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Better but not good enough? How Africans see the delivery of public services

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 290 | Michael Bratton, Jeremy Seekings, and Daniel Armah-Attoh

Summary

Africa has long been characterized as a continent of strong societies and weak states (Migdal, 1988; Chickering & Haley, 2007; Henn, 2016). This image suggests that, compared to an informal sector rich in networks of self-help, mutual aid, and private entrepreneurship, public sector institutions are ineffective at getting things done. As a set of formal structures imported during colonial rule, the centralized state for decades remained "suspended in mid-air" – that is, above society – with limited aptitude to address the everyday needs of ordinary Africans (Hyden, 1983; Boone, 2006). Recognizing this impediment, policy makers have often subcontracted essential public services to non-governmental entities, private businesses, or public-private partnerships. Especially where the state has collapsed, such non-state actors often step in and assume responsibility for the provision of "public" services (see for example Titeca and de Herdt (2011) on education in the Democratic Republic of Congo).

Pan-Africa Profiles

There has, however, been a steady expansion in public service delivery across most of Africa, especially with respect to public education and health care, along with piecemeal improvements in bureaucratic governance (Levy & Kpundeh, 2004; Fjelstad & Moore, 2008). By 2011, according to World Bank data (2018), almost three-quarters of boys and two-thirds of girls in sub-Saharan Africa completed primary school. Three out of four children were immunized against measles. Almost half of all births were attended by skilled personnel. Even where the state has collapsed, the idea of public provision remains potent (Lund, 2006). State agencies – both centralized and decentralized – continue to be the main point of service contact for most Africans.

How well are African states performing in delivering public services that citizens say they want?

The study of citizens' attitudes toward public service delivery took off in the global North following the shift among analysts, in the 1980s and 1990s, to viewing citizens as the customers or clients of the state. Surveys of customers' attitudes proliferated, bureaucracies established complaint procedures for dissatisfied citizens, and governments published charters setting out citizens' rights. In many of the advanced capitalist democracies, this went along with the introduction of competition in service delivery (through liberalization and privatization). Recent research on citizens' satisfaction with service delivery emphasizes that perceptions reflect not only actual experiences but also expectations. In other words, satisfaction reflects whether citizens get what they want or what they believe they are entitled to (van de Walle, 2018). In Africa, with the exception of South Africa, very little research has been conducted into public perceptions of and attitudes toward public service delivery. Afrobarometer data allow us to begin to correct this deficit.

This Pan-Africa Profile views state performance from a citizen perspective. Reporting on results of Round 7 Afrobarometer surveys in 34 African countries, our focus is on popular assessments of state performance in delivering the educational, medical, administrative, security, and household amenities that ordinary people require in order to live a safe and fulfilling life. Overall, we find more perceived improvements than declines and identify three factors – difficulty in accessing services, inadequate response to citizen complaints, and petty corruption – that are most damaging to how citizens regard the delivery of public services.

The importance of examining public perceptions is underscored by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 16 calls for strong institutions and inclusive development. Within SDG16, targets include the accountability and effectiveness of state institutions at providing public goods and services that promote human development. Specifically, progress on Target 6 ("develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels") is measured by the percentage of the population who express satisfaction with their last experience with a public service agency. And indicators of progress under Target 5 ("substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms") include the proportion of persons who were asked to pay bribes for public services during the previous 12 months. These indicators – among others measured by Afrobarometer – are central to the assessment of state performance as seen from a citizen perspective.

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. Six rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2015, and findings from Round 7 surveys (2016-2018) are currently being released. Interested readers may follow our releases, including our Pan-Africa Profiles series of Round 7 cross-country analyses, at #VoicesAfrica and sign up for our distribution list at www.afrobarometer.org.

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

This dispatch relies primarily on data from 45,823 interviews completed in 34 countries between September 2016 and September 2018 (see Appendix Table A.1 for a list of countries and fieldwork dates). The countries covered are home to almost 80% of the continent's population.[1]

The data are weighted to ensure nationally representative samples. Each country is weighted equally, i.e. data from countries with large and small populations are weighted equally. The Africa-wide data below are thus averages of national data, without adjustment for the size of the national populations.

Key findings

- Africans make contact with public service agencies at varying rates. On average for 34 countries, Africans are much more likely to report contact with a public clinic or

[1] Twenty African countries were not surveyed in Round 7: Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea-Bissau, Libya, Mauritania, Republic of the Congo (Brazzaville), Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, and South Sudan.

hospital than with a public utility that delivers household services such as water or electricity.

- On average, majorities of Africans report that access to most public services is "easy." This positive assessment holds true for public education, identity documents, medical care, and assistance from the police. The main exception is access to household utilities, which are regarded as more "difficult" to obtain.

- In general, service delivery is seen as quite timely; on average, slightly more people report receiving services after "short" rather than "long" delays. But citizens disagree over the timeliness of police assistance; when compared with other services, police assistance is more likely to occur either "right away" or "never."

- On average, a majority of Africans say that the treatment they receive from public officials is courteous. But about two in 10 report that interactions with public officials are "not at all respectful."

- Africans are about twice as likely to report paying a bribe for police assistance (26%) as for school (15%) or medical services (13%).

- If they report misconduct by schoolteachers or a crime, most Africans think it's likely they will get "someone to take action." But when reporting corruption, a positive outcome is widely seen as "not likely."

- Overall, Africans are more likely to see improvements than deterioration in state delivery of key public services. But on average fewer than one in five citizens see *simultaneous* improvements in the performance of all three of the state agencies charged with public safety, education, and medical care.

- To explain perceived changes in state delivery of public services, three factors matter, in reverse order of importance:
    - **Ease of access.** Perceptions that a public service is "easy" rather than "difficult" to obtain build confidence in the public mind that state performance is improving.
    - **Response to complaints.** Corrective action that occurs in response to citizen reports of abuse of office is associated with popular confidence in improved performance of the state.
    - **Corruption:** Most importantly, popular perceptions of changes in state performance are driven by whether citizens feel obliged to pay a bribe in order to obtain a service. Experience of this form of petty corruption deeply undermines citizen confidence in the performance of the state.

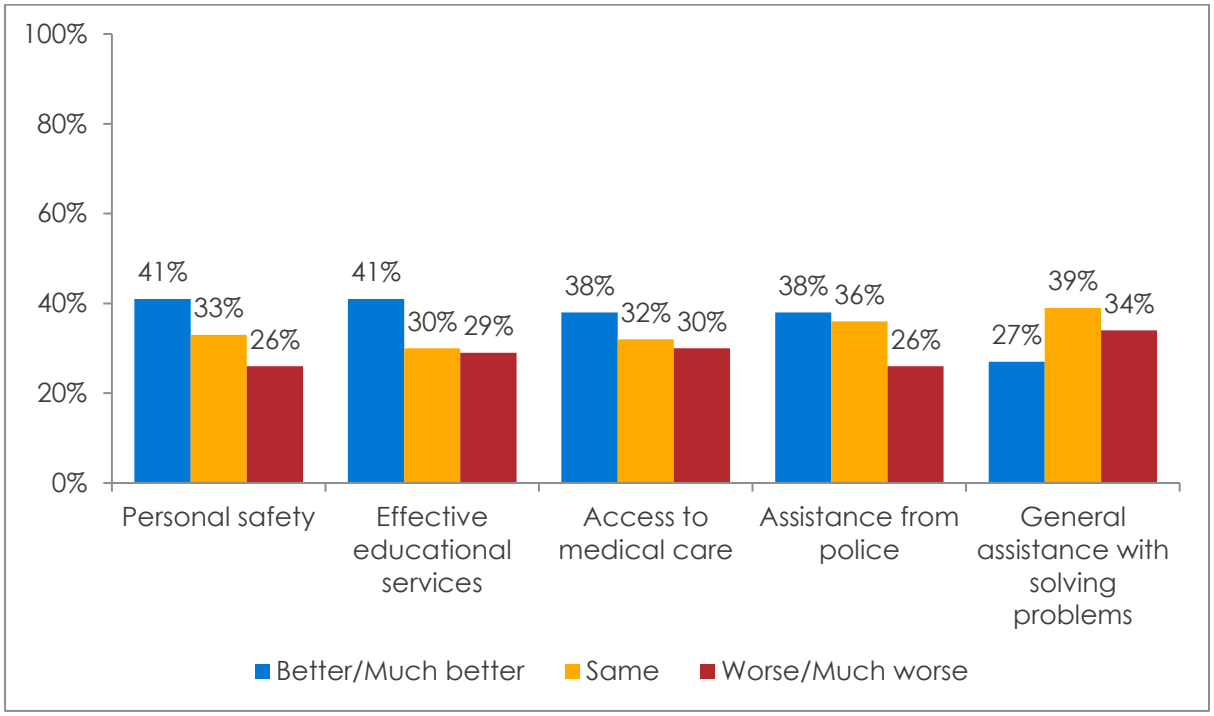
Trends in state performance

African citizens seem to consider that improvements have recently occurred in several aspects of state service delivery. The survey asked all respondents in all countries whether "*things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago*."

