

Trust in institutions, evaluations of government performance decline in Cabo Verde

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 234 | Cláudio Alves Furtado and José António Vaz Semedo

Summary

For 15 years after independence, Cabo Verde's one-party regime did not allow for the evaluation of politicians by citizens. The establishment of a democratic regime from 1991 onwards birthed a new form of relationship between elected leaders and voters. Electoral promises created high public expectations that the democratic regime would solve the country's problems and improve the living conditions of the population.

After an initial period of enthusiasm and goodwill, political leaders' difficulties in responding to problems such as unemployment, insecurity, and corruption have made the manifestation of public discontent a recurring theme among opposition politicians, in the media, and among civil society organizations (Furtado, 2014, 2015).

Recent Afrobarometer survey findings continue this theme, showing a decline in popular trust in key institutions. A majority of Cabo Verdeans are also displeased with the government's performance on job creation, food security, crime, corruption, and other issues. However, appraisals of government performance are more positive with regard to road maintenance and the provision of electricity service, and the prime minister's job-performance rating has improved dramatically, surpassing the president's.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in African countries. Six survey rounds were conducted in up to 37 countries between 1999 and 2016, and Round 7 surveys were recently completed in 34 countries. Afrobarometer performs face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Cabo Verde, led by Afrosondagem, surveyed 1,200 adults between 20 November and 7 December 2017. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Cabo Verde in 2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, and 2014.

Key findings

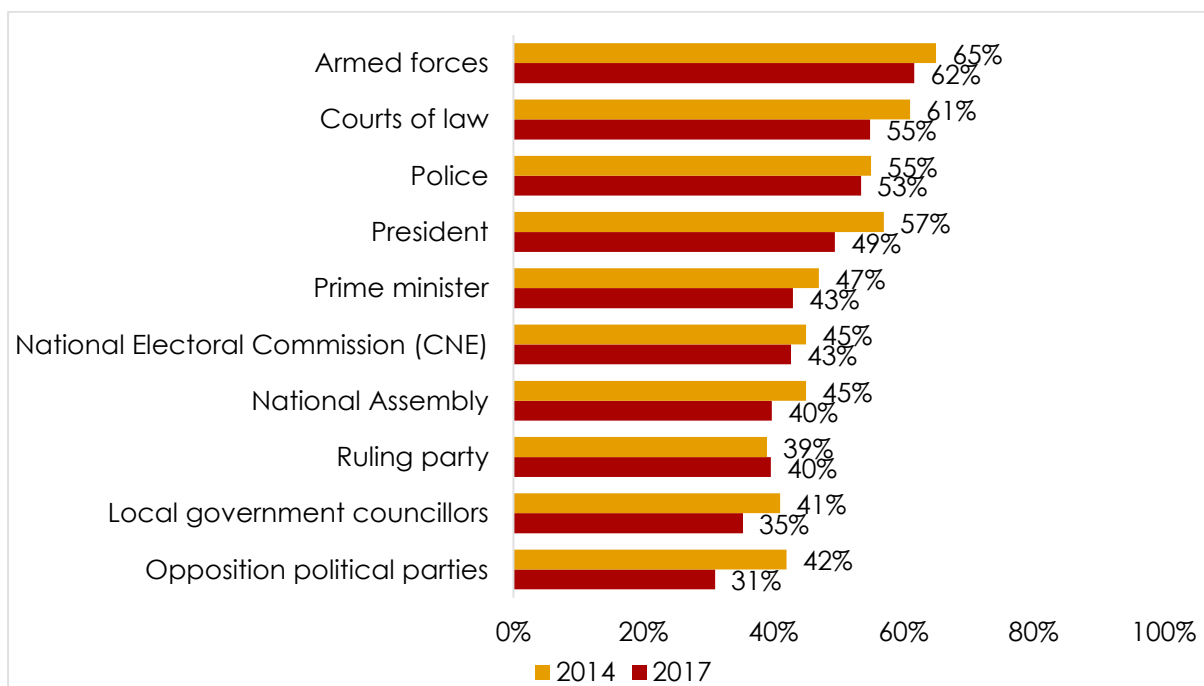
- Popular trust declined from 2014 levels for most institutions. The armed forces continue to be the most trusted institution among Cabo Verdeans (62%), followed by the courts (55%) and police (53%). Elective institutions are less trusted: Fewer than half of Cabo Verdeans express trust in the president of the Republic (49%) and the prime minister (43%), while local government councils rank near the bottom with political parties.

