

Mauritians' assessment of election quality took a hit in 2019

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 453 | Louis Amédée Darga

Summary

In November 2019, Mauritians conducted their 11th general election since independence in 1968, handing the ruling Militant Socialist Movement a clear victory and Prime Minister Pravind Kumar Jugnauth a five-year term. In the Economist Intelligence Unit (2019) Democracy Index that followed in early 2020, Mauritius ranked as a “full democracy,” 18th worldwide and No. 1 in Africa.

Yet some worrying allegations and unanswered questions still linger in citizens' minds due to perceived irregularities in the electoral process. A member of the Electoral Boundaries Commission announced in a news conference that 6,813 people had been unable to vote because their names were not featured on the voters' registration roll (Defimedia.info, 2019). Furthermore, marked ballots were alleged to have been found outside counting centers – a first in the history of Mauritius (L'Express, 2020). A number of challenges to the announced results are awaiting court proceedings.

An Afrobarometer survey in Mauritius, conducted about a year after the election, shows that citizens' assessments of their national elections took a hit. While a majority see the 2019 election as having been generally “free and fair,” negative assessments of election quality more than tripled compared to views of the 2010 and 2014 elections captured in previous surveys.

A large majority of citizens believe that an unusual number of people's names were absent from the voters' register. Significant minorities think that some people voted more than once and that the media was not fair in its coverage of candidates.

Despite these concerns, a majority of Mauritians believe that the announced election results are largely accurate.

Key findings

- Almost nine out of 10 Mauritian adults (86%) say they voted in the 2019 national election.
- Three in 10 citizens (30%) say they attended a campaign rally. About one in four (27%) say they were contacted by a political party during the campaign.
- While more than six in 10 Mauritians (63%) believe that the 2019 election was generally free and fair, that represents a sharp decline from previous assessments of national elections.
- Mauritians offer mixed evaluations of the quality of the 2019 national election:
 - More than four in 10 (44%) say people's names were “often” left off the voters' register.

- About one in four (27%) believe that some people voted more than once.
- More than four in 10 say that “a few times” (27%) or “often” (16%), votes were not accurately counted or not fairly reflected in the results.
- A substantial minority (40%) say the media “never” or only “sometimes” provided fair coverage of all candidates.
- Despite these concerns, more than two-thirds (68%) of Mauritians believe that the results announced by the Office of the Electoral Commission were generally accurate.
- Roughly half of citizens think the country’s elections don’t work very well to ensure that voters’ views are represented (46%) and to allow voters to remove non-performing leaders (54%).
- A majority (54%) of Mauritians believe that communities at least “sometimes” suffer negative consequences, such as lack of government support for local services or development projects, if they don’t vote for the ruling party.

Afrobarometer survey

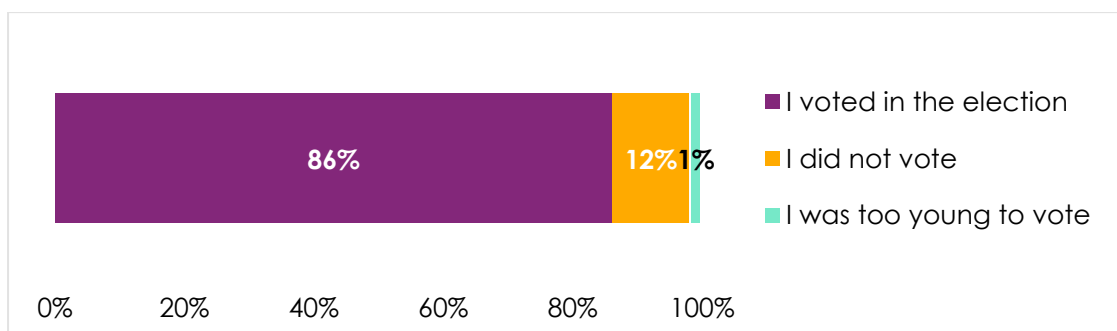
Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Seven rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018. Round 8 surveys in 2019/2021 will cover 34 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent’s choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Mauritius, led by Straconsult Ltd., interviewed 1,200 adult Mauritians in November 2020. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Mauritius in 2012, 2014, and 2017.

