

Inadequate access, poor government performance make water a top priority in Africa

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 16 | Thomas Bentley, Kangwook Han, and Richard Houessou

Summary

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 748 million people do not have access to improved drinking water, including 325 million in sub-Saharan Africa. About 2.5 billion people live without improved sanitation (WHO, 2014).

These are costly shortcomings, whether measured in the 2 million lives lost each year to diarrheal diseases or the 140 million hours that women and child devote every day to collecting water instead of to other work or education. Between a child's unwashed hands and threats to global economic growth, the effects of inadequate water and sanitation ripple through human health and community development to sustainable agriculture, energy, and industry.

Progress has been substantial; worldwide, the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of reducing by half the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water was met in 2010. But in sub-Saharan Africa, most countries are not on track to meet the MDG target, and Africans make up two of every five people without access to an improved drinking water source.

In observance of World Water Day (March 22), under the theme of "Water and Sustainable Development," Afrobarometer data amplifies the voices of ordinary Africans who call on their governments to address inadequate water supply and sanitation as a top priority. Despite some infrastructure improvements, citizen perceptions and community-level observation in 34 African countries indicate that half of the population go without enough clean water for home use, while 44% of surveyed communities lack access to a piped water supply and 72% lack access to sewerage – and access rates are even worse in rural areas. Across much of Africa, citizens rate their governments' performance on water and sanitation issues as "fairly" or "very" poor.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is an African-led, 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 Round 6 surveys are currently under way (2014-2015). Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of between 1,200 and 2,400 respondents. Samples of this size yield country-level results with a margin of error of between +/-3% (for n=1,200) and +/-2% (for n=2,400) at a 95% confidence level.

Findings presented here are based primarily on data from 34 countries collected in 2011-2013 during Afrobarometer Round 5. These results, from 51,605 respondents, represent the views of three-quarters of the continent's population. Comparisons over time are based on 16 countries surveyed since Round 2 (2002-2003).

Key findings

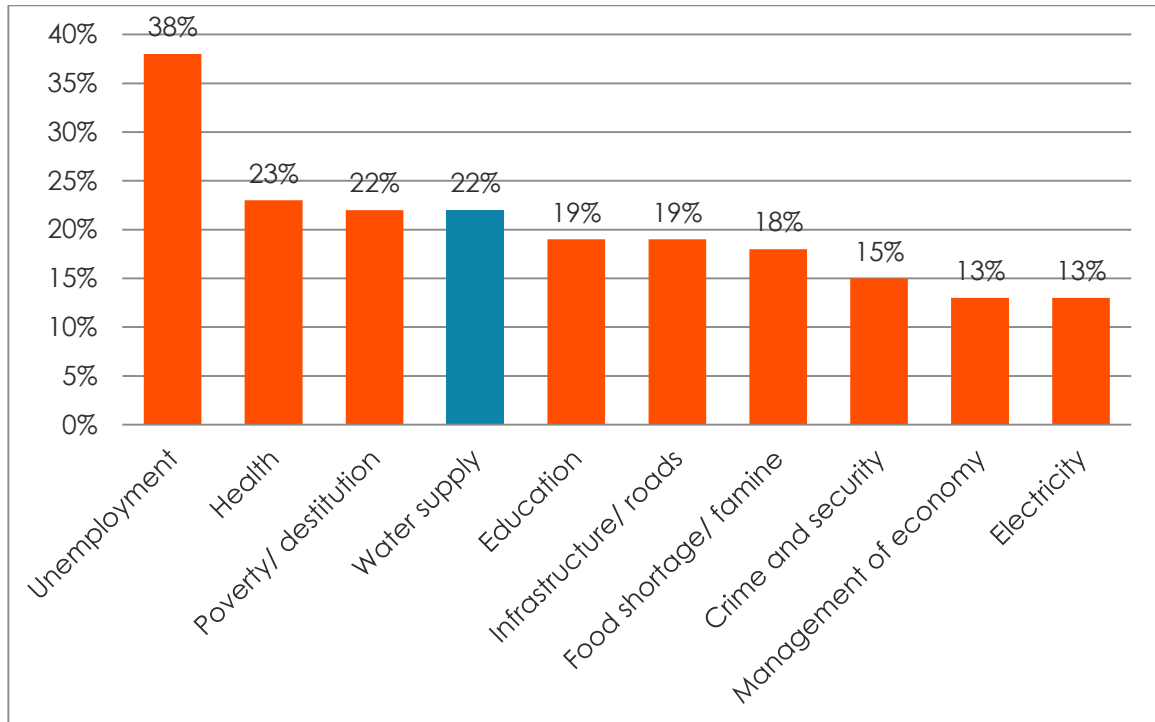
- Water and sanitation ranks fourth among important problems that citizens say their governments must address. One in five respondents (22%) rate water and sanitation among their top three priorities.
- About half (49%) of respondents went without enough clean water for home use at least once in the year preceding the survey.
- A majority of Africans (54%) can only access water outside of their home and compound; 21% have a water source inside their compound but outside their home; and just one in four (24%) have a water source inside their home.
- Four of 10 surveyed communities (44%) have no piped water supply. Rural areas are more likely to lack a piped water supply (63%) than urban areas (15%). Lack of a piped water system is more prevalent in East African countries (61%) than in southern Africa (45%), West Africa (44%), and North Africa (16%).
- A majority (55%) of African citizens rate their government's handling of water supply and sanitation as "fairly bad" or "very bad." Negative ratings are highest in Egypt (78%), Cameroon (75%), and Nigeria (71%) and lowest in Algeria (23%), Malawi (28%), and Botswana (31%).
- On average, almost one in 10 respondents (8%) say they have no access to a latrine or toilet, even outside their compound. This was most common among citizens of Benin (47%), Namibia (38%), Madagascar (28%), Togo (26%), and Niger (22%). Seven of 10 surveyed communities (72%) have no sewerage systems. Communities without sewerage were most common in Malawi (97%), Tanzania (96%), Niger (94%), and Mozambique and Burkina Faso (92% each).

Water and sanitation a high-priority issue

Water and sanitation are a high priority across the 34 surveyed countries. More than one-fifth (22%) of respondents list water and sanitation as one of the three most important problems that government should address, making it fourth among all issues (Figure 1).

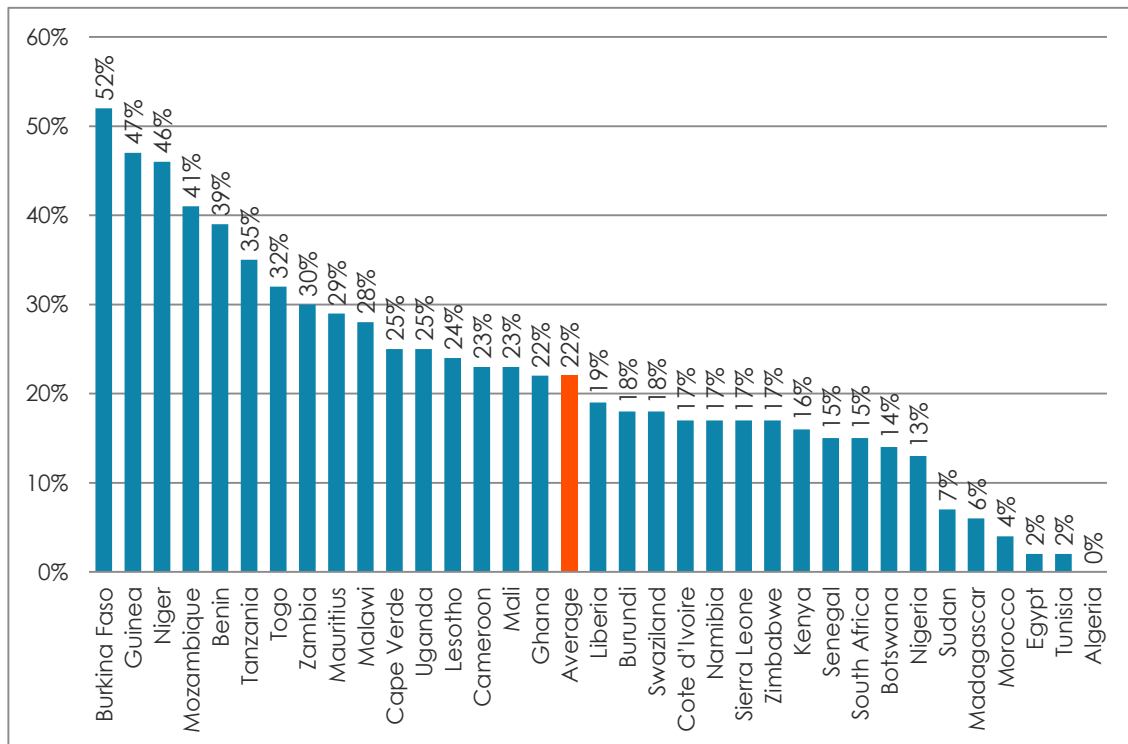
Citizens in Burkina Faso (52%), Guinea (47%), Niger (46%), and Mozambique (41%) express the greatest concern about water and sanitation, while less than 1% of citizens in Algeria rank water among their top three priorities (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Proportion who rank water/sanitation among top 3 priorities | 34 countries | 2011/2013