Average results for the surveyed parts of the continent are displayed in Figure 1. With regard to personal safety from crime and violence, on average more people report that conditions are improving (41%) rather than worsening (26%). Of course, improvements in public safety could be due in some degree to social initiatives – such as neighbourhood watch groups or anti-crime protest demonstrations – rather than to the agencies of the state. But citizens

attribute improved personal safety at least partly to effective police work, because similar proportions also say that more "ordinary people" can now "get help from the police when they need it" (38% better, 26% worse). Some countries are exceptions to this general trend. In Madagascar, Malawi, and (especially) Gabon, more people report that their personal safety has worsened than report that it has improved.

Figure 1: Perceived trends in state performance | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: *Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same: Your ability to get medical care when you need it? Your personal safety from crime and violence? The government's effectiveness in addressing educational needs? The ability of ordinary people to get help from the police when they need it? The ability of ordinary people to get assistance from government to resolve problems for themselves or their communities?*

On average, pluralities of citizens also see educational and medical services getting better. Some 41% think the government is becoming more effective at "addressing educational needs" (vs. 29% who think their government has become less effective). About as many (38%) see improvements in their "ability to get medical care when you need it" (compared with 30% who say their ability to do so has diminished). Although a few respondents may have referenced private or charitable services in these answers, the vast majority presumably had public services in mind.

Growing popular attribution of service effectiveness seems to fly in the face of any assumption that African states are uniformly weak across various service sectors. On the contrary, public opinion in most surveyed countries suggests recent incremental progress in the performance of central authorities in delivering some of the services necessary for human security and development. But there are exceptions to this trend. In one out of three countries, more people say their ability to get medical care has diminished.[2] Similarly, citizens

[2] These include Gabon, Morocco, Sudan, Malawi, Tunisia, Niger, Togo, Zimbabwe, Liberia, Madagascar, and Guinea.

in as many countries are more likely to report that the government's educational effectiveness has declined than to report that it has improved.

Several caveats are thus warranted. First, about one-third of all respondents see no improvement; they regard the state's performance in delivering public services as "about the same" as "a few years ago." Overall, a quarter or more of citizens actually report declines in recent state performance at delivering basic services. In Gabon, for example, most respondents are emphatic that public services are worsening. In addition, people report that the state's general performance in assisting ordinary people "to resolve problems for themselves or their communities" has not improved. When it comes to alignment between official and popular policy goals, a plurality instead consider that the performance of the state remains much the same as it has always been. And more people feel that the state's performance has become worse rather than better in recent years. For these reasons, the jury is still out on whether African states have turned the corner in repairing their common reputation for weak performance.

Second, Afrobarometer employs a distinctive indicator of state performance. It is based on subjective popular opinion rather than on any direct observation of bureaucratic output. Our public opinion perspective raises the possibility that citizens may be mistaken in their assessments of state performance. Education should impart skills, and health care should maintain citizens' health. We argue, however, that client satisfaction is also an important component of any assessment of the effectiveness of a service-delivery organization. Moreover, our indicator of state performance ("better" or "worse") is relative to each country's own recent past. Recognizing that other approaches are valid, we nonetheless prefer to understand country-specific trends within local contexts rather than measure African state performance against a fixed international standard that may or may not be appropriate.

A contextual approach highlights differences across countries. Figure 2 is based on an index of whether a country's citizens report improvements in *all three* of three essential services: school services, medical services, and assistance from the police. It is sobering to note that, by this rigorous criterion, only 19% of citizens consider that state performance is getting "better" in an "average" African country. More importantly, trends in state performance vary sharply across countries. At the high end (Botswana and Namibia), more than one-third (38% and 37%) of citizens see across-the-board improvements in all three service sectors, while only about 5% report that state performance has worsened in all three sectors. At the low end (Gabon), just 3% of citizens report consistent multi-sector gains in state performance, while 34% report that state performance in all three sectors has worsened.

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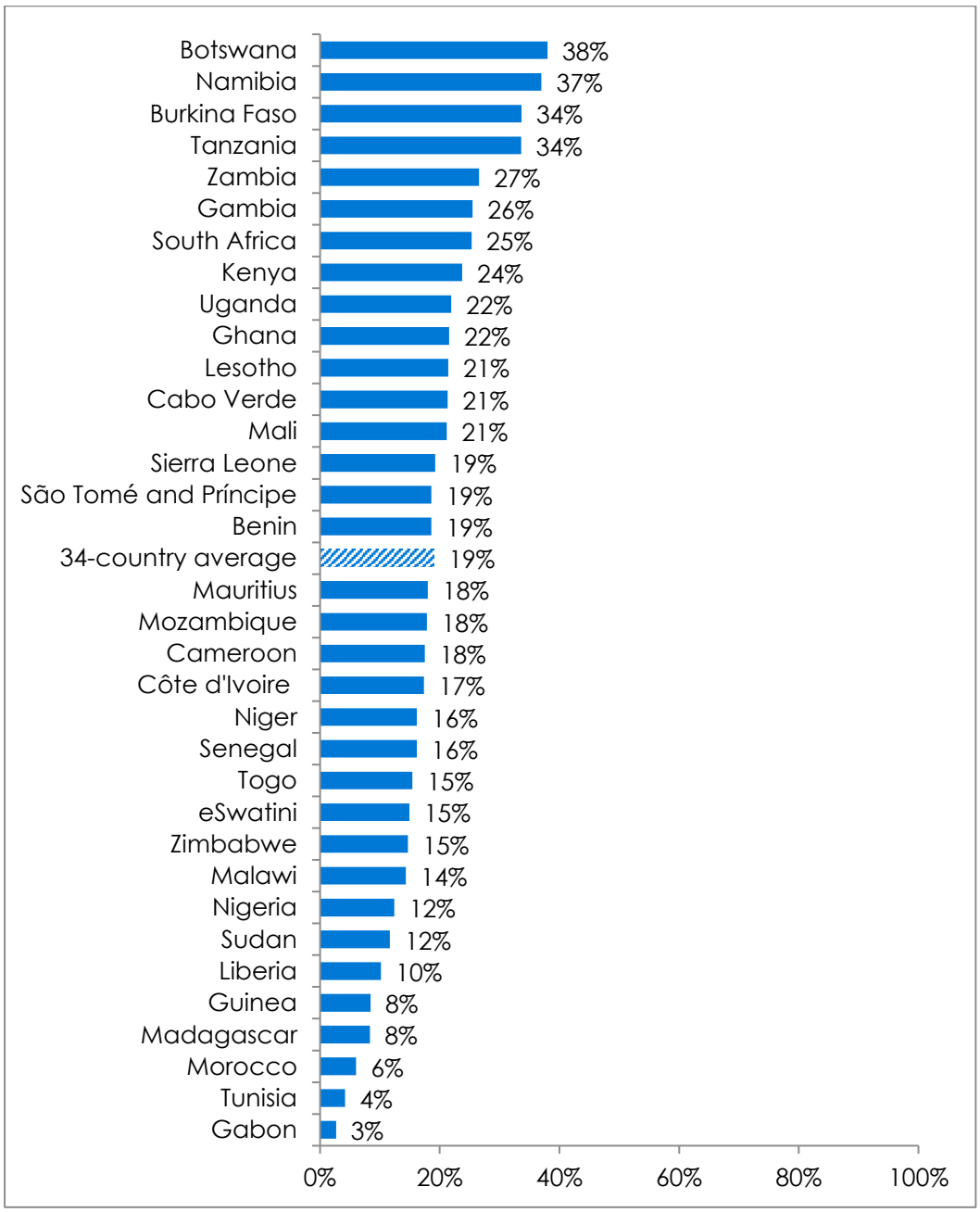
Figure 2 also raises interesting anomalies. Burkina Faso and Tanzania (34%) are not usually considered as possessing the most effective states in Africa. Yet citizens tell Afrobarometer that, from their own viewpoint and compared to their country's recent past, state performance is broadly improving. Perhaps because these countries started from a low base of state performance, citizens regard recent gains as especially welcome and noteworthy. The opposite holds at the other end of the scale. Whereas citizens of Tunisia and Morocco inhabit relatively wealthy economies and strong states, they harbor high expectations of improvements in public service delivery that are currently being disappointed.

In sum, Afrobarometer's index of trends in state performance is a useful benchmark for comparing trends among African countries. Beyond describing cross-country differences (a "what?" question), the index also raises explanatory issues (or "why?" questions). Why do Tanzanians see greater recent improvement in public service delivery than Gabonese? Is it

because the former enjoy higher levels of contact with state agencies? Is it because of the physical presence in the locality of service infrastructure? The perceived ease of service access? The timeliness of service delivery or the treatment of citizens by public officials? Or does perceived state performance hinge on whether citizens are sometimes faced with bribe-seeking officials and a public sector culture in which reported corruption is never redressed?

