

The Perceptions of Africa and Africans in Northern Ireland

Opinion Poll Survey Report

May 2011





Introduction

ACSONI was formed as an independent, charitable organisation in July 2003 to promote the capabilities and interests of the Afro-Community in Northern Ireland. ACSONI works to ensure that individuals of African descent are empowered and given equal opportunity to contribute to civic life; ACSONI also recognises the need to promote good relations, community cohesion and integration between people from different nationalities and culturally diverse groups in society.

Since its inception, ACSONI has risen to the challenge of developing and implementing a strategic framework through which the needs of the members of the Afro- community in Northern Ireland can be addressed. ACSONI launched a three year strategic plan at the Northern Ireland Parliament Buildings, Stormont in January 2010. The strategy was launched by the former Junior Ministers: Robin Newton (MLA) and Gerry Kelly (MLA) from the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister.

In 2010, the Afro-Community Support Organisation Northern Ireland (ACSONI) received European Union funding to promote images of Africa from an African perspective. ACSONI is currently working in partnership with the African Centres in Slovenia and Dublin to raise awareness of how 'Images and Messages' impact on inequalities across Europe.

In November 2010, ACSONI created a simple survey that would elicit people's views and perceptions of Africa and people of African descent. Our assumption is that a lot of people in Northern Ireland are ignorant of the diverse cultures and traditions in Africa; many people in Northern Ireland base their knowledge of Africans on media related images and messages. The aim of the opinion poll survey was to gauge peoples understanding of Africa and attitude towards Africans and people of African descent in Northern Ireland. ACSONI also wanted to investigate the likely impact of the media in reinforcing stereotypes of 'race inferiority'. Does the use of negative images and messages manipulate how individuals view the 'developing world, in this case Africa and people of African descent'? The findings from this survey will be used to inform ACSONI's work and the European Union funded programme "Images of Africa from an African Perspective."

Executive Summary

In December 2010, ACSONI carried out a very small piece of opinion poll research with students from the Queens University of Belfast. In a random poll of 149 students, it was established in the analysis and interpretation of the findings that 89% of respondents stated that they associated Africa with *"poverty"* and 60% associated the continent with *"disease"*.

46% of students surveyed said that they believed the continent of Africa to be made up of 39 countries.

In addition, 79% of respondents stated that they did not remember learning anything about the History or Geography of Africa whilst at school and when asked where they thought their knowledge about Africa came from, 70% said *"from watching TV"*.

ACSONI believes that this clearly highlights the need to raise awareness of the potential impact that can arise from what is *sometimes* skewed, biased, inaccurate, incomplete and unfair media relayed information of Africa. This reinforces limited understanding of the realities of the continent of Africa.

The survey results demonstrate that over two thirds of respondents associated *"Music and Dance"* with Africa. 40% of respondents associated Africa with *"Danger"*.

Almost 60% of respondents stated that they interacted with somebody of African descent once a year or never. One third of the people surveyed said that they interacted with somebody of African descent on a monthly-basis. 12% of respondents said that they interacted with somebody of African descent *"about once a week"*.

21% of respondents stated they remembered learning about Africa at school and listed the following as what they remembered:

- *"We looked at shanty towns and Egypt"*
- *"Tectonic activity of plate movements under Africa"*
- *"Colonisation"*
- *"Egypt, Nile history, South Africa apartheid"*
- *"South African History/ Nelson Mandela etc."*
- *"only ever really mentioned in relation to charity events"*
- *"Drought in the Sudan"*
- *"Mainly Egypt - but it's not really Africa, is it?"*

METHODOLOGY

ACSONI used a quantitative methodology to collect information and data from randomly selected students from the Queens University of Belfast. The data collection process was conducted by ACSONI staff using a structured questionnaire. During data collection, approval was sought from the student Union of Queens University to set up a table and survey stand at the Student Union foyer. Students were then randomly selected to take the survey and complete the questionnaire.

The opinion survey was in English to enhance full comprehension and understanding of the questions. At the completion of the survey, all the questionnaires were edited for accurate and complete entries. The questionnaires were then coded and entered into a spreadsheet data template format for analysis and reporting. The data collection for the survey lasted 5 hours. This report does not include the pilot survey carried out with staff of the Equality Commission Northern Ireland.

