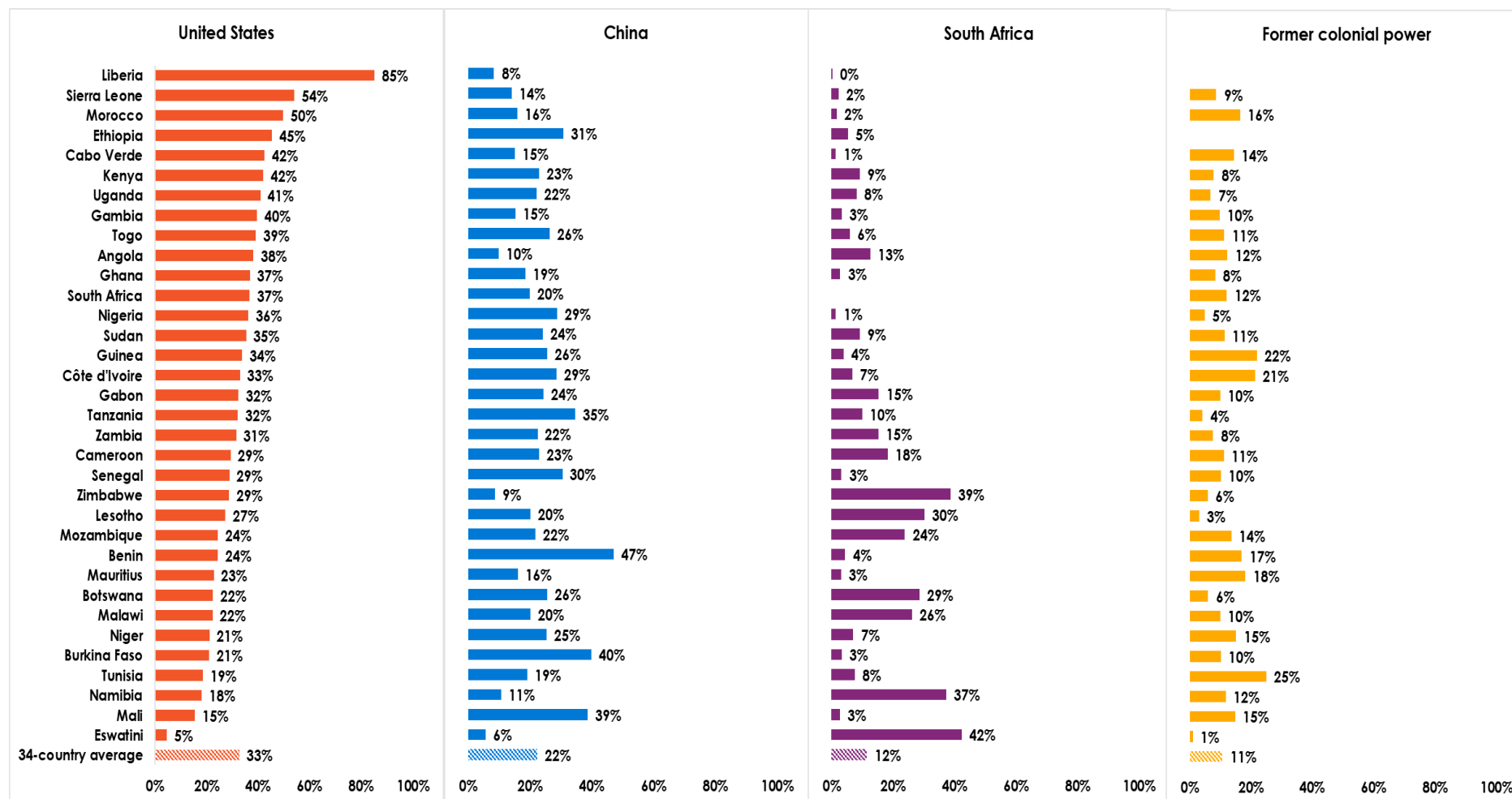


**Respondents were asked:** *In your opinion, which of the following countries, if any, would be the best model for the future development of our country, or is there some other country in Africa or elsewhere, that should be our model?*

The popular preference is strongest for the U.S. model in 19 of the 34 countries, with Liberia at the top (85%) (Figure 15). China receives its highest marks in Benin (47%), Burkina Faso (40%), and Mali (39%).

