

Elections Côte d'Ivoire: Citizens mistrust electoral commission, fear political violence

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 51 | Peter Halley Penar and Ségorbah Silwe

Summary

On 25 October 2015, Côte d'Ivoire will conduct its first presidential election since the disputed 2010-2011 contest and civil war. The election pits President Alassane Ouattara against Pascal Affi N'Guessan and other challengers. In recent weeks, several candidates have voiced concerns about electoral institutions and the election environment, and former National Assembly President Mamadou Koulibaly withdrew his candidacy, citing doubts about the fairness of the election.

Recent results from the Round 6 Afrobarometer survey, conducted in August and September 2014, suggest that many Ivoirians share these concerns and are sharply divided in their perceptions and expectations regarding the upcoming election.

While there is a strong consensus that leaders should be selected through regular elections and that it is the duty of good citizens to vote, Ivoirians are divided in their views of the direction of the country and the state of the national economy. Most believe that elections do not function well to remove underperforming leaders and have not incentivized politicians to serve the people rather than their own ambitions.

Survey results show strong mistrust of the Independent Electoral Commission (CEI), and only a minority of citizens believe that the last parliamentary elections in 2011 were mostly or completely free and fair. The CEI, which was at the centre of the 2010-2011 crisis, has reduced the number of commissioners, but larger reforms demanded by some political parties and civil society have not been undertaken.

Sizeable proportions of Ivoirians express concerns about the election environment, including the bribery of voters, biased media coverage, the likelihood of unfair vote counting, and threats to voters at polling stations. Among the 13 Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) countries where Afrobarometer Round 6 surveys have been completed,¹ Côte d'Ivoire ranks second only to Nigeria in the proportion of citizens who fear election-related violence.

President Ouattara enjoys fairly high approval ratings, and public trust in the president is higher than in the ruling coalition or the opposition. A slim majority of Ivoirians say they feel "completely free" to vote as they choose.

As Côte d'Ivoire, which signed the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance in 2009, approaches a pivotal presidential election, these survey findings provide a window on how citizens think their government is delivering on its commitment to conduct secure, high-quality, and competitive elections.

¹ Afrobarometer Round 6 surveys have been completed in 13 of 15 ECOWAS countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. Five rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and Round 6 surveys are currently under way (2014-2015). Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of between 1,200 and 2,400 respondents.

The Afrobarometer team in Côte d'Ivoire, led by Centre de Recherche et de Formation sur le Développement Intégré (CREFDI), interviewed 1,200 adult Ivoirians in August and September 2014. A sample of this size yields results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. A previous survey was conducted in Côte d'Ivoire in 2013.

For other survey results related to democracy in Côte d'Ivoire, please see Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 42, available at www.afrobarometer.org.

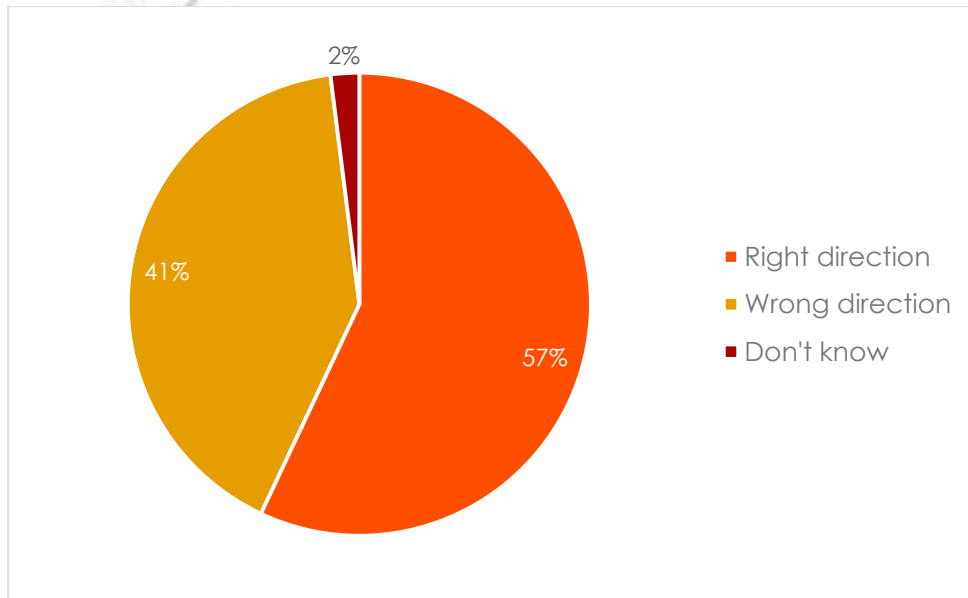
Key findings

- Ivoirians are divided as to whether the country is going in the right direction (57%) or the wrong direction (41%) (Figure 1). Views about the current state of the national economy are also mixed, with 45% saying conditions are "very" or "fairly" good and 38% saying conditions are "very" or "fairly" bad (Figure 2).
- Overwhelming majorities say that elections are the best way to select leaders (87%) (Figure 3) and that a good citizen in a democracy should always vote in elections (86%) (Figure 4). Only 51% say they voted in the 2011 legislative elections (shortly after the 2010-2011 crisis).
- Even so, a majority of Ivoirians believe that elections do not work well in enabling voters to remove underperforming leaders from office (60%) (Figure 5) and that political leaders largely serve their own ambitions (62%) as opposed to serving the people (33%) (Figure 6).
- Only 55% of citizens believe that the 2011 legislative elections were "completely free and fair" or "free and fair with minor problems" (Figure 7). Among 13 ECOWAS countries surveyed, only Nigeria, Ghana, and Liberia felt less positive about their most recent national elections (Figure 8).
- A majority of Ivoirians (57%) have no trust or "just a little" trust in the CEI (Figure 9), again an above-average negative assessment among ECOWAS countries (Figure 10).
- More than half of Ivoirians think that bribery of voters occurs "always" or "often" (54%) and that the media "never" or only "sometimes" covers election candidates fairly (51%) (Figure 11). Many Ivoirians also believe that voters are "always" or "often" threatened at the polls (42%) and that votes are "never" or only "sometimes" counted fairly (40%).
- Nearly half of Ivoirians (48%) fear election-related intimidation or violence "somewhat" or "a lot" (Figure 12), second only to Nigerians (50%) in the ECOWAS region (Figure 13). Only 54% feel "completely free" to vote for the candidate of their choice (Figure 14).

