Data for Governance Alliance Policy Brief No. 4

Perceptions are bad, reality is worse: Citizens report widespread predation by African police

Carolyn Logan, Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny, and Luyando Katenda

18 March 2022

This policy brief was previously published as Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 512

Summary

Over the past two years, the #EndSARS movement in Nigeria and widely reported abuses by police enforcing pandemic restrictions have drawn renewed scrutiny to the behaviour of Africa's security forces. Massive demonstrations against police brutality have rocked not only Nigeria (Busari, 2020; Obaji, 2020; Amnesty International, 2020; Adegoke, 2020) but also Ghana (BBC, 2020), Kenya (Odula, 2020), and South Africa (Harrisberg, 2020).

The protests in Nigeria and elsewhere erupted against a background of widespread public perceptions and experiences of the police as corrupt, untrustworthy, and unhelpful. The question of whether police should be seen as "protectors or predators" increasingly shapes the debate.

Based on interviews in 34 African countries in 2019/2021, Afrobarometer identifies continuing patterns of distrust and high levels of perceived police corruption in many countries. These perceptions are shaped by direct personal experiences that too often involve unwanted encounters with the police, poor service to the public, and frequent demands for bribes. While Nigeria is one of the worst-afflicted countries, it is by no means the only place where these problems are widespread.

A few countries offer a brighter picture. Both perceived corruption and actual bribe payments are far less common in Botswana, Cabo Verde, Mauritius, Namibia, Tanzania, and Tunisia. Ratings of government performance in fighting crime and citizens' ability to get assistance from the police are well above average in Benin, Tanzania, Botswana, and Eswatini. While these countries still have room for improvement, their police forces may serve as models for poorly performing countries to examine and emulate.

But these findings highlight the fact that many police forces across the continent have considerable work to do before they can be regarded as positive, protective promoters of security and social development, rather than a drain on society that preys especially upon the most vulnerable populations.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Eight rounds of surveys have been completed in up to 39 countries since 1999. Round 8 surveys (2019/2021) cover 34 countries – 18 countries surveyed between July 2019 and April 2020 and 16 surveyed (after a hiatus due to COVID-19) between October 2020 and July 2021.

Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples that yield country-level results with margins of error of +/-2 to +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

This 34-country analysis is based on 48,084 interviews (see Appendix Table A.1 for a list of countries and fieldwork dates). The data are weighted to ensure nationally representative samples.[1] When reporting multi-country averages, all countries are weighted equally (rather than in proportion to population size). Due to rounding, reported totals may differ by 1 percentage point from the sum of sub-categories.

---

[1] The weighted Mozambique Round 8 sample is nationally representative except that it excludes rural Cabo Delgado, comprising 6.3% of the adult population of Mozambique. Insecurity and resulting difficulties in obtaining necessary fieldwork clearances prevented Afrobarometer from collecting sufficient data in this area.

Key findings

On experience of crime and insecurity:

- Many citizens don't feel secure in their neighbourhoods (47%) or even inside their homes (39%). The public's sense of security has declined significantly since the last survey cycle in 2016/2018.

- The poorest citizens feel much less secure than their wealthier counterparts: More than one-quarter (28%) feel unsafe walking in their neighbourhoods most of the time, more than three times as many as among the wealthiest (8%).

On assessments of government performance:

- On average across 34 countries, just 40% of Africans give their governments positive marks for efforts to reduce crime. For the first time in more than two decades' worth of Afrobarometer surveys, a majority say their governments are performing badly on this issue.

On police presence:

- Countries vary widely in their levels of police presence in communities as observed via police stations, roadblocks, and related evidence. Afrobarometer field teams recorded the presence of police stations in more than two-thirds of enumeration areas (EAs) in Cameroon (68%) but fewer than one in five in Niger (19%).

- The use of roadblocks also varies widely, and is generally not proportional to the presence of police stations. Enumerators encountered police or military roadblocks in 42% of the EAs visited in Cameroon and 35% in Sudan – but none in Mauritius, Cabo Verde, and Uganda.

On corruption and (dis)trust:

- On average across 34 countries, the police are perceived to be the most corrupt among nine key government and societal institutions. Almost half (47%) of respondents say "most" or "all" police officials in their country are corrupt.

- Though generally high, perceived corruption among the police varies widely across countries. Fewer than one-fourth of citizens report that "most" or "all" police are corrupt in Tunisia (24%), Tanzania (23%), Cabo Verde (22%), and Morocco (15%). But more than two-thirds of Gabonese (69%), Ugandans (68%), Kenyans (68%), and Liberians (67%) offer this grim assessment.

- Fewer than half (49%) of respondents say they trust the police "somewhat" or "a   lot."

4

On encounters with the police:

- About one in seven citizens (15%) sought assistance from the police in the previous year. Far more (39%) say they encountered the police in other circumstances, such as checkpoints, identity checks, or during investigations. Young, urban, male, and more educated respondents are most likely to have contact with the police.

- Among those who encountered the police, 51% found it difficult to get the assistance they needed, and one in three had to pay a bribe to get help (36%) or avoid problems (34%).

- Levels of bribery are not related to levels of contact. While Eswatini and Cameroon have the highest levels of contact at 75% and 69% respectively, nearly three times as many Cameroonians had to pay a bribe (35% of all respondents, compared to 12% in Eswatini). Contact and bribery rates were far lower in Ethiopia (23% contact, 6% bribe) and Tanzania (21% contact, 8% bribe).

- The poor are especially likely to be victimized by poor service and demands for bribes. Although they have somewhat lower levels of contact than the wealthy (46% among the wealthy vs. 44% among the poorest), they are almost twice as likely to have paid a bribe (18% among the poorest, 10% among the wealthiest).

On the effects of bribery:

- There is a strong negative correlation at the country level between the proportion of the population that has paid a bribe to police and levels of trust in police. Bribery clearly undermines citizens' confidence in their security forces.

Context: Experience of crime and insecurity

In principle, the police play several critical roles in society: They enforce the law; maintain public order; prevent, combat, and investigate crime; respond to emergency situations; and, most fundamentally, protect and secure citizens and their property.

But lack of a sense of personal security is a widespread and growing problem across much of the continent. Afrobarometer asks respondents whether they feel unsafe walking in their neighbourhoods or fear crime inside their homes. Across 34 countries where these questions were asked in 2019/2021, nearly half (47%) of respondents say they felt unsafe walking in their neighbourhoods at least once, including 16% who say they felt this way "many times" or "always." Four in 10 (39%) feared crime in their own homes, including one in seven (14%) who experienced this fear frequently.

