



# Data for Governance Alliance Policy Brief No. 23

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Law enforcers or law breakers?  
Beyond corruption, Africans cite  
brutality and lack of professionalism  
among police failings

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# Law enforcers or law breakers? Beyond corruption, Africans cite brutality and lack of professionalism among police failings

Afrobarometer Policy Paper No. 90 | **Matthias Krönke, Thomas Isbell, and Makanga Ronald Kakum**

## Introduction

In late 2020, Nigerians gripped the world with massive protests against police brutality and impunity, focusing on the country's Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) (Al Jazeera, 2020; George, 2020). Three years after pictures of the #EndSARS demonstrations went viral and the SARS unit was disbanded, at least 15 protesters remain in arbitrary detention, and reports of police abuses continue unabated (Agboga, 2021; Amnesty International, 2021, 2023a; Uwazuruike, 2021).

Elsewhere in Africa, and in other parts of the world, the media frequently report on unprofessional behaviour, selective enforcement of the law, unlawful arrests, corruption, use of excessive force, and other human-rights abuses by the police (New York Times, 2022). These violations are not limited to suspected criminals and public protests against the police, as in the case of #EndSARS, but also occur during pivotal moments of democratic accountability (e.g. elections), health emergencies (e.g. COVID-19), and routine citizen-police encounters (e.g. traffic stops).

For example, recent elections in Zimbabwe (2023), Uganda (2021), and Tanzania (2020) were marred by police repression and brutality targeting opposition politicians and their supporters (Reuters, 2023; Human Rights Watch, 2023a; Kakumba, 2022; Salih & Burke, 2020). During the 2021 election campaign in Uganda, security forces killed at least 54 people (Amnesty International, 2020).

In October 2022, Chadian security officers were accused of killing 128 people and injuring many more during demonstrations calling for a quicker transition to democratic rule (Human Rights Watch, 2023b). Two months earlier, more than 20 people were killed during protests against the soaring cost of living in Sierra Leone (Amnesty International, 2023b). Police brutality and extrajudicial killings have been reported in other African countries as well, from Guinea to Kenya and Senegal to Sudan, including during enforcement of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions in 2021 (Amnesty International, 2023c; Diphoom, 2019; Logan, Sanny, & Katenda, 2022).

More frequently, citizens confront demands for bribes from the police, who are regularly cited as one of the most corrupt government institutions (Kakumba & Krönke, 2023; Keulder, 2021; Wambua, 2015a, 2015b).

Against this background, Afrobarometer surveys offer new evidence of how Africans view the professionalism of their police forces. Data from 39 African countries, collected between late 2021 and mid-2023, highlight issues of misconduct, criminal behaviour, brutality, and corruption.



While experiences and assessments vary widely by country, only one-third of Africans say their police generally operate in a professional manner and respect all citizens' rights. Many say law enforcement officers routinely use excessive force against protesters and suspected criminals.

Among citizens who had encounters with the police during the past year, a majority found it easy to obtain assistance, but many report having to pay a bribe to get help or avoid a problem. The police remain widely perceived as corrupt.

Our analysis also reveals that negative perceptions of police professionalism and corruption go hand in hand with low public trust in the police, poor marks on government performance, and citizens' sense of insecurity. Despite fairly high police visibility in many countries, our results suggest that this does not improve citizens' attitudes toward the police.

## Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Nine survey rounds in up to 42 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2023) cover 39 countries (see Appendix Table A.1 for a list of countries and fieldwork dates.)

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

This 39-country analysis is based on 53,444 interviews. The data are weighted to ensure nationally representative samples. When reporting multi-country averages, all countries are weighted equally (rather than in proportion to population size).

## Key findings

### Police presence:

- On average across 39 countries, Afrobarometer teams found police stations, police officers, and/or police vehicles in 46% of surveyed locations – 64% in cities and 29% in rural areas.

### Police professionalism:

- Among respondents who sought police assistance during the previous year, 54% say it was easy to get the help they needed.
- Only one-third (32%) of citizens say their police “often” or “always” operate in a professional manner and respect the rights of all citizens, ranging from just 13% in Nigeria to 58% in Burkina Faso.

### Police corruption and criminal activity:

- Almost half (46%) of citizens say “most” or “all” police officials are corrupt, the worst rating among 11 public institutions and leaders the survey asked about.
- Among respondents who sought police assistance, 36% say they had to pay a bribe to get the help they needed. Among those who encountered the police in other situations, 37% report having to pay a bribe to avoid problems, ranging from 1% in Cabo Verde to 70% in Liberia.
- Across 39 countries, three in 10 citizens (29%) say their police “often” or “always” engage in criminal activities, in addition to 27% who say they “sometimes” do.



### Police brutality:

- On average, about four in 10 Africans say their police “often” or “always” use excessive force in managing protests (38%) and dealing with suspected criminals (42%).

### Correlations between dimensions of police performance:

- Police presence and contact are not significantly correlated with perceptions of police professionalism, police corrupt behaviour, or police brutality. But high levels of police professionalism are correlated with perceptions of less police corruption and police brutality.

### Outcomes associated with police conduct:

- On average across 39 countries, 48% say they never felt unsafe walking in their neighbourhood during the previous year, and 59% say they never feared crime in their home. Lower perceptions of corrupt activity by the police are significantly associated with more widespread feelings of being safe in one’s surroundings.
- Fewer than four in 10 citizens (37%) say their government is doing “fairly well” or “very well” at reducing crime, ranging from just 10% in Sudan to 77% in Benin. Countries with higher scores on police professionalism tend to record better government performance evaluations on crime.
- Fewer than half (46%) of citizens say they trust the police “somewhat” or “a lot.” Perceived police professionalism is strongly associated with citizens’ trust in the police.

## Police presence and contact

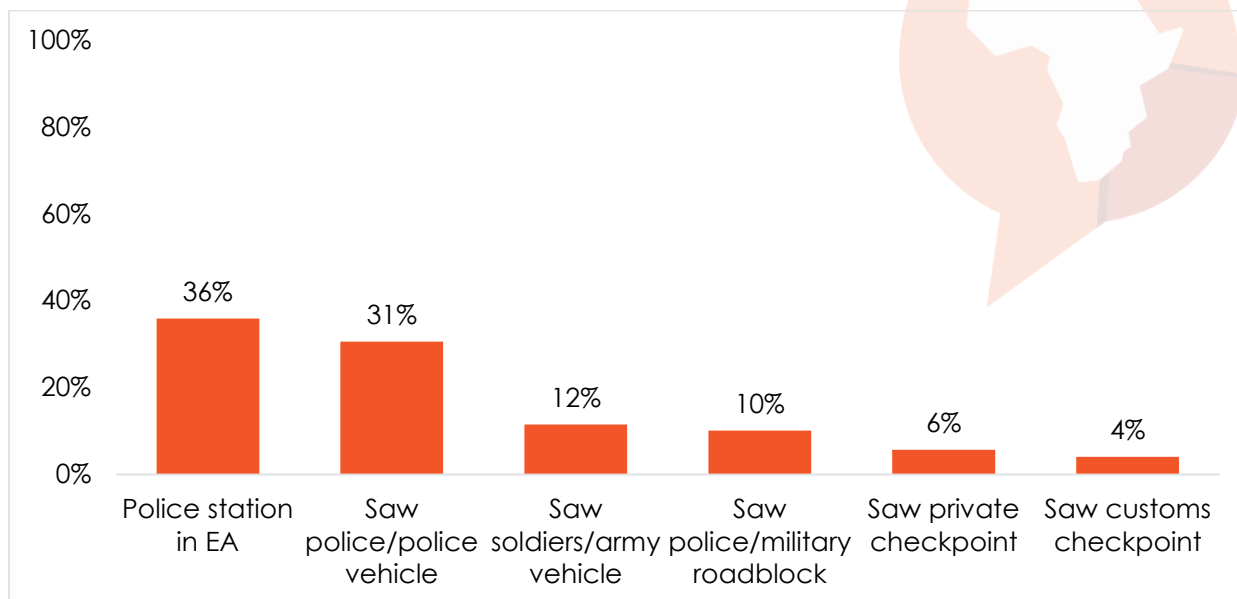
As part of the data collection process, Afrobarometer field teams make on-the-ground observations to identify facilities and services that are available in each census enumeration area (EA) they visit or “within easy walking distance.” Since the EAs visited are selected to represent the population of the country as a whole, these data provide reliable indicators of infrastructure and service availability.<sup>1</sup>

Across 39 countries, fieldworkers found a police station in 36% of surveyed EAs and reported seeing police personnel or vehicles in 31% of them (Figure 1). Signs of other security-related activity were less common, including soldiers or army vehicles (12%), police or military roadblocks (10%), private or community checkpoints (6%), and customs checkpoints (4%).

**Figure 1: Police presence in comparative perspective** | 39 countries | 2021/2023

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<sup>1</sup> Afrobarometer samples are based on a selection of enumeration areas (EAs) drawn randomly from the national census frame. In most countries, eight interviews are conducted in each selected EA, so interview teams usually visit between 150 (for surveys with N=1,200) and 300 (for surveys with N=2,400) EAs. In each EA, the team records the presence or absence of basic infrastructure and services. Because of the smaller sample sizes, the margin of error on the results reported here is higher than for findings captured in individual interviews.



**Afrobarometer data collectors were asked:**

*Are the following facilities present in the primary sampling unit/enumeration area or within easy walking distance: Police station?*

*In the PSU/EA, did you (or any of your colleagues) see: Any police officers or police vehicles? Any soldiers or army vehicles? Any roadblocks set up by police or army? Any roadblocks or booms set up by private security providers or by the local community? Any customs checkpoints?*

On average across 39 countries, Afrobarometer teams found police presence – either a police station or police personnel/vehicles – in 46% of surveyed locations. It was far more common in urban than in rural areas (64% vs. 29% on average). This pattern holds true in all surveyed countries except in Mauritania (67% urban vs. 76% rural), Mauritius (64% vs. 81%), and Cameroon (71% vs. 72%) – the three countries with by far the highest rural police presence (Figure 2).

Urban police presence was highest in Morocco (94%) and Tunisia (85%). It was lowest in Zambia (29%) – still far above the lowest rural police presence (6% in São Tomé and Príncipe and none at all in Seychelles).

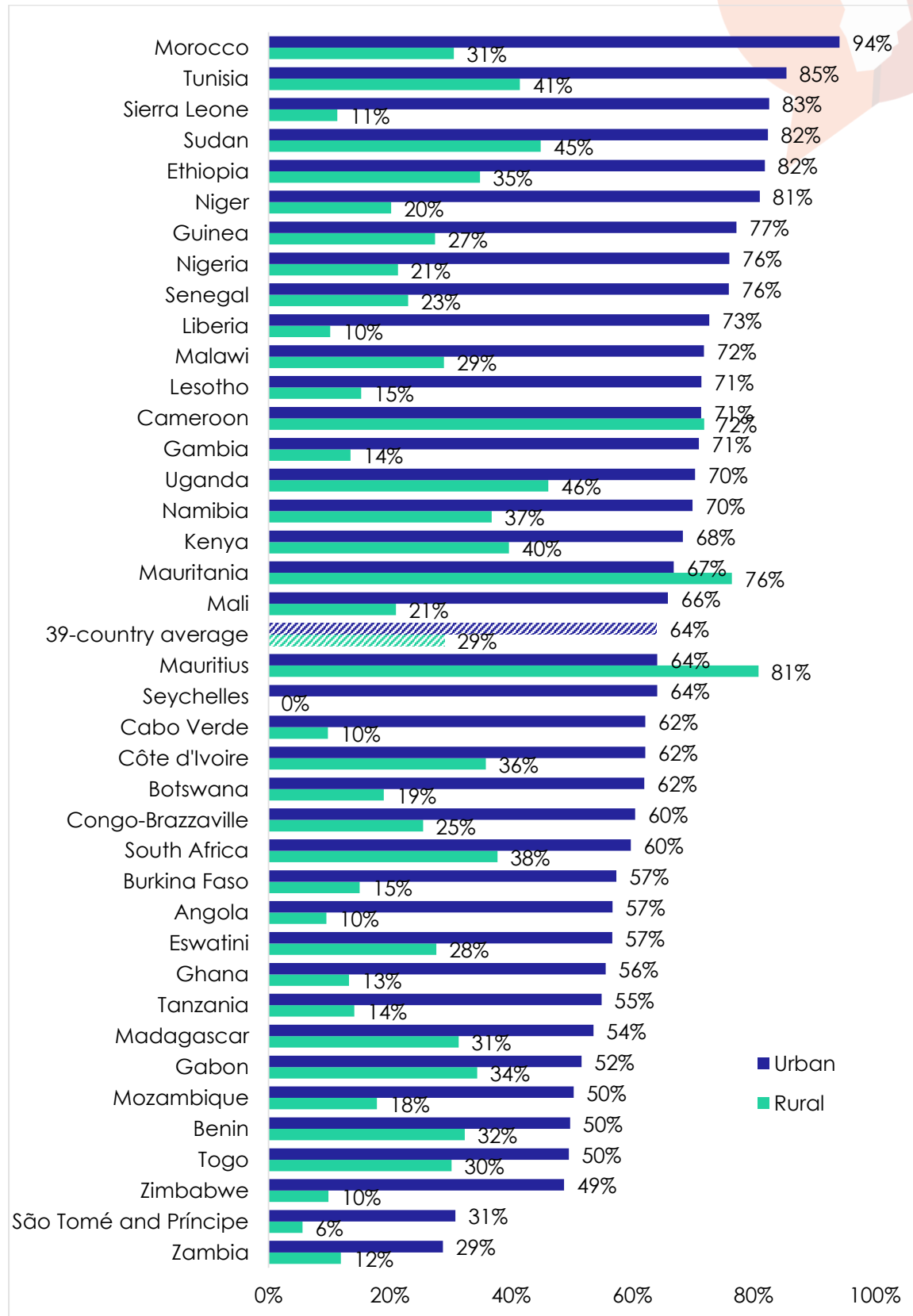
Similarly, police presence tended to be much higher in EAs with better road infrastructure: 66% in areas with paved, tarred, or concrete roads, compared to 36% in EAs with earth, gravel, stone, or muram roads.

