

Job performance of MPs, local councillors: Are representatives serving voters or themselves?

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 115 | Rose Aiko, Hervé Akincho, and Mogopodi Lekorwe

Summary

Members of Parliament (MPs) and local government councillors are elected to represent their constituents. In a functioning democracy, these office-holders are expected to represent the public interest and to be accountable to those who elected them.

How well do African citizens think their elected representatives are fulfilling their roles? How do constituents perceive their political leaders' integrity, their responsiveness, and their commitment to serving the public interest?

Findings from Afrobarometer surveys in 36 African countries suggest considerable room for improvement. While assessments vary by country, overall public trust is low, perceived corruption and official impunity are on the rise, and most people say MPs and local councillors aren't interested in listening to their views. More fundamentally, a majority of Africans believe that political leaders are more concerned with advancing their own ambitions than with serving the people.

Job performance ratings reflect these concerns: Almost half of all citizens disapprove of how their MPs and councillors are doing their jobs, and disapproval is even higher among those who see their elected officials as motivated by personal ambition, involved in corruption, or unwilling to listen to their constituents.

Afrobarometer survey

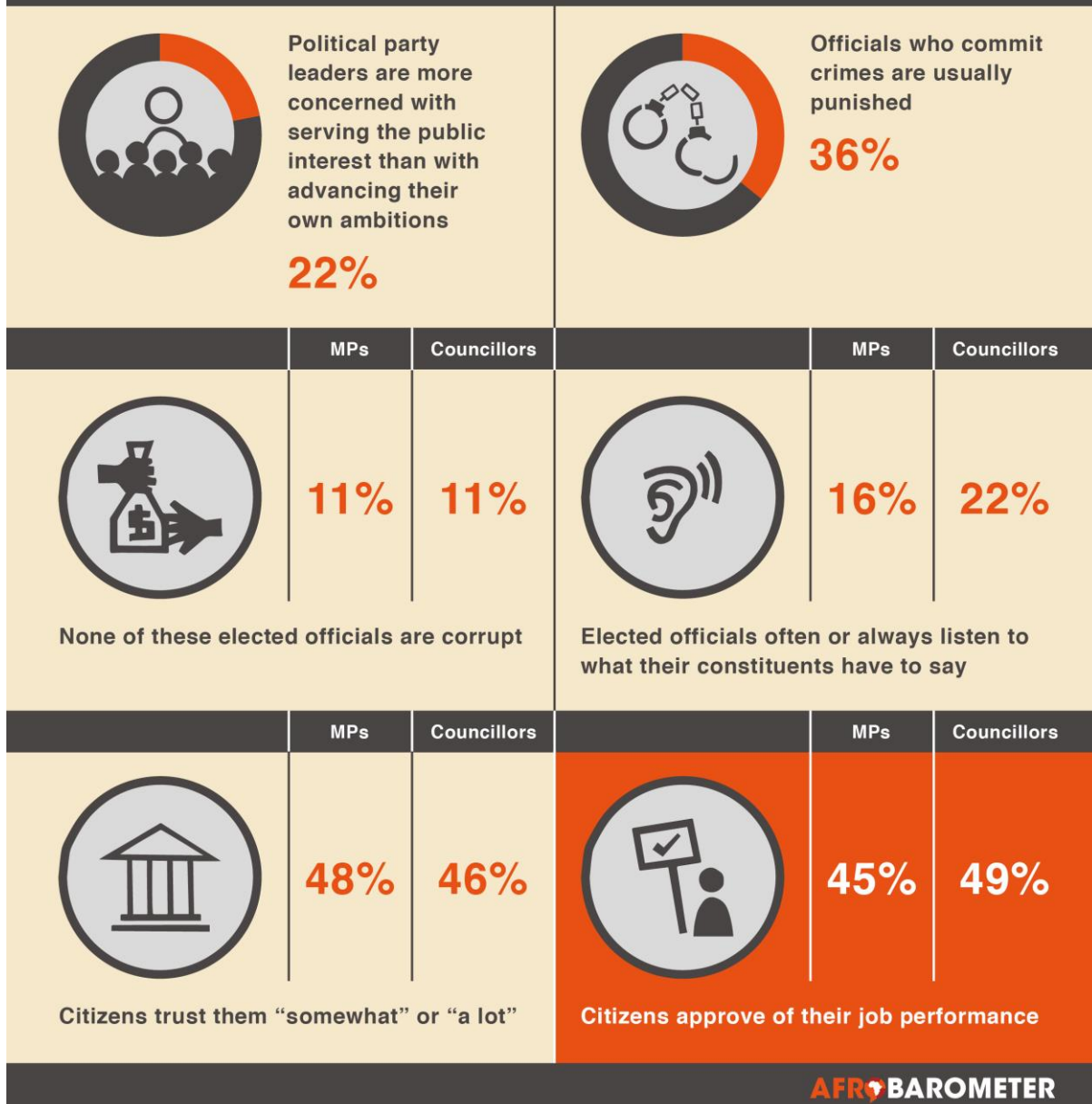
Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. Five rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and findings from Round 6 surveys (2014/2015) are currently being released. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples that yield country-level results with a margin of sampling error of +/- 2% (for a sample of 2,400) or +/- 3% (for a sample of 1,200) at a 95% confidence level.

Round 6 interviews with almost 54,000 citizens in 36 countries (see list in the Appendix) represent the views of more than three-fourths of the continent's population.

Key findings

- Across 36 African countries, fewer than half of respondents say they trust their MPs (48%) and local councillors (46%) "somewhat" or "a lot." Among 12 public institutions and leaders, MPs and local councillors rank eighth and ninth in public trust.

Do elected representatives make the grade? Citizen perceptions
 36 African countries | 2014/2015



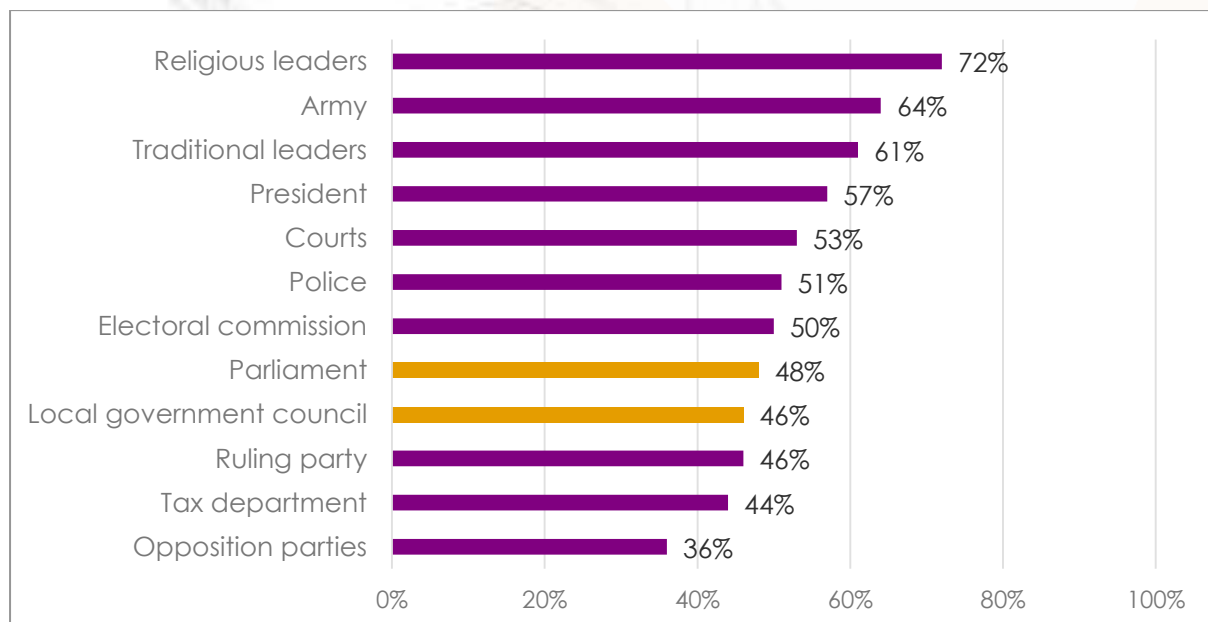
- Large majorities say at least "some" of their MPs and local government councillors are corrupt, including one-third of citizens who see "most" or "all" of these elected representatives as corrupt. Across 18 countries tracked over the past decade, public perceptions of corruption have increased for both MPs (by 8 percentage points) and local government councillors (by 6 points).
- A majority (59%) of citizens say that officials who commit crimes "often" or "always" go unpunished. In 18 countries tracked over the past decade, this perception has increased by 13 percentage points.

- About three-fourths of Africans say their MPs and councillors “never” or “only sometimes” listen to what their constituents have to say.
- More than two-thirds (69%) of Africans believe that political party leaders are more concerned with pursuing their own political ambitions than with representing the people’s interests.
- Fewer than half of Africans approve of the job performance of their MPs (45%) and local government councillors (49%). Disapproval is especially high among citizens who see their leaders as driven by personal ambition rather than public service, as corrupt, or as uninterested in what their constituents have to say.

Trust in parliaments and local government councils

Despite two decades of (sometimes competitive) multiparty elections in many African countries, we observe poor links between citizens and elected leaders marked by declines, rather than gains, on most indicators, starting with public trust. Fewer than half of respondents across the continent affirm that they trust their Parliament (48%) and their local government council (46%) “somewhat” or “a lot.” Among 12 national institutions and leaders, MPs and local councillors rank eighth and ninth in public trust – ahead only of opposition political parties and tax officials (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Trust in leaders and government officials | 36 countries | 2014/2015



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?¹ (% who say “somewhat” or “a lot”)