Moreover, citizens are losing ground in their quest for personal security. Across 30 countries tracked for the past decade, we see 7-percentage-point drops in the proportions saying they "never" experienced fear in their homes (from 61% to 54%) or in their neighbourhoods (from 61% to 54%) (Figure 1).
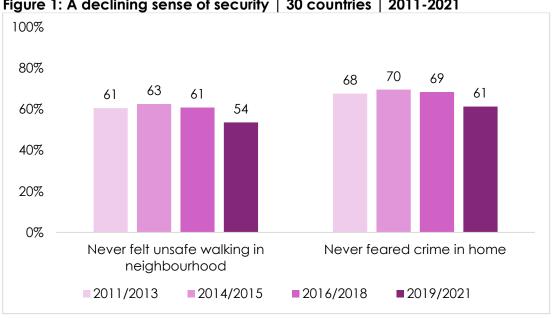
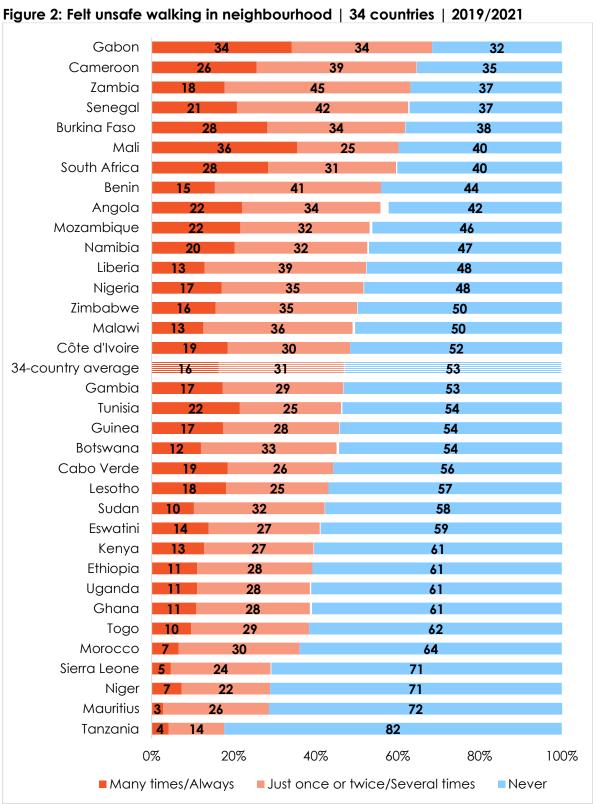**Figure 1: A declining sense of security | 30 countries | 2011-2021**

Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Felt unsafe walking in your neighbourhood? Feared crime in your own home? (% who say "never")

There is wide country variation in citizens' sense of (in)security. Tanzanians are most confident moving about in their communities, although even there nearly one in five (18%) say they at least occasionally feel unsafe (Figure 2). Mauritians, Nigeriens, and Sierra Leoneans follow with "only" about three in 10 expressing concern. But the story is vastly different in Gabon, Cameroon, Zambia, Senegal, Burkina Faso, and Mali, all countries where more than six in 10 citizens experience at least occasional fear in their neighbourhoods. More than one-third of Malians (36%) and Gabonese (34%) say they felt unsafe "many times" or "always" during the past year.
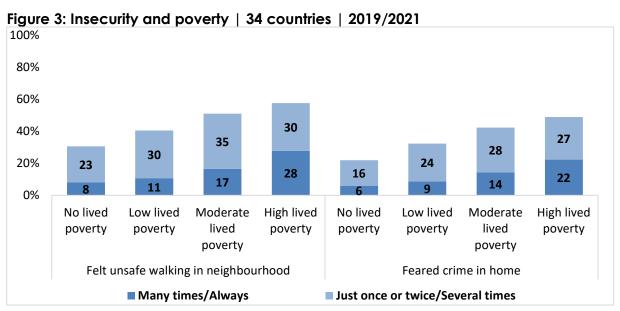
Although men (46%) and women (48%) report similar levels of insecurity while walking in their communities, other demographic differences are more pronounced. Those under age 35 (48%-49%) feel more insecure than their elders over age 55 (41%-44%), while more educated respondents are somewhat more likely to feel fearful than the least educated (51% vs. 44%). Urbanites (55%) are also significantly more concerned about personal security than those in rural areas (42%).

But the starkest differences are evident across income groups.[2] While some might assume that wealthier individuals, with more physical property to lose, would be most at risk, in fact the poor are much more likely to feel unsafe (Figure 3). Comparing the poorest group to the wealthiest, nearly twice as many among the poorest report having experienced fear walking in their neighbourhoods in the past year (58% vs. 31%), and more than three times as many say this happened frequently or always (28% vs. 8%). The patterns are similar with respect to fear of crime within the home.

---

[2] Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes (2020).

Figure 2: Felt unsafe walking in neighbourhood | 34 countries | 2019/2021

Country	Many times/Always	Just once or twice/Several times	Never
Gabon	34	34	32
Cameroon	26	39	35
Zambia	18	45	37
Senegal	21	42	37
Burkina Faso	28	34	38
Mali	36	25	40
South Africa	28	31	40
Benin	15	41	44
Angola	22	34	42
Mozambique	22	32	46
Namibia	20	32	47
Liberia	13	39	48
Nigeria	17	35	48
Zimbabwe	16	35	50
Malawi	13	36	50
Côte d'Ivoire	19	30	52
34-country average	16	31	53
Gambia	17	29	53
Tunisia	22	25	54
Guinea	17	28	54
Botswana	12	33	54
Cabo Verde	19	26	56
Lesotho	18	25	57
Sudan	10	32	58
Eswatini	14	27	59
Kenya	13	27	61
Ethiopia	11	28	61
Uganda	11	28	61
Ghana	11	28	61
Togo	10	29	62
Morocco	7	30	64
Sierra Leone	5	24	71
Niger	7	22	71
Mauritius	3	26	72
Tanzania	4	14	82

■ Many times/Always   ■ Just once or twice/Several times   ■ Never

Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family felt unsafe walking in your neighbourhood?

Figure 3: Insecurity and poverty | 34 countries | 2019/2021

Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Felt unsafe walking in your neighbourhood? Feared crime in your own home?

In light of these findings, it should not come as a surprise that most governments get poor marks for their handling of crime (Figure 4). On average across 34 countries, just 40% of citizens say their government was doing "fairly well" or "very well" in fighting crime; for the first time in more than two decades' worth of Afrobarometer surveys, a majority (58%) say their governments are doing a poor job on this issue. Majorities give their governments negative marks in 25 out of 34 countries, and fewer than one in five respondents have good things to say in Gabon (8% fairly/very well), Sudan (14%), Cabo Verde (14%), and South Africa (19%). Citizens are far more satisfied in Tanzania (86%), Benin (76%), and Botswana (69%).
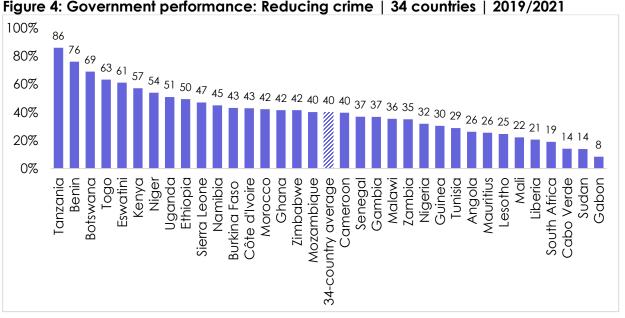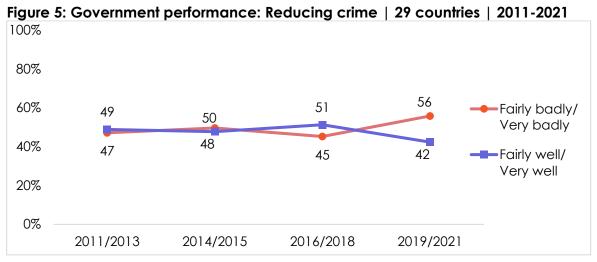
Figure 4: Government performance: Reducing crime | 34 countries | 2019/2021

Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Reducing crime? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")

Across 29 countries where government performance in fighting crime has been tracked for the past decade, we see a marked shift. As recently as 2016/2018 (Round 7), a narrow majority (51%) gave their governments positive marks, but since then there has been a precipitous 9-percentage-point drop in positive ratings and an even sharper 11-point increase in negative assessments (Figure 5).

The sharp decline between 2016/2018 and 2019/2021 is led by Lesotho (-43 percentage points), Liberia (-32 points), Cabo Verde (-23 points), and Nigeria (-21 points), but 11 other countries also saw double-digit declines in performance ratings (Figure 6). Just three recorded double-digit gains: Benin (+28 points), Togo (+13 points), and Tanzania (+12 points).