Like variable police presence at the community level, citizens' experiences with the police vary at the individual level. While some citizens seek assistance from the police (e.g. to report a crime), others might only encounter the police in less voluntary situations, such as at a checkpoint or traffic stop or during an investigation. Across the 39-country sample, only 13% of respondents say they requested police assistance during the previous 12 months, while three times as many (40%) report encountering the police in other situations (Figure 3).

Namibians and Batswana were most likely to ask for police assistance (29% each), while Tunisians, Ivoirians, and Malagasy (7% each) were least likely to do so. Contact with the police in other situations was highest in Cameroon (65%), Liberia (63%), and Nigeria (62%) and lowest in Madagascar and Senegal (12% each).

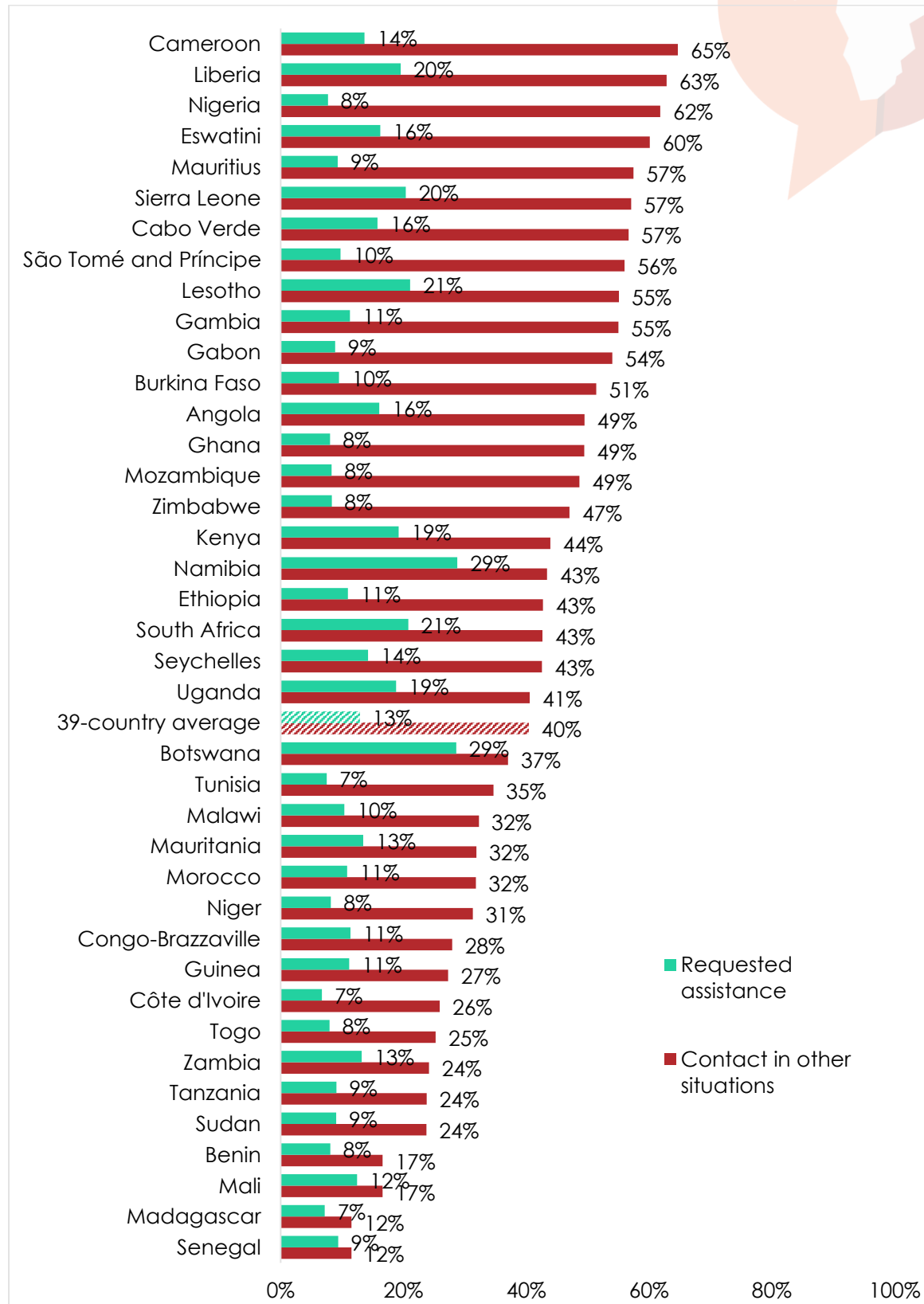
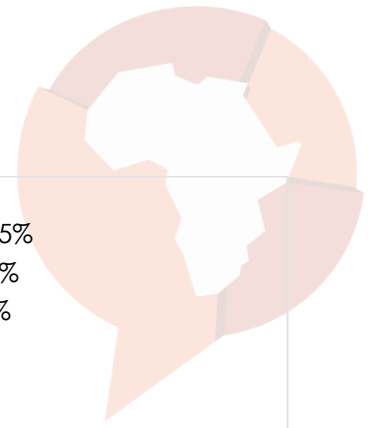
Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question,  
for any country and survey round. It's easy and free at  
[www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis](http://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis).

**Figure 2: Police presence in EA** | by urban vs. rural location | 39 countries  
| 2021/2023



**Police presence** is calculated as the percentage of EAs that have a police station or where fieldworkers saw police or police vehicles.

**Figure 3: Contact with police | 39 countries | 2021/2023**



**Respondents were asked:**

*In the past 12 months, have you requested assistance from the police?*

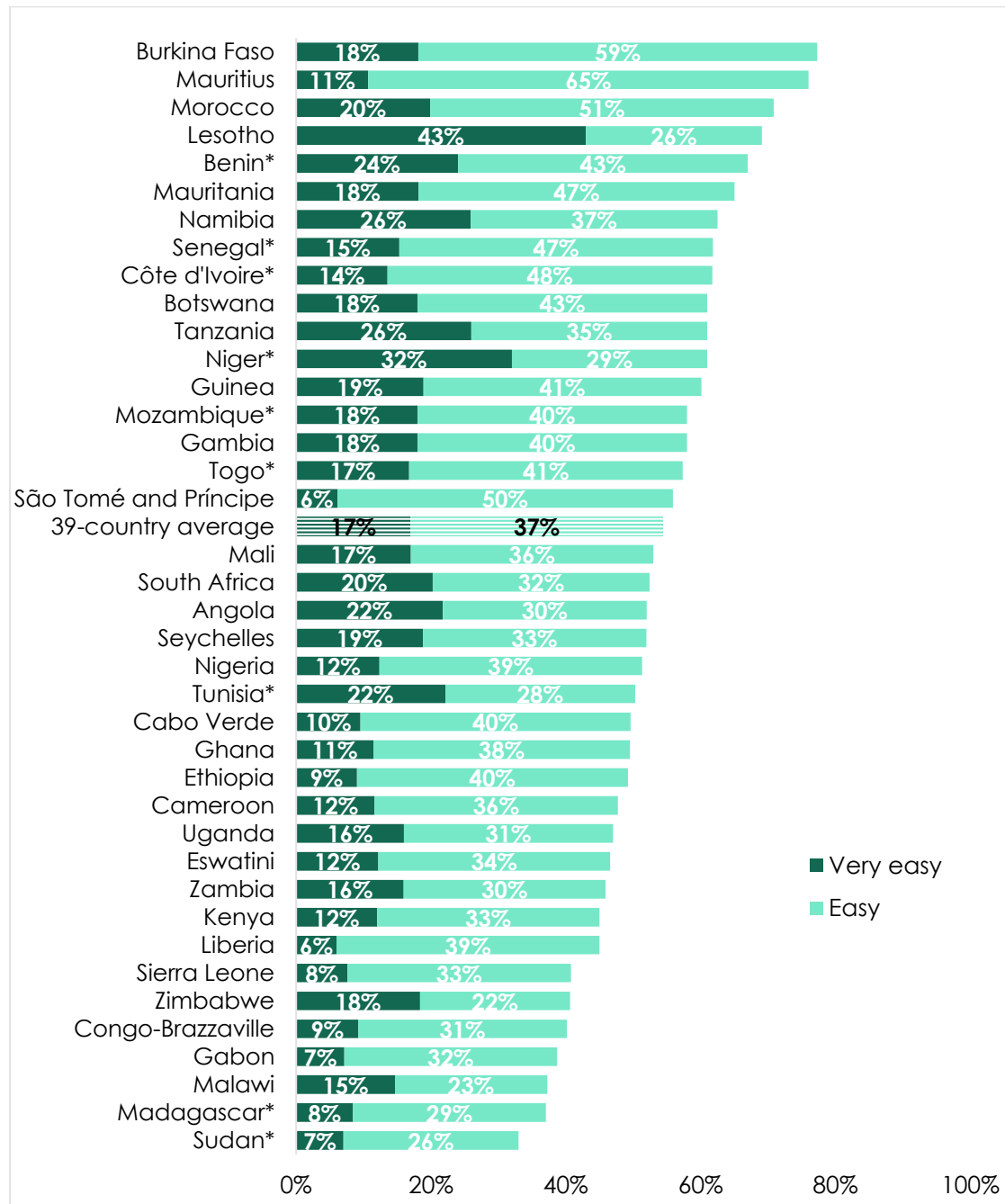
*In the past 12 months, how often have you encountered the police in other situations, like at checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation? (% who say "once or twice," "a few times," or "often")*

## Police professionalism

If police presence and contact set the stage for officer-citizen interaction, measures of police professionalism – including the ease of obtaining assistance and officers' conduct and integrity – help us describe the quality of police work.

Among respondents in the 39-country sample who asked for police assistance during the previous year, more than half (54%) say it was “easy” (37%) or “very easy” (17%) to get the help they needed (Figure 4). More than three-fourths found it easy in Burkina Faso (77%) and Mauritius (76%), though no more than half as many say the same in Malawi (37%), Madagascar (37%), and Sudan (33%).

**Figure 4: Ease of obtaining assistance from police | 39 countries | 2021/2023**



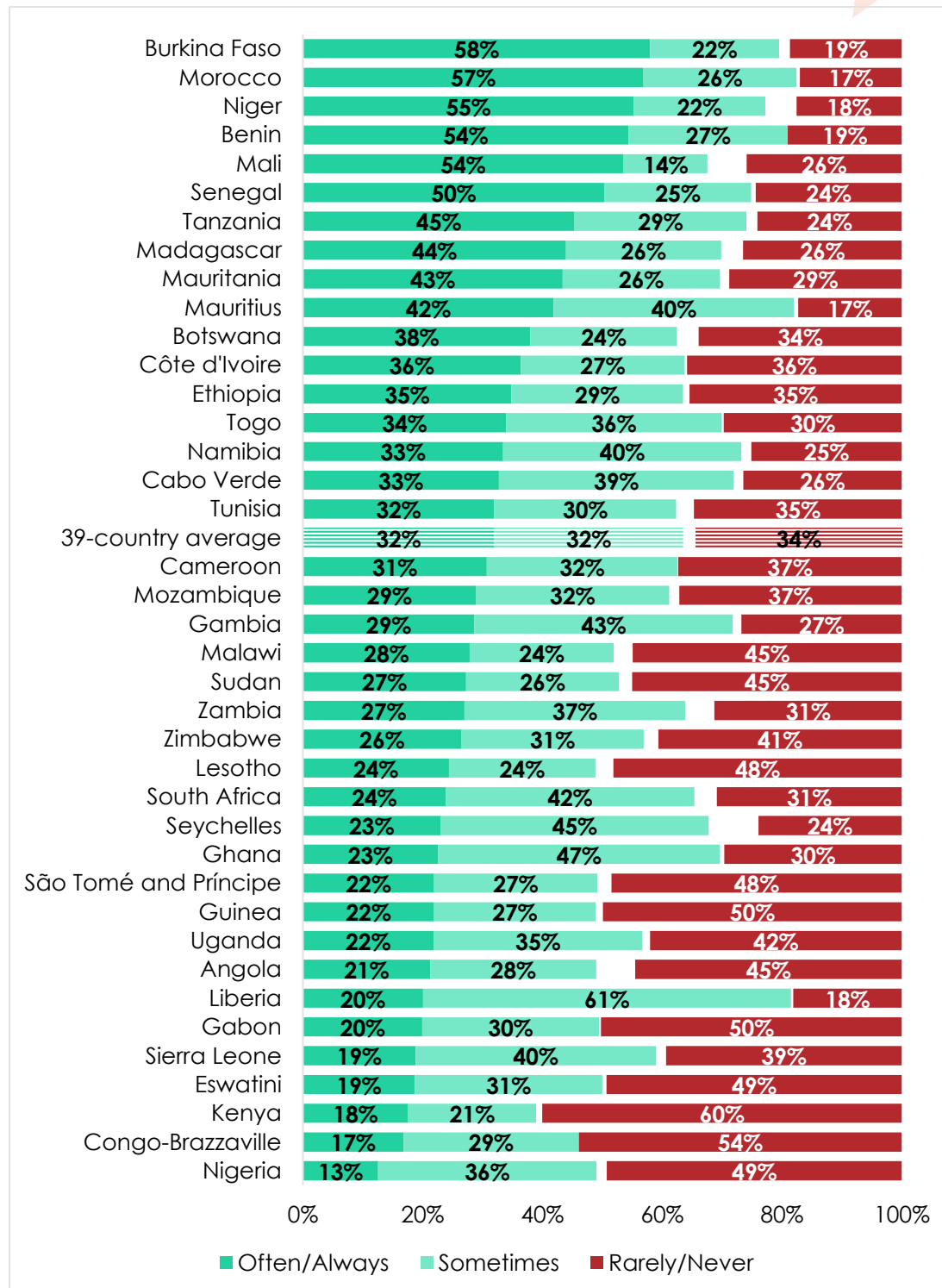
**Respondents who sought police assistance were asked:** How easy or difficult was it to obtain the assistance you needed? (Respondents who did not request police assistance are excluded.)

