



Afrobarometer Briefing Paper No. 118

POPULAR ATTITUDES TOWARD DEMOCRACY IN MAURITIUS

by Gilles Joomun and Boniface Dulani

July 2013

Introduction

Expert assessments of democracy such as the Freedom House Index, Mo Ibrahim Index on Governance, among others, have always rated Mauritius as a paragon of democracy on the African continent. The availability of data from the 2012 Afrobarometer survey that gauged the attitudes and opinions of Mauritian citizens on democracy, governance, the economy, leadership, identity and other related issues, provides us with the first opportunity to test whether ordinary Mauritians agree with those assessments. At the same time, we can compare Mauritius with other African countries.

Afrobarometer Surveys

The Afrobarometer is a comparative series of public attitude surveys, covering 35 African countries in Round 5 (2011-2013). It measures public attitudes on democracy and its alternatives, evaluations of the quality of governance and economic performance. In addition, the surveys assess the views of the electorate on critical political issues in the surveyed countries. The Afrobarometer's main goal is to produce scientifically reliable data on public opinion in Africa while strengthening institutional capacities for survey research, and research findings to inform policy and practice. The Afrobarometer also provides comparisons over time, as four previous rounds of surveys have been held from 1999 to 2008..

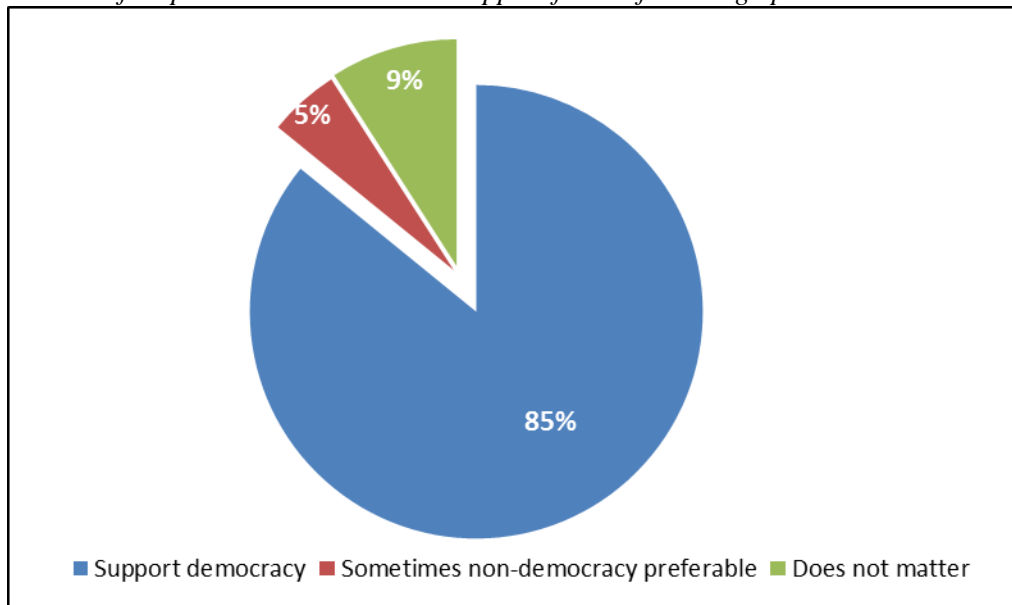
During Round 5, Afrobarometer surveys will be conducted in 35 African countries using a common survey instrument and methodology. The instrument asks a standard set of questions that permits systematic comparison in public attitudes across countries over time. In the Mauritius survey, the methodology was based on a national probability sample of 1,200 adult Mauritians selected to represent all adult citizens of voting age. In order to allow for comparison, residents of Rodrigues were oversampled such that the total number of respondents in the survey from Rodrigues was 120 while on the main island of Mauritius the number of respondents was 1080. The sample was drawn randomly based on Probability Proportionate to Population Size (PPPS), thus taking account of population distributions, gender as well as rural-urban divides. The sampling process ensured that every adult Mauritian citizen had an equal and known chance of being selected in the sample. The combined sample of 1,200 allows for national inferences with a sampling margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. Fieldwork in Mauritius was conducted by the StraConsult Ltd between 7 January and 26 February 2012.

Demand for democracy

To gauge demand for democracy, Afrobarometer looks at the extent of support for democracy in Mauritius and the rejection of non-democratic alternatives such as military, one-party and one man rule. Respondents who say that "democracy is preferable to any other kind of government" and expressly disapprove the non-democratic alternatives are deemed to demand democracy.