Figure 5: Government performance: Reducing crime | 29 countries | 2011-2021

Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Reducing crime?

Figure 6: Change in government performance: Reducing crime | 29 countries | 2016-2021

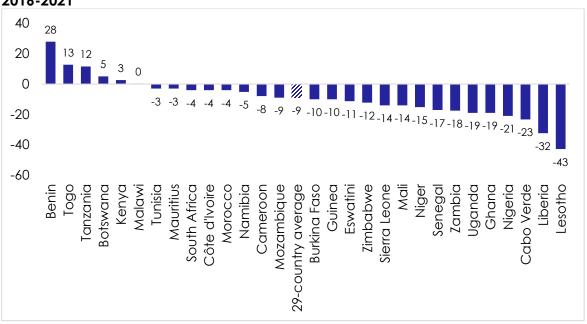*Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Reducing crime? (% saying "fairly well" or "very well" in 2019/2021 minus % who said the same in 2016/2018. Positive numbers represent improvement.)*

Police presence

In the context of the public's widespread sense of insecurity and disappointment with government efforts to fight crime, what do citizens have to say about their perceptions of and interactions with police? We begin by examining basic measures of police presence before turning to more detailed explorations of how police forces interact with the public.

During the course of fieldwork in any given country, Afrobarometer field teams visit between 150 (for survey n=1,200) and 300 (for survey n=2,400) enumeration areas (EAs). They conduct eight interviews in each EA and also capture information on the presence of basic services and facilities within that EA. The information presented in this section comes from these EA-level observations recorded by the field teams, rather than from individual interviews. The information includes several indicators of the presence of police and other security forces.

The most common evidence of security presence is the physical presence of a police station, which was evident in 36% of the EAs visited (Figure 7). Field teams actually saw police in 30% and soldiers in 12% of EAs. In addition, teams encountered frequent checkpoints or roadblocks in the EAs, including those run by police or military (10%), by private security or community members (6%), and by customs authorities (5%).
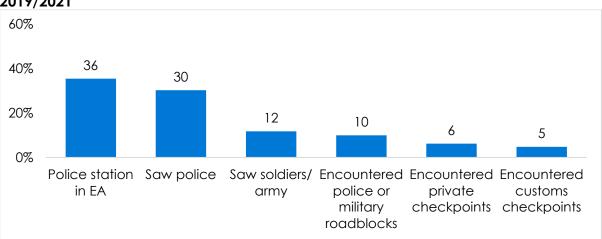
**Figure 7: Police and security presence in enumeration areas (EAs) | 34 countries |
2019/2021**

Source: Observations recorded by Afrobarometer field teams in each enumeration area (EA) they visited for interviews during fieldwork. Teams visit between 150 and 300 EAs in each country depending on the sample size.

Police presence varies widely by country. Police stations were recorded in more than half of the EAs visited in Cameroon (68%), Botswana (63%), Kenya (58%), Morocco (57%), and Tunisia (56%), but in fewer than one in five EAs in Niger (19%).

Moreover, how police make their presence felt can also vary drastically. In Cameroon, where 68% of EAs have a police station, teams encountered police or military roadblocks in 42% of all EAs they visited (Figure 8). In sharp contrast, police station presence is almost as high in Botswana (63%), but teams encountered roadblocks in only 3% of EAs. Overall, there appears to be only a relatively weak correlation at the country level between the physical presence of police stations and police use of roadblocks in local communities.[3]

---

[3] Pearson's r=0.399, significant at the 0.05 level

Figure 8: Police presence in enumeration areas (EAs) | 34 countries | 2019/2021

	Police station	Police/Military roadblocks
Cameroon	68	42
Botswana	63	3
Kenya	58	9
Morocco	57	20
Tunisia	56	23
Sudan	48	35
Mozambique	46	4
Mauritius	43	0
South Africa	43	1
Benin	41	14
Guinea	40	7
Liberia	40	4
Senegal	38	1
Angola	37	30
Cabo Verde	36	0
34-country average	36	10
Ghana	35	9
Uganda	34	0
Mali	31	7
Malawi	30	2
Ethiopia	29	3
Côte d'Ivoire	28	11
Gambia	28	12
Namibia	28	3
Gabon	26	16
Burkina Faso	25	5
Nigeria	25	18
Tanzania	24	5
Togo	24	8
Eswatini	22	13
Lesotho	21	6
Sierra Leone	21	6
Zimbabwe	21	5
Zambia	21	5
Niger	19	10

Source: Observations recorded by Afrobarometer field teams in each enumeration area (EA) visited for interviews during fieldwork. Teams visit between 150 and 300 EAs in each country depending on the sample size.
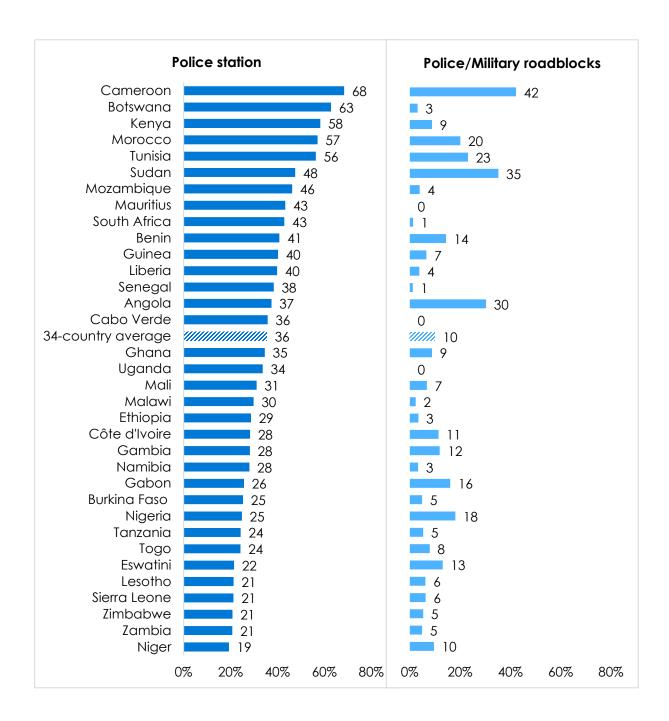
It is also important to note that the implications of higher police presence are not necessarily obvious. In countries where higher presence means "more roadblocks," do those roadblocks serve as a form of law enforcement or as an opportunity for police predation, or both? It does not appear that police presence necessarily makes community residents feel safer. On average across 34 countries, people who lived in communities with a police station felt marginally *less* safe walking in their neighbourhoods (50% never felt unsafe, compared to 54% in EAs with no station) and in their homes (60% never feared crime, compared to 62% in EAs with no station).

Perceptions of the police: Corruption and (dis)trust

Although in principle the mission of the police is clearly intended to foster safety, security, and social development, the question of whether in practice they act as "protectors or predators" comes up far too frequently (Agbiboa, 2015; Newham & Faull, 2011; Wambua, 2015). Do citizens perceive the police to be part of the solution to the challenges they face, or part of the problem?