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (% who rank water/sanitation among three most important problems)*

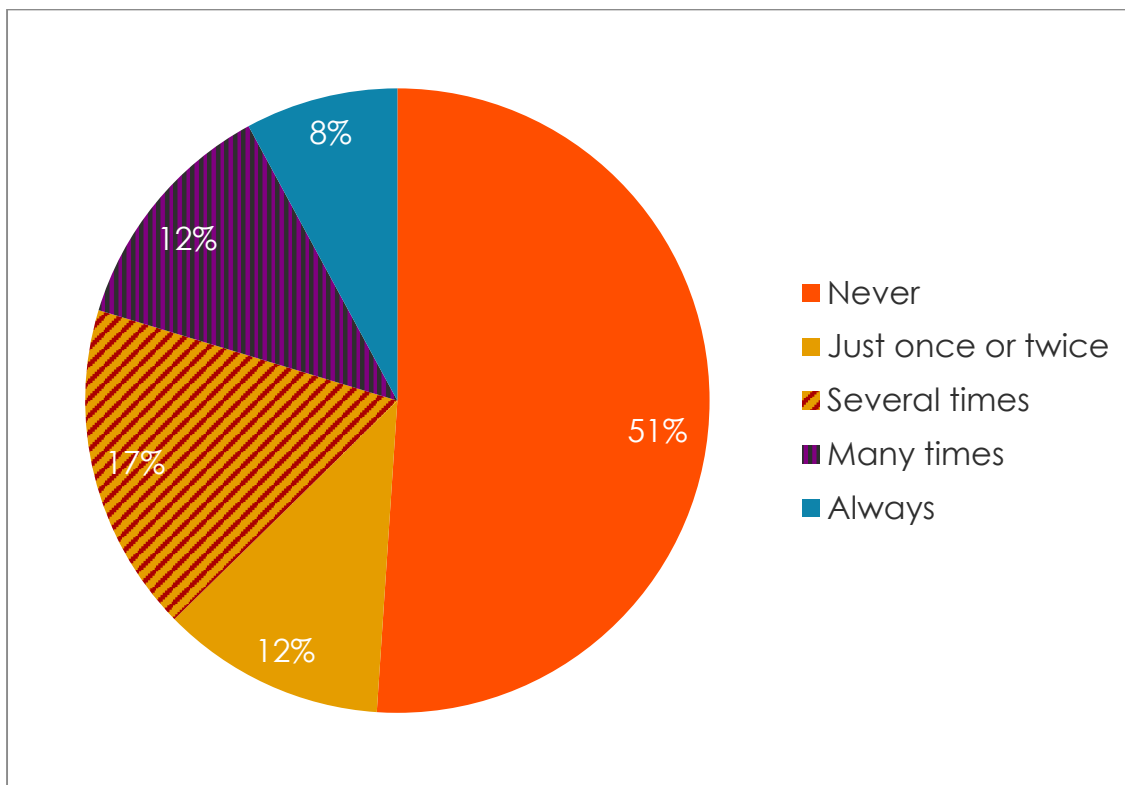
Figure 2: Water/sanitation among top 3 priorities | by country | 2011/2013



Limited access to water and sanitation

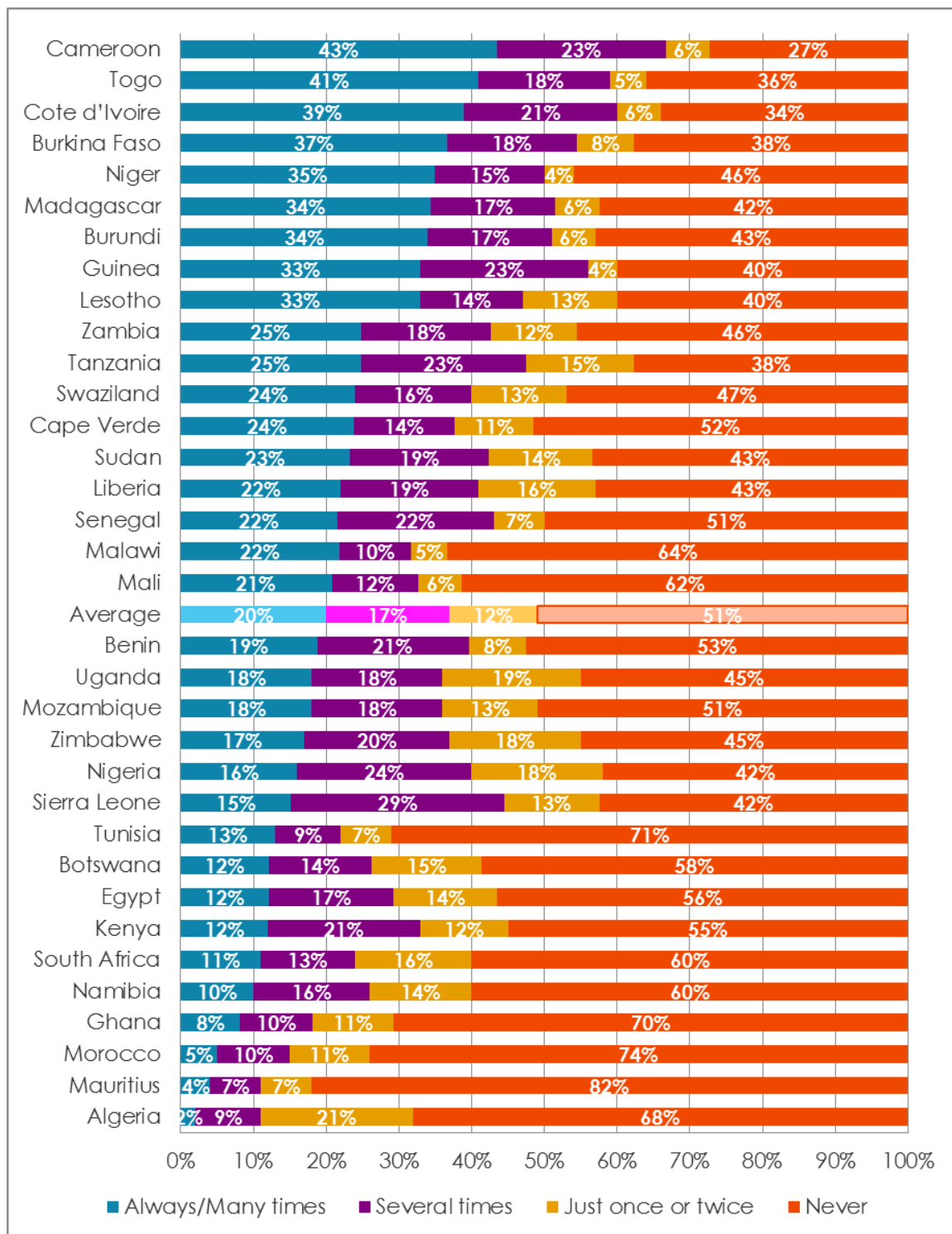
One likely reason that water remains such a high priority across the continent is that nearly half of citizens still lack access to a reliable supply of clean water. Across 34 countries, on average 49% of respondents say they went without enough water for home use at least once in the year preceding the survey, including 20% who say they went without water “many times” or “always” (Figure 3). Cameroon (73%), Côte d'Ivoire (66%), Togo (64%), Burkina Faso (62%), and Tanzania (62%) have the largest proportion of citizens who went without water at least once (Figure 4).

