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Ties that bind? Evidence of unity and division in 34 African countries

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 516[1] | Carolyn Logan and Alfred Kwadzo Torsu

Summary

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the ability of societies to work collectively to respond to challenges has taken centre stage. In fact, early public support for and adherence to public health measures has been cited as one factor explaining Africa's far lower per-capita infection and death rates compared to other global regions (BBC, 2020).

Analysts study social bonds and social divisions precisely because they believe that societies that are more cohesive, i.e. that have stronger, more positive relationships across social groups, and between social groups and the government, will be more capable of solving shared problems and promoting greater well-being and development.

Pan-Africa Profiles

How strong or weak are social bonds in Africa? The continent has often been portrayed as conflict-ridden and characterised by divisions, especially divisions based on ethnicity. What is the reality? Do citizens of African countries share a sense of common identity and national purpose that can bring them together to serve collective goals, as some of the recent experiences fighting the coronavirus pandemic would suggest? Or are they, as the stereotypes suggest, riven by cleavages and distrust that thwart the pursuit of the public good?

Extensive research, built around concepts such as social capital, social cohesion, and pluralism, has explored how people identify themselves, where social rifts are deepest, and how relationships develop horizontally across identity groups and vertically between these groups and the state (see for example Chan, To, & Chan, 2006; Jenson, 2019; Lockwood, 1999).

Both identities and relationships are complex and multi-dimensional. While it is often taken for granted, for example, that ethnicity is the most salient identity – and source of division – in many African countries, even a first look beyond ethnicity suggests that gender, religion, race, wealth, education, nationality, and partisanship are all potentially critical sources of identity and cleavage, at least in some countries and at some times. And understanding the presence or absence of overarching national or pan-African identities that may counter-balance or even override sub-national identities and differences is essential as well.

Relationships may also be multi-layered. Analysts of social capital and social cohesion often focus on "trust" among and between individuals, identity groups, and the state. But "trust" may be a fairly high bar in many societies (see for example Nunn & Wantchekon, 2011), and other aspects of relationships – tolerance, acceptance, or mutual respect on the one hand,

[1] 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. 412.

and rejection, bias, and discrimination on the other – may be equally relevant, as is understanding whether individuals and societies value diversity as a source of social strength.

Recent data from Afrobarometer shed new light on some of these identities and relationships. During its Round 8 (2019/2021) surveys, Afrobarometer has focused on three key sources of identity and potential cleavage – ethnicity, religion, and economic status – while also examining the pull of collective national identity. In terms of relationships, in addition to measuring trust, Afrobarometer explores tolerance as well as identity-based discrimination.

Findings reveal the complexity of social cohesion. Generalised trust is exceedingly low – seemingly quite a bad sign for African societies – and the experience of discrimination, especially unfair treatment based on economic status, is relatively widespread. But at the same time, there is clear evidence of popular appreciation for diversity, as well as powerful adherence to overarching national identities.

In short, there is no simple answer to the question of how cohesive, or not, African societies are. But the findings presented here suggest some new and perhaps more nuanced directions for understanding multi-dimensional social bonds and cleavages.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan 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 countries 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.[2] When reporting multi-country findings such as regional or Africa-wide averages, all countries are weighted equally (rather than in proportion to population size). Due to rounding, percentages for combined categories may differ by 1 percentage point from the sum of sub-categories.

Key findings

- Across 34 African countries, generalised trust is extremely low: Just 14% of respondents believe that "most people can be trusted."
- At the same time, Africans value diversity and are quite tolerant of some types of people who are different from them. More than two-thirds (68%) believe that diverse communities are stronger than homogeneous ones.

[2] The weighted Mozambique Round 8 sample is nationally representative except that it excludes rural Cabo Delgado, comprising 6.3% of the adult population of Mozambique. Insecurity and resulting difficulties in obtaining necessary fieldwork clearances prevented Afrobarometer from collecting sufficient data in this area.

- Majorities would like having people from other ethnicities, religions, political parties, and countries as neighbours – an expression of tolerance that has increased significantly in recent years.
    - A major exception is people of different sexual orientation: Only about one in five citizens (21%) would be content having homosexuals as neighbours, a share that has remained largely unchanged over the past several years.

- Africans have a strong sense of national unity. Nearly two-thirds (65%) say there is more that unites everyone in their country as one people than divides them. And on average across 32 countries, only 14% are more strongly attached to their ethnic than their national identity.

- Discrimination is, however, a widespread problem. Economic status, rather than ethnicity or religion, is the most common basis of discrimination. Reported levels of unfair treatment are generally higher at the hands of government than at the hands of fellow citizens.

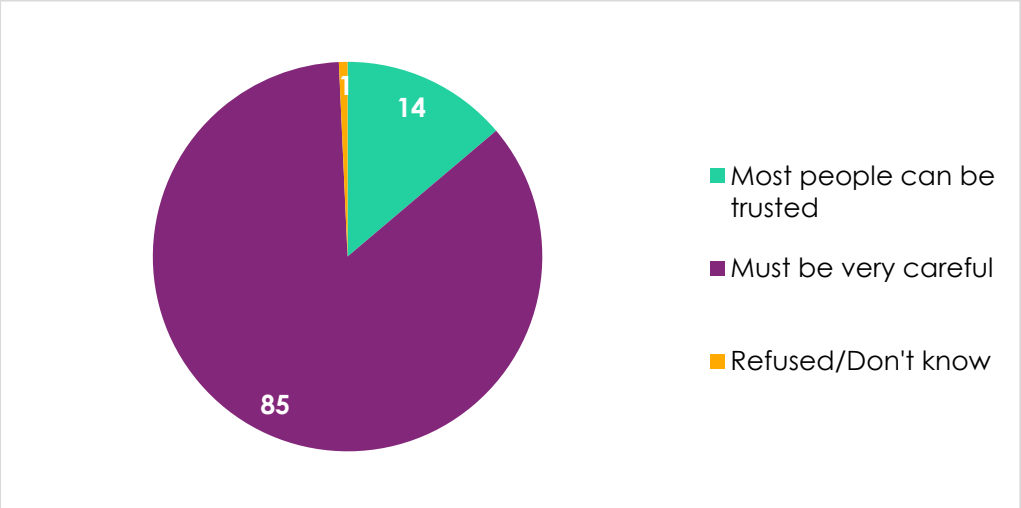
- Poorer citizens report facing discrimination at much higher rates than their wealthier counterparts – sometimes twice as high. This is true not only of discrimination based on economic status, but also when it is based on ethnicity or religion.

- Measured across six categories, Cameroon, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, and South Africa report the most widespread problems with discrimination, while Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Tanzania stand out as countries where discrimination is much less prevalent.

Rejecting trust while embracing diversity and tolerance

Levels of trust within society are sometimes taken as a key baseline indicator of levels of social cohesion (Jenson, 2019). If this is indeed an effective indicator, then the news for much of Africa is not good. When asked simply to say whether "most people can be trusted" or "you must be very careful in dealing with people," a mere 14% express generalised trust, while 85% recommend caution in dealing with others (Figure 1).

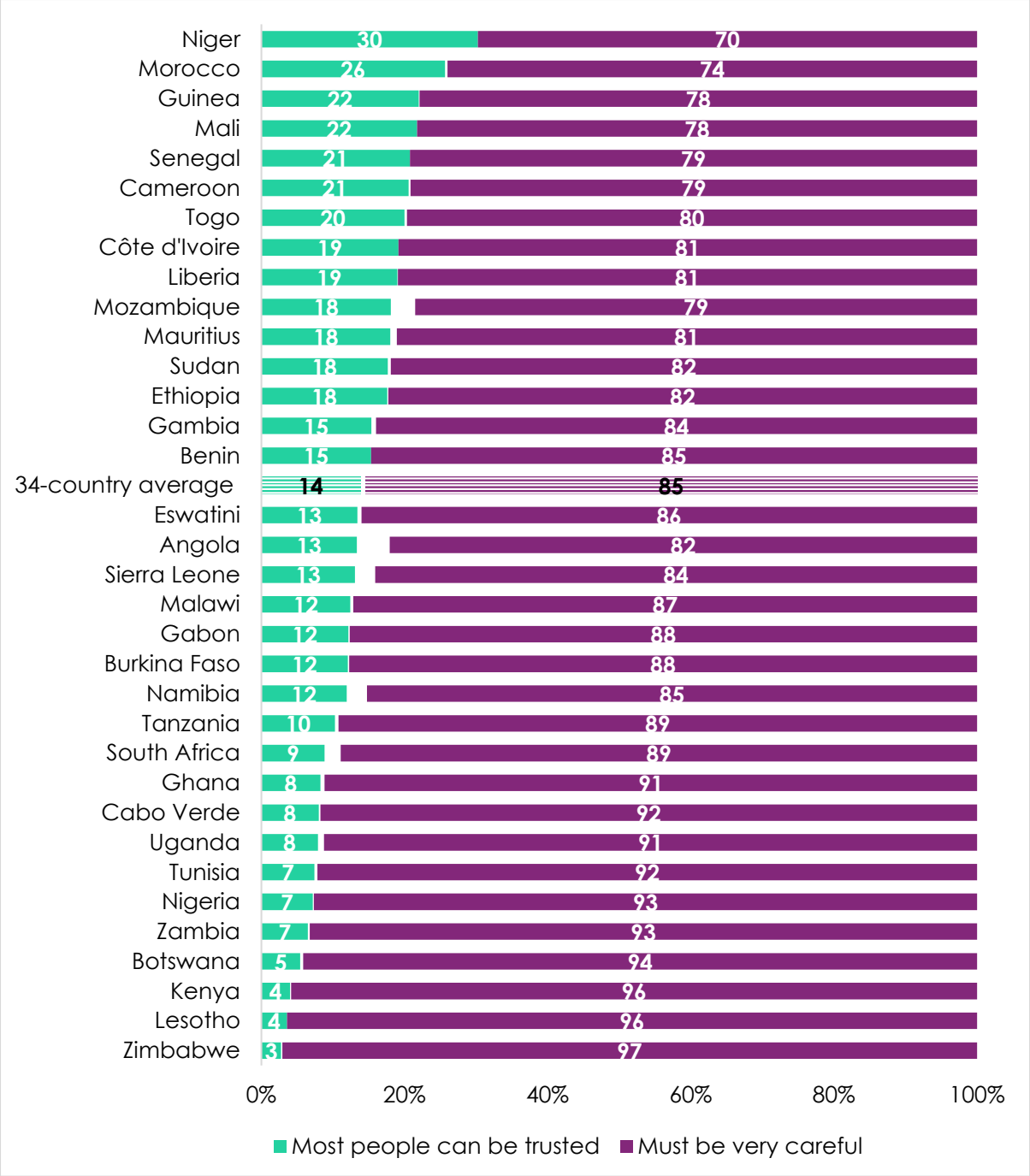
Figure 1: Can most people be trusted? | 34 countries | 2019/2021