Political participation

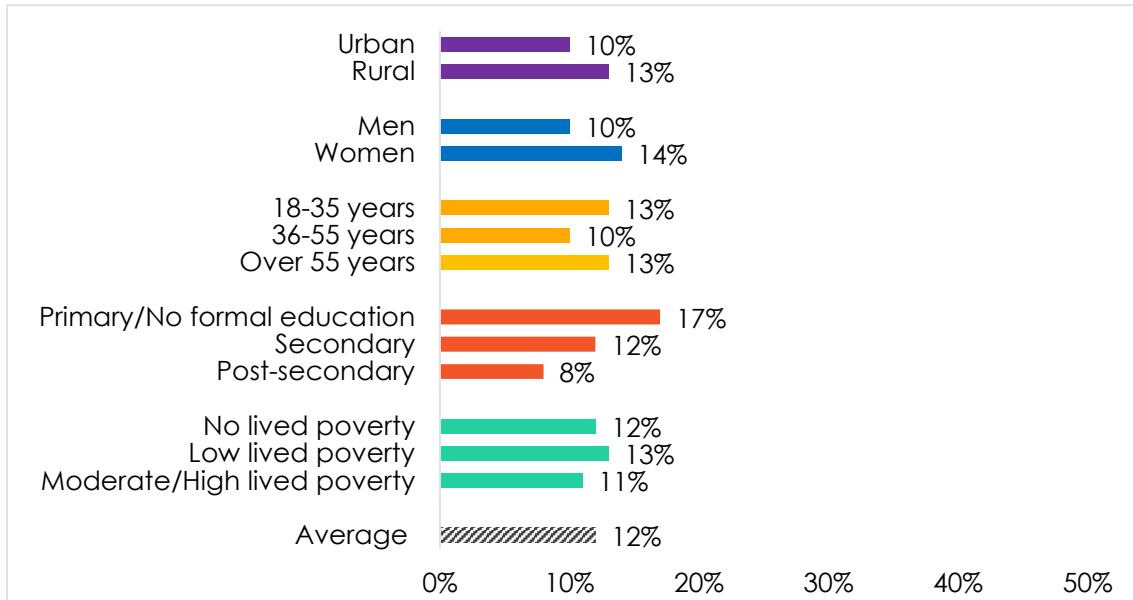
Participation in the 2019 national election was high: Almost nine out of 10 Mauritian adults (86%) say they voted (Figure 1). Citizens with no formal education or only primary schooling (17%) are more likely to say they did not vote than those with secondary (12%) or post-secondary (8%) education (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Voted in the 2019 election | Mauritius | 2020



Respondents were asked: People are not always able to vote in elections, for example, because they weren’t registered, they were unable to go, or someone prevented them from voting. How about you? In the last national election, held in 2019, did you vote, or not, or were you too young to vote? Or can’t you remember whether you voted?

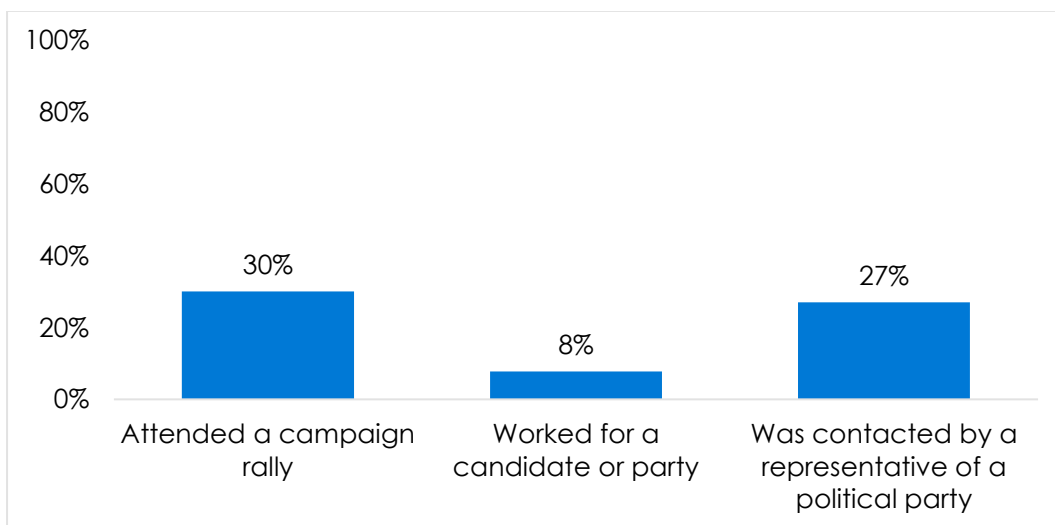
Figure 2: Did not vote in the 2019 election | by socio-demographic group | Mauritius | 2020



Respondents were asked: People are not always able to vote in elections, for example, because they weren't registered, they were unable to go, or someone prevented them from voting. How about you? In the last national election held in 2019, did you vote, or not, or were you too young to vote? Or can't you remember whether you voted? (% of respondents who answered "I did not vote").