Figure 3: How often went without enough water | 34 countries | 2011/2013



Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Gone without enough clean water for home use?

Figure 4: How often went without water | by country | 34 countries | 2011/2013

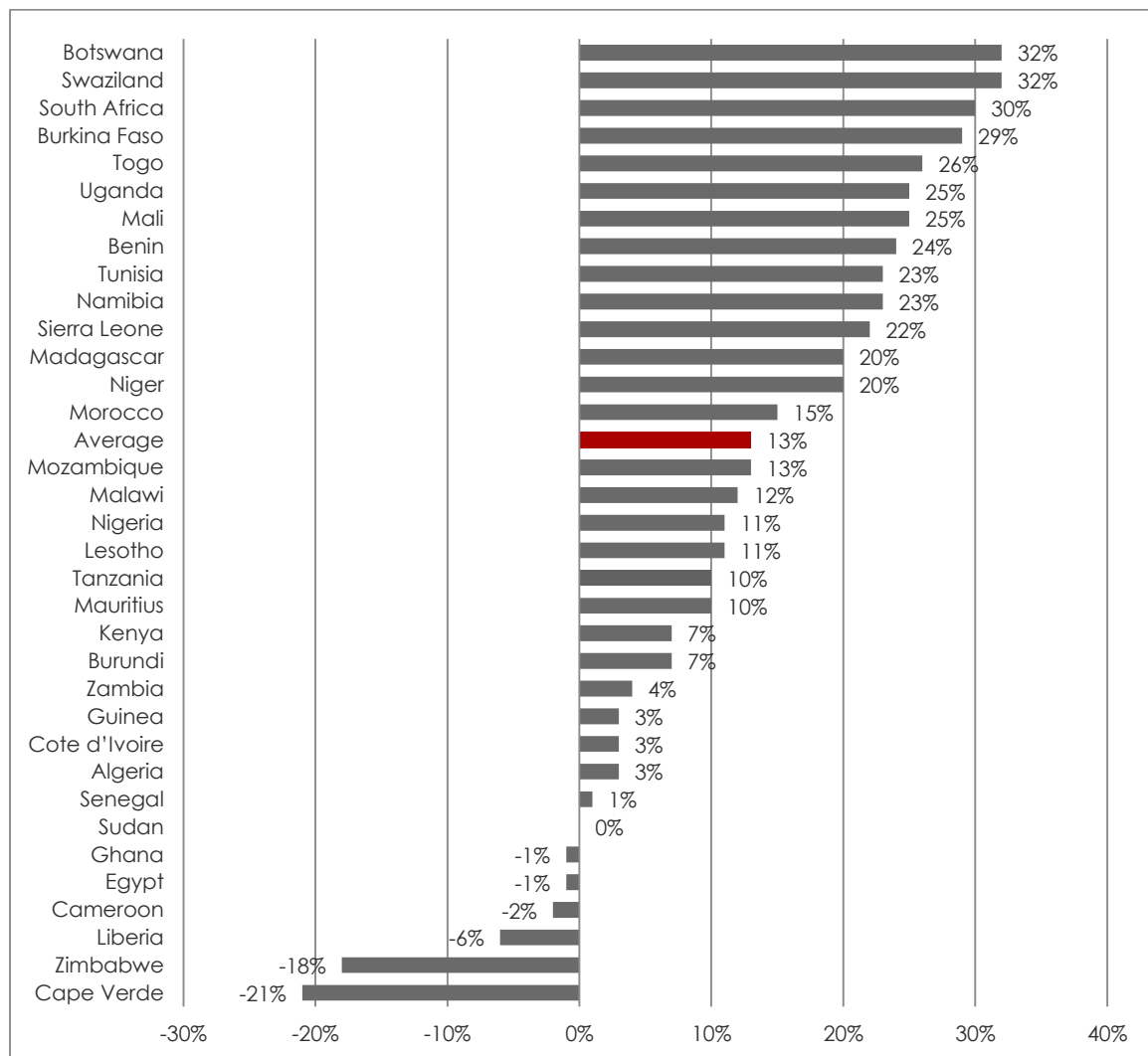


Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Gone without enough clean water for home use?

Rural residents are more likely to go without water than their urban counterparts. The urban-rural disparity, measured as the difference between the proportion of urban and rural respondents who never went without water during the preceding year, is on average 13 percentage points. The greatest urban-rural gaps are in Swaziland (32 percentage points),

Botswana (32 points), South Africa (30 points), and Burkina Faso (29 points) (Figure 5). In the three countries where the disparity favours rural over urban residents and exceeds the survey's margin of error (Cape Verde, Zimbabwe, and Liberia), the result may suggest that urban slum areas resulting from urban influx and inadequate planning are particularly underserved.

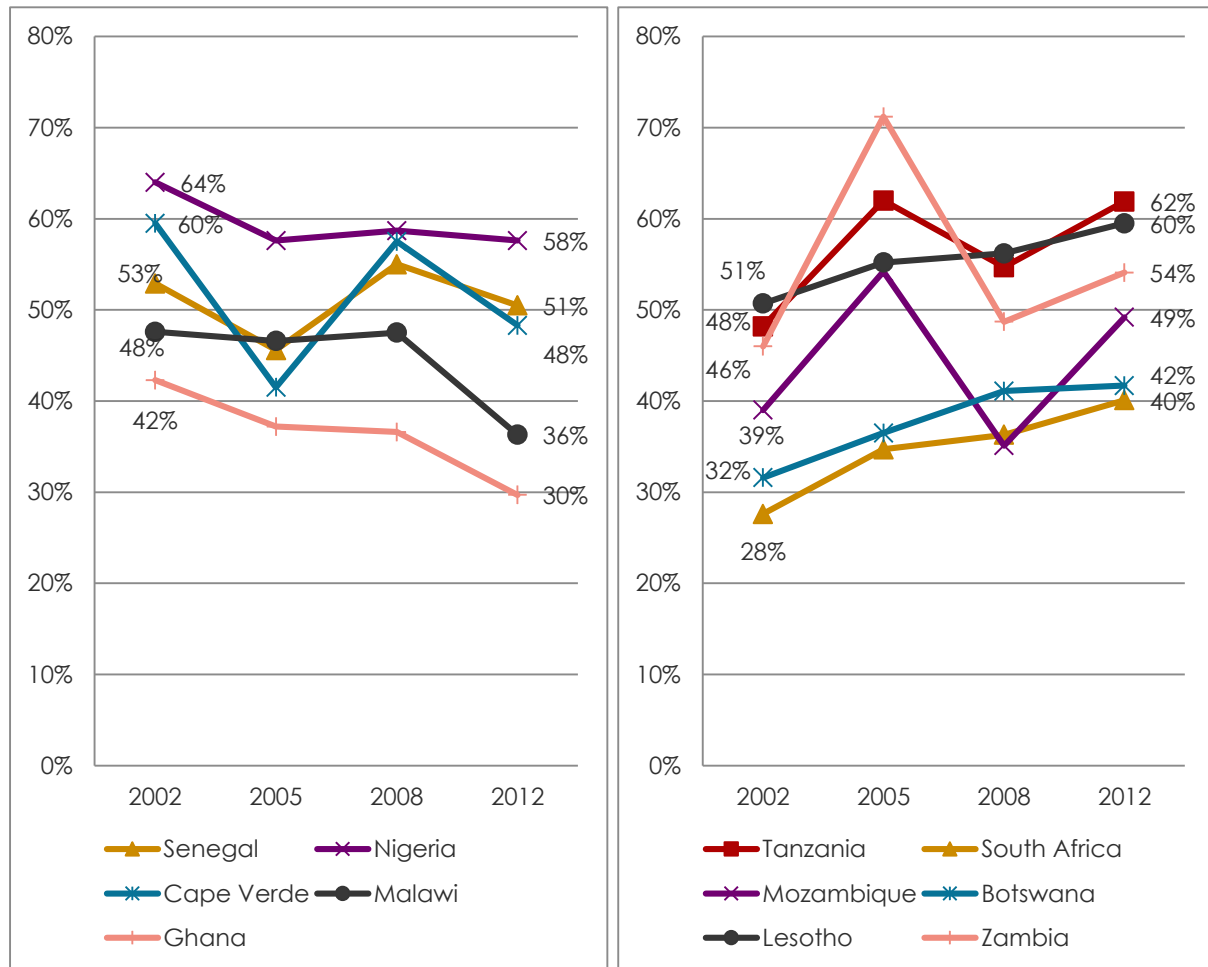
Figure 5: Urban-rural gap in water supply | 34 countries | 2011-2013



Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Gone without enough clean water for home use? (% of urban residents minus % of rural residents who did not go without water. A positive number means urban residents are better supplied; a negative number means rural residents are.)