\* N<100; larger margins of error suggest caution in interpreting results.

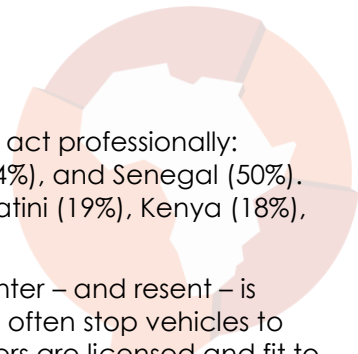


Beyond their personal experiences when seeking assistance, most citizens have a sense of how professional they think their police force is. On average across 39 countries, only about one-third (32%) of respondents say the police in their countries “often” or “always” operate in a professional manner and respect the rights of all citizens, while 32% say they “sometimes” and 34% say they “rarely” or “never” do (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Do police act professionally and respect citizens’ rights? | 39 countries**  
| 2021/2023



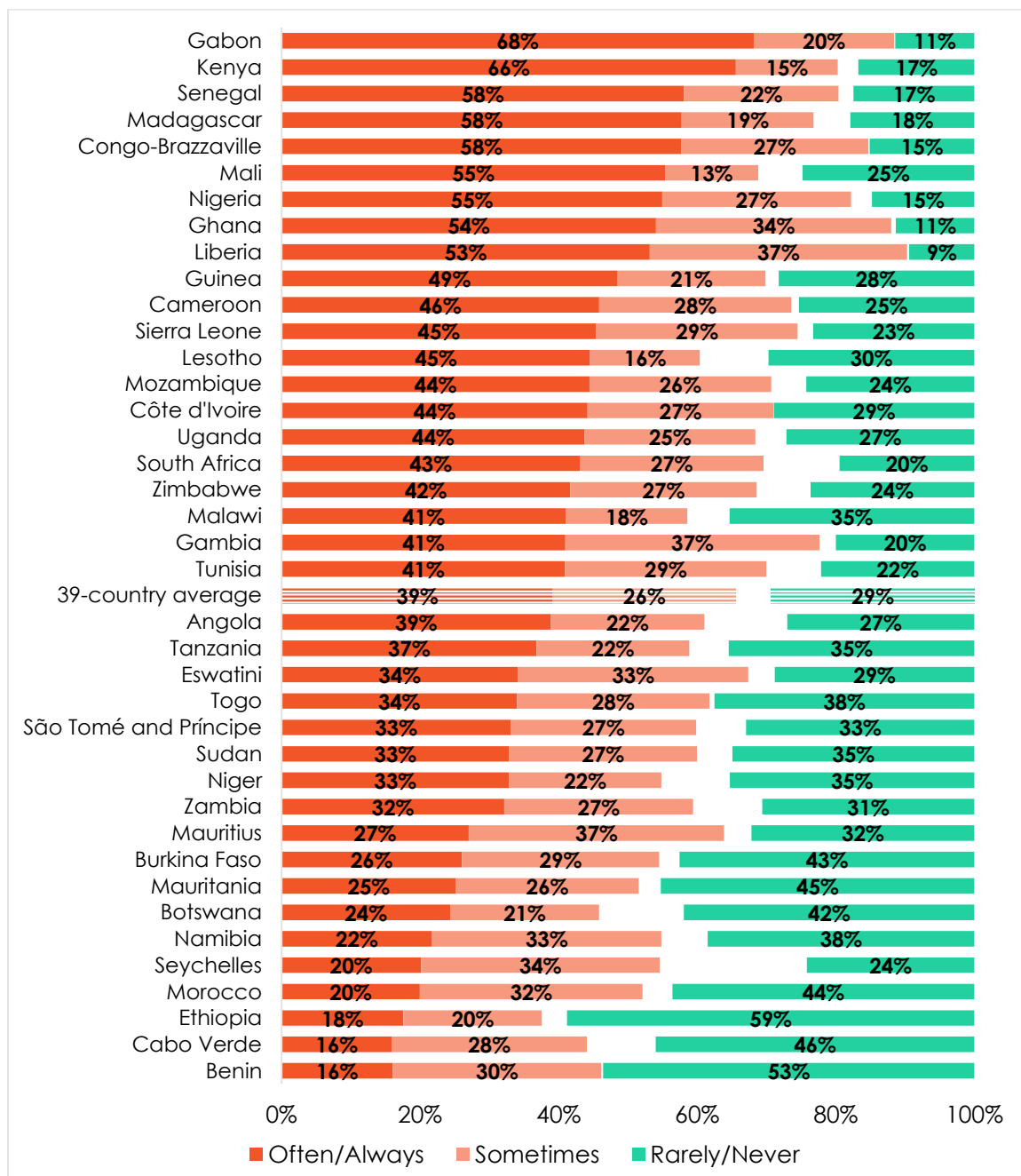
**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, how often do the police in [your country] operate in a professional manner and respect the rights of all citizens?



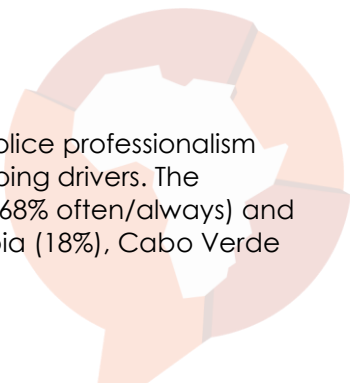
In just six countries do at least half of citizens think their police usually act professionally: Burkina Faso (58%), Morocco (57%), Niger (55%), Benin (54%), Mali (54%), and Senegal (50%). Fewer than one in five respondents agree in Sierra Leone (19%), Eswatini (19%), Kenya (18%), Congo-Brazzaville (17%), and Nigeria (13%).

One form of unprofessional police conduct that citizens may encounter – and resent – is stopping drivers on the road without a valid reason. While the police often stop vehicles to check whether they are registered and roadworthy, or whether drivers are licensed and fit to drive, officers can also abuse their power in this domain. On average, 39% of Africans say the police “often” or “always” stop drivers without good reason, in addition to 26% who say they “sometimes” do so (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: How often do police stop drivers without good reason? | 39 countries**  
| 2021/2023



**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, how often do the police in [your country] stop drivers without good reason?



Perhaps unsurprisingly, countries that fare poorly in terms of overall police professionalism (Figure 5) also tend to score poorly when it comes to needlessly stopping drivers. The practice is particularly widespread, according to citizens, in Gabon (68% often/always) and Kenya (66%). In contrast, fewer than one in five respondents in Ethiopia (18%), Cabo Verde (16%), and Benin (16%) have this complaint.

## Police corruption

Being stopped for no good reason may sometimes be a prelude to being asked for money. Similarly, asking for police assistance may prompt a demand for under-the-table payments. How often do Africans confront police requests for a bribe, a gift, or a favour?

Among the 13% of respondents who say they asked for police assistance during the previous year, 36% of respondents say they were asked to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour to get the assistance they needed from the police (Figure 7). These types of interactions when seeking assistance were most common in Liberia (78%), Nigeria (75%), Sierra Leone (72%), and Uganda (71%), and least common in Seychelles (4%), Mauritius (3%), and Cabo Verde (2%).

Similarly, among citizens who encountered the police in other situations, 37% say they had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour in order to avoid a problem. At the country level, although citizens are more likely to encounter the police in situations other than actively asking for assistance (see Figure 3 above), the rate at which they are asked to engage in corruption is often very similar irrespective of the reason for the contact with the police.<sup>2</sup> For example, in Liberia, 70% of respondents say they had to pay a bribe to avoid a problem with the police. On the other end of the spectrum, very few were asked to pay a bribe when encountering the police in the Seychelles (2%) and Cabo Verde (1%).

Considering how many Africans personally experience having to bribe the police, it may not be surprising that on average across 39 countries, the police are more widely seen as corrupt than other public institution or leader the surveys ask about (Figure 8). Almost half (46%) of respondents say that “most” or “all” police officials are corrupt, compared to almost four in 10 who see widespread corruption among members of Parliament, tax officials, civil servants, officials in the Presidency, business executives, and judges and magistrates.

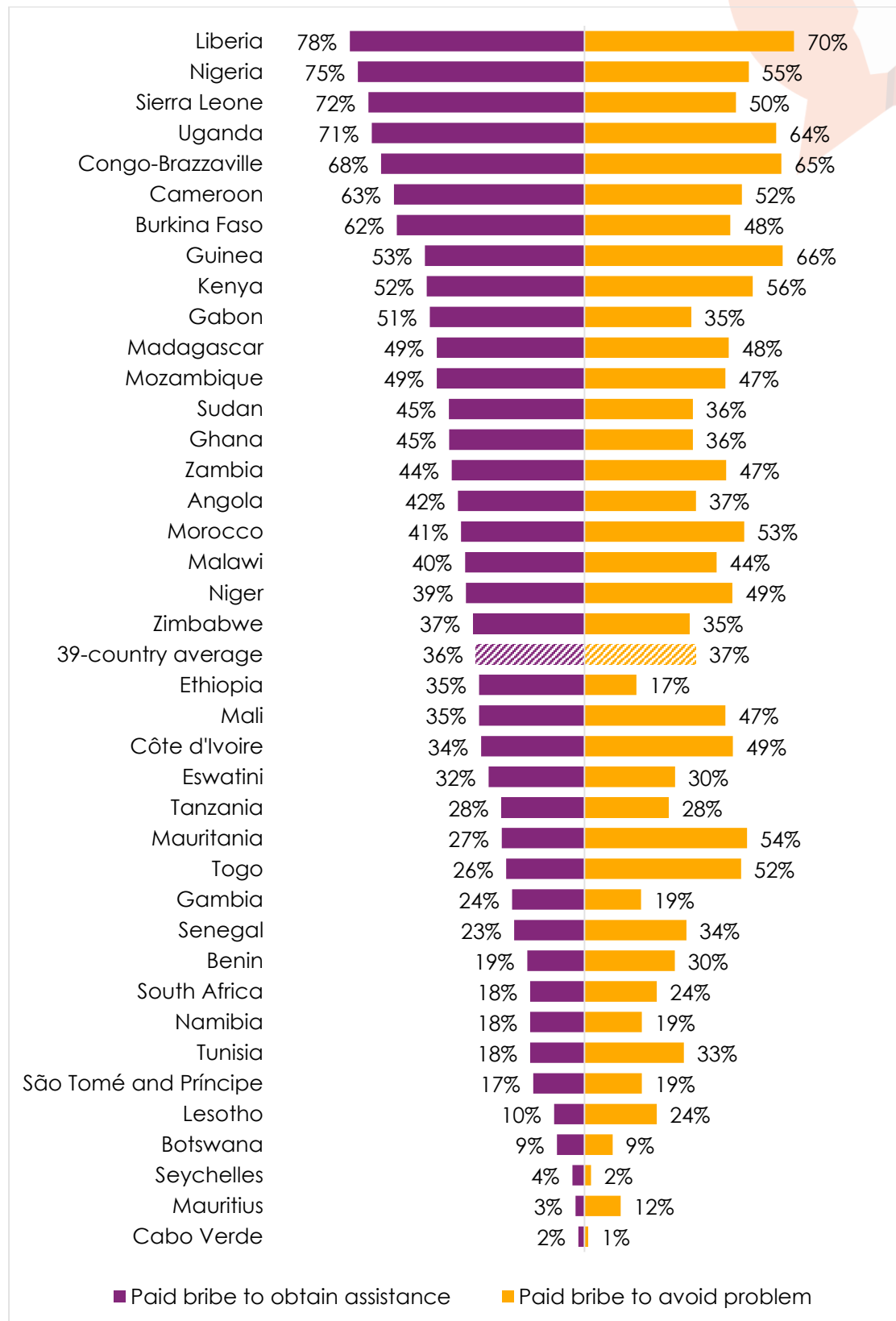
In contrast, roughly one in five citizens perceive “most” or “all” traditional (22%) and religious leaders (19%) as corrupt.

The “most corrupt” ranking for the police is not a new development; previous rounds of Afrobarometer surveys have shown similar patterns (Logan et al., 2022; Wambua, 2015a).