- Almost two-thirds (64%) of citizens approve of President Ouattara's performance in office (Figure 15), but fewer say they trust him "a lot" (40%) or "somewhat" (14%). Public trust is lower in the ruling parties (35% who trust them "a lot" or "somewhat") and the opposition parties (32% "a lot" or "somewhat") (Figure 16). Ivoirians are divided as to whether opposition parties provide a viable alternative for the country: 38% say yes, and 40% say no (Figure 17).

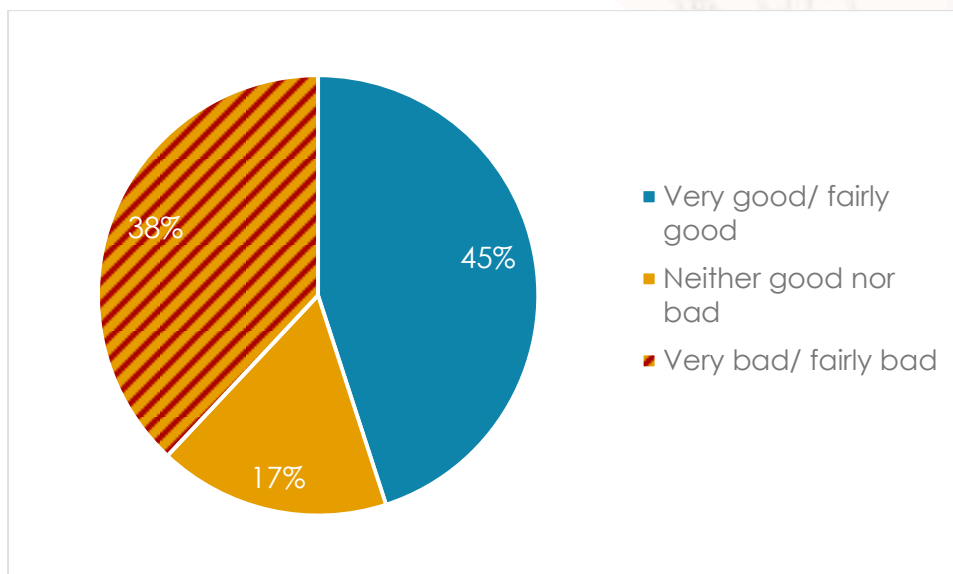
Charts

Figure 1: Overall direction of the country | Côte d'Ivoire | 2014



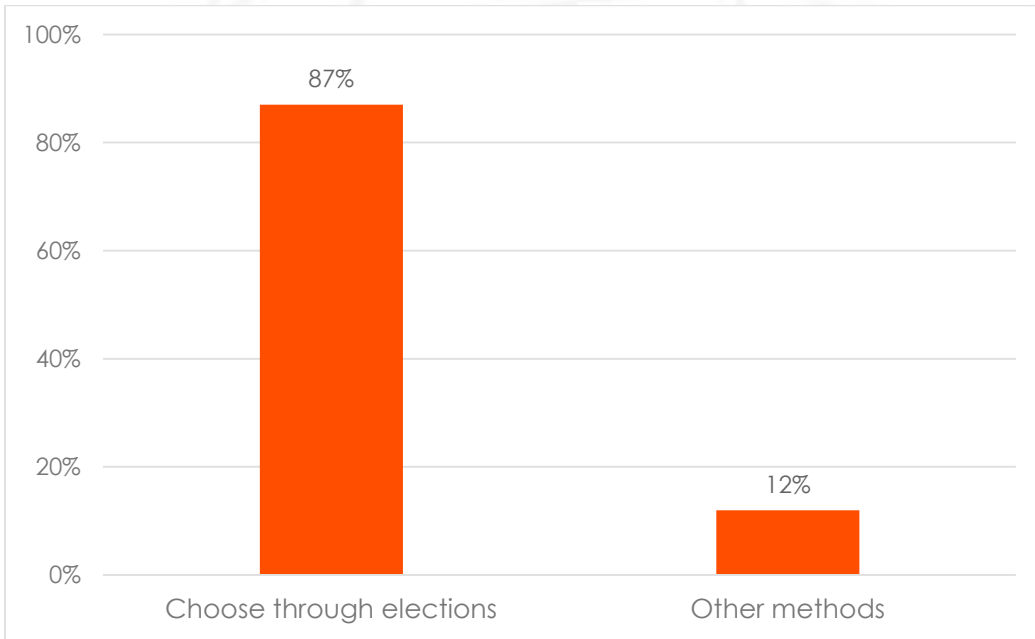
Respondents were asked: *Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction?*