Generally the answer is the latter. Across the continent, citizens give Africa's police forces poor marks for integrity and trustworthiness. The police are, on average, perceived to be the most corrupt among nine key government and societal institutions. Almost half (47%) of respondents say "most" or "all" of the police in their country are corrupt, far outstripping the proportion who perceive widespread corruption among members of Parliament (38%), tax officials (35%), judges and magistrates (35%), and officials in the Presidency (35%) (Figure 9). Fewer than half (49%) say they trust the police "somewhat" or "a lot," making them less trusted than presidents and their staff (51%), traditional leaders (60%), the military (64%), and religious leaders (69%).
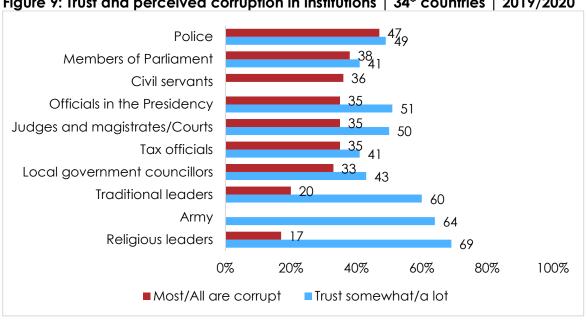
Figure 9: Trust and perceived corruption in institutions | 34* countries | 2019/2020

Respondents were asked:
  How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?
  How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?
* *Questions about members of Parliament were not asked in Sudan.*
Questions about traditional leaders were not asked in Cabo Verde, Mauritius, and Tunisia.
Questions about local government councils/councillors were not asked in Angola and Sudan.

Though generally high, perceived corruption among the police varies widely across countries. At least two-thirds of citizens see "most" or "all" police officials as corrupt in Gabon (69%), Uganda (68%), Kenya (68%), and Liberia (67%) (Figure 10). In contrast, only about one in five share this perception in Tanzania (23%), Cabo Verde (22%), and Morocco (15%).

In 23 of 34 countries, the police rank as more corrupt than three other key institutions (judges/magistrates, Parliament, and the Presidency). In several countries, such as Gabon, Mali, and Guinea, perceived corruption is high across many government institutions. But in others, most notably Côte d'Ivoire, Eswatini, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Uganda, the police are regarded as far more corrupt than other government institutions.

Figure 10: Perceived corruption among officials | 34 countries | 2019/2021

Respondents were asked: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

15

Like perceptions of corruption, popular trust in the police varies widely across surveyed countries (Figure 11). Nigerians, Liberians, Gabonese, South Africans, and Sierra Leoneans are least trusting of their police; only one in four say they trust them "somewhat" or "a lot." In contrast, the police enjoy the trust of three-quarters or more of the population in Tanzania (84%), Niger (80%), Senegal (76%), Burkina Faso (75%), and Morocco (75%).
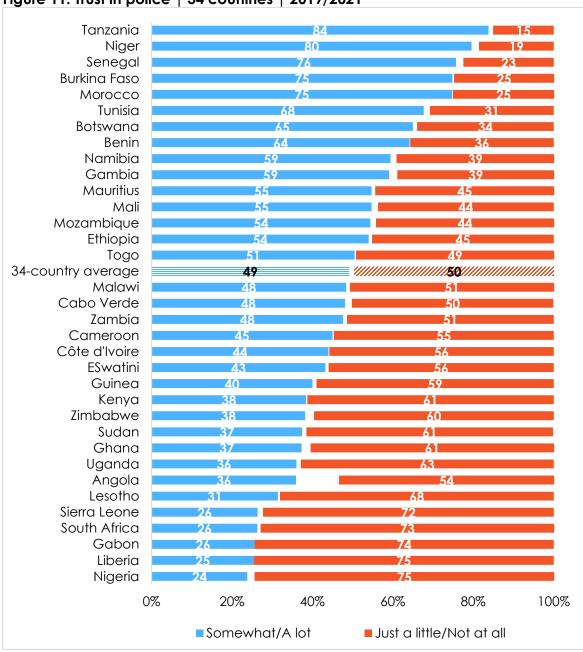
Figure 11: Trust in police | 34 countries | 2019/2021
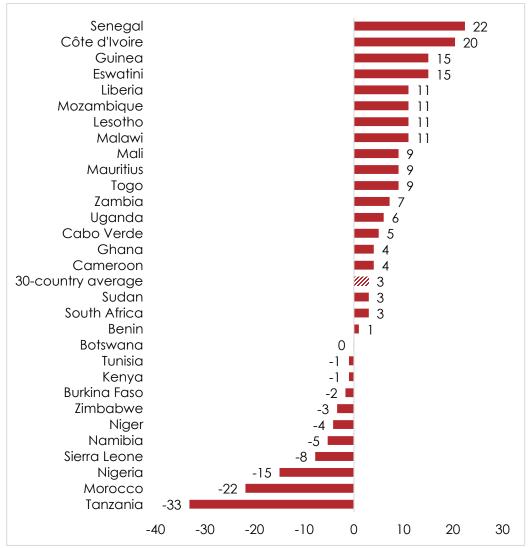

Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

On average, across the 30 countries where perceptions of the police have been tracked since 2011/2013, the assessment that "all" or "most" police are corrupt has increased by just 3 percentage points, while trust

16

has remained steady at 52%. However, there have been drastic increases over the past decade in perceived police corruption in Senegal (+22 percentage points), Côte d'Ivoire (+20 points), Guinea (+15 points), and Eswatini (+15 points), with smaller but still significant increases in another 12 countries (Figure 12).

Over the same period, just three countries recorded double-digit improvements: Perceived corruption among the police was down 15 percentage points in Nigeria, 22 points in Morocco, and a remarkable 33 points in Tanzania. But even after this improvement, Nigeria still reports some of the highest levels of perceived corruption in 2019/2021.
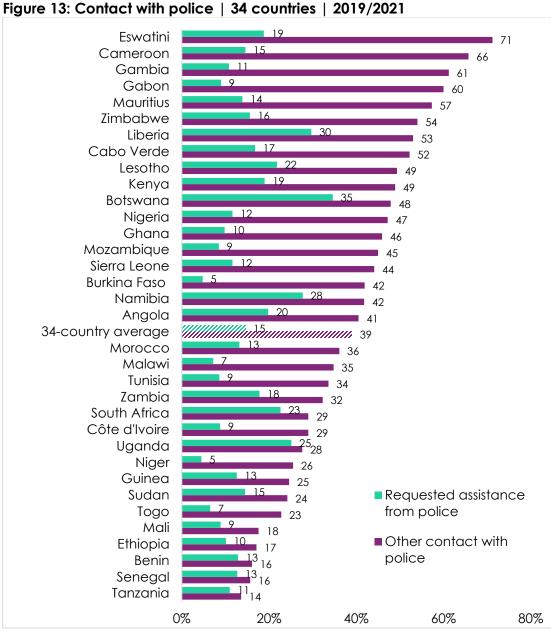
Figure 12: Changes in perceived corruption among police | 30 countries | 2011-2021

Respondents were asked: *How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption,   or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Police? (% saying "most" or "all" in 2019/2021 minus % who said the same in 2011/2013. Positive numbers indicate increased corruption.)*

Encounters with the police

To what extent are these relatively negative assessments of police integrity rooted in personal experiences as opposed to a more diffuse societal perception? We find significant evidence that personal encounters with police play a formative role in these public perceptions. While about one in seven citizens (15%) say they went to the police during the previous year to request assistance, many more (39%) encountered police in other circumstances, such as checkpoints or identity checks or during investigations (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Contact with police | 34 countries | 2019/2021

Respondents were asked:
In the past 12 months, have you requested assistance from the police? (% who say "yes")
In the past 12 months, how often have you encountered the police in other situations, like at checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation? (% who say "often," "a few times," or "once or twice")

Relatively high trust in the police (see Figure 11) in Botswana (65%) and Namibia (59%) may be reflected in the fact that large numbers of Batswana (35%) and Namibians (28%) went to the police for assistance at least once during the previous year. However, Liberians requested police assistance at a similar rate (30%) even though the country has one of the lowest levels of trust on the continent (25%). More than one in five adults also had voluntary contact with the police in Uganda (25%), South Africa (23%), Lesotho (22%), and Angola (20%). However, in 11 of the 34 countries, one in 10 or fewer sought out police assistance.
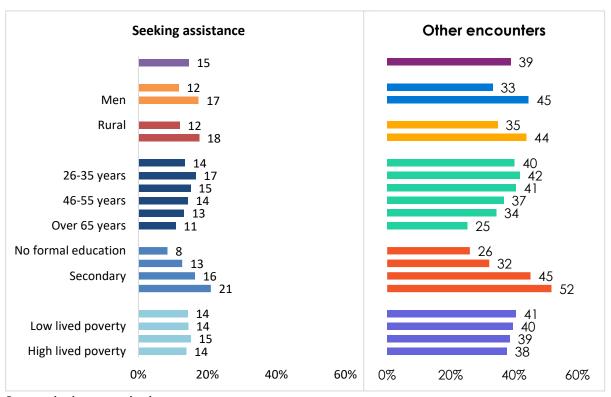
Contact with the police under other circumstances was higher in every country. In Eswatini, a remarkable 71% report encountering the police via checkpoints, identity checks, or investigations, and the same is true for large majorities of Cameroonians (66%), Gambians (61%), and Gabonese (60%). Fewer than one in five experienced similar encounters in Mali (18%), Ethiopia (17%), Benin (16%), Senegal (16%), and Tanzania (14%).

