

A no-confidence vote? Mozambicans still vote, but faith in democracy is slipping

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 139 | Thomas Isbell

Summary

Since independence in 1975, Mozambique's history has been marked by deep economic crises, political instability, and widespread human-rights violations. In 1990, after 16 years of civil war between the governing Frente de Libertação de Moçambique (FRELIMO) and the Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (RENAMO), the government of former President Joaquim Alberto Chissano established a democratic constitution in an effort to end the conflict (Pitcher, 2006). The constitution foresees multiparty elections and the separation of legislative, executive, and judiciary powers.

Economic and political reforms to support a transition to democracy won praise from independent observers. However, elections in 2005, 2009, and 2014 were marred by charges of electoral manipulation (Bertelsen, 2016; Azevedo-Harman, 2015), raising questions about Mozambique's progress toward peace and democracy.

Using data from Afrobarometer's 2015 survey, this dispatch examines how ordinary Mozambicans perceive the quality of their elections and the current state of their country's democracy. Survey responses paint a troubling picture, suggesting an alarming decline in popular confidence in elections and democracy. Fewer than half of respondents see democracy as preferable to any other form of government, and acceptance of authoritarian alternatives is on the rise. Increasing numbers of citizens see their elections as less than free and fair and doubt that elections ensure that voters' views are represented. Still, most Mozambicans see voting as a good citizen's duty – perhaps an indication that despite high current levels of dissatisfaction, they have not entirely given up on democracy.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across Africa. Six rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2015, and Round 7 surveys are currently underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Mozambique, led by Ipsos Mozambique, interviewed 2,400 adult Mozambicans in June-August 2015. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Mozambique in 2002, 2005, 2008, and 2012.

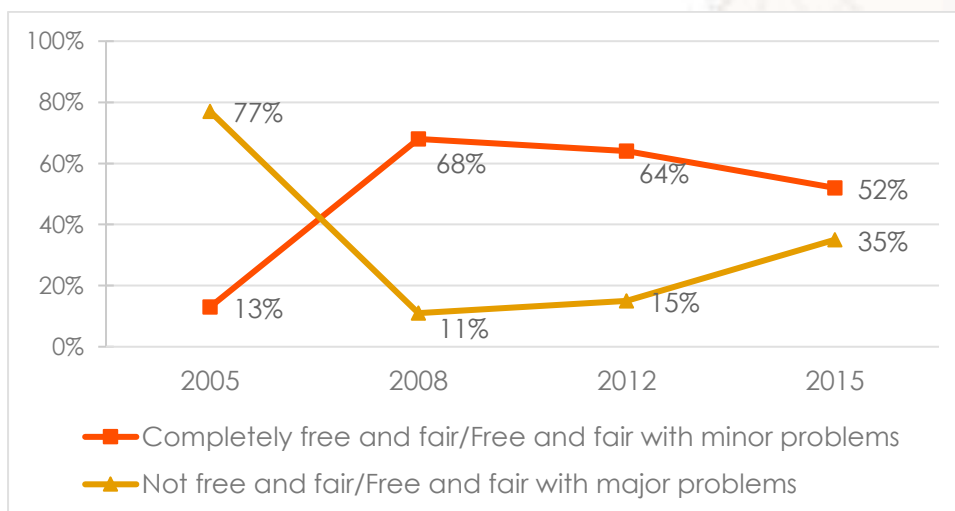
Key findings

- Mozambicans are critical of the quality of their elections: Only about half (52%) say their most recent national election was free and fair, the lowest level since 2008, and only one in three believe that votes are “always” counted fairly (32%) and that opposition parties are “never” prevented from running (33%).
- While a strong majority (78%) see voting as a civic duty, citizens are becoming increasingly accepting of choosing leaders through methods other than elections (27%, up from 17% in 2012).
- Fewer than half (45%) of Mozambicans say they prefer democracy over any other system – the lowest level since 2002, and the second-lowest among all 36 African countries surveyed in 2014/2015. Growing numbers of citizens see non-democratic alternatives as acceptable.
- The proportion of citizens who consider Mozambique “a full democracy” or “a democracy, but with minor problems” has declined to 42%, and only one in four respondents (23%) say they are satisfied with the way democracy works in their country – less than half the level of satisfaction recorded in 2002.
- Only minorities believe that elections work well to ensure that the Assembly of the Republic reflects citizens’ views (42%) and that voters can remove underperforming leaders from office (32%).

Are Mozambique’s elections free and fair?