Question One

1. How many different countries make up the continent of Africa? (tick your answer)

22

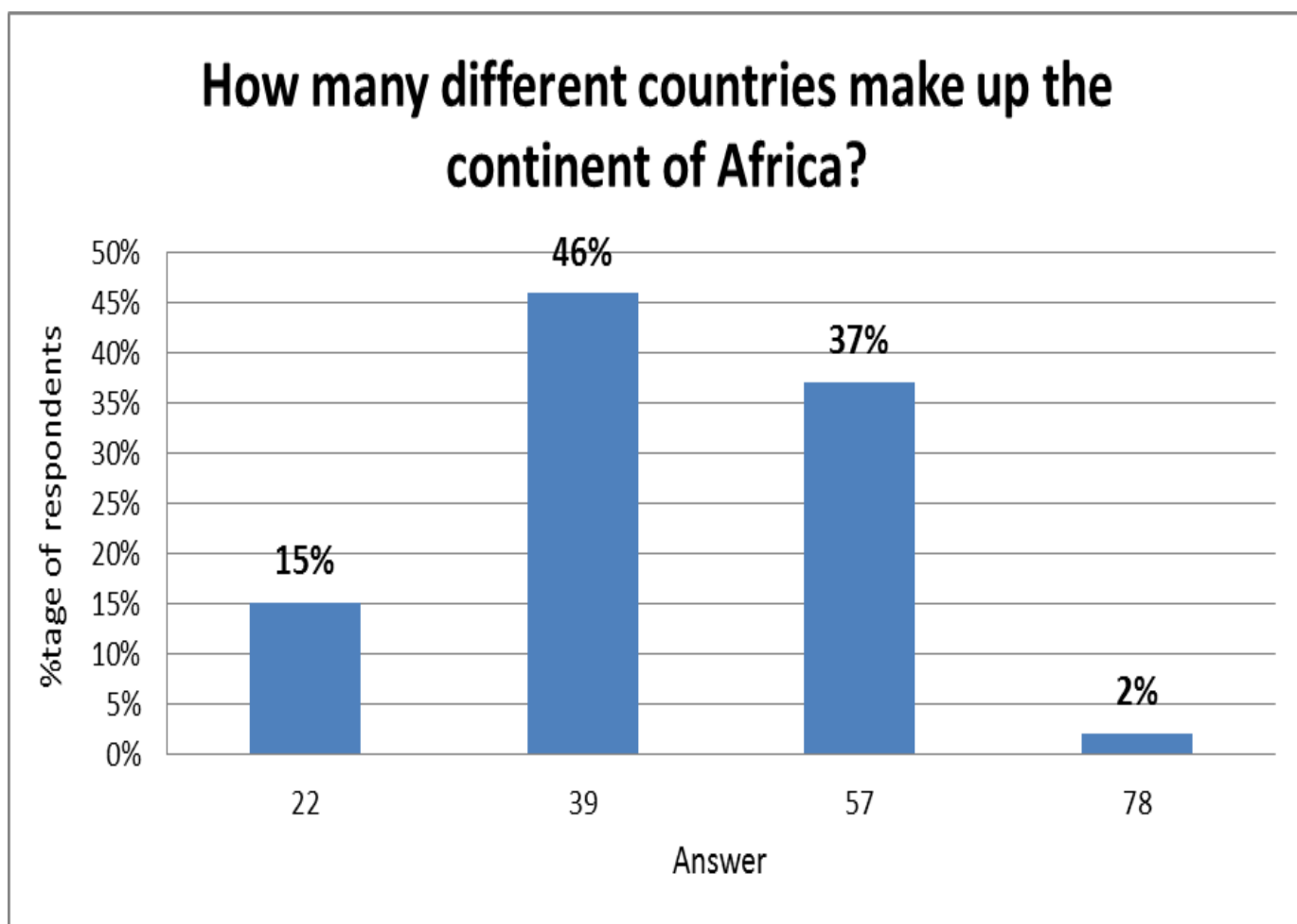
39

57

78

Of the 149 people surveyed, 146 attempted to answer this question.

Their responses are shown below:



Less than 40% of respondents were able to correctly answer this question. The highest percentage of respondents said that they believed the continent of Africa to be made up of 39 countries.

Africa is the world's second largest continent after Asia. There are officially 54 countries in Africa, (some have quoted 56, 57, and 58). The United Nations membership roster contains 54 African states, and that of the African Union contains 53.

Question Two

2. What is the longest river in the world? (tick your answer)

The Nile

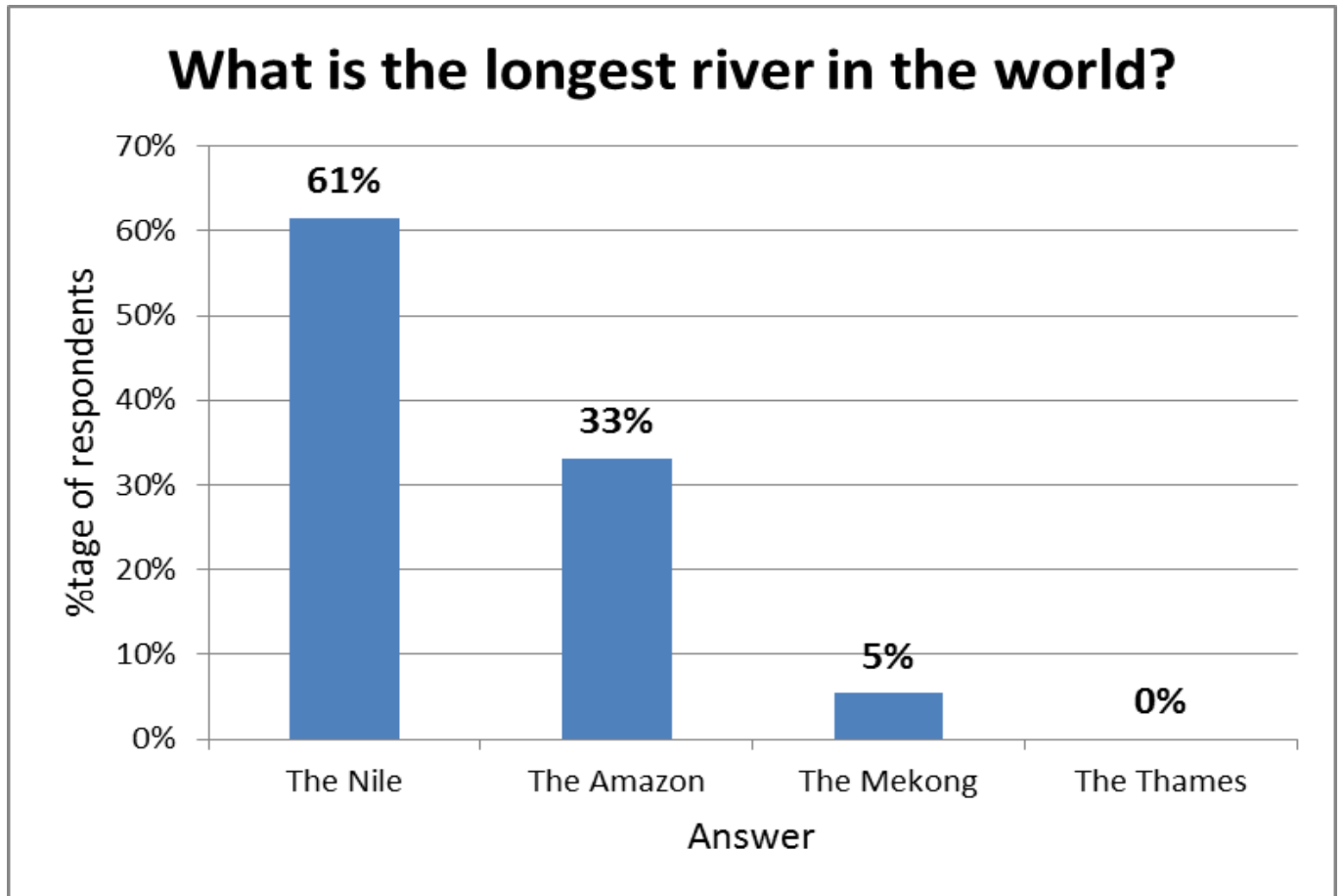
The Amazon

The Mekong

The Thames

Of the 149 people survey, 148 attempted to answer this question.

Their responses are shown below:



The Nile is considered the longest river in the world.