- Popular job-performance ratings remain unchanged since 2014 for most key public officials, including less-than-shining evaluations for National Assembly members (44% approval), mayors (48%), and local government councillors (40%). An exception is the prime minister, whose approval rating rose from 58% in 2014 to 77%, surpassing the president's (67%) for the first time.
- Large majorities of citizens say the government is performing "fairly badly" or "very badly" on economic issues, including creating jobs (84%), reducing the gap between rich and poor (79%), improving the living conditions of the poor (76%), keeping prices stable (70%), and managing the economy (59%). On all of these indicators, 2017 ratings are worse than those given in 2014.
- Large majorities also give the government negative ratings on ensuring that everyone has enough to eat (74%), fighting corruption in government (61%), and reducing crime (60%).
- The most important problems that Cabo Verdeans want government to address are unemployment (84%), crime/insecurity (32%), and poverty (31%).

Popular trust in public institutions

Compared to the 2014 Afrobarometer survey, levels of popular trust show modest declines for key public and political institutions (Figure 1). Non-elective institutions continue to earn greater trust from Cabo Verdeans than their elective counterparts. The most trusted institution is the armed forces, which are trusted "somewhat" or "a lot" by 62% of respondents, down from 65% in 2014. The military is followed by the courts (55%, down from 61% in 2014) and the police (53% in 2017, 55% in 2014).

Figure 1: Levels of trust in institutions | Cabo Verde | 2014-2017



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

Fewer than half of citizens say they trust elective political institutions. The greatest popular trust in this category goes to the president of the Republic (49%, down from 57% three years earlier) and the prime minister (43%, down from 47%).

Only about one in three Cabo Verdeans (35%) say they trust their local government councillors “somewhat” or “a lot.” This places local councillors near the bottom, slightly below the ruling party (steady at 40%) and just ahead of opposition political parties, which suffered an 11-percentage-point decline in public trust, from 42% in 2014 to 31%.

Popular trust in institutions is highest on São Vicente and Santiago islands and lowest on Santo Antão and Fogo (Table 1). Lower trust levels on Santo Antão and Fogo may be due not only to poor performance of institutions but also to lower exposure to the media by residents of these islands, which may translate into less knowledge of these institutions. However, residents in the interior of Santiago, which is also marked by less centrality and less media exposure than Praia and São Vicente, express comparatively high levels of trust in institutions.

Table 1: Levels of trust in institutions | by island/region | Cabo Verde | 2017

	São Vicente	Santiago – Interior	Santiago – Praia	Fogo	Santo Antão
Armed forces	72%	69%	62%	48%	31%
Police	71%	54%	49%	47%	39%
Courts of law	62%	59%	56%	53%	31%
President	53%	48%	55%	40%	39%
Prime minister	46%	46%	45%	33%	32%
Ruling party	45%	41%	40%	33%	31%
National Electoral Commission	42%	46%	47%	38%	25%
National Assembly	40%	44%	42%	33%	24%
Opposition political parties	35%	34%	30%	32%	16%
Local government councillors	31%	38%	40%	31%	27%
Average	49%	49%	48%	41%	30%