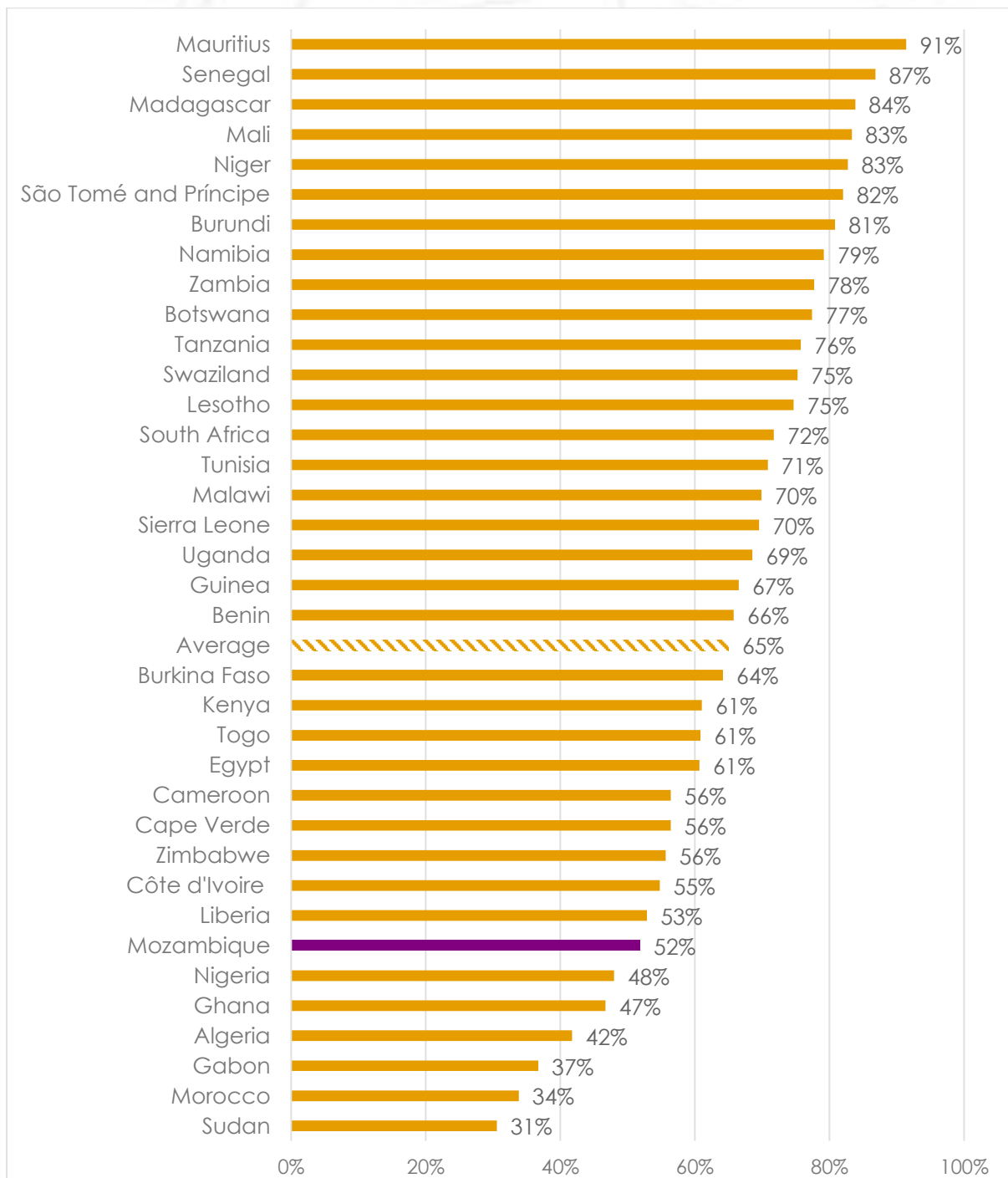
A decreasing number of Mozambicans feel confident that their national elections are free and fair. While confidence rose steeply between 2005 and 2008, the proportion of citizens who say their most recent national election was “completely free and fair” or “free and fair, but with minor problems” has declined steadily over the past decade, from 68% in 2008 to 52% to 2015 (Figure 1). These perceptions place Mozambicans near the bottom in terms of confidence in elections among 36 African countries surveyed in 2014/2015 (Figure 2), well below the average of 65%. Meanwhile, the proportion who say the elections were “not free and fair” or “free and fair, with major problems” has more than tripled, from 11% to 35%.

Figure 1: Are elections free and fair? | Mozambique | 2005-2015



Respondents were asked: *On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in [20XX]?*

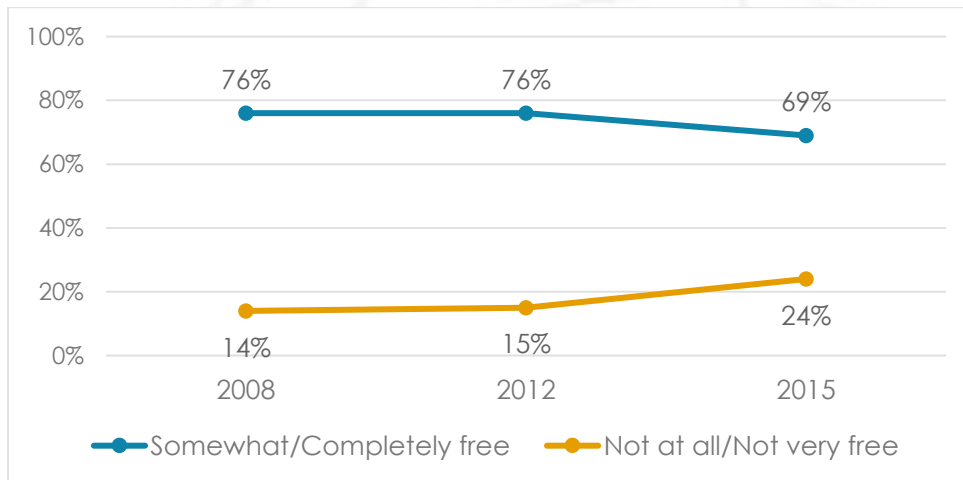
Figure 2: Freeness and fairness of last national election | 36 countries | 2014/2015



Respondents were asked: *On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election, held in [20XX]? (% who say “completely free and fair” or “free and fair, but with minor problems”)*

In line with these concerns about free and fair elections, fewer Mozambicans report feeling free to vote for the candidate of their choice. While a majority (57%) still feel “completely free” and an additional 12% feel “somewhat free,” the proportion of respondents who feel “not at all free” or “not very free” increased from 15% in 2012 to 24% in 2015 (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Freedom to vote for candidate of one's choice | Mozambique | 2002-2015