Despite the significant disparities in the initiation, purpose, and overall magnitudes of the two types of contact, the demographic distribution of those who have contact in each case are quite similar. In both cases, men and urbanites are significantly more likely to have contact with the police, and young adults have more contact than the elderly (Figure 14).

Education, however, stands out as a major factor predicting the likelihood of contact: Those with post-secondary education are more than twice as likely as those with no formal education to seek police assistance (21% vs. 8%), and twice as likely to encounter police under other circumstances (52% vs. 26%). The latter likely in part reflects the frequency of police encounters at roadblocks or checkpoints, since those with post-secondary education are far more likely to personally own a vehicle compared to those with no education (37% vs. 15%). In contrast, differences across poverty levels are marginal.

Police presence is also associated with higher contact rates. Nearly one in five citizens (18%) approached police for assistance where police stations are present in the community, compared to 13% where they are not. And contact rates in other types of encounters are also higher – by 8 percentage points in both cases – among individuals who live in enumeration areas with police stations and where police/military roadblocks were present.

Figure 14: Who has contact with police: Seeking assistance vs. unintended encounters | 34 countries | 2019/2021

Respondents were asked:

In the past 12 months, have you requested assistance from the police? (% who say "yes")

In the past 12 months, how often have you encountered the police in other situations, like at checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation? (% who say "often," "a few times," or "once or twice")

Among those who contacted the police for assistance, more than half report that it was "difficult" (30%) or "very difficult" (22%) to get the help they needed (Figure 15). As many as two-thirds found it difficult in Uganda (69%), Gabon (69%), Kenya (67%), and Sudan (66%), and even among the best-performing countries – Benin (29%), Namibia (35%), and Mauritius (35%) – roughly one in three experienced challenges.

Figure 15: Difficulty of getting police assistance | 34* countries | 2019/2021

Country	Very difficult	Difficult
Uganda	38	31
Gabon	25	44
Kenya	33	34
Sudan	12	54
Liberia	22	43
Zambia	38	27
Ghana	24	41
Guinea	33	31
Nigeria	29	34
Zimbabwe	30	29
Sierra Leone	27	31
Angola	21	36
South Africa	29	28
Gambia	24	32
Ethiopia	17	38
Tunisia	23	29
34-country average	22	30
Cameroon	22	27
Senegal	11	36
Botswana	23	20
Cabo Verde	13	29
Mali	12	29
Côte d'Ivoire	12	28
Tanzania	20	21
Mozambique	19	21
Morocco	6	32
Lesotho	27	11
Eswatini	12	25
Mauritius	5	29
Namibia	15	20
Benin	10	19

■ Very difficult ■ Difficult

Respondents were asked: In the past 12 months, have you requested assistance from the police? [If yes:] How easy or difficult was it for you to obtain the assistance you needed? (Those who did not ask for police assistance are excluded. Countries with fewer than 100 respondents who said they requested assistance (Burkina Faso, Malawi, Niger, and Togo) are not shown due to the large margin of error, although they are included in the 34-country average.)

Paying bribes is a common problem in both types of encounters with the police. More than one in three (36%) of those who contacted the police for assistance report paying a bribe to get the help they needed, and 34% of those who encountered the police in other situations paid bribes to avoid problems. These

levels are high compared to demands for bribes in exchange for other key public services, such as the delivery of identity documents (25%), medical care (19%), and public school services (18%).

The differences in bribe paying across the continent are stark. More than three-quarters of Nigerians (80%) and Ugandans (76%) who sought police assistance paid a bribe to get the help they needed, as did two-thirds (68%) of Liberian supplicants (Figure 16). However, bribe payments are still the exception in much of southern Africa: Fewer than one in 10 paid bribes for police assistance in Lesotho (9%), Botswana (7%), Namibia (5%), and Mauritius (4%). In Cabo Verde, a mere 1% report such payments.

Figure 16: Paid bribe for police assistance | 34* countries | 2019/2021

Respondents were asked: In the past 12 months, have you requested assistance from the police? [If yes:] And how often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a police officer in order to get the assistance you needed? (% who say "once or twice," "a few times," or "often") (Those who did not ask for police assistance are excluded. Countries with fewer than 100 respondents who said they requested assistance (Burkina Faso, Malawi, Niger, and Togo) are not shown due to the large margin of error, although they are included in the 34-country average.)

The pattern is similar with respect to bribe payments to avoid problems with the police: 75% of those making contact in Guinea and 69% in Nigeria paid a bribe, compared to just 2% in Cabo Verde (Figure 17).

Figure 17: Paid bribe to avoid problem with police | 34 countries | 2019/2021

Country	A few times/Often	Once or twice
Guinea	56	19
Nigeria	44	25
Togo	42	20
Liberia	29	26
Côte d'Ivoire	35	19
Uganda	29	23
Sudan	25	27
Cameroon	26	21
Niger	21	26
Sierra Leone	32	14
Mozambique	28	15
Zimbabwe	22	21
Angola	22	19
Ghana	27	14
Tanzania	26	15
Zambia	23	17
Senegal	26	14
Benin	19	20
Kenya	27	12
Mali	15	23
34-country average	20	14
Burkina Faso	17	15
Malawi	22	10
Morocco	13	16
Lesotho	16	9
South Africa	11	14
Ethiopia	12	11
Gabon	11	12
Tunisia	15	6
Gambia	10	7
Eswatini	6	8
Botswana	3	7
Mauritius	2	8
Namibia	3	6
Cabo Verde	1	1

Respondents who said they encountered the police in other situations (not when asking for assistance) during the previous 12 months were asked: And how often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a police officer in order to avoid a problem during one of these encounters? (Respondents who did not encounter

23

police in these circumstances are excluded.]

Earlier we reviewed the profile of citizens most likely to encounter the police (Figure 14): those who are younger, more urban, more educated, and/or male. But once contact is made, who is most likely to encounter problems in their dealings with the police, either in terms of finding it difficult to get help or having to pay a bribe?

To get a more comprehensive sense of both the quantity and quality (in terms of bribe payments) of police interactions, the next two charts combine both types of contact to look at *population totals* for contact and for bribe payment. The total share of the population that reports any type of contact, voluntary or involuntary, with police in the past year is 45% on average, while 15% of the total population report paying a bribe at least once during these contacts (Figure 18). About one in three citizens (29%) had contact with the police but *did not* pay a bribe.

These numbers reveal important distinctions across countries. For example, 75% of all adults in Eswatini had contact with the police in the past year, the highest contact rate of any surveyed country. But at 12%, the prevalence of bribery is comparatively low. Botswana, Mauritius, Cabo Verde, and Namibia similarly have high contact rates – all above 50% – but low incidence (6% or less) of bribery.