Figure 2: Perceived improvement in state performance for three services | by country | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: *Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same: Your ability to get medical care when you need it? The government's effectiveness in addressing educational needs? The ability of ordinary people to get help from the police when they need it? (Figure shows % of respondents who say that all three have gotten "better" or "much better")*

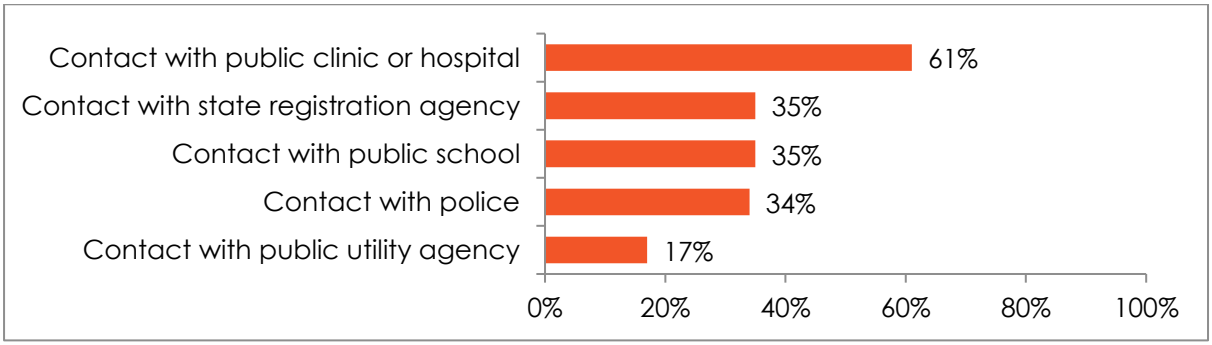
The remainder of this paper focuses on these aspects of the service delivery process. After analyzing the impact of each, we offer a comprehensive account of the most important factors influencing the way that citizens regard the service delivery performance of the state.

Citizen contact with state agencies

The first step in the service-delivery process is contact between state and citizen. Figure 3 displays the frequency of citizen reports of interactions during the 12 months preceding the survey with five state agencies described in the questionnaire as delivering "essential government services." We do not know how respondents defined "contact." For example, does "contact" with a school include the attendance at a school of the respondent's child, or might it entail only direct contact between the respondent and a school official or teacher, for example over a child's admission or performance? It is also possible that respondents would answer that they had no contact with a school if another adult in the household was responsible for contact with school officials and teachers. Whereas people cannot access health care without interacting with doctors or nurses, children can access public education without adults in the household interacting with school officials or teachers.

Taken at face value, however, the data reported in Figure 3 show that, by a clear margin, adult citizens were most likely to have "contact" with a public clinic or hospital. On average across all 34 countries, some six in 10 survey respondents (61%) say they made use of public medical services during the previous year. This result echoes another well-known Afrobarometer finding: Over time, popular concern about health care has surpassed desire for education as the most important social-service issue that people think the government should address (Logan, Coulibaly, & Silwé, 2018).

Figure 3: Reported citizen contact with state agencies | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked:

- *In the past 12 months, have you: Had contact with a public school? Had contact with a public clinic or hospital? Tried to get an identity document like a birth certificate, driver's license, passport or voter's card, or permit from government? Tried to get water, sanitation, or electric services from government? (% who say "yes")*
- *In the past 12 months, how often have you encountered the police … at checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation? (% who say at least once)*

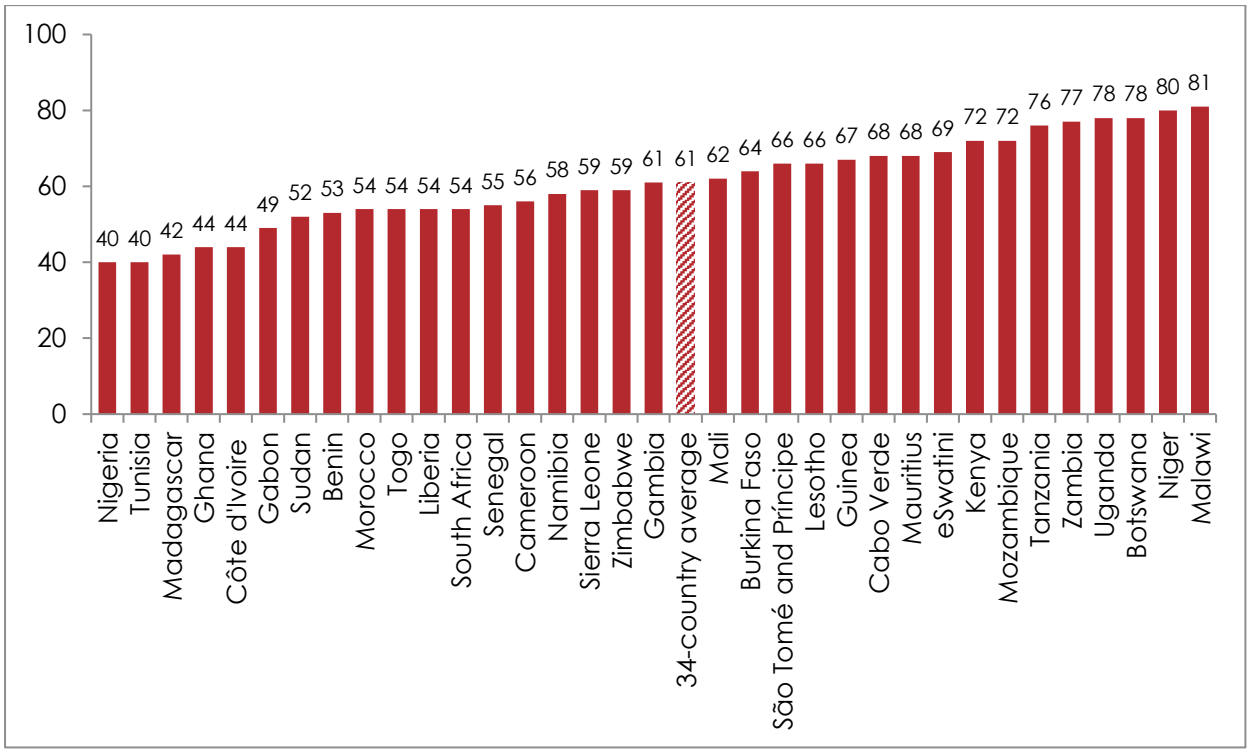
This level of service contact is almost twice as high as reported engagement with a public school (35%) or with an administrative agency responsible for issuing vital documents such as birth certificates, driver's licenses, national identity cards, or voter registration cards (also 35%). For schools and documents, similar contact rates may reflect different levels of service provision and client satisfaction; whereas respondents without school-age children have little reason to contact a public school, and even respondents with school-going children might not be responsible for dealing with school officials or teachers, almost everyone has a regular need to interact with agencies that provide state-mandated documents. Moreover, contact with the police – assessed with the question "*How often have you encountered the police …*

at checkpoints, identity checks, traffic stops, or during an investigation?" – registered a similar, relatively low level of contact (34%). While we cannot be sure how respondents understood the question, there is reason to believe that police roadblocks are hardly ubiquitous on the continent and that African countries are more likely to be under-policed than over-policed.[3]

Among all services studied, citizens were least likely to have tried to get services from a public utility agency that provides water, sanitation, or electricity. Fewer than one in five citizens (17%) report any such contact. Although urban residents report higher contact rates (19%) than their rural cousins (15%), the gap is quite narrow. Again, it is difficult to be certain of how to understand "contact." Respondents in some rural areas might assess that there is no point in contacting officials about services, because the likelihood of services being provided to them is negligible.

Nor do average contact rates apply uniformly in different parts of the continent. Take citizen dealings with the public health service. As Figure 4 shows, the frequency of such citizen-state interactions varies greatly by country, with reported contacts being about twice as high in Malawi (81%), Niger (80%), and Botswana (78%) as in Madagascar (42%), Tunisia (40%), and Nigeria (40%).

Figure 4: Reported contact with public health service (%) | by country | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: *In the past 12 months, have you had contact with a public clinic or hospital? (% who say "yes")*

[3] In some countries (e.g. Gabon and Cameroon), majorities of citizens say they experienced such interactions with the police. In eSwatini, almost half say they did so "often." Uncertainty over how respondents understood the question can be considered with the following example: You are in a bus that is stopped at police checkpoints several times, but the police speak only to the driver and look at the passengers. Would you say that you have "encountered the police"?

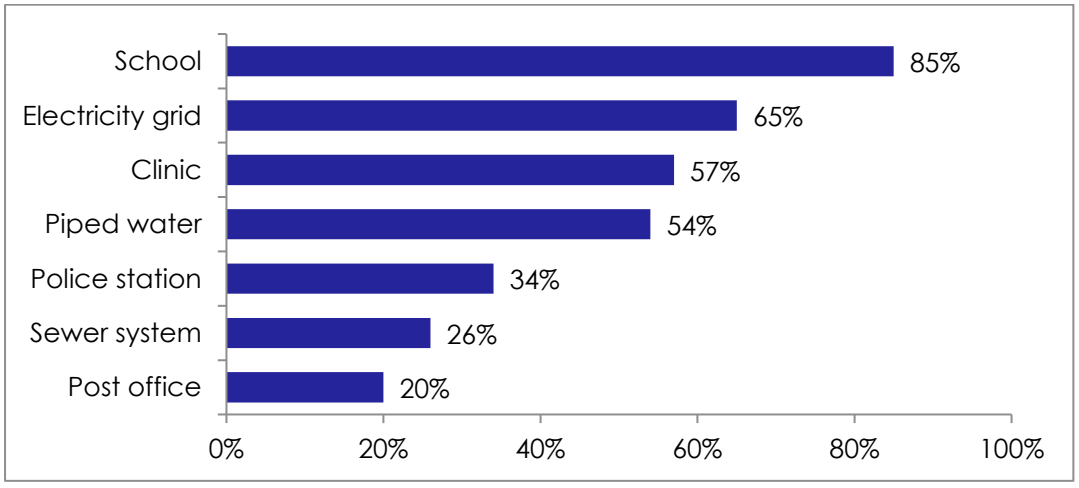
Thus some poorer countries like Malawi and Niger (GNI per capita of $320 and $360, respectively) appear to "over-perform" relative to state fiscal capacity in the delivery of medical services whereas some richer countries seem to "under-perform" (such as Tunisia at GNI per capita of $3,500). And in other countries, such as Madagascar and Nigeria with extensive land areas and large populations, the state apparently faces difficulty in comprehensively providing health services on a large scale.