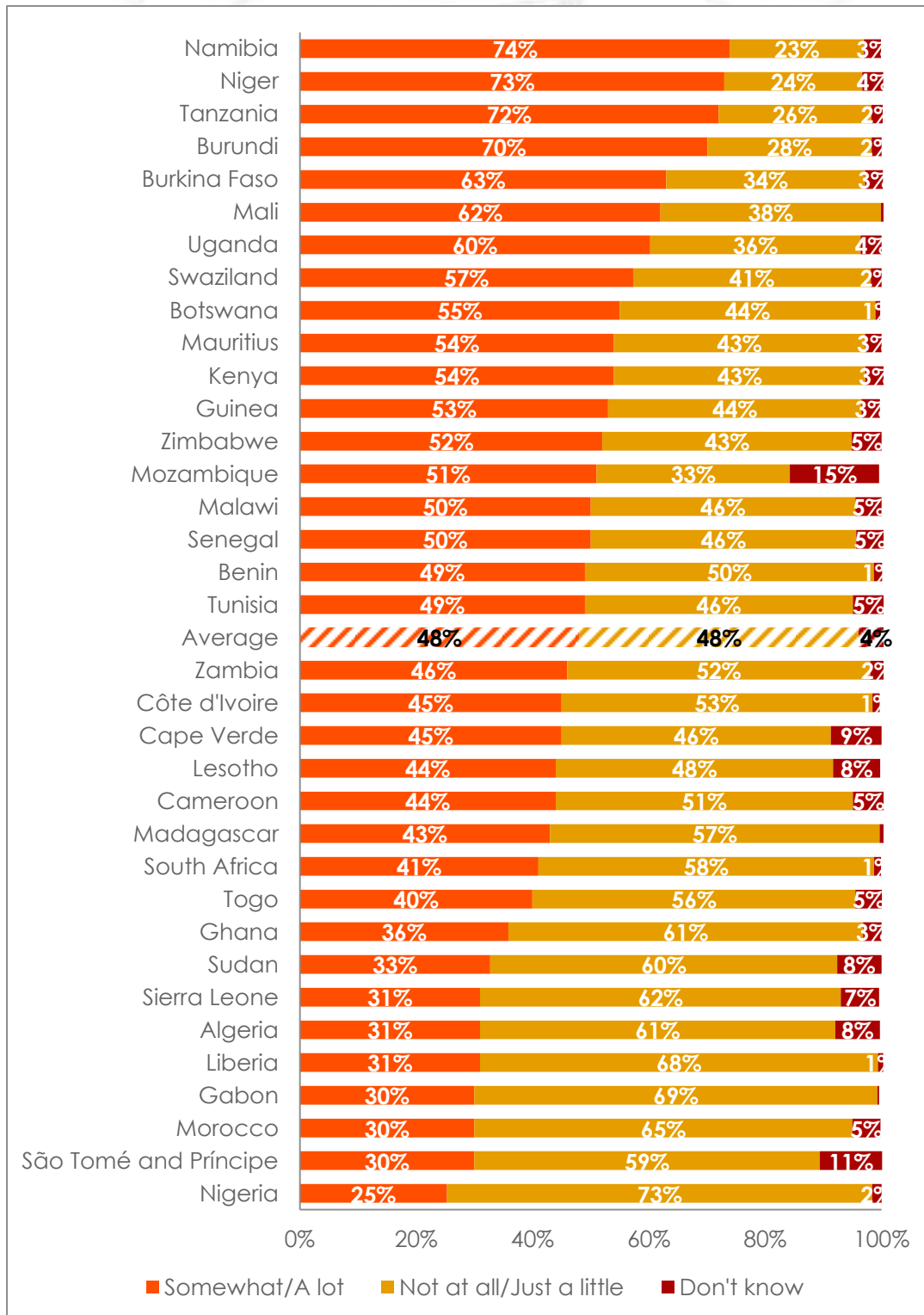
Trust in Parliament

Trust in Parliament varies considerably across countries. More than seven in 10 citizens trust their MPs “somewhat” or “a lot” in Namibia (74%), Niger (73%), and Tanzania (72%),

¹ Questions about parliaments and local government councils were adapted for national contexts, e.g. by asking about national assemblies, local district councils, etc.

compared to fewer than one in three citizens in Nigeria, São Tomé and Príncipe, Morocco, Gabon, Liberia, Algeria, and Sierra Leone (Figure 2).

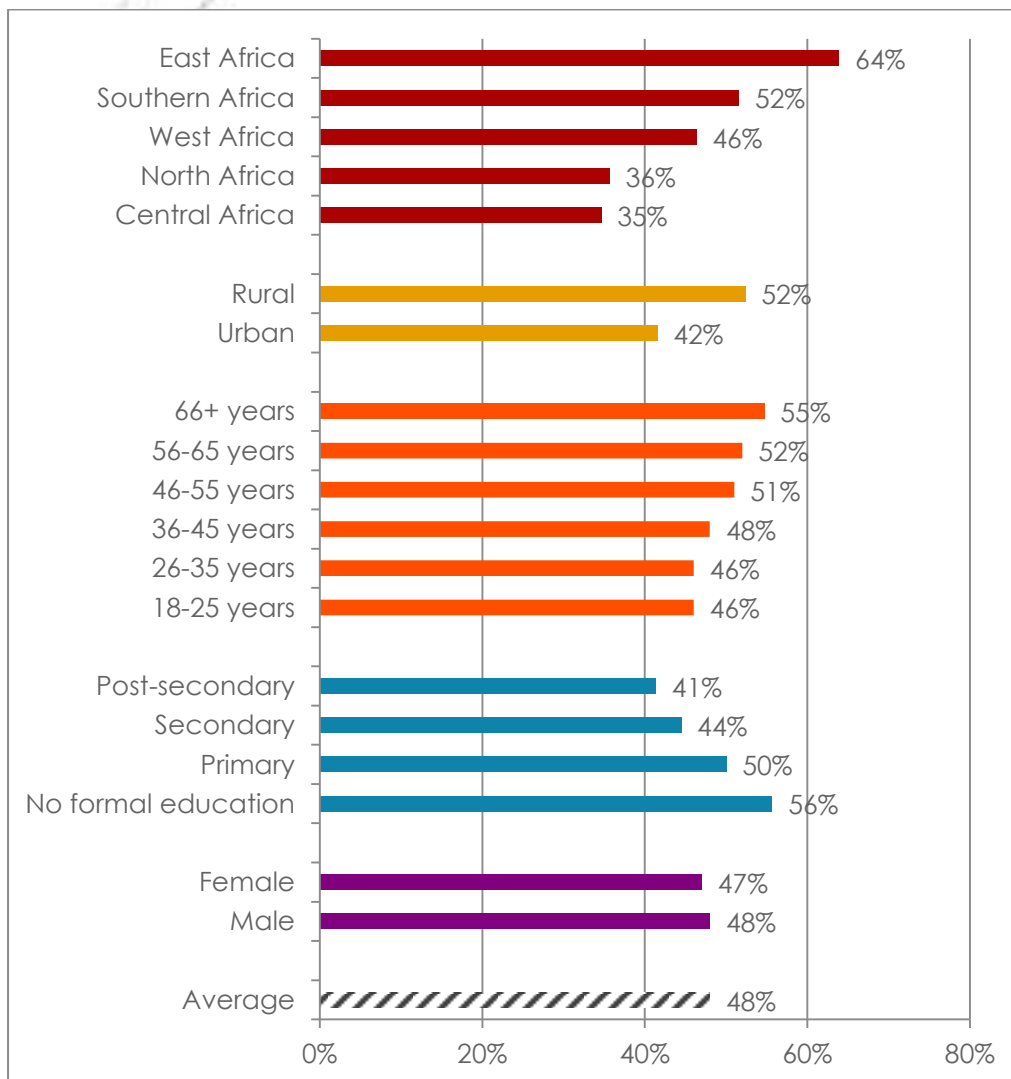
Figure 2: Trust in Parliament | 35 countries* | 2014/2015



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Parliament? (* The question about trust in Parliament was not asked in Egypt.)

Analysis of trust by region and demographic factors shows that on average East Africans express the greatest trust in Parliament (64%), while Central Africans (35%) and North Africans (36%) have the least trust.² Trust is greater among residents of rural areas (52%) compared to urban dwellers (42%); among older citizens compared to their younger counterparts (ranging from 55% to 46%); and among less educated respondents compared to those with higher education levels (ranging from 56% to 41%) (Figure 3). Women and men are about equally likely to trust parliamentarians.

Figure 3: Trust in Parliament | by region, urban-rural residence, age, education, and gender | 35 countries | 2014/2015



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

² Regional groupings are: East Africa (Burundi, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda), West Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo), Southern Africa (Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia, Zimbabwe), North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia), and Central Africa (Cameroon, Gabon, and São Tomé and Príncipe).

Across 18 countries tracked since 2005/2006, trust in Parliament has decreased by 5 percentage points. Trust decreased sharply in Ghana (-32 percentage points) and Mozambique (-23 points), while the greatest improvements in trust were seen in Zimbabwe (17 percentage points), Benin (11 points), and Kenya (8 points) (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Change in level of trust in Parliament | percentage points | 18 countries | 2005-2015

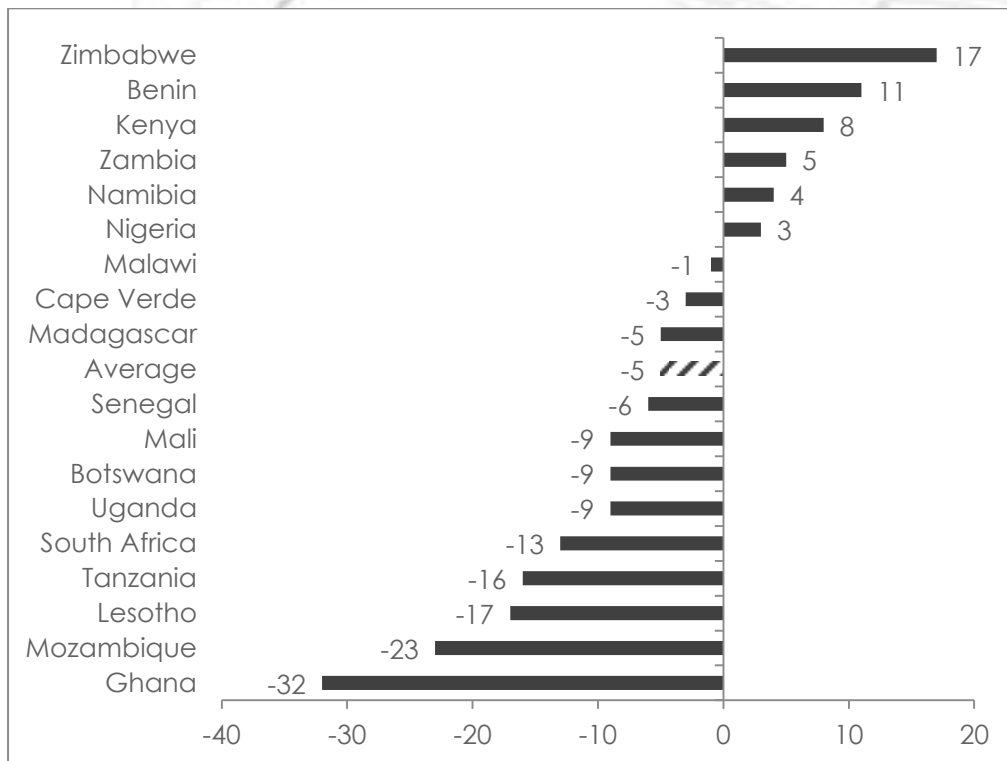


Figure shows percentage-point change between 2005/2006 and 2014/2015 in the proportion of citizens who trust Parliament “somewhat” or “a lot.”

Trust in local government councils

Public trust in elected local government councils³ follows a similar pattern as trust in parliamentarians. More than two-thirds of citizens in Niger (74%), Tanzania (72%), and Madagascar (67%) say they trust their councillors “somewhat” or “a lot.” As with parliamentarians, local councillors are least trusted in São Tomé and Príncipe, Morocco, Nigeria, Liberia, Gabon, Sierra Leone, and Algeria (Figure 5). Madagascar is a striking exception: Two-thirds (67%) of citizens trust local councillors, though only a minority (43%) trust Parliament.