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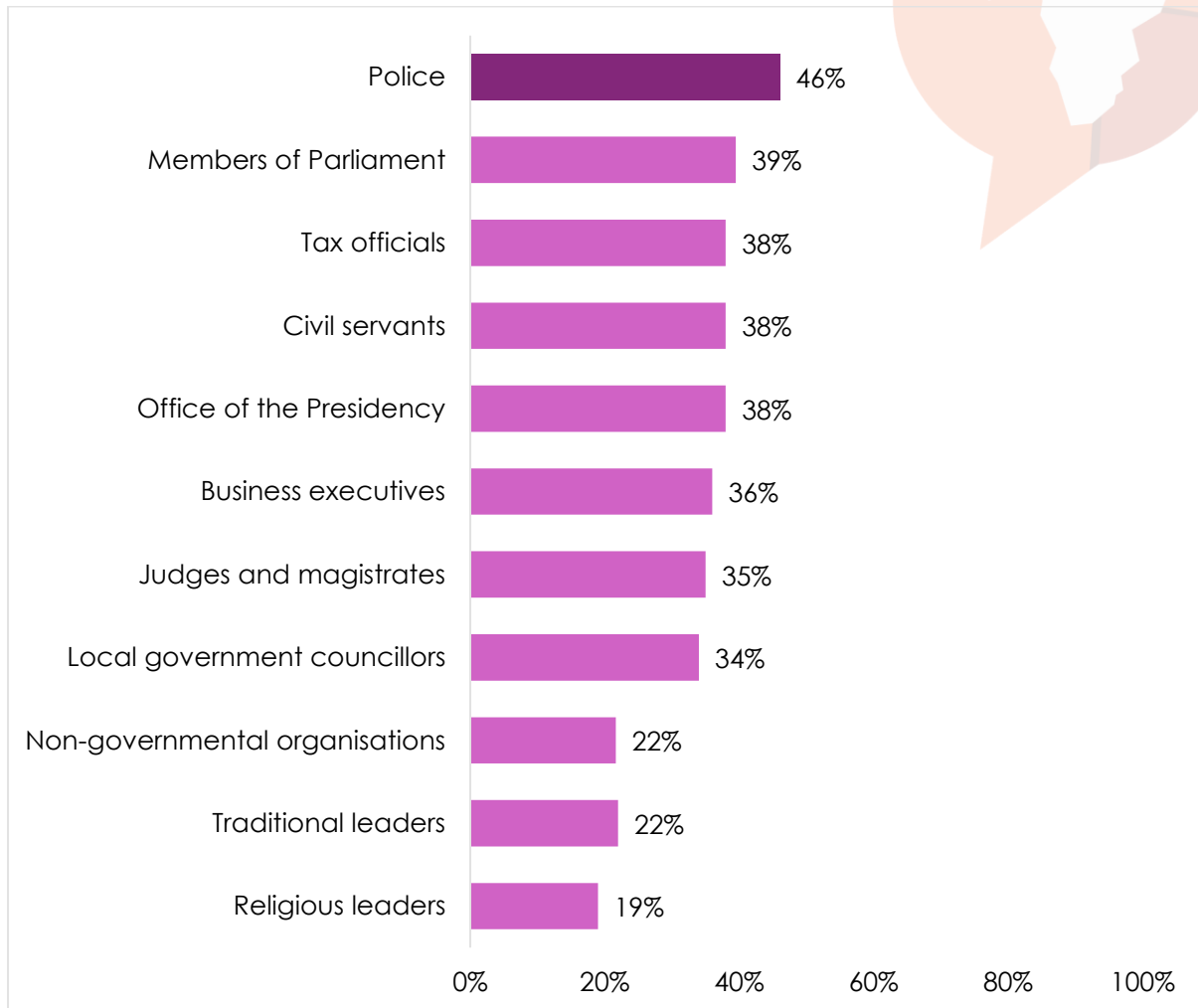
<sup>2</sup> The country-level correlation for the two variables (request for a bribe, gift, or favour when asking for assistance and when encountering the police) using the Pearson correlation coefficient is  $r=0.831$ ;  $p<.001$ .

**Figure 7: Pay bribe to receive police assistance/avoid problems | 39 countries**  
| 2021/2023



**Respondents who encountered the police during the previous year were asked:** 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 order to avoid a problem during one of these encounters? (% who were asked to pay a bribe) (Respondents who did not have contact with the police are excluded.)

**Figure 8: Who is corrupt?** | 39 countries | 2021/2023

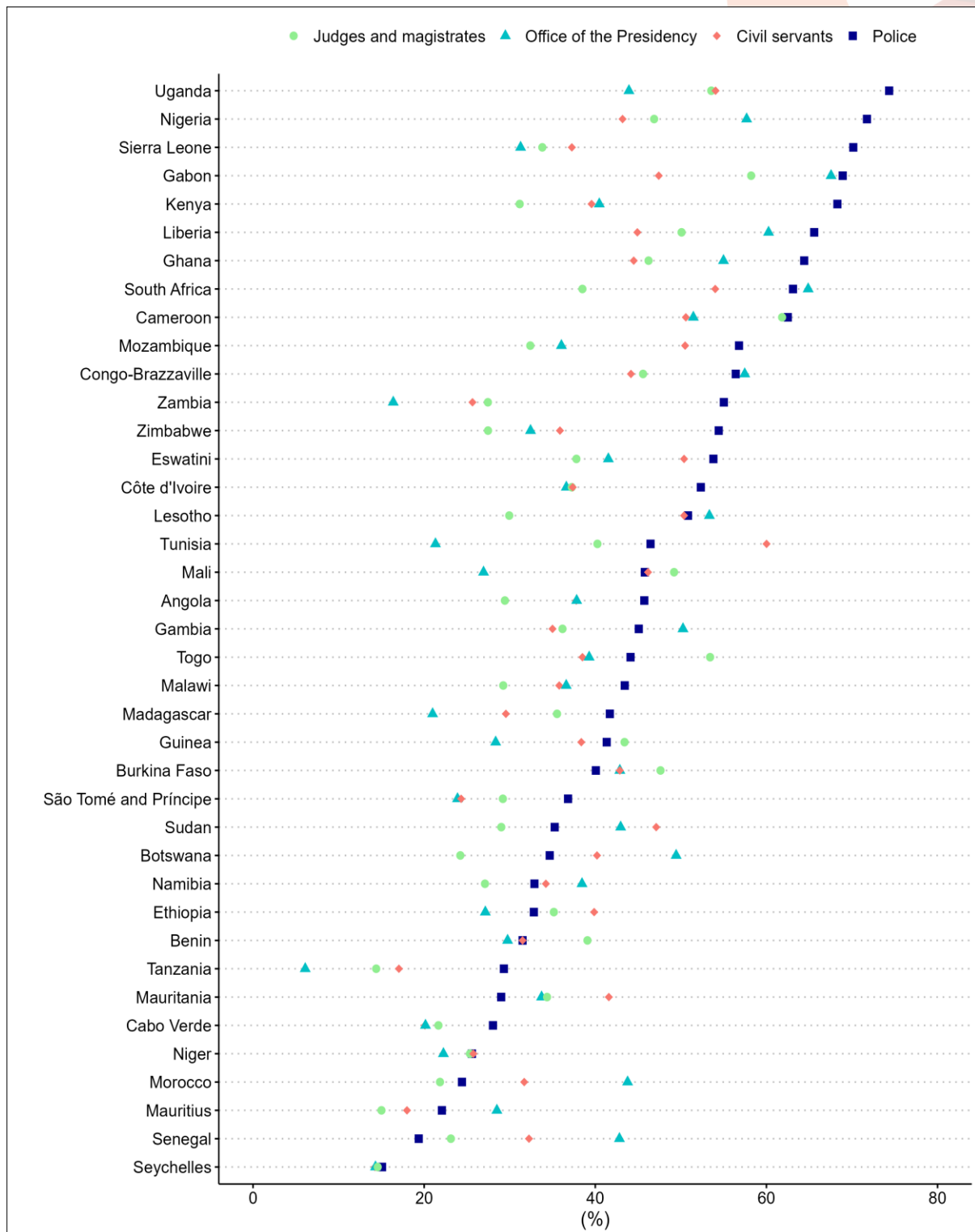


**Respondents were asked:** How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say "most of them" or "all of them")

\* On the question about members of Parliament, data are not available for Burkina Faso, Guinea, Sudan, and Tunisia.

Disaggregating the data by country, however, reveals that the police are not perceived as the most corrupt actor in every country (Figure 9). While it is true in 19 of the 39 countries – and by wide margins in Uganda and Zambia – in the remaining 20 countries at least one of the other institutions or leader groups is more widely seen as corrupt than the police.

Figure 9: Most/All are corrupt | 39 countries | 2021/2023

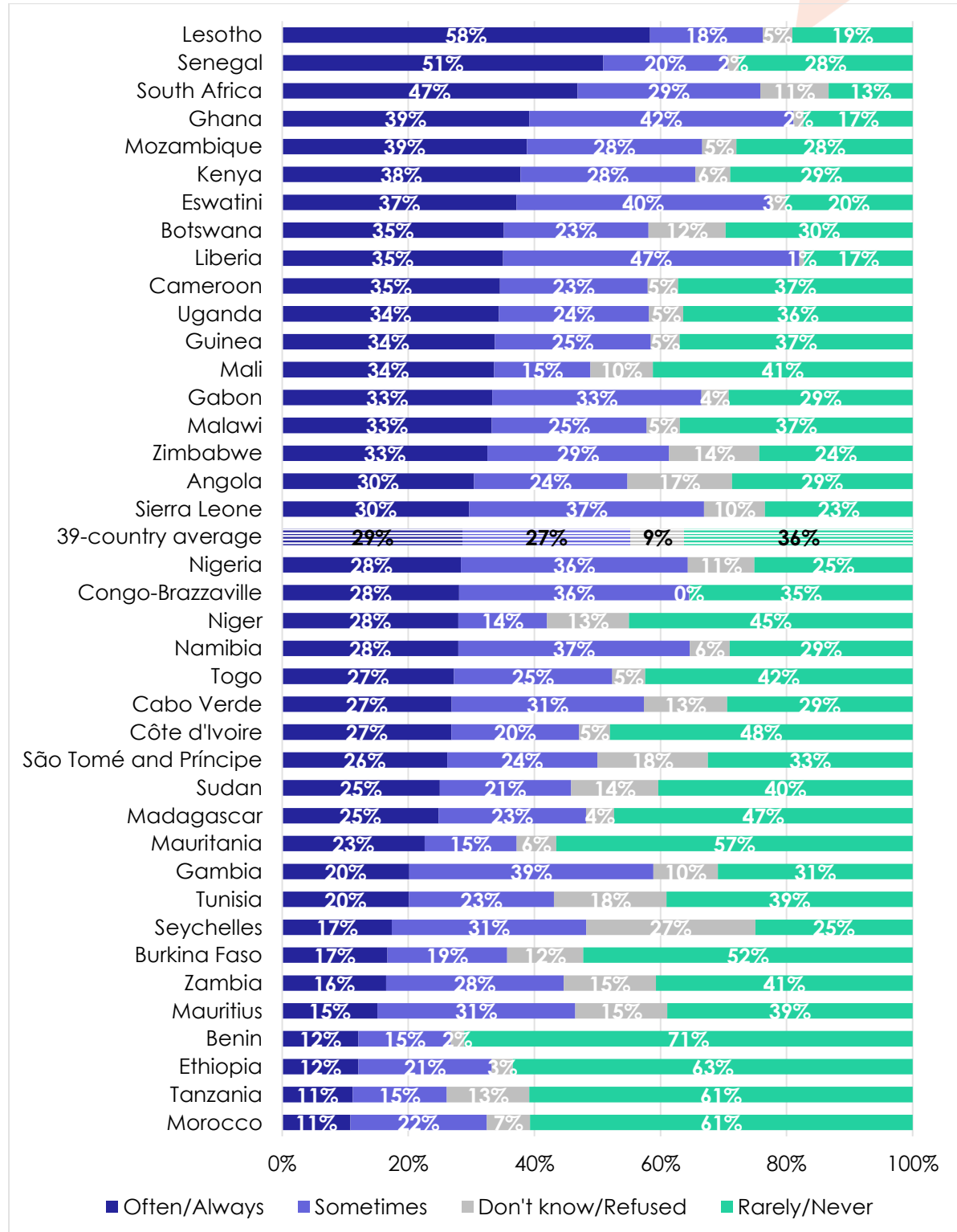


### Criminal activities by the police

Worse than asking to be paid extra to do their jobs, some police officers actually do the opposite of their jobs: Three in 10 Africans (29%) say the police in their country “often” or “always” engage in criminal activities. Another 27% of respondents say they “sometimes” do so, while only 36% say the police “rarely” or “never” commit crimes (Figure 10).

The perception of widespread criminality (often/always) among the police is shared by more than half of citizens in Lesotho (58%) and Senegal (51%). At the other extreme, majorities in six countries say criminal activity by the police is rare or unheard of: Benin (71%), Ethiopia (63%), Tanzania (61%), Morocco (61%), Mauritania (57%), and Burkina Faso (52%).

**Figure 10: How often do police engage in criminal activities? | 39 countries**  
| 2021/2023



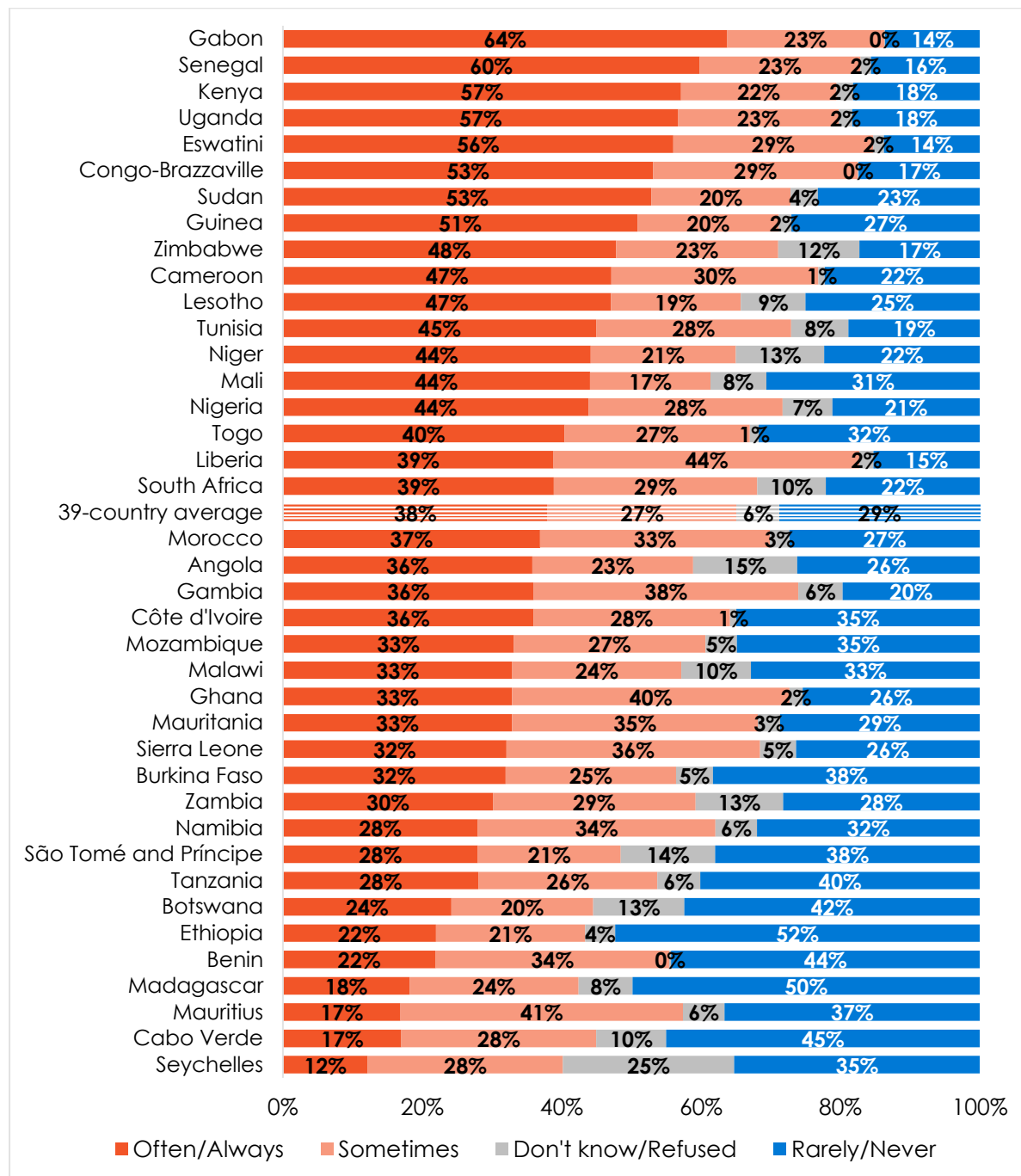
**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, how often do the police in [your country] engage in criminal activities?