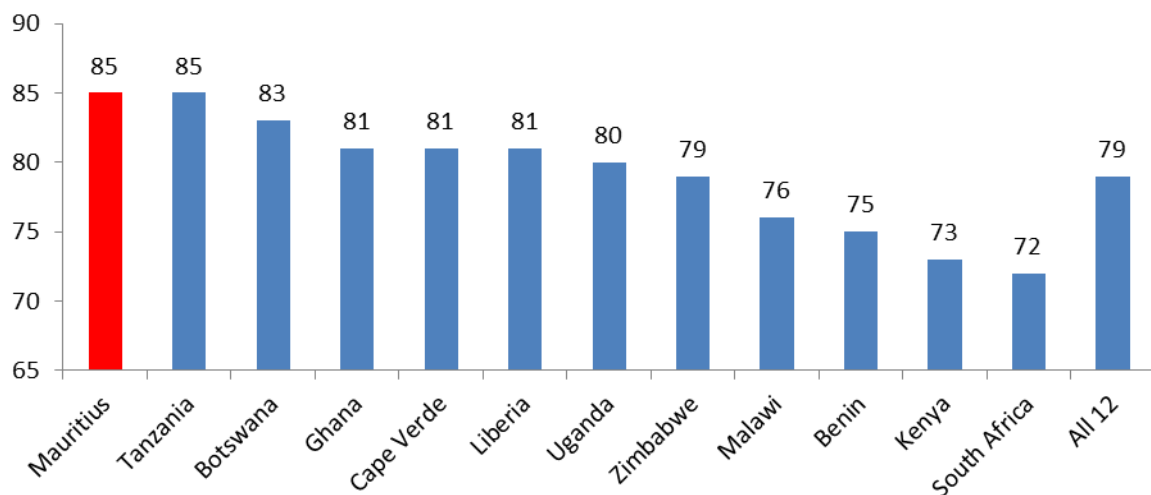
Figure 1: Support for democracy vs. other forms of government

Percent of respondents who indicated support for the following options



A majority of Mauritians—85%—express support for democracy while only 5% indicate that sometimes non-democracy is preferable. When compared with respondents in 11 other African countries, Mauritians show the highest levels of support for democracy (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Percentage of support for democracy in 12 African countries



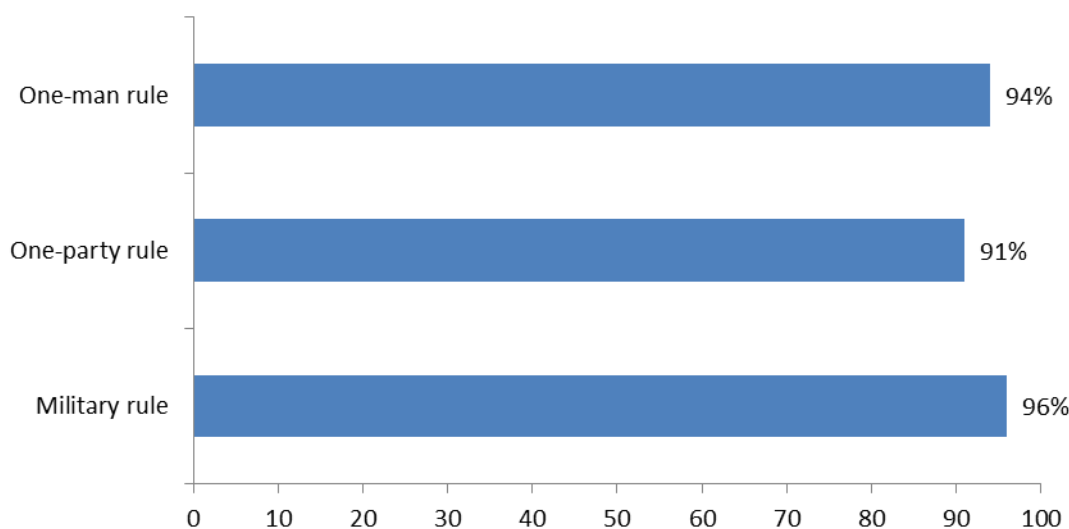
Despite different levels of political development, support for democracy is high across the 12 countries. In all, nearly 8 in 10 citizens prefer democracy to any other form of government. Support for democracy is highest in Mauritius and Tanzania—85%—and lowest in South Africa—72%.

Rejection of non-democratic alternatives

An additional test of demand for democracy assesses whether respondents reject authoritarian regimes. The Afrobarometer asks respondents to indicate whether they reject or approve of military rule, one-party rule or one-man rule. Figure 3 presents findings on the extent of rejection of these undemocratic regimes in Mauritius.

