

Deepening understanding of voluntary civic engagement: Findings from an Afrobarometer supplemental survey in Benin

UNV Innovation Challenge Phase II | Richard Houessou and Carolyn Logan

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) capture the ambitions and aspirations of citizens across Africa and the world to build better lives for themselves and their children. The goals are ambitious and demanding. Achieving them will require the effort and investment not just of governments, but also of ordinary citizens, acting alone and collectively.

Afrobarometer has been able to document the fact that ordinary Africans are ready and willing to take action to realize these ambitions (Gyimah-Boadi & Asunka, 2021). Citizen action takes place in many forms and forums, including organizing and working together on shared goals, providing mutual support and assistance, campaigning or advocating for shared needs, and engaging with governments, making demands on them and holding them to account. While some citizens may become involved in a formal capacity, as through paid employment with non-governmental advocacy or service organizations, in government, or with other service providers, large numbers will – and must – be engaged in a voluntary capacity.

And they are. Examples abound of citizens joining together voluntarily to do everything from fighting corruption in the management of local natural resources in Ghana (Mohammed, 2016) to initiating local awareness-raising and relief campaigns in response to COVID-19 in Cameroon, Kenya, South Africa, and South Sudan (Wickranmanayake, 2020).

Afrobarometer's Innovation Challenge Phase I report provided an extensive analysis of *who* participates in voluntary action in Africa (Logan, Sanny, & Han, 2020). Among its insights into voluntary participation, it generated profiles of the kinds of individuals who are most likely to participate as well as a deeper understanding of some of the individual- and country-level factors that shape voluntary participation. However, many questions about forms and formats of this participation, issues that participants seek to address with their volunteerism, and motivators and constraints remained unanswered.

Yet fostering volunteerism requires an understanding of its scope and determinants that goes beyond profiling users. We need to understand not just who engages but how, how much, where, and why. By learning about the ways in which people are already engaging every day in these critical but uncompensated contributions in pursuit of the public good, we can better understand how voluntary engagement can be measured, supported, and promoted. This highlights the need to gather and analyze additional data.

New research methods available to Afrobarometer offered an opportunity to delve deeper into these questions about voluntary civic engagement and means for supporting and promoting it to advance the SDGs. With the support of the United Nations Volunteers (UNV)

Innovation Challenge Fund Phase II, Afrobarometer has undertaken a supplemental survey, described in the next section, of 550 respondents in Benin to explore all aspects of their voluntary civic engagement in greater depth. This report presents the findings of that survey, providing insights on key questions such as: i) the extent of voluntary civic engagement in terms of time commitment; ii) the primary sectors in which engagement occurs; and iii) key motivators and constraints on voluntary engagement. In addition to helping us quantify the contributions of voluntary civic engagement, our findings will suggest priorities for interventions to overcome constraints to further engagement.

Background on Afrobarometer's pilot supplemental survey

During Phase I of the United Nations Volunteers Innovation Challenge in 2020, Afrobarometer explored its enormous body of existing public opinion data on voluntary civic engagement. Afrobarometer used the data to develop descriptive profiles of African citizens who participate in voluntary civic engagement and conducted statistical analysis to identify key drivers of engagement at both the individual and country levels. These findings served as the basis for recommendations for actions to promote and increase voluntary engagement.

Among challenges in the initial analysis, however, were limitations on the scope of the available data from standard Afrobarometer surveys. Existing Afrobarometer data could reveal whether individual respondents had participated in voluntary civic engagement, but not why, in which forms, on which issues, how much time they spent, or which barriers they faced. For Phase II of the Innovation Challenge, Afrobarometer therefore proposed a modest supplemental data collection and analysis effort to explore some of these questions in greater depth.

The current juncture offered an opportunity to pilot a data collection approach that seems especially well suited to filling gaps like this in our knowledge about volunteerism. Space on standard Afrobarometer survey instruments is in high demand, and once the standard questionnaire for a round has been developed, there is little flexibility to explore specific issues in greater depth. So capturing more in-depth data on volunteerism via a standard Afrobarometer survey was not a viable option.

However, due to restrictions that the COVID-19 pandemic placed on face-to-face survey fieldwork, Afrobarometer has begun developing the capacity to conduct phone surveys to complement – though not to replace – its face-to-face surveys. Phone surveys may be used in several different contexts, but one new approach Afrobarometer is testing that seems well suited to the data needs of the Innovation Challenge Fund is a supplemental follow-up phone survey. These surveys are conducted with respondents who have already participated in a standard Afrobarometer face-to-face survey and who have agreed to be contacted again by phone to participate in follow-up surveys. Supplemental surveys offer the opportunity to collect additional in-depth data on selected topics at a modest cost and with greater flexibility than standard Afrobarometer face-to-face surveys allow.

Thus, for Phase II of the Innovation Challenge, Afrobarometer piloted a supplemental survey in Benin. Benin conducted its regular Round 8 Afrobarometer survey with 1,200 respondents in November/December 2020. At the end of that survey, 754 individuals agreed to participate in follow-up interviews and provided mobile phone contact information.

With support from an Innovation Challenge Fund Phase II grant, Afrobarometer developed a specialized questionnaire on voluntary civic engagement and conducted a follow-up phone survey with as many of these respondents as possible (we reached 550) to explore their participation (or lack thereof) in voluntary civic engagement in greater depth. For those respondents who reported that they have been civically engaged, Afrobarometer collected additional data on the primary sectors of engagement, the time spent engaged in these activities, as well as the motivators for and constraints on engagement. For those who were

not involved in voluntary civic engagement activities, Afrobarometer asked about constraints on engagement and factors that motivate or demotivate participation.

This report presents the findings of this survey, including sector and contributor profiles, time profiles that quantify the overall contributions of voluntary civic engagement, and findings on gender profiles and related issues. The report closes by using the findings on motivators and constraints to extend and deepen the list of recommendations made in the Phase I report regarding how to foster additional voluntary engagement.

Key findings

Keeping in mind that this supplemental survey should not be regarded as nationally representative (as described in more detail in the next section) but rather as indicative of patterns in Benin specifically, a summary of the key findings of this analysis includes the following:

- More than one-third (37%) out of 550 respondents (n=204) reported participating in at least 321 voluntary associations.
- The SDGs/sectors with the highest level of engagement were:
 - SDG10: Reduced inequality
 - SDG3: Good health and well-being
 - SDG12: Responsible consumption and production
 - SDG1: No poverty
- We estimate that active individuals devote an average of 3.0 hours per week to voluntary associations, equivalent to an average of roughly 1.1 hours per week across all respondents.
- In addition, 313 respondents reported volunteering as individuals, rather than in groups, averaging an additional 1.4 hours per week per volunteer, or an average of 0.8 hours per week across all respondents, for a total average of 1.9 hours per person per week spent on volunteering.
- Volunteering has both public and private benefits. The primary motivations that respondents cited for their involvement were altruistic (63%), relating to helping others in the community and caring about issues. But one in three (31%) cited more personal motives, such as learning new skills and pursuing opportunities for social interaction.
- For those who were engaged in civic groups, the biggest challenge they faced was lack of time. But other issues, including lack of voice or perceived impact, can also present challenges for some volunteers.
- Although respondents reported that most groups contained both genders, they appear to gravitate toward engaging primarily with others of their own gender. This is especially true for women.
- For current non-participants, the most commonly cited reasons for not participating were lack of time (27%) and lack of interest or perceived lack of importance of the issues these groups address (33%). But not knowing of groups to join was also one of the mostly commonly cited impediments to engagement (25%). Many who were not engaged reported past engagement in voluntary associations as well as interest in participating in the future, so there is a large additional pool of potential volunteers.

- A majority of all respondents (both active volunteers and those who were not engaged) saw voluntary associations as important players in community development.
- A sizeable majority (65%) said the government is generally supportive of the work of voluntary organizations, but 15% believed that the government discourages these groups from engaging.
- The factors most strongly associated with voluntary engagement are indicators of political engagement such as access to news, interest in politics, and even affiliation with a political party. Political engagement does not compete with voluntary engagement for people's time and attention, but instead seems to reinforce it.
- When controlling for an array of factors, gender does not affect engagement. But poorer individuals tend to be more engaged, and more educated individuals tend to be somewhat less engaged.

Methodology: Sampling and data collection

Sampling

Regular Afrobarometer face-to-face surveys are based on nationally representative samples. However, there is no guarantee that the sample in a follow-up supplemental survey will be fully representative, for a variety of reasons.