Change over the past decade has been mixed. Among the 16 countries tracked by Afrobarometer surveys since 2002-2003, four countries have reduced the proportion of citizens who went without water at least once (Nigeria, Cape Verde, Malawi, and Ghana), while the proportions increased in six countries, all in southern and eastern Africa (Tanzania, South Africa, Mozambique, Botswana, Lesotho, and Zambia) (Figure 6). In Kenya, Mali, Namibia, Senegal, Uganda, and Zimbabwe, the proportions remained roughly stable.

Figure 6: Countries with reduced (left) and increased (right) proportions of the population going without water | 2002-2013



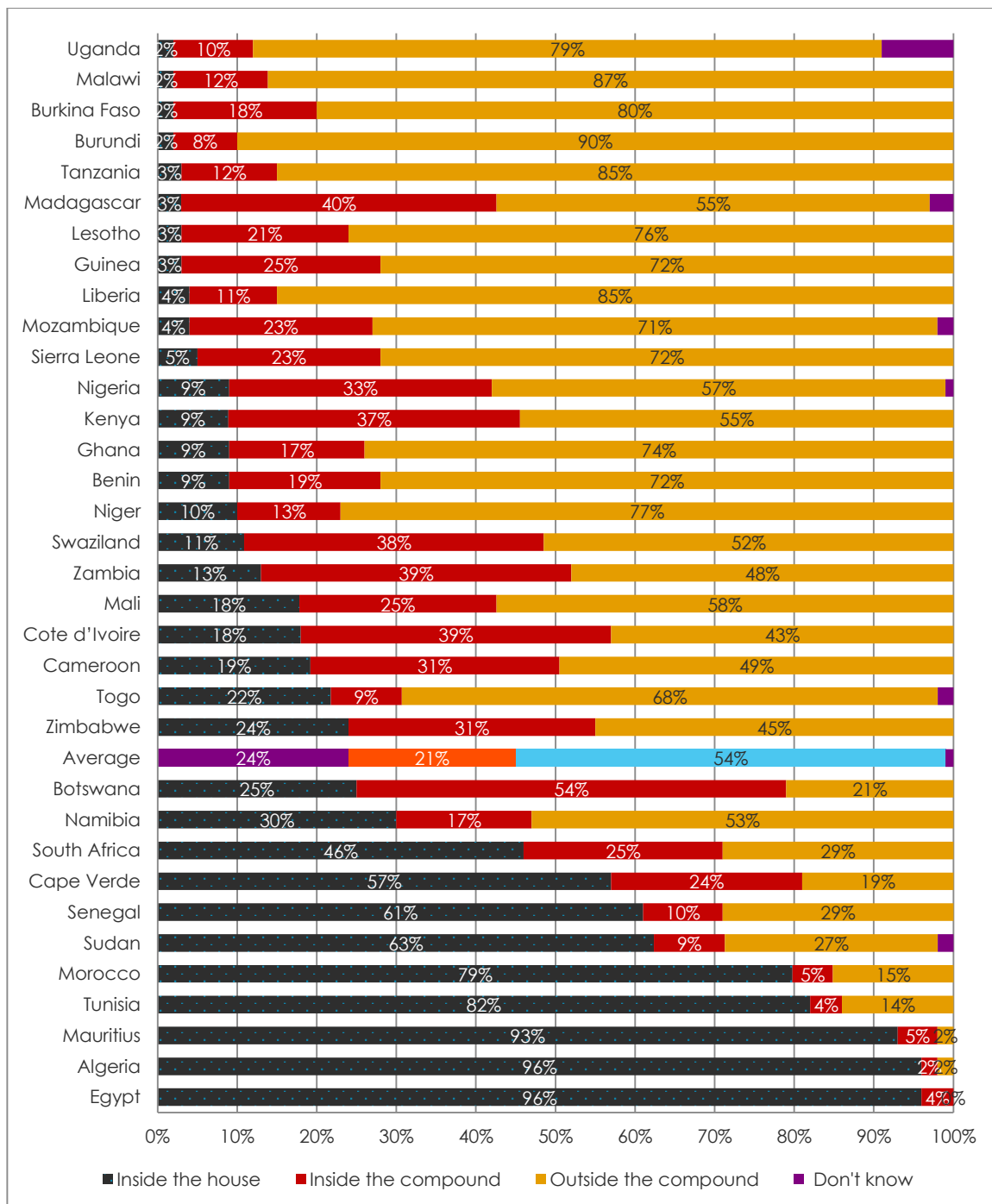
Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Gone without enough clean water for home use? (% who went without water at least once in the preceding year)

Limited water and sanitation infrastructure

If regular handwashing, which is important for health, depends in part on easy availability of water, the survey results indicate a hurdle for many African households. A majority (54%) of survey respondents do not have access to water for household use inside their homes or compounds, relying instead on more distant water sources (Figure 7). About one-quarter (24%) say their primary source of household water is within their household, while 21% have access within their compound but outside their home.

Countries show wide disparities on this measure of accessibility of water. Among Egyptians and Algerians, 96% say their source of water is within their house – an impressive 51 percentage points higher than the 34-country average.

Figure 7: Primary source of water for household use | 34 countries | 2011-2013



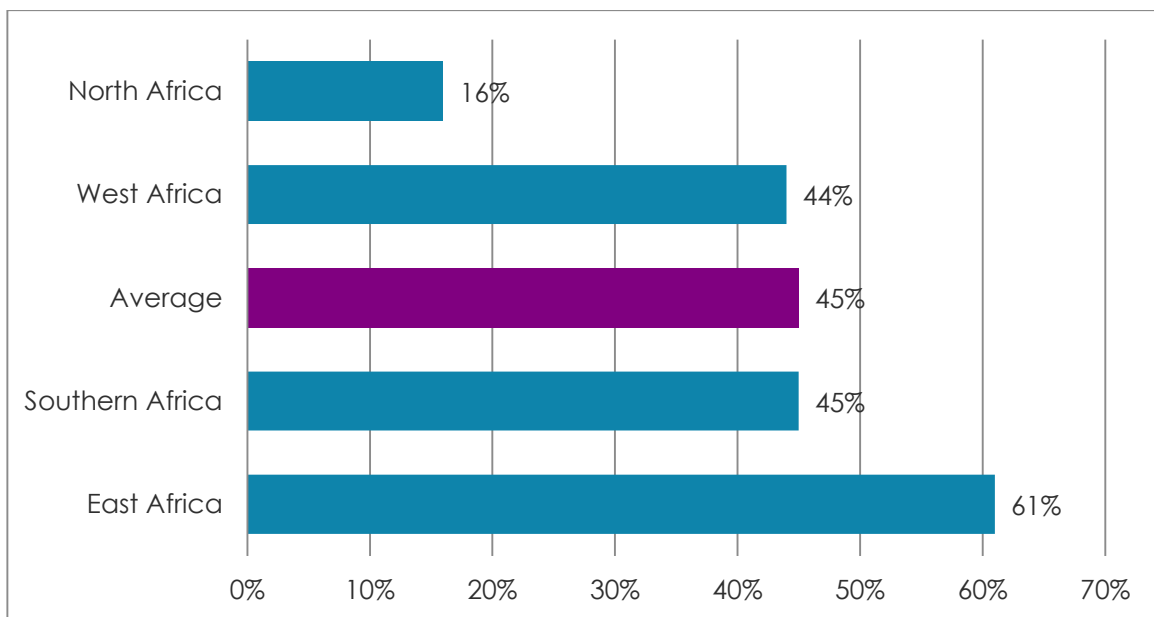
Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether each of the following are available inside your house, inside your compound, or outside your compound: Your main source of water for household use?