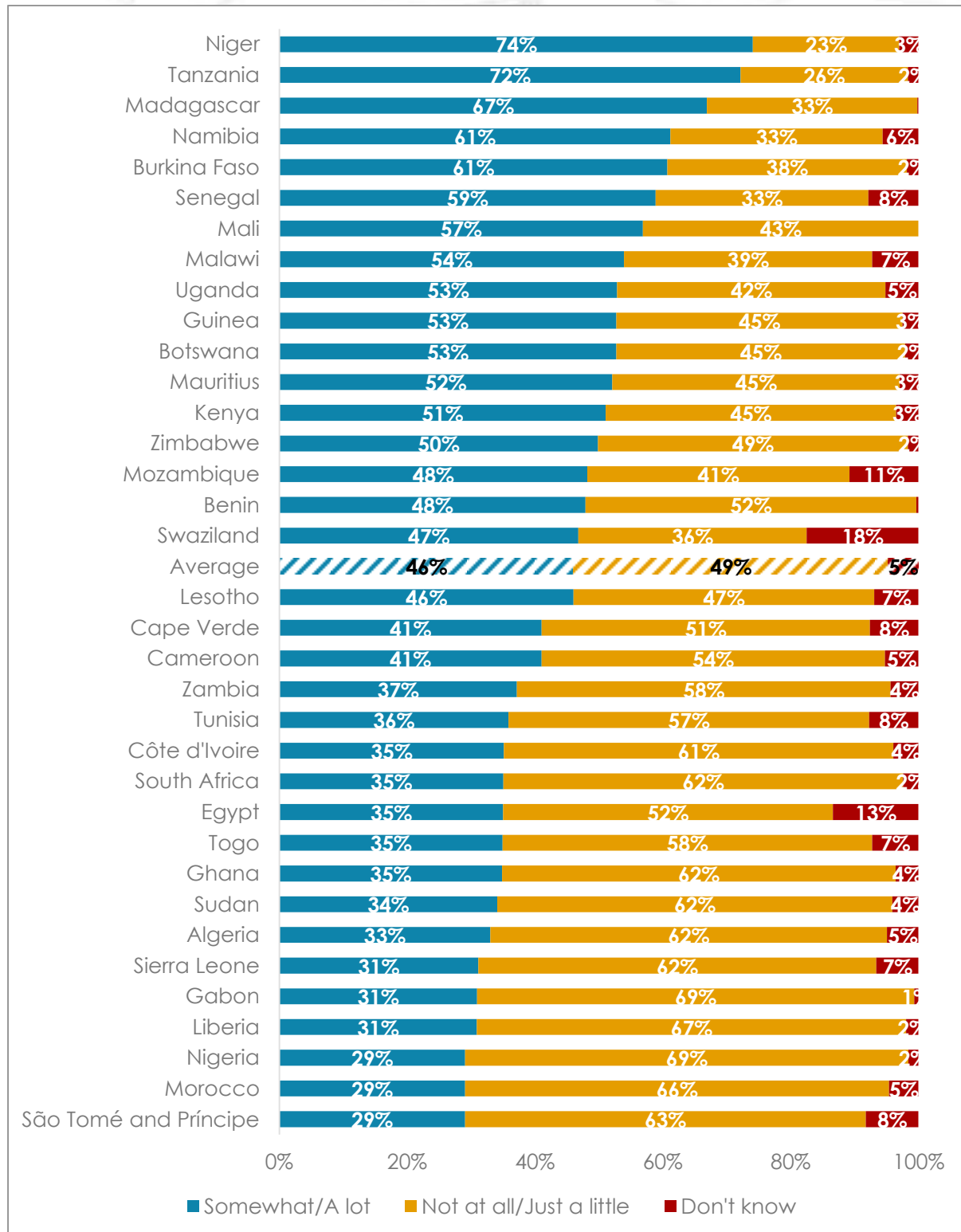
Patterns of trust in local councils by region, urban-rural residence, age, education, and gender are similar to those for trust in Parliament (Figure 6).

On average across 18 countries tracked for the past decade, trust in local government councils declined by only 3 percentage points, but some individual countries show large changes in trust levels. The greatest improvements in trust in local government councillors occurred in Zimbabwe (by 17 percentage points), Kenya (10 points), and Madagascar (8

³ In Togo, local councils are appointed by the government.

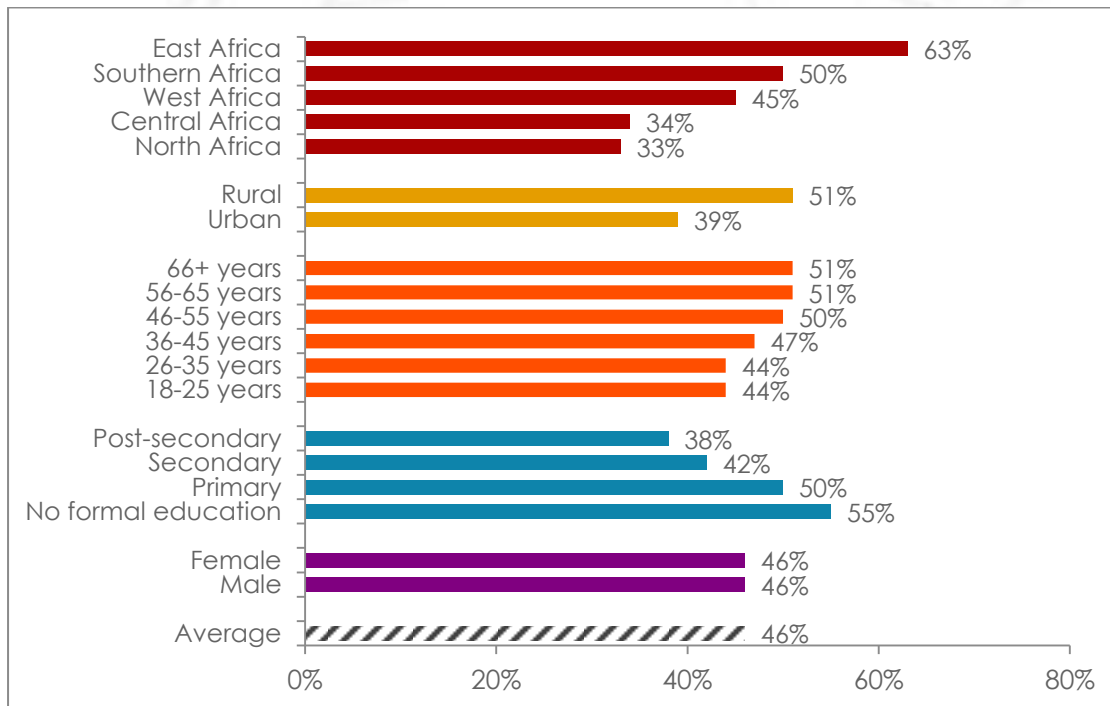
points), while the largest declines were again recorded in Ghana (-20 points) and Mozambique (-17 points), along with Uganda (-24 points) and Mali (-17 points) (Figure 7).

Figure 5: Trust in local government councils | 36 countries | 2014/2015



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

Figure 6: Trust in local government councils | by region, urban-rural residence, age, education, and gender | 36 countries | 2014/2015



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

Figure 7: Changes in level of trust in local government councils | percentage points | 18 countries | 2005-2015

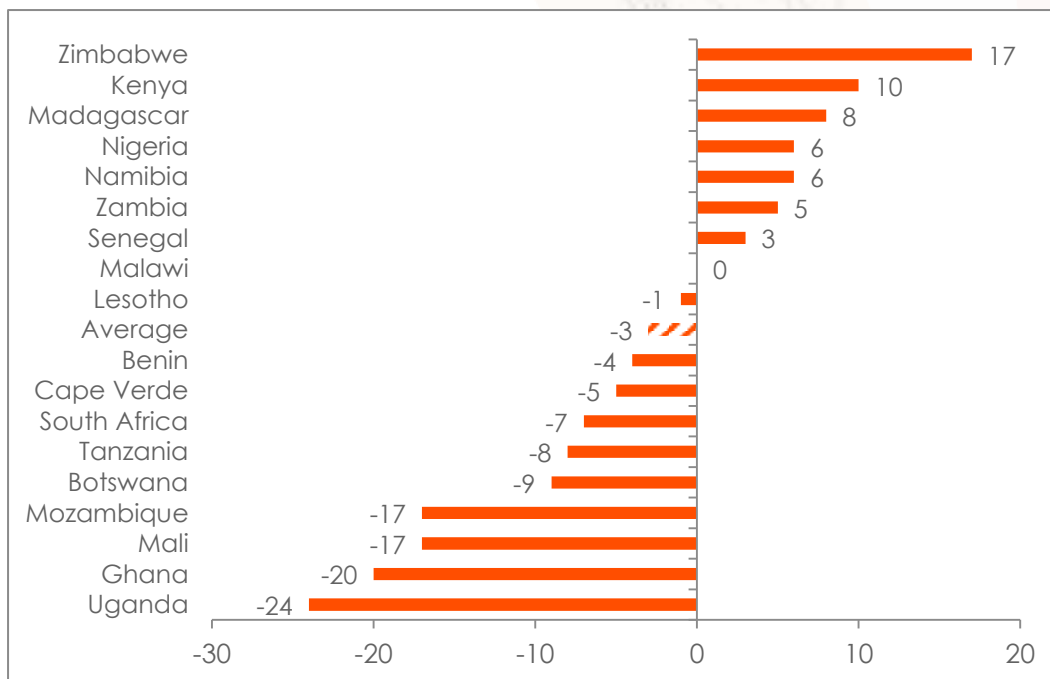
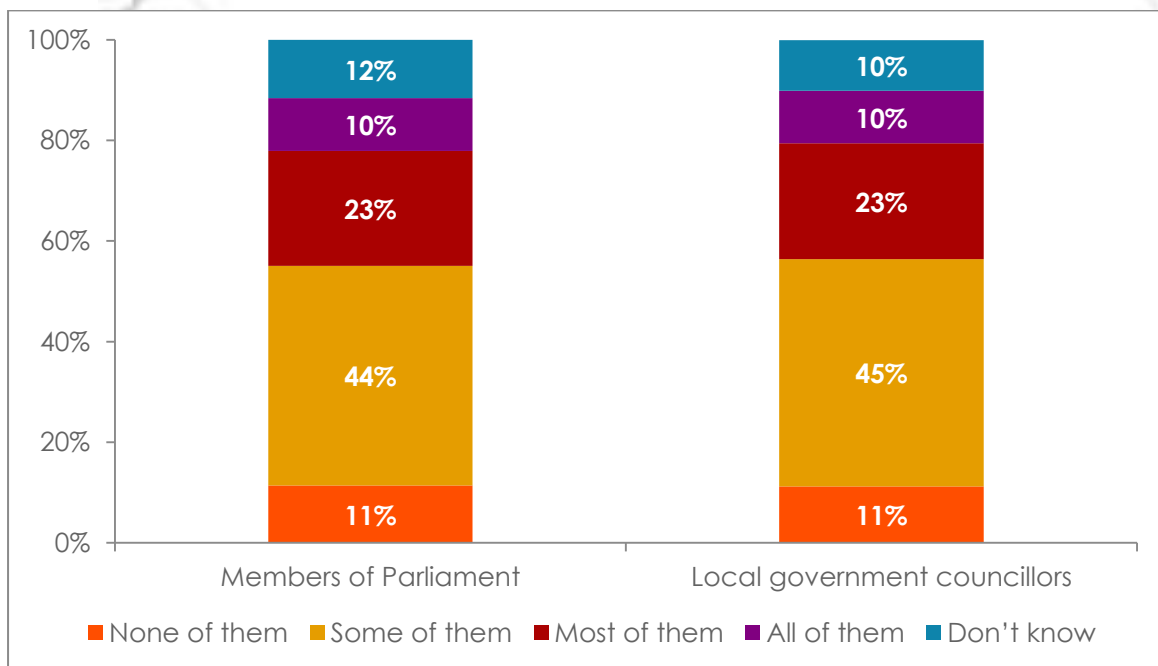


Figure shows percentage-point change between 2005/2006 and 2014/2015 in the proportion of respondents who trust local government councils "somewhat" or "a lot."