First, not all respondents in the original survey have access to a cell phone and are therefore able to participate in a follow-up survey. In the Round 8 survey in Benin, 82% of respondents said that they personally own a cell phone, and another 11% reported having access to a cell phone through someone else in their household. This approximates continental averages (83% and 8%, respectively) and represents reasonably good coverage. But it still means that roughly 7% of the population is completely excluded from the follow-up survey, and another 11% have uncertain ability to participate. This is likely to bias the sample of any phone survey at least slightly, because those with least access to cell phones will not be evenly distributed across all segments of the population in terms of age, gender, education, economic status, and urban-rural location. Those without phones are more likely to be among the most marginalized members society, i.e. the poorest, least educated, rural women.

The coverage of the sample will be further limited by the fact that not all respondents who provided contact information can actually be reached for a follow-up interview, and not all of those who are reached are actually willing or able to participate when they receive a call. In the Afrobarometer Round 8 survey in Benin, 754 of the 1,200 respondents said they were willing to be interviewed again and provided contact numbers. After extensive efforts – including a minimum of five attempts to call up to three contact numbers provided by each respondent – Afrobarometer was able to conduct interviews with 550 individuals for this supplemental survey.

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic distribution of the samples for the original Round 8 survey and for this AB/UNV.II supplemental survey. Despite the above impediments, the table shows that *on most* indicators, the two samples are reasonably well matched. The supplemental survey sample is biased modestly toward middle-aged respondents and away from those with no formal education, while the match with regard to poverty levels is quite close.

The main difference arises with regard to gender balance. Standard Afrobarometer samples are distributed evenly between women (50%) and men (50%). However, in the supplemental survey, two-thirds (66%) of the respondents were men. Several factors explain this. One of the

most important is likely the digital gap in Benin. For example, as noted, 82% of Beninois report owning their own mobile phone, but there is a sizeable gender gap: 89% of men own their own phone, compared to 75% of women. Other factors may also contribute, including possible gender differences in the willingness to take a call from an unknown number or participate in an interview over the phone rather than in person. Afrobarometer will continue to explore these differences as it experiments with this methodology and studies its effectiveness. But the gender imbalance in the sample should be kept in mind when reviewing any aggregate results. Where gender differences are most relevant, the findings will be disaggregated between men and women.

Table 1: Comparison of sample distribution in Round 8 standard survey and follow-up phone survey | Benin | 2020-2021

	AB Round 8 sample	AB/UNV.II survey sample
Gender		
Men	50%	66%
Women	50%	34%
Location		
Urban	48%	43%*
Rural	52%	57%*
Lived poverty		
No lived poverty	2%	1%
Low lived poverty	21%	18%
Moderate lived poverty	40%	42%
High lived poverty	37%	38%
Education		
No formal education	34%	25%
Primary	24%	28%
Secondary	32%	36%
Post-secondary	11%	11%
Age		
18-35 years	59%	54%
36-55 years	30%	47%
Over 55 years	11%	9%

*Defined by respondent rather than based on census as in Round 8

As shown in Table 2, the regional distribution of respondents is also reasonably well matched between the two surveys. The biggest gap is the small AB/UNV.II sample achieved in Alibori Department, leaving it significantly under-represented in the follow-up survey.

Table 2: Comparison between face-to-face survey and follow-up phone survey
| Benin | 2020-2021

Department	AB R8 survey		AB/UNV.II survey	
	Number of respondents	Frequency	Number of respondents	Frequency
Alibori	93	8%	13	2%
Atacora	85	7%	46	8%
Atlantique	178	15%	71	13%
Borgou	135	11%	52	10%
Collines	84	7%	45	8%
Couffo	83	7%	48	9%
Donga	64	5%	24	4%
Littoral	99	8%	51	9%
Mono	61	5%	34	6%
Ouémé	140	12%	72	13%
Plateau	76	6%	31	6%
Zou	102	9%	63	12%
Total	1200	100%	550	100%

Source: Afrobarometer Round 8 (2020) and UNV data (2021)

In sum, despite limitations, we find that the sample profile in the supplemental survey suggests a reasonably good distribution that matches the profile of Beninese society as a whole relatively closely in most respects. The notable exception of the gender distribution can be overcome by focusing on the disaggregated results where necessary. Thus we are confident that although they are not nationally representative, the findings of this supplemental survey can reliably offer an opportunity to develop greater depth of understanding of voluntary civic engagement in Beninese society, albeit without the same level of statistical reliability produced in a standard Afrobarometer survey.

Data collection

Afrobarometer developed a dedicated questionnaire for this supplemental AB/UNV.II survey that focused on identifying who participates in voluntary organizations, what kinds of organizations (i.e. which sectors) they are involved in, how much time they invest, what roles they play, and what constraints they face in participation. The instrument also explored reasons that non-participants do not engage and captured attitudes across all respondents regarding the role of voluntary organizations in meeting community needs and related issues.

The survey was conducted by the Afrobarometer national partner in Benin, Innovant Recherche en Economie et Gouvernance (IREG). IREG organized a two-day training (30-31 August 2021) for 16 enumerators. On the first day, interviewers were trained on the

methodology and the French version of the questionnaire. The second day included training in electronic data capture (EDC). The IREG team programmed the questionnaire for electronic data capture using Survey Solutions software (see <https://surveysolutions.com>), a World Bank platform. Enumerators also worked with the local language translations of the questionnaire and conducted pre-tests. Data collection lasted nine days, 3-11 September 2021.

Figure 1: AB/UNV.II supplemental phone survey training | Cotonou, Benin | 2021



Participants in the training
 Source: IREG

Enumerator conducting an interview

As noted, during the Round 8 surveys, willing respondents were able to provide up to three contact numbers. During AB/UNV.II data collection, each of the phone numbers collected in the face-to-face survey was attempted at least five times, when necessary, in an effort to reach every willing respondent.

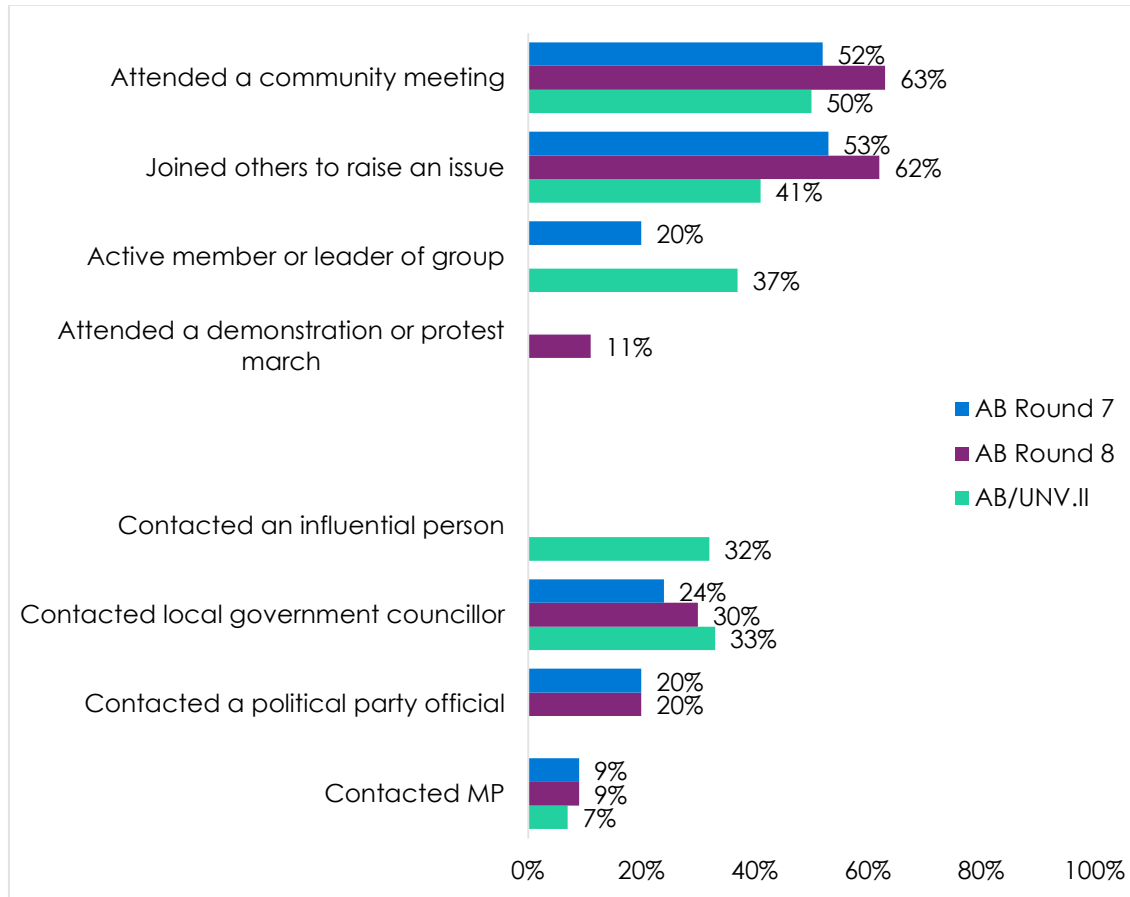
The IREG team designed several strategies to ensure data quality. These include a high-frequency check using STATA software and back checks via phone calls made by supervisors to ensure that enumerators had correctly captured the respondents' information and responses. After data collection, the cleaning syntaxes were developed using STATA.