Local presence of public service infrastructure

Do citizen contacts with the state therefore depend on the availability of public service infrastructure? For example, are citizens most likely to present themselves for, say, medical services if there is a public health clinic or government hospital conveniently located close at hand?

Figure 5 documents the physical presence of various public service facilities in the neighbourhoods and villages where the Round 7 Afrobarometer survey was conducted. Rather than being based on citizen perceptions, these data derive from on-site observations by field interviewers in the census enumeration areas randomly selected as primary sampling units for the survey. The data, which are collated and certified by supervisors of Afrobarometer field teams, constitute an independent audit of the actual existence of public service facilities on the ground. The first set of questions posed to the field interviewers concerned the presence of each facility (such as a school or clinic) within the enumeration area or within "easy walking distance." It is not straightforward to interpret the data because some primary sampling units are very small and we do not know how interviewers understood "easy walking distance." The second set of questions asked whether the field interviewer saw any police, roadblocks, etc. in the enumeration area. If the field interviewer encountered police or a roadblock just *outside* of the primary sampling unit, their response should be "no."

Figure 5: Local presence of public service infrastructure | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Survey enumerators *record the presence or absence in the primary sampling unit/enumeration area of key services and facilities, including electricity, piped water, and sewage systems that most houses can access; a school; a clinic; a police station; and a post office.*

On the face of it, these data suggest that schools are by far the most common public service facilities across the continent. On average, 85% of people live within easy walking distance of a school. The construction of countrywide networks of public primary schools – often the product of state-community partnerships – is one of the most visible achievements of the first 50 years of African independence. Thanks in part to the challenge set by the UN Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals, most primary-age children are

now in school, even if the quality of school construction, staffing, and teaching commonly leave much to be desired (Economist, 2018). Nonetheless, local schools serve as hubs of local civic life, especially in deep rural communities where other public facilities may be lacking.

Fewer people live close to public clinics and related health facilities. On average, 57% of the people live within easy walking distance of a clinic. This result implies that nearly half of the Africans interviewed have to travel outside the area in which they live in order to access a health-service provider. Nearby access to other services is even more limited. For example, two out of every three citizens must leave their home area to initiate contact with a police officer; only 34% of people live within easy walking distance of a police station.[4] And four out of five citizens cannot easily walk to government facilities – say a post office (20%) – where certain essential documents can be acquired.

On average, about two out of three people (65%) live in areas where most households can access electricity. We do not know whether the household itself can access electricity. A majority (54%) live in localities where most households can access piped water. Only 26%, however, live in localities where most households can access a sanitary sewer system. In some countries, most people do not have easy access to electricity, water, and other basic services.[5]

We have already seen that citizen-state contact is lowest (just 17%) for household services such as electricity, water, or sewage. Yet the survey reveals that, as of 2018, African states have extended an electricity grid to an average two-thirds (65%) of populated areas. The discrepancy in these figures suggests that many households in these areas may not be hooked up to the electric grid. The same may also apply to piped water systems and sanitary sewer systems. Of course, many citizens might already enjoy these services and never encounter problems such as intermittent service or billing disputes and thus may have no reason to contact service providers.

Taken together, these results point to a weak link between the physical presence of public service infrastructure and subsequent contacts between citizens and the state. Table 1 uses correlation coefficients to illustrate this weakness statistically.

Table 1: Citizen contact with public services, by presence of infrastructure (correlation coefficients) | 34 countries | 2016/2018

	Local presence of public service infrastructure						
Contact with clinic	0.004						
Contact with registration agency		0.020**					
Contact with school			.017**				
Contact with police				.048**			
Contact with public utility							
Electricity					.091**		
Piped water						.049**	
Sewer system							.032**

** *sig = <0.01*

[4] This does not mean that the police are absent in areas without a police station. Our interviewers reported seeing the police or army in the immediate area, including at checkpoints, in one in five areas where there was no nearby police station.

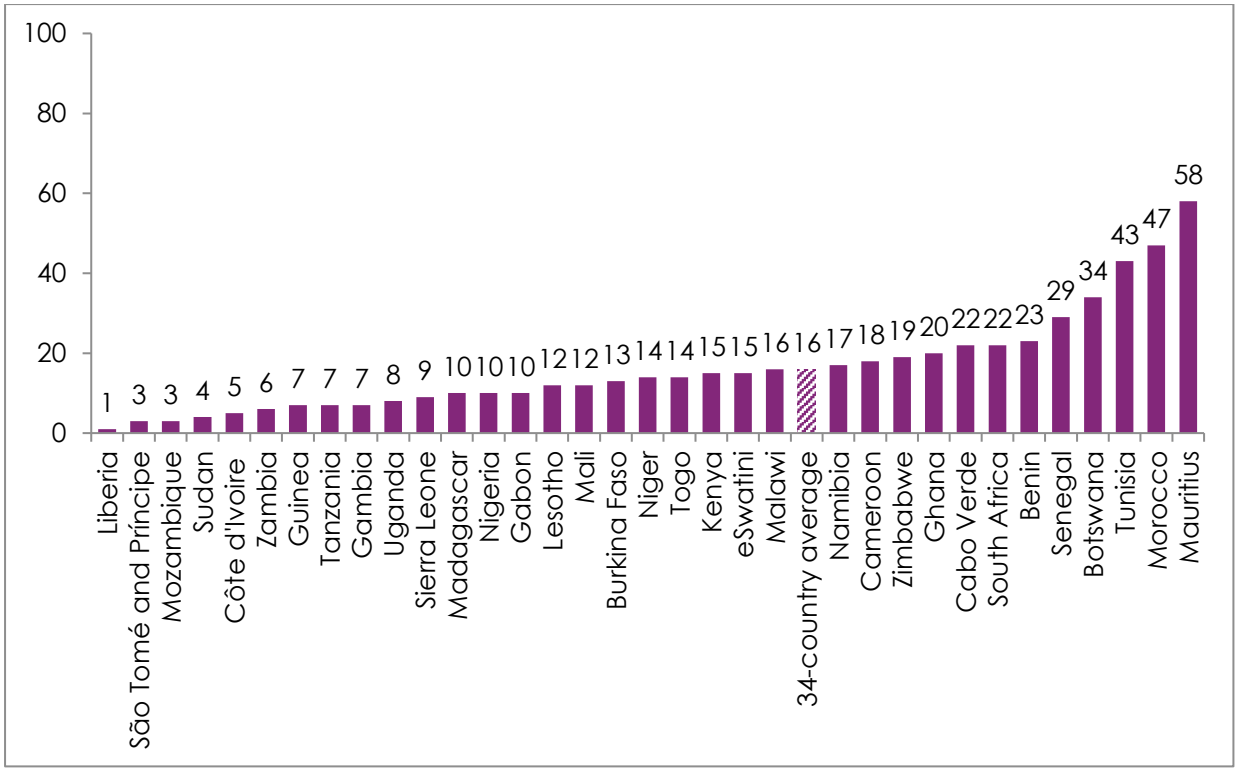
[5] For example, only 28% of citizens in Madagascar live in neighbourhoods where most households can access electricity.

Contact with health services is the best example; there is no association whatever (r=.004) between the local presence of a clinic and citizen contact with the health service. This result suggests that, in the face of widespread medical needs, many citizens may seek help for health care needs outside their own immediate locality. The fact that people who cannot walk to a clinic are just as likely to access it as people who do live within easy walking distance of a clinic suggests, however, that proximity to a clinic is not an important constraint on access. Many people may rely on public or private transport to access a clinic, but this does not result in lower access rates.

Statistical associations between other service infrastructure (such as schools, post offices, and the police) and citizen-state contact are also weak, even if relationships are statistically significant due to the survey's large sample size. The closest link is for electricity (r= .091); after all, citizens are unlikely to interact with a public power company unless it has installed a grid in the locality.

Schools are almost ubiquitous, but consider whether localities contain the infrastructure of *all three* other essential services: a clinic, a post office, and a police station. The distribution of African countries along this index is shown in Figure 6. In this case, Mauritius – a very small country with a high population density – scores well, with more than half of all citizens (58%) living in areas containing all three facilities. Morocco and Tunisia also score well on the infrastructure index even though, as seen in the case of Tunisia, the physical presence of a service facility and actual contact with citizens do not necessarily go together. Other countries, such as Sudan and Mozambique – which are both poor and have low population densities – unsurprisingly lag behind in building a local infrastructure of development service. And Liberia is in an unfortunate class of its own with fewer than 1% of its population living in zones with a clinic *and* a post office *and* a police station.