Perceived corruption among politicians

One factor that may contribute to low levels of public trust is a perception of official corruption. Few Africans assert that “none” of their elected officials are involved in corruption. On average across 36 countries, one-third of respondents say that “most” or “all” of their MPs (32%) and local government councillors (33%) are corrupt, and an additional four in 10 say that “some” of these representatives are corrupt (Figure 8). These perceived levels of corruption are higher than those for religious and traditional leaders (15% and 19%, respectively) and the presidency (30%) but lower than for the police (45%), business executives (41%), government officials (38%), and tax officials (36%)

Figure 8: Perceived extent of corruption among MPs and local government councillors | 36 countries | 2014/2015



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: Members of Parliament? Local government councillors? (Notes: The question about parliamentarians was not asked in Egypt. The question about local government councillors was not asked in Malawi.)

Countries vary widely in their perceptions of corruption among their elected representatives (Figure 9). More than half of Liberians (68%), Nigerians (61%), and Gabonese (57%) say that most/all of their parliamentarians are corrupt, while fewer than one in five citizens in Cape Verde, Burundi, São Tomé and Príncipe, Tunisia, Mauritius, and Lesotho make the same assertion.

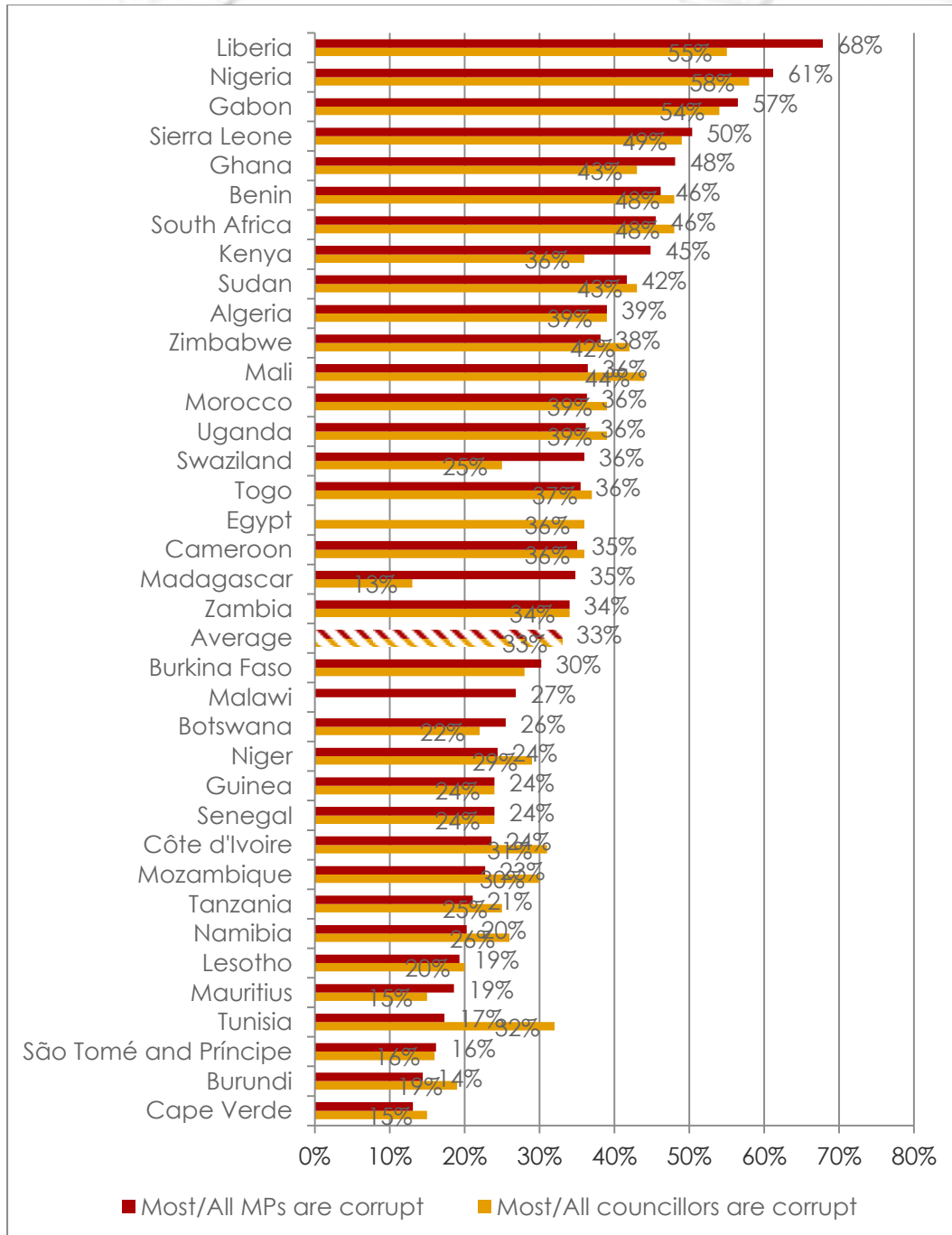
Similarly, majorities see most or all local government councillors as corrupt in Nigeria (58%), Liberia (55%), and Gabon (54%), while fewer than one-fifth hold such negative views of local councillors in Madagascar, Cape Verde, Mauritius, São Tomé and Príncipe, and Burundi.

Again, Madagascar stands out with a 22-percentage-point difference in perceptions of corruption among MPs (35%) and local councillors (13%), while Tunisians are far more likely to see their local councillors as corrupt (32%) than their MPs (17%).

West, Central, and North Africans are somewhat more likely to see these leaders as corrupt than Southern and East Africans. Perceptions of official corruption are also modestly higher among urban and younger residents, more educated citizens, and men (Figure 10).

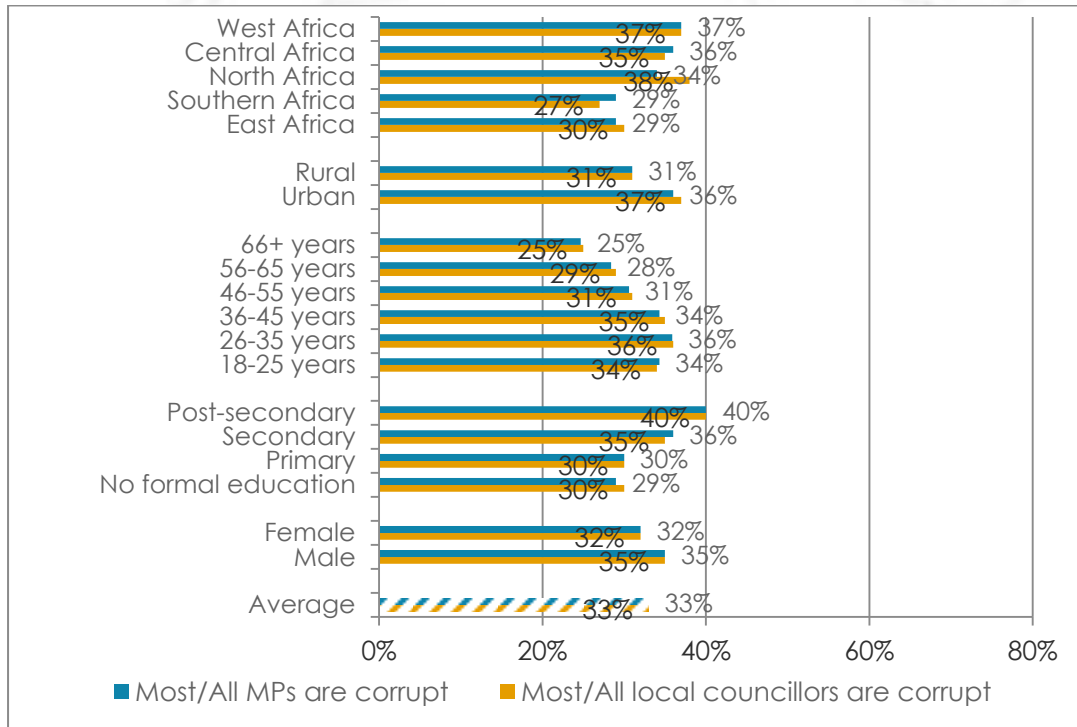
Across 18 countries tracked over the past decade, public perceptions of MPs' involvement in corruption have gone up by 8 percentage points. The most dramatic increase occurred in Ghana (by 32 percentage points), followed by Madagascar (20 points) and South Africa (19 points) (Figure 11). Only three countries did not experience a worsening in corruption perceptions: Namibia (-7 percentage points), Zambia (-4 points), and Zimbabwe (-1 point).

Figure 9: Perceived corruption among MPs and local government councillors
 | 36 countries | 2014/2015



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: Members of Parliament? Local government councillors? (% who say "most" or "all" of them are corrupt)

Figure 10: Perceived corruption among MPs and local government councillors | by region, urban-rural residence, age, education, and gender | 36 countries | 2014/2015



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: Members of Parliament? Local government councillors? (% who say "most" or "all" of them are corrupt)

Figure 11: Change in perceived corruption among MPs | percentage points | 18 countries | 2005-2015

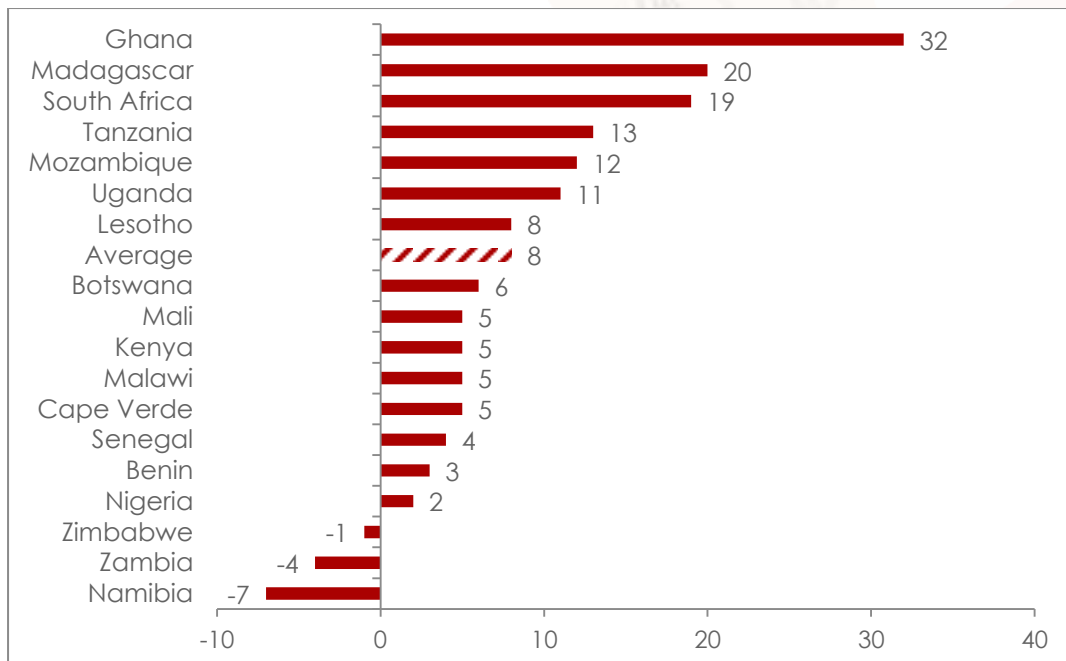


Figure shows percentage-point change between 2005/2006 and 2014/2015 in the proportion of respondents who say "most" or "all" MPs are corrupt.