Figure 3: Rejection of Non-democratic alternatives, Mauritius

The percentage of respondents who said they did not support the following government types:



The findings show that commitment to democracy is very strong in Mauritius. Overwhelming majorities, more than 90%, reject all three forms of non-democratic regimes. The highest rejection rates are for military rule—96%—followed by one-man rule—94%—and one-party rules—91%.

Supply of democracy

There are several questions on the Afrobarometer survey that allow us to gauge the perceived supply of democracy. These include questions on assessment of the freeness and fairness of the previous elections, perceptions on the extent of democracy in the country and levels of satisfaction with democracy.

Satisfaction with Democracy

Although support for democracy is very high, fewer Mauritian citizens are satisfied with the way democracy is working in the country than those that express support for it. While 85% indicated that they support democracy, only 72% say that they are satisfied with how democracy is working (Table 1):

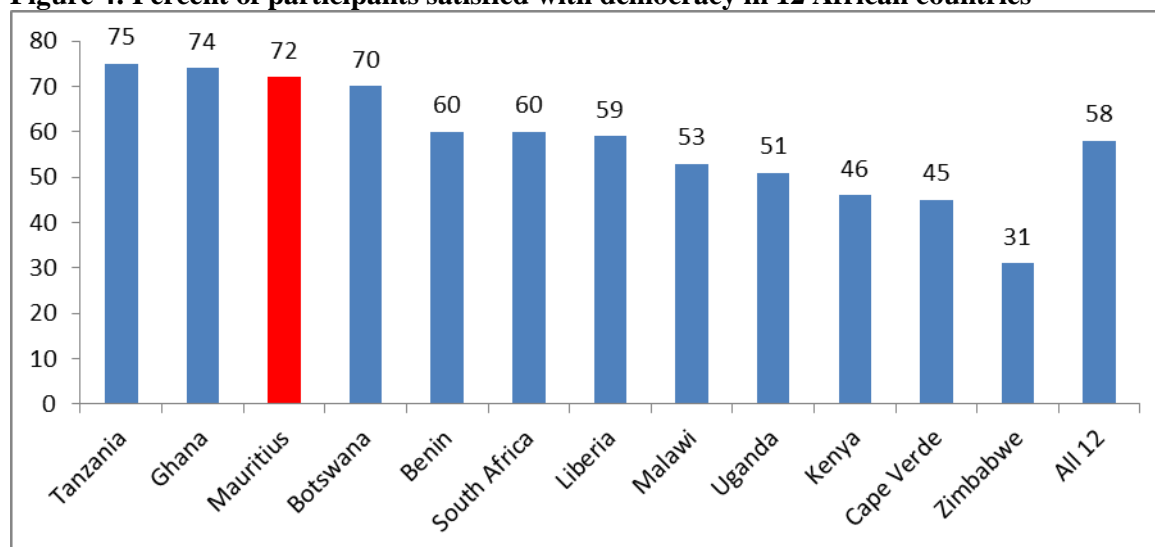
Table 1: Satisfaction with Democracy

Respondents were asked: Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Mauritius?

	Percentage
Mauritius is not a democracy	0
Not at all satisfied	5
Not very satisfied	22
Fairly satisfied	56
Very satisfied	16

No Mauritian participant says the country is “not a democracy,” though about 3 in 10 people are less than satisfied with the way democracy is currently working in the country. When compared with 11 other African countries though, the level of satisfaction with democracy in Mauritius is ranked third (Figure 4):

Figure 4: Percent of participants satisfied with democracy in 12 African countries



Extent of Democracy in Mauritius

The Afrobarometer survey asks respondents to rate the extent of the country's democracy. Responses range from “a full democracy” to “not a democracy”. A majority – 54% – said the democracy had just minor problems 22% said it was a full democracy (Table 2).

Table 2. Extent of Democracy in Mauritius 2012

Respondents were asked how much of a democracy Mauritius is today

	Percent
Mauritius is not a democracy	2
A democracy with major problems	19
A democracy with minor problems	54
A full democracy	22

