

# VOZES DO POVO:

Guinea-Bissau's First Public Opinion Survey

## Summary of Main Results & Recommendations

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### Disclaimer

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The following text offers a synopsis of the principal findings derived from Guinea-Bissau's first public opinion poll. Further detail on this initiative can be found in the attached PowerPoint, "*Vozes do Povo: A Primeira Pesquisa de Opinião Pública na Guiné-Bissau.*" The survey was based on Afrobarometer questions and methodology, carried out in mid-2018, with a national sample of 1,184 people. Here are seven conclusions made from this study:

1. There is a **general sense of malaise in Guinea-Bissau**, with 82% of its population claiming the country is heading in the wrong direction. While 74% believe the economy is doing bad or very bad. Still, when asked about the future, **people are inclined to be hopeful**. 69% trusted the economy would be better or much better next year.

2. **Though only half of the population could understand the word "democracy," a clear majority identified with values associated with this form of government.** Citizens of Guinea-Bissau agreed on the importance to:

- Protect basic **freedoms of association** (71%) rather than favor government controls (20%).
- Defend the **right to protest** (75%) over state restrictions (18%).
- Hold **regular, free and honest elections** (73%) instead of other forms of leadership selection (22%).
- Maintain a **plurality of parties** (61%) rather than believe parties foment division and are unnecessary (35%).
- Uphold the **president's obligation to respect the rule of law** (66%) rather than not have to abide by laws and court decisions (27%).

Adding to this, the vast majority of people **reject the possibility of an authoritarian regime**, be it a military junta (80%), single-party-led (77%) or an autocratic presidency (82%).

3. The people of Guinea-Bissau perceive their **country offers significant political freedoms** – with 70% claiming citizens are completely free to say what they want and 75% to vote without any pressure. Nonetheless, more than 3 of every 4 inhabitants are **dissatisfied with its democratic process**.

4. The population's **critical view of the country's governance** is sustained by several elements detected in the survey, among them:

- **Precarious living conditions** of the majority of the population. During the last year, 1 out of 4 people had chronic difficulties getting food, while half the population had

serious limitations in accessing drinkable water. Moreover, 38% of the respondents did not finish primary school or received no education at all.

- A ***pervasive feeling of injustice breeds mistrust***. In Guinea-Bissau, 81% of the population believes the distribution of wealth in their country is unjust; and 88% claim their government upholds the interest of a few powerful groups and not those of the people. Interpersonal trust in this country is low, with only 12% feeling they can trust most people. Mistrust in state institutions is generally high as well, with the exception of the armed forces, where distrust levels reached only 34%.
- A discernably ***weak presence of the state in the lives of most people***. In the last year, a majority of citizens had no contact with the courts (86%), police (79%), electricity and water service agencies (78%), and public school staff (62%). All told, 64% of the population said they felt abandoned by the state.
- A ***context of corruption***. This is fueled by high perceptions of corruption among political leaders (59%), Finance Ministry staff (53%), legislators (51%), entrepreneurs (45%), the Prime Minister and his cabinet (44%), magistrates (43%) and governors (42%). By contrast, religious (18%) and traditional (23%) leaders received the lowest marks on corruption. Among citizens who had contact with relevant public institutions, the highest levels of petty corruption were experienced in the courts, where 32% of users claimed to have paid bribes, followed by 28% who said they offered “gifts” to the police.
- A ***perception of power abuse by dominant actors***. Half of the population believes the president ignores both the constitution and National Assembly on a regular basis. Moreover, 88% of the respondents believe that political parties are more interested in serving their own interests than serving the interest of the people (7%).
- ***General dissatisfaction with government*** on a wide range of issues. At least 4 in every 5 citizens said they were dissatisfied with government efforts to create jobs, improve conditions for the poor, provide electricity and water, ensure people have enough food to eat, reduce wealth inequities, manage the economy, maintain roads, and deliver education and health services. Asked what areas should be government priorities, respondents underscored education and health, well above other top concerns: water, electricity and roads.

Rather surprisingly, 60% of the population expressed approval for President José Mario Vaz. Among other factors influencing this score is Guinea-Bissau’s semi-presidential system, which confers powers to the President, but entrusts main government functions to a Prime Minister. In a country with weak institutional norms, the duality of executive power muddles the attribution of blame for government failings.

5. By contrast, *several qualities of Guinean society account for its strength and resilience*. These involve:

- An *egalitarian ethos* that most people would like to see reflected in various dimensions of public life. Underscoring the need to avoid great differences between rich and poor (60%), and preferring common people as leaders (72%) instead of wealthy ones (24%).

- *Support for equal gender rights*. With citizens affirming that women should have the same opportunities as men to be elected to office (78%). Be treated equally (78%) rather than under customary laws (18%). And have the same rights to inherit land as men (85%).

- A *defense of the rule of law and equal treatment before the law*. Agreeing with the principle that people should always obey court decisions (88%), police efforts to uphold the law (84%), and corrupt politicians should go to prison (94%). Most Guineans also agreed with the idea that leaders should not favor their relatives and group (64%), while fewer argued they had an obligation to support them (29%).