Question Three

3. What is the biggest country (in terms of land mass) in Africa called? (tick your answer)

Sudan

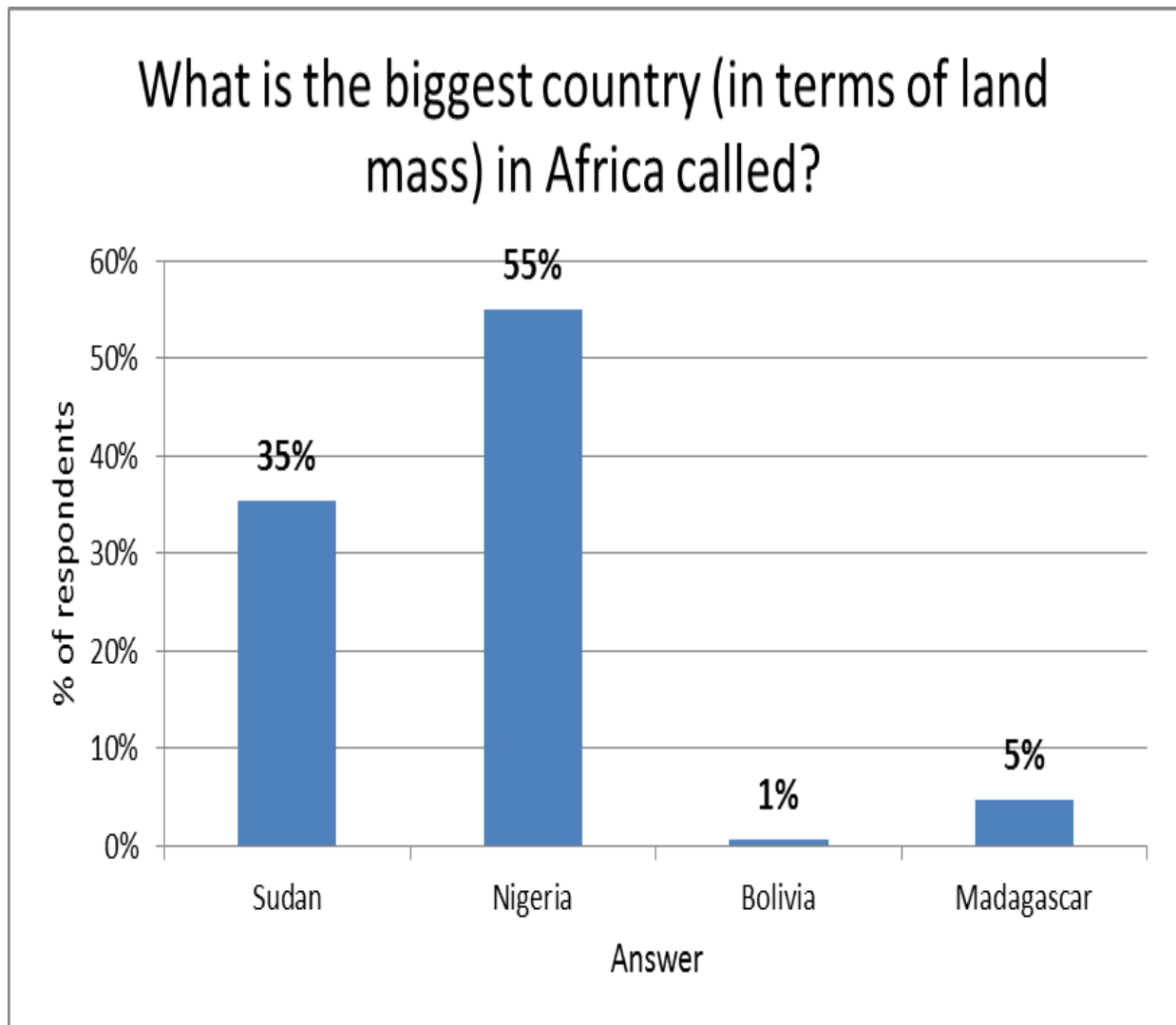
Nigeria

Bolivia

Madagascar

Of the 149 people surveyed, 147 attempted to answer this question.

Their responses are shown below:



The biggest country in Africa in terms of land mass is Sudan. Nigeria is Africa's most populous country.