Figure 6: Local presence of three key service providers (%) | by country | 34 countries | 2016/2018



(Figure shows % of respondents who live in areas containing three public service facilities: a clinic, a post office, and a police station.)

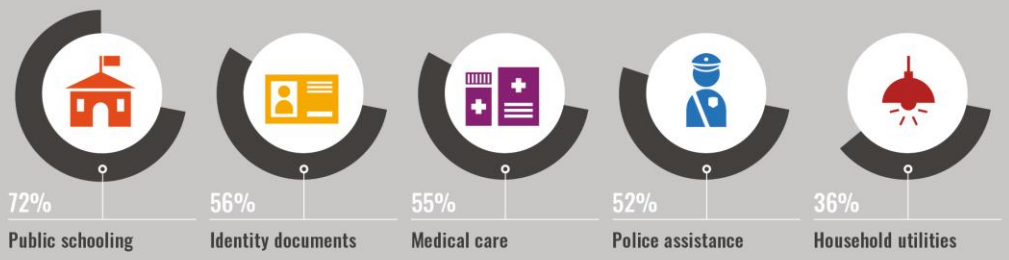
State performance from a citizen perspective

34 African countries | 2016/2018

Three factors drive whether Africans think their government is getting better or worse at delivering basic public services: ❶ **Is the service easy to access?** ❷ **Are officials responsive to complaints? And – most importantly –** ❸ **do you have to pay a bribe?** Across 34 African countries, here's how citizens answer these questions.

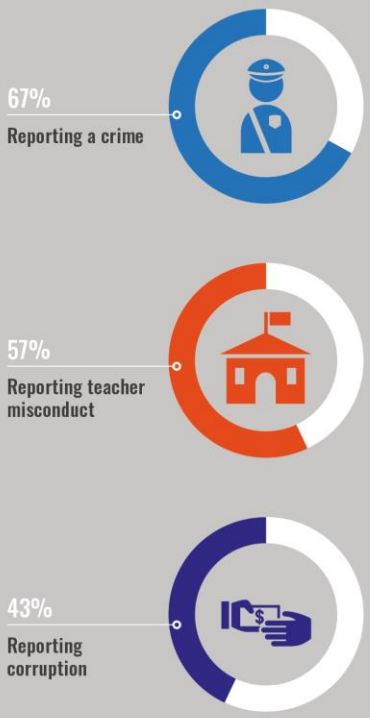
Ease of access

Among respondents who had contact with key agencies, % who say services were "easy" or "very easy" to obtain:



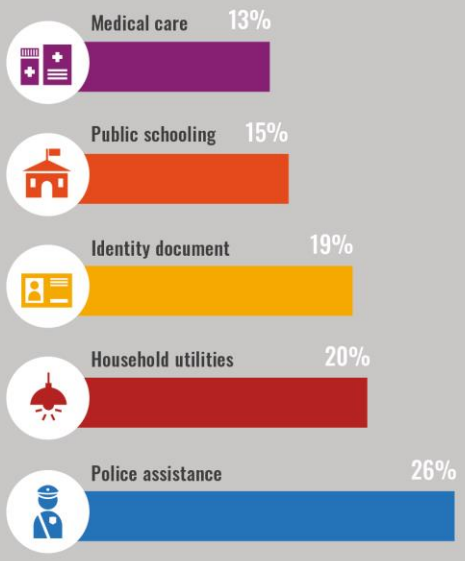
Responsiveness to complaints

% of respondents who say it is "somewhat likely" or "very likely" that they could get someone to take action:



Corruption

Among respondents who had contact with key agencies, % who say they paid a bribe:



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LET THE PEOPLE HAVE A SAY

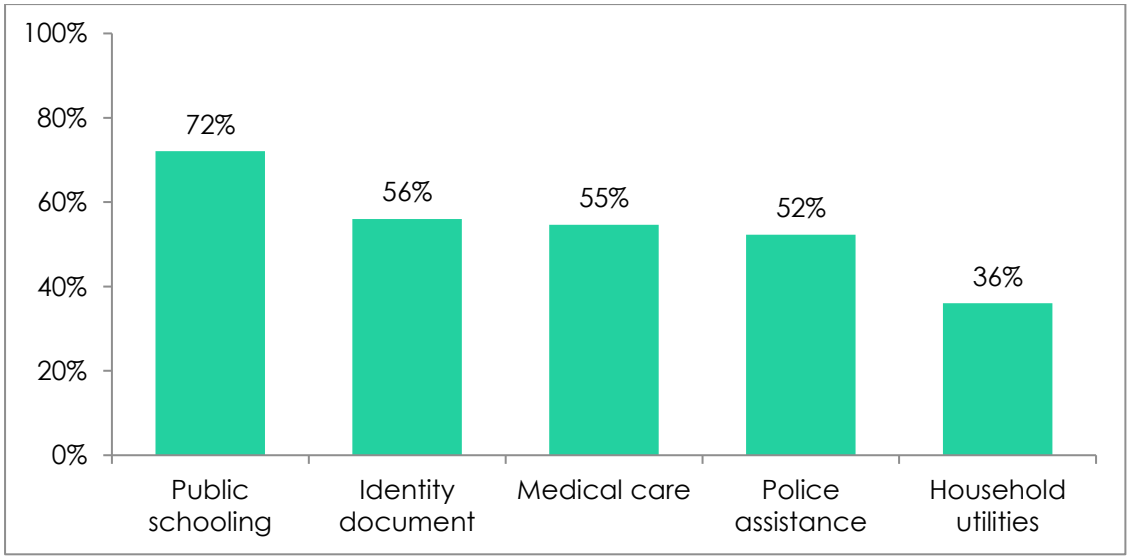
Ease of access to services

This Pan-Africa Profile aims to reveal how Africans regard the delivery of public services. To accurately capture public opinion on the delivery process itself, it is necessary to limit analysis to those individuals who, by contacting a state agency, have actively tried to make use of a public service. The opinion of those who have not made any such contact may be interesting and important, but it is not based on direct recent knowledge.[6] For this reason, the remaining sections of this paper focus on the lived experience of engaged citizens, that is, those who have made contact with a school, clinic, or other public service agency within the previous year.

For each of the services under review, the survey asked these "contacters" how easy or difficult it was to obtain the required service. Responses were coded on a four-point scale from "very easy" through "easy" to "difficult" and "very difficult," with an added category for "don't know."

As Figure 7 shows, on average, more than seven out of 10 Africans (72%) who sought contact with a public school during the previous year report that service was "easy" or "very easy" to obtain. Even though citizen contact with public schools was quite low (35%, see Figure 3), ease of service access was rated as quite high. (It seems likely that this means that accessing officials or teachers over admitting a child to school or issues that arose during the year was easy, not that it was easy to obtain a high-quality education!) The opposite held true for medical care; whereas contact with public clinics was relatively high (61%), reported ease of service access was rated as relatively low (55%). It is likely that many respondents either found it difficult to get to the clinic (often, as we have seen, outside of easy walking distance) or to obtain medical care once they were at the clinic (perhaps because of long queues). This result speaks both to the proven ability of African states to provide widespread opportunities for public schooling (although perhaps of dubious quality) and the large gap that remains in their capacity to broadly deliver access to the health care that people need.

Figure 7: Reported ease of access to services | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents who had contact with key public services were asked: *How easy or difficult was it to obtain the services you needed? (% who say "easy" or "very easy")*

[6] Some citizens might choose not to contact a state agency because of negative past experiences. Afrobarometer asks only about contacts in the past year.

Citizen and state alike face an even greater challenge with regard to the accessibility of household utilities – electricity, piped water, and sewer systems. Not only are citizen-state contacts lowest in the household-utility sector (17%), but those citizens who contact a public utility also report the lowest levels of ease of access to services (36%). As a bottom-up reflection of client dissatisfaction, these results tend to reinforce the widespread reputation of state-owned enterprises in Africa's public utility sector as unprofitable, debt-ridden, and badly managed.