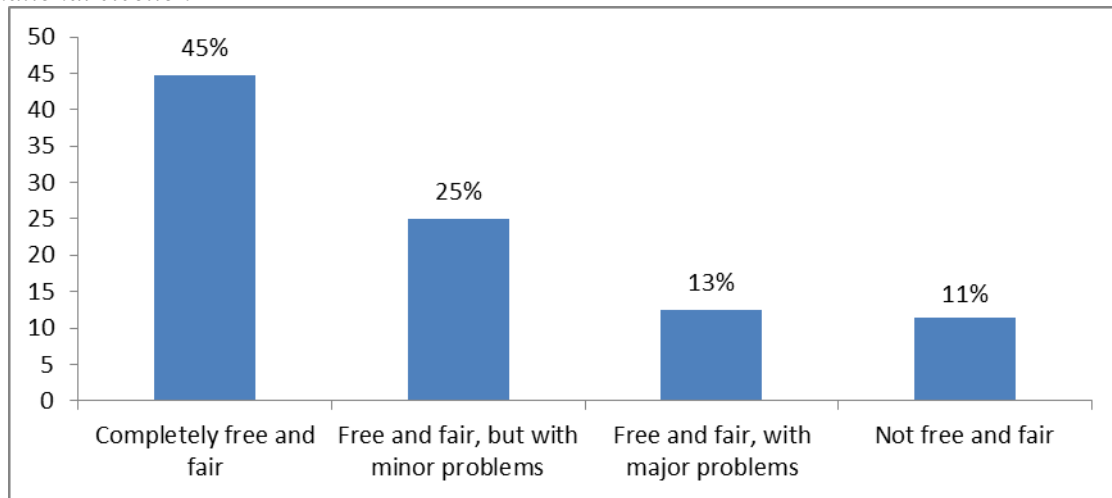
Overall 76% of the country's citizens hold a positive view of the extent of democracy in the country, matching the assessments of expert-driven indicators such as Freedom House who rate Mauritius as “Free” in its 2013 assessment of Freedom in the World.

Freeness and fairness of the previous elections

In May 2010, Mauritians went to the polls to choose a new parliament, and the election results influenced the composition of the new government. The majority said the elections were free and fair with at most minor problems.

Figure 5: Freeness and fairness of 2010 Elections in Mauritius

Respondents were asked on the whole how they would rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election



Levels of participation in the democratic process

The Afrobarometer questionnaire includes questions that enable us to gauge levels of political participation in the democratic process. These include voting in elections, membership of political parties, interest in public affairs and discussing of political topics.

Voting

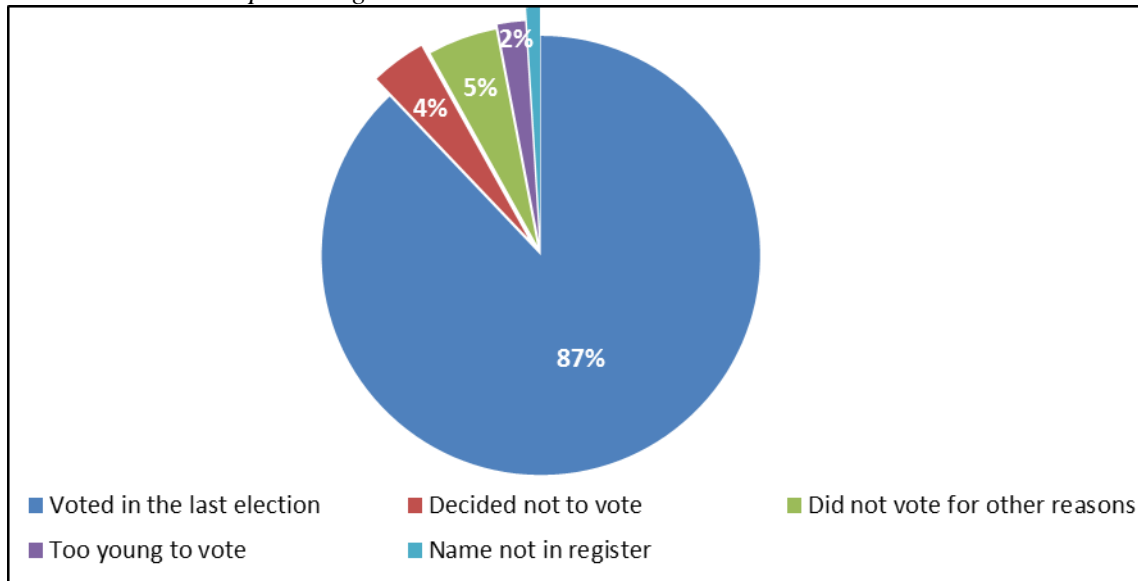
Voting is one of the major hallmarks of a healthy democracy. When voters turn out to vote, the government that is elected can make a genuine claim to represent the interests of the wider public. Conversely, when voter turnout is low, governments that emerge from these elections face a crisis of legitimacy. Historically, voter turnout in Mauritian elections has been high. In the four elections between 1995 and 2010, turnout in the legislative elections has averaged 80%.