Question Four

4. Where is Timbuktu? (tick your answer)

Asia

Central Africa

Middle East

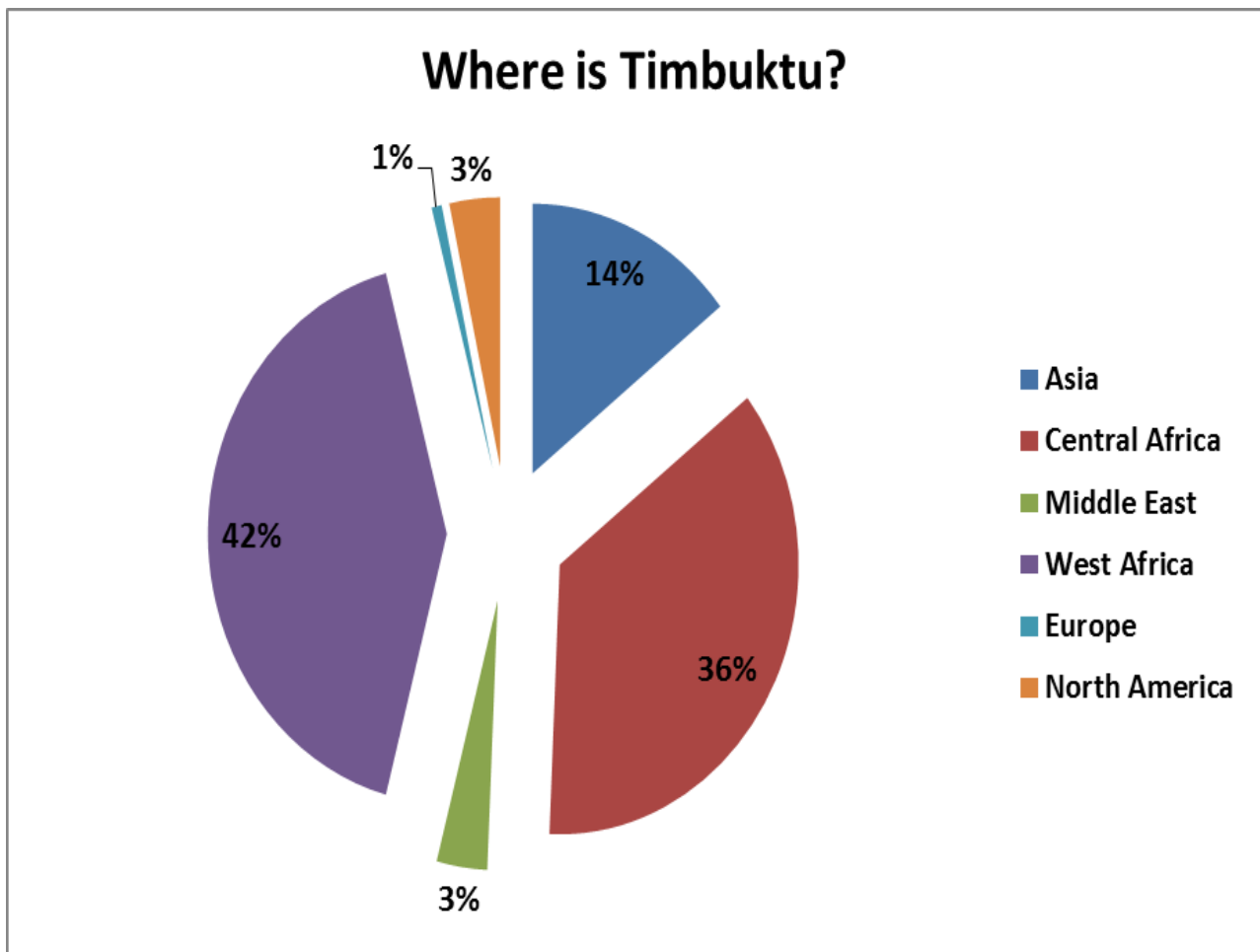
West Africa

Europe

North America

Of the 149 people surveyed, 146 people attempted to answer this question.

Their answers are shown in this pie chart:



Timbuktu is a town in the West African nation of Mali.

Question Five

5. Which two African countries were first to gain Independence from Britain after WW2? (tick your answer)

Mali and Kenya

Sudan and Ghana

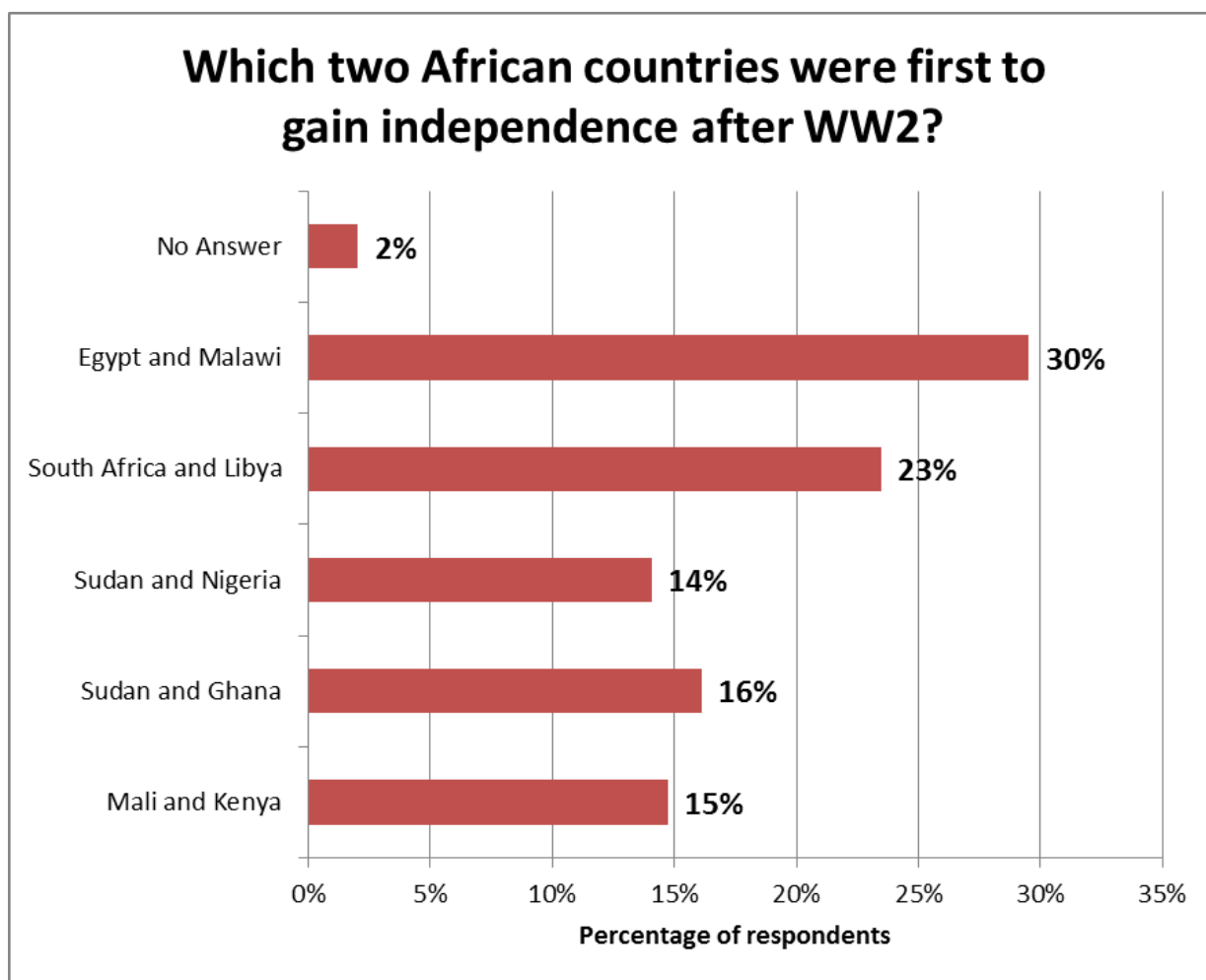
Sudan and Nigeria

South Africa and Libya

Egypt and Malawi

All 149 people surveyed attempted to answer this question.