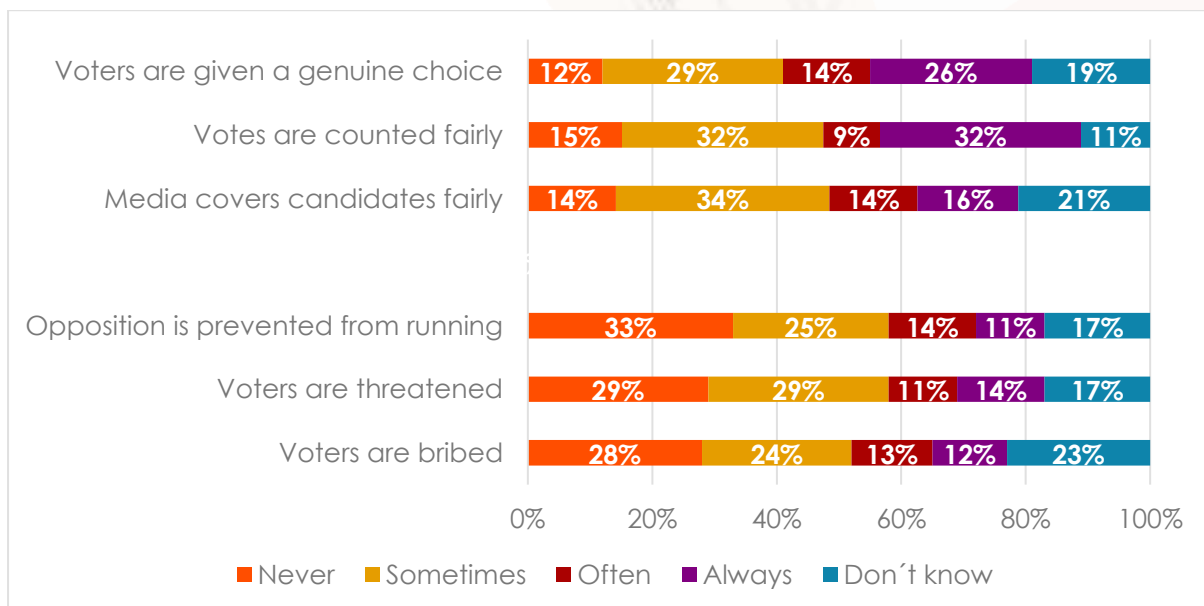


Respondents were asked: *In this country, how free are you to choose who to vote for without feeling pressured?*

Perceptions of election quality

On specific indicators of the quality of their elections, Mozambicans offer fairly negative evaluations (Figure 4). They are evenly divided as to whether voters are given a genuine choice in elections: 41% say this is “never” or only “sometimes” the case, while 40% say it “often” or “always” happens. Only one in three (32%) say that votes are “always” counted fairly. Almost half (48%) say the media “never” or only “sometimes” provides fair coverage of all candidates, and only 33% say that opposition parties are “never” prevented from running. One in four respondents say voters are “often” or “always” bribed (25%) and are often/always threatened during elections (25%).

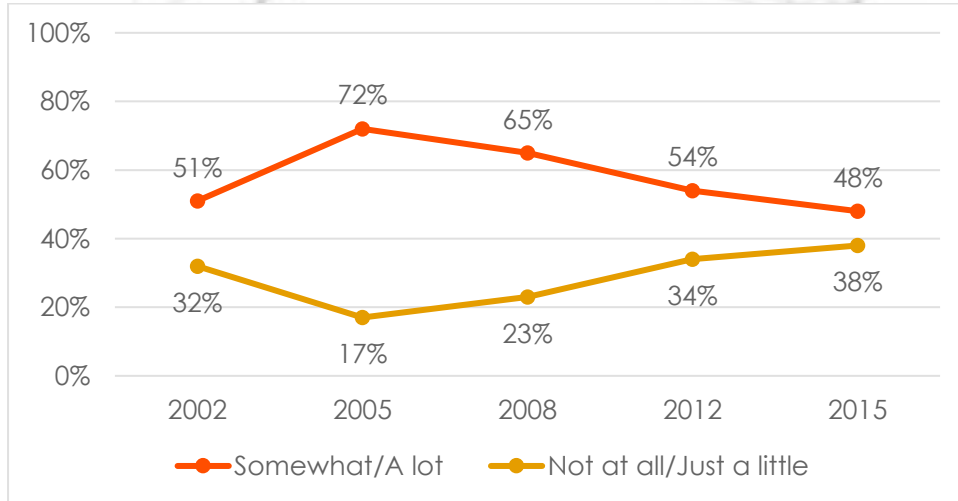
Figure 4: Perceptions of election quality | Mozambique | 2015



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often do the following things occur in this country's elections: Voters are offered a genuine choice in the elections? Votes are counted fairly? The media provides fair coverage of all candidates? Opposition candidates are prevented from running for office? Voters are threatened with violence at the polls? Voters are bribed?*

Critical assessments of election quality are also reflected in declining public trust in Mozambique’s Electoral Commission, which is tasked with organizing and conducting elections. After a sharp increase in trust between 2002 and 2005, the proportion of citizens who say they trust the commission “somewhat” or “a lot” has continued a decade-long, from 72% in 2005 to 48% in 2015 (Figure 5). Meanwhile, the proportion expressing “just a little” or no trust at all has doubled, from 17% to 38%.