Almost one-tenth (8%) of respondents say they have no access to a latrine or toilet, even outside their compound. This was most common among citizens of Benin (47%), Namibia (38%), Madagascar (28%), Togo (26%), and Niger (22%).

Access to basic water-related infrastructure such as piped water and sewerage is highly variable among regions and countries. Afrobarometer interviewers gather observational data about the availability of public services, including the presence of piped water and sewerage systems “that most houses could access,” in the 120-300 enumeration areas per country where they conduct surveys.

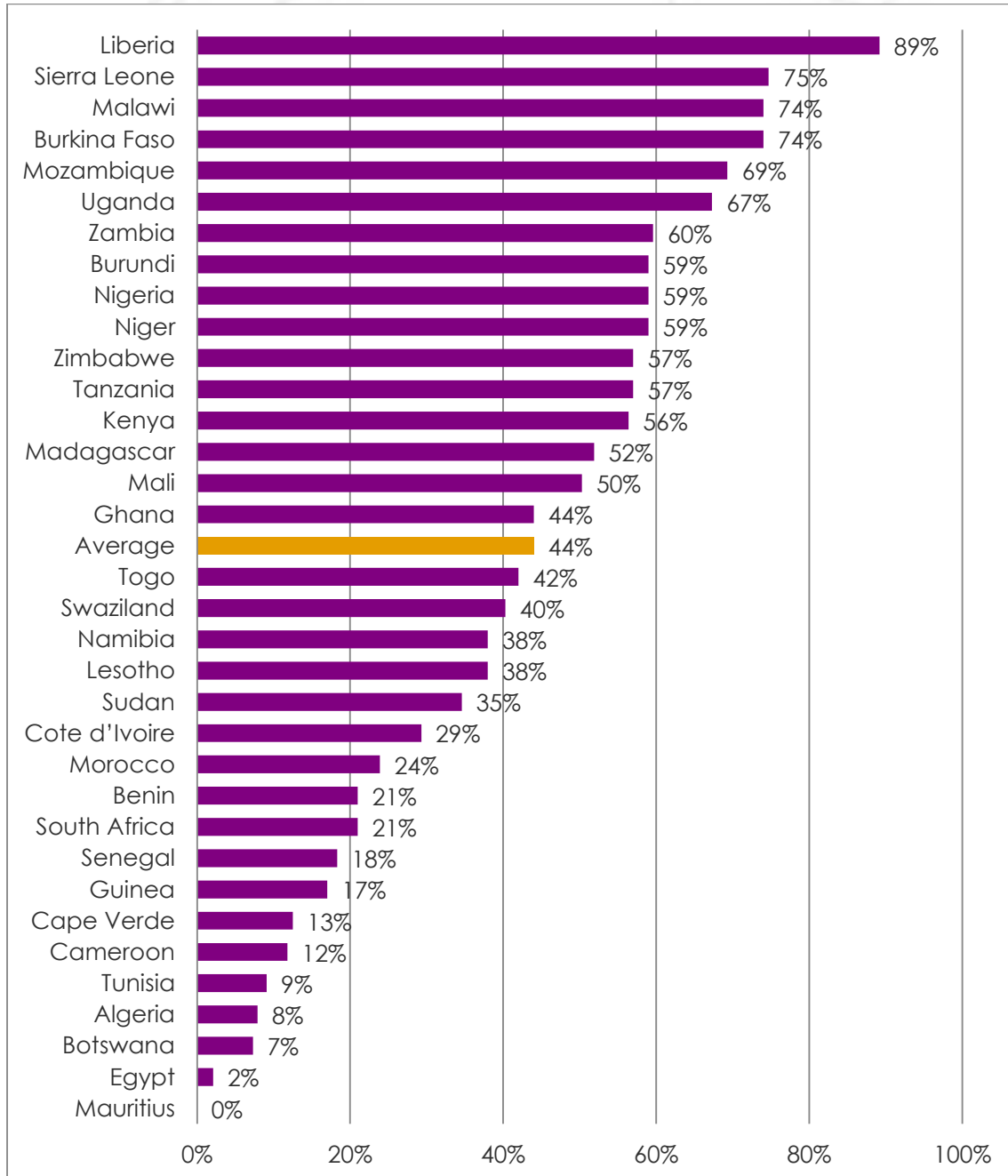
In North African countries, 16% of enumeration areas lack piped water systems, compared to 44% in West Africa, 45% in southern Africa, and 61% in East Africa (Figure 8). Among the 34 countries in the Round 5 survey, the highest proportion of enumeration areas without piped water systems are in Liberia (89%), Sierra Leone (75%), Malawi (74%), and Burkina Faso (74%) (Figure 9). In contrast, 100% of enumeration areas in Mauritius have piped water systems.

Figure 8: Proportion of enumeration areas without piped water system | by region
 | 2011/2013



Afrobarometer interviewers were asked to observe: Are the following services present in the primary sampling unit/enumeration area: Piped water system that most houses could access? (% of enumeration areas lacking piped water system)

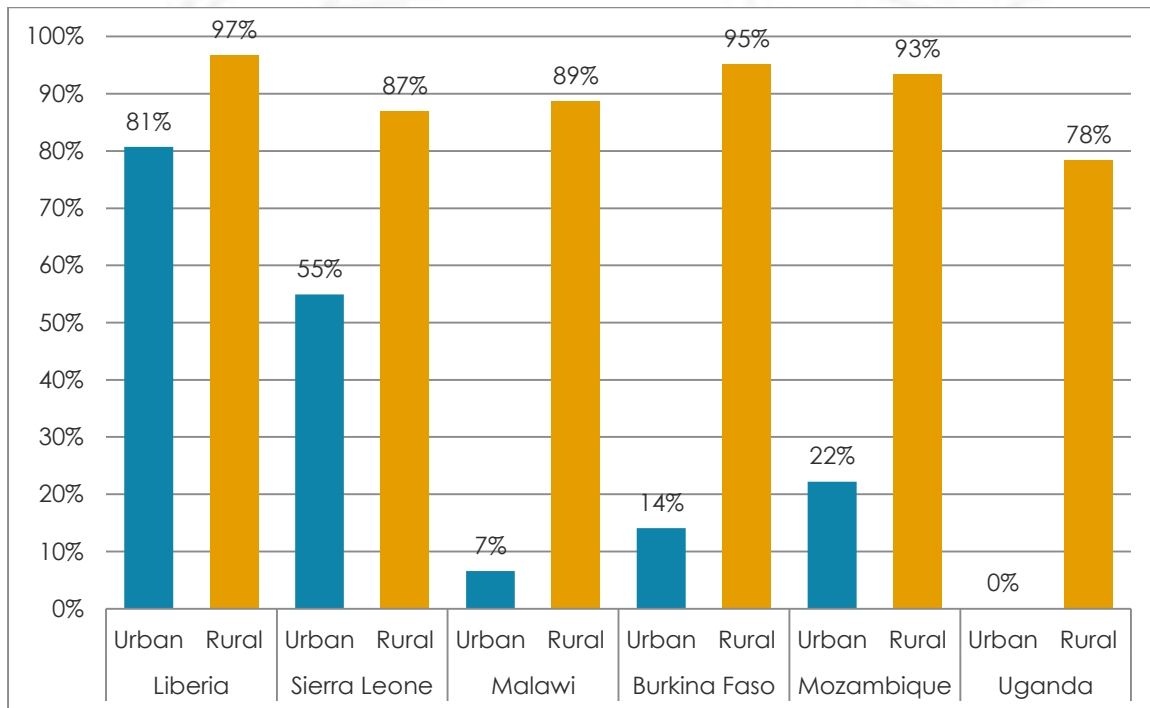
Figure 9: Proportion of enumeration areas without piped water system
 | by country | 2011/2013



Afrobarometer interviewers were asked to observe: Are the following services present in the primary sampling unit/ enumeration area: Piped water system that most houses could access?
 (% of enumeration areas lacking piped water system)

The six countries with the highest proportion of enumeration areas lacking piped water systems also illustrate the dramatic disparities between urban and rural infrastructure (Figure 10). In Malawi, for example, 89% of rural enumeration areas lack piped water systems, compared to 7% of urban areas, an 82-percentage-point difference. (For more on urban-rural disparities in infrastructure, see Logan, 2014).