Respondents were asked: *Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you must be very careful in dealing with people?*

Only seven out of 34 countries register at least one in five citizens who are generally trusting: Niger (30%), Morocco (26%), Guinea (22%), Mali (22%), Senegal (21%), Cameroon (21%), and Togo (20%). Meanwhile, just one in 20 respondents say most people can be trusted in Botswana (5%), Kenya (4%), Lesotho (4%), and Zimbabwe (3%) (Figure 2). It is notable that the four countries with the lowest levels of trust include two of the most ethnically homogeneous countries on the continent (Botswana and Lesotho) but also one of the most ethnically diverse (Kenya).

Figure 2: Can most people be trusted? | 34 countries | 2019/2021



Respondents were asked: *Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you must be very careful in dealing with people?*

Across 31 countries where this question was also asked in Round 5 (2011/2013), generalised trust has declined by 4 percentage points, from 18% to 14% (Figure 3). Only six countries record significant increases in societal trust, led by Morocco (10 percentage points) and Côte d'Ivoire (8 points). On the other hand, drastic declines are recorded in Burkina Faso (-20 percentage points), Benin (-17 points), Niger (-16 points), and Zimbabwe (-14 points).

Figure 3: Changes in levels of societal trust | 31 countries | 2011-2021

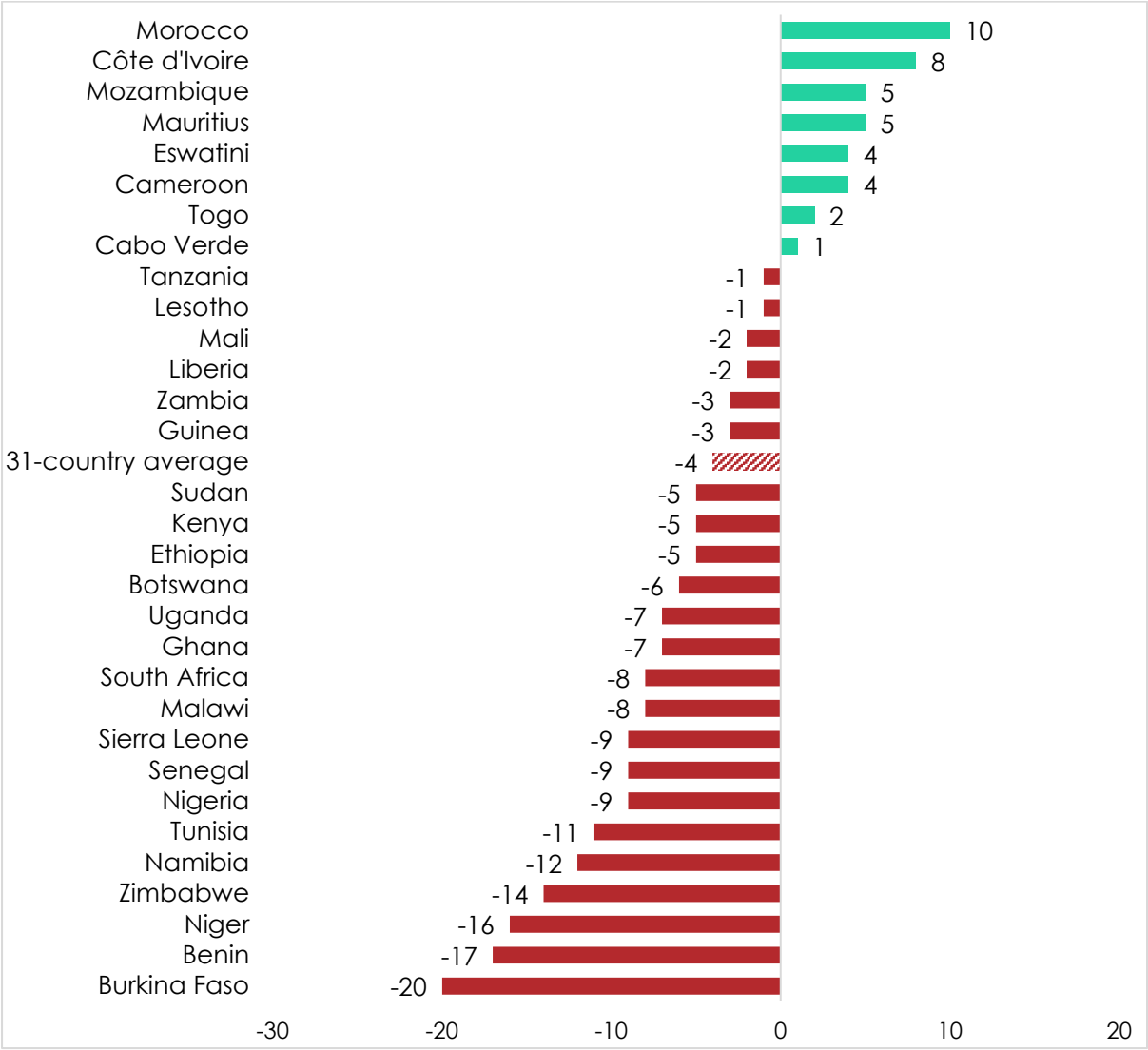
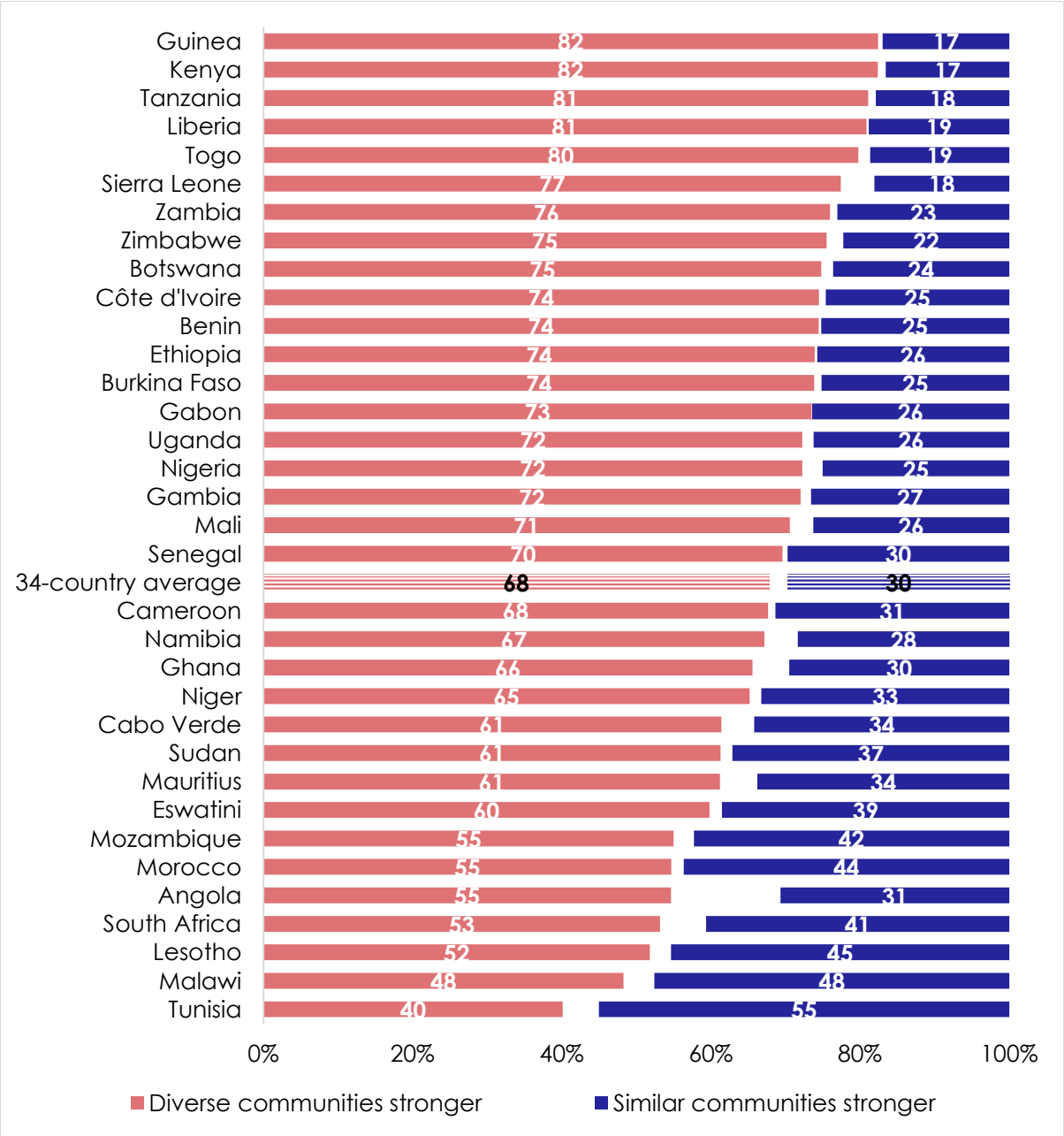


Figure shows changes, in percentage points, between surveys in 2011/2013 and 2019/2021 in the proportions of respondents who say that most people can be trusted.

