



## Africans' Views of International Organizations

Africans live in a globalized world. But are they *aware* of the United Nations and other international organizations? If so, how do they *evaluate* the performance of these organizations?

For the first time in 2002-3, Round 2 Afrobarometer\* surveys included a question on this subject. The exact wording is: "Giving marks out of ten, where 0 is very badly and 10 is very well, how well do you think the following institutions do their jobs? Or haven't you heard enough about the institutions to have an opinion?" The relevant institutions are then listed:

- A. African Union/Organization of African Unity
- B. European Union
- C. United Nations
- D. World Bank
- E. International Monetary Fund
- F. World Trade Organization
- G. Southern African Development Community (SADC)/Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)/East African Community (EAC) (institution varies by region).

At the time of writing, results are available for 7 of the 15 countries in Afrobarometer Round 2. The results refer to representative samples of national populations aged 18 years and older, which are achieved through multistage random selection. The countries are indicated in the box, along with the dates of survey fieldwork, and the size of national samples. The Afrobarometer covers anglophone, francophone and lusophone countries, but cannot be generalized to sub-Saharan Africa as a whole since we emphasize countries that have undertaken political and economic reforms.

Cape Verde	(June 2002)	(n = 1268)
Mozambique	(July 2002)	(n = 1425)
Uganda	(August 2002)	(n = 2400)
South Africa	(September 2002)	(n = 2400)
Ghana	(September 2002)	(n = 1200)
Mali	(November 2002)	(n = 1286)
Senegal	(January 2003)	(n = 1200)

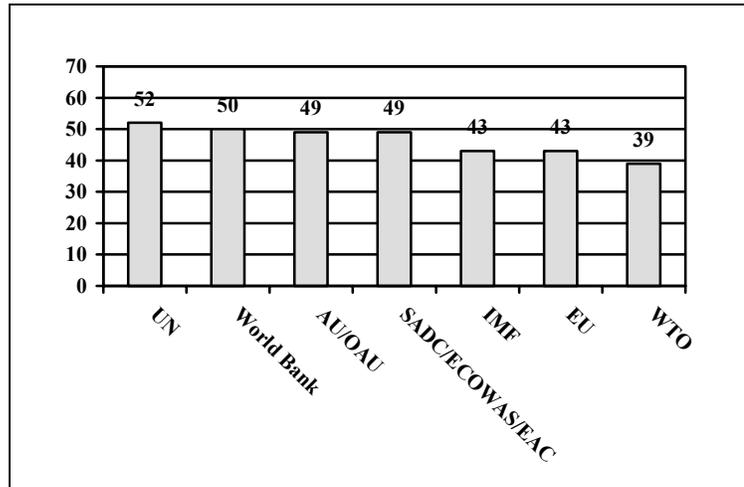
**Total:**  
**7 countries**      2002-3      (N= 11,179)

\* The Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from various African countries. It is coordinated by the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa), the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), and Michigan State University (MSU). When complete, Round 2 surveys will cover 15 countries in the period from mid-2002 to late-2003: Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. Several donors support the Afrobarometer's research, capacity-building and outreach activities, including the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For more information, including reports with complete findings, see:

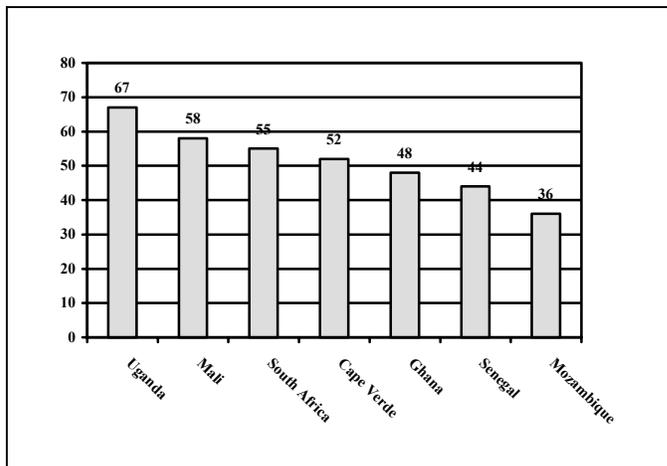
[www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org)

## Popular Awareness of International Organizations is Low

The Africans we interviewed are not keenly aware of international organizations. On average, fewer than half (46 percent) have ever heard of the listed institutions. The most well known body is the United Nations, formed half a century ago in 1948 (52 percent) and the least recognized is the World Trade Organization, recently formed in 1995 (39 percent). Remarkably, only half of all respondents (49 percent) have heard of continental bodies like the African Union (even when referred to in the



questionnaire by its former name, the Organization of African Unity) or the relevant economic union for their region of Africa (like SADC, ECOWAS and the East African Community).