## Police brutality

One of the harshest criticisms levelled against some police officers is that they use excessive force in their interactions with the citizenry they are meant to serve and protect, whether against protesters, political dissidents, or people suspected of crimes (Human Rights Watch, 2018; Kakumba & Krönke, 2023; Olukoya & Oyekanmi, 2020).

As Figure 11 shows, almost four in 10 Afrobarometer respondents (38%) say the police “often” or “always” use excessive force in managing protests or demonstrations, while another 27% say they “sometimes” do so. Only 29% say the police are “rarely” or “never” guilty of brutality in their handling of protesters.

**Figure 11: Do police use excessive force during protests? | 39 countries | 2021/2023**



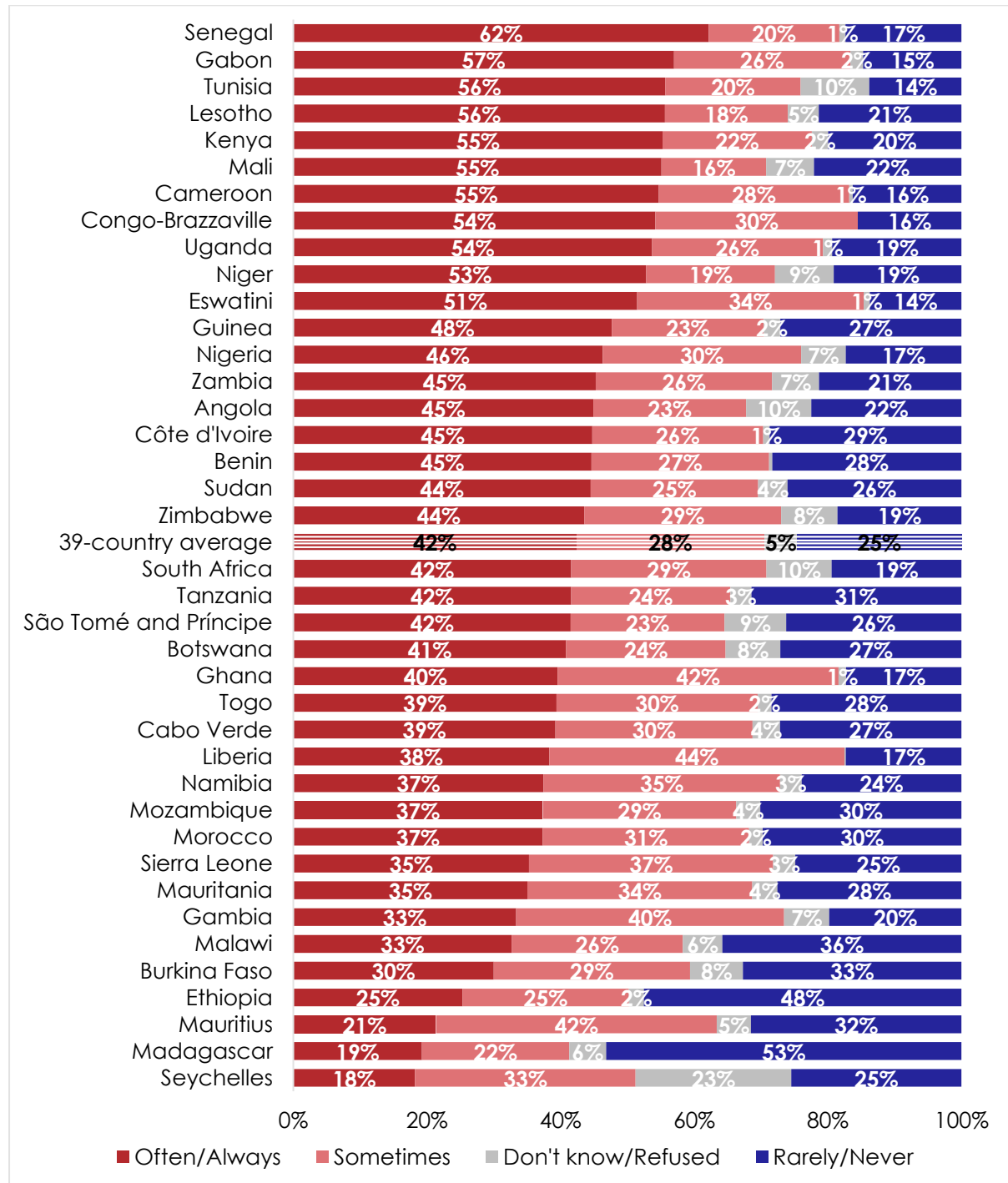
**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, how often do the police in [your country] use excessive force in managing protests or demonstrations?



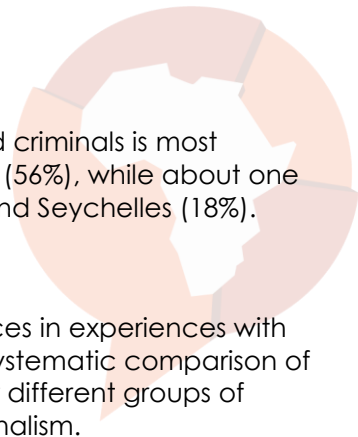
The perception of widespread police brutality in dealing with protesters is most common in Gabon (64%), Senegal (60%), Kenya (57%), and Uganda (57%), and least common in Mauritius (17%), Cabo Verde (17%), and Seychelles (12%).

A similar picture emerges with regard to how the police deal with criminal suspects: On average, 42% of Africans say the police “often” or “always” use excessive force, and another 28% say they “sometimes” do so. Only one in four respondents (25%) think the police “rarely” or “never” treat suspected criminals brutally (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Do police use excessive force with suspected criminals? | 39 countries**  
| 2021/2023



**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, how often do the police in [your country] use excessive force when dealing with criminals?



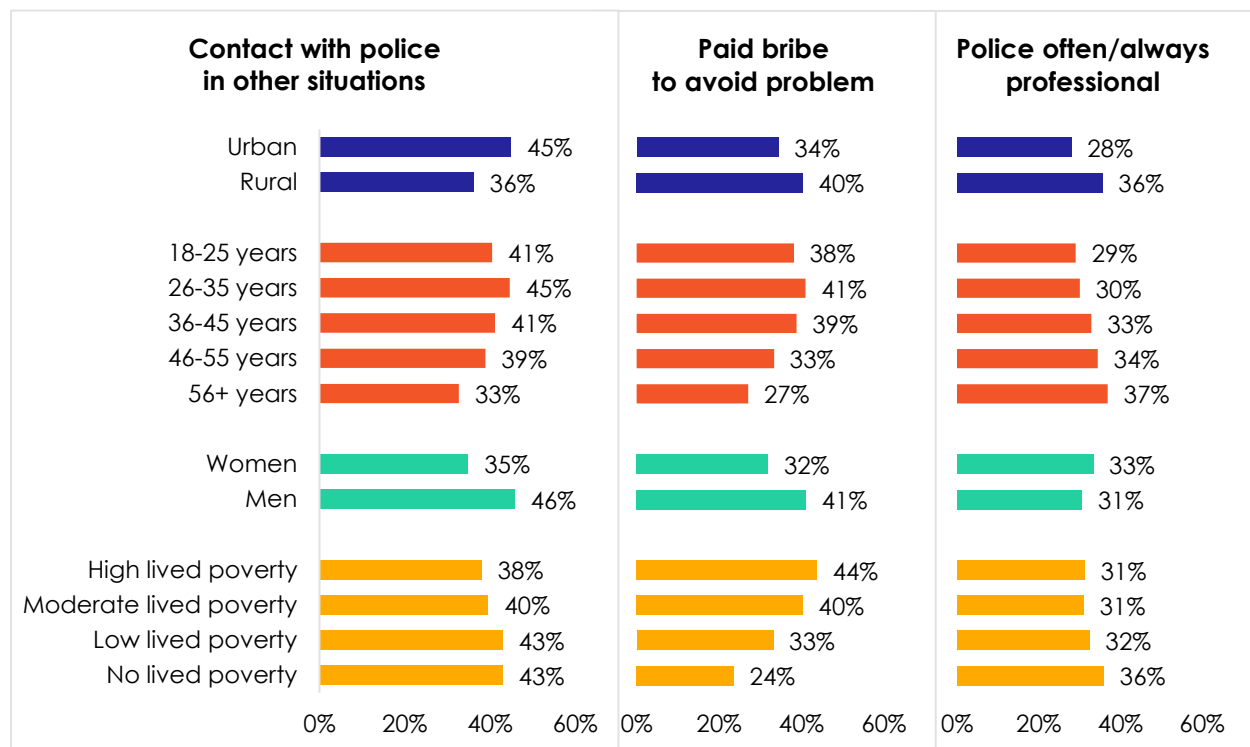
The perception of frequent police brutality in dealing with suspected criminals is most common in Senegal (62%), Gabon (57%), Tunisia (56%), and Lesotho (56%), while about one in five citizens say the same in Mauritius (21%), Madagascar (19%), and Seychelles (18%).

### Divergent experiences with and perceptions of police

The comparisons so far are useful to draw out country-level differences in experiences with and perceptions of African police forces. Before providing a more systematic comparison of different dimensions of police performance, we focus briefly on how different groups of citizens engage with the police and evaluate their level of professionalism.

As we saw in Figure 3, contact initiated by the police is far more frequent than citizens' requests for police assistance. The first panel in Figure 13 further shows that urban residents (45%), younger people (41%-45%), men (46%), and poor citizens (43%) are more likely to encounter the police at checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation than rural residents, older people, women, and well-off citizens.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 13: Citizens' experience with and perceptions of police** | by demographic group | 39 countries | 2021/2023



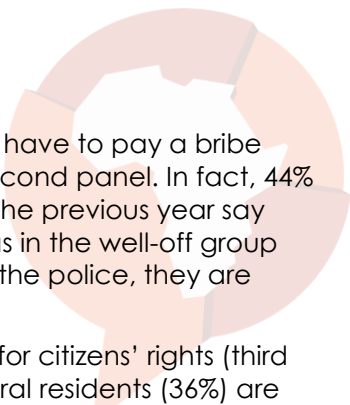
**Respondents were asked:**

*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 "once or twice," "a few times," or "often")*

*[Those who encountered the police during the previous year:] 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? (% who say "once or twice," "a few times," or "often") (Respondents who did not have contact with the police are excluded.)*

*In your opinion, how often do the police in [your country] operate in a professional manner and respect the rights of all citizens? (% who say "often" or "always")*

<sup>3</sup> 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 and Patel (2022).



Younger people, men, and poor citizens are also particularly likely to have to pay a bribe when they encounter the police in such situations, as shown in the second panel. In fact, 44% of the poorest respondents who had contact with the police during the previous year say they had to pay a bribe to avoid a problem, almost twice as many as in the well-off group (24%). While rural residents are less likely than urbanites to encounter the police, they are more likely to have to pay a bribe when they do (40% vs. 34%).

When it comes to perceptions of police professionalism and respect for citizens' rights (third panel), older people (37% among those aged 56 and above) and rural residents (36%) are more likely to see the police as "often" or "always" meeting this standard than youth (29%) and urbanites (28%).

## Dimensions of police performance

Our cross-country comparisons lead us to a further question: Is police performance in one area (e.g. community presence) associated with citizens' experiences with and perceptions of the police in another (e.g. police brutality)? Building on previous cross-country comparisons of police presence and integrity in Africa (Logan et al., 2022), we created a multi-dimensional picture of how police engage with citizens in each country. While it is theoretically possible to create a single police-performance score per country, this would severely limit our ability to identify which aspects of police performance correlate with important outcomes such as citizens' sense of personal safety and trust in the police. Therefore, we created four indices that combine respondents' personal experiences with broader perceptions of the police by averaging the following survey questions for each dimension:<sup>4</sup>

- 1) **Professionalism**
  - a. Percentage of citizens who say police often/always operate in a professional manner and respect the rights of all citizens
  - b. Percentage of citizens who requested police assistance and report that it was easy/very easy to obtain the help they needed
- 2) **Corruption**
  - a. Percentage of people who requested police assistance and say they did not have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour to get the help they needed
  - b. Percentage of people who encountered the police in other situations and say they did not have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour to avoid problems
- 3) **Brutality**
  - a. Percentage of citizens who say the police rarely/never use excessive force in managing protests or demonstrations
  - b. Percentage of citizens who say the police rarely/never use excessive force when dealing with criminals
- 4) **Presence and contact**
  - a. Percentage of EAs in which fieldworkers found a nearby police station or saw police officers or vehicles
  - b. Percentage of citizens who requested police assistance during the previous 12 months
  - c. Percentage of citizens who encountered the police in other situations during the previous 12 months

Table 1 shows the country scores for each dimension after averaging the results on the individual variables. To facilitate comparison across dimensions, we scaled each dimension from 0% (worst performance) to 100% (best performance) and colour-coded the scores (from dark red for poor performance to dark green for good performance).