Levels of participation

A core goal of this survey was to investigate to what extent ordinary Beninois were involved in voluntary associations or community groups in the preceding year.

Overall, 37% of respondents (204 respondents) reported participating in one or more voluntary associations or community groups (Figure 2). This is higher than the 20% measured in the Afrobarometer Round 7 survey and reported in the Afrobarometer Phase 1 report (Logan, Sanny, & Han, 2020). But it is consistent with generally higher levels of participation in Benin reported in the Round 8 survey compared to Round 7. Rates of contacting local leaders, attending community meetings, and joining others to raise an issue all went up between the two rounds. The AB/UNV.II survey captured somewhat mixed levels in comparison. Rates of attending community meetings and joining others to raise issues were down somewhat, but rates of contacting local leaders and of participating in community groups – the main indicator of interest here – were the highest recorded in any of the three surveys. It is possible that people who are active in their community may have been somewhat more willing to agree to participate in follow-up surveys.

Figure 2: Modes of civic participation, AB Round 7 / AB Round 8 / AB/UNV.II | Benin
 | 2017-2021

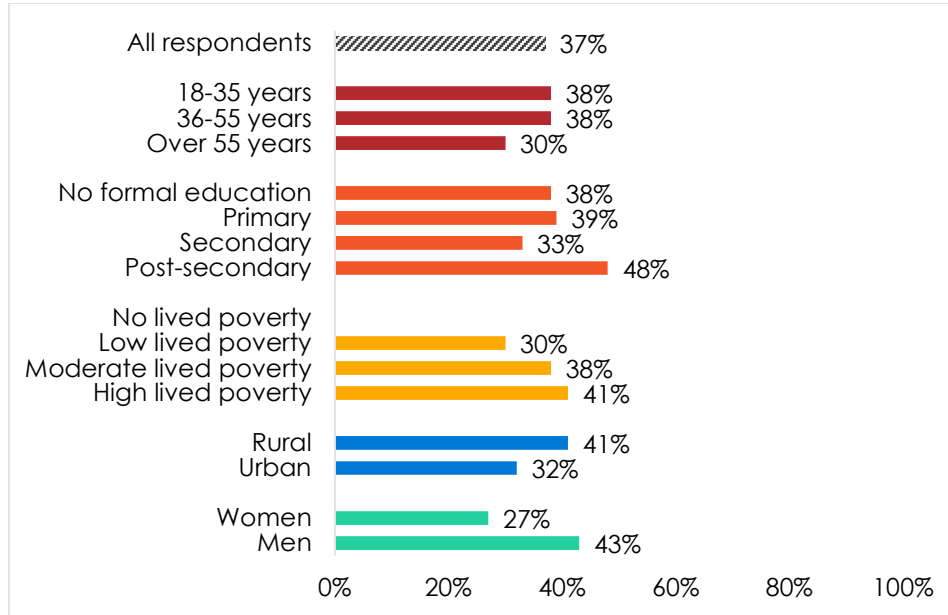


Respondents were asked:

Now I am going to read out a list of groups that people join or attend. For each one, could you tell me whether you are an official leader, an active member, an inactive member, or not a member? Some other voluntary association or community group? (% "official leader" or "active member") (Note: The other group asked about was "religious group that meets outside of regular worship services," so engagement in religious organizations is not captured by this indicator.) 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? Participated in a demonstration or protest march? (% who say "once or twice," "several times," or "often") During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views: A member of Parliament? A local government councillor? A political party official? An influential person? (% who say "only once," "a few times," or "often")

The profile of respondents who participate in voluntary associations, the key target of this study, is shown in Figure 3. Men and more educated respondents were substantially more likely to report participation, but so were those with high lived poverty and those who live in rural areas. Older respondents were somewhat less likely to report participation. These findings are all consistent with those across 34 countries from Round 7 reported in the Phase I report, with the exception of age.

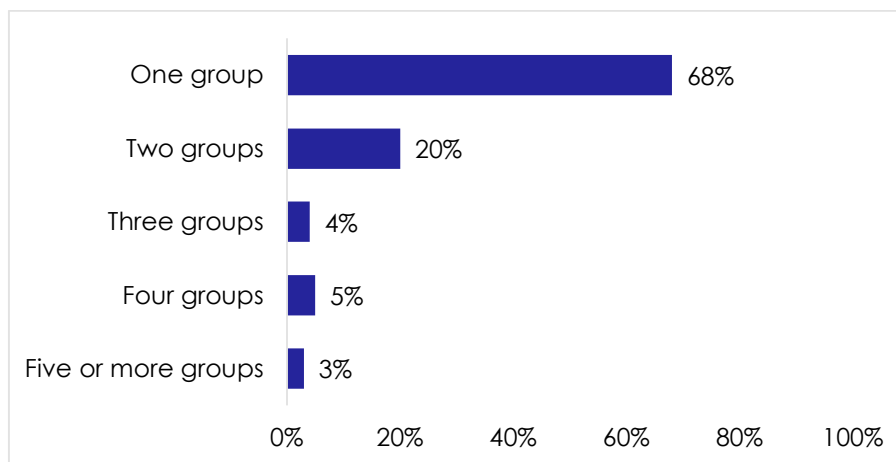
Figure 3: Participation in voluntary associations (base = 550 respondents) | Benin | 2021



Respondents were asked: In the past year, have you participated in any voluntary associations or community groups? (% "yes") **Note:** There were too few respondents with "no lived poverty" to report this category.

Among the participants who were involved in groups, 68% (138 respondents) reported participating in one group, 20% (40 respondents) in two groups, and 13% (25 respondents) in three or more groups (Figure 4). In total, 204 respondents reported participating in at least 321 groups. More detailed assessments of the nature of these groups, respondents' time invested, and related questions are presented in the following section.

Figure 4: Number of groups among active participants (base = 204 active participants) | Benin | 2021



Respondents who said they participated in a voluntary association or community group were asked: How many voluntary associations or community groups have you participated in during the past year?

What does “participation” in voluntary associations look like?

To explore “participation” in voluntary associations, we asked the 204 respondents active in such associations for details about the group they participated in the most. After that set of questions was complete, those who participated in more than one group were asked the same series of questions about their second-most-important group and, where applicable, their third-most-important group. We asked respondents to provide details on a maximum of three groups. Questions focused on the purpose/sector of the group, the amount of time spent, leadership and gender composition and roles, and related questions.

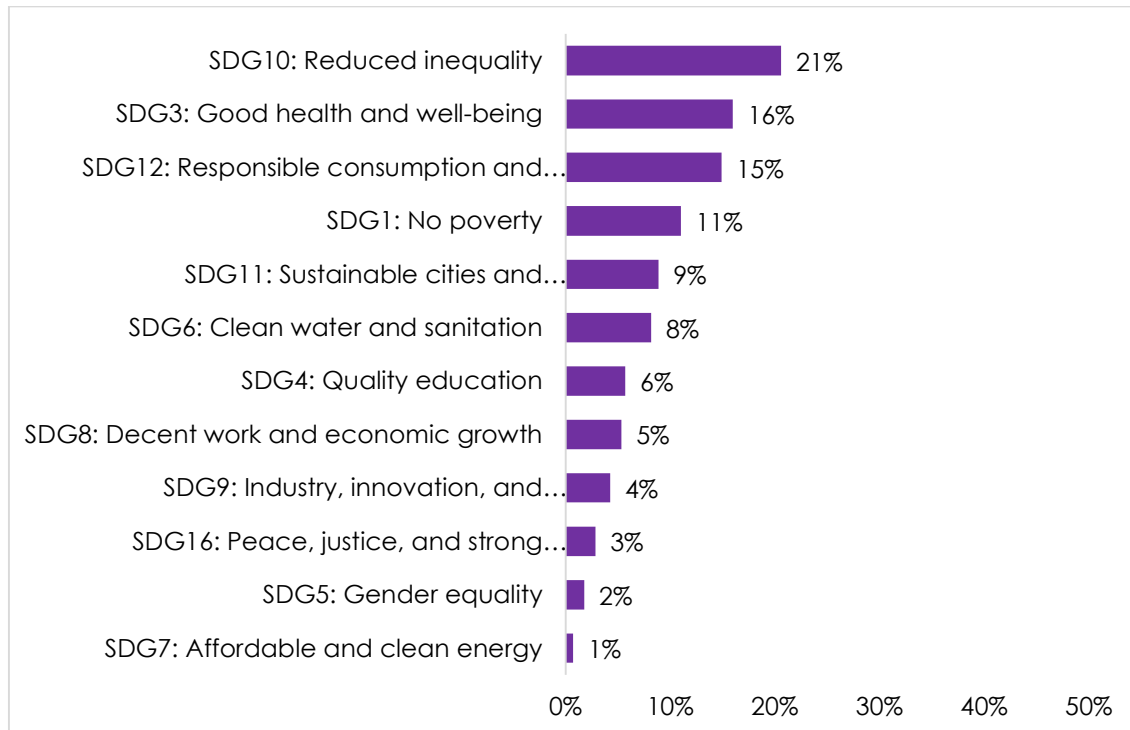
In this way, we collected information on respondent participation in a total of 296 groups. Details on these “group participation cases” are reported below.