Figure 2: Economic conditions of the country | Côte d'Ivoire | 2014



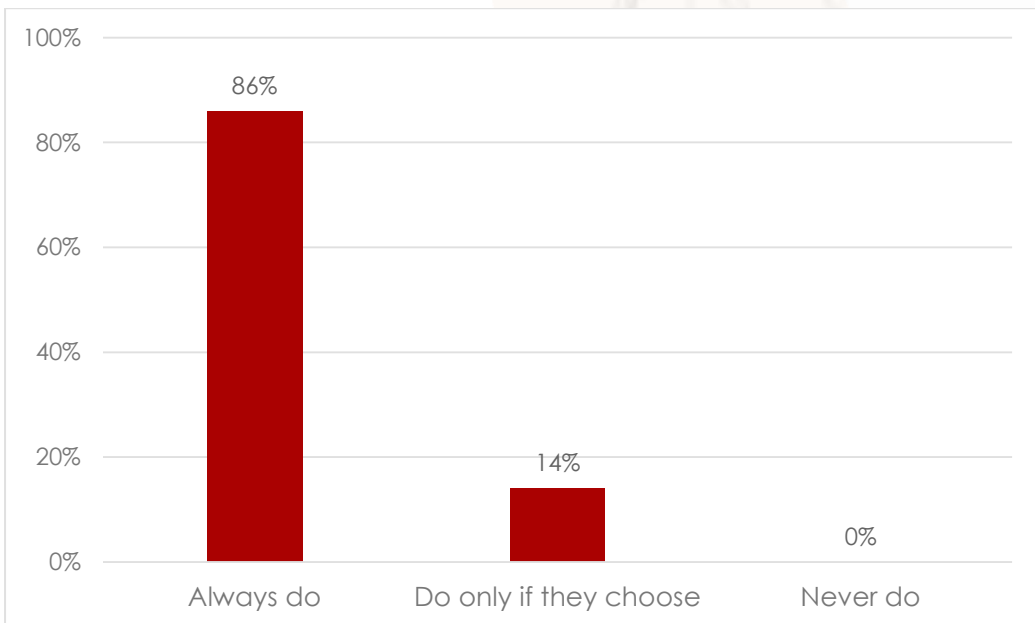
Respondents were asked: *In general, how would you describe the present economic conditions of this country?*

Figure 3: Choose leaders through elections vs. other methods | Côte d'Ivoire | 2014



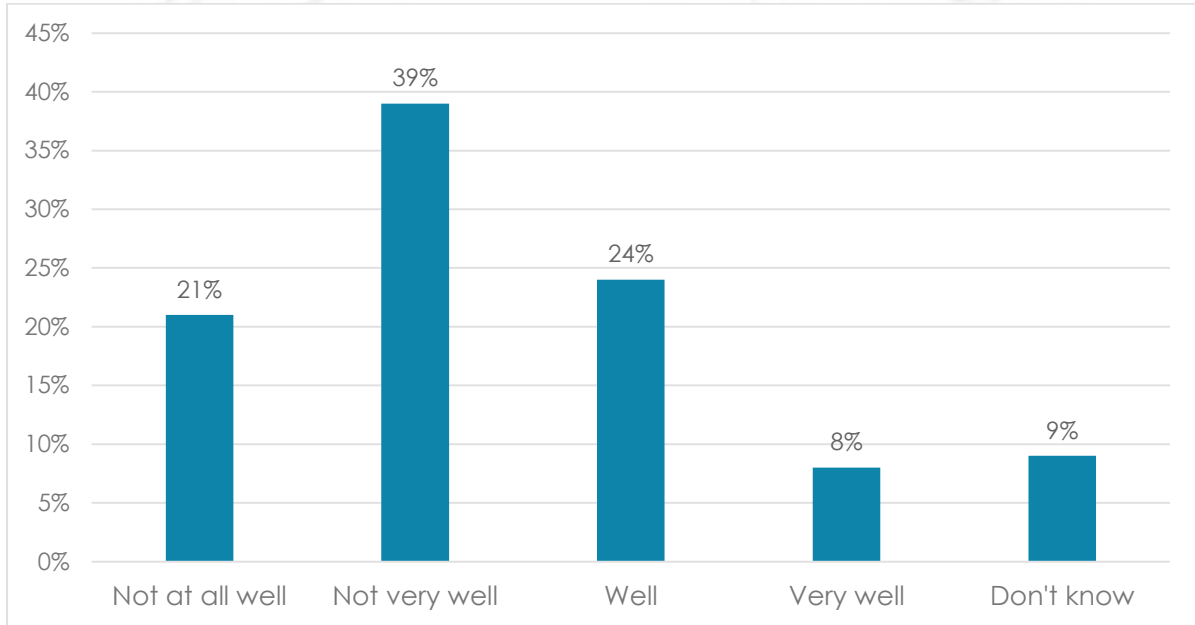
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? (1) We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open, and honest elections. (2) Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country's leaders. (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

Figure 4: Good citizens vote in elections | Côte d'Ivoire | 2014



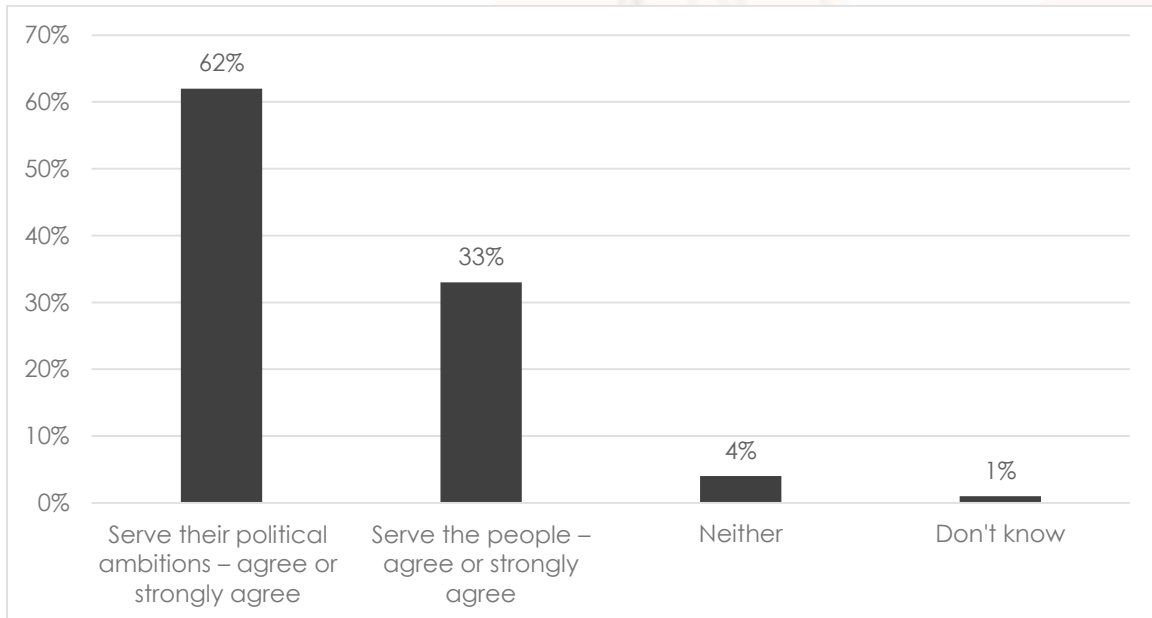
Respondents were asked: For each of the following actions, please tell me whether you think it is something a good citizen in a democracy should always do, never do, or do only if they choose: Vote in elections?