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

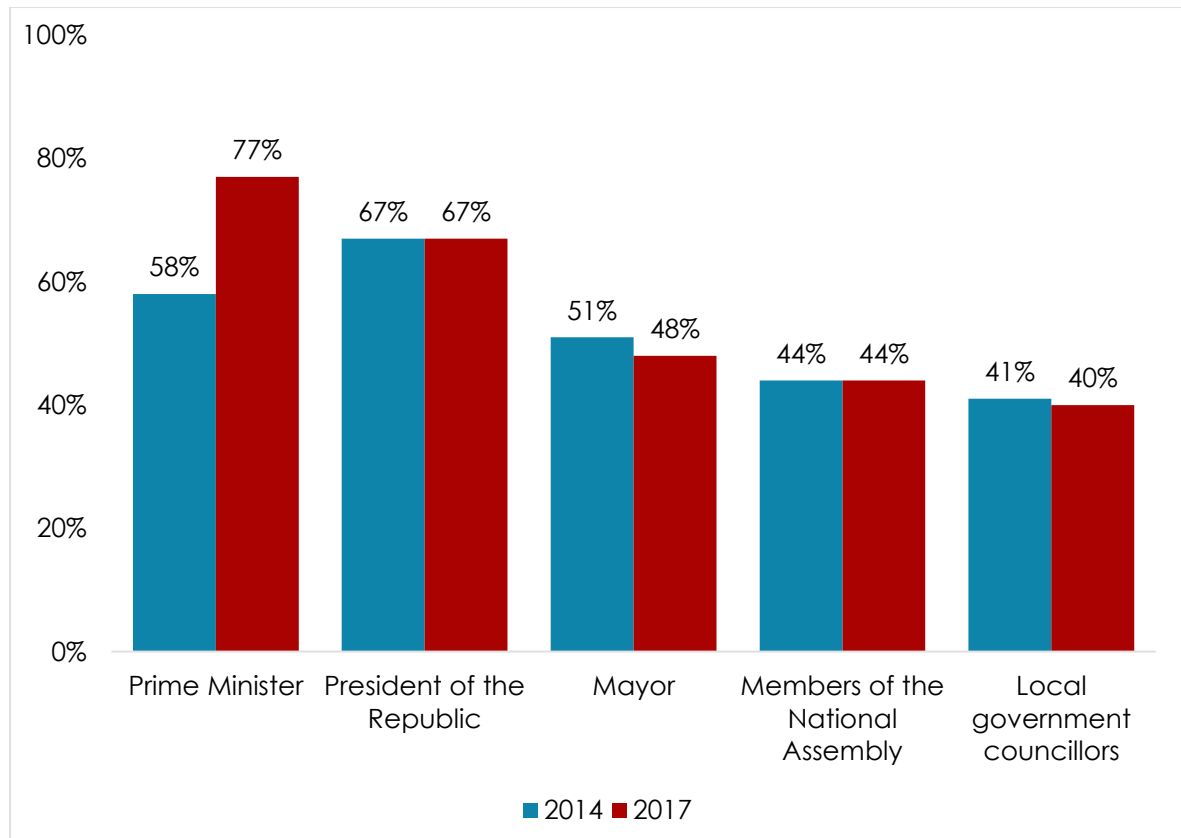
Ratings of leader performance

Compared to 2014, popular job-performance ratings remain unchanged for most key elected officials. One major exception is the prime minister, whose approval rating increased by 19 percentage points, from 58% to 77% who “approve” or “strongly approve” of his performance. It is important to note that this is a comparison of two different prime ministers at two different periods. The 2017 rating, for incumbent Ulisses Correia e Silva, represents the

first time in Afrobarometer surveys that the prime minister has earned greater popular approval than the president of the Republic (67%) (Figure 2).

Fewer than half of respondents approve of the way their mayor (48%), member of the National Assembly (44%), and local government councillor (40%) have done their jobs over the previous 12 months.

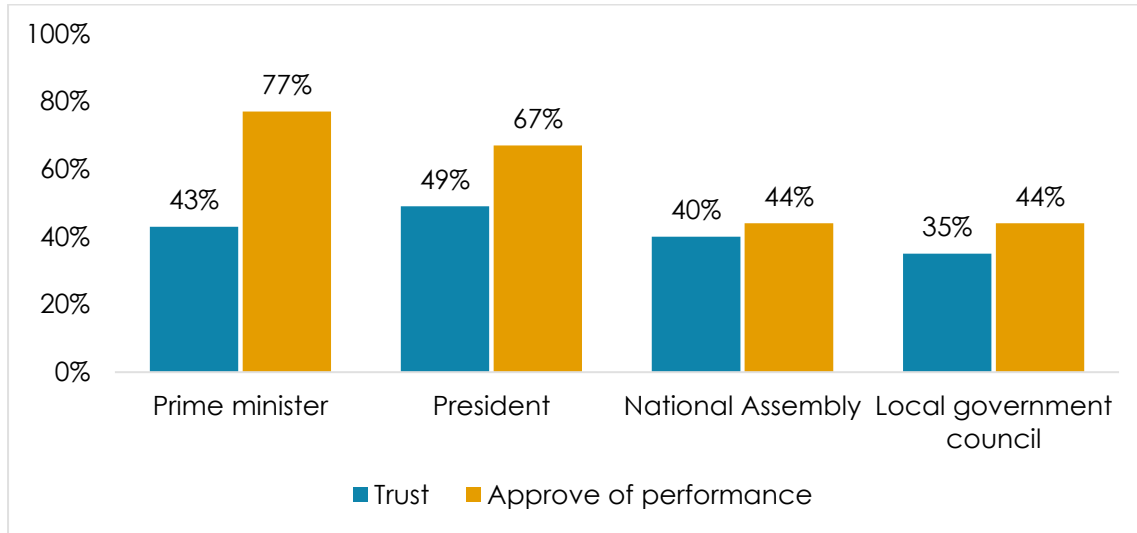
Figure 2: Performance of elected officials | Cabo Verde | 2014-2017