Similarly, perceptions of corruption among local government councillors have increased slightly. Across 17 countries tracked on this issue over the past decade, the average increase was 6 percentage points, led by jumps of 24 points in Ghana and 19 points in Mozambique (Figure 12). Zimbabwe recorded a 7-percentage-point reduction over the decade, although its corruption perceptions still remain above average.

Figure 12: Change in perceived corruption among local government councillors
 | percentage points | 17 countries* | 2005-2015

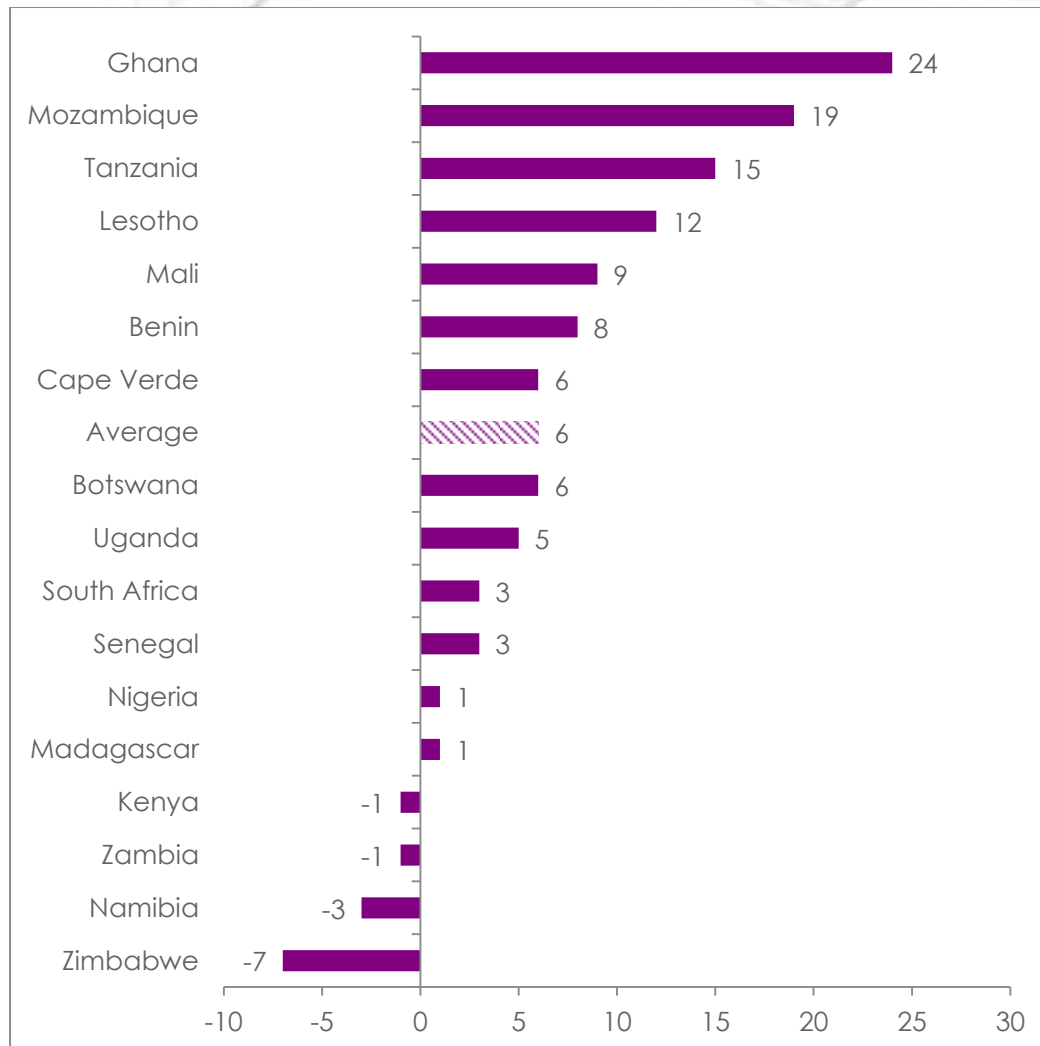
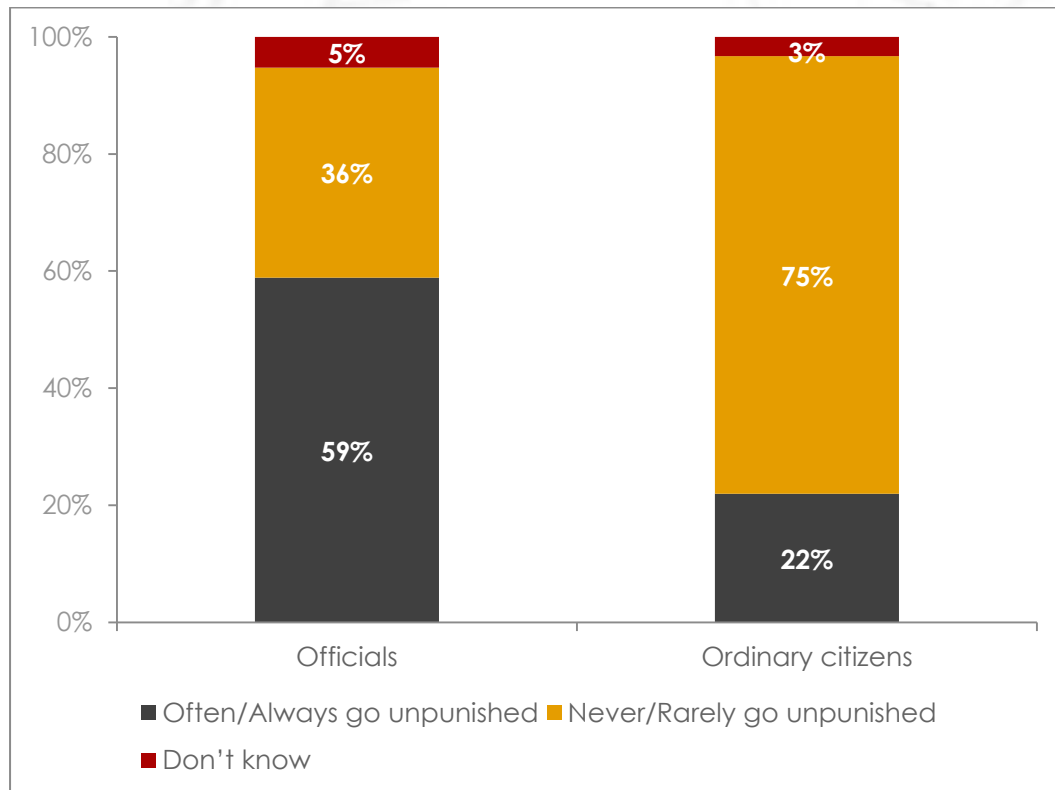


Figure shows percentage-point change between 2005/2006 and 2014/2015 in the proportion of respondents who say “most” or “all” local government councillors are corrupt. (* This question was not asked in Malawi during the most recent (2014) survey).

Official impunity

In addition to high perceptions of corruption among elected representatives, many citizens believe that officials usually get off scot-free when they break the law. A majority (59%) of citizens say that officials who commit crimes “often” or “always” go unpunished (Figure 13). Less than half as many respondents (22%) say the same about ordinary citizens who commit crimes.

Figure 13: How often officials and ordinary citizens who commit crimes go unpunished | 36 countries | 2014/2015



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often, in this country: Do officials who commit crimes go unpunished? Do ordinary people who break the law go unpunished?*

Three-fourths or more of citizens in Tunisia, Gabon, Kenya, Côte d'Ivoire, and Mali believe that official impunity is the norm in their countries (Figure 14). Even at the low extreme – in Namibia, Mauritius, Cape Verde, and Botswana – at least one in three citizens say this is the case.

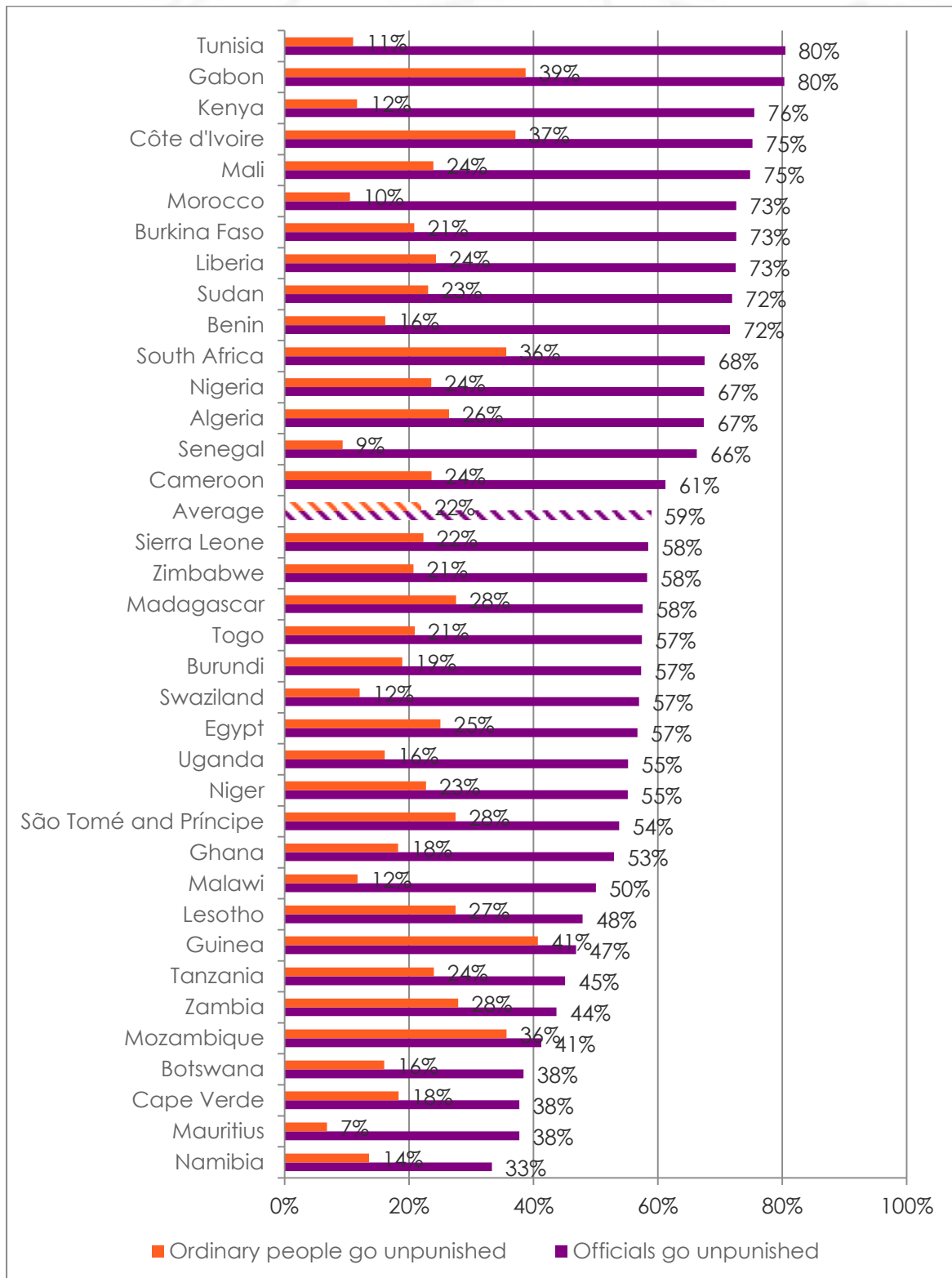
In Morocco, Senegal, Tunisia, and Kenya, respondents are about seven times as likely to report that there is impunity for officials as they are to report that there is impunity for ordinary citizens who commit crimes. In Guinea and Mozambique, perceptions of impunity for officials and ordinary citizens differ only slightly.