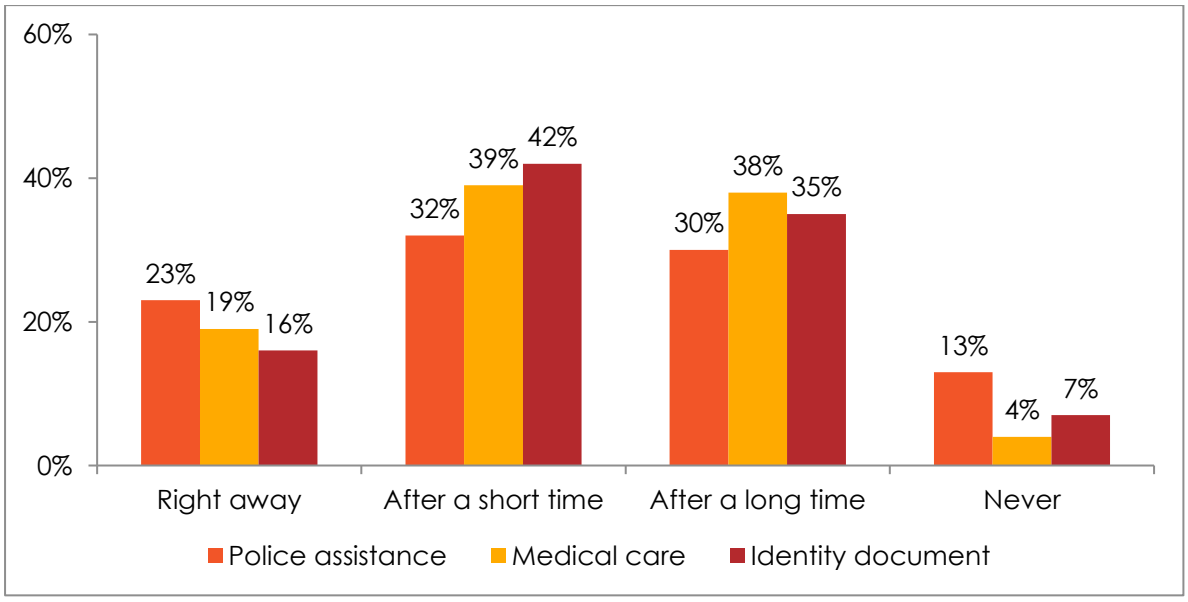
A breakdown of ease of access to public utilities by country (Appendix Figure A.1) tends to confirm that low rates of contact are compounded by reports of difficult service accessibility.

Timeliness of service delivery

In appraising public services, citizens may consider the time taken for delivery. The survey asked: "*How long did it take for you to receive (the service) that you needed? Was it right away, after a short time, after a long time, or never?*" The question was applied separately to three specific services: medical care, an identity document, and assistance from the police.

According to Figure 8, the results are somewhat encouraging. For citizens who sought medical care from a clinic or a hospital, a majority (58%) report receiving assistance either right away (19%) or after a short time (39%). Perhaps surprisingly, the same positive proportion (58%) report receiving an identity document in timely fashion, which suggests a moderately capable level of bureaucratic responsiveness from state registration agencies.

Figure 8: Reported timeliness of service delivery | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents who had contact with key public services were asked: *How long did it take for you to receive (the service) that you needed?*

As for police services, however, opinion was much more cautious and divided. True, a majority of citizens who sought police assistance (62%) eventually received some level of response after a short time (32%) or a long time (30%). And, impressively, about one quarter of "contacters" (23%) reported obtaining a police response "right away," the highest level of immediate reaction from any of the services under review. After all, the cries of crime victims have a built-in urgency that rarely accompany most other public requests for service. By the same token, however, citizens also criticized the police for "never" responding to a request for service (13%), the highest level for any service on record here. Probably referenced in this

category are police forces that are so politicized, under-trained, or under-resourced that they lack the capability to react even-handedly, professionally, and promptly to citizen complaints about public safety. For example, the survey researchers heard anecdotal reports about police forces that were unwilling or unable to attend to public calls for assistance because all means of transport at the nearest police station lacked fuel or were out of order.

Countries in this category can be found in the bottom half of the ranked distribution in Appendix Figure A.2, which shows rapid police response ("right away") for all 34 countries. The countries in the top half of the list lead the way in timely service delivery.

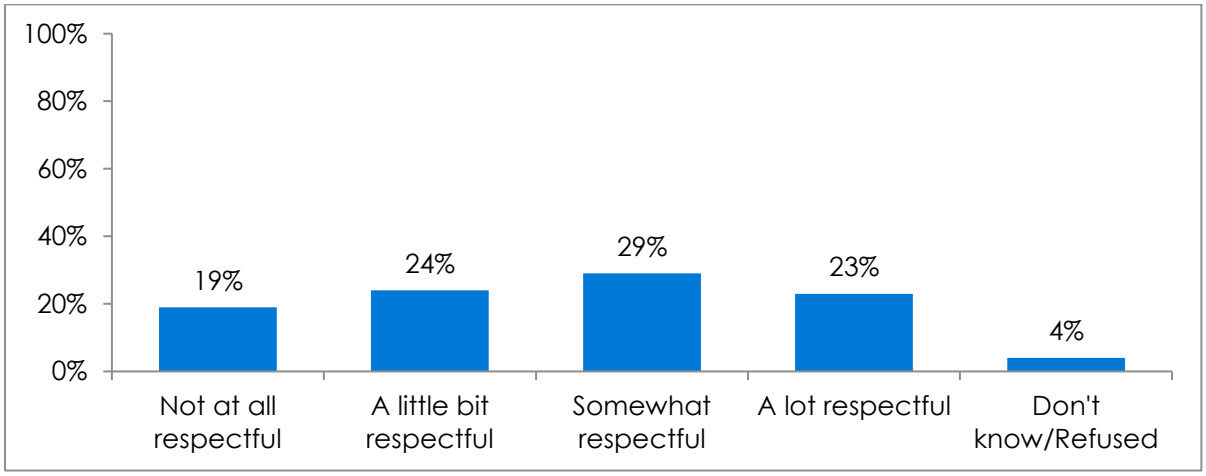
Treatment by public officials

If and when citizens obtain a service, they expect respectful treatment from front-line officials, who after all are public "servants." Given an excess of demand over supply for day-to-day public services, however, officials may be too overworked, underpaid, and thus poorly motivated to devote much personal attention to clients. For less educated or even illiterate citizens, an approach to an educated public official may require surmounting an intimidating status gap, which the latter may exploit. For these reasons, public service delivery runs the risk of devolving into a stressful encounter for all parties.

The survey therefore posed the following question: "*In general, when dealing with public officials, how much do you feel that they treat you with respect?*" The four-point response scale ranged from "not at all" through "a little bit" and "somewhat" to "a lot." We employed a generous definition of respectful treatment by only coding "not at all" as disrespect. And, to capture the broader social reputation of service providers, the question was applied to all respondents, not just "contacters."

Figure 9 displays citizen perceptions of the quality of treatment received from public officials for a generic (i.e. unspecified) public service. The results reflect a mixed picture that leans favourable. On average, more than half of respondents (52%) report that they receive some respect (29%) or a lot of respect (23%) from the representatives of the state. More than three-quarters (76%) report at least "a little bit of respect," which is all that might be reasonably expected in many routine service situations. But almost two in 10 citizens (19%) make it clear that their treatment at the hands of service-delivery personnel was "not at all" courteous. This last figure suggests that, in at least some circumstances, state and citizen are locked in an unacceptably antagonistic, even hostile interaction at the point of service delivery.

Figure 9: Perceived treatment by public officials | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: *In general, when dealing with public officials, how much do you feel that they treat you with respect?*

As a possible silver lining, citizens do not seem to harbor a sense of social discrimination from official ill-treatment. The survey asked individual respondents whether the quality of service offered to them by public officials was better, the same, or worse than that offered to other people. On average, about half say "the same" (51%), and the remainder are evenly split between "better" and "worse" (21% apiece).

For countries that have failed to curb disrespectful behaviour by front-line state workers, see the top half of the ranked distribution in Appendix Figure A.3. The countries in the bottom half of the list have made more progress in cultivating dutiful state-society relations.

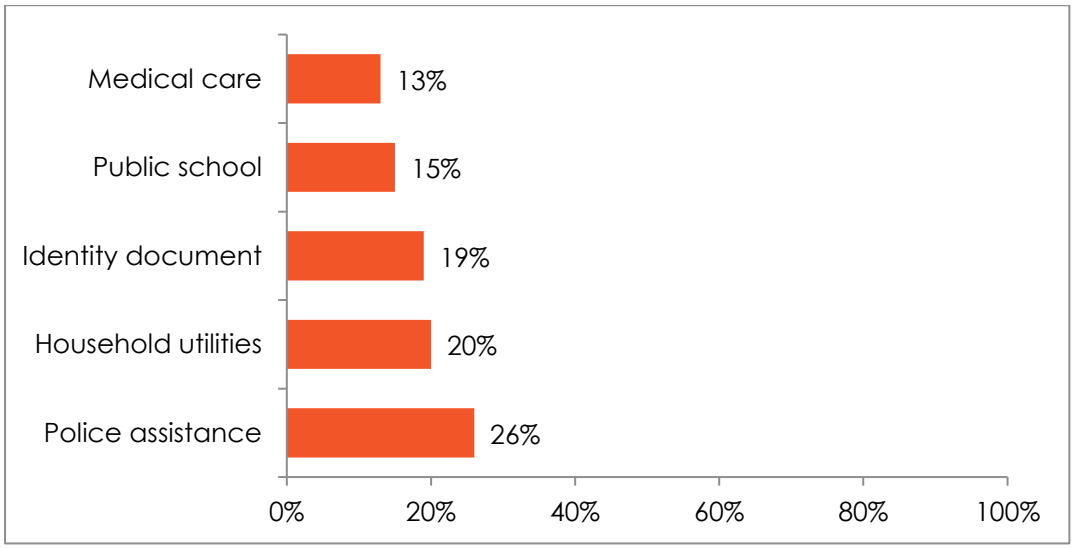
Reported payment of bribes

Even recognizing that public servants are linked to citizens by formal duties, all participants may still be tempted to engage in informal transactions. Given power disparities, state officials are well positioned to extract economic rents from citizens. For their part, citizens have incentives to offer side-payments in order to accelerate access to timely service. In short, both parties stand to benefit from bribery and corruption, even if such illicit exchanges erode the quality of public service overall.