Respondents were asked: *Do you approve or disapprove of how the following entities have performed their duties during the past 12 months, or have you not heard enough about it to give your opinion? (% who “approve” or “strongly approve”)*

In general, we might expect citizens' trust in institutions to correlate with the level of performance and credibility of institutions and their agents (Miller & Listhaug, 1999; Mishler & Rose, 2001; Moisé, 2005). In other words, the better the performance of institutions, the greater the level of public trust in them. This seems to apply in the case of National Assembly deputies and local government councillors, where trust and performance approval are fairly balanced (and low) (Figure 3). However, the data are quite different for Cabo Verdeans' perceptions of their prime minister and president. The prime minister's job performance is rated positively by almost eight in 10 respondents (77%), but the incumbent is trusted by fewer than half (43%) of citizens. While his performance outranks that of the president, his trust level trails the president's by 6 percentage points. This marked divergence seems to be unique to 2017. If we look at the previous Afrobarometer surveys in Cabo Verde, from 2002 through 2014, the difference between the trust rate and the performance approval of the president and the prime minister never exceeded 10 percentage points. In 2017, the difference is 18 percentage points for the president and 34 percentage points for the prime minister.

Figure 3: Trust vs. performance | Cabo Verde | 2017



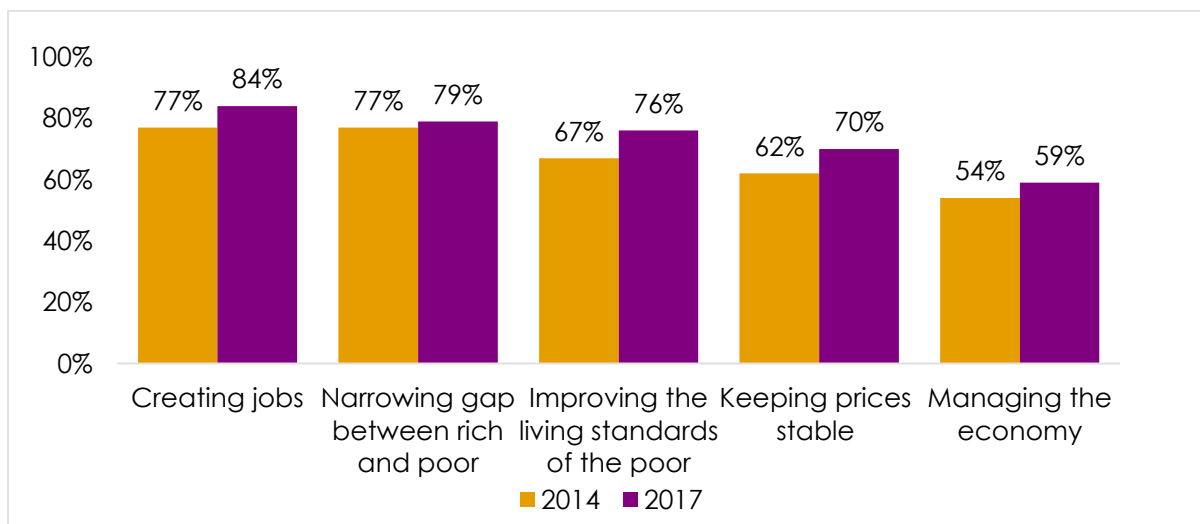
Respondents were asked:

- How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")
- Do you approve or disapprove of how the following entities have performed their duties during the past 12 months, or have you not heard enough about it to give your opinion? (% who "approve" or "approve strongly")

Government performance on key issues

In addition to expressing less trust in key institutions, Cabo Verdeans are displeased with the government's economic performance. Large majorities say the government is performing "fairly badly" or very badly" on creating jobs (84%), narrowing gaps between rich and poor (79%), improving living standards of the poor (76%), keeping prices stable (70%), and managing the economy (59%) (Figure 4). On all of these indicators, 2017 ratings are worse than those given in 2014.