Participation in election campaigns was far less common: Three in 10 respondents (30%) say they attended a campaign rally, and almost as many (27%) say they were contacted by a political party during the campaign (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Participation in the campaign | Mauritius | 2020



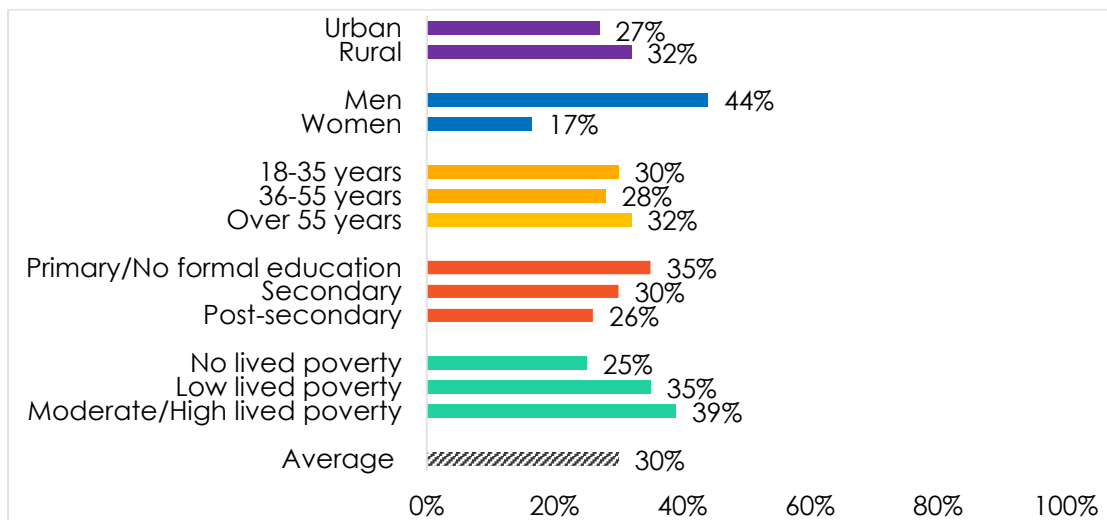
Respondents were asked: Thinking about the last national election in 2019:
 Did you attend a campaign rally?
 Did you work for a candidate or party?
 Did any representative of a political party contact you during the campaign?
 (% "yes")

Men are considerably more likely than women to report having attended a campaign rally (44% vs. 17%), a form of participation that was also somewhat more common among rural, less educated, and poorer citizens (Figure 4).

Men (34%) and rural residents (29%) are also more likely than women (20%) and urbanites (24%) to report being contacted by a representative of a political party (Figure 5).

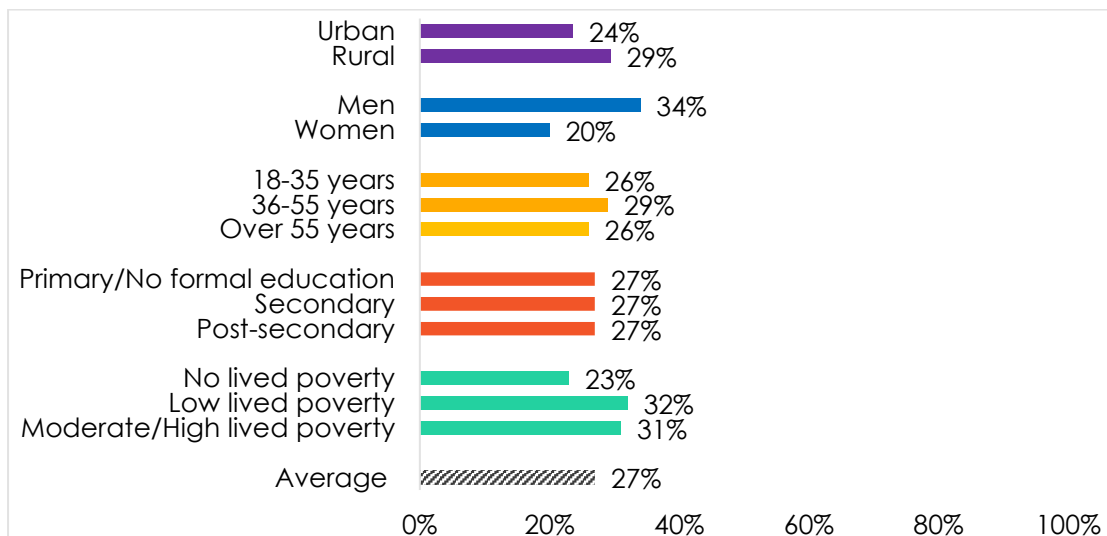
Only 8% of Mauritians report having worked for a candidate or political party ahead of the elections. Men (12%) and citizens experiencing moderate or high lived poverty (13%) are more likely than women (4%) and better-off respondents (7%) to say they worked for a candidate or party.