However, other indicators paint a significantly different picture of interpersonal and inter-group relations. Despite low levels of interpersonal trust, Africans appear to embrace diversity both in the abstract and in their own neighbourhoods. When asked whether communities are stronger when they are diverse or when they are homogeneous, more than two-thirds (68%) of respondents across 34 countries identify diversity as a source of strength, including majorities in all but two countries. More than eight in 10 Guineans (82%), Kenyans (82%), Tanzanians (81%), and Liberians (81%) agree (Figure 4). The exceptions are Malawi, where people are evenly split on the question (48% each), and Tunisia, the only country where a majority (55%) prefer less, rather than more, diversity.

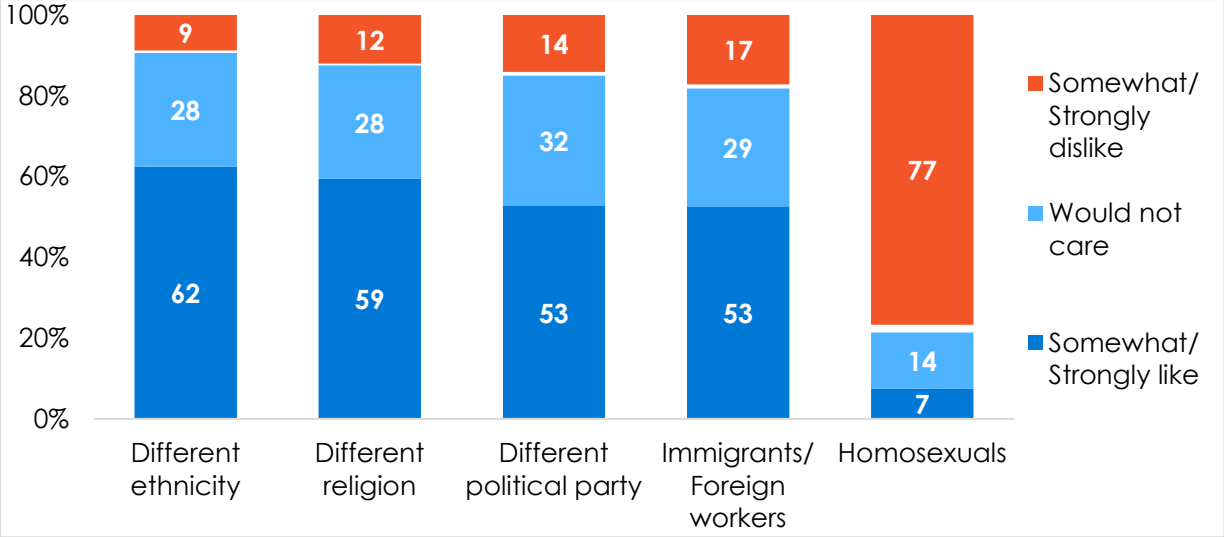
Figure 4: Does diversity make communities stronger? | 34 countries | 2019/2021



Respondents were asked: *Which of the following statements is closest to your view?*
Statement 1: Communities are stronger when they are made up of people from different ethnic groups, races, or religions.
Statement 2: Communities are stronger when they are made up of people who are similar to each other, that is, people from the same ethnic group, race, or religion.
(% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

Many also report a personal willingness, or even desire, to live alongside people who are different from themselves. Majorities say they would welcome having people of different ethnicities (62%), religions (59%), political allegiances (53%), and nationalities (53%) as neighbours, and another three in 10 say they would not care one way or the other (Figure 5). The notable exception concerns homosexuals, who continue to face high levels of intolerance in many countries (Howard, 2020; Dulani, Sambo, & Dionne, 2016).

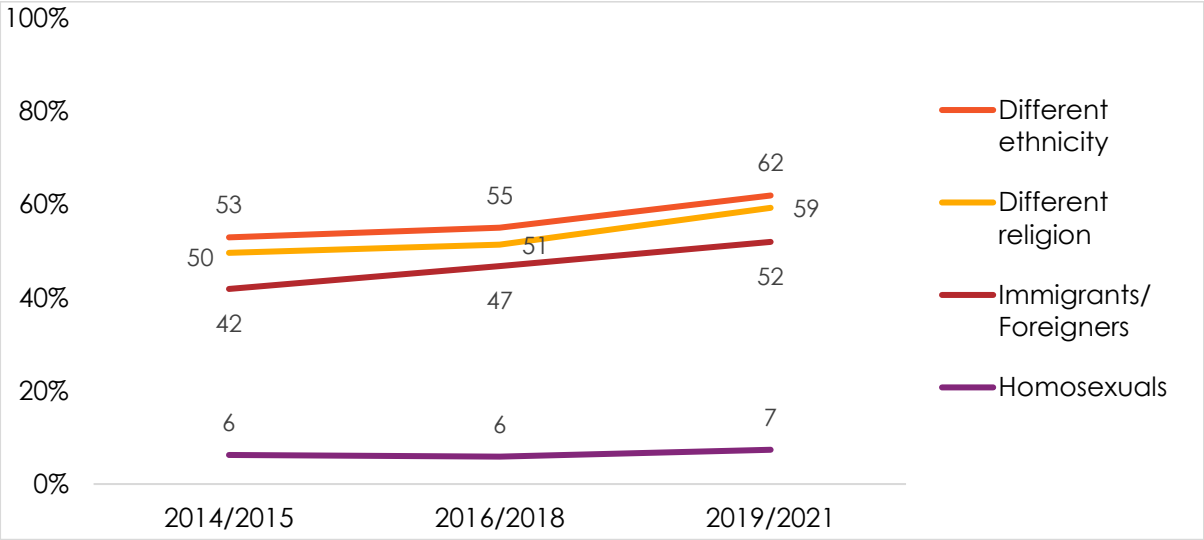
Figure 5: Tolerance for others | 34* countries | 2019/2021



Respondents were asked: *For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care: People of a different religion? People from other ethnic groups? Homosexuals? Immigrants or foreign workers? People who support a different political party?*
**Question on tolerance for people who support a different political party was asked in only 20 countries.*

Across 30 countries surveyed since 2014/2015, neither tolerance levels nor intolerance levels (i.e. the proportions saying they would "somewhat" or "strongly" dislike having people from these groups as neighbours) have changed significantly. But among the tolerant, a substantial number of respondents have moved from the "would not care" to the "somewhat/strongly like" category, producing increases in these welcoming responses with regard to different ethnicities, religions, and nationalities (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Welcoming responses to ethnic, religious, national, and sexual differences | 30 countries | 2014-2021



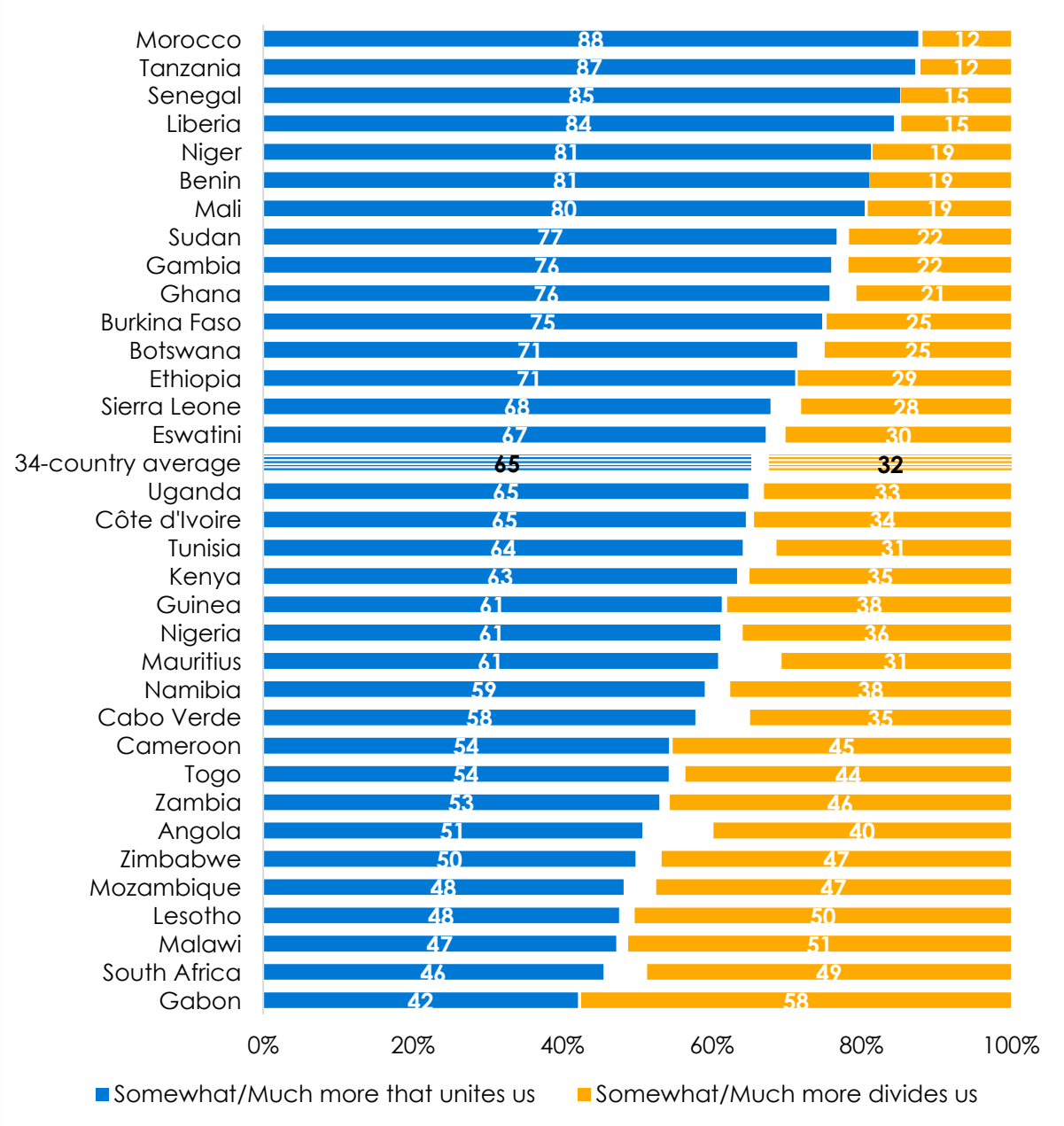
Respondents were asked: *For each of the following types of people, please tell me whether you would like having people from this group as neighbours, dislike it, or not care. (% who say "somewhat like" or "strongly like")*

A sense of belonging?