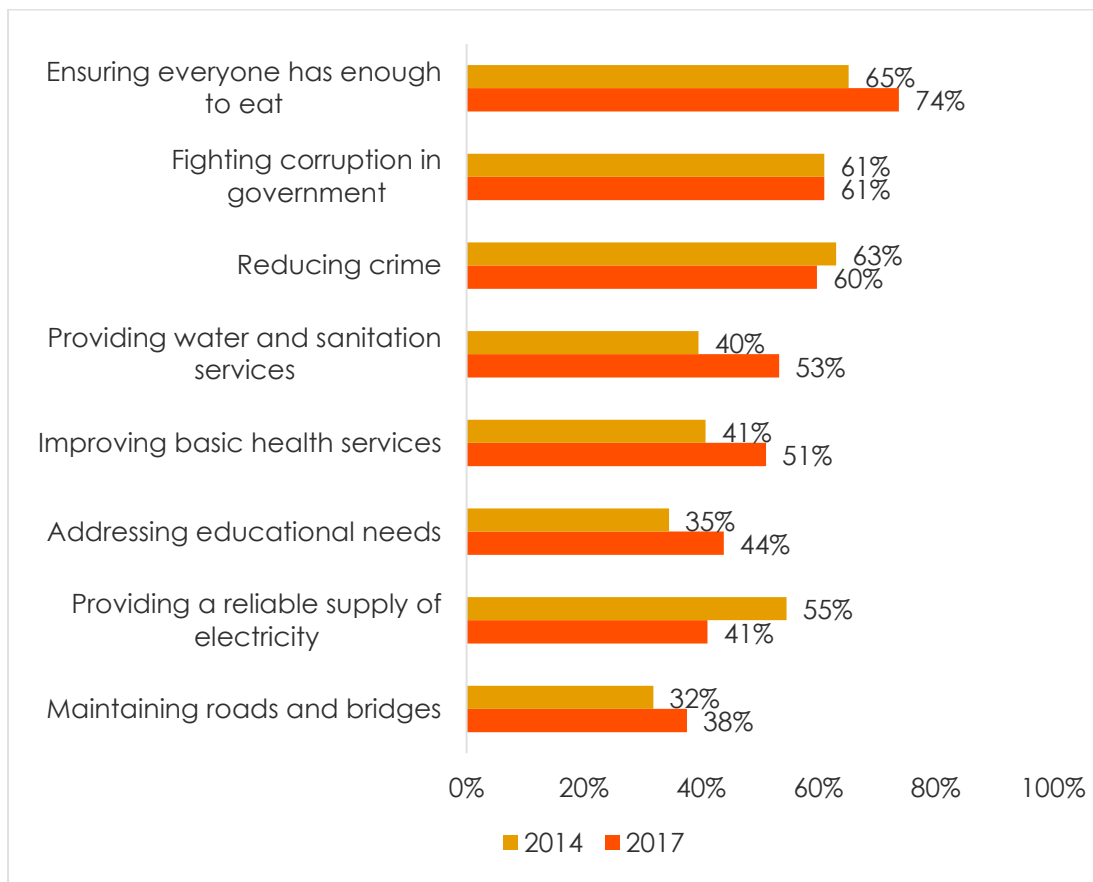
Figure 4: Negative assessments of government performance on economic issues | Cabo Verde | 2014-2017



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? (% who say "fairly badly" or "very badly")

Dissatisfaction also dominates popular assessments of the government's performance on food security (74% fairly/very badly), corruption (61%), and crime/insecurity (60%) (Figure 5). Evaluations of the government's performance have become considerably more negative with regard to providing water and sanitation services (53% fairly/very badly, compared to 40% in 2014), improving basic health care (51%, up from 41%), and addressing educational needs (44%, up from 35%). Appraisals are somewhat more positive with regard to road maintenance and the provision of quality electricity service.