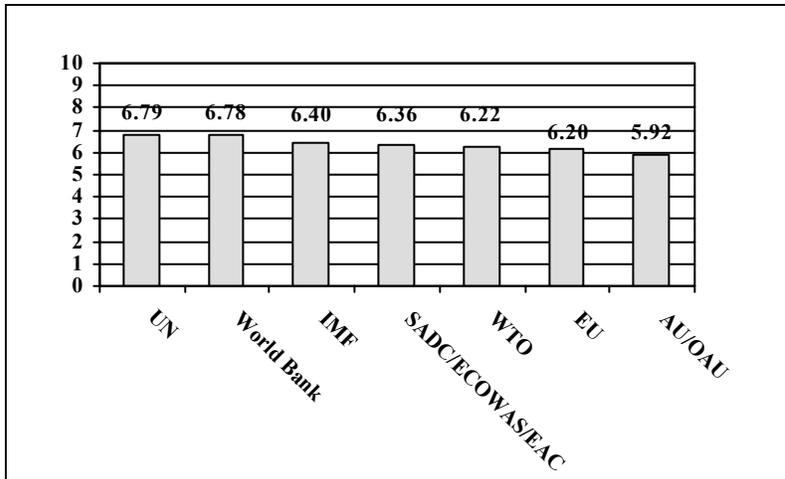
### Ugandans are More Aware of the United Nations than Mozambicans

There is considerable variation in popular awareness of the United Nations, however, across the 7 African countries surveyed. Almost twice as many Ugandans as Mozambicans have heard of the UN (67 versus 36 percent). Malians are generally better informed about international organizations than other Africans, leading the way in name recognition of ECOWAS (65 percent),

the African Union (63 percent), World Bank (63 percent), and IMF (57 percent). This is a somewhat surprising result given low levels of formal education in Mali. In line with their extensive educational needs, however, Mozambicans are consistently the least well informed, with only one quarter recognizing the IMF (27 percent) and WTO (26 percent).

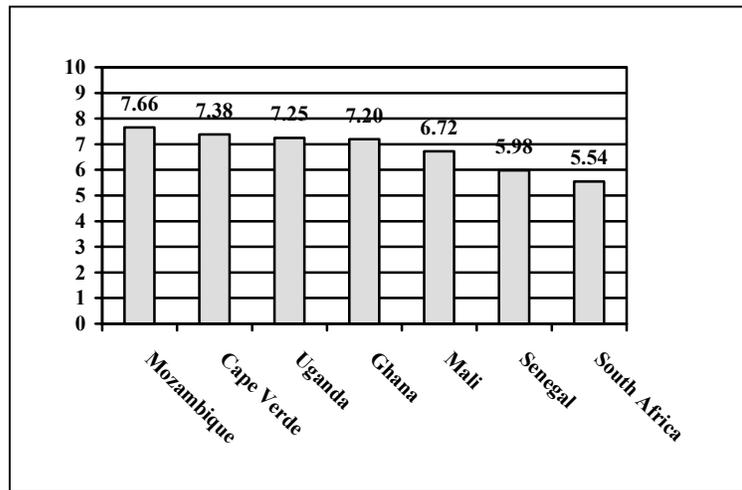
### The UN is Evaluated More Highly than the African Union

Africans who are adequately informed think that international organizations perform quite well. (Note: We did not record evaluations from people who said they did not know enough to venture an opinion). On a scale of zero to 10, the average performance rating is 6.38, a moderately positive score. There is very little variation in the ratings, however, averaging less than one point on this eleven-point scale, between 6.79 for the UN and 5.92 for the AU. This narrow band of variation leads us to suspect that respondents do not differentiate clearly among organizations, giving much the same rating to all bodies. This interpretation is supported by the fact that evaluations across various organizations are highly correlated (e.g., mean  $r = .545$ ) especially between World Bank and IMF ( $r = .794$ ). It is noteworthy, through, that Africans regard the UN, a global presence, in a more positive light than the AU, the premier continental forum.



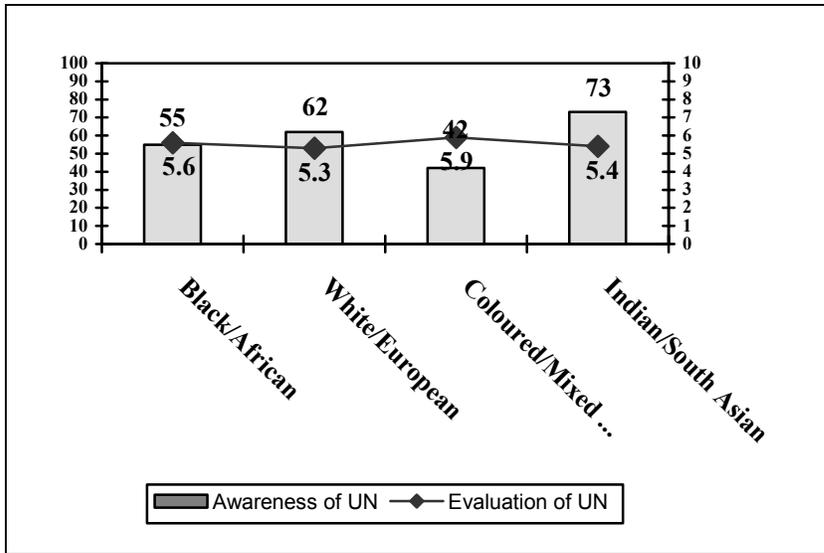
### Higher Awareness Leads to Lower Evaluations