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Across 18 countries tracked since 2005/2006, public perceptions of official impunity have increased over the past decade (Figure 15): The proportion of citizens who say

officials "often" or "always" go unpunished increased by 13 percentage points, from 42% to 55%. Countries with the greatest increases in perceived impunity are South Africa (36 percentage points), Senegal (31 points), Ghana (29 points), and Mali (25 points). Three countries show decreases in perceptions of official impunity: Zambia (-18 percentage points), Zimbabwe (-15 points), and Namibia (-7 points).

Figure 14: Impunity for officials vs. ordinary citizens | 36 countries | 2014/2015



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how often, in this country: Do officials who commit crimes go unpunished? (% who say "often" or "always")

Figure 15: Changes in perceived impunity for officials | percentage points | 18 countries | 2005-2015

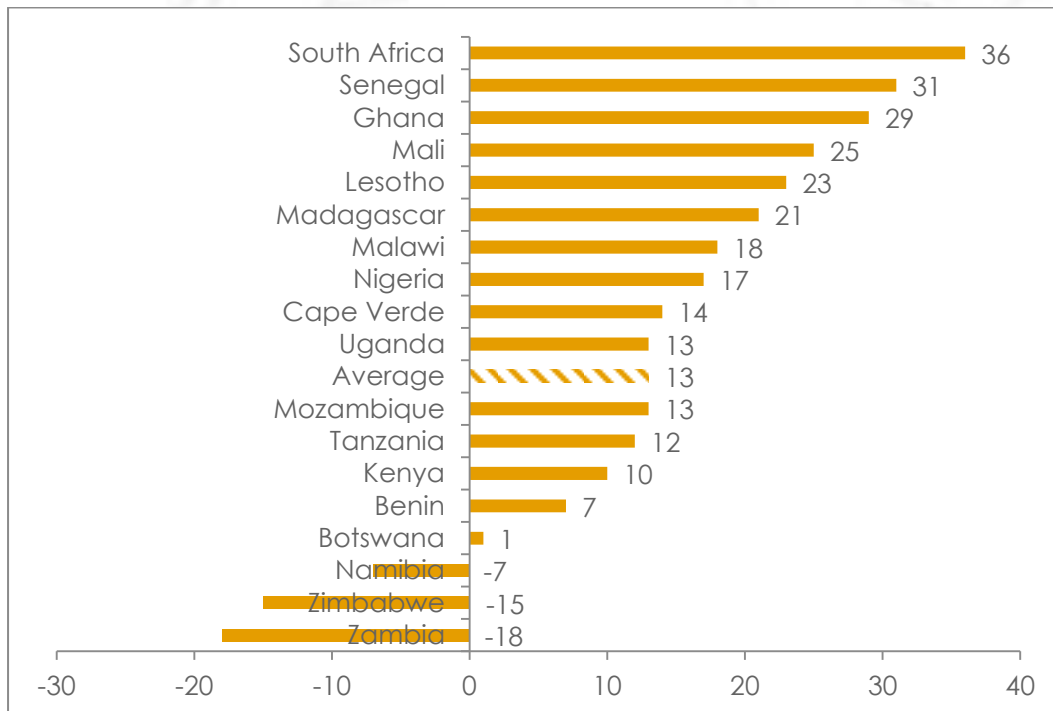
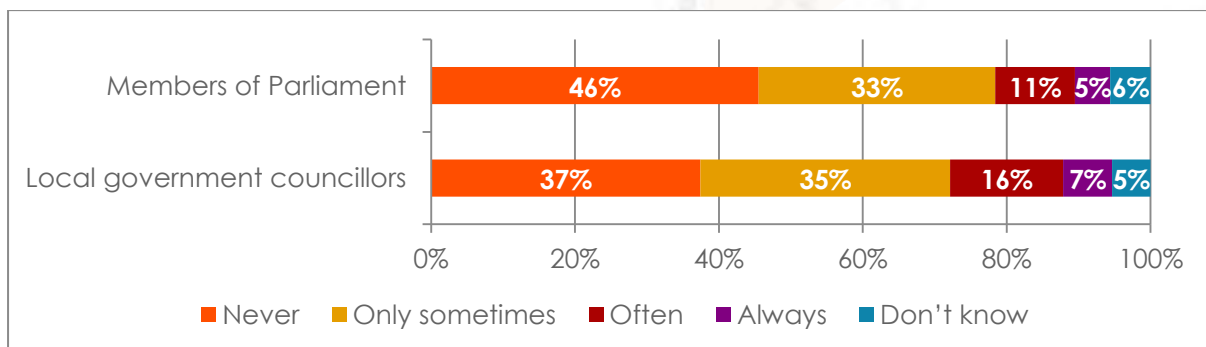


Figure shows the percentage-point change between 2005/2006 and 2014/2015 in the proportion of respondents who say that officials who commit crimes “often” or “always” go unpunished.

Are leaders listening?

If public trust is low and perceptions of corruption are high, citizens are even more critical of their elected representatives for not listening to their constituents. Asked how much of the time MPs and councillors “try their best to listen to what people like you have to say,” about three-fourths of citizens say their political representatives “never” or “only sometimes” listen to their views. MPs (78% never/only sometimes) are rated slightly worse than local councillors (72%) (Figure 16).

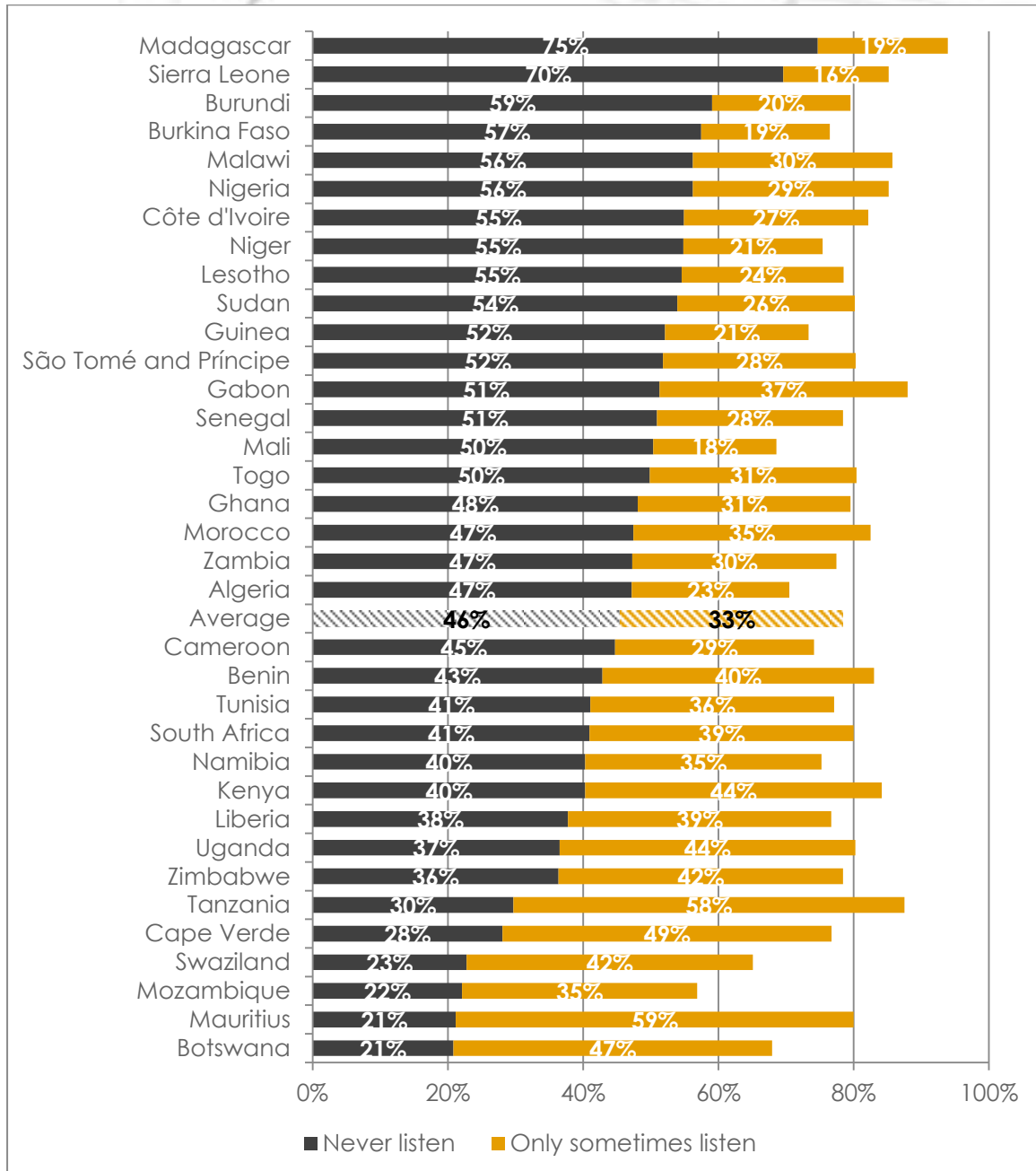
Figure 16: Do MPs and local government councillors listen to their constituents? | 35 countries* | 2014/2015



Respondents were asked: How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what people like you have to say: Members of Parliament? Local government councillors? (* The question about MPs was asked in 35 countries (not in Egypt); the question about local government councillors was asked in 34 countries (not in Malawi and Mozambique).)

The countries with the worst ratings on MPs' willingness to listen to people's views are Madagascar (where 75% of citizens say MPs "never" listen) and Sierra Leone (70% "never") (Figure 17). MPs fare better in Botswana and Mauritius, where just one in five citizens (21%) say MPs "never" listen, although even there, only minorities say they "often" or "always" listen.