Figure 5: Do elections enable voters to remove underperforming leaders? | Côte d'Ivoire | 2014



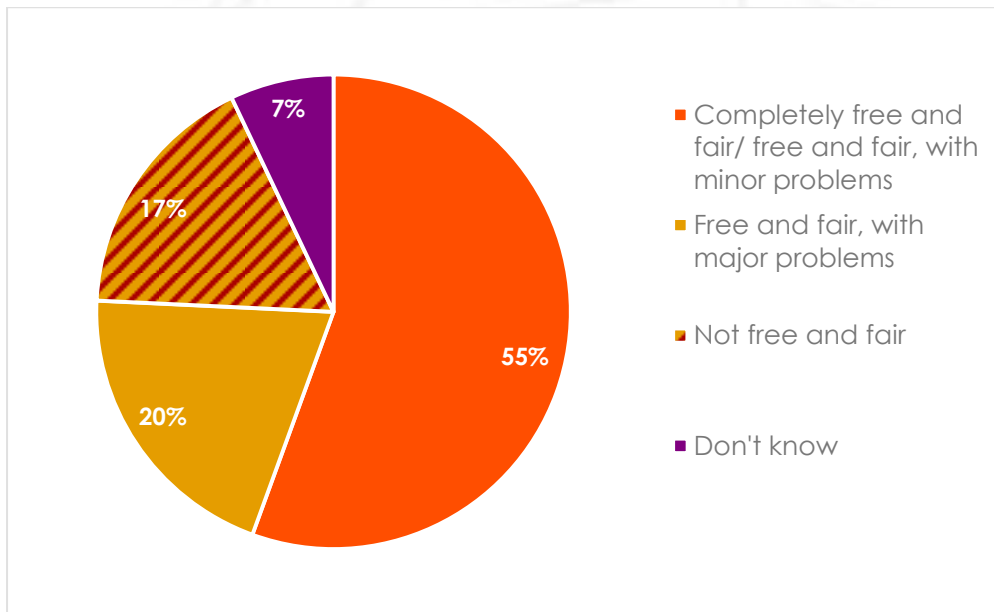
Respondents were asked: *Think about how elections work in practice in this country. How well do elections enable voters to remove from office leaders who do not do what the people want?*

Figure 6: Elected leaders serve the people or themselves? | Côte d'Ivoire | 2014



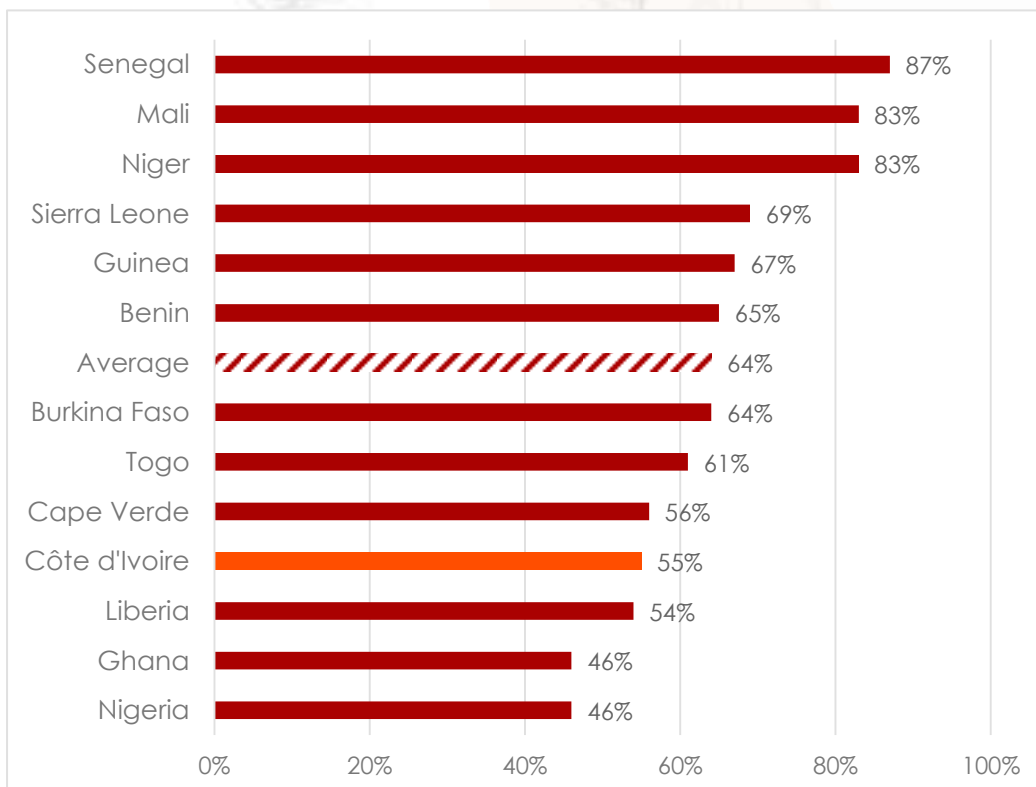
Respondents were asked: *Do you think that leaders of political parties in this country are more concerned with serving the interests of the people, or more concerned with advancing their own political ambitions, or haven't you heard enough to say?*