Once evaluations are broken down by country, then differences emerge. Take the UN. We can see that Mozambicans give the UN a much more favorable score (7.66) than do South Africans, who are divided over the issue of whether the UN is doing a good job (5.54). There is an interesting paradox here: the people (e.g., Mozambicans) who know least about the UN give it the highest rating, whereas people who seem relatively well informed (e.g., South Africans) have far more mixed opinions. Of course, the Mozambicans who are familiar with the UN’s program in their country may be granting this organization some well deserved applause; but it is also possible that they may approach this institution in a less critical frame of mind than do their better informed neighbors to the south. Uganda represents the best of both worlds: not only are Ugandans relatively well informed about the UN (67 percent know it) but they also give it an above average performance score (7.25).



### In South Africa, Race Affects Evaluations of International Organizations

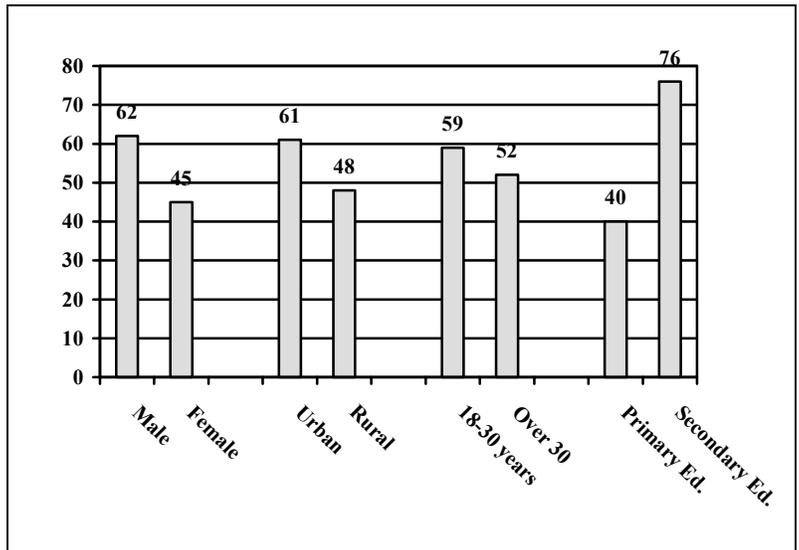
Digging into the South African case, we discover predictably that opinions vary among different racial groups. Awareness of the UN is extremely high among South Africans of Asian origin (73 percent), but very low among mixed race populations (just 43 percent). If nothing else, this seems to suggest a need for programs to inform and educate the “Coloured” community about UN goals and programs. South African blacks are already quite knowledgeable about the UN and evaluate its work positively. But the profile of the country as a whole is strongly influenced by the opinions of white and “Indian” minorities, both of which easily recognize the UN, but have less favorable views of its effectiveness.



### Education, Gender and Habitat Affect Popular Awareness

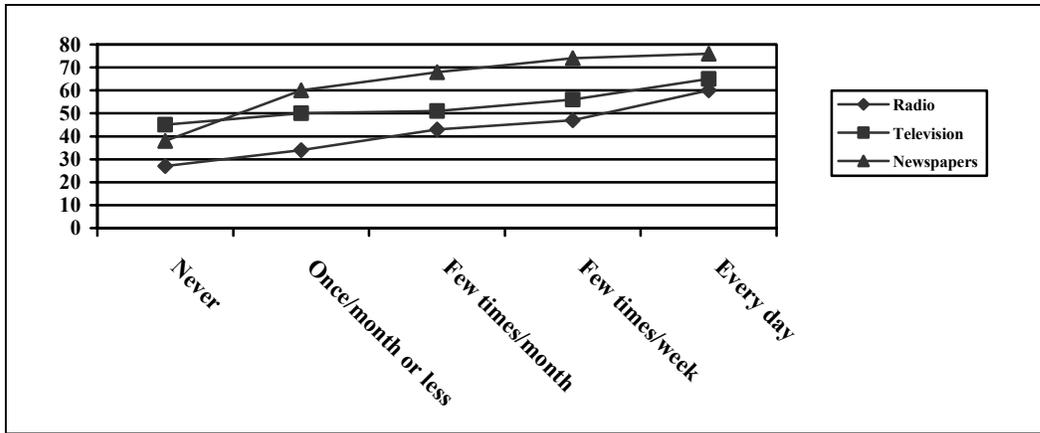
Returning to the full seven-country sample, we also explore whether public opinion is shaped in other ways by the structure of society. Do Africans' views of international organizations derive from gender, age, habitat or education? Starting with awareness of the UN, we find that