- *Strong concern over environmental degradation*. With people stating that illegal logging (94%), abusive fishing practices (90%), plastic trash pollution (84%), the extinction of wild animals (82%) and climate change (82%) were big problems. Respondents also observed that climate change had adversely impacted agriculture in the last ten years (65%).

- *Remarkable social tolerance on matters of inter-religious and ethnic coexistence*. Guinea-Bissau is a country of great ethnic diversity and substantial religious assortment. The largest ethnic groups are the Fula (25%), Balanta (20%), Mandinga (14%), Papel (11%) and Manjaco (10%). Most inhabitants are Muslim (47%), Christian (40%) or Animist (9%). Nine out of 10 Guineans said they would like or not mind having someone of a different religion or ethnic group as neighbors. A large majority felt the same way about immigrants (77%).

- *Broad adherence to national identity*. Guineans, on the whole, feel attached to their country (91%); with only a small minority saying their ethnic identity is stronger than their national one (9%).

6. *Despite the country's political malaise, an expressive part of the population exhibits clear party preferences*. A significant number of citizens identify with the country's founding political party, PAIGC (42%), followed by PRS (21%), and other parties and political movements (7%). Still, many respondents refused to identify who

they would vote for in the upcoming parliamentary elections (26%), while a smaller number indicated they would not vote (5%).

- ***Civil society and communal actors elicit greater confidence.*** Guineans place greater trust in religious leaders (68%), NGOs (65%), news outlets (46%), civil society movements (46%) than in political parties, namely, PAIGC (38%), PRS (29%) and others (14%). Similarly, people feel that village elders (63%), community associations (58%), NGOs (53%), and religious entities (46%) are more helpful to their communities than political parties (17%).

7. The ***international community is generally perceived as an influential force for the good of the country.*** Close to two thirds of the population believe the World Bank, European Union, international NGOs and UN agencies are helpful to Guinea-Bissau. While the European Union and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) are viewed as the most influential foreign actors in the country.

## Recommendations

Based on the assessments made in the final project report we offer the following suggestions, with the hope of stimulating a deeper examination and analysis of the survey results:

- 1) ***The Vozes do Povo data set needs to be explored further.*** Survey results should be calculated by gender, region, place of residency (urban/rural), age group, social status, religion and ethnicity. The use of econometric instruments – correlations, multiple regressions and factorial analysis – could greatly enrich the survey findings. These and other exercises could improve understanding of issues dealing with religious extremism, menace of violence, migration, autocratic sentiments and democratic values. Such knowledge would offer crucial insights for development strategies, democracy promotion and political risk assessments.
- 2) ***Comparative assessments with other countries would enrich understanding on Guinea-Bissau.*** By drawing on the Afrobarometer methodology and questionnaire, *Vozes do Povo* has generated information that can be compared to 37 countries in Africa, and, on corruption metrics, to almost all countries in the world. Piecing and pairing all this data would generate novel insights and literally put Guinea-Bissau on the global map for relevant public opinion data.
- 3) ***Guinea-Bissau would benefit greatly from wider dissemination and use of survey findings.*** This could be accomplished through the preparation of publications and workshops designed to increase familiarity with survey results, foster public conversation over the country's main democratic and development

challenges, encourage strategic use of survey data, and promote empirical-driven policy-making. These activities would also strengthen the social scientific community in this country and improve opportunities for further studies of this kind, and thus enhance project sustainability.

- 4) Survey findings indicate that ***the international community has a crucial role to play in Guinea-Bissau***. This is particularly so on two key concerns. First, helping make sure political disputes are channeled in a peaceful way. Second, supporting the country's development. According to survey respondents, political conflicts are the main threat to stability in this country. The favorable view of international actors, especially those offering development assistance – the EU, World Bank and UN agencies – provides a unique opportunity for constructive leverage.
- 5) Civil society and communal actors have much greater prestige in Guinea-Bissau than the state and political parties. ***Pursuing development strategies in collaboration with non-state actors makes good sense. In doing so, however, one should consider findings that underscore people's expectations for better state services***. Their yearning for public goods, improved delivery and honest administration. Development strategies should find ways of weaving both prospects.
- 6) ***Evidence of great frustration with the quality of political representation and leadership in Guinea-Bissau suggest the need to design strategies and invest resources in activities that can help generate better leaders, over the medium and long run***. These should include a careful assessment of the socialization process and incentive structure that undermine leadership quality. Trainings should draw on alternative pedagogical methods – such as camps and community service projects –, build on positive developments within the country, stir creative ideas, and nurture constructive social energies.
- 7) ***Environmental concerns are widely shared in Guinea-Bissau and could serve as source of motivation for various civic engagements***, particularly among children and youth. Much could be done to bridge the gap between these broader apprehensions and daily practices, such as the disposal of plastic litter and need for charcoal fuel.
- 8) The survey revealed ***various positive attributes of Guinean society that need to be better known and celebrated***. Such public recognitions can help boost confidence and self-esteem. It can also open vistas on which to plan constructive interventions to advance human development, gender equality, environmental care, transparency, democracy and peacebuilding.