In addition to considering how trusting and welcoming Africans are toward "others" in their communities and societies, how welcomed and connected do they feel themselves? Do they feel part of a national collective, accepted in their own societies?

The evidence suggests that most do. Asked whether "there is more that unites all [citizens of your country] as one people, or more that divides them," two-thirds (65%) see their societies as more united, including majorities in 29 of 34 countries (Figure 7). Just 32% think that divides of religion, ethnicity, politics, or economic status overwhelm unifying factors.

Figure 7: More that unites or more that divides? | 34 countries | 2019/2021

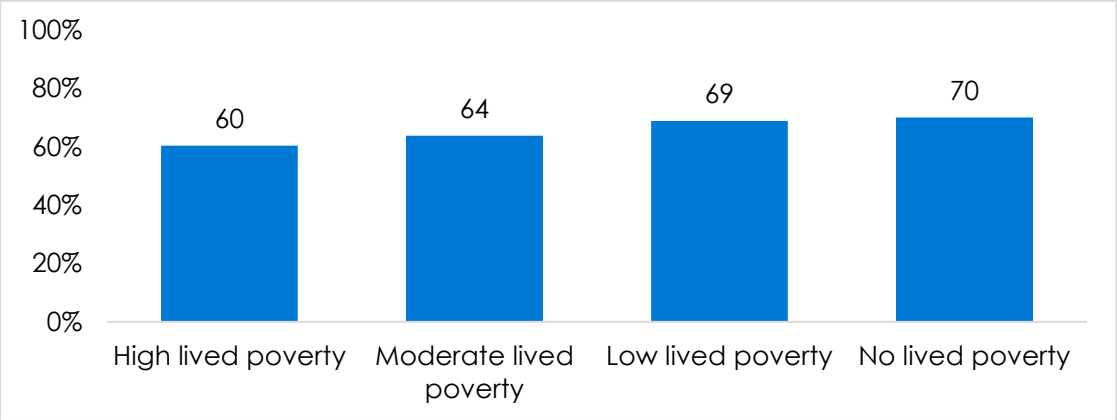


Respondents were asked: *[Citizens of this country] are very diverse. They come from different religions, ethnic groups, political parties, and economic and social backgrounds. Overall, would you say that there is more that unites all [citizens of this country] as one people, or more that divides them?*

Despite their country's political struggles over the past decade, Moroccans have the most widespread sense of unity (88%), followed by Tanzanians (87%), Senegalese (85%), and Liberians (84%). In contrast, majorities believe that more divides citizens than unites them in Gabon (58%) and Malawi (51%).[3]

The sense of unity is more widespread among the economically well-off than the economically vulnerable. Based on Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI),[4] people experiencing no lived poverty are 10 percentage points more likely than those with high lived poverty to say that there is more that unites citizens as one people (70% vs. 60%) (Figure 8).

Figure 8: More that unites citizens as one people | by lived poverty | 34 countries | 2019/2021



Respondents were asked: *[Citizens of this country] are very diverse. They come from different religions, ethnic groups, political parties, and economic and social backgrounds. Overall, would you say that there is more that unites all [citizens of this country] as one people, or more that divides them? (% who say "somewhat more that unites us" or "much more that unites us")*

Ethnicity is often identified as a key social and political cleavage in African societies. The ethnic or regional affiliations of major political parties, for example, are often regarded as more salient than their economic or social platforms (Berman, Eyoh, & Kymlicka, 2004; Norris & Mattes, 2003). But are Africans more at home with their separate ethnic identities or their shared national identities?

In fact, their preference is to inhabit both identities equally. When asked whether they feel more attached to their national or their ethnic identity, a plurality (46%) across 32 countries[5] say they feel equally attached to both. Another 39% say their national identity matters more to them than their ethnic identity, compared to just 14% who lean more strongly toward their ethnic identity (Figure 9).

There is considerable cross-country variation in preferences for "both identities" vs. "only national identity." For example, three-quarters (74%) of Liberians and nearly two-thirds (63%) of Ugandans and Nigerians value both identities equally, in contrast to just 10% of Guineans,

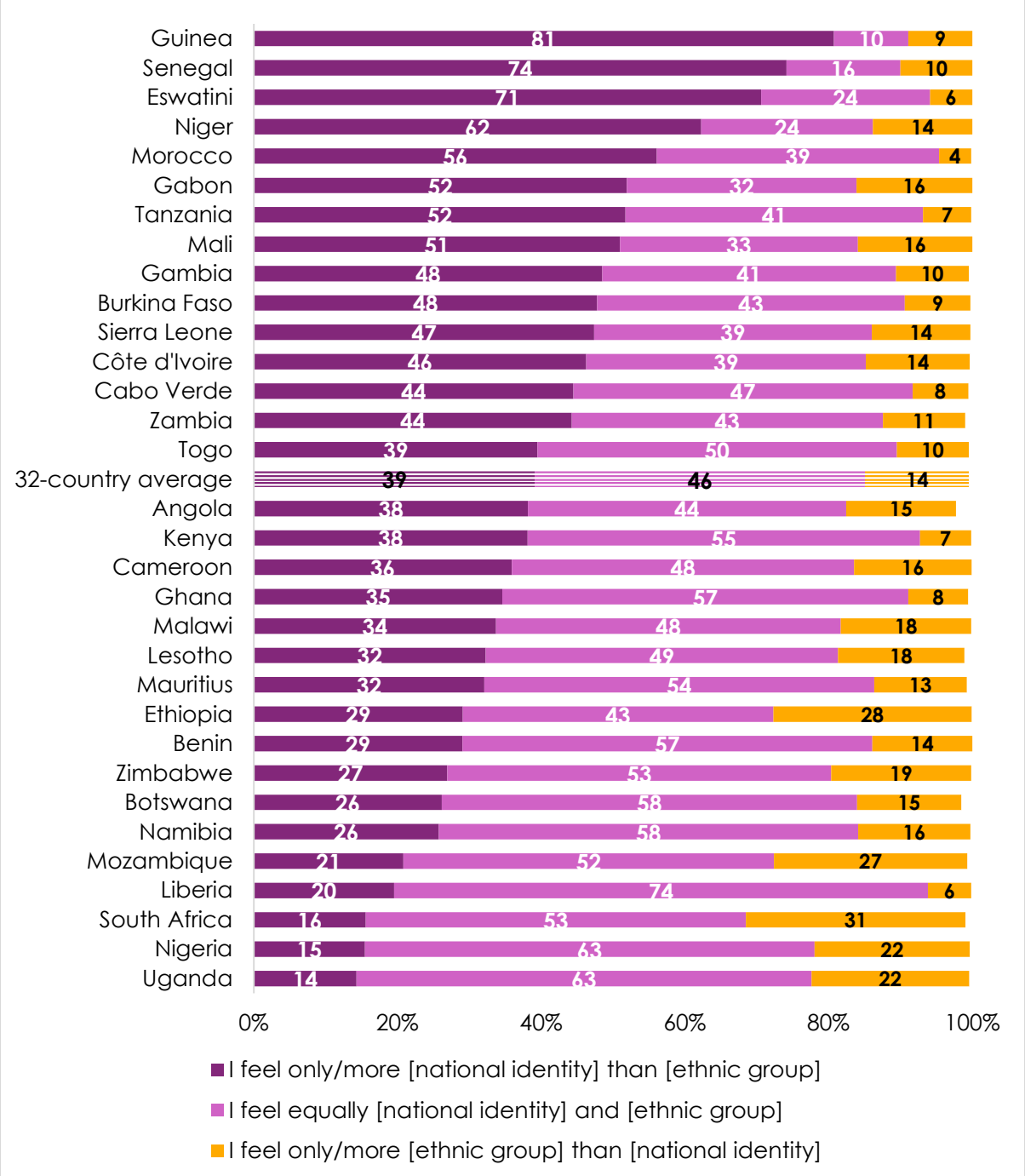
[3] Round 8 surveys preceded the re-running of the presidential election in Malawi in June 2020, the August 2020 coup in Mali, and the November 2020 internal crisis in Ethiopia.

[4] 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).

[5] Questions about ethnicity were not asked in Tunisia and Sudan.

who strongly prefer their national identity (81%). Large majorities also focus on national identity in Senegal (74%) and Eswatini (71%). A preference for their ethnic identity, on the other hand, is expressed by about three in 10 South Africans (31%), Ethiopians (28%), and Mozambicans (27%), while only about one in 20 citizens prioritise their ethnicity in Morocco (4%), Eswatini (6%), and Liberia (6%).