Cameroon, Liberia, and Nigeria, on the other hand, stand out because they have similarly high contact rates (69%, 59%, and 50%, respectively) but much higher proportions that report having paid a bribe: Fully one in three adults (34%-35%) in each country paid a bribe to police *within the past year.* In sharp contrast, Benin, Senegal, Mali, Ethiopia, and Tanzania all report contact rates of 25% or below and bribery rates of 10% or lower.

As we have previously noted, men, urban residents, and younger people are more likely to have had contact and more likely to have paid bribes than women, rural residents, and older people (Figure 19). Similarly, both contact and bribery rates increase steadily across education categories.

But the pattern with respect to poverty level is distinctive. While poorer respondents are less likely to have contact with police, they are *more likely* to have paid a bribe compared to wealthier citizens, suggesting that they are especially likely to be victimized by police during their interactions.

Almost half (46%) of the wealthiest had contact with police, but only about one in five of those with contact (10% of all respondents in the wealthiest group) paid a bribe. Among the poorest, contact rates were slightly lower at 44%, but more than four in 10 of those who encountered police (18% of all in the poorest group) wound up paying a bribe at least once.
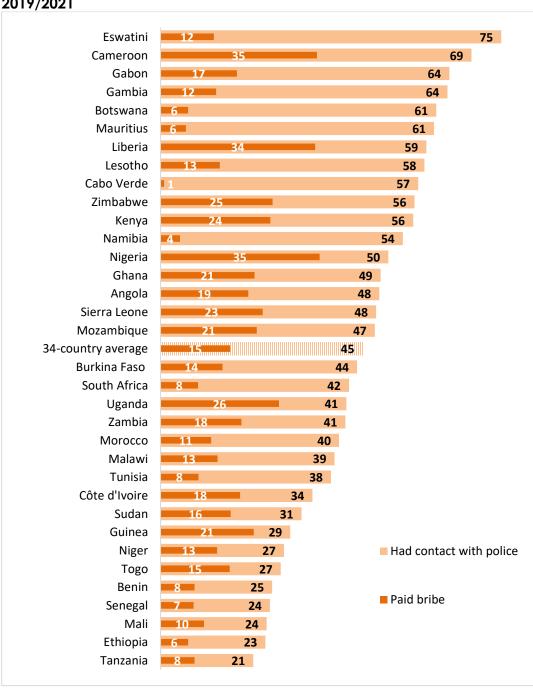
Figure 18: Police contact and bribery for total population | 34 countries | 2019/2021

Country	Paid bribe	Had contact with police
Eswatini	12	75
Cameroon	35	69
Gabon	17	64
Gambia	12	64
Botswana	6	61
Mauritius	6	61
Liberia	34	59
Lesotho	13	58
Cabo Verde	1	57
Zimbabwe	25	56
Kenya	24	56
Namibia	4	54
Nigeria	35	50
Ghana	21	49
Angola	19	48
Sierra Leone	23	48
Mozambique	21	47
34-country average	15	45
Burkina Faso	14	44
South Africa	8	42
Uganda	26	41
Zambia	18	41
Morocco	11	40
Malawi	13	39
Tunisia	8	38
Côte d'Ivoire	18	34
Sudan	16	31
Guinea	21	29
Niger	13	27
Togo	15	27
Benin	8	25
Senegal	7	24
Mali	10	24
Ethiopia	6	23
Tanzania	8	21

Respondents were asked:

In the past 12 months have you requested assistance from the police? [If yes:] And how often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a police officer in order to get the assistance you needed?
In the past 12 months, how often have you encountered the police in other situations, like at checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation? [If ever:] How often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a police officer in order to avoid a problem during one of these encounters?
Figure shows % of all respondents who report either or both types of contact with police (light-blue bars) and % of all respondents who report paying a bribe to police under either circumstance (dark-blue bars).

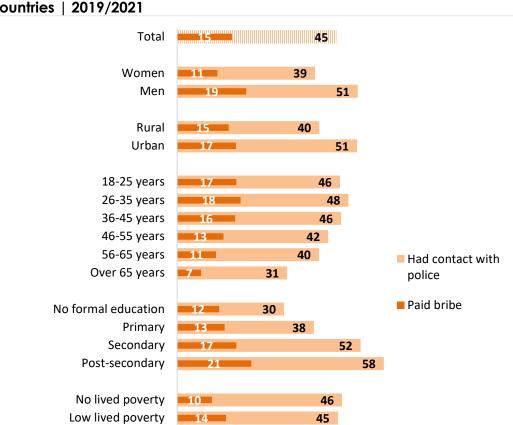**Figure 19: Police contact and bribery rates | by socio-demographic group | 34 countries | 2019/2021**

Figure shows % of all respondents who report either or both types of contact with police (light-blue bars) and % of all respondents who report paying a bribe to police under either circumstance (dark-blue bars).
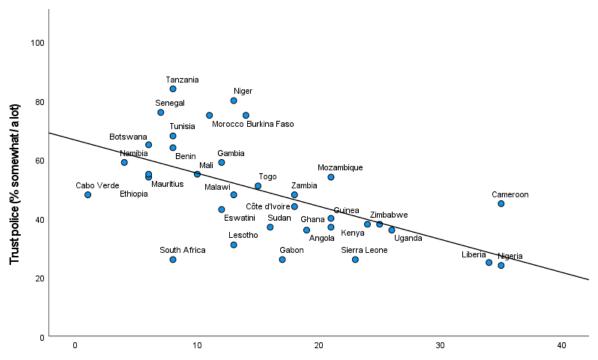
Circling back: Bribery and (lack of) trust

We have described low levels of trust in the police and widespread payment of bribes when interacting with police. How closely linked are the two findings? As shown in Figure 20, there is a strong correlation at the country level between the proportion of the total population who have paid a bribe in the past year and the level of trust in the police (Pearson's r=.695, significant at the 0.01 level). Liberia and Nigeria, two of the countries with the highest incidences of police bribes, also have some of the lowest levels of trust, while Tanzania occupies the opposite extreme, with low levels of bribery and high levels of trust.

It is clear that bribery is not the only factor affecting trust: Although perceptions of police bribery are still relatively modest in South Africa, for example, police there earn some of the lowest levels of trust on the continent. This may in part reflect a more generalised and profound loss of public confidence in state institutions over the past decade in South Africa (Moosa & Hofmeyr, 2021), rather than mistrust focusing only on the police.

But it is evident that frequent encounters with expectations of or demands for bribes in order to get police assistance or avoid police harassment seriously undermine public confidence in the institution.

Figure 20: Bribe payment and trust in police | 34 countries | 2019/2021

Paid bribe to police for assistance or to avoid problem (% of all respondents)

Summarising policing

The three tables below summarise our indicators related to police presence and contact, police capacity or effectiveness, and police integrity, offering some overall perspective on how countries rank with respect to each of these issues.

We begin with a comparison, in Table 1, of the measures of police presence and of direct contact with police that were described above. Countries are ordered from highest to lowest based on the average of the three indicators of police presence (police station in the EA, police seen in the EA, and police or military roadblock in the EA). Cameroon, Morocco, Tunisia, Sudan, and Angola stand out for the highest levels of police presence, ranking high across all three indicators, while Niger, Malawi, Zimbabwe, and Lesotho record relatively low levels of presence across all three indicators.