Their responses are shown in this bar chart:



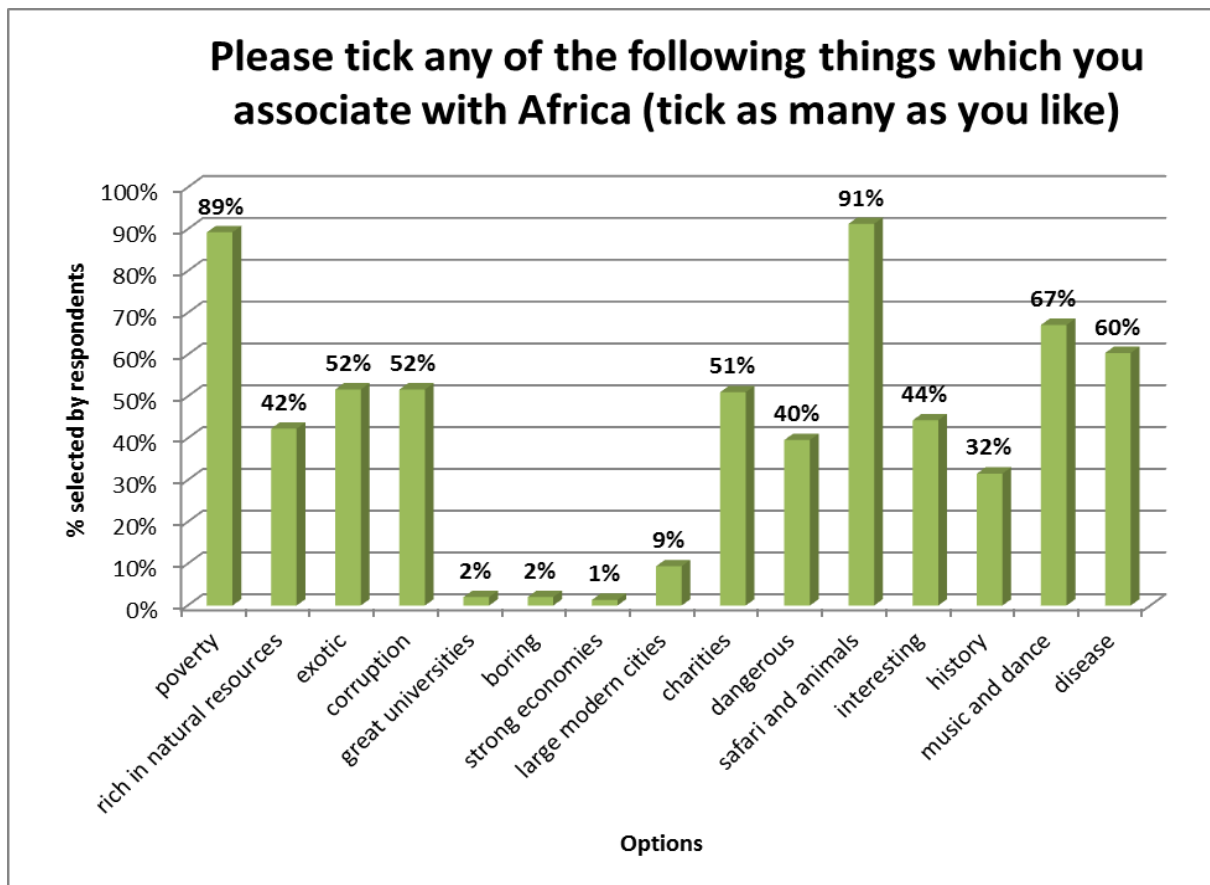
The two African countries that were first to gain Independence from the United Kingdom after WW2 were: Sudan and Ghana.

Question Six

6. Please tick any of the following things which you associate with Africa (tick as many as you like)

poverty	<input type="checkbox"/>	rich in natural resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	exotic	<input type="checkbox"/>
corruption	<input type="checkbox"/>	great universities	<input type="checkbox"/>	boring	<input type="checkbox"/>
strong economies	<input type="checkbox"/>	large modern cities	<input type="checkbox"/>	charities	<input type="checkbox"/>
dangerous	<input type="checkbox"/>	safari and animals	<input type="checkbox"/>	interesting	<input type="checkbox"/>
history	<input type="checkbox"/>	music and dance	<input type="checkbox"/>	disease	<input type="checkbox"/>

Participants ticked an average of six boxes for this question. The lowest number of boxes ticked by one participant was two and the highest was thirteen.



The results demonstrate that the two things most frequently associated with Africa amongst this sample were “Safari and Animals” and “poverty”.

Only 2% of associated the Continent with “Great Universities”.

Over two thirds of respondents associated “Music and Dance” with Africa.

40% of respondents associated Africa with “Danger”. More than half of all respondents associated Africa with “Charities” and 60% associated the continent with “Disease”.

Question Seven

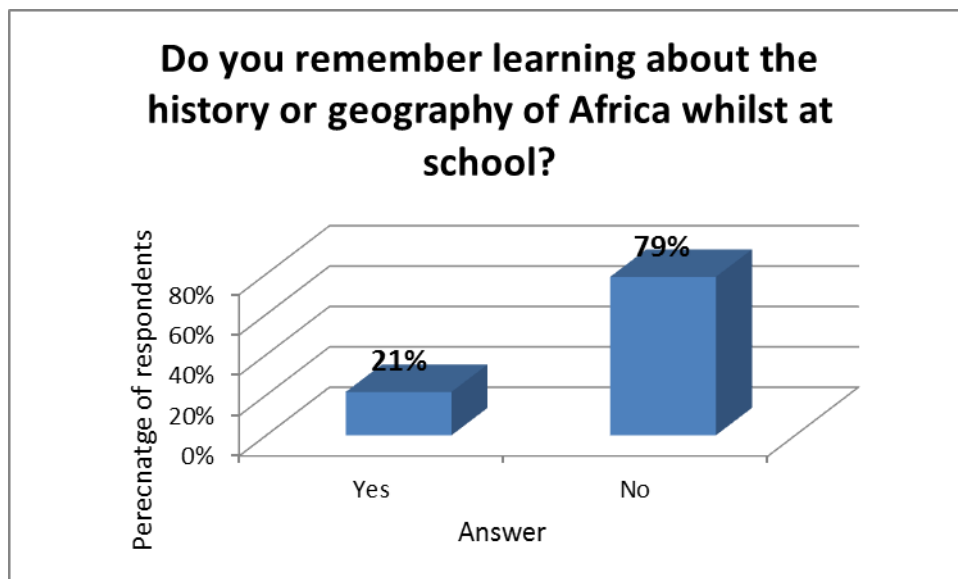
7. Do you remember learning about the history or geography of Africa whilst at school? (circle your answer)

Yes

No

If "yes" please give a brief overview of what this involved:

All 149 respondents answered this question. Just under four fifths of respondents stated that they did not remember learning about the history or geography of Africa whilst at school.