Types of groups

Beninois are engaged in a wide array of voluntary groups focused on addressing many different priorities. We asked respondents to describe, in their own words, the primary purpose of each group they were involved in. We then categorized the responses based on which of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) the group was most closely aligned with.

As shown in Figure 5, more than one in five groups (21%) aimed at addressing social issues and reducing inequality (SDG10). Groups focused on health (SDG3) were the second-most-common (16%), followed by those aligned with responsible consumption and production (SDG12), such as producers’ associations and marketing groups.

Figure 5: Primary sectors of voluntary groups, by SDG (base = 296 participation cases) | Benin | 2021



Respondents who said they participated in a voluntary association or community group were asked:
What is issue the group deals with?

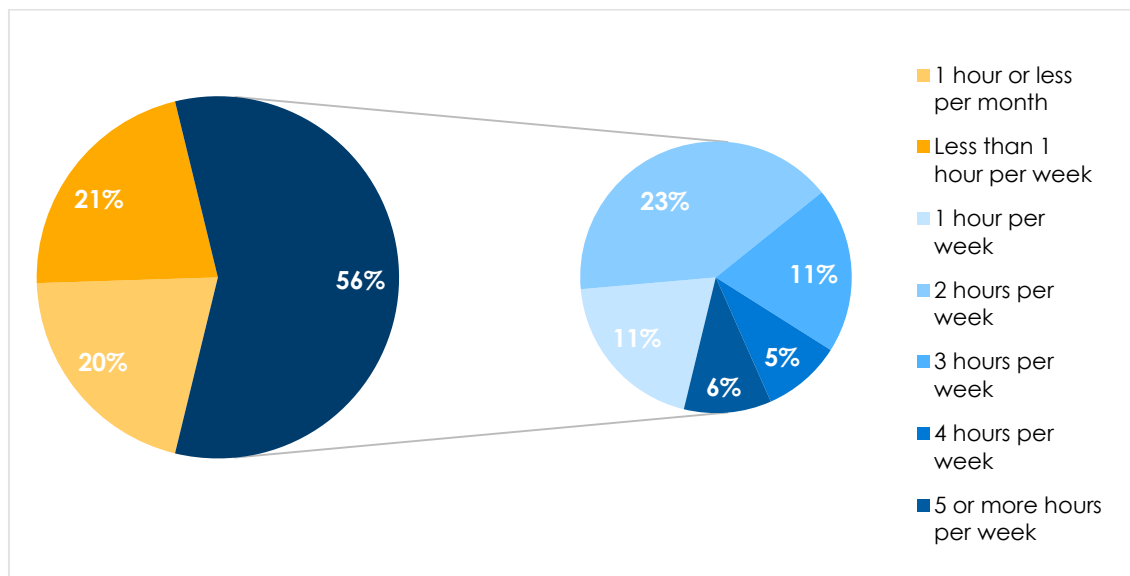
About one in 10 groups were aimed at tackling poverty (SDG1), creating sustainable cities and communities (SDG11), and clean water and sanitation (SDG6).

Time commitment

One key goal of voluntarism studies is to improve measures of how much time ordinary citizens commit to volunteering. We asked respondents how much time they normally spent working with each of the groups they engaged with. Time commitments vary widely. At the low end, in 20% of participation cases, respondents reported involvement of one hour or less per month. Another 21% reported engagement of less than an hour per week (Figure 6).

But 56% of cases involved participation of an hour or more per week. In these cases, we asked respondents for further details about the average number of hours per week. We found that among this most active group, one in five (20%) reported one hour per week (11% of all participation cases), 41% reported two hours per week (23% of all cases), 19% reported three hours (11% of all cases), 9% reported four hours (5% of all cases), and 11% reported five hours or more per week (6% of all cases).

Figure 6: Time commitment to voluntary associations (base = 296 participation cases) | Benin | 2021



Respondents were asked: Thinking about all the things you do with this group, please tell me whether you participate one hour or less per month, less than an hour per week, or an hour or more per week? [If response is "an hour or more per week":] In a normal week, can you tell me about how many hours you are involved with this group?

We can use these numbers to generate rough estimates of the average amount of time that participating individuals spend and the average amount of time spent volunteering across all individuals. From a pool of 550 respondents, with 204 participating in voluntary groups, we can estimate a total of roughly 594 hours per week of voluntarism and an average of roughly three hours per week for each volunteering respondent, or roughly 1.1 hours per week per person on average across all respondents. Given the high levels of participation reported in this sample relative to nationally representative samples as discussed above, this may over-estimate voluntary engagement to a modest degree. But these data nonetheless offer rough baselines regarding overall participation levels in Beninese society.

We also note that a large majority of volunteering respondents said they would like to spend more time volunteering in the future, including 50% who said they would like to spend “much more” time and 32% who would engage “somewhat more.” Only 8% thought they would spend less time engaging with voluntary or community groups in the future.

Commitments to groups also tend to be relatively long term. We asked respondents how long they had been a member of each association, and the most frequent response was more than four years (28%). Another 18% said two to four years, and 21% said one to two years. So two-thirds of participation cases represent groups that respondents have engaged with for at least one year. Another 9% said they didn't know, and uncertainty is more likely when participation has been relatively long term. Just one-fifth (22%) of cases involved participation of less than a year.

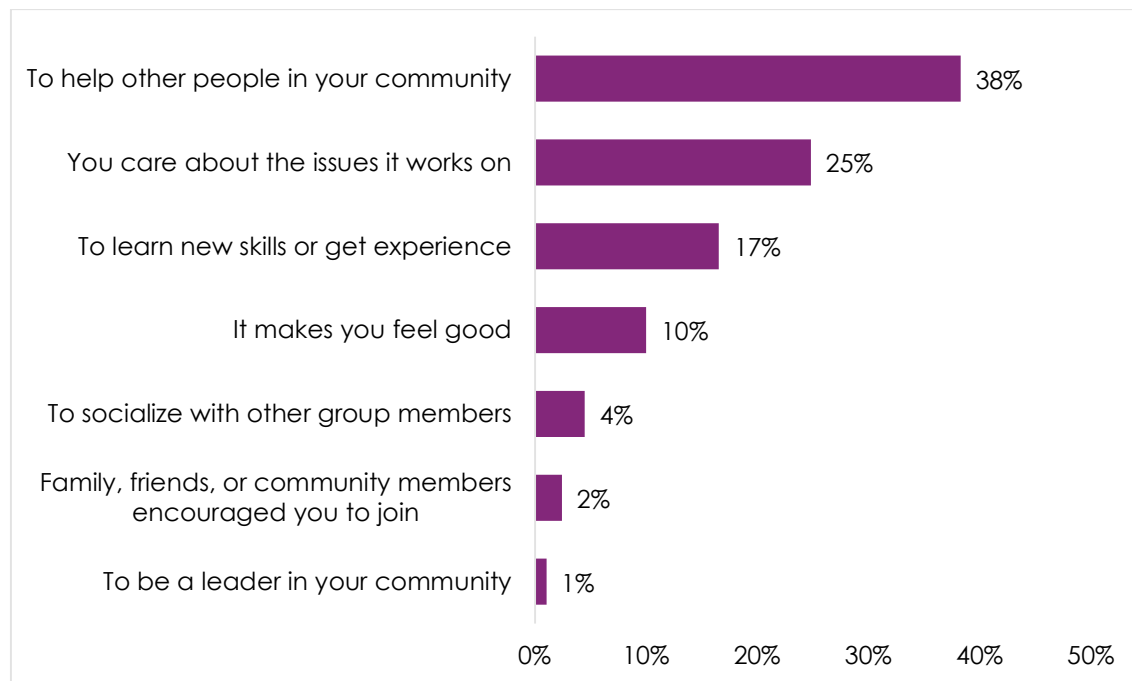
Motivations and challenges

What motivates people to join voluntary organizations? And what kind of support or discouragement do they get from their families and from local government?