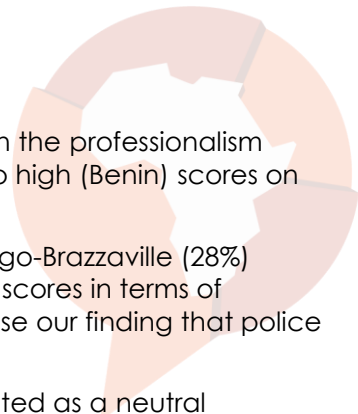
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<sup>4</sup> For a detailed breakdown of each variable in each index, see Table A.2 in the Appendix. The selection of variables is based on a combination of conceptual fit with previous studies (e.g. Logan et al., 2022) and the results of an exploratory factor analysis (results not shown).

**Table 1: Dimensions of police performance** | 39 countries | 2021/2023

Country	Professionalism	Corruption	Brutality	Presence and contact
Burkina Faso	68%	45%	36%	30%
Morocco	64%	53%	29%	38%
Benin	61%	76%	36%	22%
Mauritius	59%	93%	34%	47%
Niger	58%	56%	21%	24%
Senegal	56%	71%	16%	23%
Mauritania	54%	59%	28%	39%
Mali	53%	59%	26%	20%
Tanzania	53%	72%	36%	21%
Botswana	49%	91%	35%	37%
Côte d'Ivoire	49%	58%	32%	28%
Namibia	48%	82%	28%	43%
Lesotho	47%	83%	23%	40%
Togo	46%	61%	30%	24%
Mozambique	44%	52%	32%	29%
Gambia	44%	79%	20%	38%
Ethiopia	42%	74%	50%	35%
Cabo Verde	41%	98%	37%	40%
Tunisia	41%	75%	16%	38%
Guinea	41%	41%	27%	28%
Madagascar	40%	52%	52%	18%
Cameroon	39%	42%	19%	50%
São Tomé and Príncipe	39%	82%	32%	29%
South Africa	38%	79%	21%	39%
Seychelles	37%	97%	30%	40%
Angola	37%	61%	24%	35%
Zambia	36%	54%	25%	19%
Ghana	36%	60%	21%	32%
Uganda	34%	33%	19%	37%
Zimbabwe	34%	64%	18%	27%
Eswatini	33%	69%	14%	37%
Malawi	33%	58%	34%	26%
Liberia	32%	26%	16%	41%
Nigeria	32%	35%	19%	38%
Kenya	31%	46%	19%	38%
Sudan	30%	60%	25%	30%
Sierra Leone	30%	39%	26%	40%
Gabon	29%	57%	14%	37%
Congo-Brazzaville	28%	34%	16%	30%
<b>39-country average</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>33%</b>
<b>Key</b>	<b>81%-100%</b>	<b>61%-80%</b>	<b>41%-60%</b>	<b>31%-40%</b>
	<b>21%-30%</b>	<b>0%-20%</b>		

Professionalism (higher scores = more professional conduct); Corruption (higher scores = less corruption); Brutality (higher scores = less brutality); Presence and contact (higher scores = higher presence and contact)



Burkina Faso (68%), Morocco (64%), and Benin (61%) score highest on the professionalism dimension while achieving moderate (Burkina Faso and Morocco) to high (Benin) scores on the corruption measure (i.e. moderate to low levels of corruption).

In contrast, Sudan (30%), Sierra Leone (30%), Gabon (29%), and Congo-Brazzaville (28%) score worst on professionalism while also showing moderate to poor scores in terms of corruption and police brutality. The 39-country averages re-emphasise our finding that police performance remains inadequate in most countries.

Police presence and contact as measured here is perhaps best treated as a neutral category. A higher density of police stations and more contact between police officers and citizens might be good, as it might mean better access to police assistance and better collaboration. But other interpretations are also plausible. For example, high police presence might indicate areas with high levels of crime. The implications of frequent contact, especially unsought contact, are especially unclear. It may mean that police are interacting with citizens as a result of community policing, but it may also indicate police predation, as reflected in relatively high rates of bribe paying. Without a more detailed analysis that is beyond the scope of this paper, we do not interpret police presence and contact as intrinsically good or bad, a view that is also to some extent borne out in analyses below.

How closely are these four dimensions of police performance associated with one another? Table 2 shows the correlation coefficients for the four dimensions at the country level. We find that police professionalism is significantly and negatively correlated with police brutality. That is, higher levels of perceived professionalism are associated with lower perceptions of police brutality vis-à-vis protesters and criminals.

Correlations between police professionalism and corruption, and between corruption and brutality, are also plausible. The correlation coefficients point in the expected direction (i.e. better corruption scores are associated with higher levels of professionalism and with better scores on the police brutality index), but the correlations just miss statistical significance ( $p=.065$  for corruption and professionalism and  $p=.055$  for corruption and brutality).

Interestingly, the police presence and contact index is not significantly correlated with any of the other indices, supporting the earlier suggestion that police presence and contact is likely to be the result of divergent dynamics.

**Table 2: Dimensions of police performance** | country-level correlation | 39 countries | 2021/2023

	Professionalism	Corruption	Brutality	Presence and contact
Professionalism	1			
Corruption	.298	1		
Brutality	<b>.382*</b>	.309	1	
Presence and contact	-.178	.132	-.277	1

**Note:** Professionalism (higher scores = more professional conduct); Corruption (higher scores = less corruption); Brutality (higher scores = less brutality); Presence and contact (higher scores = higher presence and contact). Bivariate Pearson correlation coefficients (2-tailed). \*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

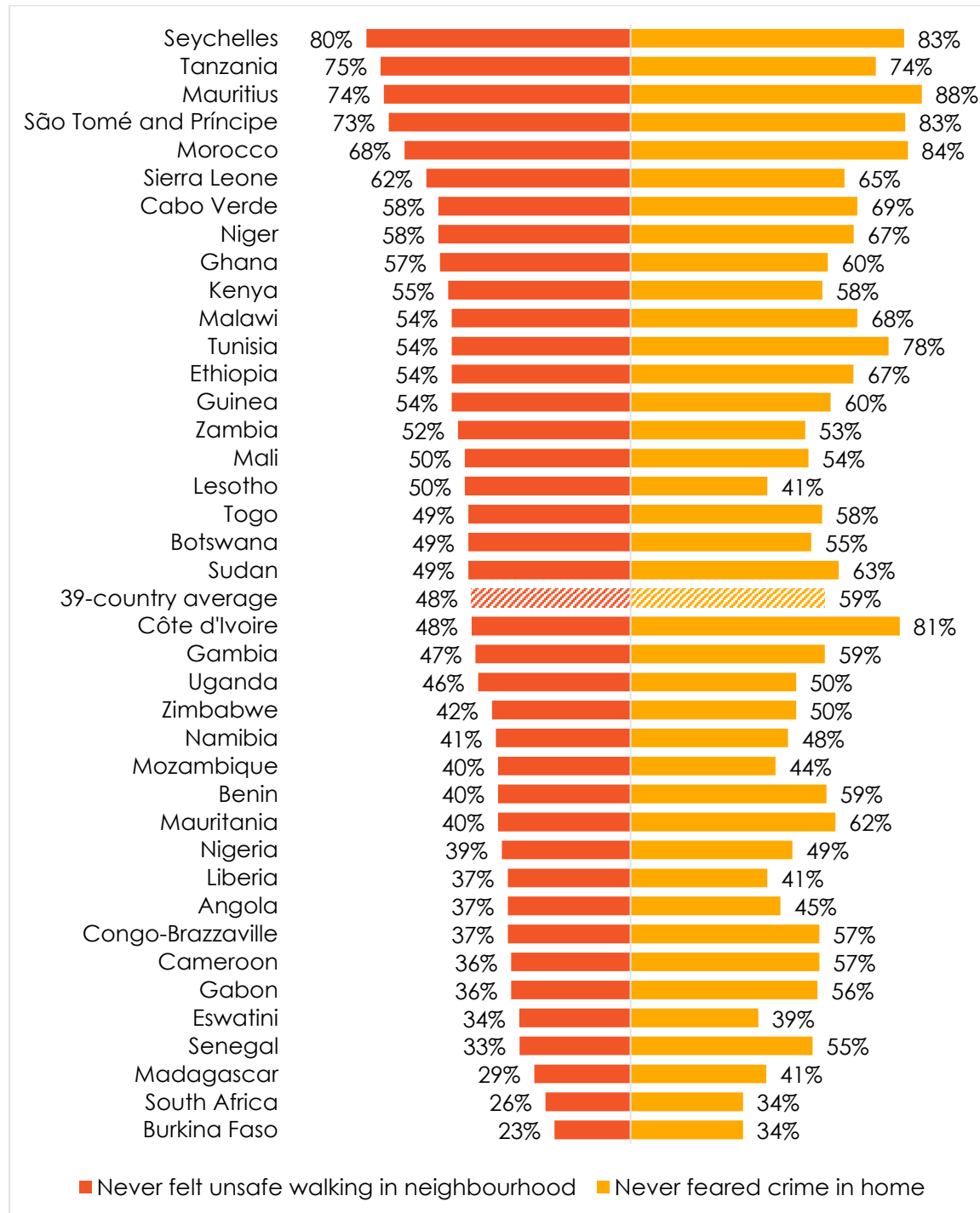
## Outcomes associated with police conduct

But what implications, if any, might police conduct have? In this section we explore whether police conduct is associated with perceptions of personal safety, trust in the police, and evaluations of how government is addressing crime.

## Perceptions of safety

Feelings of being safe in one's surroundings vary widely by country (Figure 14). On average, fewer than half (48%) of respondents say they never had the experience of feeling unsafe walking in their neighbourhood during the past year. Reports of feeling entirely safe are about three times as common in Seychelles (80%) and Tanzania (75%) as they are in Burkina Faso (23%) and South Africa (26%). Across the sample, 59% of respondents say they never feared crime in their home during the preceding 12 months, ranging from 34% in Burkina Faso and South Africa to 88% in Mauritius.

**Figure 14: Never felt unsafe and never feared crime | 39 countries | 2021/2023**



**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")

Are these perceptions of personal safety associated with any of the four dimensions of police performance? While it seems intuitive that citizens will feel safer in their neighbourhoods and at home in countries with higher levels of police professionalism, we do not find any evidence of this at the country level (Table 3). However, lower perceptions of police corruption are significantly associated with a more frequent feeling of being safe in the neighbourhood ( $r=.372$ ,  $p=.020$ ) and at home ( $r=.331$ ,  $p=.040$ ). The limited associations between police performance indices and citizen perceptions of safety suggest that these relationships are not straightforward, requiring more comprehensive analyses of these variables (e.g. how multiple aspects of police performance are required to improve perceptions of safety).

**Table 3: Dimensions of police performance and perceptions of safety** | country-level correlation | 39 countries | 2021/2023

	Felt safe in neighbourhood	Felt safe in home
<b>Professionalism</b>	.096	.191
<b>Corruption</b>	<b>.372*</b>	<b>.331*</b>
<b>Brutality</b>	.229	.224
<b>Presence and contact</b>	.053	.061

**Note:** Professionalism (higher scores = more professional conduct); Corruption (higher scores = less corruption); Brutality (higher scores = less brutality); Presence and contact (higher scores = higher presence and contact). Bivariate Pearson correlation coefficients (2-tailed). \*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

### Government performance on crime reduction

Moving beyond personal experiences, we can also analyse how citizens view their government's efforts to reduce crime in the country. Across the sample, fewer than four in 10 respondents (37%) say their government is doing "fairly well" or "very well" in handling crime (Figure 15). About three-fourths of Beninese (77%) and Tanzanians (74%) give their government a positive evaluation on crime, but only about one in 10 citizens in South Africa (11%), Gabon (11%), and Sudan (10%) agree.

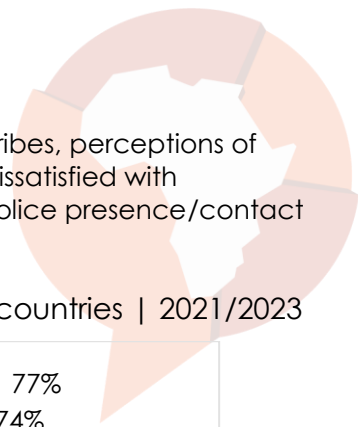
When we test for associations between police performance and how people rate the government on reducing crime, we find divergent results (Table 4).

On the one hand, we see a significant and positive correlation between police professionalism and people's evaluations of government performance on crime (displayed graphically in Figure 16): Perceptions of more professional conduct by the police are associated with more positive evaluations of government on crime ( $r=.331$ ,  $p=0.039$ ). Similarly, in countries with better police brutality scores, citizens are more likely to approve of the government's performance on crime ( $r=.328$ ,  $p=0.042$ ). We do not observe a statistically significant correlation between police corruption and government performance on crime ( $r=-.133$ ,  $p=.420$ ).