Some of the written responses to this question included:

- *"very vaguely, just geographical and economic data"*
- *"famine, colonialism, wildlife, mountains, continental shelf, explorers"*
- *"desert geography, animals living on continent of Africa"*
- *"South Africa - apartheid, Egypt - Ancient History"*
- *"poverty and famine"*
- *"Very brief info about the "cradle of life" very little depth of detail. Charity Drives"*
- *"Only in primary regarding Egypt"*
- *"We looked at shanty towns and Egypt"*
- *"Tectonic activity of plate movements under Africa"*
- *"Colonisation"*
- *"Egypt, Nile history, South Africa apartheid"*
- *"South African History/ Nelson Mandela etc"*
- *"only ever really mentioned in relation to charity events"*
- *"Drought in the Sudan"*
- *"Mainly Egypt - but it's not really Africa, is it?"*

Question Eight

8. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were agreed by the United Nations in 2000.

Name two of them:

i) _____

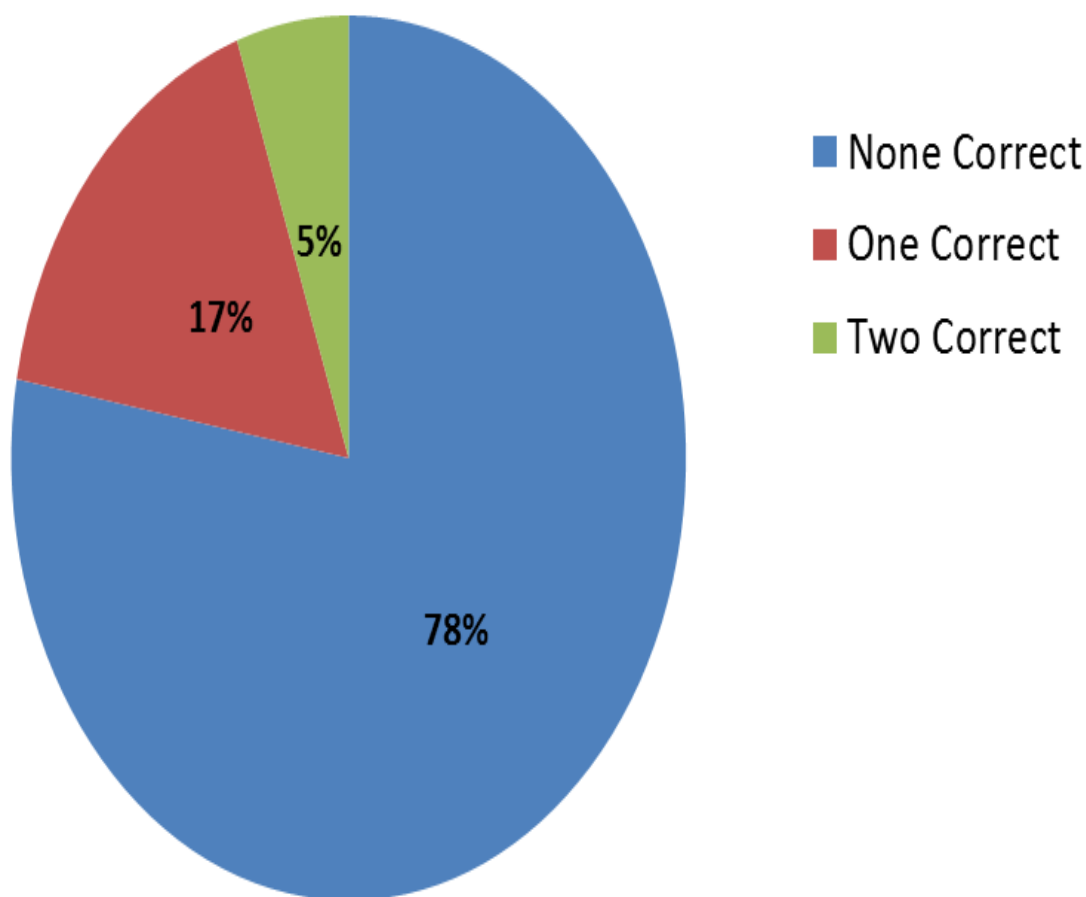
ii) _____

Almost 80% of all participants were unable to name one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

17% were able to name one.

Just one out of every twenty people asked was able to name two of the eight goals.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were agreed by the United Nations in 2000. Name two of them.



Millennium Development Goals by 2015: (a) Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (b) Achieve universal primary education (c) Promote gender equality and empower women (d) Reduce child mortality (e) Improve maternal health (f) Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (g) Ensure environmental sustainability (h) Develop a global partnership for development

Question Nine

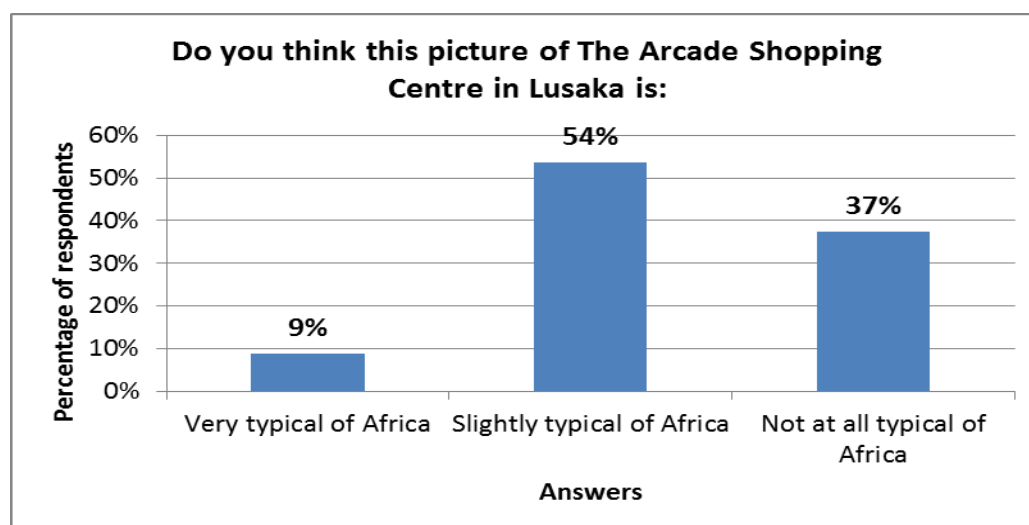
9. This is a picture of The Arcade Shopping Centre in Lusaka, **Zambia**. Do you think it is:

- Very typical of Africa
- Slightly typical of Africa
- Not at all typical of Africa

Please give a reason for your answer:



147 of the 149 people surveyed answered this question. The two participants who did not answer stated that they “didn’t know”, one wrote “Not sure – haven’t been to Africa”.