Figure 5: Trust national electoral commission | Mozambique | 2002-2015

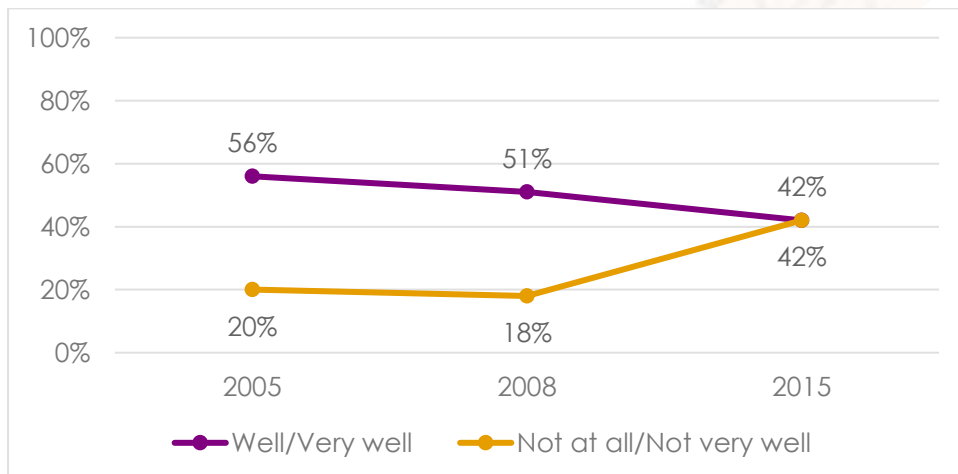


Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The Electoral Commission?

Does voting make a difference?

The same trends are evident in Mozambicans’ perceptions of how well elections serve their intended purposes. Respondents are equally divided as to how well elections work to ensure that the Assembly of the Republic reflects voters’ views: 42% say they fulfill this function “well” or “very well” (down from 56% in 2005), while 42% say they do so “not very” or “not at all” well – more than double the level of negative perceptions 10 years ago (Figure 6).

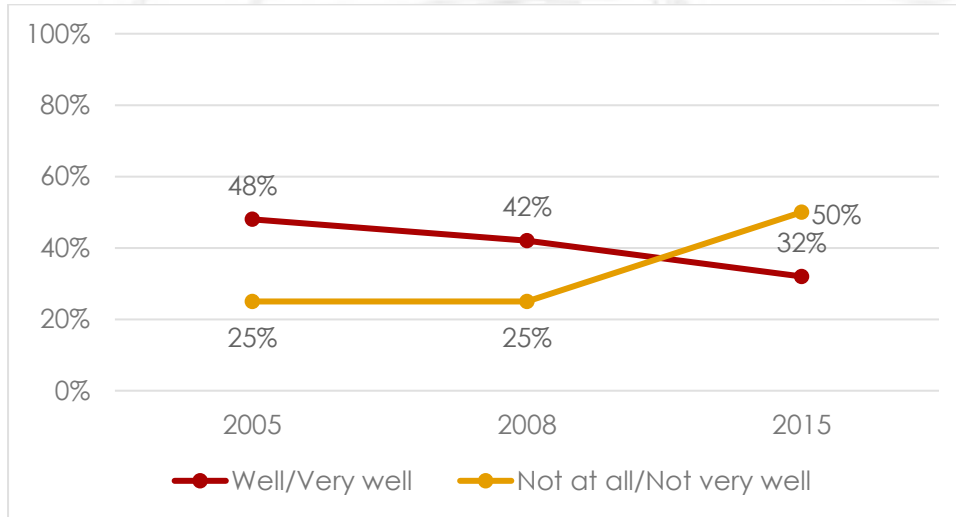
Figure 6: Do elections ensure that Assembly of the Republic reflects voters’ views? | Mozambique | 2005-2015



Respondents were asked: Think about how elections work in practice in this country. How well do elections ensure that the representatives to the Assembly of the Republic reflect the views of voters?

Similarly, the perception that elections work “well” or “very well” to allow ordinary people to remove under-performing leaders from office has decreased from 48% to 32% over the past decade (Figure 7). Again, the opposite view has doubled since 2005, from 25% to 50%.

Figure 7: Do elections enable voters to remove leaders? | Mozambique | 2005-2015

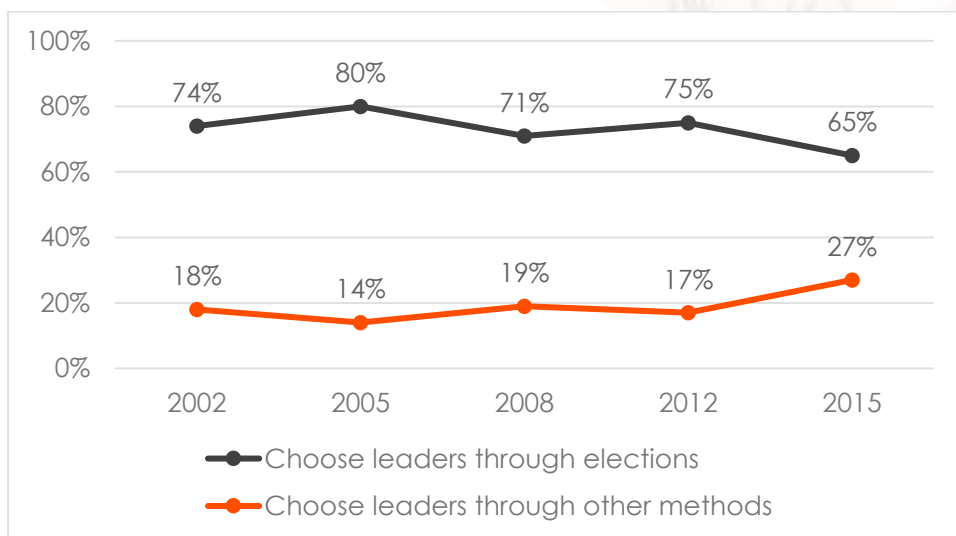


Respondents were asked: Think about how elections work in practice in this country. How well do elections enable voters to remove from office leaders who do not do what the people want?