For each group they participated with, we asked respondents about the main reason they engage with the group. The most common reason was to help other people in their community (38% of participation cases), followed by “[caring] about the issues the group works on” (25%). Thus, nearly two-thirds (63%) expressed primarily altruistic motives for their participation (Figure 7).

But some people have more personal motives as well: 17% of cases identified a desire to learn new skills or to gain experience, 10% said it just makes them feel good, and 4% are there primarily for the social interaction. A desire to be a community leader (1%) and encouragement or pressure from friends or family (2%) were only cited by a handful of participants.

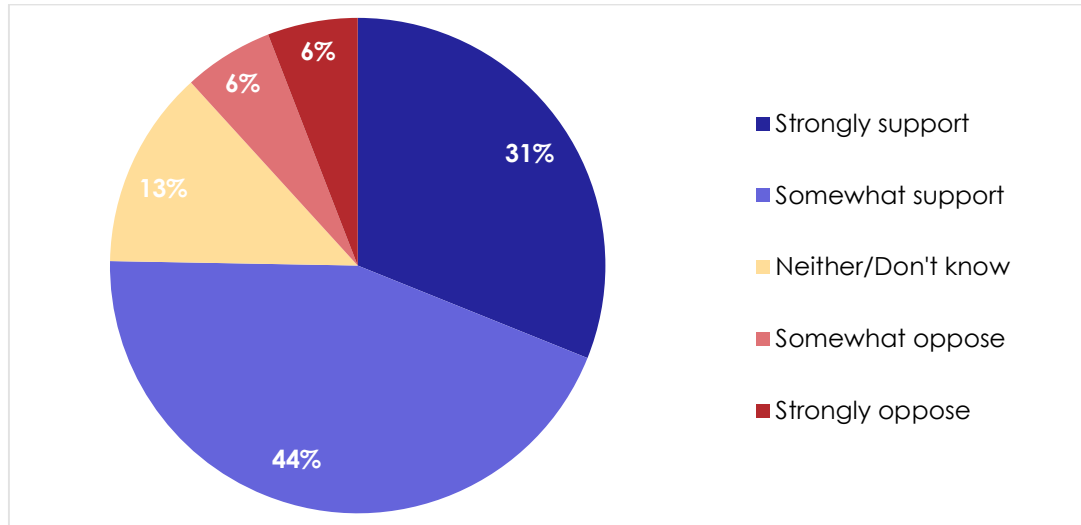
Figure 7: Main reasons to work with voluntary associations (base = 296 participation cases) | Benin | 2021



Respondents were asked: *What is the main reason that you work with this group?*

An overwhelming majority (96%) of those who participate in voluntary associations or community groups said their families support their participation in these groups, including 84% of men and 78% of women who said their families “strongly support” their engagement. Three-quarters (75%) reported that local government officials are generally supportive, but that includes just 31% who considered government officials “strongly supportive” (Figure 8). One in ten (12%) said their local government actually opposes the work of voluntary groups.

Figure 8: Local government support for work of voluntary associations (base = 204 active participants) | Benin | 2021



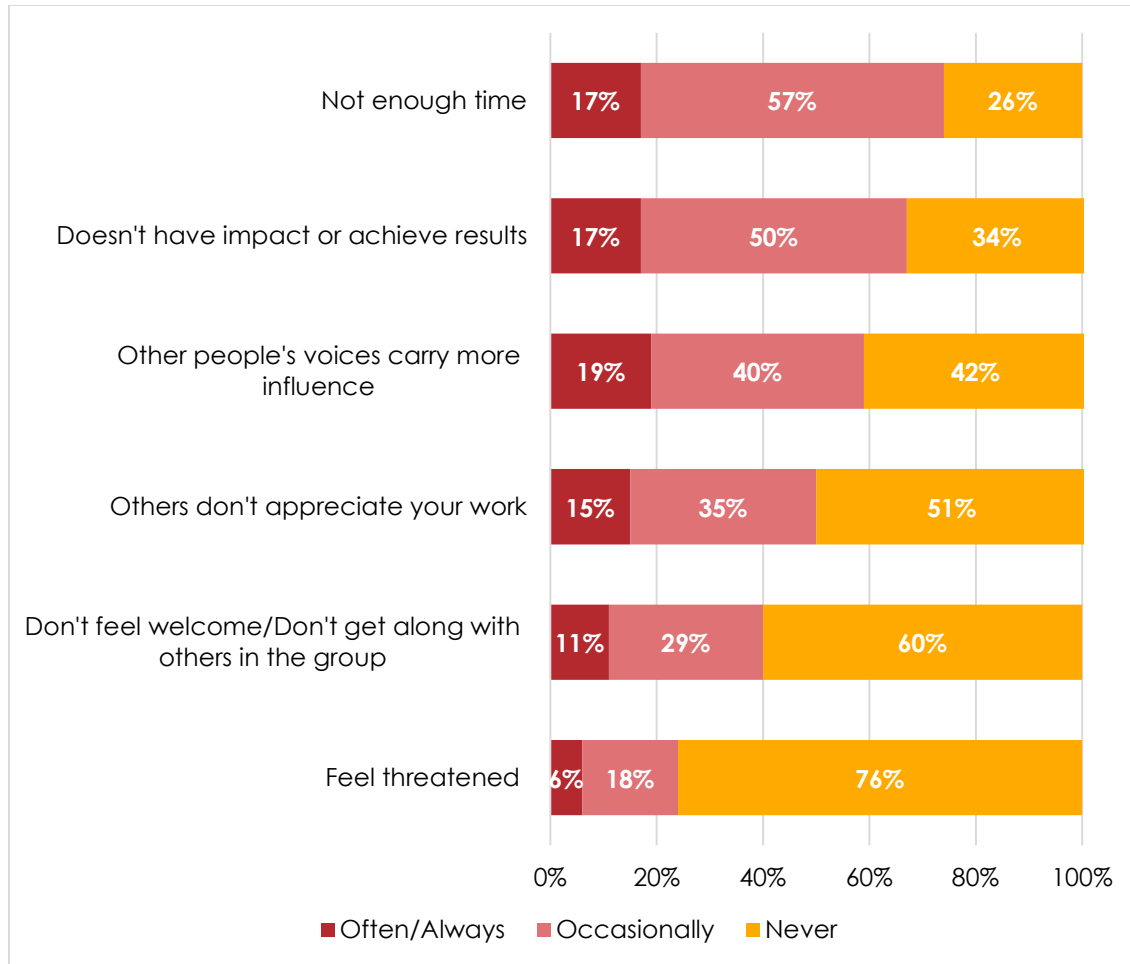
Respondents were asked: *In general, would you say that local government officials support the work of voluntary groups like the ones you participate in, or oppose it?*

We also asked respondents about challenges they might face in participating in voluntary groups. By far the most pressing problem is time: 59% of men and 52% of women (57% of all participating respondents) said they occasionally face time constraints, and 16% of men and 20% of women said they often or always do (Figure 9).

The second-most-significant challenge is impact: 66% said that at least occasionally, they do not have the impact or achieve the results they seek. A majority (58%) also feel that the voices of some individuals within their group(s) carry more influence than their own.

Sizeable minorities also reported that at least on occasion they encounter a lack of appreciation (49%), feel unwelcome (40%), or feel threatened (24%), though majorities said they “never” come up against these challenges.

Figure 9: Challenges in group participation (base = 204 active participants) | Benin | 2021



Respondents were asked: How often, if ever, do you face any of the following challenges when it comes to participating in this group/these groups?

Gender and leadership

We asked respondents what role they play in each organization they are part of. In 39% of cases, respondents reported playing a leadership role in the organization, while another 55% of cases involved respondents participating as "active members." Just 6% of cases involved "inactive members." In total, 45% of respondents who participate in voluntary associations reported playing a leadership role in at least one group.

We also asked respondents about gender participation and leadership to explore whether women face additional challenges in participating in civic institutions. The results are shown in Table 3. There is evidence of a degree of gender separation in group participation. More than one-third (35%) of cases of women's group participation involved groups that were primarily or entirely women, and another third (32%) were predominantly women. Just 15% of women's participation cases were in groups that were predominantly male. Men were somewhat less segregated, but 61% reported being in groups that were mostly/entirely men or had more men as members than women.

Patterns are similar for group leadership. More than two-thirds of men's participation cases (69%) were in groups led entirely or predominantly by men, and the obverse is true for 62% of women's participation cases.