Figure 4: Attended a campaign rally | by socio-demographic group | Mauritius | 2020



Respondents were asked: Thinking about the last national election in 2019, did you attend a campaign rally? (% "yes")

Figure 5: Contacted by representative of a political party | by socio-demographic group | Mauritius | 2020

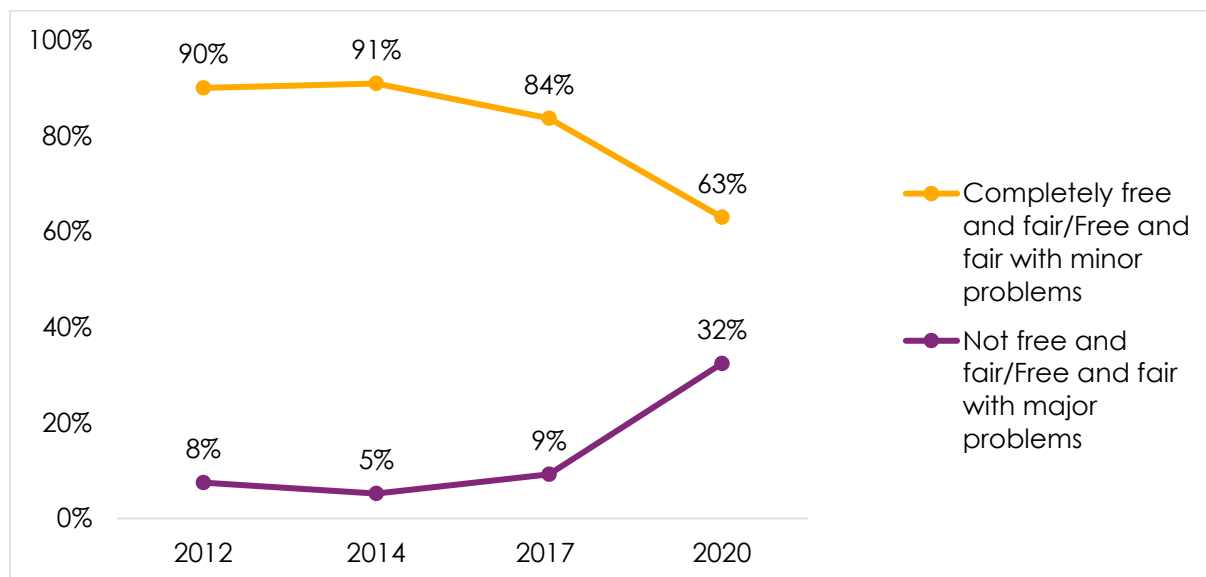


Respondents were asked: Thinking about the last national election in 2019, did any representative of a political party contact you during the campaign? (% "yes")

Was the election free and fair?

While a clear majority (63%) of Mauritians consider the 2019 election to have been “completely free and fair” or “free and fair with minor problems,” the proportion offering this positive assessment of national elections has dropped by about a third over the past six years (Figure 6). Meanwhile, the share of citizens who say that the most recent national election was “not free and fair” or had “major problems” has more than tripled, from 9% in 2017 to 32% in 2020.

Figure 6: Freeness and fairness of the last election | Mauritius | 2012-2020



Respondents were asked: On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in 2019?

Perceptions of election quality

Mauritians offer mixed evaluations of the quality of the 2019 national election (Figure 7). More than eight in 10 (82%) say people’s names were not on the voters’ register at least “a few times,” including 44% who say this happened “often.”

About one in four (27%) believe that some people voted more than once, while 46% say this “never” happened.