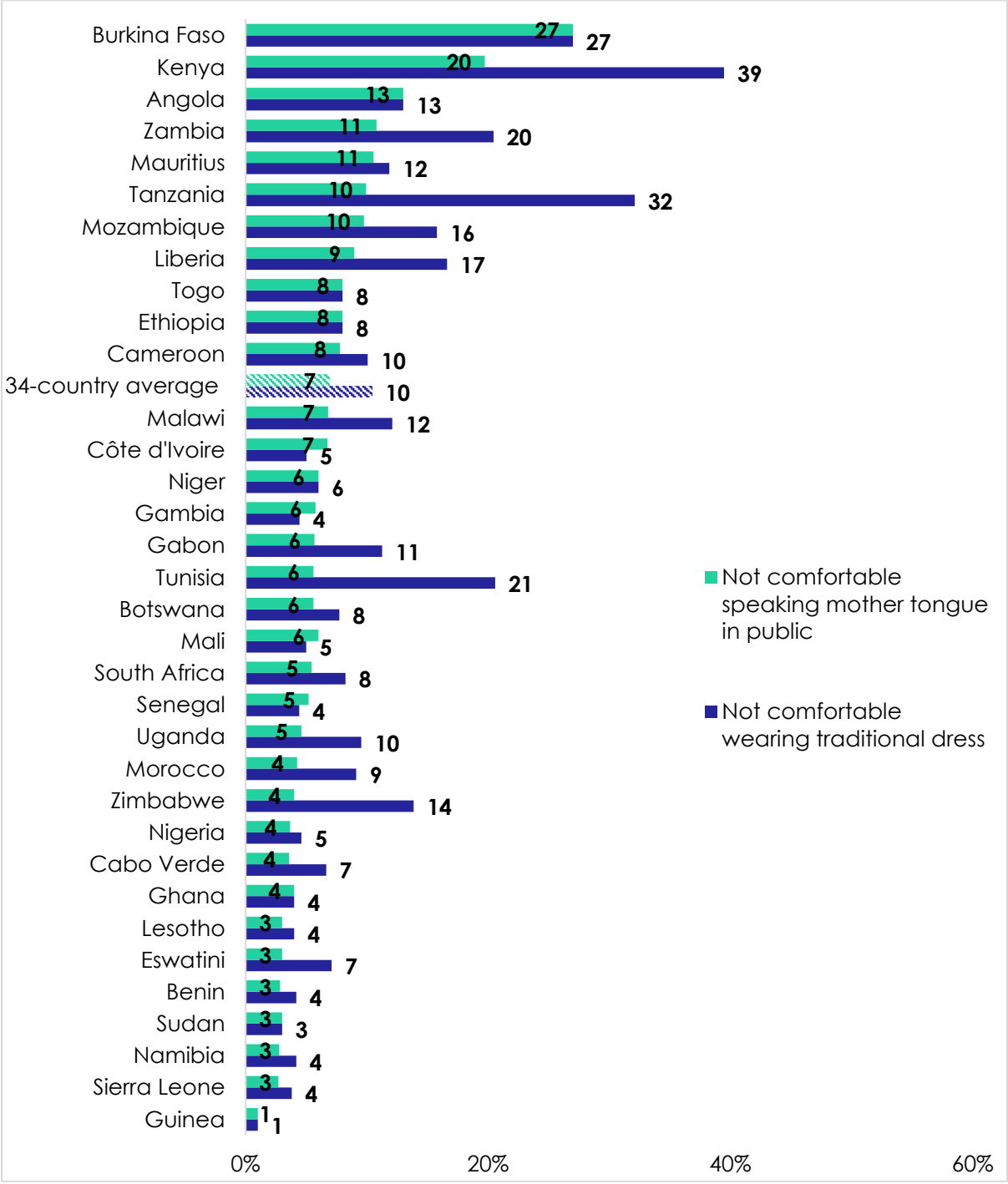
Figure 9: National vs. ethnic identity | 32* countries | 2019/2021



Respondents were asked: *Let us suppose that you had to choose between being a [citizen of this country] and being a [member of respondent's ethnic group]. Which of the following statements best expresses your feelings?*
**This question was not asked in Tunisia and Sudan.*

For the most part, people are also quite comfortable expressing their separate ethnic and cultural identities, for example by speaking their mother tongue or wearing customary dress in public. On average, only one in 10 respondents (10%) report being uncomfortable wearing traditional clothing in public, and even fewer (7%) indicate any reluctance to openly speak their mother tongue. In 20 of the 34 countries, fewer than one in 10 citizens express discomfort with either of these practices (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Uncomfortable expressing ethnicity | 34 countries | 2019/2021



Respondents were asked: Do you feel comfortable: Speaking your mother tongue in public? Wearing *your traditional or cultural dress in public?*

However, there are a few notable exceptions. Nearly one in three Tanzanians (32%) are not comfortable wearing traditional dress, though far fewer (10%) are ill at ease speaking their mother tongue in public. The situation is similar in Tunisia (21% uncomfortable wearing traditional dress, 6% speaking mother tongue). In Burkina Faso, about one-quarter (27%) are reluctant to speak or dress according to their ethnic or cultural roots.

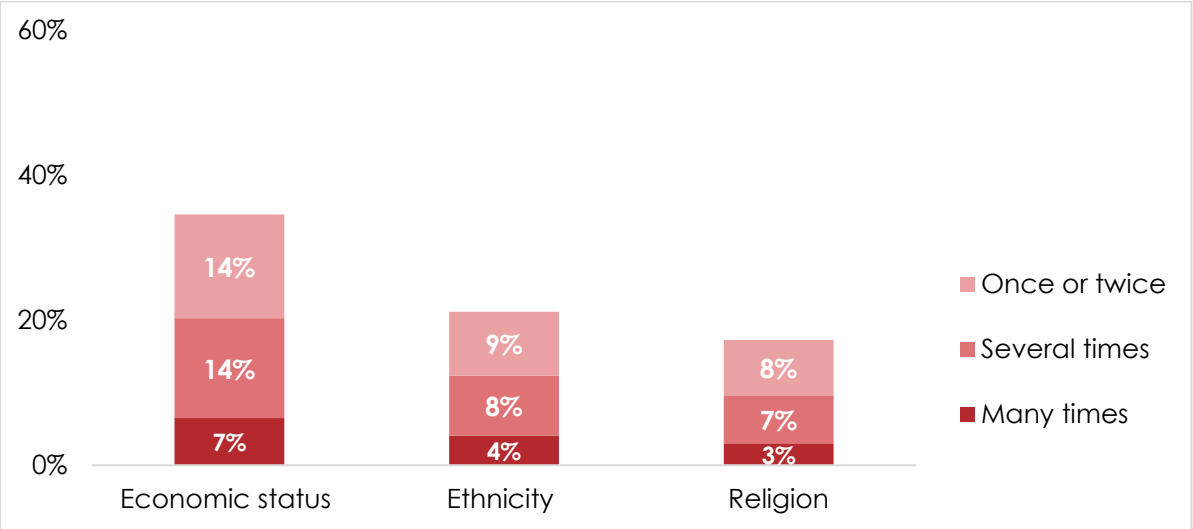
Most starkly, in Kenya, nearly four in 10 (39%) are reluctant to wear traditional clothing in public, and half that number (20%) feel uncomfortable speaking their mother tongue publicly. Kenya thus presents something of a conundrum. It is an ethnically diverse country where ethnicity has been widely regarded as a highly salient factor in politics and social life – political parties, for example, have strong ethnic affiliations (see Bratton & Kimenyi, 2008). Yet while discomfort around ethnic and cultural expression is relatively high, very few Kenyans express a preference for their ethnic identity over their national one (just 7%, Figure 9), and Kenyans are among the most likely to say they value diverse communities (82%, Figure 4).

Experience of discrimination

Beyond people's sense of belonging to a larger national community, we explore whether they have personally experienced discrimination at the hands of fellow citizens and whether "people like you" typically experience discrimination by the government. Afrobarometer asked about unfair treatment based on three key social identities: ethnicity, religion, and economic status.

Contrary to conventional wisdom that tends to focus on ethnicity as the most critical cleavage in many African societies, these findings reveal that economic status is the key locus of both horizontal discrimination (by fellow citizens) and vertical discrimination (by the government). More than one in three respondents (35%) report being treated unfairly by fellow citizens based on their economic status within the past year, while 21% and 17%, respectively, experienced unfair treatment due to their ethnicity and their religion (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Unfair treatment by fellow citizens | 34* countries | 2019/2021

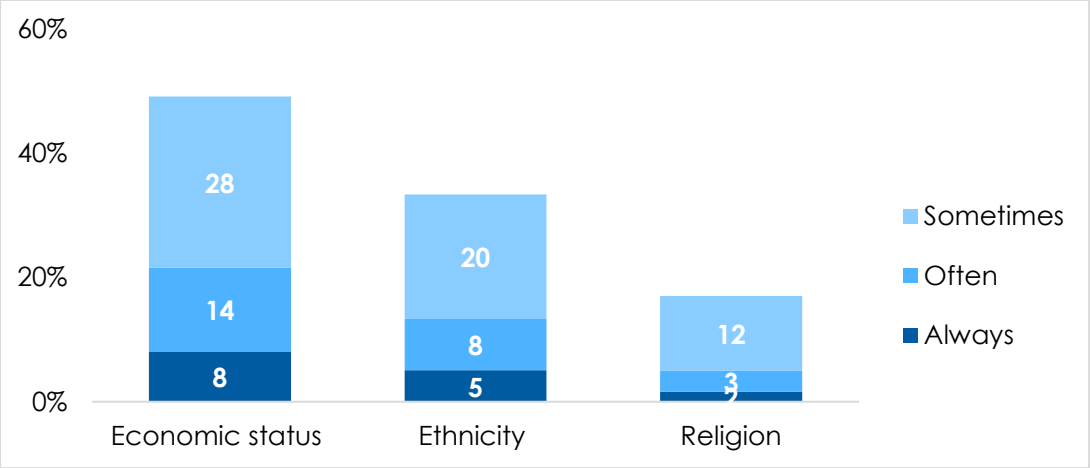


Respondents were asked: *In the past year, how often, if ever, have you personally been treated unfairly by other [citizens] based on: Your economic status, that is, how rich or poor you are? Your religion? Your ethnicity?*
**The question about unfair treatment based on ethnicity was not asked in Tunisia.*

The numbers for government mistreatment are even higher, though this may in part reflect the fact that this set of questions asked about the general experiences of the respondent's

group, rather than their personal experience, and did not specify a time frame. One in three (33%) say their ethnic group experiences unfair treatment by the government, and half (50%) say the government treats "people like them" unfairly due to their economic status (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Unfair treatment by government | 34* countries | 2019/2021



Respondents were asked:

How often, if ever, are people like you treated unfairly by the government based on your economic status, that is, how rich or poor you are?