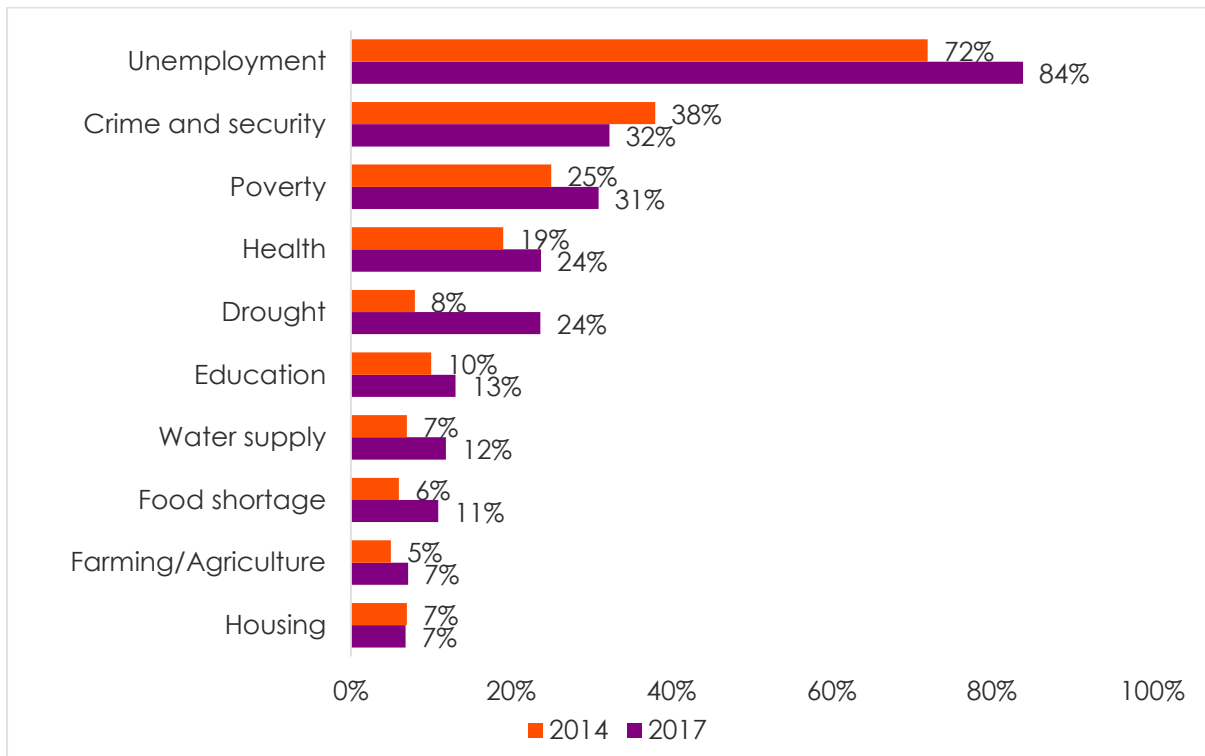
Figure 5: Negative assessments of government performance on basic service delivery | Cabo Verde | 2014-2017



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? (% who say "fairly badly" or "very badly")

Three issues on which the government receives poor marks stand out as the most important problems that Cabo Verdeans want their government to address. By far the most important, in citizens' eyes, is unemployment; fully 84% of respondents cite a lack of jobs among their top three priorities for government action – the same proportion who describe the government as performing badly on this issue. Crime/insecurity (cited by 32% of respondents) and poverty (31%) rank second and third among priority problems (Figure 6). The order of these priorities is unchanged from 2014, though the proportion of citizens concerned about unemployment grew by 12 percentage points.

Figure 6: Country's most important problems | Cabo Verde | 2014-2017



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Note: Up to three responses per person were recorded. Figure shows % of respondents who cite each issue among their priority problems.)*

Conclusion

The gulf between citizens and elected officials is becoming more perceptible as popular trust declines and job-performance ratings remain mixed at best. This is particularly true at the level of local government councillors and National Assembly deputies, whose limited capacity to distribute resources to meet the population's basic needs means they have their work cut out to build popular trust and support.

Political parties, which should serve as a link between elected officials and their constituents, are among the least trusted institutions in the country, which may prompt some rethinking of their role in the political game in the Cabo Verdean context.

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Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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