The Afrobarometer survey asks a standard question: "*How often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give gift, or do a favour for (a public official) in order to get the service you needed?*" In reply, respondents with service contact could say "never," "once or twice," "a few times," or "often." The question was applied to each of the five services discussed in this paper. We measured payment of a bribe if it *ever* reportedly occurred, regardless of how frequently.

Figure 10 shows the top-line results. Payment of bribes is reported at least "once or twice" for all the services that we studied, but least often for medical care (13%) and public schooling (15%). Anecdotally, we learned that bribes facilitated, among other things, school admissions, private lessons, medical appointments, and access to diverted drugs. Payment of bribes is even more common for purchasing or speeding up access to identity documents (such as birth certificates and national identity cards) and household utilities (such as electricity hookups, both legal and illegal). One out of every five clients (19%) report making such side-payments.

Figure 10: Reported payment of bribes | 34 countries | 2016/2018

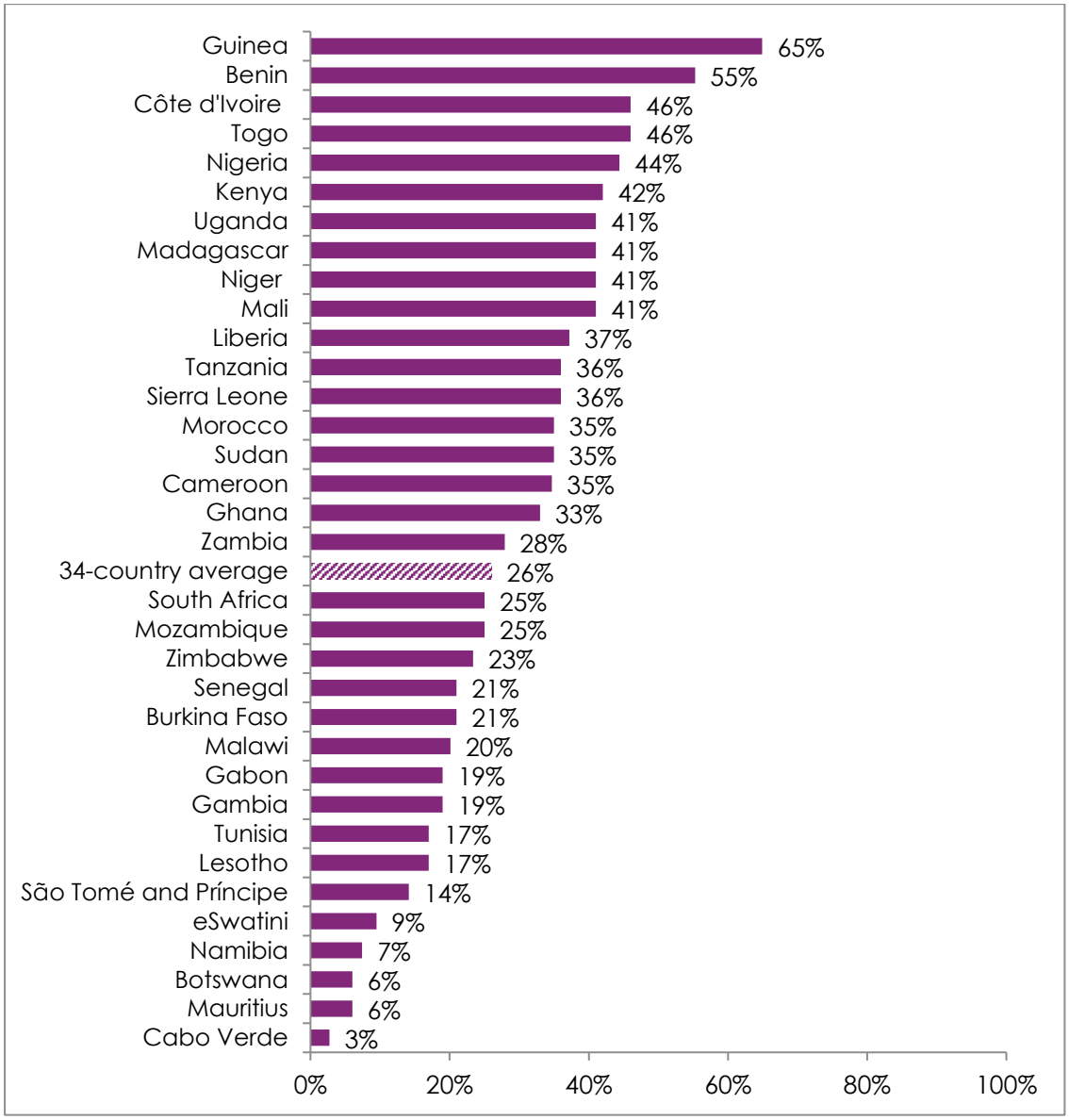


Respondents who had contact with key public services were asked: *How often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give gift, or do a favour for (a public official) in order to get the service you needed? (% who say "once or twice," "a few times," or "often")*

By a clear margin, however, more than one-quarter (26%) of citizens interviewed confirm a finding from earlier Afrobarometer surveys: Payment of bribes is most common for police services. Such payments are equally likely regardless of whether contact is initiated by the client ("requesting assistance from the police") or the provider (for example, "encountering the police at a checkpoint").

On its face, the ranked distribution of countries by bribe payment to the police (see Figure 11) seems valid. It places countries with an established reputation for probity in governance (such as Cabo Verde, Mauritius, Botswana, and Namibia) at the bottom of the list and countries well-known for grand and petty police corruption (such as Nigeria and Kenya) toward the top.

Figure 11: Reported payment of bribes to police | by country | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents who reported encountering the police at checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation 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 avoid a problem during one of these encounters? (% who say "once or twice," "a few times," or "often")*

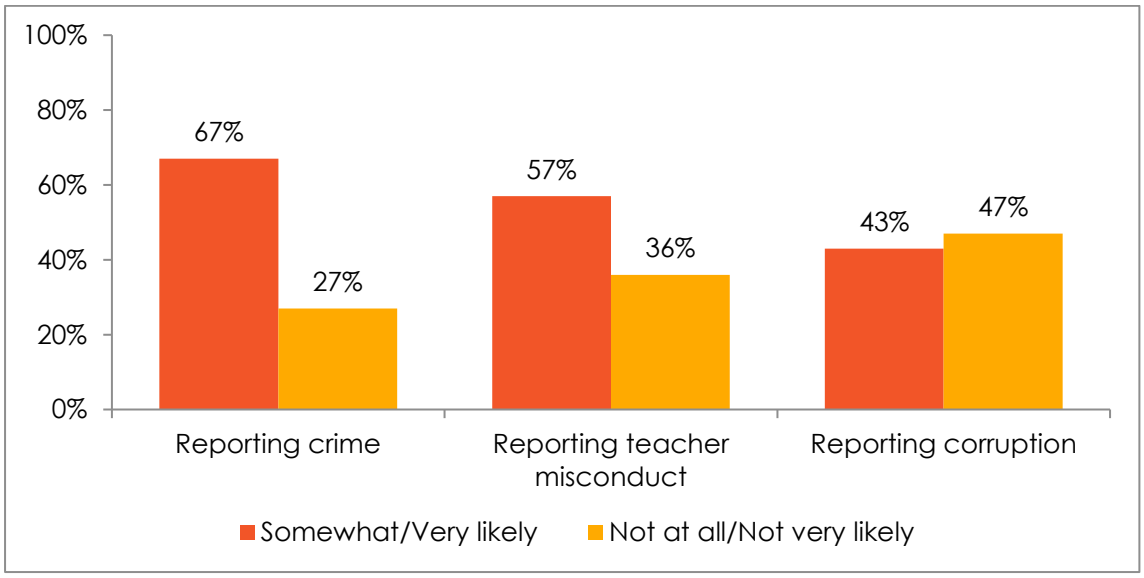
Official response to complaints

Previous studies have documented shortfalls in the responsiveness of state agencies to popular priorities and concerns (Bratton, Mattes, & Gyimah-Boadi, 2005; Bratton, 2013; Logan, Coulibaly, & Silwé, 2018). However, research so far has focused on the political responsiveness of policy makers and elected officials; less is known about what happens when citizens try to hold front-line (or "street-level") bureaucrats to account.

The Afrobarometer Round 7 survey begins to address this issue. Respondents were asked about the likelihood that "you could get someone to take action if you went to a government office or other public institution to report problems." The question then specified examples of popular oversight claims in three service areas: going to the police to report a crime, going to a school to report teacher misbehaviour, and going to a government office to report requests for bribes by public officials.

Average responses are shown in Figure 12. Echoing the earlier finding that police sometimes provide assistance "right away," some 67% say they expect to receive an official response to a crime report. Just 27% say their appeal would go unheard. A smaller majority expect a response to a report on a wayward teacher (57%), while 36% are skeptical. When it comes to reporting an incidence of bribery, however, the pattern is reversed: Fewer people think an official response likely (43%), and more deem it not likely (47%). To all appearances, corruption remains largely a taboo topic that public service agencies are reluctant to acknowledge, let alone redress.