Figure 17: MPs "never" or "only sometimes" listen to constituents | 35 countries
 | 2014/2015

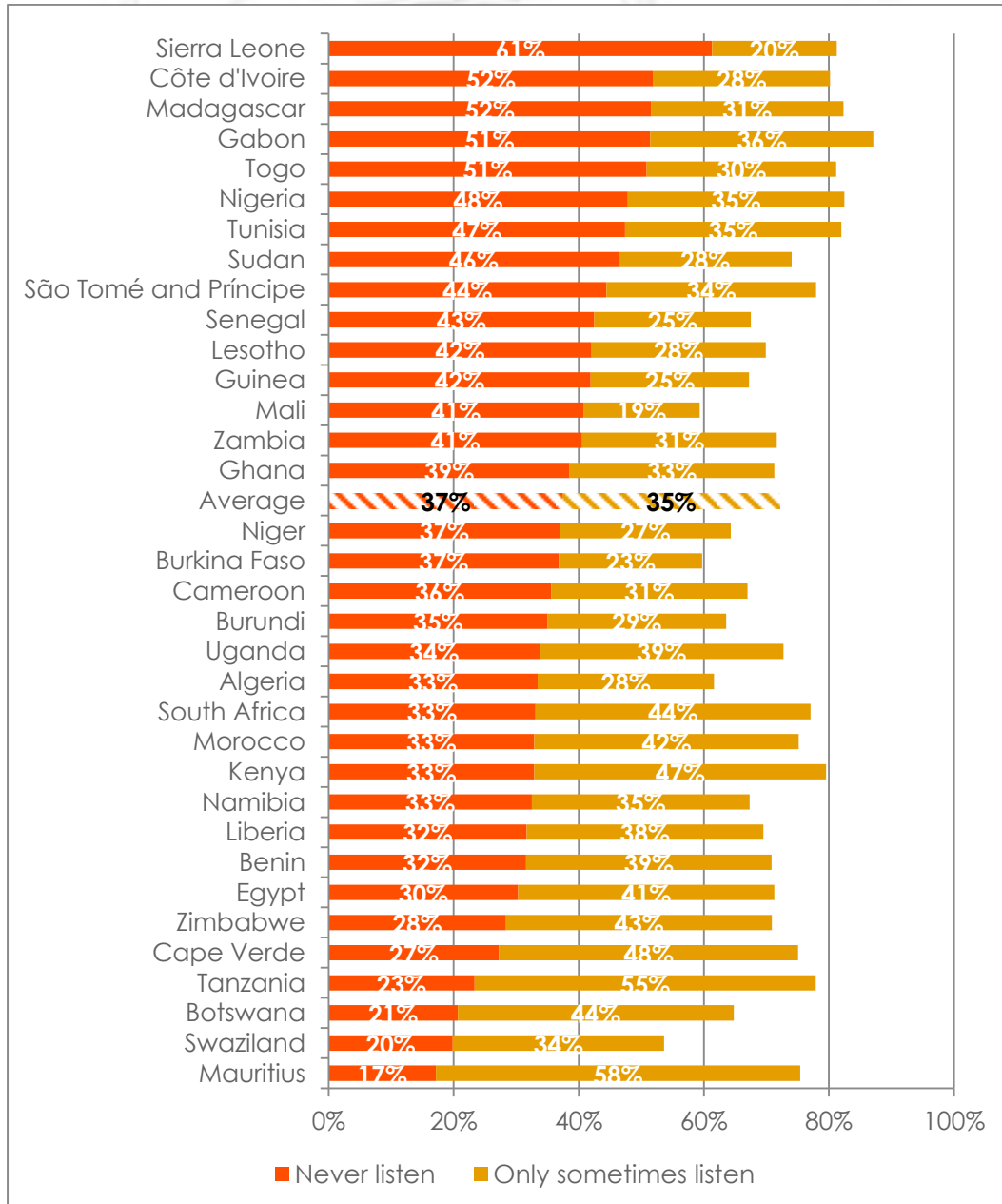


Respondents were asked: How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what people like you have to say: Members of Parliament?

Similarly, local councillors' attentiveness to ordinary citizens varies among countries (Figure 18). More than half of citizens say councillors "never" listen in Sierra Leone (61%), Côte d'Ivoire

(52%), Madagascar (52%), Gabon (51%), and Togo (51%). Fewer than one-quarter say the same in Mauritius (17%), Swaziland (20%), Botswana (21%), and Tanzania (23%).

Figure 18: Local government councillors “never” or “only sometimes” listen to constituents | 34 countries | 2014/2015



Respondents were asked: How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what people like you have to say: Your local government councillor?

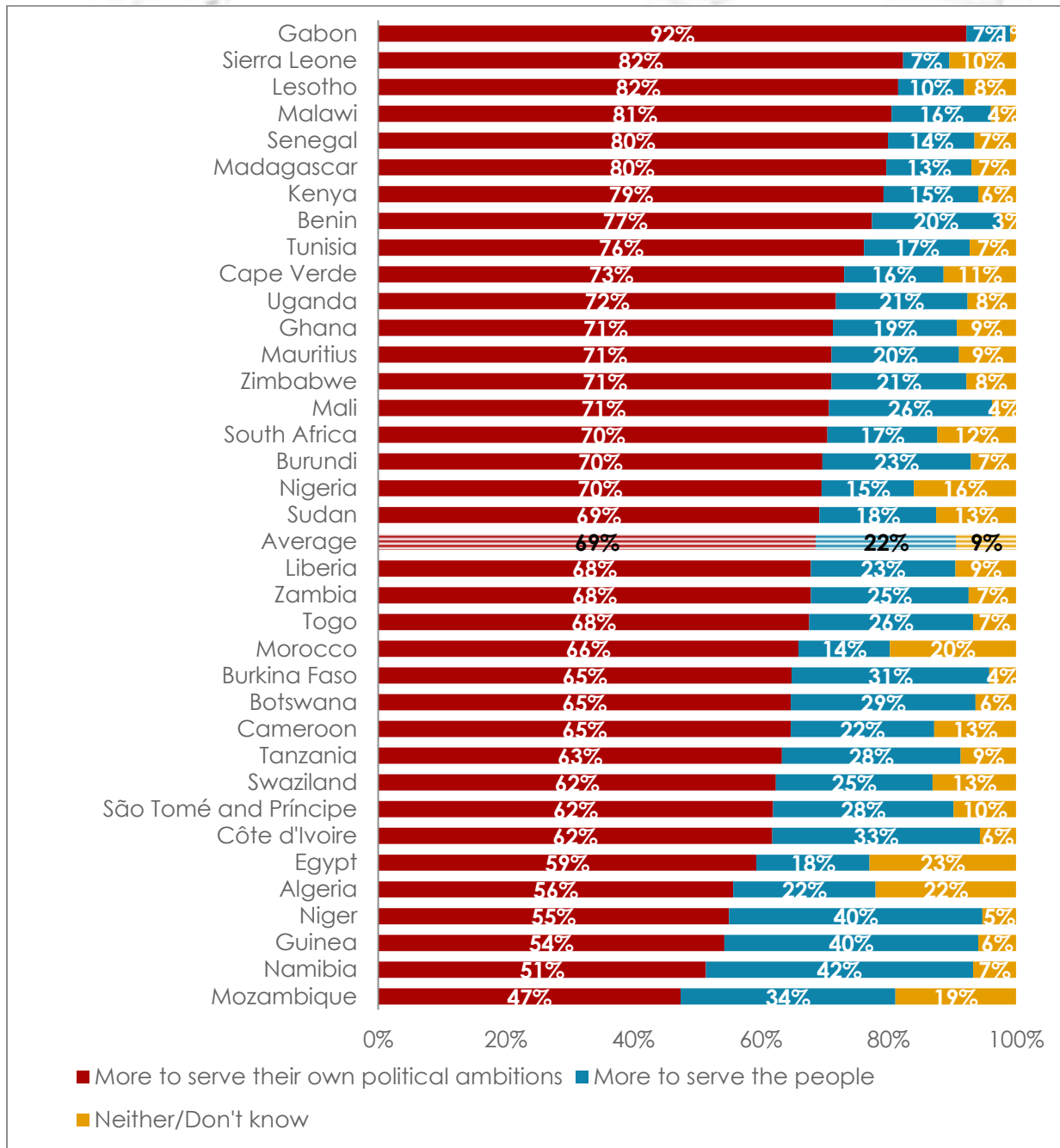
Whom do political leaders serve?

Given their fairly negative views of political leaders' integrity and willingness to listen, it may not come as a surprise that many Africans doubt that their elected representatives are truly interested in representing them. On average, more than two-thirds (69%) of citizens say that leaders of political parties in their country are “more concerned with advancing their own

political ambitions” than with “serving the people.” Only 22% of respondents believe that leaders of political parties are primarily interested in serving the people.

The perception of leaders as mainly interested in advancing their own ambitions is the majority view in every country except Mozambique (where it is the plurality view) (Figure 19). In Gabon, Sierra Leone, Lesotho, Malawi, Senegal, and Madagascar, 80% or more of citizens perceive leaders of political parties as primarily self-interested.

Figure 19: Motivation of leaders of political parties | 36 countries | 2014/2015

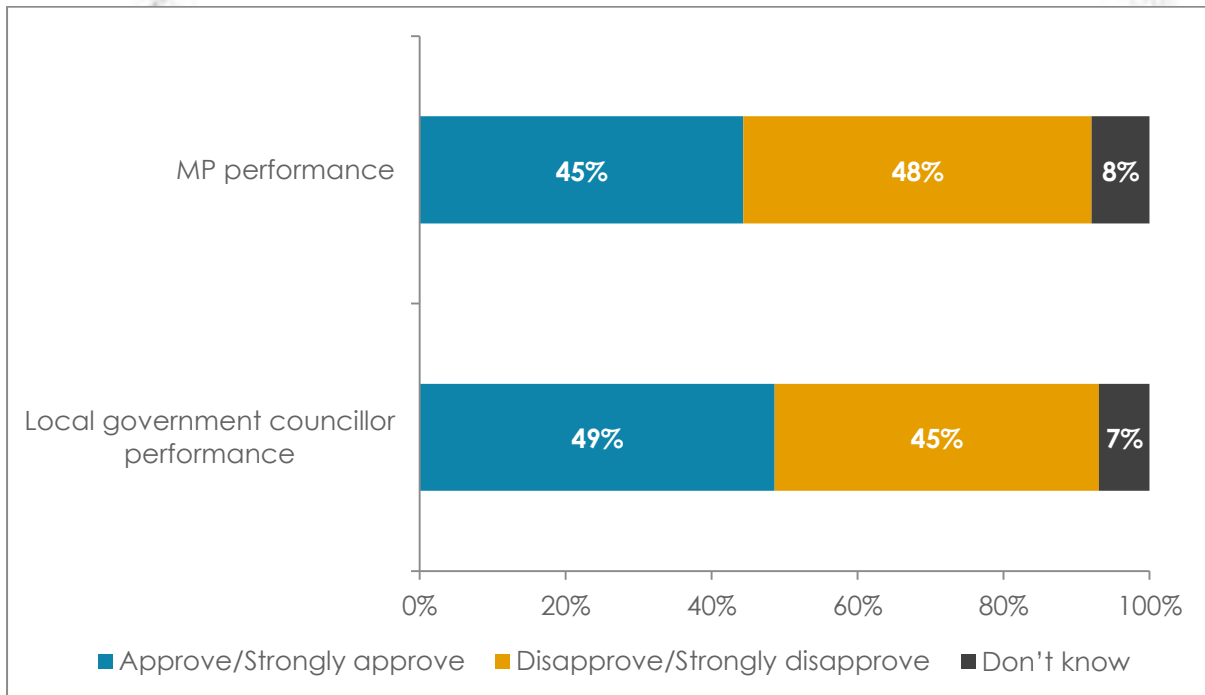


Respondents were asked: Do you think that leaders of political parties in this country are more concerned with serving the interests of the people, or more concerned with advancing their own political ambitions, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who “agree” or “strongly agree” with each option)

Job performance of MPs and local government councillors

Concerns about the integrity, willingness to listen, and self-interest of elected representatives are clearly reflected in citizens' assessments of how well their MPs and local government councillors are doing their jobs. On average across surveyed countries, fewer than half (45%) of Africans “approve” or “strongly approve” of their MPs' job performance during the 12 months preceding the 2014/2015 survey, while 48% “disapprove” or “strongly disapprove.” Assessments are only slightly better for local government councillors (49% approval, 45% disapproval) (Figure 20).