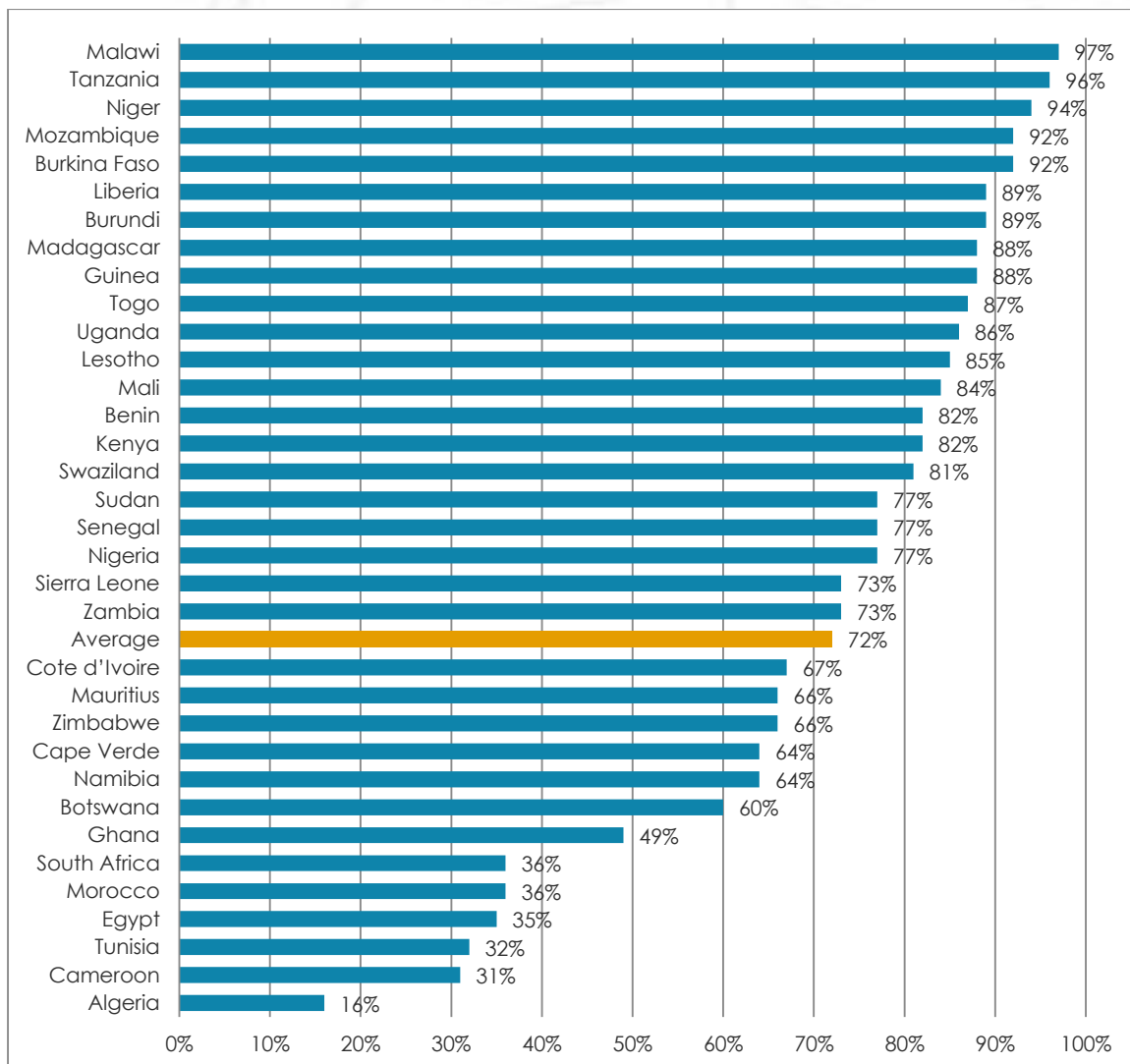
Figure 10: Urban-rural differences in countries with worst overall access to piped water infrastructure | 6 countries | 2011/2013



Afrobarometer interviewers were asked to observe: *Are the following services present in the primary sampling unit/enumeration area: Piped water system that most houses could access? (% of enumeration areas lacking piped water systems)*

With regard to access to sewerage, the situation is even worse. On average, 72% of enumeration areas lack sewerage systems (Figure 11). In 16 of the 34 surveyed countries, this proportion is greater than 80%, with Malawi and Tanzania in the lead at 97% and 96%, respectively. Algeria has by far the smallest proportion of enumeration areas lacking sewerage (16%).

Figure 11: Proportion of enumeration areas without sewerage | 34 countries | 2011/2013



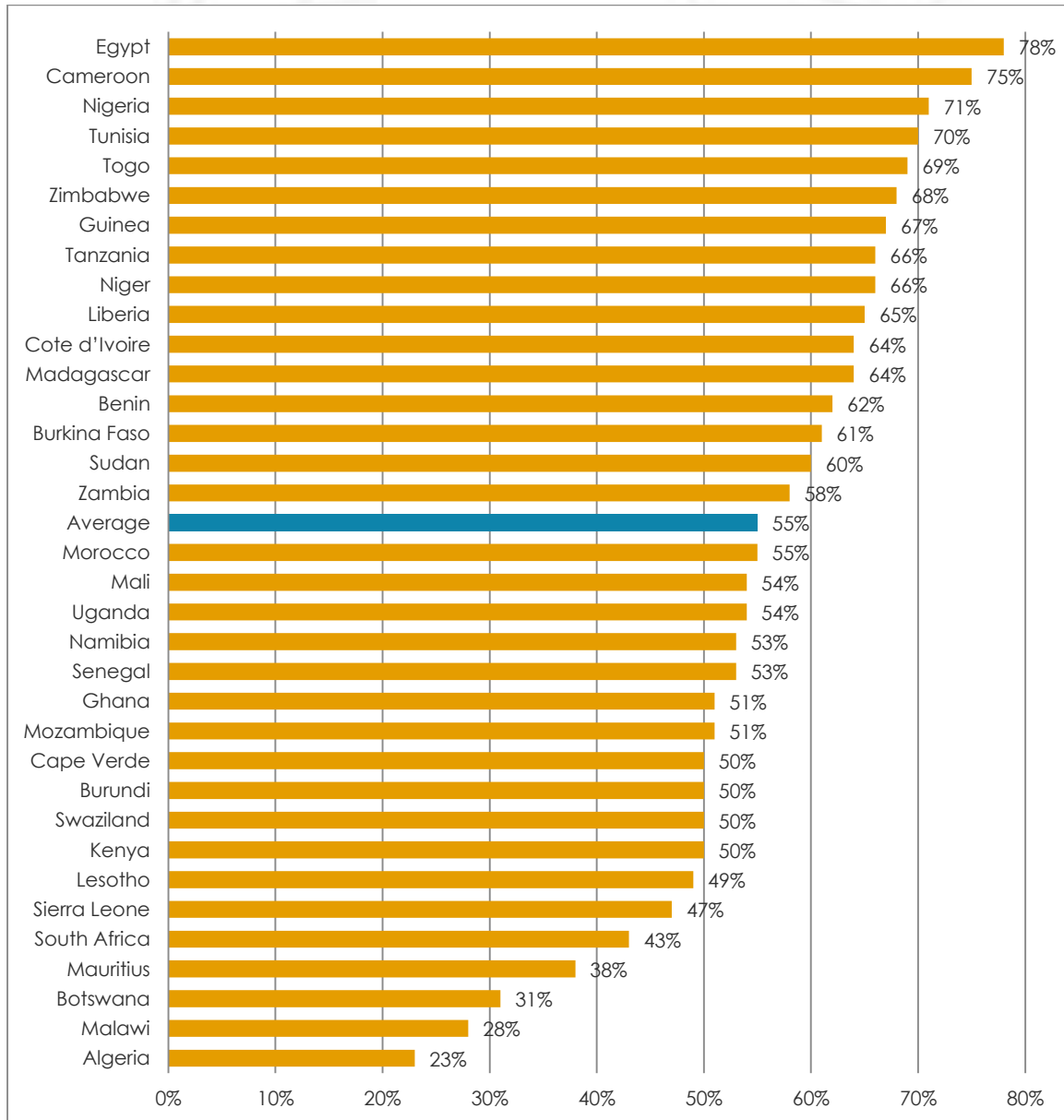
Afrobarometer interviewers were asked to observe: *Are the following services present in the primary sampling unit enumeration area: Sewerage system that most houses could access? (% of enumeration areas lacking sewerage system)*

Government handling of water/sanitation issues

On average across the 34 countries, a majority (55%) of citizens rate their government's performance in handling water and sanitation services as "fairly" or "very" bad (Figure 12). More than three-quarters (78%) of Egyptians rate their government's handling as bad, followed by Cameroon (75%), Nigeria (71%), and Tunisia (70%). The top-rated country is Algeria (23% negative rating, vs. 76% rating its performance as "fairly" or "very" good).