How often, if ever, are [members of respondent's ethnic group/religious group] treated unfairly by the government?

**The question about ethnicity was not asked in Tunisia and Sudan. In other countries, respondents who identified only with their national identity and not an ethnic group (5% of all respondents) were not asked this question.*

***Respondents who did not identify any religion (i.e. the 5% of all respondents who answered "none," "refused," or "don't know") were not asked this question.*

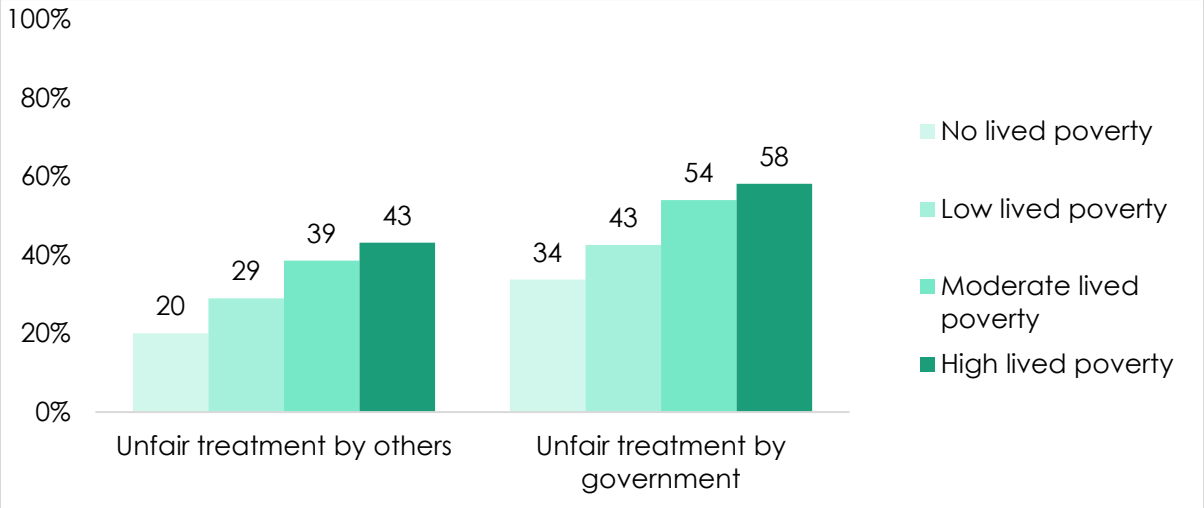
As we might expect, poorer citizens are substantially more likely to feel that they are mistreated based on economic status. Those who experience the highest levels of lived poverty are more than twice as likely to feel that their fellow citizens mistreat them based on their economic status (43%) compared to those with no lived poverty (20%) (Figure 13). And a solid majority (58%) of the poorest feel that the government treats them unfairly, fully 24 percentage points higher than the number of wealthier citizens who feel this way (34%).

But poorer citizens are also significantly more likely to face unfair treatment based on their ethnicity and religion, although the gaps with wealthier citizens are not always as wide (Figure 14). The poorest report 9-percentage-point higher levels of unfair treatment by fellow citizens based on their ethnicity compared to the wealthiest (25% vs. 16%), and the margin is 8 percentage points for religion (21% vs. 13%). The margins for government mistreatment are 14 points for ethnicity (40% among the poorest vs. 26% among the wealthiest) and 4 points for religion (20% vs. 16%).

Keeping in mind that the measures are similar but not exactly comparable, Figure 15 shows reports of unfair treatment based on economic status by both fellow citizens and the government. About seven in 10 Nigerians (73%) and Malawians (70%) believe their governments treat them unfairly, a startling condemnation. Even in the best-performing country, Tanzania, more than one in 10 (12%) say their government treats them unfairly.

Fellow citizens are less discriminatory, but still, a majority of respondents in Malawi (54%) feel that other Malawians discriminate against them based on economic status, followed closely by Cameroon (52%) and Zambia (50%).

Figure 13: Unfair treatment based on economic status | by economic status | 34 countries | 2019/2021

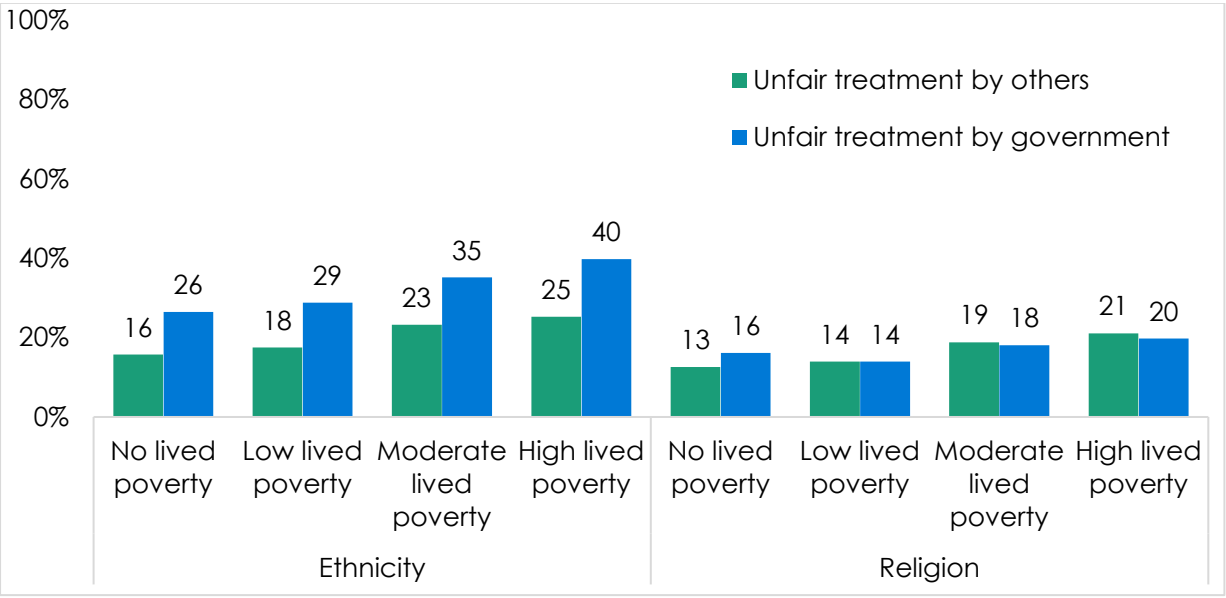


Respondents were asked:

In the past year, how often, if ever, have you personally been treated unfairly by other [citizens] based on your economic status, that is, how rich or poor you are? (% who say "once or twice," "several times," or "many times")

How often, if ever, are people like you treated unfairly by the government based on your economic status, that is, how rich or poor you are? (% who say "sometimes," "often," or "always")

Figure 14: Unfair treatment based on ethnicity and religion | by economic status | 34* countries | 2019/2021



Respondents were asked:

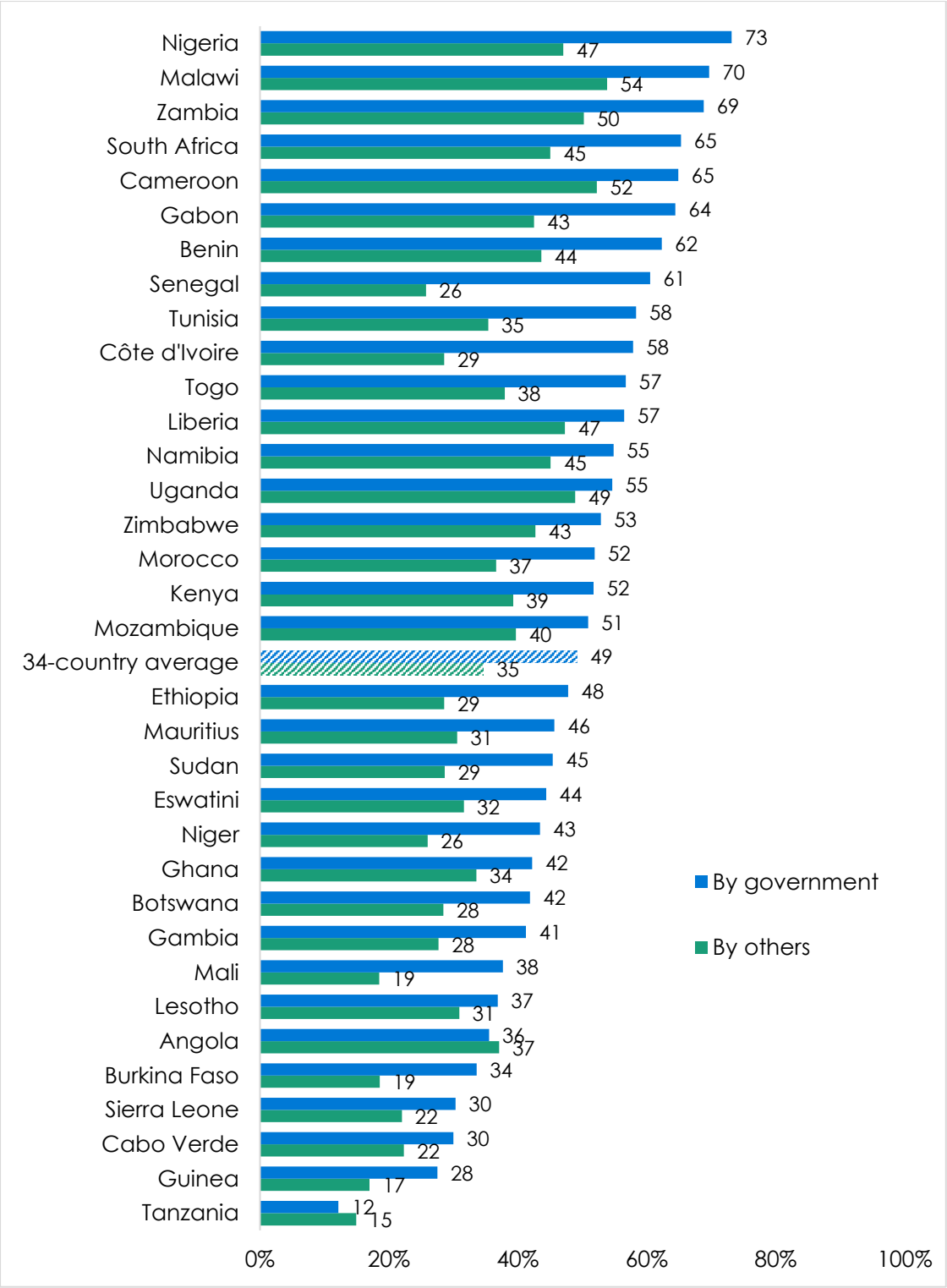
In the past year, how often, if ever, have you personally been treated unfairly by other [citizens] based on: Your religion? Your ethnicity? (% who say "once or twice," "several times," or "many times")

**The question about ethnicity was not asked in Tunisia.*

How often, if ever, are [members of respondent's ethnic group/religious group] treated unfairly by the government? (% who say "sometimes," "often," or "always")

**The question about ethnicity was not asked in Tunisia and Sudan.*

Figure 15: Unfair treatment based on economic status | 34 countries | 2019/2021



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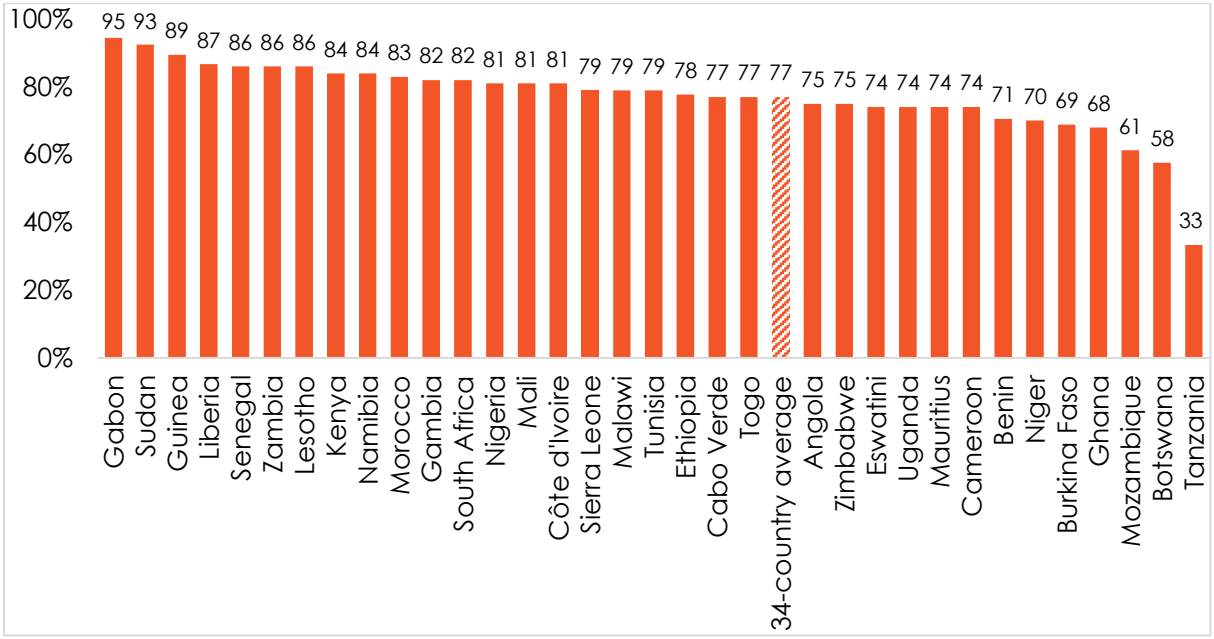
How often, if ever, are people like you treated unfairly by the government based on your economic status, that is, how rich or poor you are? (% who say "sometimes," "often," or "always")

Table 1 summarises the reported prevalence of unfair treatment by country across the six indicators that have been discussed. The cells are color-coded, with darker shades indicating higher levels of unfair treatment. Cameroon, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, and South Africa report the most widespread problems with discrimination, with high or moderate-to-high levels of unfair treatment reported across all six indicators. Malawians and Zambians report remarkably high levels of economic discrimination at the hands of both the government and other citizens, and strike at least moderate levels across all indicators. Angola, Benin, Ethiopia, Gabon, Kenya, Liberia, Namibia, Togo, and Uganda, also record at least moderate levels of unfair treatment on all six indicators.

In contrast, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Tanzania stand out as countries where discrimination is much less prevalent, although it clearly still occurs. But it is worth noting that although some countries register only marginal levels of discrimination based on religion (especially Cabo Verde, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Tanzania) or even ethnicity (Lesotho and Tanzania), no country except Tanzania scores better than "moderate to high" on government discrimination based on economic status. And Ethiopia and Mauritius are the only countries where discrimination based on economic status is matched by discrimination based on ethnicity.

In short, economic inequality and the poor treatment that many citizens experience because of it appear to be crucial elements undermining unity and social cohesion. While the more traditionally recognised cleavages of religion and ethnicity are the basis for some popular grievance, economic inequality is a far more significant source of perceived maltreatment. Yet more than three-quarters (77%) of respondents say their governments are doing "fairly badly" or "very badly" at narrowing gaps between rich and poor, including large majorities in every country except Tanzania (Figure 16). This suggests that governments need to address economic inequality more directly and aggressively, as it is a critical, and in some countries growing, source of potential cleavage (Chancel, Cogneau, Gethin, & Myczkowski, 2019).

Figure 16: Poor government performance on economic inequality | 34 countries | 2019/2021



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the *following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Narrowing gaps between rich and poor?* (% who *say "fairly badly" or "very badly")*

Table 1: Experience of unfair treatment | 34 countries | 2019/2021

	Unfair treatment by government (% "sometimes," "often," or "always")			Unfair treatment by others (% "once or twice," "several times," or "many times")		
	Economic status	Ethnicity	Religion	Economic status	Ethnicity	Religion
Angola	36%	30%	20%	37%	31%	32%
Benin	62%	34%	22%	44%	18%	21%
Botswana	42%	27%	12%	28%	17%	15%
Burkina Faso	34%	12%	10%	19%	10%	11%
Cabo Verde	30%	17%	3%	22%	9%	9%
Cameroon	65%	64%	41%	52%	47%	34%
Côte d'Ivoire	58%	39%	11%	29%	18%	13%
Eswatini	44%	33%	6%	32%	10%	18%
Ethiopia	48%	52%	21%	29%	30%	18%
Gabon	64%	55%	30%	43%	33%	20%
Gambia	41%	28%	10%	28%	15%	7%
Ghana	42%	25%	13%	34%	19%	17%
Guinea	28%	28%	2%	17%	10%	4%
Kenya	52%	48%	15%	39%	30%	20%
Lesotho	37%	8%	6%	31%	6%	17%
Liberia	57%	25%	16%	47%	25%	23%
Malawi	70%	52%	25%	54%	25%	24%
Mali	38%	25%	10%	19%	13%	9%
Mauritius	46%	47%	43%	31%	30%	31%
Morocco	52%	24%	5%	37%	14%	3%
Mozambique	51%	38%	29%	40%	30%	29%
Namibia	55%	41%	16%	45%	32%	26%
Niger	43%	20%	17%	26%	12%	12%
Nigeria	73%	50%	34%	47%	33%	30%
Senegal	61%	22%	7%	26%	11%	6%
Sierra Leone	30%	13%	2%	22%	11%	7%
South Africa	65%	46%	33%	45%	35%	30%
Sudan	45%	Not asked	16%	29%	24%	19%
Tanzania	12%	6%	3%	15%	4%	4%
Togo	57%	47%	29%	38%	24%	19%
Tunisia	58%	Not asked	27%	35%	Not asked	9%
Uganda	55%	44%	19%	49%	34%	23%
Zambia	69%	34%	16%	50%	22%	19%
Zimbabwe	53%	25%	14%	43%	17%	11%
34-country avg	49%	31%	17%	35%	21%	17%
	<15%	*Low*		*15%-25%*	*Moderate*	
	26%-35%	*Moderate to high*		*>35%*	*High*	