Figure 20: MP and local government councillor job performance | 32 countries
 | 2014/2015



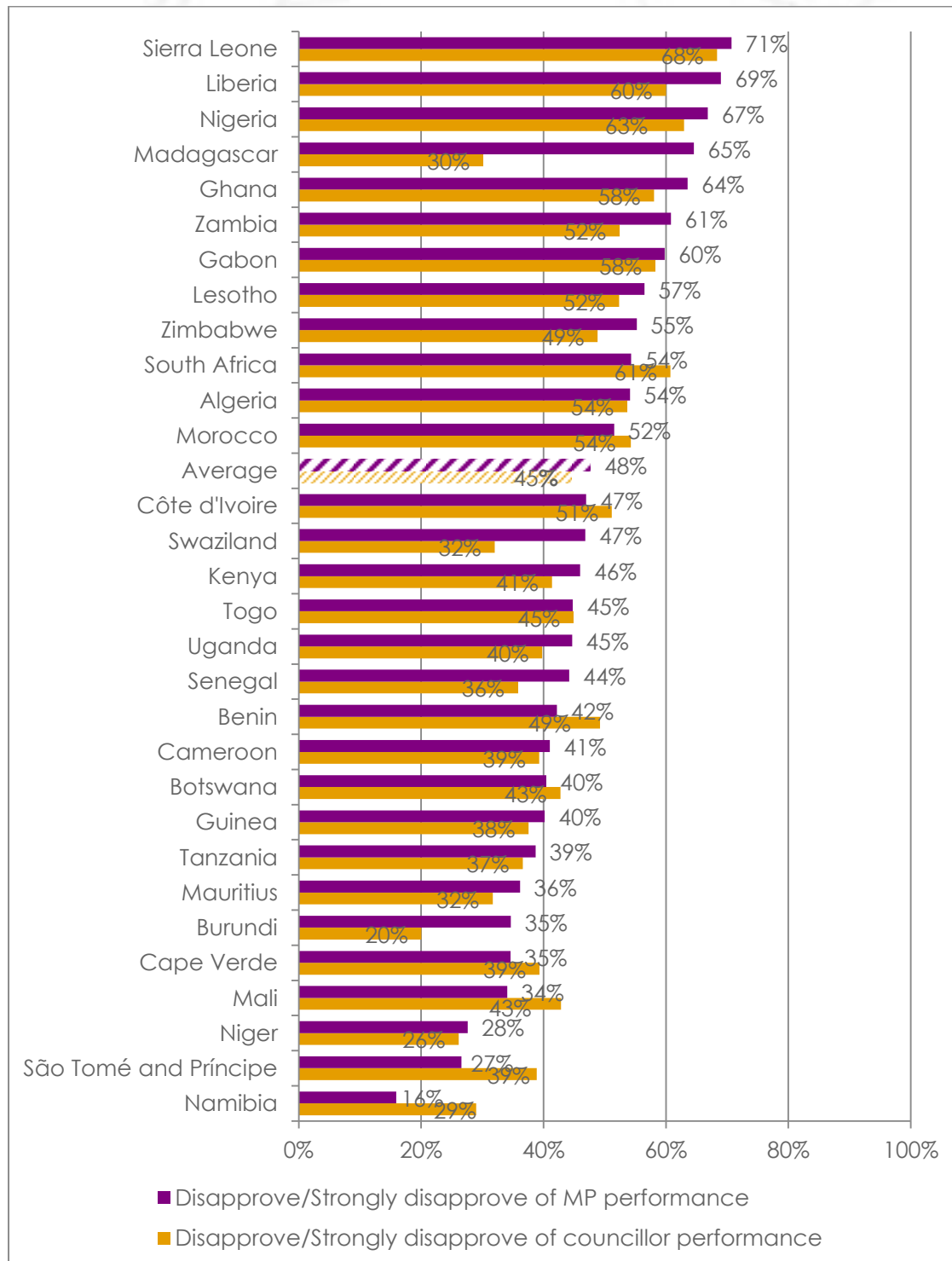
Respondents were asked: Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past 12 months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Your member of Parliament? Your elected local government councillor?

(Note: These performance questions were not asked in Burkina Faso, Egypt, Mozambique, and Tunisia. In addition, the question about local councillor performance was not asked in Malawi and Sudan.)

These averages obscure significant disparities between countries (Figure 21). Disapproval of MP performance ranges from one in six citizens in Namibia (16%) to more than two-thirds in Sierra Leone (71%), Liberia (69%), and Nigeria (67%). Similarly, much higher proportions of citizens in Sierra Leone (68%), Nigeria (63%), South Africa (61%), and Liberia (60%) disapprove of their local government councillors' performance than in Burundi (20%), Niger (26%), and Namibia (29%).

While in most countries, MP and local councillor assessments tend to be fairly similar, there are interesting exceptions. In Madagascar, 65% disapprove of MP performance, while only 30% disapprove of local councillor performance – clearly aligning citizens' overall performance ratings with their levels of trust and perceptions of corruption discussed above. In Swaziland and Burundi, MPs also fare significantly worse than local councillors, while the reverse is true in Namibia and São Tomé and Príncipe.

Figure 21: Disapproval of MP and local government councillor performance
 | 32 countries* | 2014/2015



Respondents were asked: Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past 12 months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Your member of Parliament? Your elected local government councillor?
 (* These performance questions were not asked about MPs in Burkina Faso, Egypt, Mozambique, and Tunisia. In addition, the question about local councillor performance was not asked in Malawi and Sudan.)

Perceived conduct and performance evaluation

While the present analysis does not pinpoint causes of public dissatisfaction (or satisfaction) with the job performance of elected representatives, citizens' perceptions of their leaders' conduct clearly matter. Survey findings show that job performance ratings are strongly correlated with perceptions of office-holders' motivations, involvement in corruption, and willingness to listen to what people have to say. For instance, among citizens who think political leaders are there to serve the public interest, 72% approve of the way their MPs performed in the 12 months before the survey, compared to just 40% job approval among those who think the leaders are busy advancing their own ambitions (Table 1).

Similarly, people who think that most or all MPs are involved in corruption are significantly more likely to disapprove of their performance (69%) than are those who believe MPs are relatively clean (24% when "none" are seen as corrupt, 47% when "some" are seen as corrupt). Moreover, when the public perceives that MPs don't pay attention to what the people have to say, approval of MP performance is much lower (35%) than when MPs are perceived to be good listeners (72%).

Table 1: Perceptions of MP conduct and job performance⁴ | 36 countries | 2014/2015

	MP job performance	
	Approve/ Strongly approve	Disapprove/ Strongly disapprove
Leaders' intentions		
Leaders serve own ambitions	40%	60%
Leaders serve the people	72%	28%
Corruption		
Most/all are corrupt	31%	69%
Some are corrupt	53%	47%
None are corrupt	76%	24%
MP responsiveness		
Never listen	35%	65%
Only sometimes listen	55%	45%
Often/Always listen	72%	28%

Respondents were asked:

1. Do you think that leaders of political parties in this country are more concerned with serving the interests of the people, or more concerned with advancing their own political ambitions, or haven't you heard enough to say?
2. How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Members of Parliament?
3. How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what people like you have to say: Members of Parliament?
4. Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past 12 months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Your member of Parliament?

⁴ Pearson's chi-squared test (df=2) for leaders' intentions=2431.598, for corruption=2868.465, and for MP responsiveness=2623.543, all significant at the 0.000 level.

Conclusion

Mediocre job performance ratings for MPs and local government councillors may reflect, in part, citizens' perceptions of many elected representatives as uninterested in serving the people, as involved in corruption, and/or as unwilling to listen to their constituents. Low levels of trust and high levels of perceived official impunity further undermine a healthy relationship between representatives and constituents.

Leaders who serve the people, pay attention to their constituents' demands, and uphold the rule of law are crucial to advancing accountability in the public sector and achieving greater effectiveness in delivering services that meet the needs of the people they are elected to represent.

Appendix

Table A.1: Afrobarometer Round 6 fieldwork dates and previous survey rounds

Country	Months when Round 6 fieldwork was conducted	Previous survey rounds
Algeria	May-June 2015	2013
Benin	May-June 2014	2005, 2008, 2011
Botswana	June-July 2014	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012
Burkina Faso	April-May 2015	2008, 2012
Burundi	September-October 2014	2012
Cameroon	January-February 2015	2013
Cape Verde	November-December 2014	2002, 2005, 2008, 2011
Côte d'Ivoire	August-September 2014	2013
Egypt	June-July 2015	2013
Gabon	September 2015	N/A
Ghana	May-June 2014	1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012
Guinea	March-April 2015	2013
Kenya	November-December 2014	2003, 2005, 2008, 2011
Lesotho	May 2014	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012
Liberia	May 2015	2008, 2012
Madagascar	December 2014-January 2015	2005, 2008, 2013
Malawi	March-April 2014	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012
Mali	December 2014	2001, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2013
Mauritius	June-July 2014	2012
Morocco	November 2015	2013
Mozambique	June-August 2015	2002, 2005, 2008, 2012
Namibia	August-September 2014	1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012
Niger	April 2015	2013
Nigeria	December 2014-January 2015	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013
São Tomé and Príncipe	July-August 2015	N/A
Senegal	November-December 2014	2002, 2005, 2008, 2013

Country	Months when Round 6 fieldwork was conducted	Previous survey rounds
Sierra Leone	May-June 2015	2012
South Africa	August-September 2015	2000, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2011
Sudan	June 2015	2013
Swaziland	April 2015	2013
Tanzania	August-November 2014	2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012
Togo	October 2014	2012
Tunisia	April-May 2015	2013
Uganda	May 2015	2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012
Zambia	October 2014	1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013
Zimbabwe	November 2014	1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012

Other Round 6 global releases

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Rose Aiko is an independent researcher and former project manager for REPOA, the Afrobarometer national partner in Tanzania. Email: rose.aiko@gmail.com.

Hervé Akinoch is director of the Center for Research and Opinion Polls (CROP), the Afrobarometer national partner in Togo. Email: hervé.akinoch@crop-africa.org

Mogopodi Lekorwe is an associate professor of public administration at the University of Botswana and national investigator with Star Awards Ltd., the Afrobarometer national partner in Botswana. Email: lekorwem@mopipi.ub.bw.

Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Accra, 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.

Core support for Afrobarometer Rounds 5 and 6 has been provided by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank.

Donations help the Afrobarometer Project give voice to African citizens. Please consider making a contribution (at www.afrobarometer.org) or contact Aba Kittoe (akitoe@afrobarometer.org) to discuss institutional funding.

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Infographic design by Lulu Kitololo Studio

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 115 | 15 September 2016