Just over half of respondents said that they thought the image was “slightly typical” of Africa.

35% stated that they thought the photograph was “not at all typical of Africa”.

Just fewer than 10% of respondents said that they thought the picture was “very typical of Africa”.

Examples of written comments

- **“Very Typical of Africa” Respondents:**
 - I would imagine they have all different types of shopping centres - like us
 - shopping centres are everywhere
- **“Slightly Typical of Africa” Respondents:**
 - I imagine South Africa to be like this i.e. tourism
 - depends what part of Africa e.g. South Africa - places which receive investment from overseas
 - Globalisation bringing more foreign investment
 - Due to media influence I am unsure
 - I'd say a lot of adverts we see on TV would want us to think this isn't typical of Africa because people wouldn't donate to charity, but I'm sure there are lots of places in Africa
- **“Not at all typical of Africa” Respondents:**
 - I know its stereotypical, but such property is not what we are lead to believe exists in Africa
 - Don't associate Africa as being modern
 - Too fancy
 - I have never seen an African shopping centre
 - Didn't think they had the money
 - Africa is not developed like this
 - Seems modern and un-to-date whereas people give the impression Africa is poor
 - Africa is seen as an impoverished country by the outside world and this picture does not reflect that

Question Ten

10 Living in Northern Ireland, how often do you meet or interact with somebody of African descent?

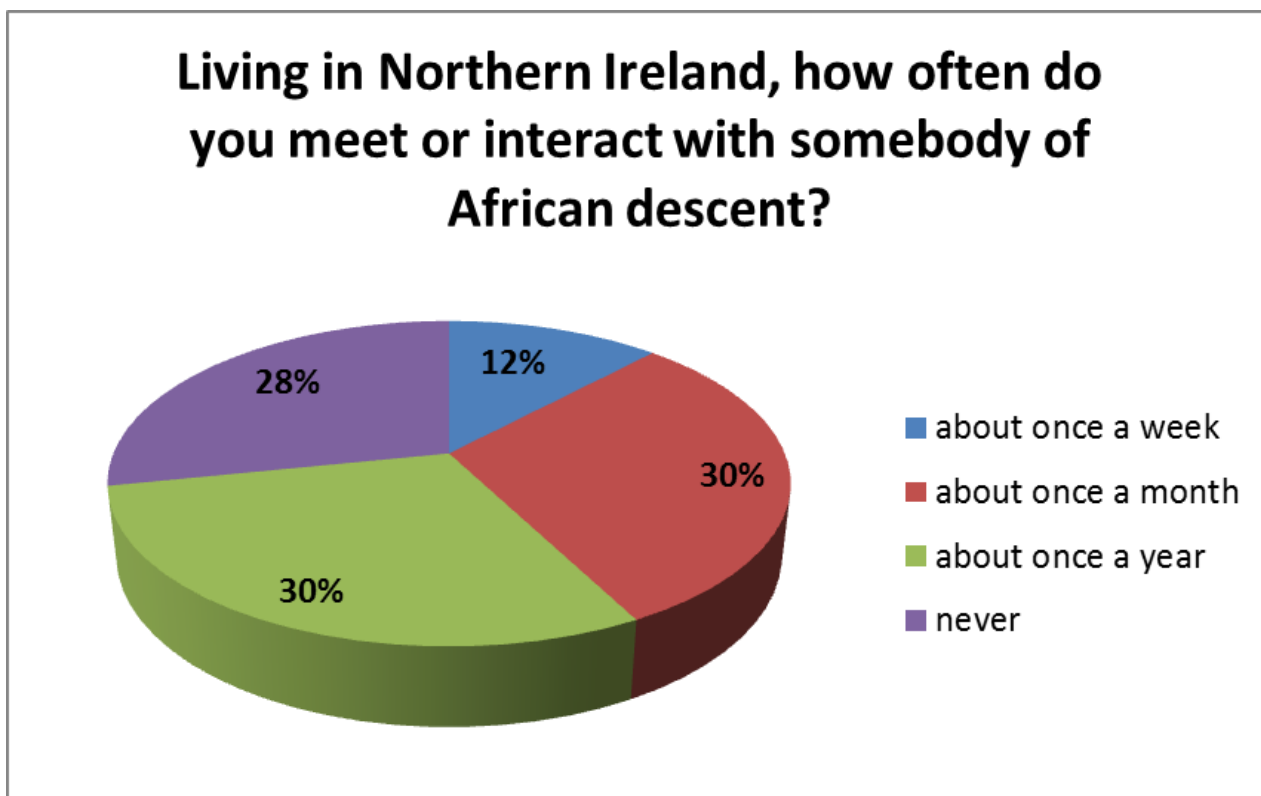
about once a **week**

about once a **month**

about once a **year**

never

All 149 respondents answered this question.



Almost 60% of respondents stated that they interacted with somebody of African descent once a year or never.

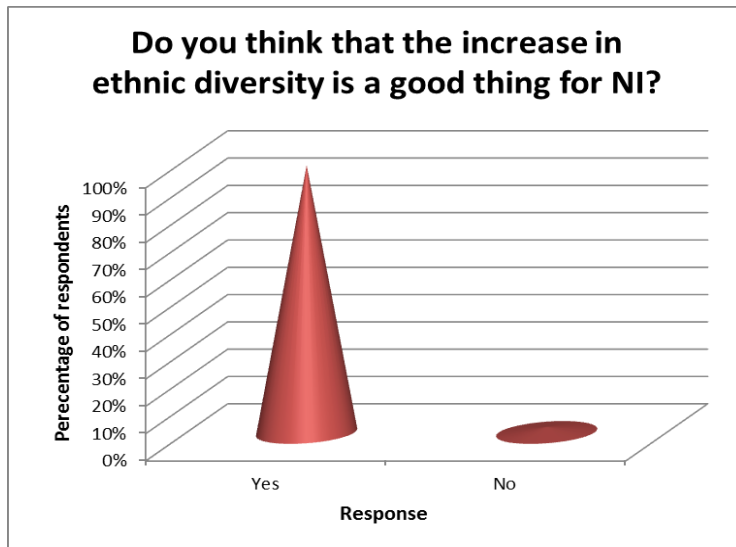
One third of people surveyed said that they interacted with somebody of African descent on a monthly-basis.

12% of respondents said that they interacted with somebody of African descent “about once a week”.