Figure 7: Freeness and fairness of the 2011 elections | Côte d'Ivoire | 2014



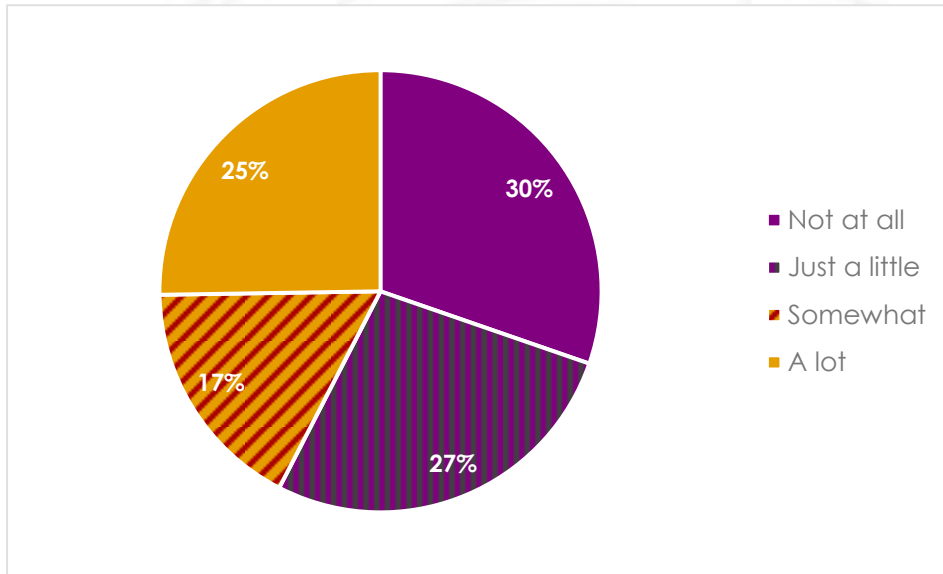
Respondents were asked: *On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last legislative elections, held in 2011?*

Figure 8: Freeness and fairness of the most recent election | 13 ECOWAS countries | 2014/2015



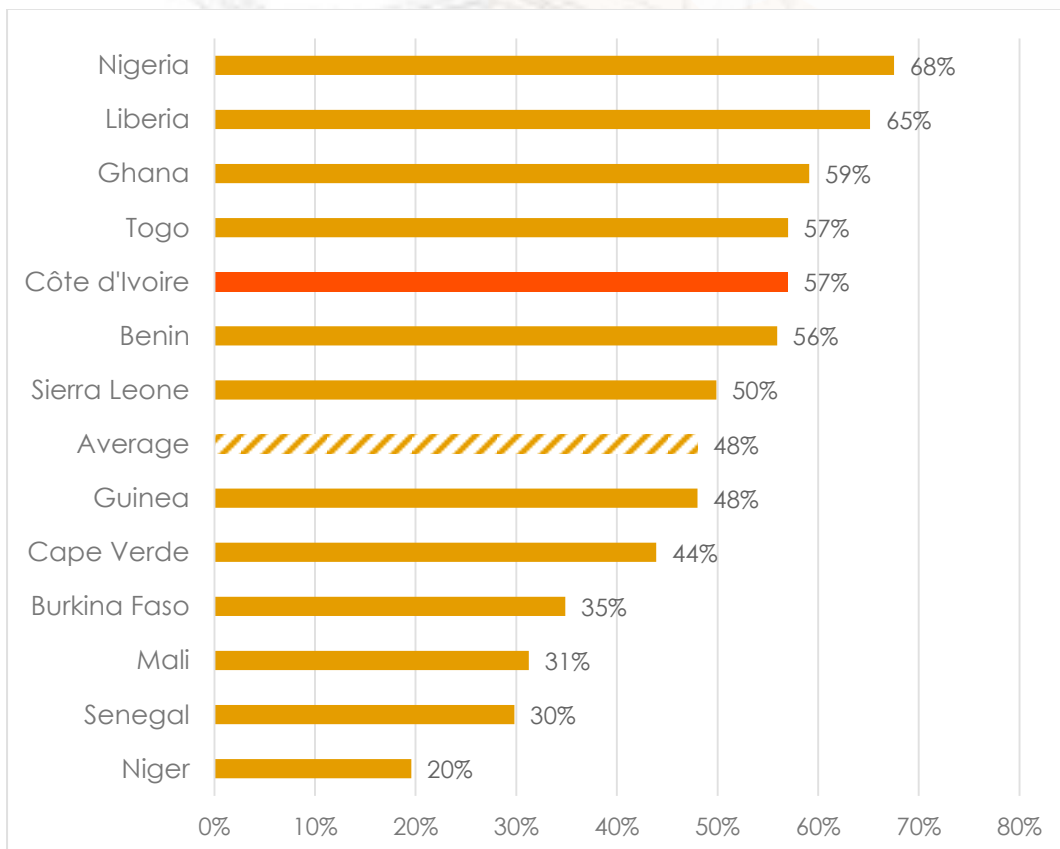
Respondents were asked: *On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election? (% who say "completely free" or "free and fair, but with minor problems")*

Figure 9: Trust in the Independent Election Commission (CEI) | Côte d'Ivoire | 2014