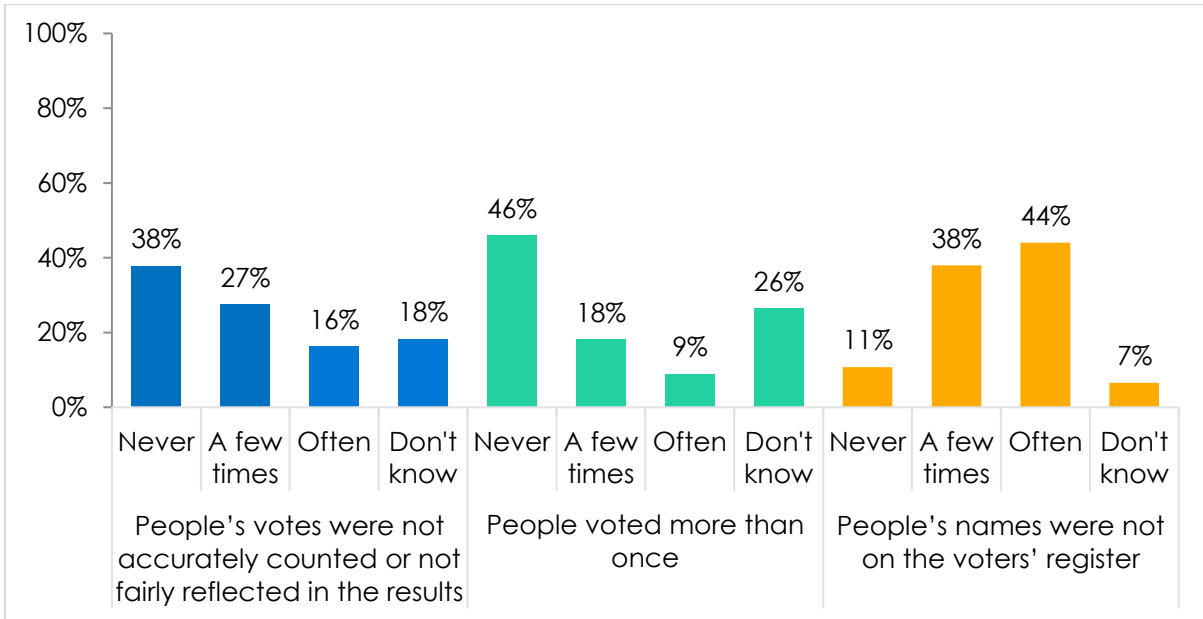
As to whether votes were not accurately counted or not fairly reflected in the results, more than four in 10 respondents say this occurred “often” (16%) or “a few times” (27%), while 38% say it “never” happened.

More than half (52%) of Mauritians believe that the media “often” or “always” provided fair coverage of all candidates during the 2019 election campaign, but a substantial minority (40%) think this was “never” or only “sometimes” the case (Figure 8).

About one in seven respondents (14%) say they were offered money or other incentives in return for their votes (Figure 9).

Despite these concerns about election quality, more than two out of three Mauritians (68%) believe that the results announced by the Office of the Electoral Commission of Mauritius were “mostly accurate, with minor discrepancies” or “completely accurate” (Figure 10). The belief that the results were generally accurate is the majority view across key demographic groups except for citizens experiencing moderate or high lived poverty (44%) (Figure 11).

Figure 7: Perceptions of election quality | Mauritius | 2020



Respondents were asked: In the last national election in 2019, how often did each of the following things happen?