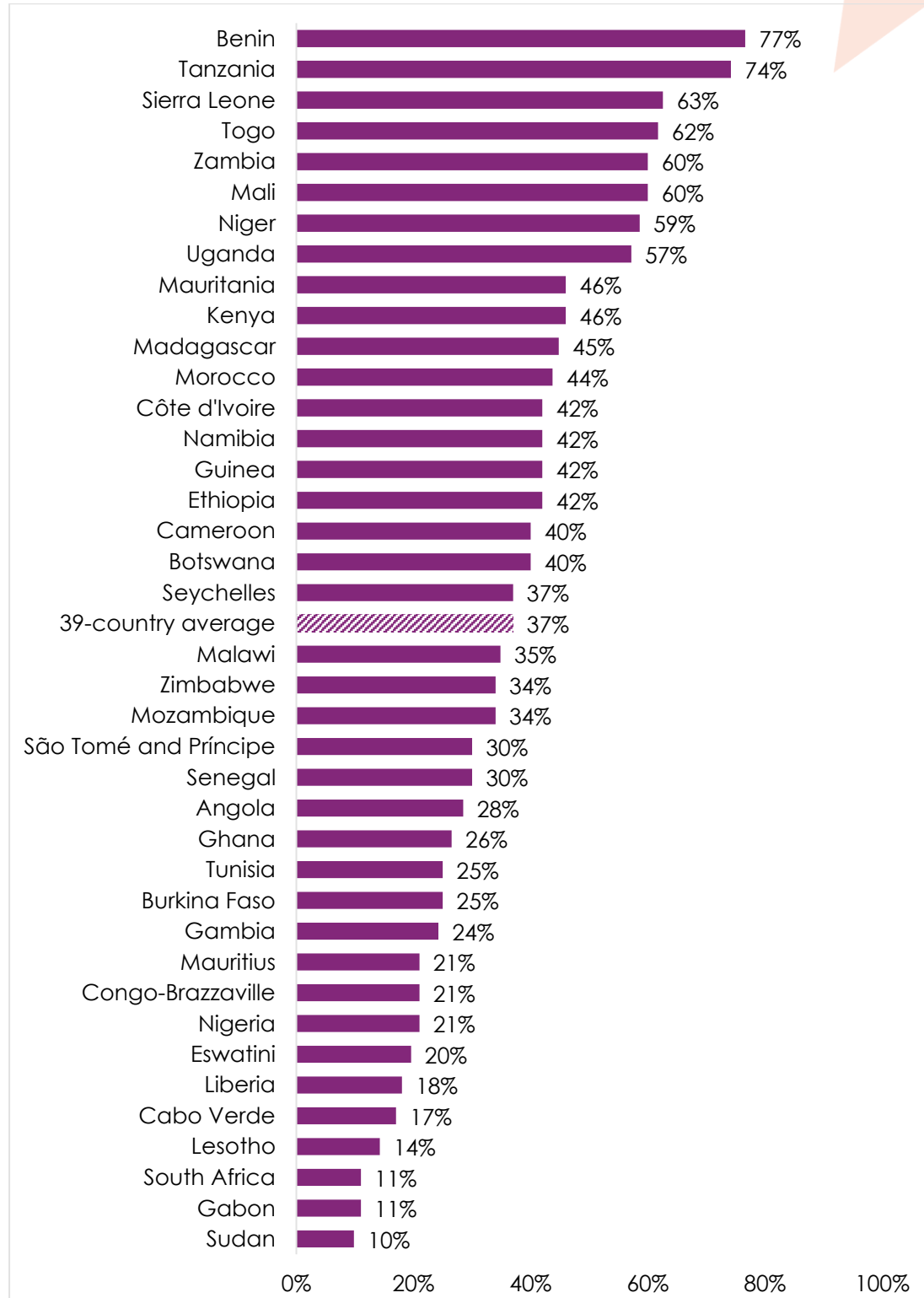
Despite the results shown in Figure 16, it is possible that high levels of police presence/contact would boost citizens' satisfaction with how their government handles crime, if they were combined with high levels of police professionalism. However, such an analysis goes beyond the scope of this report.

On the other hand, we see that people in countries in which there is greater police presence and contact with citizens, the latter are generally more negative in their evaluations of how their government is handling the reduction of crime ( $r=-.465$ ,  $p=.003$ ). The correlation is displayed graphically in Figure 17. Here, it is important to emphasise that this is an association rather than a causal relationship. However, while it is plausible that negative evaluations of government performance on crime are caused by high crime rates, which also drive higher

police presence, the evidence presented earlier (e.g. requests for bribes, perceptions of excessive police violence) suggests that people are at least partly dissatisfied with government performance on crime because of a combination of police presence/contact and conduct.



**Figure 15: Government performance on crime reduction | 39 countries | 2021/2023**



**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")



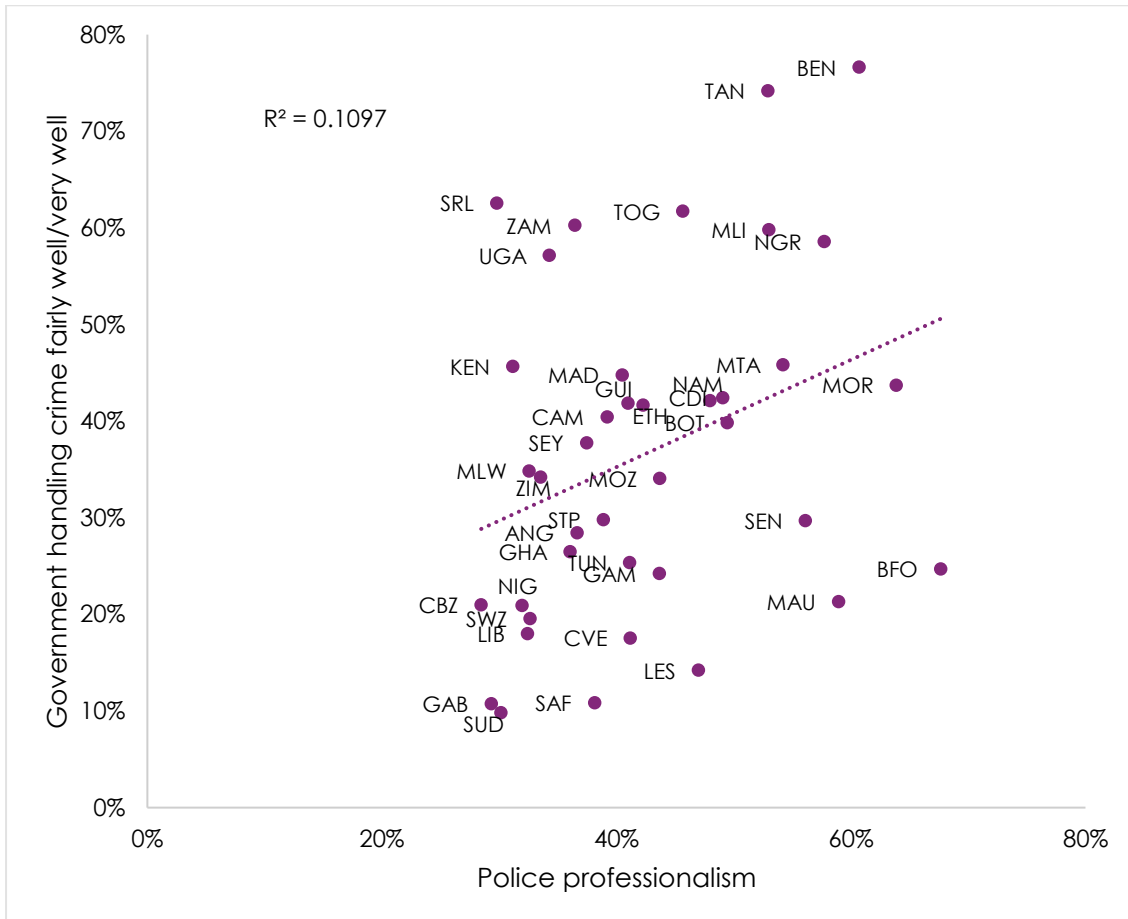


**Table 4: Dimensions of police performance and government performance on crime**  
 | country-level correlation | 39 countries | 2021/2023

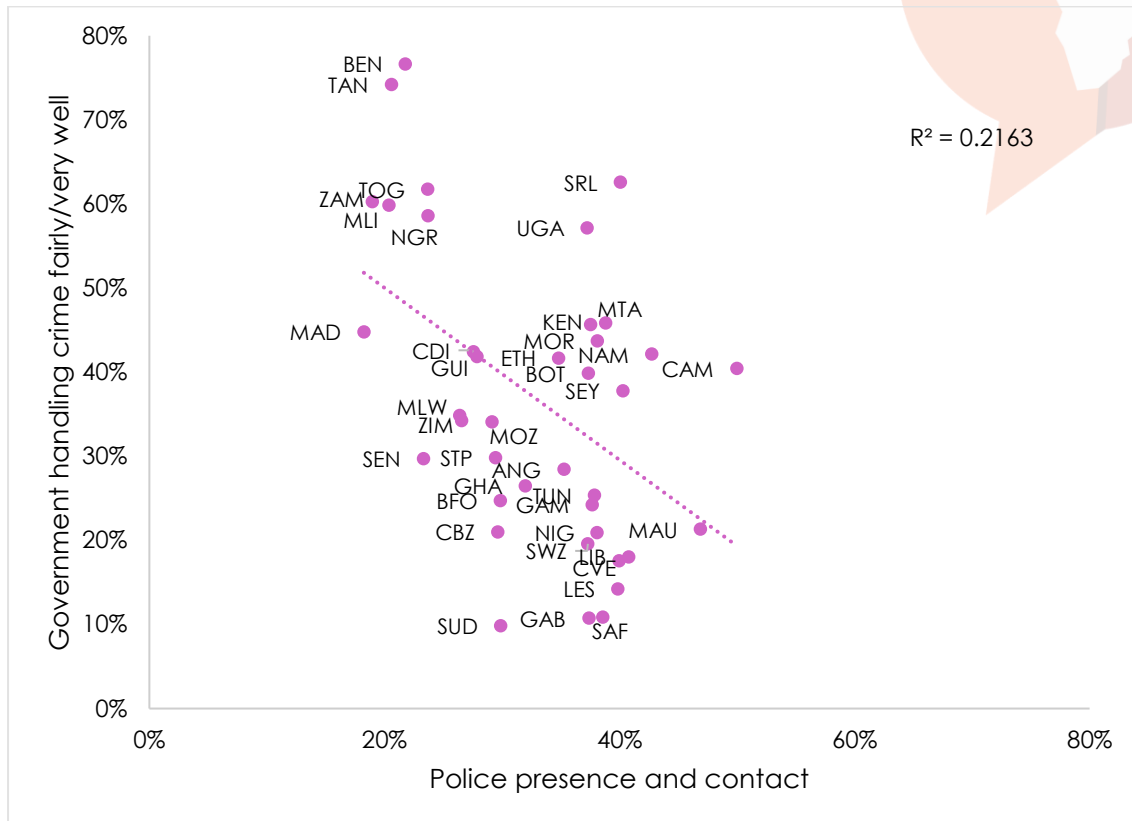
Government performance on crime	
Professionalism	.331*
Corruption	-.133
Brutality	.328*
Presence and contact	-.465**

**Note:** Professionalism (higher scores = more professional conduct); Corruption (higher scores = less corruption); Brutality (higher scores = less brutality); Presence (higher scores = higher presence). Bivariate Pearson correlation coefficients (2-tailed). \*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). \*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Figure 16: Police professionalism and government performance on crime**  
 | 39 countries | 2021/2023



**Figure 17: Police presence/contact and government performance on crime**  
 | 39 countries | 2021/2023

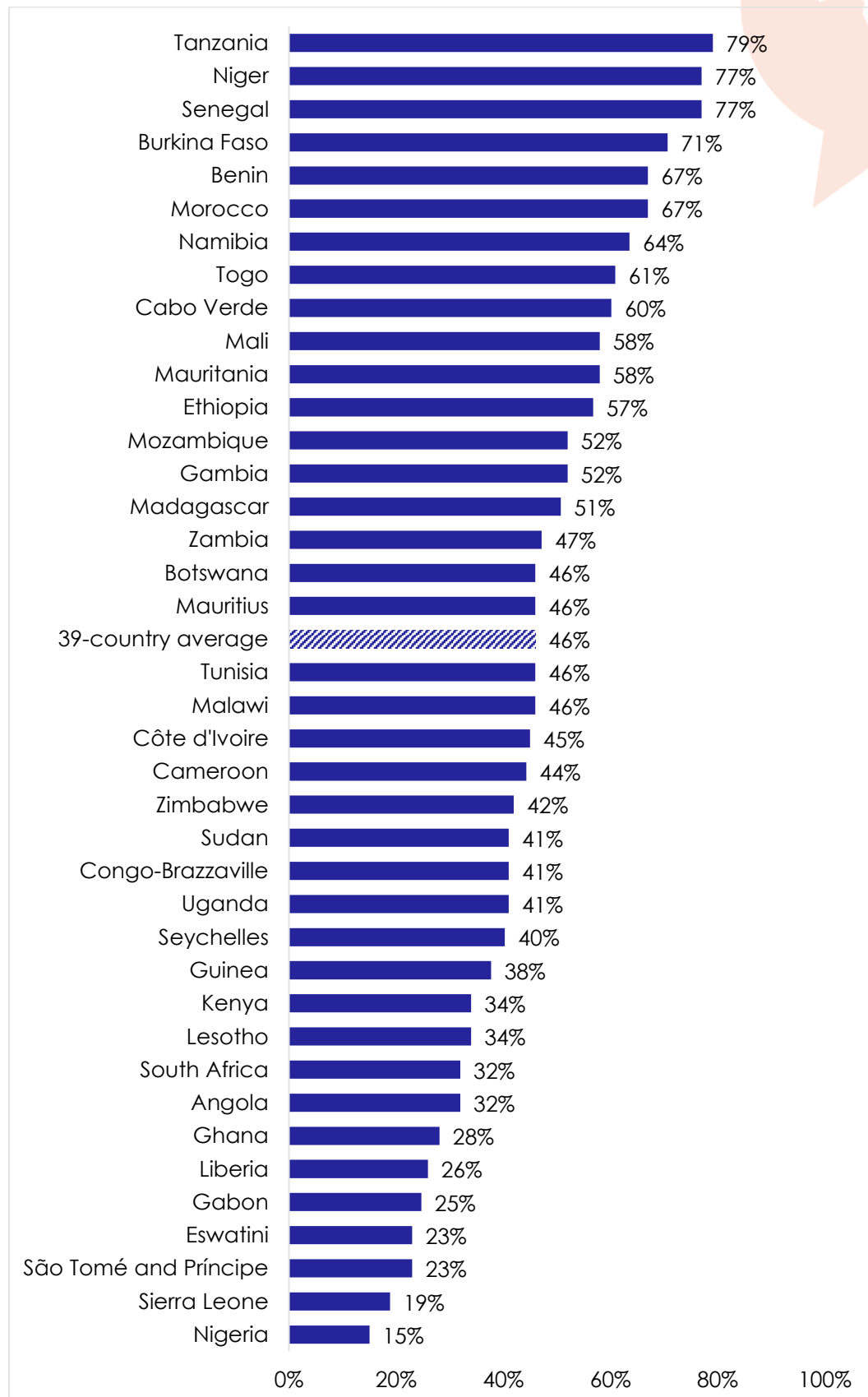


### Trust in the police

Enforcing the law is easier if citizens trust the police enough to support and collaborate with them. However, citizens' trust in the police varies widely across the continent (Figure 18). On average across 39 countries, fewer than half (46%) of respondents say they trust the police "somewhat" or "a lot." Tanzania (79%), Niger (77%), and Senegal (77%) stand out with high levels of trust, while fewer than one in five Sierra Leoneans (19%) and Nigerians (15%) trust their police even "somewhat."