Is declining confidence in elections a threat to democracy?

If fewer citizens see elections as a fair and efficient way of expressing their political demands, is Mozambique’s government running the risk of losing legitimacy? Two-thirds (65%) of Mozambicans still support elections as the best way to choose their leaders, but this level of support is 10 percentage points lower than in 2012 (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Choose leaders through elections or other methods? | Mozambique | 2002-2015



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open, and honest elections.
 Statement 2: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country’s leaders.

More ominously, fewer than half of all Mozambicans feel that democracy is always preferable to other regime types. After a slow, decade-long increase (from 54% in 2002 to 63% in 2012), support for democracy plunged by 18 percentage, to 45% in 2015 (Figure 9). This is the second-lowest level of support for democracy across 36 African countries surveyed in 2014/2015 (Figure 10).

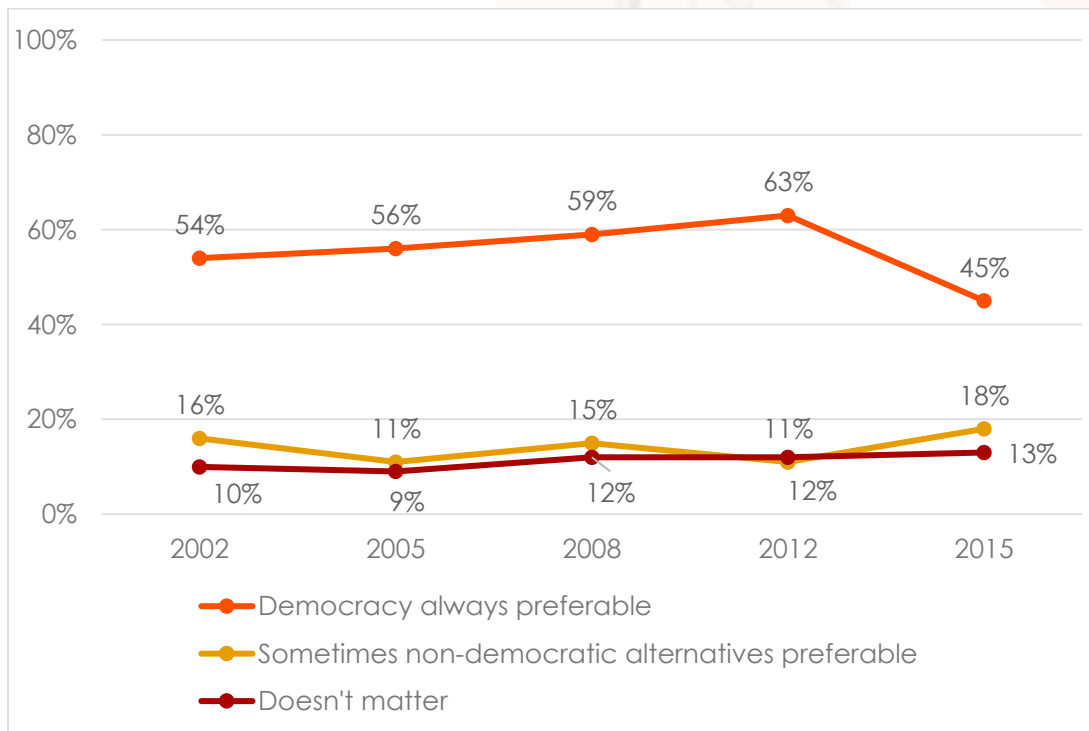
Not only are Mozambicans less supportive of democracy than most other countries, they also have become less opposed to non-democratic alternatives. While rejection of non-democratic alternatives increased between 2002 and 2008, it has become less common since. Half or fewer of Mozambicans in 2015 “disapprove” or “strongly disapprove” of one-party rule (50%), one-mal rule (35%), and military rule (43%) – all substantially lower levels of rejection than in 2012 (Figure 11).

Given trends of declining support for democracy and increasing acceptance of non-democratic alternatives, it is perhaps unsurprising that the number of Mozambicans who say they are satisfied with the way democracy works in their country continues to drop. Fewer than one in four (23%) say they are “fairly” or “very” satisfied – less than half the proportion who expressed satisfaction in 2002 (54%) (Figure 12).

Indeed, fewer than half of Mozambicans (42%) consider their country “a full democracy” or “a democracy, but with minor problems” – a 15-percentage-point drop since 2012 (57%) and 25 points lower than in 2002 (67%).