Figure 8: Fair media coverage of all candidates | Mauritius | 2020

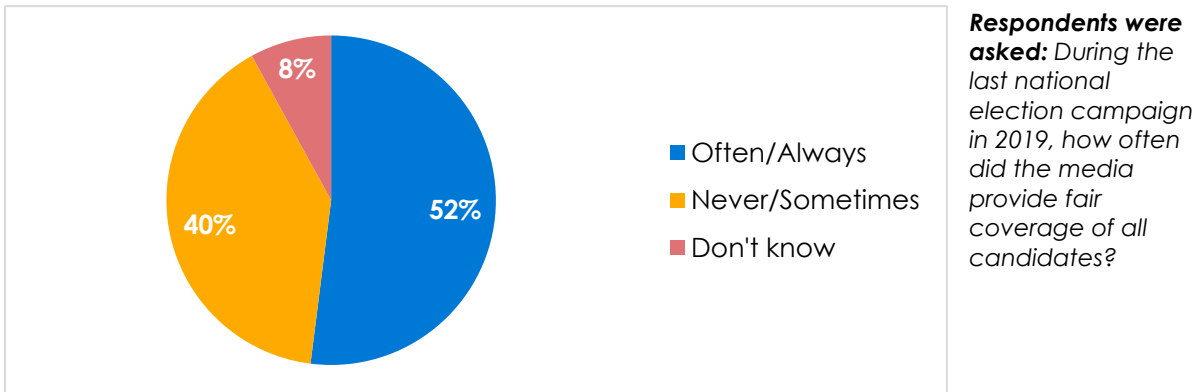


Figure 9: Did candidates offer gifts to obtain votes? | Mauritius | 2020

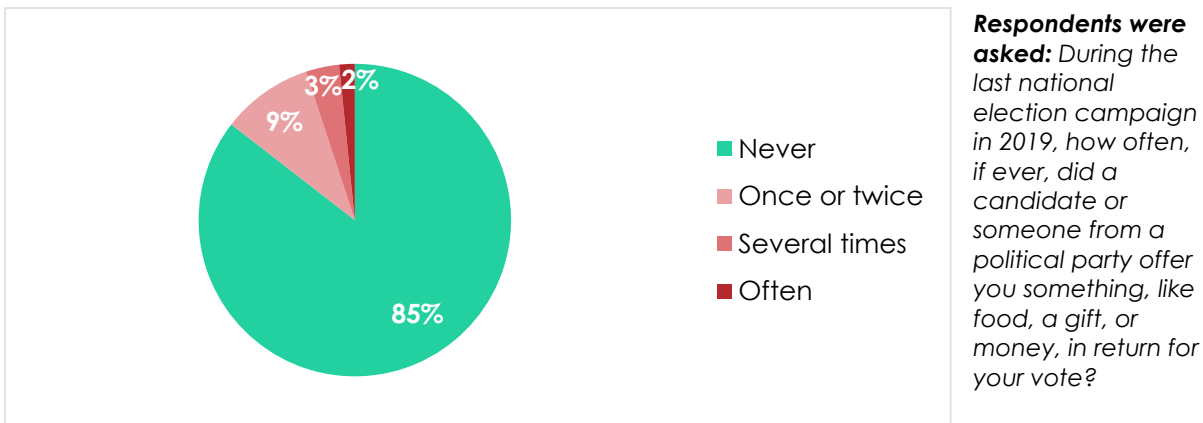
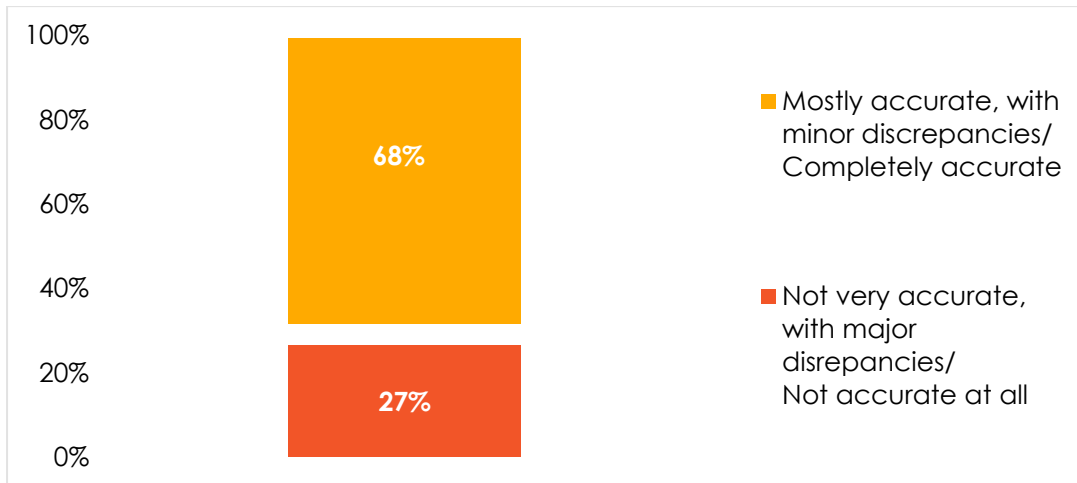
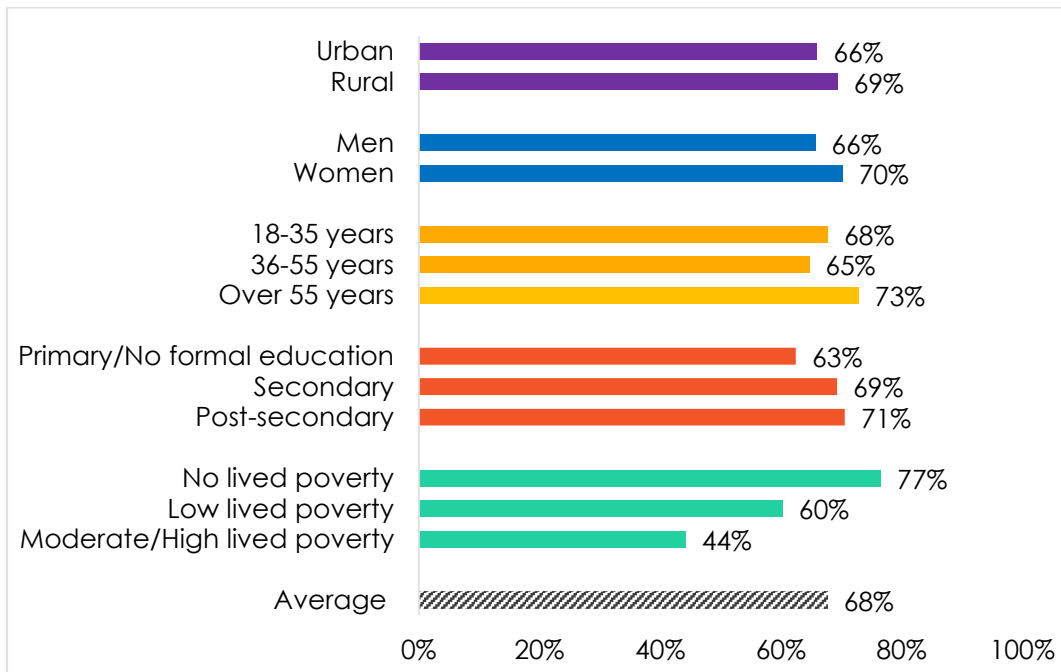