In Tunisia, the model of the former colonial power (France) gets the most votes (25%), while the U.S. and China tie at 19% each. As the former colonial power, France also rates well in Guinea (22%) and Côte d'Ivoire (21%), although the U.S. and China score higher. South Africa's model outranks the U.S. and China in the neighbouring countries of Zimbabwe (39%), Namibia (37%), Lesotho (30%), Botswana (29%), and Malawi (26%).

Figure 15: Best model for development | 34 countries | 2019/2021



**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, which of the following countries, if any, would be the best model for the future development of our country, or is there some other country in Africa or elsewhere, that should be our model?

## Conclusion

The AfCFTA may hold the potential to unlock local development opportunities through an inclusive free market. However, the success of the AfCFTA will depend on the ease of cross-border trade in goods and services, as well as the potential benefits to ordinary Africans. Citizens across 34 countries are sharply divided on the question of opening borders to trade vs. closing them to protect local producers. So negative or uncertain attitudes toward open trade may still be a serious impediment to the AfCFTA, especially in those countries (such as Tunisia, Senegal, Lesotho, Botswana, and South Africa) where protectionist sentiments are strongest.

But the concrete realities of moving goods and people across borders will also be critical, and there is much work to be done here. Currently, two-thirds of Africans across 34 countries face difficulties moving around their region, including for work, and the situation has gotten substantially worse in the past few years. This is despite the fact that a solid majority of Africans support the free movement of people and goods across borders. Policies aimed at easing regulations and reforming border controls, with specific attention to promoting agency for Africans living on the fringes of economic inclusion, will be vital to the success of a free trade area.

Perceptions of fostering interconnectedness vary greatly across countries, highlighting local dynamics that underpin facilitation of the AfCFTA. One way to address this might be to establish regional autonomous oversight bodies that assess domestic challenges and put forward recommendations to help overcome local and regional barriers to the success of the AfCFTA.

Deepening interconnectedness as a means of entrenching peace and building self-reliant nations requires broad access to the free trade area for regular Africans. Otherwise, the AfCFTA will fail to take advantage of the labour, skills, and knowledge of the very populations that will determine its success.

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## Appendix

Table A.1: Afrobarometer Round 8 fieldwork dates and previous survey rounds

Country	Round 8 fieldwork	Previous survey rounds
Angola	Nov.-Dec. 2019	N/A
Benin	Nov.-Dec. 2020	2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017
Botswana	July-August 2019	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017
Burkina Faso	Dec. 2019	2008, 2012, 2015, 2017
Cabo Verde	Dec. 2019	2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017
Cameroon	Feb.-March 2021	2013, 2015, 2018
Côte d'Ivoire	Nov. 2019	2013, 2014, 2017
Eswatini	March-April 2021	2013, 2015, 2018
Ethiopia	DDc. 2019-Jan. 2020	2013
Gabon	Feb. 2020	2015, 2017
Gambia	Feb. 2021	2018
Ghana	Sept.-Oct. 2019	1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017
Guinea	Nov.-Dec. 2019	2013, 2015, 2017
Kenya	August-Sept. 2019	2003, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2016
Lesotho	Feb.-March 2020	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017
Liberia	Oct.-Dec. 2020	2008, 2012, 2015, 2018
Malawi	Nov.-Dec. 2019	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017
Mali	March-April 2020	2001, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014, 2017
Mauritius	Nov. 2020	2012, 2014, 2017
Morocco	Feb. 2021	2013, 2015, 2018
Mozambique	May-July 2021	2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2018
Namibia	August 2019	1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017
Niger	Oct.-Nov. 2020	2013, 2015, 2018
Nigeria	Jan.-Feb. 2020	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2015, 2017
Senegal	Dec. 2020-Jan. 2021	2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014, 2017
Sierra Leone	March 2020	2012, 2015, 2018
Sudan	Feb.-April 2021	2013, 2015, 2018
South Africa	May-June 2021	2000, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2015, 2018
Tanzania	Feb.-March 2021	2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017
Togo	Dec. 2020-Jan. 2021	2012, 2014, 2017
Tunisia	Feb.-March 2020	2013, 2015, 2018
Uganda	Sept.-Oct. 2019	2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2017
Zambia	Nov.-Dec. 2020	1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2014, 2017
Zimbabwe	April-May 2021	1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2017



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Afrobarometer, a non-profit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 35 countries is provided by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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