Question 11

11. Do you think that the increase in ethnic diversity is a good thing for Northern Ireland? (please circle your answer and give a reason) **Yes** **No**

Five of the 149 people surveyed did not answer this question.



Of the respondents who answered the question, 98% said “Yes” – indicating that they do believe the increase in Ethnic Diversity is a positive thing for Northern Ireland.

2% answered “No”.

One participant asked the surveyors what “Ethnic Diversity” meant. The surveyor explained that it means the ‘increase in people from different areas who come to live in Northern Ireland’.

Examples of comments given in response to this question included:

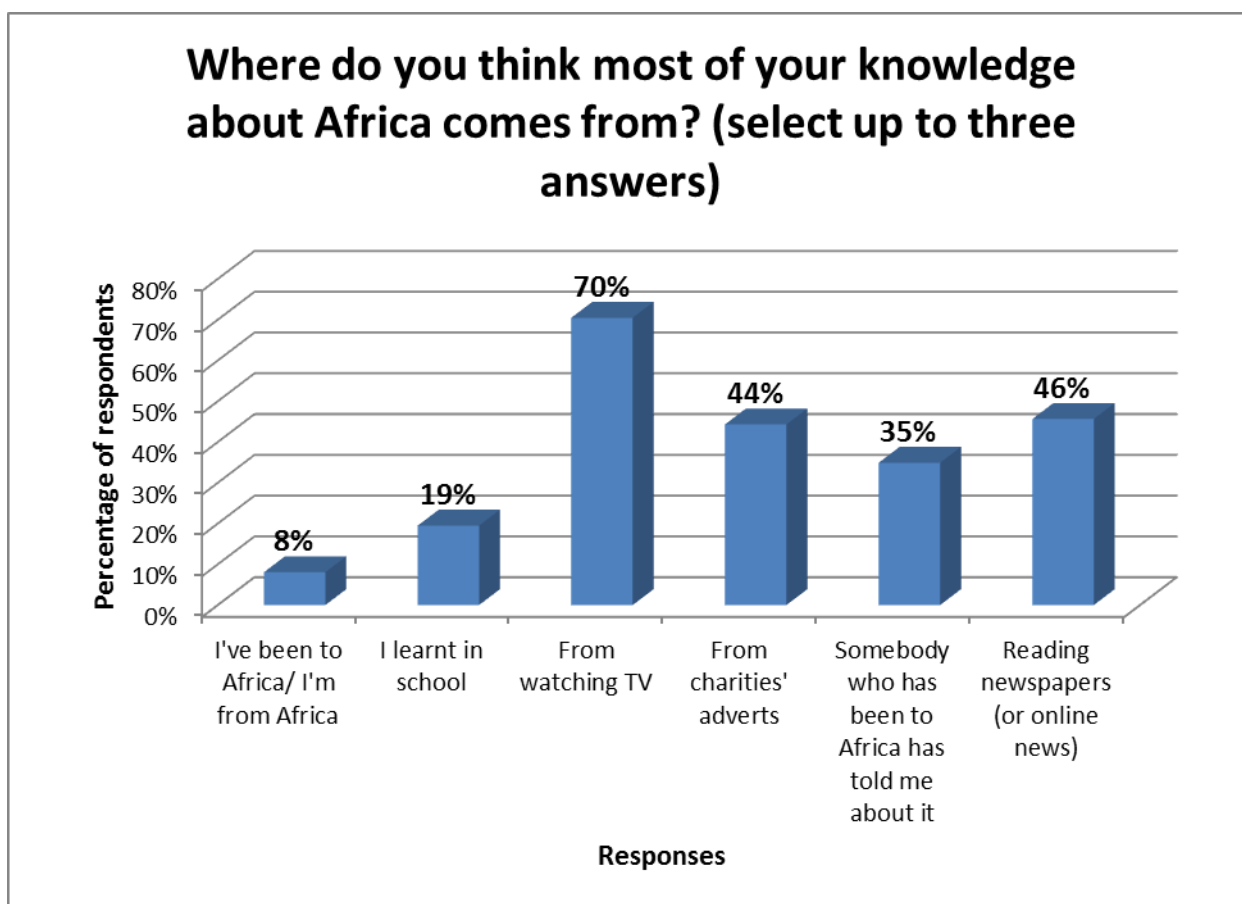
- much more interesting multi-cultural society
- reflects global changes
- we have been too insular and need our beliefs and ideas shaken up
- Too many people concentrate in their own community. People become ignorant of other communities. Ethnic diversity changes this
- Cultural Understanding and Diversity is important to diffuse racial discriminations
- I am ethnic and I would like to not be the only non-white person around
- Ethnic diversity is neither good nor bad - it is just what happens, it can have both positive and negative effects
- Too insular country. Too racist
- NI is much too homogenous ethnically
- We should know and respect other cultures as they should know and respect ours
- Diversity is the way forward - learning and respecting other cultures
- Depends on what you mean
- Us Irish people need to be a little more open minded and not so prejudice
- Builds cultural awareness
- Drives social change and improves the population's understanding of the world
- It is always a good thing. The more people from different ethnic descents get to know each other, the easier it will be to dissolve prejudice
- If you can interact with a wide variety of people you will be more open-minded
- Until I attempted this survey, I was unaware of how little I knew about Africa. Greater diversity may help us learn about such a culture.

Question 12

12. Where do you think most of your knowledge about Africa comes from? (tick up to three answers)

I've been to Africa/ I'm from Africa	<input type="checkbox"/>	I learnt in school	<input type="checkbox"/>
From watching TV	<input type="checkbox"/>	From charities' adverts	<input type="checkbox"/>
Somebody who has been to Africa has told me about it	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Reading newspapers (or online news)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please state _____)	

Several respondents ignored the instruction to tick a maximum of three boxes and some selected five!



It was clear from the responses to this question that the media has a huge influence on the respondents' knowledge of Africa. By far the greatest source of knowledge came from "watching TV".

The next largest source of information was "Reading newspapers (or online news)", which 46% of respondents said informed their knowledge of Africa.

44% of respondents stated that their knowledge of Africa was informed by "charities adverts".

Less than one fifth of respondents said that their knowledge of Africa have been learnt at school.

For further information about this survey report contact:

Alfred Abolarin

Manager

Afro-Community Support Organisation Northern Ireland (ACSONI)

First Floor, 9 Lower Crescent, Belfast

BT7 1NR

Telephone: 02890 434090

Email: info@acsoni.org

Website: www.acsoni.org

Supported by the European Commission