But of particular interest in this table is the lack of evident connection at the country level – as opposed to the individual level reported above – between the local presence of police and reported levels of citizen contact with police. We might expect high police presence to be closely associated with "other contact" with police (through roadblocks, etc.), but the connection appears to be weak at best. This suggests that national-level differences in policing policies and practices have a greater influence on contact rates than local police presence. Cameroon ranks highest in terms of police presence and has one of the highest levels of police contact at 66%. But there is no consistent pattern that holds across most countries. On the one hand, Sudan has quite a high police presence but relatively modest levels of (unplanned) contact (24%). On the other hand, the Gambia, Eswatini, and Zimbabwe, with moderate to very low levels of police presence, have some of the highest levels of contact across all countries. The lack of evident relationship is confirmed by the absence of a significant correlation among these indicators.

Table 1: Summary of police presence and contact indicators | 34 countries | 2019/2021

	Presence			Contact	
	Police station	Survey team saw police	Police/Military roadblocks	Contact for assistance	Other contact
Cameroon	68%	79%	42%	15%	66%
Morocco	57%	60%	20%	13%	36%
Tunisia	56%	57%	23%	9%	34%
Sudan	48%	51%	35%	15%	24%
Angola	37%	43%	30%	20%	41%
Botswana	63%	37%	3%	35%	48%
Kenya	58%	32%	9%	19%	49%
South Africa	43%	42%	1%	23%	29%
Benin	41%	31%	14%	13%	16%
Guinea	40%	33%	7%	13%	25%
Cabo Verde	36%	43%	0%	17%	52%
Namibia	28%	47%	3%	28%	42%
Nigeria	25%	34%	18%	12%	47%
Liberia	40%	33%	4%	30%	53%
Mauritius	43%	31%	0%	14%	57%
Gabon	26%	30%	16%	9%	60%
Côte d'Ivoire	28%	28%	11%	9%	29%
Mozambique	46%	18%	4%	9%	45%
Gambia	28%	25%	12%	11%	61%
Senegal	38%	25%	1%	13%	16%
Ghana	35%	20%	9%	10%	46%
Eswatini	22%	26%	13%	19%	71%
Ethiopia	29%	22%	3%	10%	17%
Sierra Leone	21%	27%	6%	12%	44%
Togo	24%	22%	8%	7%	23%
Burkina Faso	25%	21%	5%	5%	42%
Tanzania	24%	20%	5%	11%	14%
Zambia	21%	23%	5%	18%	32%
Mali	31%	9%	7%	9%	18%
Uganda	34%	11%	0%	25%	28%
Niger	19%	15%	10%	5%	26%
Malawi	30%	11%	2%	7%	35%
Zimbabwe	21%	14%	5%	16%	54%
Lesotho	21%	11%	6%	22%	49%
34-country avg	36%	30%	10%	15%	39%
	0-30%	0-30%	0-5%	0-5%	0-30%
	31-40%	31-40%	6-10%	6-10%	31-40%
	41-50%	41-50%	11-15%	11-15%	41-50%

| | 51-60% | 51-60% | 16-20% | 16-20% | 51-60% |
| | 61% and above | 61% and above | 21% and above | 21% and above | 61% and above |

Countries are ordered based on the average of the three indicators of police presence, highest to lowest.
Presence indicators are measured at the EA level by field teams, not during respondent interviews.

We next turn to several indicators of policing effectiveness, including respondents' personal sense of security, the reported ease of getting police assistance, and overall assessments of how well the government is performing when it comes to reducing crime (Table 2). Countries are ordered based on the average across these indicators, from highest to lowest (with higher scores representing more positive outcomes).

Tanzanians stand out as the most secure and satisfied with police performance, followed by citizens in Niger, Togo, Benin (although safety in the neighbourhood is lower here), Morocco, Eswatini, Botswana, and Mauritius. All of these countries score highly on at least three of the four indicators. It is worth noting that in both Morocco and Mauritius, the governments get poor performance marks from their citizens even though both perform relatively well on the other three indicators.

In contrast, Angola, Liberia, Mali, Zambia, South Africa, and Gabon score poorly on most or all of these indicators. People generally feel unsafe in their homes and neighbourhoods (although Liberians and Gabonese are somewhat less concerned inside their homes) and find it difficult to get police assistance (though Mali is an exception on this indicator), and all rate their government's overall performance on crime poorly.

Finally, we capture three indicators of police (lack of) integrity: lack of trust, perceptions of corrupt behaviour, and experience of paying a bribe (Table 3). Countries are ordered based on the average across these indicators, from highest to lowest (with higher scores representing worse outcomes).

Liberia, Nigeria, Gabon, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Kenya, and Cameroon all average more than 50% negatives across these three indicators, but Zimbabwe, Ghana, and South Africa are not much better. In contrast, Tanzania, Morocco, Niger, Tunisia, Burkina Faso, Botswana, and Cabo Verde average less than 25% across the three indicators.

Notably, Tanzania, Morocco, Niger, and Botswana were also among the countries recording the highest police effectiveness (Table 2), while Gabon, Liberia, and Nigeria were among the countries scoring lowest. But also note that there is not a complete correspondence between performance and (lack of) integrity. For example, Burkina Faso has one of the best levels of integrity, but the country ranks fairly low (26th of 34 countries) in terms of policing effectiveness. On the other hand, police in Sierra Leone get very poor marks for integrity but above-average marks (9th out of 34 countries) for effectiveness.

Table 2: Summary of police effectiveness indicators | 34 countries | 2019/2021

	Never felt unsafe walking	Never feared crime	Easy to get police assistance*	Handle reducing crime very/fairly well
Tanzania	82%	81%	60%	86%
Niger	71%	78%		54%
Togo	62%	68%		63%
Benin	44%	60%	71%	76%
Morocco	64%	83%	61%	42%
Eswatini	59%	64%	62%	61%
Botswana	54%	63%	58%	69%
Mauritius	72%	82%	65%	26%
Sierra Leone	71%	77%	42%	47%
Ethiopia	61%	74%	46%	50%
Kenya	61%	65%	33%	57%
Côte d'Ivoire	52%	72%	49%	43%
Namibia	47%	56%	65%	45%
Tunisia	54%	73%	48%	29%
Ghana	61%	64%	36%	42%
Malawi	50%	64%		36%
Gambia	53%	64%	44%	37%
Mozambique	46%	50%	61%	40%
Uganda	61%	53%	31%	51%
Senegal	37%	68%	54%	37%
Lesotho	57%	51%	62%	25%
Cabo Verde	56%	62%	58%	14%
Guinea	54%	65%	36%	30%
Cameroon	35%	57%	51%	40%
Zimbabwe	50%	46%	42%	42%
Burkina Faso	38%	47%		43%
Nigeria	48%	54%	36%	32%
Sudan	58%	64%	33%	14%
Angola	42%	48%	42%	26%
Liberia	48%	55%	35%	21%
Mali	40%	33%	59%	22%
Zambia	37%	43%	36%	35%
South Africa	40%	46%	42%	19%
Gabon	32%	55%	31%	8%
34-country avg	53%	61%	48%	40%
	0-20%	0-20%	0-20%	0-20%
	21-30%	21-30%	21-30%	21-30%
	31-40%	31-40%	31-40%	31-40%
	41-50%	41-50%	41-50%	41-50%

51-60%	51-60%	51-60%	51-60%
61-70%	61-70%	61-70%	61-70%
71-80%	71-80%	71-80%	71-80%
81% and above	81% and above	81% and above	81% and above

Countries are ordered based on the average of the four indicators of police efficacy, highest to lowest.