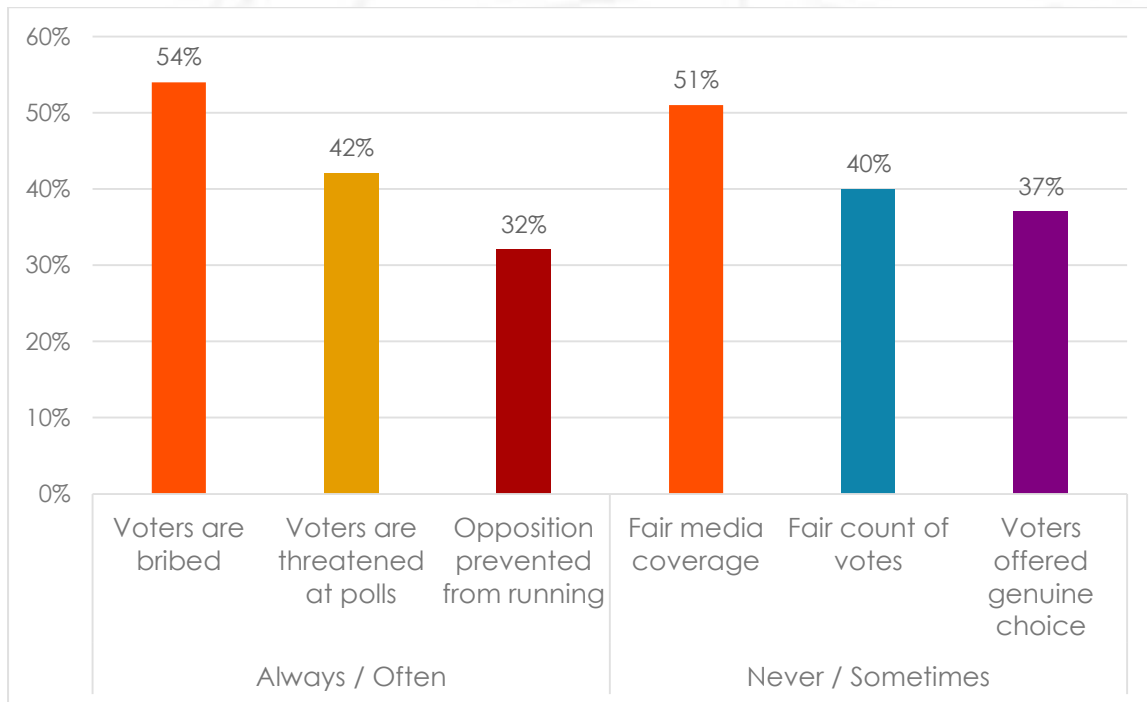
Respondents were asked: *How much do you trust the Independent Election Commission (CEI)?*

Figure 10: Lack of trust in the election commission | 13 ECOWAS countries | 2014/2015



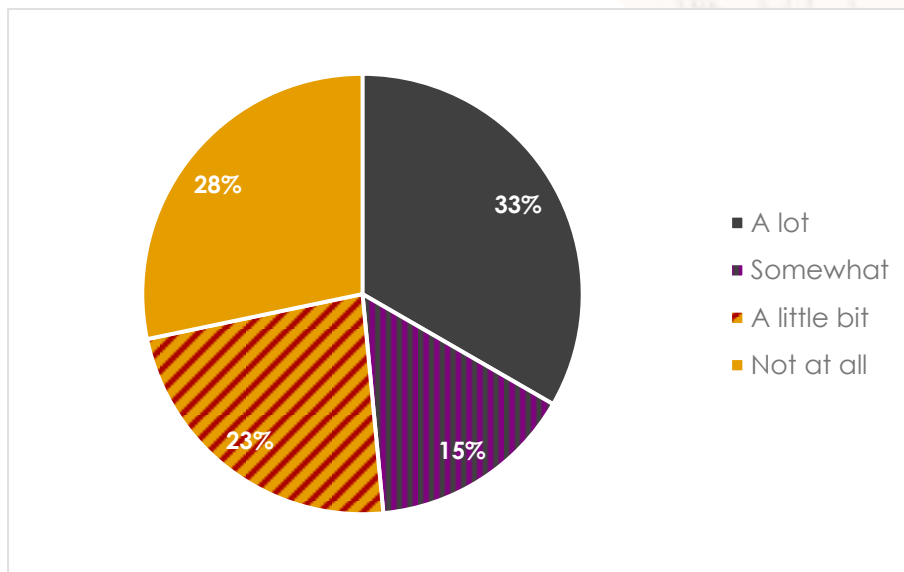
Respondents were asked: *How much do you trust the [national election commission]? (% who say "just a little" or "not at all")*