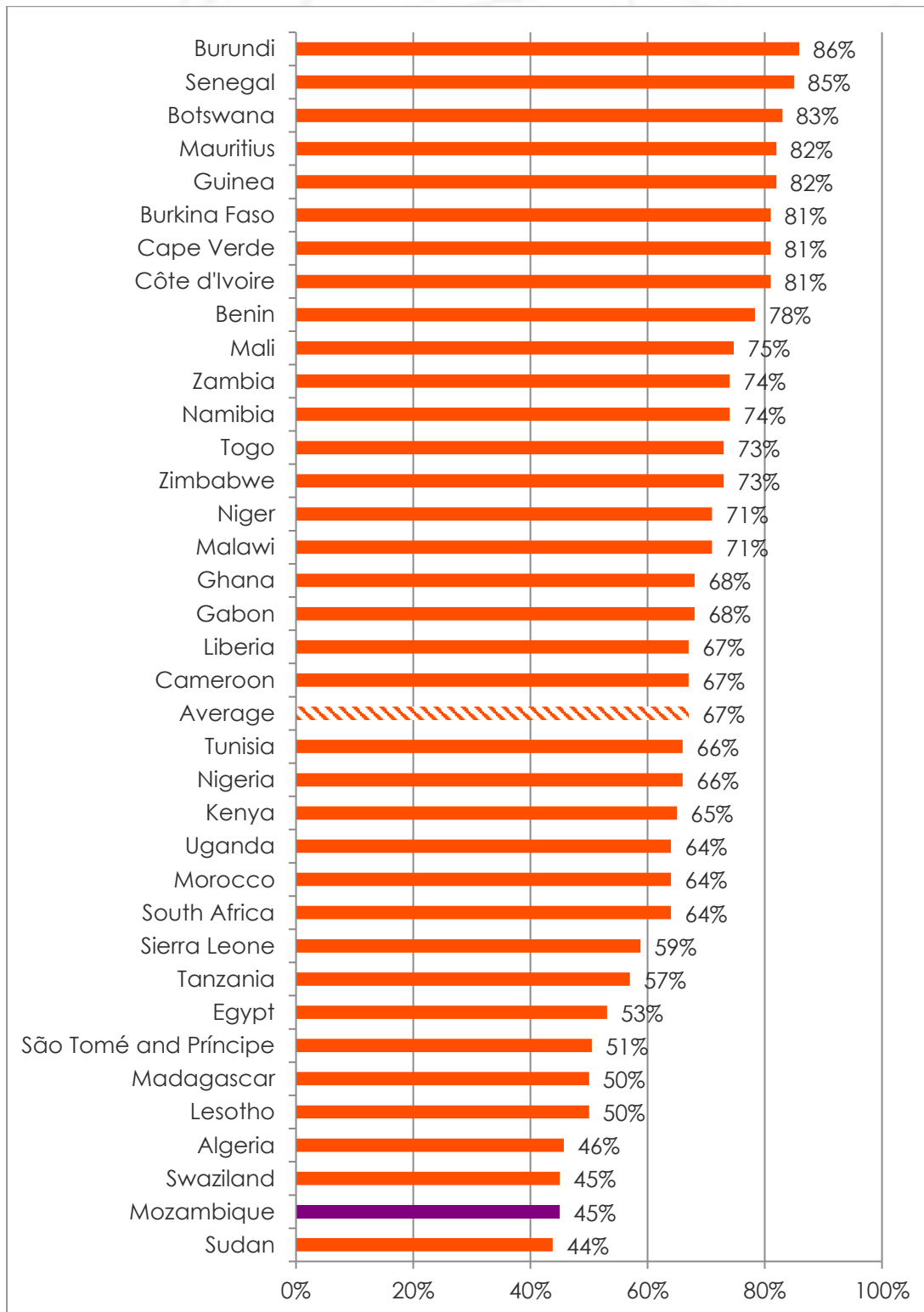
Moreover, while two-thirds (65%) of Mozambicans consider it “important to obey the government in power, no matter who you voted for,” a growing number disagree: The proportion of respondents who say that it is “not necessary to obey the laws of a government that you did not vote for” has doubled since 2008, from 12% to 27% (Figure 13).

Figure 9: Support for democracy | Mozambique | 2002-2015



Respondents were asked: Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?
 Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.
 Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.
 Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.

Figure 10: Support for democracy | 36 countries | 2014/2015



Respondents were asked: Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?

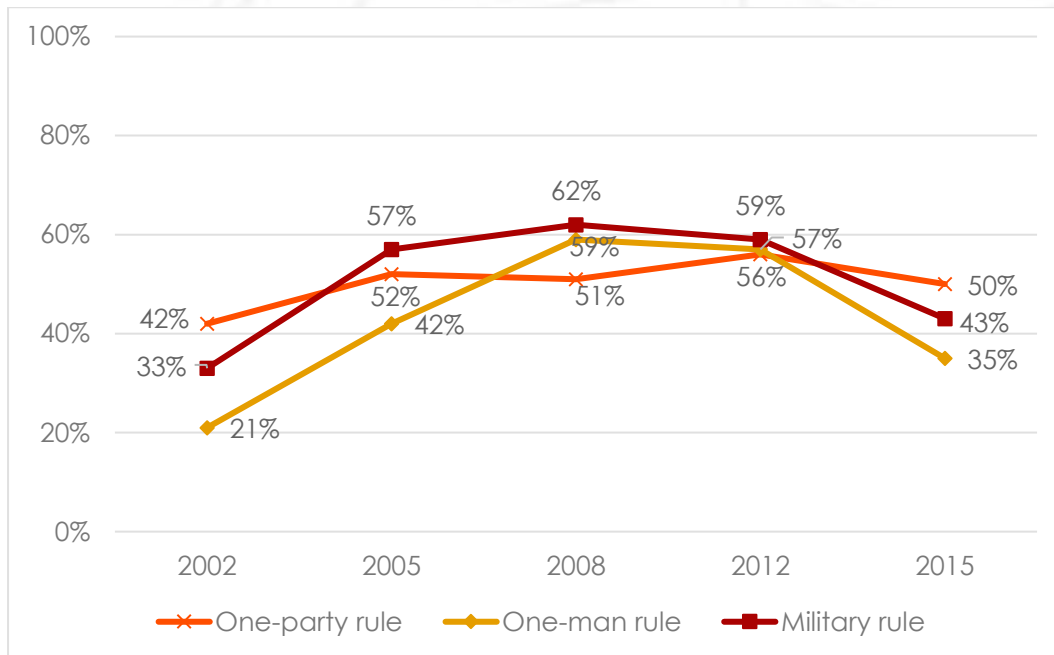
Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.

Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.

Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.

(% who say democracy is preferable)

Figure 11: Rejection of non-democratic alternatives | Mozambique | 2002-2015

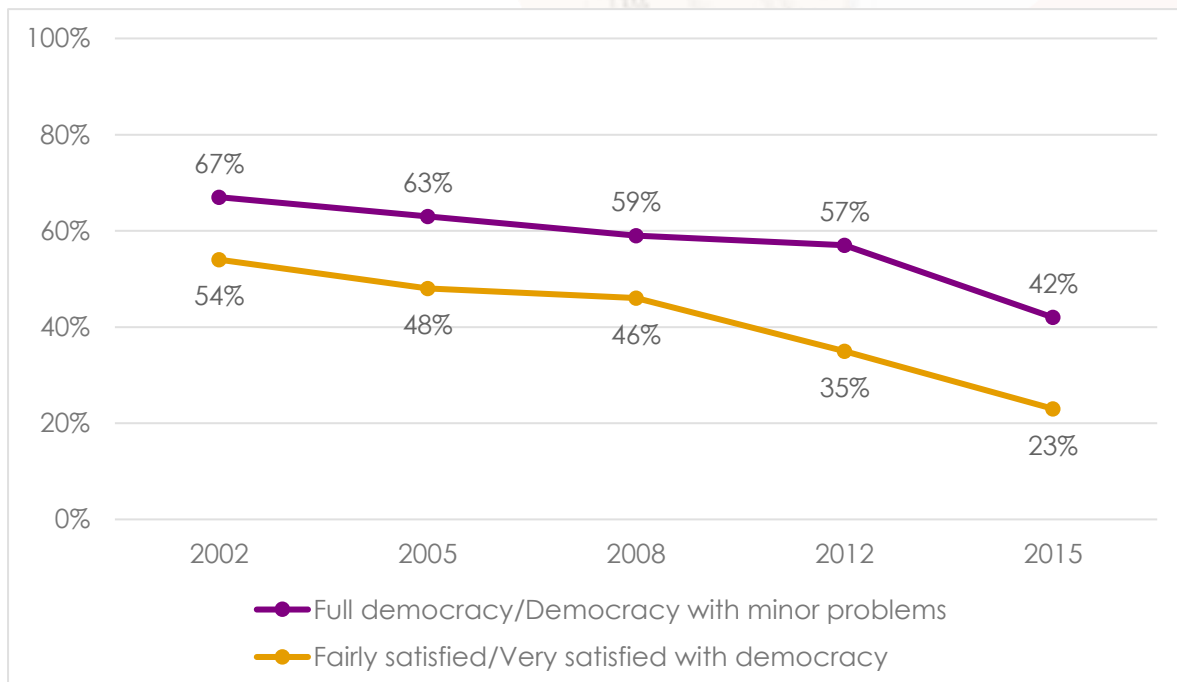


Respondents were asked: *There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives?*

- Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office.
- Elections and Parliament are abolished so that the president can decide everything.
- The army comes in to govern the country.

(% of respondents who "disapprove" or "strongly disprove")

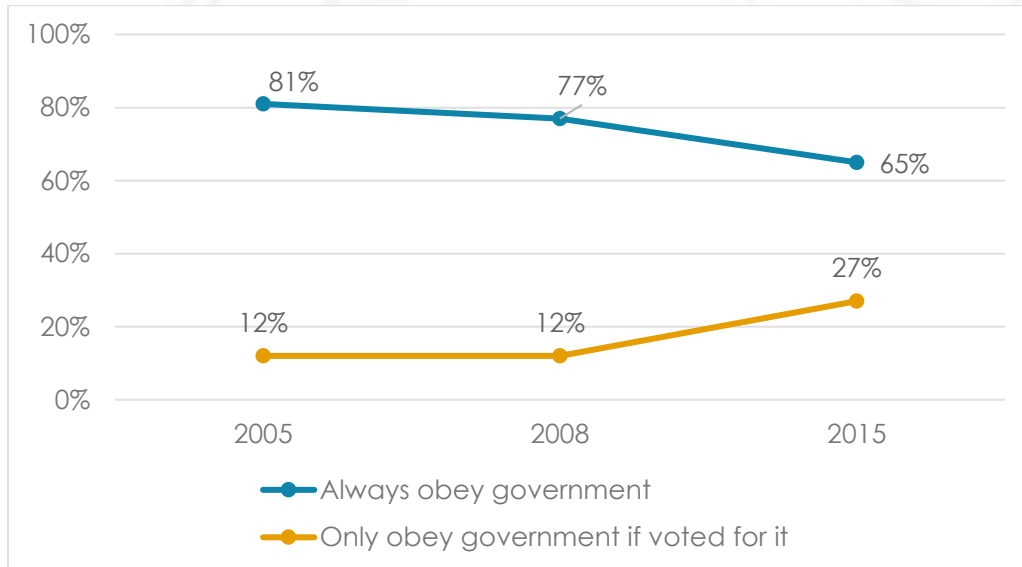
Figure 12: Extent of and satisfaction with democracy | Mozambique | 2002-2015



Respondents were asked:

- In your opinion, how much of a democracy is Mozambique today?
- Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Mozambique?