Figure 10: Accuracy of announced results | Mauritius | 2020



Respondents were asked: With regard to the last national election in 2019, to what extent do you think the results announced by the Office of the Electoral Commission of Mauritius accurately reflected the actual results as counted?

Figure 11: Election results were accurate | by socio-demographic group | Mauritius | 2020

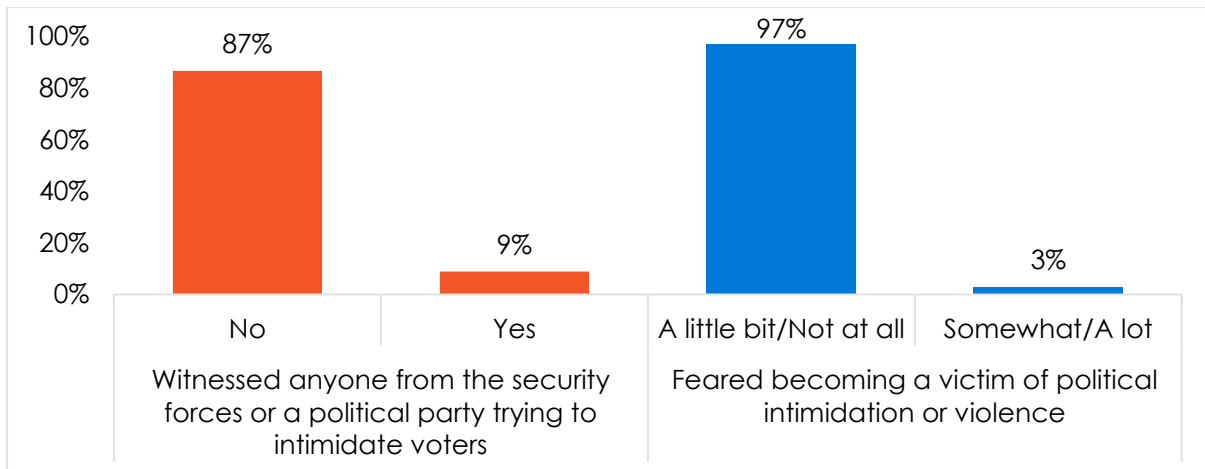


Respondents were asked: With regard to the last national election in 2019, to what extent do you think the results announced by the Office of the Electoral Commission of Mauritius accurately reflected the actual results as counted? (% who say "completely accurate" or "mostly accurate, with minor discrepancies")

Political intimidation

About one in 10 Mauritians (9%) say they witnessed attempts by security forces or a political party to intimidate voters during the 2019 election. Very few (3%) say they were "somewhat" or "a lot" afraid of becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Political intimidation | Mauritius | 2020



Respondents were asked:

During the last national election campaign in 2019, how much did you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence?