they do. Men are significantly more likely than women to have heard of the United Nations (62 versus 45 percent), as are urban as opposed to rural dwellers (61 versus 48 percent). Age also matters to some extent, but the major factor seems to be education: whereas 76 percent of those with some secondary or higher education are familiar with the UN, this attribute is shared by only 40 percent of those with primary education or less. Indeed, once education is controlled, age ceases to be an influential factor affecting international awareness. But, a gender gap remains even after education is taken into account, suggesting that persistent cultural differences distinguish the worldviews of African men and women.



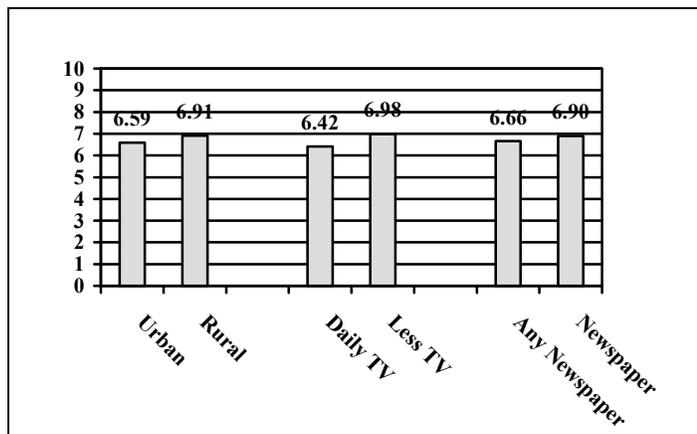
### Exposure to Mass News Media Affects Awareness of UN

Apart from education, awareness of the United Nations is driven by exposure to the mass media. The Afrobarometer asks people how often they get news from radio, television and newspapers. Reflecting the global communications revolution, twice as many Africans now get their daily news from television as from newspapers (33 percent versus 14 percent in these 7 Afrobarometer countries), though most still rely for daily news on the radio (66 percent). Awareness of the UN increases in roughly linear fashion with the frequency that people use each of these media. To the extent that there are any thresholds in these relationships, greater increases in awareness occur as people start reading a newspaper (this is probably a proxy for literacy) and as they move from weekly to daily use of TV and radio. When we weigh education and media exposure as competing catalysts of international awareness, we find the former to be the most powerful, followed by reading a newspaper. As such, the schools and the print media would appear to be the best channels for teaching and learning about the UN in Africa.



### Urban Newspaper Readers are Most Critical of UN Performance

Evaluations of international organizations are harder to explain than mere awareness. Fewer factors impinge on people's judgments of organizational performance, which, as we have seen, manifest less variation anyway. Education, for example, no longer distinguishes degrees of popular approval of the UN's job performance: the well and poorly educated have similar opinions. Instead, evaluations depend more on habitat, with urban folk being more critical than their forgiving country cousins. And thresholds of media use also add explanation: as people start to read newspapers (with any frequency at all), and as they move from occasional to daily viewing of TV news bulletins, they become more critical of UN performance. In other words, we have found a syndrome in which poorly informed rural dwellers are loath to criticize international agencies like the UN, but as urbanites learn from the media, they acquire the information and self-confidence to question the operations of international development agencies. As other Afrobarometer research has shown, these patterns in the formation of public opinion in Africa are similar whether the objects of performance evaluation are international organizations or national governments.



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### The Reputation of the UN Depends on the Performance of National Governments

To push this argument one step further, we find that the public reputation of international organizations is largely beyond their control. The best predictors of the UN's reputation are an index of the performance of government leaders (Pearson's  $r = .200$ ) and an index of the performance of government policies ( $r = .178$ ). Specifically, what matters most are the actions in office of local government councilors ( $r = .158$ ) and the record of the national government at combating crime ( $r = .140$ ). Ordinary people infer close connections between local, national, and international arenas because they see UN programs in their country being administered through official channels. But the implications of this popular worldview is sobering, since the reputation of international agencies is thereby captive to the capability of indigenous institutions, whose performance often leaves a lot to be desired. Thus, if international organizations are to boost their standings among Africans, they have little choice but to assist local leaders and national governments to improve the quality of their own governance.