Figure 11: Perceptions of the election environment | Côte d'Ivoire | 2014



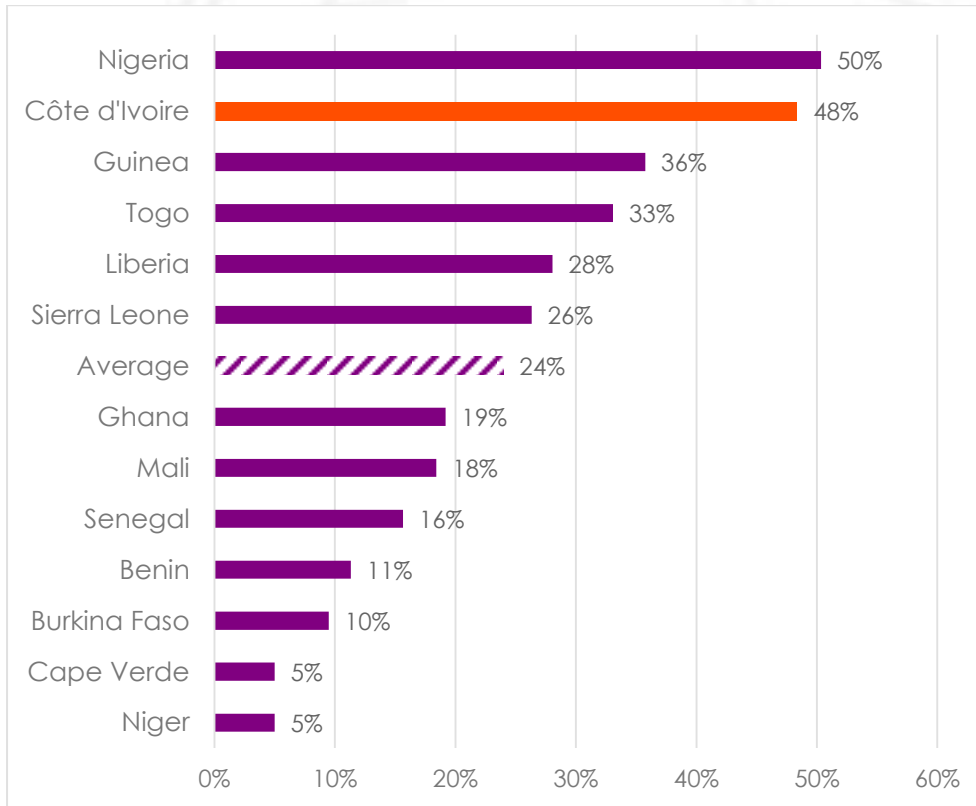
Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often do the following things occur in this country's elections:*
 Voters are bribed?
 Voters are threatened with violence at the polls?
 Opposition candidates are prevented from running for office?
 The media provides fair coverage of all candidates?
 Votes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

Figure 12: Fear of intimidation or violence during election campaigns | Côte d'Ivoire | 2014



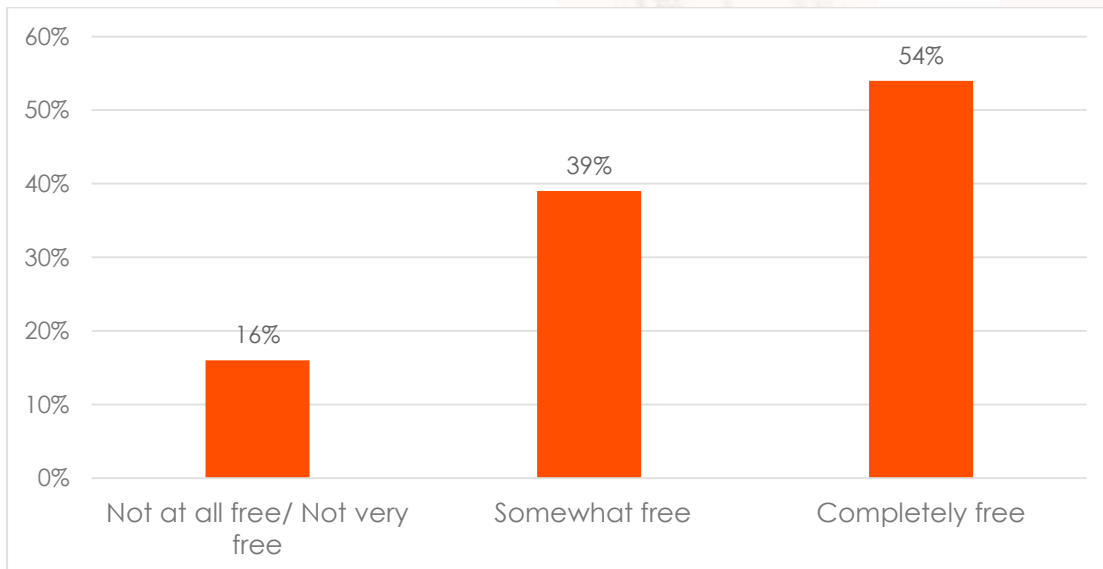
Respondents were asked: *During election campaigns in this country, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence?*

Figure 13: Fear of intimidation or violence during election campaigns | 13 ECOWAS countries | 2014/2015



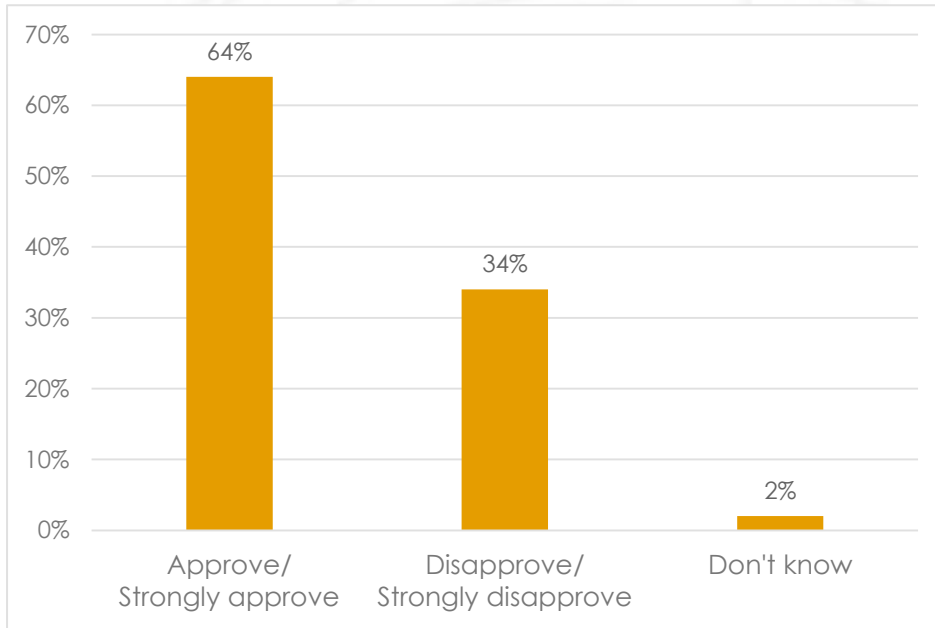
Respondents were asked: *During election campaigns in this country, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")*