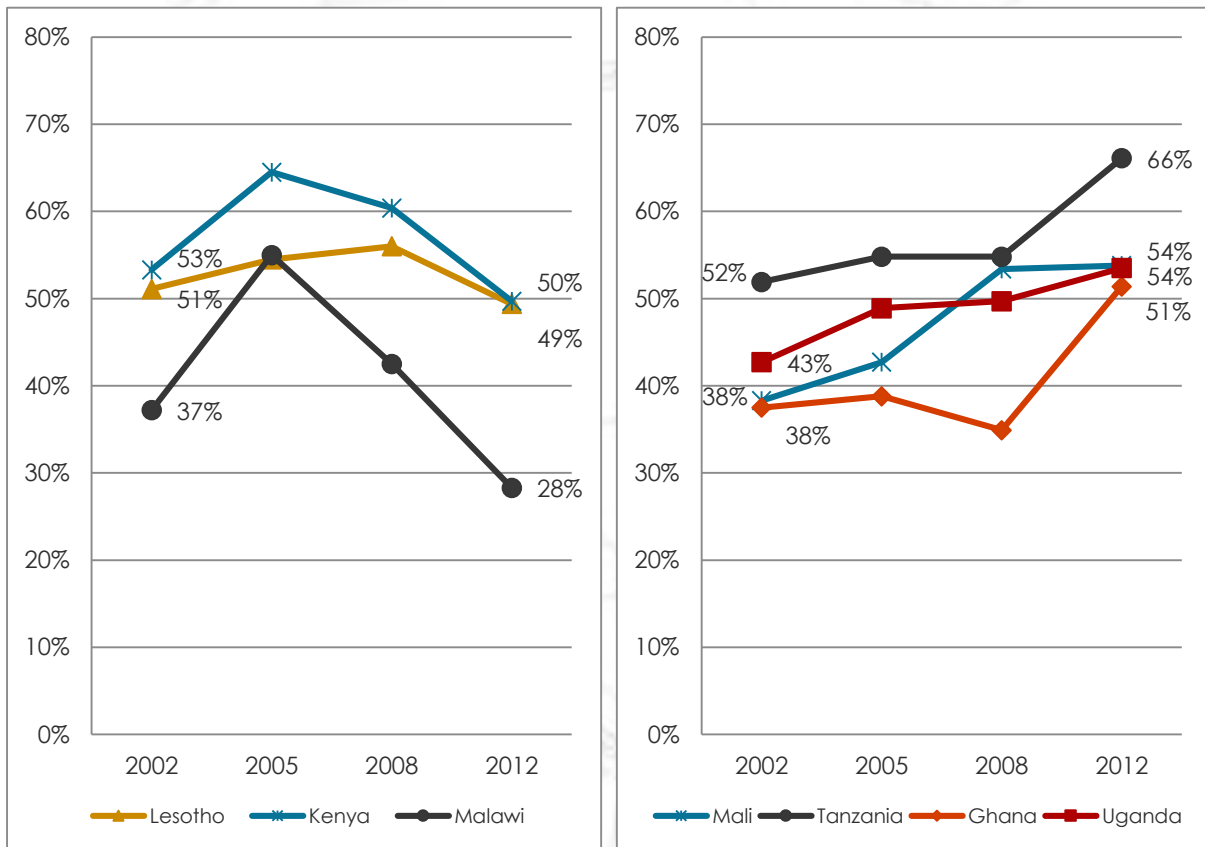
Across the 16 countries tracked since 2002/2003, negative public ratings of government performance in providing water and sanitation gradually increased from 46% in 2002/2003 to 52% in 2011/2013. Ratings became steadily more positive in three countries (Lesotho, Kenya, and Malawi) and worsened in four countries (Ghana, Mali, Tanzania, and Uganda) (Figure 13). Ratings changed little in Botswana, Cape Verde, Nigeria, Senegal, and South Africa.

Figure 12: Poor government performance in handling water and sanitation services
 | 34 countries | 2011/2013



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: Providing water and sanitation services? (% who say "fairly badly" or "very badly")

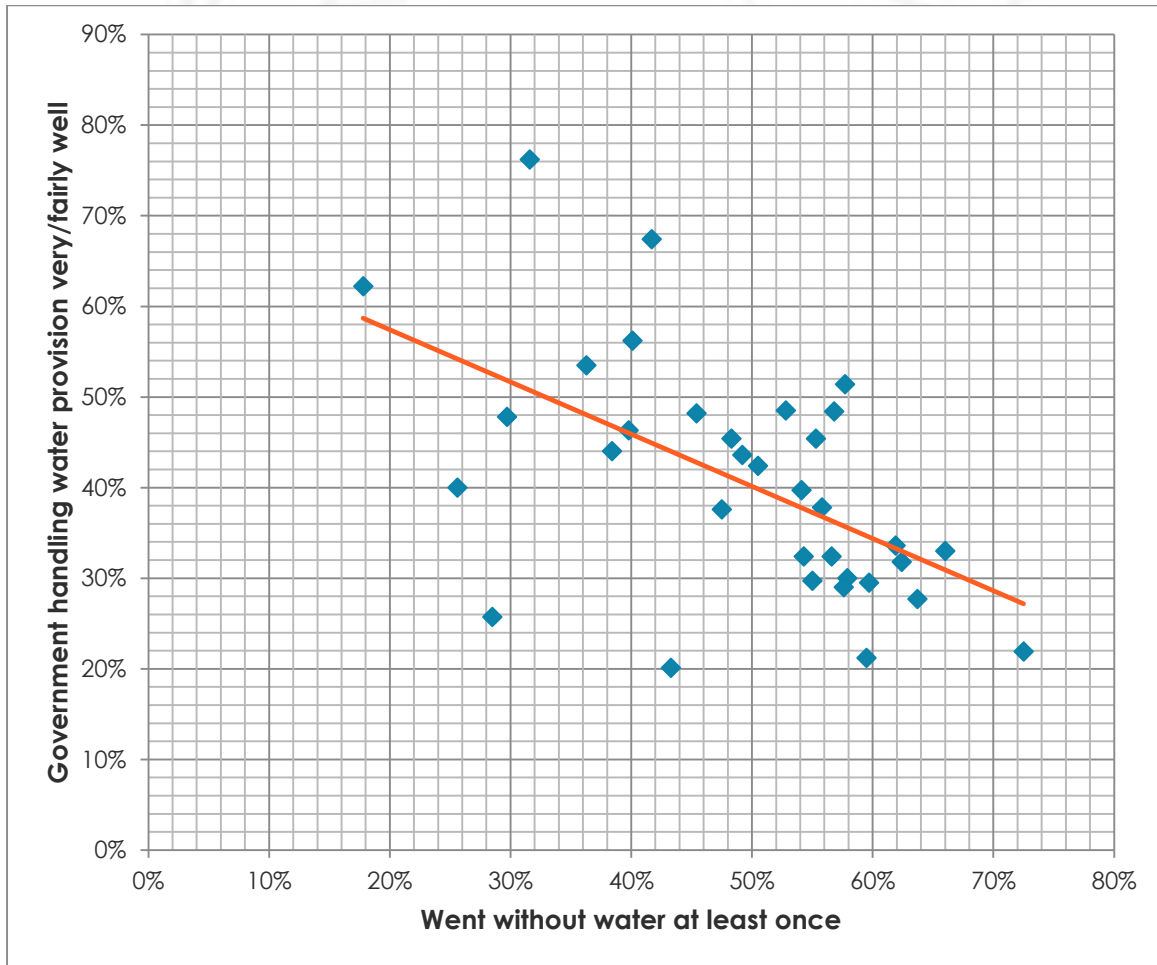
Figure 13: Poor government performance: Countries with reduced (left) and increased (right) negative ratings | 2002-2013



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: Providing water and sanitation services? (% who say "fairly badly" or "very badly")

Figure 14, whose data points represent the 34 countries surveyed in 2011-2013, suggests a moderately strong relationship between the experience of going without enough water and assessments of the government's performance in providing water: The greater the proportion of the population that went without enough water at least once during the preceding year, the smaller the proportion who say the government is performing "very well" or "fairly well" in providing water.