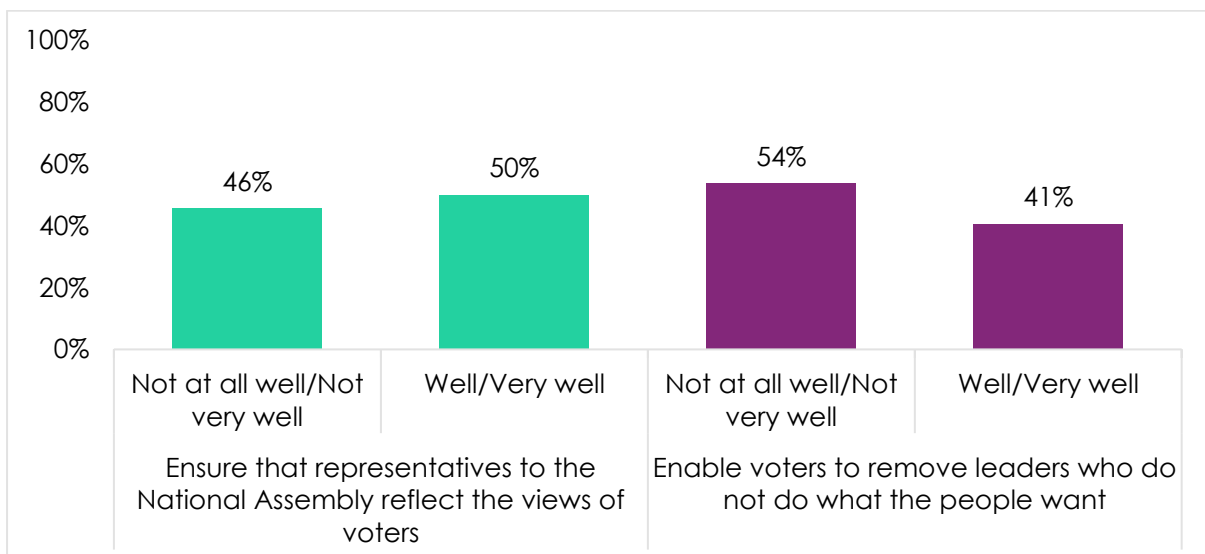
During the last national election in 2019, did you witness anyone from the security forces or a political party trying to intimidate voters?

Representation and accountability

Mauritians are sharply divided in their perceptions of how well their elections function in support of representation and accountability (Figure 13). Half (50%) say elections work “well” or “very well” as mechanisms to ensure that people’s views are represented in the National Assembly. But almost as many (46%) disagree.

A slim majority (54%) believe that elections do “not work very well” or “not at all well” to ensure that voters are able to hold non-performing office leaders accountable by voting them out.

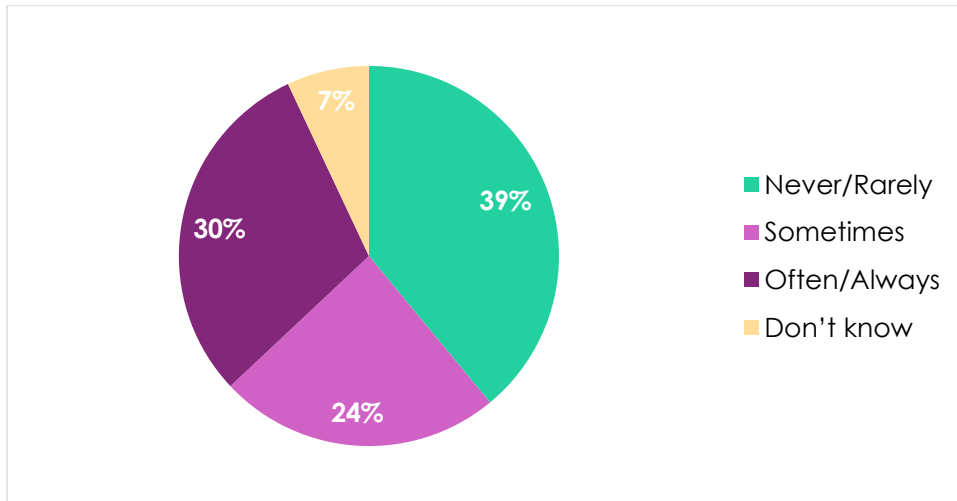
Figure 13: Do elections ensure representation and accountability? | Mauritius | 2020



Respondents were asked: *Think about how elections work in practice in this country. How well do elections: Ensure that representatives to the National Assembly reflect the views of voters? Enable voters to remove from office leaders who do not do what the people want?*

More than half (54%) of Mauritians also believe that communities “sometimes,” “often,” or “always” suffer negative consequences, such as lack of government support for local services or development projects, if they don’t vote for the ruling party (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Negative consequences if communities don’t vote for the ruling party?
 | Mauritius | 2020



Respondents were asked: How often do you think that communities that do not vote for the ruling party suffer negative consequences, such as lack of government support for local services or development projects?

Conclusion

The 2019 national election was clearly not Mauritius’ usually highly trusted democratic exercise in the eyes of citizens. Although most believe that the results announced by the Office of the Electoral Commission of Mauritius were generally accurate, these survey findings highlight concerns about quality that election management bodies should take seriously if they wish to preserve public trust in Mauritius’ leading status among the continent’s democracies.

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.

References:

- Defimedia.info. (2019) Election 2019: Electoral blunders frustrate voters. 8 November.
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Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, non-partisan 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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