Figure 14: Freedom to vote for candidate of one's choice | Côte d'Ivoire | 2014



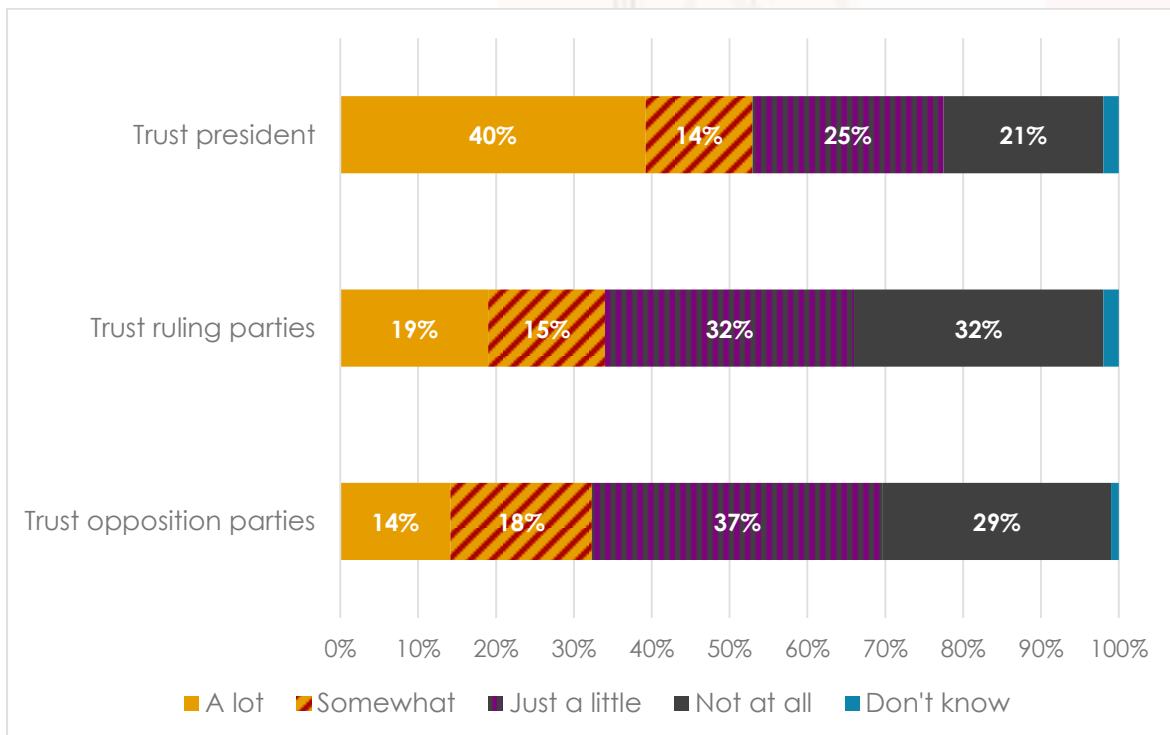
Respondents were asked: *In this country, how free are you to choose who to vote for without feeling pressured?*

Figure 15: Assessment of presidential performance | Côte d'Ivoire | 2014



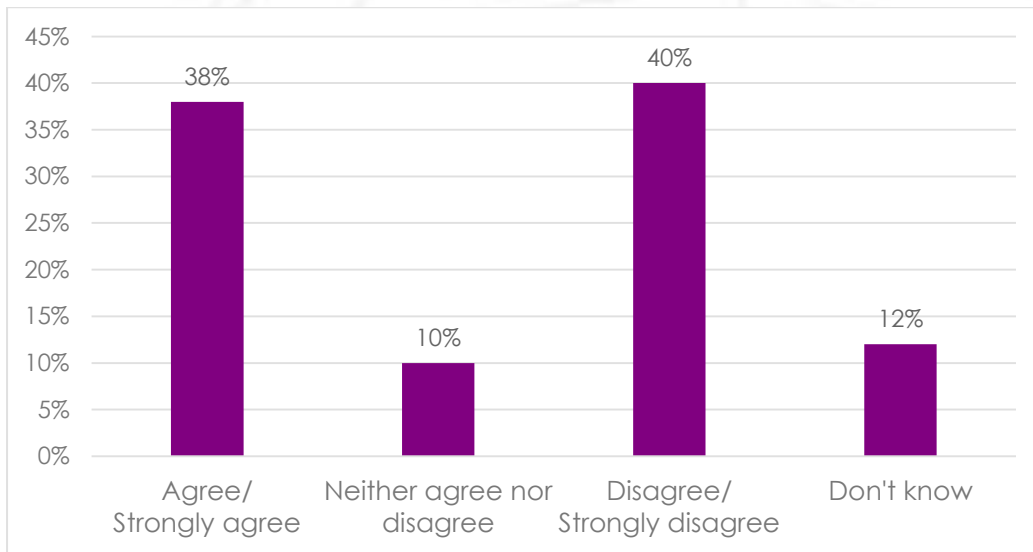
Respondents were asked: Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past 12 months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The president?

Figure 16: Trust in the president, ruling parties, and opposition parties | Côte d'Ivoire | 2014



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The president? The ruling coalition? Opposition political parties?

Figure 17: Opposition parties a viable alternative? | Côte d'Ivoire | 2014



Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: The political opposition in Côte d'Ivoire presents a viable alternative vision and plan for the country?

To further explore this data, please visit Afrobarometer's online data analysis facility at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

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Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

Core support for Afrobarometer Rounds 5 and 6 has been provided by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank.

For more information, please visit www.afrobarometer.org.

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 51 | 19 October 2015