Social bonds and pro-social outcomes

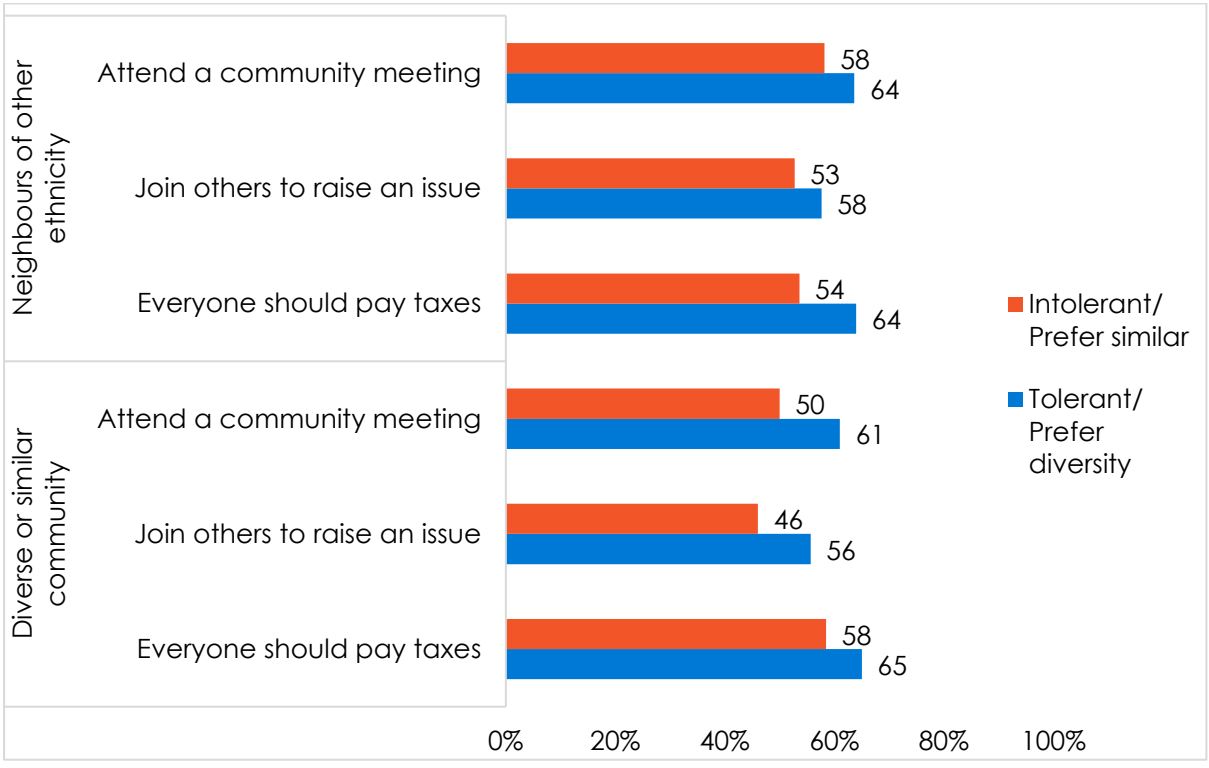
The key reason that analysts are interested in factors such as social capital and social cohesion is their anticipated impact on *outcomes*. In general, the expectation is that more cohesive societies will also be more effective in acting collectively to solve problems and achieve core development goals.

It is beyond the scope of this assessment to evaluate the impacts of different types of social bonds and social cleavages on outcomes such as community collaboration or commitment to the common good. But a few preliminary findings suggest at least a modest link worth further exploration.

We first examine the relationship between attitudes that favour diversity – tolerance for diverse neighbours and the belief that diverse communities are stronger – and several key outcomes. In terms of behavioural outcomes, we consider two actions that can be key components of collective problem solving: attendance at community meetings and joining with others to raise issues. In terms of attitudinal outcomes, we consider whether individuals agree that the state has the right to collect taxes, an attitude that suggests a commitment to the common good.

In all cases, we find that commitment to tolerance and diversity is associated with higher levels of pro-social behaviours and attitudes (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Pro-diversity attitudes and pro-social outcomes | 34 countries | 2019/2021



Respondents were asked:

Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year: Attended a community meeting? Got together with others to raise an issue? (% who say "once or twice," "several times," or "often")

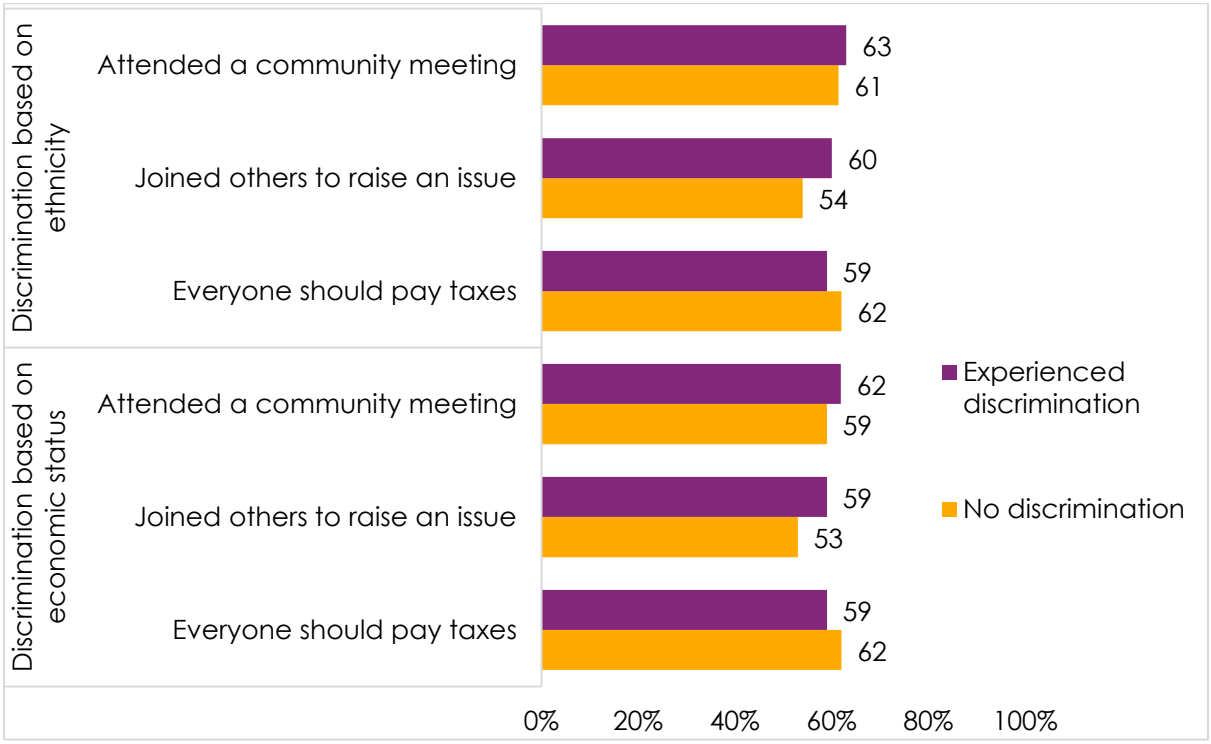
For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: The tax authorities always have the right to make people pay taxes? (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

Some differences between those with pro-diversity/tolerance attitudes and those who reject tolerance or diversity are quite modest. But in others – for example the pro-social attitude that people must pay taxes – the gap (10 percentage points) is quite substantial. We cannot say whether pro-diversity attitudes are a cause or a consequence of factors such as engaging with others; there is likely some degree of causality in both directions (Jenson, 2019). But these findings clearly suggest that further exploration of how various degrees of social bonding affect desired social outcomes is an essential next step.

When we flip the script and consider how negative experiences – in particular the experience of discrimination based on ethnicity or economic status – are related to pro-social outcomes, we observe an interesting divergence. As we might expect, respondents who experienced discrimination are somewhat less likely to express pro-social attitudes such as commitment to paying taxes (Figure 18).

However, we also find that those who have directly experienced discrimination at the hands of fellow citizens are somewhat *more* likely, rather than *less* likely, to engage in collective activities and actions. At first blush this might seem like an unexpected finding. But we recall that we earlier saw that the economically disadvantaged are the most likely to experience discrimination (Figure 13 and Figure 14). Earlier Afrobarometer findings (Logan, Sanny, & Han, 2020) have shown that the poorest members of society are actually the most likely to engage in voluntary civic behaviour such as community meetings and joining with others to raise issues.

Figure 18: Experience of discrimination and pro-social outcomes | 34 countries | 2019/2021



Respondents were asked:

Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year: Attended a community meeting? Got together with others to raise an issue? (% who say "once or twice," "several times," or "often")

For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: The tax authorities always have the right to make people pay taxes? (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

In short, it appears that those experiencing the greatest poverty and the most discrimination may actually be incentivised to take action to improve their situations, while at the same time disengaging from "mandatory" demands that an unequal state or society places on them, such as tax payment. However, we note again that these findings are very preliminary and warrant further exploration.

Conclusion

Understanding the balance between social cohesion and social dissolution (Lockwood, 1999) experienced in African societies is still a work in progress. The new findings from Afrobarometer Round 8 presented here suggest that we need to question our traditional assumptions about which identities and cleavages matter most in any given society, as well as our assumptions about the best ways to measure "cohesion." In all 34 countries covered here, levels of generalised trust are extremely low, yet commitment to diversity and tolerance and acceptance of differences (on most issues) is high. We also see quite high levels of commitment to the nation, alongside significant levels of discrimination. Much work remains to be done to understand what these complex and varied indicators mean for the measurement of social cohesion and, most importantly, for social and developmental outcomes.

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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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