Nonetheless, large majorities of both men (75%) and women (71%) reported that men and women have an equal opportunity to lead their groups.

Table 3: Group composition and leadership (base = 296 participation cases)

	Men	Women	All
Group composition			
Group members are entirely or mostly men	17%	6%	14%
There are more men than women	44%	9%	35%
There are about equal numbers of men and women	17%	19%	18%
There are more women than men	19%	32%	22%
Group members are entirely or mostly women	1%	35%	9%
Group leadership			
Group leaders are entirely or mostly men	21%	7%	18%
There are more men leaders than women	48%	25%	43%
There are about equal numbers of men and women among the leaders	15%	6%	13%
There are more women leaders than men	11%	29%	15%
Group leaders are entirely or mostly women	3%	33%	10%
Equal leadership opportunity			
Strongly/Somewhat disagree	23%	27%	24%
Strongly/Somewhat agree	75%	71%	74%

Respondents were asked:

Thinking about all of the members of this group, which of the following best describes the gender makeup of the group?

Thinking about all of the leaders of this group, which of the following best describes the gender makeup of the leadership?

Please tell me whether you disagree or agree with the following statement: In this voluntary group, women and men have an equal chance of taking on leadership positions.

Why not participate?

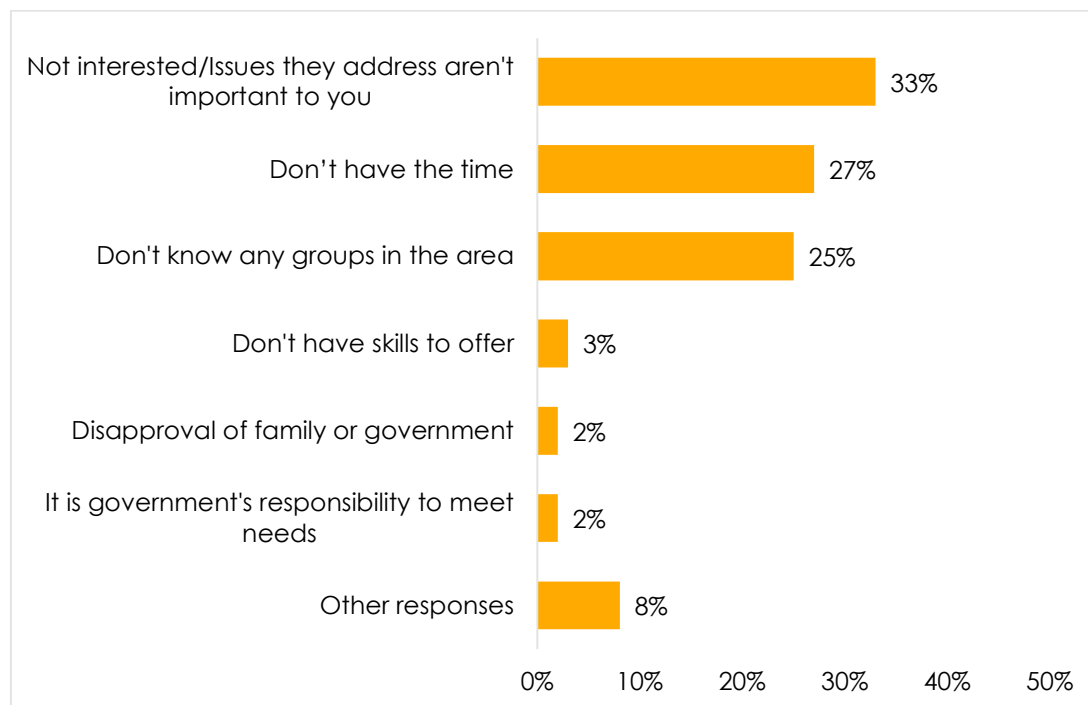
We now turn to a brief review of findings among those who do not currently participate in any voluntary associations to capture their views on the role of these groups and the reasons they do not participate.

Considering up to two responses per person, the most common reason cited for lack of participation is lack of interest or the belief that groups were not addressing issues that are important to the respondent (33% of all substantive responses) (Figure 10). Some respondents may indeed simply not be interested in engaging, but this response could also reflect a lack of group-participation options in some areas. This latter interpretation is reinforced by the fact

that the third-most-commonly cited impediment to participation is that respondents don't know of any groups in their area (25%). So while dense urban areas may offer a wide range of groups tackling diverse issues that an individual can join, in other areas there may be few or no groups (or those that are there are not widely known). This suggests significant potential for increasing voluntary participation if the density and diversity of civic associations were to increase. The second-most-commonly cited issue is lack of time.

Mentions of other factors fall far behind these three primary reasons for non-participation. Only a handful of respondents cited a lack of skills (3%), family or government disapproval (2%), or other factors. Only 2% were put off by the idea that the government should be taking on the responsibility of meeting community needs.

Figure 10: Reasons for non-participation (base = 521 responses from 346 non-participants) | Benin | 2021



Respondents were asked: What is the main reason that you are not currently participating in any voluntary associations or community groups? (Respondents could give up to two responses. Percentages are based on a total of 521 reasons cited by 343 respondents who do not participate in voluntary associations.)

Past and future participation

Participation in voluntary groups is not a permanent either/or situation. One in 10 (10%) of those not currently participating said they had participated in an association during the past year, and another 21% said they had done so during the past five years. In addition, eight in 10 said it was "somewhat likely" (53%) or "very likely" (27%) that they would join an association during the coming year.¹

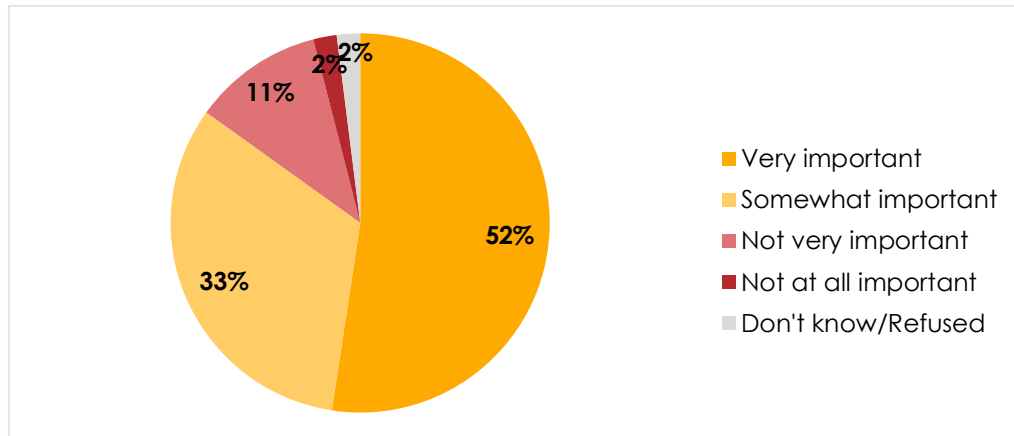
¹ Note, however, that there was a programming error on this question, so while "somewhat unlikely" was the response of 20%, the option of "very unlikely" was inadvertently not offered, which may have skewed responses slightly toward future participation.

Associating for the good of the community?

Across both active volunteers and non-volunteers, there is widespread agreement that voluntary organizations and community groups play a “very important” (52%) or “somewhat important” (33%) role in meeting community needs (Figure 11). It’s not surprising that those who participate feel this way (20% somewhat important, 70% very important), but even those who don’t participate agreed (40% somewhat important, 43% very important).

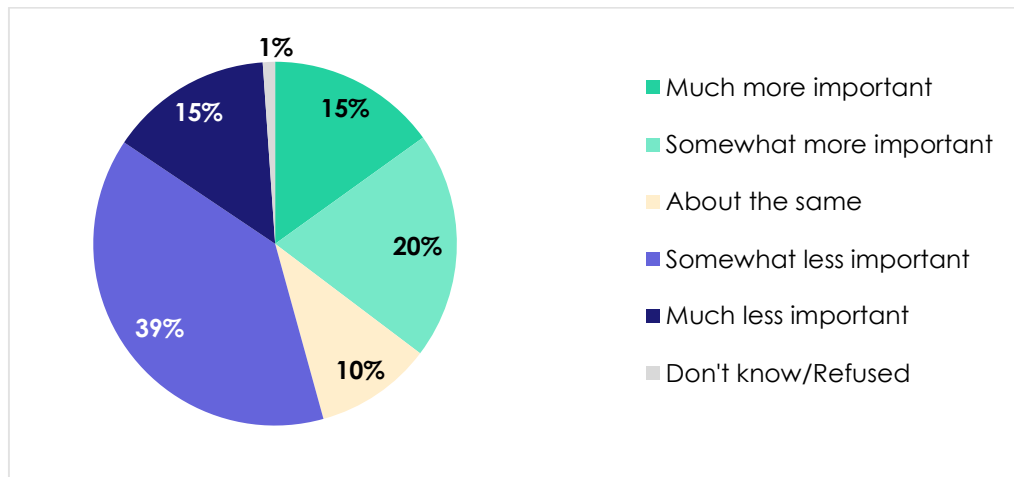
Nonetheless, the public still ascribes the primary responsibility for meeting community needs to government: 53% said the role of community organizations is “somewhat less” or “much less” important than the role of government, compared with 35% who said they play a more important role than government (10% said they are equally important) (Figure 12).