Figure 14: Relationship between going without enough water and government performance rating | by country | 34 countries | 2011/2013



Respondents were asked:

Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Gone without enough clean water for home use? (% who went without water at least once in the preceding year)

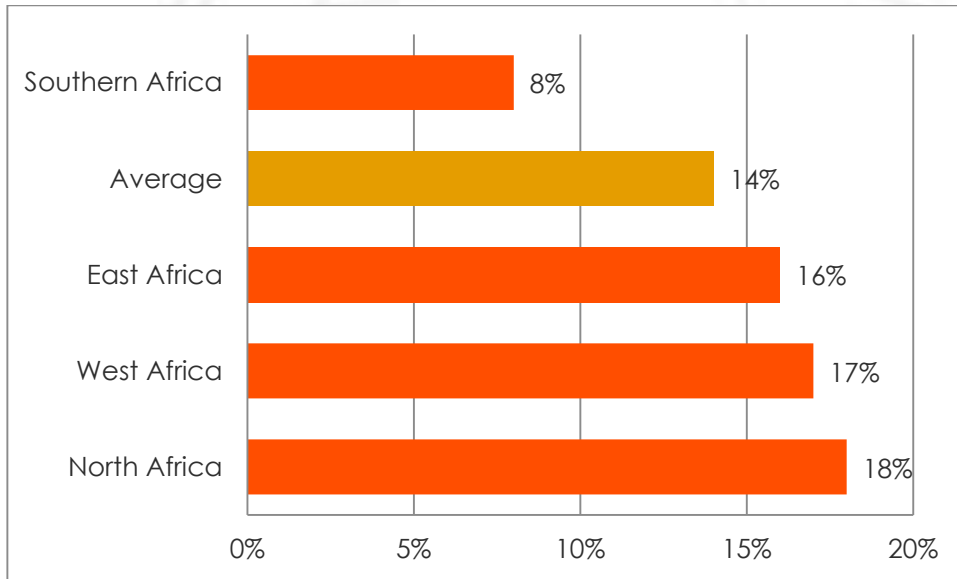
How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Providing water and sanitation services? (% who say "very well" or "fairly well")

Note: Pearson's $r = -.526^{**}$ (significant at .01 level)

Bribery to obtain water and sanitation services

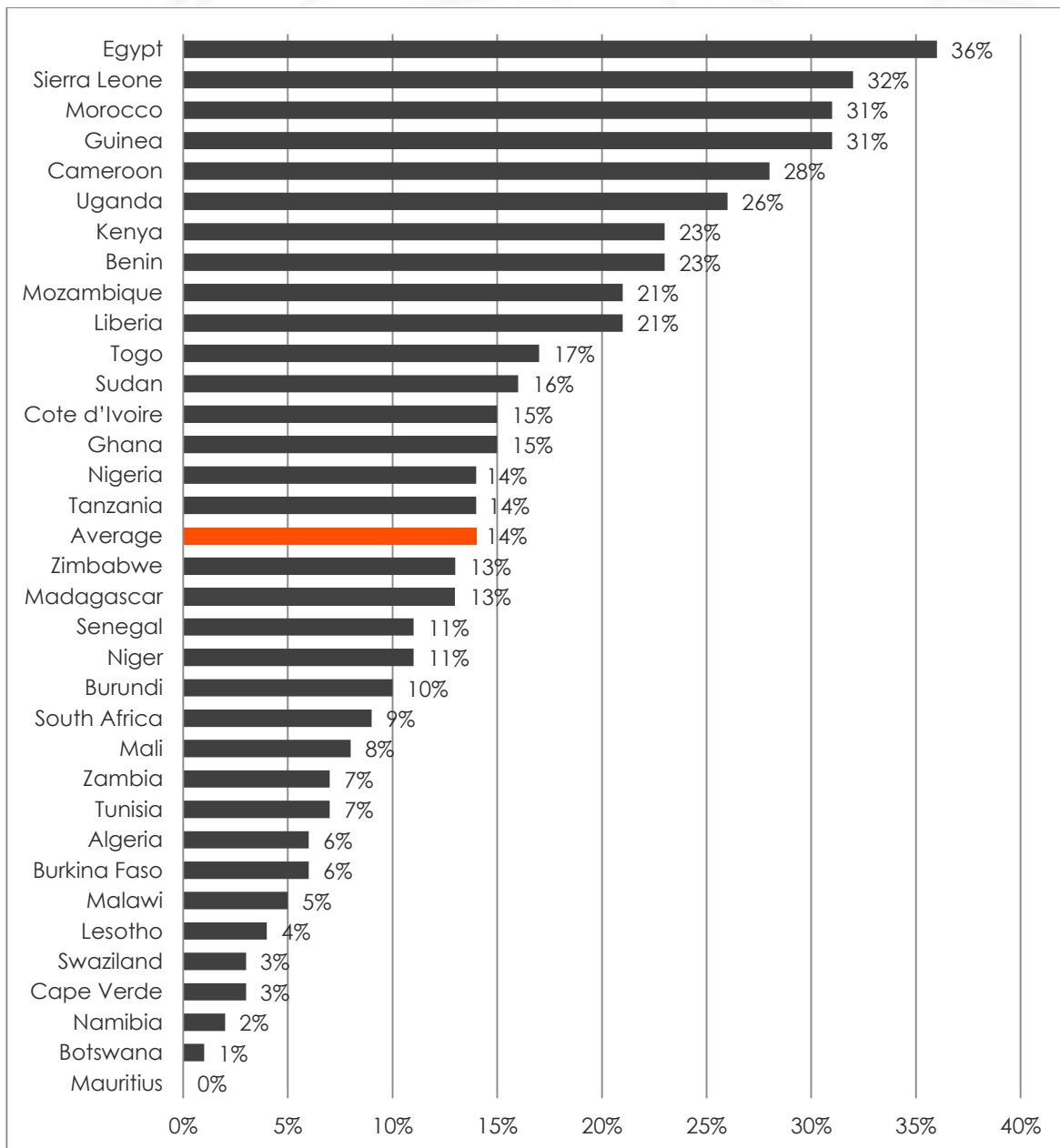
With a majority of Africans lacking piped water and sewerage, and expressing little confidence in their government's handling of the issue, it may not be surprising that, on average, 14% of respondents who dealt with water/sanitation services during the previous 12 months say they paid a bribe "once or twice," "a few times," or "often" to obtain the needed services. North Africa (18%) and West Africa (17%) have the highest percentage of citizens who say they paid a bribe for water or sanitation services (Figure 15). However, the country with the highest percentage of citizens who say they paid a bribe for water or sanitation services is Egypt (36%), followed by Sierra Leone (32%) (Figure 16).

Figure 15: Paid a bribe to obtain water or sanitation services in past year | by region
 | 2011-2013



Respondents were asked: *In the past year, how often, if ever, have you had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour to government officials in order to get water or sanitation services? (Among respondents who dealt with water/sanitation services during the previous year, % who say they paid a bribe "once or twice," "a few times," or "often")*

Figure 16: Paid a bribe to obtain water or sanitation services | by country | 2011/2013



Respondents were asked: *In the past year, how often, if ever, have you had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour to government officials in order to get water or sanitation services? (Among respondents who dealt with water/sanitation services during the previous year, % who say they paid a bribe "once or twice," "a few times," or "often")*

To further explore water-related data, please visit Afrobarometer's online data analysis facility at www.afrobarometer-online-analysis.com.

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- Logan, C. (2014). Developing Africa's infrastructure: The rough road to better services. Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 3. Available at <http://www.afrobarometer.org/publications/dispatches/item/1498-developing-africa-s-infrastructure-the-rough-road-to-better-services>.
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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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