Table 3: Summary of police integrity indicators | 34 countries | 2019/2021

	Trust not at all/ just a little	Most/All police are corrupt	Paid a bribe
Liberia	75%	67%	34%
Nigeria	75%	63%	35%
Gabon	74%	69%	17%
Uganda	63%	68%	26%
Sierra Leone	72%	61%	23%
Kenya	61%	68%	24%
Cameroon	55%	61%	35%
Zimbabwe	60%	59%	25%
Ghana	61%	60%	21%
South Africa	73%	55%	8%
Côte d'Ivoire	56%	58%	18%
Guinea	59%	50%	21%
Lesotho	68%	46%	13%
Zambia	51%	54%	18%
Eswatini	56%	53%	12%
Togo	49%	51%	15%
Mozambique	44%	48%	21%
Angola	54%	41%	19%
Sudan	61%	36%	16%
Malawi	51%	49%	13%
Mali	44%	55%	10%
Gambia	39%	48%	12%
Ethiopia	45%	43%	6%
Benin	36%	46%	8%
Namibia	39%	37%	4%
Senegal	23%	47%	7%
Mauritius	45%	26%	6%
Cabo Verde	50%	22%	1%
Botswana	34%	30%	6%
Burkina Faso	25%	30%	14%
Tunisia	31%	24%	8%
Niger	19%	29%	13%
Morocco	25%	15%	11%
Tanzania	15%	23%	8%
34-country avg	50%	47%	15%

	71% and above	71% and above	31-40%
	61-70%	61-70%	21-30%
	51-60%	51-60%	11-20%
	41-50%	41-50%	1-10%
	31-40%	31-40%	
	21-30%	21-30%	
	0-20%	0-20%	

Countries are ordered based on the average of the three indicators of police efficacy, highest to lowest.

Conclusion

In an era when societies confront increasing threats – whether from organised crime, terrorism, natural disasters, pandemics, or other causes – effective and trusted security forces can play an instrumental role in keeping citizens safe and secure, and thus in promoting development. But in many countries, police corruption erodes public confidence in the institution.

This not only undermines day-to-day security as citizens avoid interacting with police, fail to report crimes, or, in the case of criminals, act with impunity, but also renders the police less effective as an essential response institution in times of crisis. The charges of abuse against some police forces as they implemented lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic have drawn sharp attention to this lack of public confidence and its critical implications (Okeowo & Mainga, 2020; Daily Maverick, 2020; France 24, 2020).

Security is a foundation on which citizens build productive lives and livelihoods. Popular perceptions and experiences of the police as corrupt, untrustworthy, and unhelpful hold back national development while providing fertile soil for protest. Even without the high-profile reports of police brutality that have sent Nigerians, Kenyans, South Africans, and others into the streets, poor police service and demands for bribes make everyday victims of citizens from all walks of life, especially among the poor and most vulnerable.

Countries plagued by predatory police practices may find inspiration in neighbours such as Botswana and Tanzania, where officers' hands are more likely to be extended to offer assistance, rather than to take a bribe. But these exceptions are too rare, and aggressive efforts to bring integrity to the forefront will be required in order to break the cycle of corruption and distrust that plagues many of Africa's police forces.

References

Adegoke, Y. (2020). Nigeria's EndSARS protests have been about much more than police brutality. Quartz Africa. 31 October.

Agbiboa, D. E. (2015). Protectors or predators? The embedded problem of police corruption and deviance in Nigeria. *Administration and Society*, 47(3), 244-281.

Amnesty International. (2020). Nigeria: Time to end impunity: Torture and other human rights violations by special anti-robbery squad (SARS). 26 June.

BBC. (2020). Black Lives Matter: Ghana protest leader arrested. 8 June.

Busari, S. (2020). Nigeria's youth finds its voice with the EndSARS protest movement. CNN. 25 October.

Daily Maverick. (2020). Covid-19: Lockdown creates ripe pickings for corrupt police. 15 April.

France 24. (2020). Curfew crackdowns in several African countries kill more people than Covid-19. 17 April.

Harrisberg, K. (2020). South Africans protest police brutality against poor under lockdown. Reuters. 9 June.

Mattes, R. (2020). Lived poverty on the rise: Decade of living-standard gains ends in Africa. Afrobarometer Policy Paper No. 62.

Moosa, M., & Hofmeyr, J. (2021). South Africans' trust in institutions and representatives reaches new low. Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 474.

Newham, G., & Faull, A. (2011). Protector or predator? Tackling police corruption in South Africa. Institute for Security Studies Monograph No. 182.

Obaji, P. (2020). Nigeria's #EndSARS protesters draw inspiration from Black Lives Matter movement. USA Today. 26 October.

Odula, T. (2020). Tear gas, arrests as Kenyans protest police brutality. AP. 7 July.

Okeowo, A., & Mainga, L. (2020). COVID19 and police brutality in Africa. Witness.

Wambua, P. M. (2015). Call the police? Across Africa, citizens point to police and government performance issues on crime. Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 57.

Appendix

Table A.1: Afrobarometer Round 8 fieldwork dates and previous survey rounds

Country	Round 8 fieldwork	Previous survey rounds
Angola	Nov.-Dec. 2019	N/A
Benin	Nov.-Dec. 2020	2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017
Botswana	July-August 2019	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017
Burkina Faso	Dec. 2019	2008, 2012, 2015, 2017
Cabo Verde	Dec. 2019	2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017
Cameroon	Feb.-March 2021	2013, 2015, 2018
Côte d'Ivoire	Nov. 2019	2013, 2014, 2017
Eswatini	March-April 2021	2013, 2015, 2018
Ethiopia	DDc. 2019-Jan. 2020	2013
Gabon	Feb. 2020	2015, 2017
Gambia	Feb. 2021	2018
Ghana	Sept.-Oct. 2019	1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017
Guinea	Nov.-Dec. 2019	2013, 2015, 2017
Kenya	August-Sept. 2019	2003, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2016
Lesotho	Feb.-March 2020	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017
Liberia	Oct.-Dec. 2020	2008, 2012, 2015, 2018
Malawi	Nov.-Dec. 2019	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017
Mali	March-April 2020	2001, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014, 2017
Mauritius	Nov. 2020	2012, 2014, 2017
Morocco	Feb. 2021	2013, 2015, 2018
Mozambique	May-July 2021	2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2018
Namibia	August 2019	1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017
Niger	Oct.-Nov. 2020	2013, 2015, 2018
Nigeria	Jan.-Feb. 2020	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2015, 2017
Senegal	Dec. 2020-Jan. 2021	2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014, 2017
Sierra Leone	March 2020	2012, 2015, 2018
Sudan	Feb.-April 2021	2013, 2015, 2018
South Africa	May-June 2021	2000, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2015, 2018

Country	Round 8 fieldwork	Previous survey rounds
Tanzania	Feb.-March 2021	2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017
Togo	Dec. 2020-Jan. 2021	2012, 2014, 2017
Tunisia	Feb.-March 2020	2013, 2015, 2018
Uganda	Sept.-Oct. 2019	2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2017
Zambia	Nov.-Dec. 2020	1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2014, 2017
Zimbabwe	April-May 2021	1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2017

Authors

Carolyn Logan is director of analysis for Afrobarometer and associate professor in the Department of Political Science at Michigan State University. Email: clogan@afrobarometer.org.

Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny is Afrobarometer knowledge translation manager. Email: jappiah@afrobarometer.org.

Luyando Mutale Katenda is a student in the Master of Public Policy program at Michigan State University. Email: katendal@msu.edu.

About Data for Governance Alliance

The Data for Governance Alliance is a four-year project that promotes data-based advocacy and engagement between pan-African civil society organisations (CSOs) and African Union organs. The project is led by Afrobarometer with partners, including CDD Ghana, the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Nairobi, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation and Laws.Africa. The project is funded by the European Union.

Data for Governance Alliance
African voices for African policy

Partners

AFRO BAROMETER
Let the people have a say

cDD
CDD-GHANA

IJR
THE INSTITUTE
FOR JUSTICE AND
RECONCILIATION

LAWS.AFRICA