Figure 13: Obey government always vs. obey only if voted for it | Mozambique
 | 2002-2015



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

Statement 1: It is important to obey the government in power, no matter who you voted for.

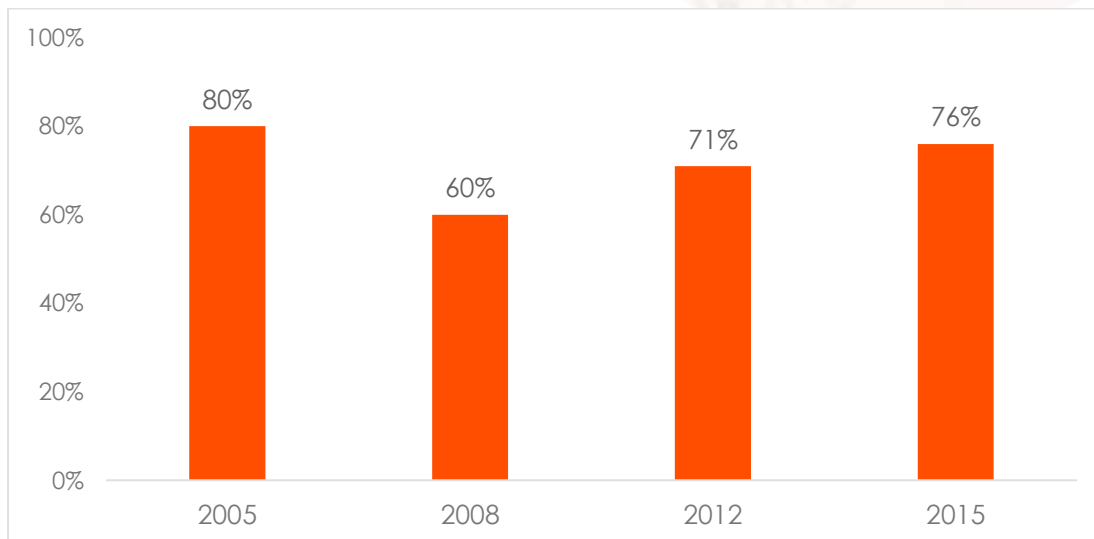
Statement 2: It is not necessary to obey the laws of a government that you did not vote for.

(% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

Do perceptions of election quality impact voter turnout?

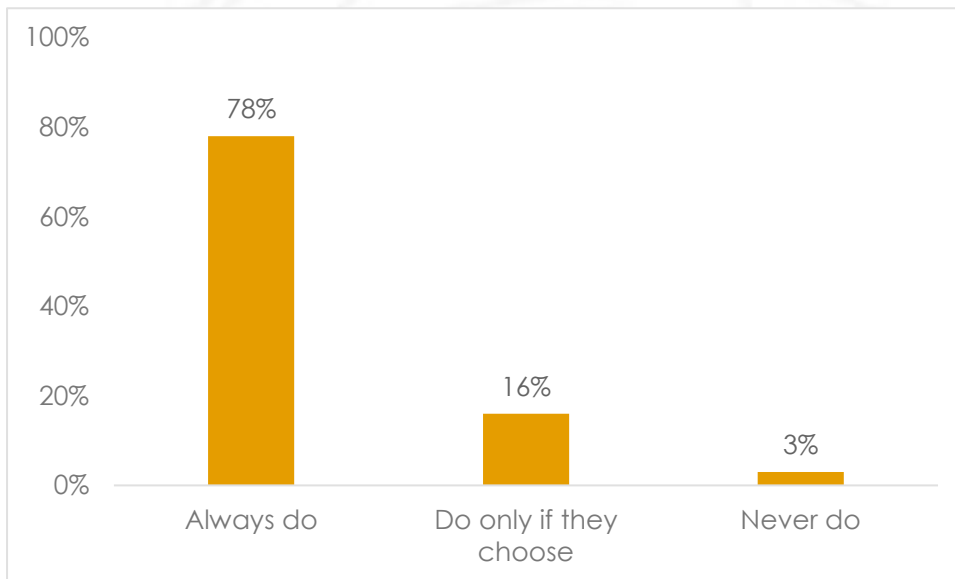
Mozambicans' increasingly negative assessments of their elections stand in contrast to increasing voter turnout and a widespread perception that voting is a civic duty. Self-reported voter turnout has increased from 60% in 2008 to 76% in the most recently national election (2014) (Figure 14). And more than three-fourths (78%) of respondents say that voting is something that a good citizen in a democracy should always do (Figure 15).

Figure 14: Voted in the most recent national election | Mozambique | 2005-2015



Respondents were asked: Understanding that some people were unable to vote in the most recent national election in 2014, which of the following statements is true for you: You voted in the elections?

Figure 15: Do good citizens vote? | Mozambique | 2015



Respondents were asked: For each of the following actions, please tell me whether you think it is something a good citizen in a democracy should always do, never do, or do only if they choose: Vote in elections?

Conclusion

Survey responses suggest a troubling deterioration in public perceptions of elections and democracy in Mozambique. Increasing numbers of citizens see their elections as less than free and fair and doubt that elections ensure that voters' views are represented. Popular support for democracy and satisfaction with its implementation have dropped alarmingly. Still, most see voting as a good citizen's duty – perhaps an indication that despite high current levels of dissatisfaction, Mozambicans have not given up on democracy.

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.

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