When asked if they took part in the 2010 elections, 87% of the survey respondents indicated that they voted, which is 9 percentage points above the official turnout figure of 78% from the Electoral Commission¹. Figure 6 provides a summary of the findings on turnout in the 2010 elections as captured in the Afrobarometer survey:

¹ This is consistent with other studies that have found that opinion surveys tend to inflate the rates of voting.

Figure 6: Voting patterns

Respondents were asked: Regarding the most recent election which statement is true for you? The chart shows the percentage who chose each situation

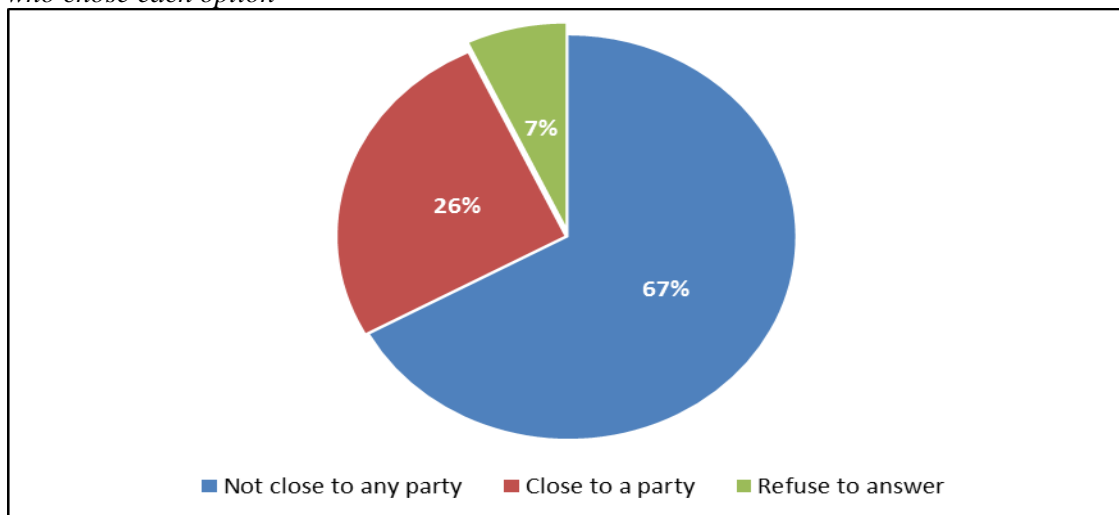


Political party support

While a majority of Mauritians said they voted in the 2010 elections, the country is characterized by very low levels of political party membership. Two-thirds of Mauritians indicate that they are not close to any political party, while only a quarter of the population profess partisanship.

Figure 7: Political party membership

Respondents were asked if they felt close to any political party. Chart shows percentage of people who chose each option



Interest in public affairs

Despite the limited political partisanship, 6 in 10 Mauritians express interest in public affairs compared 40% who indicate not to be interested (Table 3):

Table 3: Interest in public affairs

Respondents were asked how interested would they say they are in public affairs. The chart shows percentage who chose each option.

	Percentage
Not at all interested	21
Not very interested	19
Somewhat interested	44
Very interested	16

Discussing politics

Although many Mauritians mention interest in public affairs, an overwhelming majority—88%—say that either never or only occasionally discuss politics.

Conclusion

Although Mauritius may be seen by outsiders to be a model for African countries in terms of achievement in democracy, many Mauritian citizens are critical of the level of democracy within the country.

Mauritians, as many of their counterparts on the continent, view democracy as the best type of government, yet they still feel that there is room for improvement in the Mauritian democratic model. The demand side of democracy, in other words, is higher than its perceived supply.

With regard to their participation in the democratic process, a majority of Mauritian do vote in national elections and express interest in the political matters of their country. However, most of them avoid political partisanship and shy away from discussing politics with others.

This Briefing Paper was prepared by Gilles D. Joomun, Consultant at the StraConsult and Boniface Dulani, Fieldwork Operations Manager for Afrobarometer.

The Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa), the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), University of Nairobi, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Survey implementation in the Republic of Mauritius, including preparations, data collection and management and overall project coordination, was undertaken by StraConsult. We gratefully acknowledge generous support from the UK's Department for International Development (DfID), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for support on Afrobarometer Round 5. For more information and further requests for analysis please visit Afrobarometer website: www.afrobarometer.org or contact the Afrobarometer Project Manager for Southern Africa on achingwete.ab@gmail.com