Figure 11: Importance of voluntary associations in meeting community needs
 (base = 550 respondents) | Benin | 2021



Respondents were asked: How important do you think the role of voluntary organizations and community groups is in meeting the needs of your community, or haven't you heard enough to say?

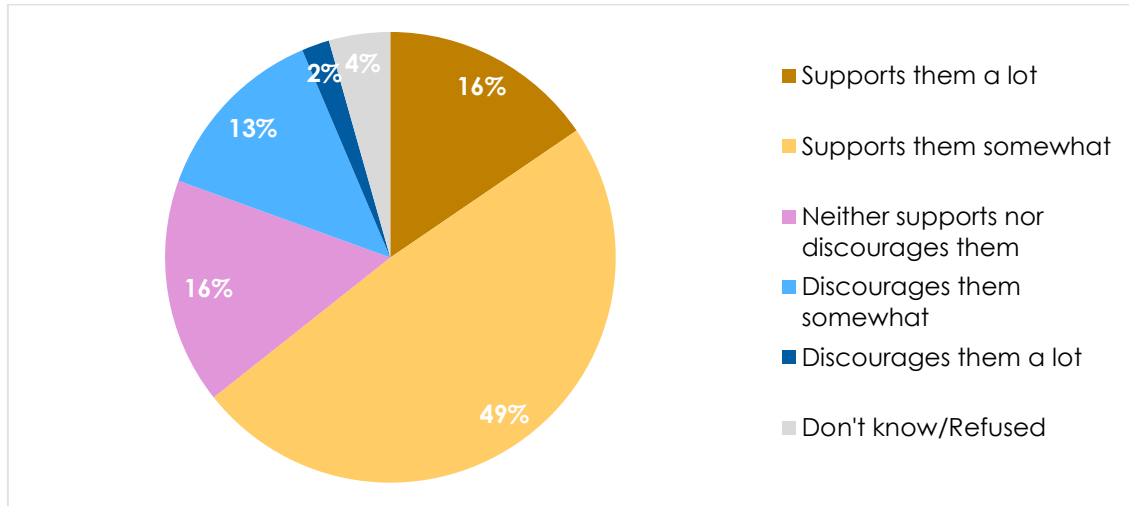
Figure 12: Importance of voluntary organizations compared to government in meeting community needs
 (base = 550 respondents) | Benin | 2021



Respondents were asked: Do you think the role of voluntary organizations and community groups in meeting the needs of your community is more important than the role of government, less important, or about the same, or haven't you heard enough to say?

People also feel that the government is generally supportive of the role of community groups, but not overwhelmingly so: 49% said the government “somewhat” supports an active role for voluntary organizations and community groups in “solving problems in your community,” and 16% said it is strongly supportive (Figure 13). About three in 10 said the government is neither supportive nor opposed (16%) or that it actually opposes the work of voluntary organizations (15%).

Figure 13: Does government support an active role for voluntary organizations?
 (base = 550 respondents) | Benin | 2021



Respondents were asked: Generally speaking, do you think the government supports an active role for voluntary organizations and community groups in solving problems in your community, or discourages them from getting involved, or haven't you heard enough to say?

Volunteering as individuals

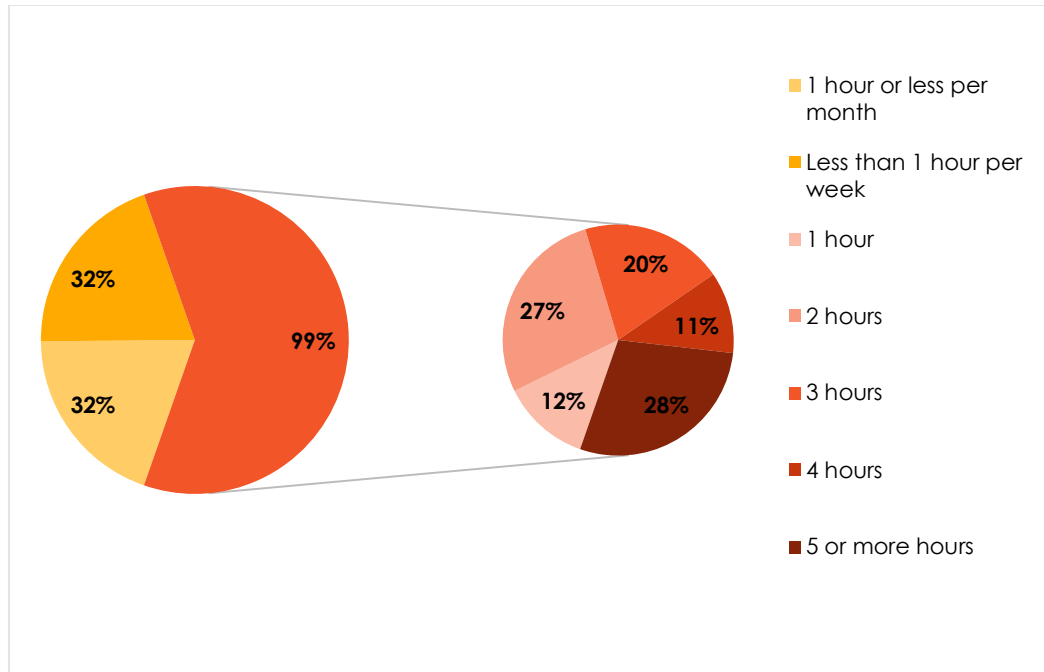
The survey also asked all respondents whether they do any voluntary or unpaid work on their own, rather than with an organized group. Nearly six in 10 (57%) said they do. Among those who participate in civic associations, 62% said they also volunteer in an individual capacity. But in addition, more than half (55%) of those who do not participate in any associations nonetheless volunteer as individuals. This means in total, fully 71% of our sample engaged in some type of volunteer activity

Among those who reported solo volunteering, time commitments were roughly evenly divided between those who spend very little time (one hour or less per month, 33%), those who spend a modest amount of time (less than an hour per week, 33%), and those who devote considerable time (an hour or more per week, 34%) (Figure 14).

In total, 313 individuals who volunteer solo reported spending about 442 hours per week in these activities. This amounts to roughly 1.4 hours per volunteer, or an average of 0.8 hours per week across all respondents.

When combined with the levels of participation reported above for voluntary associations, across all individuals in our sample (solo and/or group volunteers and non-volunteers, 550 respondents in total) we find average volunteering of nearly two hours (1.9 hours) per person per week.

Figure 14; Time spent doing solo voluntary unpaid work (base = 550 respondents)
 | Benin | 2021



Respondents were asked:

Do you do any voluntary work on your own, that is, not with an organized group, or do you spend time helping friends, neighbours, or others in your community, not including members of your family, for no pay?

[If yes:] About how much time do you spend doing this kind of voluntary unpaid work on your own to help others in your community?

[For those who said "an hour or more per week":] In a normal week, about how many hours do you spend on this voluntary work?

Individual and societal factors associated with civic participation

In Afrobarometer's Phase I report, we looked beyond individuals' demographics to investigate other factors, such as their attitudes, preferences, and assessments, that might also shape their propensity to engage in voluntary civic action. The Benin survey similarly asked respondents about a range of attitudes, from interest in politics to assessments of government job performance and levels of corruption, in order to explore additional factors associated with voluntary engagement.

The most notable finding is evidence that voluntary civic engagement is strongly linked to individuals' political engagement. Exposure to news is associated with higher levels of participation, and reported engagement in civic organizations was far more common among those who said they discuss politics occasionally or often (40% and 56%, respectively) than among those who said they never discuss politics (20%) (Table 4). In addition, those who reported affiliation with a political party were twice as likely to report voluntary engagement as those without a party affiliation. Thus, rather than different types of engagement "competing" for respondents' time and attention, it appears that those who are engaged politically are also more likely to be engaged in voluntary civic action.