How could police forces in Nigeria or Sierra Leone increase public confidence? Which one of the four dimensions of police performance is most strongly associated with levels of public trust in the police? In Table 5, three of the four dimensions show statistically significant correlations with trust in police. Perhaps unsurprisingly, in countries with professional police forces, citizens are much more likely to trust the police (see Figure 19). This is the strongest association across all the outcome variables ( $r=.771$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Similarly, citizens tend to trust the police more if the latter score well on the brutality index ( $r=.393$ ,  $p=.013$ ). Once again, the negative correlation between police presence/contact and trust in the police ( $r=-.406$ ,  $p=.010$ ) not only highlights the complicated relationship between police officers and citizens, but also the need to further investigate how police presence and contact could improve citizens' perceptions of law enforcement.

**Figure 18: Trust the police somewhat/a lot | 39 countries | 2021/2023**



**Respondents were asked:** How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The police? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

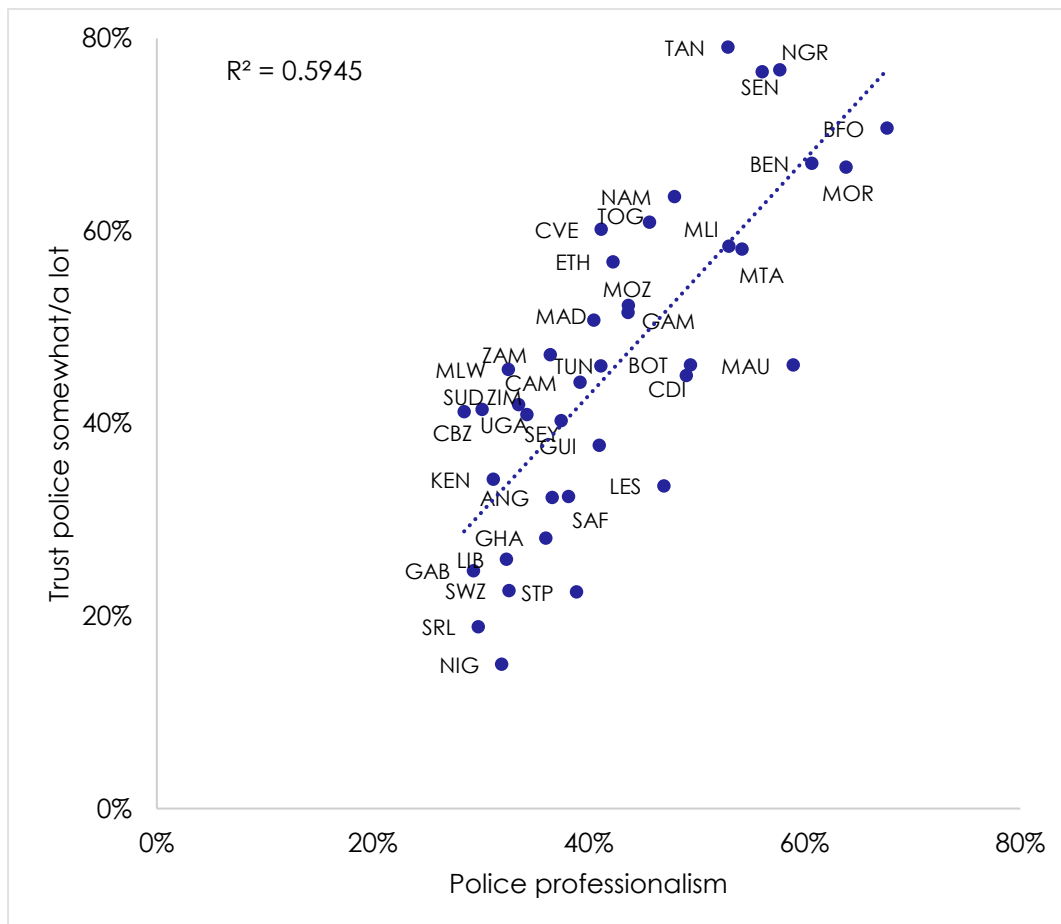


**Table 5: Dimensions of police performance and trust in police | country-level correlation | 39 countries | 2021/2023**

Trust in police	
Professionalism	.771**
Corruption	.232
Brutality	.393*
Presence and contact	-.406*

**Note:** Professionalism (higher scores = more professional conduct); Corruption (higher scores = less corruption); Brutality (higher scores = less brutality); Presence (higher scores = higher presence). Bivariate Pearson correlation coefficients (2-tailed). \*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). \*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

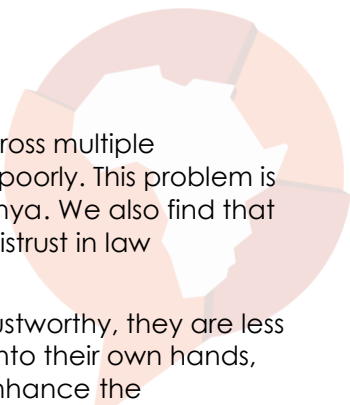
**Figure 19: Police professionalism and trust in police | 39 countries | 2021/2023**



## Conclusion

The police are mandated to enforce the law, prevent crime, and safeguard lives and property. Yet they are frequently accused of unlawful arrests, corruption, extrajudicial killings, and other egregious human-rights abuses.

The most recent Afrobarometer survey findings show that Africans' experiences and evaluations of their police are notably negative in many countries, reflecting deep concerns about the quality of policing across the continent. Although police forces in some countries –

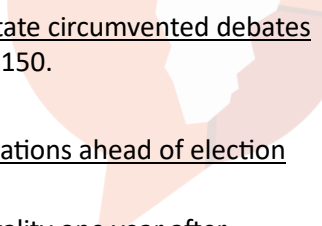


including Burkina Faso, Morocco, and Benin – score relatively well across multiple performance indicators, this analysis shows that many more perform poorly. This problem is particularly acute in Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Kenya. We also find that negative perceptions of police professionalism are associated with distrust in law enforcement and a sense of insecurity among citizens.

Other research has shown that when people view the police as untrustworthy, they are less inclined to comply with the law, might even resort to taking the law into their own hands, and are less likely to cooperate with the police in ways that would enhance the effectiveness of law enforcement (Jackson et al., 2012; Tyler, 2006; Kakumba, 2020).

Our findings point to broad cross-country patterns of how police professionalism, integrity, and respectful conduct are correlated with more positive citizen attitudes toward the police. African governments looking to confront the challenges of improving unfavourable public perceptions of the police – and of government performance in the fight against crime – might take a closer look at which dimensions of police performance matter in their country, and which better-performing police forces might have solutions to share.

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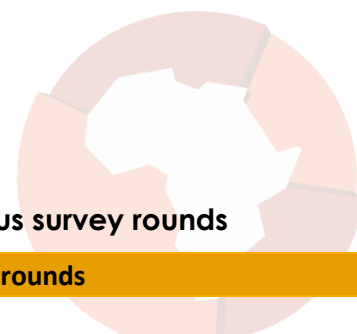
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## Appendix



**Table A.1: Afrobarometer Round 9 fieldwork dates and previous survey rounds**

Country	Round 9 fieldwork	Previous survey rounds
Angola	Feb.-March 2022	2019
Benin	Jan. 2022	2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017, 2020
Botswana	June-July 2022	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019
Burkina Faso	Sept.-Oct. 2022	2008, 2012, 2015, 2017, 2019
Cabo Verde	July-Aug. 2022	2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017, 2019
Cameroon	March 2022	2013, 2015, 2018, 2021
Congo-Brazzaville	June-July 2023	NA
Côte d'Ivoire	Nov.-Dec. 2021	2013, 2014, 2017, 2019
Eswatini	Oct.-Nov. 2022	2013, 2015, 2018, 2021
Ethiopia	May-June 2023	2013, 2020
Gabon	Nov.-Dec. 2021	2015, 2017, 2020
Gambia	Aug.-Sept. 2022	2018, 2021
Ghana	April 2022	1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019
Guinea	Aug. 2022	2013, 2015, 2017, 2019
Kenya	Nov.-Dec. 2021	2003, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2016, 2019
Lesotho	Feb.-March 2022	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2020
Liberia	Aug.-Sept. 2022	2008, 2012, 2015, 2018, 2020
Madagascar	April-May 2022	2005, 2008, 2013, 2015, 2018
Malawi	Feb. 2022	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019
Mali	July 2022	2001, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2020
Mauritania	Nov. 2022	NA
Mauritius	March 2022	2012, 2014, 2017, 2020
Morocco	Aug.-Sept. 2022	2013, 2015, 2018, 2021
Mozambique	Oct.-Nov. 2022	2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2018, 2021
Namibia	Oct.-Nov. 2021	1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019
Niger	June 2022	2013, 2015, 2018, 2020
Nigeria	March 2022	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2020
São Tomé and Príncipe	Dec. 2022	2015, 2018
Senegal	May-June 2022	2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2021
Seychelles	Dec. 2022	NA
Sierra Leone	June-July 2022	2012, 2015, 2018, 2020
South Africa	Nov.-Dec. 2022	2000, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2015, 2018, 2021
Sudan	Nov.-Dec. 2022	2013, 2015, 2018, 2021
Tanzania	Sept.-Oct. 2022	2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2021
Togo	March 2022	2012, 2014, 2017, 2021
Tunisia	Feb.-March 2022	2013, 2015, 2018, 2020
Uganda	Jan. 2022	2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2017, 2019
Zambia	Aug.-Sept. 2022	1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2020
Zimbabwe	March-April 2022	1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2021



Table A.2: Dimensions of police performance | 39 countries | 2021/2023

Country	Presence and contact			Professionalism		Corruption		Brutality	
	Police station/ Police seen in EA	Requested police assistance	Encountered police in other situations	Police professional and respectful	Easy to get police assistance	No bribe when requesting assistance	No bribe in other situations	No excessive force with protesters	No excessive force with criminals
Angola	40%	49%	16%	21%	52%	58%	63%	26%	22%
Benin	41%	17%	8%	54%	67%	81%	70%	44%	28%
Botswana	46%	37%	29%	38%	61%	91%	91%	42%	27%
Burkina Faso	29%	51%	10%	58%	77%	38%	52%	38%	33%
Cabo Verde	47%	57%	16%	33%	50%	98%	99%	45%	27%
Cameroon	72%	65%	14%	31%	48%	37%	48%	22%	16%
Congo-Brazzaville	50%	28%	11%	17%	40%	32%	35%	17%	16%
Côte d'Ivoire	50%	26%	7%	36%	62%	66%	51%	35%	29%
Eswatini	36%	60%	16%	19%	47%	68%	70%	14%	14%
Ethiopia	51%	43%	11%	35%	50%	65%	83%	52%	48%
Gabon	49%	54%	9%	20%	39%	49%	65%	14%	15%
Gambia	47%	55%	11%	29%	59%	76%	81%	20%	20%
Ghana	38%	49%	8%	23%	49%	55%	64%	26%	17%
Guinea	45%	27%	11%	22%	60%	47%	34%	27%	27%
Kenya	49%	44%	19%	18%	45%	48%	44%	18%	20%
Lesotho	43%	55%	21%	24%	70%	90%	76%	25%	21%
Liberia	40%	63%	20%	20%	45%	22%	30%	15%	17%
Madagascar	36%	12%	7%	44%	37%	51%	52%	50%	53%
Malawi	37%	32%	10%	28%	37%	60%	56%	33%	36%
Mali	32%	17%	12%	54%	53%	65%	53%	31%	22%
Mauritania	71%	32%	13%	43%	65%	73%	46%	29%	28%
Mauritius	74%	57%	9%	42%	76%	97%	88%	37%	32%
Morocco	72%	32%	11%	57%	71%	59%	47%	27%	30%
Mozambique	30%	49%	8%	29%	59%	51%	53%	35%	30%
Namibia	56%	43%	29%	33%	63%	82%	81%	32%	24%

<b>Niger</b>	32%	31%	8%	55%	60%	61%	51%	22%	19%
<b>Nigeria</b>	45%	62%	8%	13%	51%	25%	45%	21%	17%
<b>São Tomé and Príncipe</b>	23%	56%	10%	22%	56%	83%	81%	38%	26%
<b>Senegal</b>	49%	12%	9%	50%	62%	77%	66%	16%	17%
<b>Seychelles</b>	64%	43%	14%	23%	52%	96%	98%	35%	25%
<b>Sierra Leone</b>	43%	57%	20%	19%	41%	28%	50%	26%	25%
<b>South Africa</b>	52%	43%	21%	24%	52%	82%	76%	22%	19%
<b>Sudan</b>	57%	24%	9%	27%	33%	55%	64%	23%	26%
<b>Tanzania</b>	29%	24%	9%	45%	61%	72%	72%	40%	31%
<b>Togo</b>	38%	25%	8%	34%	57%	74%	48%	32%	28%
<b>Tunisia</b>	71%	35%	7%	32%	50%	82%	67%	19%	14%
<b>Uganda</b>	52%	41%	19%	22%	47%	29%	36%	18%	19%
<b>Zambia</b>	20%	24%	13%	27%	46%	56%	53%	28%	21%
<b>Zimbabwe</b>	24%	47%	8%	26%	40%	63%	65%	17%	19%

**Note:** Presence (higher scores = higher presence); Professionalism (higher scores = more professional conduct); Corruption (higher scores = less corruption); Brutality (higher scores = less brutality). All component variables are allocated equal weight for the respective dimension.



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