Table 4: Political engagement and voluntary civic engagement | Benin | 2021

	Participate in voluntary organizations
Full sample	37%
Access to news	
Radio news daily/frequently	40%
Radio news rarely/never	29%
Television news daily/frequently	41%
Television news rarely/never	36%
Internet or social media news daily/frequently	45%
Internet or social media news rarely/never	31%
Discuss politics	
Often	56%
Occasionally	40%
Never	20%
Party affiliation	
Affiliated with a political party	52%
Not affiliated	26%

Some aspects of government performance may also be associated with levels of voluntary participation, but the findings are somewhat mixed in their direction and implications, and barely outside the margin of error. On the one hand, individuals who think the government is performing badly with regard to either health care or education are *more* likely to participate (Table 5), perhaps responding to a perceived need to fill a gap left by poor government performance. Recall that health was the second-most-common sector for citizen voluntary action, while education was seventh.

However, addressing inequality was the largest sector for voluntary work, and reducing poverty was the fourth-largest, yet there is no difference in participation rates between those who think the government is doing well in improving the living standards of the poor and those who think it is doing poorly, so the pattern is not consistent across all sectors. Similarly, government performance in the water sector (sixth-most-important sector of engagement) also has no discernable association with participation levels.

In contrast, thinking the government is doing a good job in fighting corruption is associated with higher likelihood of participation. This may be because citizens feel they will be more effective, and are thus more inclined to engage, if the government is managing corruption well.

Table 5: Government performance and voluntary civic engagement | Benin | 2021

	Participate in voluntary organizations
Full sample	37%
Government performance	
Handling improving health services fairly/very well	36%
Handling improving health services fairly/very badly	43%
Handling addressing educational needs fairly/very well	37%
Handling addressing educational needs fairly/very badly	43%
Handling fighting corruption fairly/very well	39%
Handling fighting corruption fairly/very badly	33%

There is less evidence that other factors, including attitudes about and assessments of the political system, or even a personal sense of efficacy, are linked to engagement. We observe only minor (less than the margin of error) differences in participation levels between those who think the country is more or less democratic, those who think elected leaders do/do not listen to them, those who do/don't trust elected leaders, those who do/don't think elected leaders are corrupt, and those who agree/disagree that they can make leaders listen or that ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption. Even differences in the perceived levels of personal freedom of expression and association do not appear to have a consistent impact on participation levels.

To put these potential linkages to a more rigorous test, we ran a simple ordinary least squares model, with the number of groups a respondent participates in as the dependent variable. The first model tests only demographic variables, the second adds indicators of political engagement, and the third includes indicators of government performance, personal efficacy, and selected attitudes about democracy and democratic institutions. The findings are shown in Table 6.

With regard to socio-demographics, we highlight one critical finding: Our initial findings suggested that women are much less inclined to engage than men (see Figure 3), consistent with the strong significance and negative sign on this indicator in the first model. However, in models 2 and 3, we find that when we control for political interest and engagement, gender is no longer significant as a predictor of engagement.

The modeling also confirms that forms of political engagement, especially an inclination to discuss politics and affiliation with a political party, are clearly the strongest predictors. It would appear that social activists also tend to be political activists. Other factors are more weakly linked, but still important, including poverty: Poorer respondents are significantly more likely to engage than wealthier ones. Education (associated with lower participation rates) and a belief in individual efficacy (associated with higher participation) are also significant, but with far more modest effects.

Table 6: Factors driving participation in voluntary civic organizations, OLS model
| Benin | 2021

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Socio-demographics			
Age	-0.001 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.004)
Gender (woman)	-0.307*** (0.095)	-0.115 (0.097)	-0.136 (0.100)
Education	-0.002 (0.025)	-0.029 (0.026)	-0.054* (0.027)
Poverty	0.193*** (0.055)	0.141* (0.055)	0.146* (0.058)
Engagement			
Get news from radio		0.065* (0.033)	0.067* (0.033)
Get news from TV		-0.018 (0.031)	-0.021 (0.032)
Get news from Internet/social media		0.071* (0.028)	0.075** (0.029)
Discuss politics		0.234*** (0.070)	0.198** (0.074)
Affiliated with (any) political party		0.257** (0.091)	0.281** (0.094)
Government performance			
On improving health services			-0.037 (0.059)
On addressing educational needs			-0.088 (0.064)
On fighting corruption			0.039 (0.059)
Personal efficacy			
Can join others to make leaders listen to concerns			-0.071 (0.054)
Believes ordinary people can fight corruption			0.071* (0.032)
Political system assessments			
Extent of democracy			-0.100 (0.051)
Local government councillors listen			0.063 (0.053)
Constant	0.359 (0.225)	-0.151 (0.243)	0.426 (0.400)
Adjusted r-squared	0.043	0.124	0.144

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Standard errors in parentheses

Dependent variable: Number of voluntary associations respondent participates in

Advancing Afrobarometer recommendations: Phase II

In its Phase I report, Afrobarometer made a number of recommendations regarding entry points for fostering voluntary civic engagement, including promoting education, especially for women; conducting research to deepen understanding of women's engagement in order to better promote it; engaging youth; enhancing efficacy; promoting democracy and responsive leadership; identifying community needs and priorities for action; and building an enabling environment for volunteerism.

Keeping in mind that this Phase II report, while based on a deeper study, is limited to a single country, we would not regard the results here as warranting changes in the original recommendations based on data from 34 countries. For example, the Phase I study found a positive effect for education, but this is not the case in this Benin sample. But the Phase I study also noted some cross-country variability and the importance of understanding context. So our recommendation regarding promoting education, especially women's education, still stands.

But we can add to our recommendations based on key findings identified here, especially:

- 1) the strong linkages between political engagement and participation in voluntary associations;
- 2) the identification of a lack of groups to engage with as a key impediment to participation; and
- 3) the reported opposition of some government officials to the work of voluntary organizations.

These findings suggest additional entry points, including:

- **Providing training to increase leadership and organizational skills** – It appears that in Benin, a lack of active organizations may be one key impediment to engagement. Building individuals' skills in organization and team leadership, advocacy and engagement, budgeting and fundraising, and related volunteering skills could contribute to expansion of the network of voluntary organizations with which respondents can engage. These efforts should especially be **targeted in areas with low density of voluntary associations**.
- **Recognizing and promoting synergies between political engagement and voluntary civic engagement** – Different types of engagement appear to be mutually reinforcing, so efforts to build civic engagement should look not just at existing voluntary organizations, but also at other types of political and social organizations as potential sources of "seeds" for expansion of volunteerism.
- **Sharing impact stories** – Individuals care about making an impact, which is an important motivator and challenge. Stories of effective engagement by voluntary associations and reports of impact and success in solving community problems can encourage both current and potential volunteers. A lack of awareness of the potential to make a difference may be a key de-motivator for civic action.
- **Recognizing the diversity of sectors of engagement** – We often assume that basic needs and services such as health, education, and poverty reduction are focal points of civic engagement. The findings here show some support for this belief, but they also reveal that people engage in voluntary associations that touch on a very wide array of issues, including some less traditional sectors. SDG12, focused on "responsible consumption and production," is the third-most-active sector identified in this study, capturing participation in many types of economic activity, such as production and marketing groups that help advance individual and community well-being. In order

to foster volunteerism, we should be thinking beyond traditional sectors linked to service delivery or poverty reduction. Since activism appears to promote activism, promoting activity in any sector may have beneficial effects across other sectors as well.

- **Building government support for the work of voluntary organizations** – While a majority of all respondents reported that the government tends to at least “somewhat” support the work of voluntary organizations, only a small number described the government as strongly supportive, and a roughly equal number believed that the government actually opposes these groups. Encouraging governments to recognize the value added by these voluntary associations may break down barriers to entry, and to efficacy, that prevent some people from engaging. Sharing impact stories focused on ways in which voluntary organizations have successfully collaborated with governments to improve outcomes may be an especially useful approach.

Africans' aspirations are wide-ranging. They want not just economic and social security, but also self-sufficiency and autonomy as well as democratic and responsive governments (Gyimah-Boadi & Asunka, 2021). And many individuals have demonstrated that they are ready and willing to take action in order to realize these ambitions. But this rich resource – the energy and will of millions of citizens – has not been fully tapped.

We can learn from the voluntary engagement that is already taking place, and the views of citizens – both those who are volunteering and those who aren't, yet – to understand what can be done to build on these energies and ambitions to achieve the targets of the SDGs and the African Union's Agenda 2063. Building organizational and advocacy skills, increasing opportunities for participation, fostering a sense of efficacy, and breaking down government resistance where it is present are all tools that can help make increasingly effective use of the people's assets. By expanding the space for African voice and agency in all arenas, from problem-solving to policy making, the power of citizen action can be unleashed across the continent.

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