Figure 12: Expected likelihood of official response | 34 countries | 2016/2018



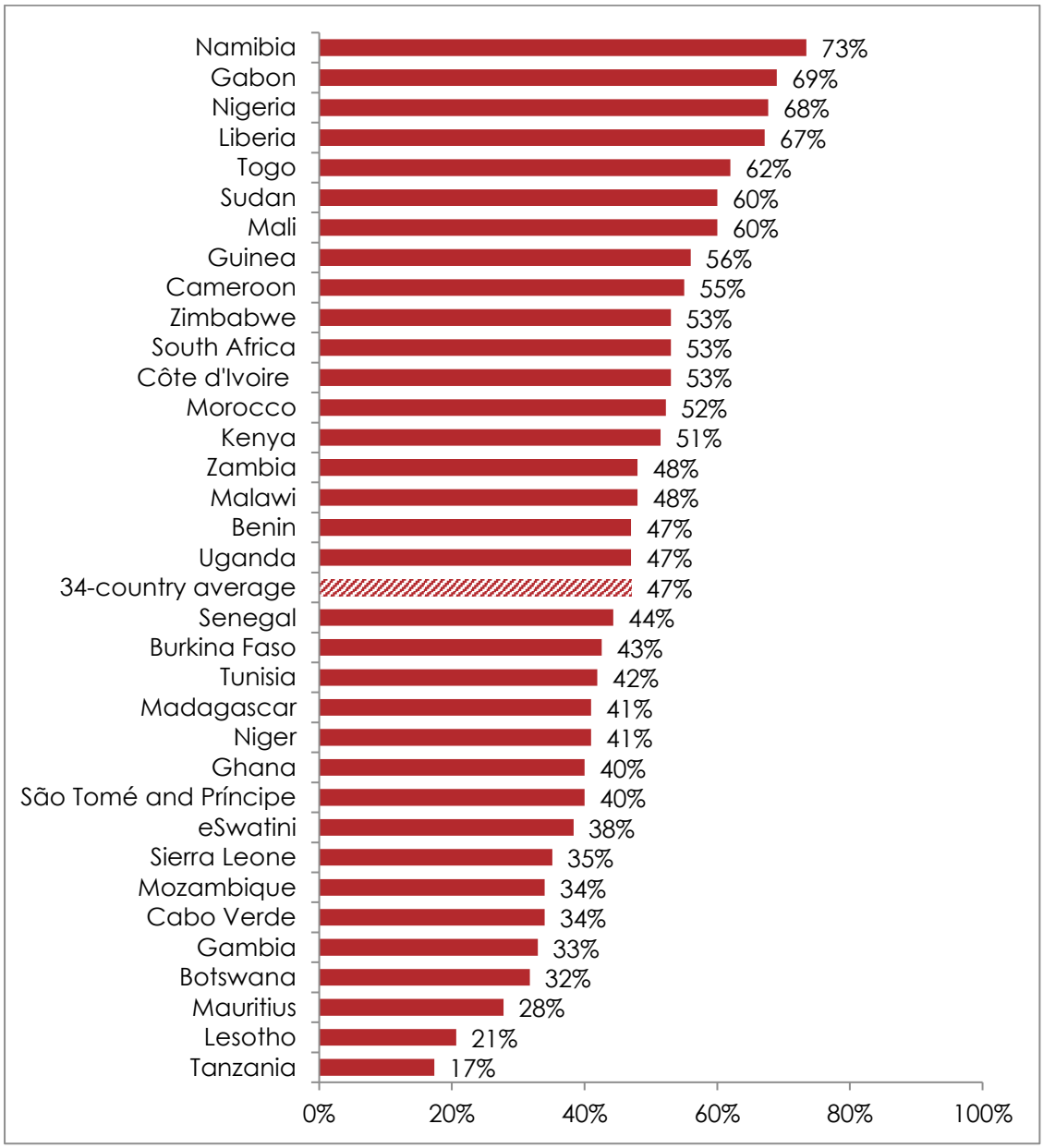
Respondents were asked: *How likely is it that you could get someone to take action if you went to a government office or other public institution to report the following problems, or haven't you heard enough to say?*

- *If you went to the local school to report teacher misbehaviour such as absenteeism or mistreatment of students?*
- *If you went to your [local government office] to report corrupt behaviour like misuse of funds or requests for bribes by government officers, police, or school or clinic staff?*
- *If you went to the local police to report a crime?*

A breakdown by country of how citizens expect governments to respond to reports of corruption (Figure 13) produces some unanticipated results. For example, while Namibians

tend to see little bribery within their country's police force (Figure 11), three out of four (73%) doubt their own ability as citizens to obtain redress when corruption does occur. By contrast, Tanzania appears in the top half of the country rankings on police corruption (Figure 11) yet also boasts the smallest proportion of citizens who think that an official response to a citizen complaint about corruption would languish unattended (17%). Further research is required to understand these cross-national contrasts. One possible supposition is that the Magufuli administration in Tanzania has mounted a more visible anti-corruption and pro-whistleblower campaign than the Geingob government in Namibia.

Figure 13: Official action in response to corruption report not likely | by country | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: *How likely is it that you could get someone to take action if you went to a government office or other public institution to report the following problems, or haven't you heard enough to say: If you went to your [local government office] to report corrupt behaviour like misuse of funds or requests for bribes by government officers, police, or school or clinic staff? (% who say "not very likely" or "not at all likely")*

What explains perceived state performance?

We have shown that, on average, African citizens perceive a modicum of recent improvements in the performance of the state in delivering essential public services (see Figure 1), although there is considerable variation among countries. At the same time, trends in the delivery of these services remain uneven, since rarely more than one-third of the citizens in any given country see consistent and simultaneous service improvements across three essential service sectors – education, health care, and public safety (see Figure 2) – and there are some countries where most citizens agree that public services are worsening.

Why do citizens feel the way they do about the performance of the state?

To explain perceived state performance with reference to aspects of the service-delivery process, we use the index of perceived changes in state performance as measured in Figure 2. Potential explanatory factors are indices for the presence of service infrastructure (Figure 6) and ease of service access (Figure A.1), timeliness of delivery (Figure A.2), respectful treatment by officials (Figure A.3), payment of a bribe (Figure 11), and official responsiveness (Figure 13). A variable for citizen contact with the state is excluded from the model since the analysis is limited to "contacters." Since we lack data that measure changes in the explanatory factors over time, we instead assume that a popular perception that service delivery has recently become better or worse is a *current* attitude that can therefore be explained in terms of other current attitudes.

The results of a linear regression analysis are shown in Table 2. Taken together, various aspects of the service-delivery process explain about 30% of the variance in perceived changes in state performance. Inclusion of other factors – such as the micro-level demographic characteristics of individual respondents or the macro-level physical and economic characteristics of whole countries – would probably add greater explanatory power. But our interest is to discern whether, and to what relative extent, aspects of the service-delivery process influence perceived changes in the performance of African states.

Table 2: Predictors of perceived change in state performance | 34 countries | 2016/2018

	B	SE	Beta	Sig
(Constant)	0.432	0.086		0.000
Presence of service infrastructure	-0.009	0.015	-0.028	0.533
Ease of service access	0.033	0.015	0.143	0.027
Timeliness of service delivery	0.011	0.021	0.034	0.595
Respect shown by public officials	0.052	0.045	0.055	0.244
Had to pay a bribe	-0.040	0.008	-0.232	0.000
Response expected to report of abuse	0.062	0.016	0.189	0.000

Adjusted r squared = 0.182

Taking results in reverse order of importance, we see:

- **Non-influential factors** (with weak, non-significant associations with state performance):
  - **Timeliness of service delivery** has barely discernible influence. While citizens may prefer that services be delivered promptly, they will apparently tolerate delays without impugning the performance of the state.
  - **Respectful treatment by public officials** also plays virtually no role in forming popular opinion about state performance. While citizens certainly expect service providers to be courteous, this preference does not affect popular judgments about whether states are becoming more effective at service provision.
  - **The presence of service infrastructure** has a very limited effect on whether citizens think that state performance is improving. Indeed, once controlled for other factors, the association is negative (while not significant statistically). This result echoes the earlier finding that the presence of physical infrastructure (especially clinics) is not a prerequisite for citizen contact with services (such as health care).
- **Influential factors** (with stronger associations that are statistically significant):
  - **Ease of service access** helps to positively shape popular perceptions of improving state performance. The relationship is both strong (beta = 0.143) and significant at a conventional level (p=<0.05). If service delivery is open, seamless, efficient, and free of bureaucratic red tape, then people tend to think that the state's performance is "getting better."
  - **Official response to complaints.** Corrective action that occurs in response to citizen reports of abuse of office is even more strongly and significantly associated (beta = 0.189, p = <.001) with popular confidence in the performance of the state.
  - **Payment of bribes** for public services has a *profoundly damaging effect* on popular perceptions of changes in state performance. Not only is there a negative sign on the regression coefficient, but the association is the strongest in the model (beta = -0.232) and highly significant (p=<.001). This result indicates that strong informal ties continue to pervade African societies and that they often penetrate the formal structures of the state. It is no exaggeration to say that citizen experience with corruption *drives* popular judgments about how the states on the continent are developing. In this paper we have found no factor that contributes more to why many African citizens think African state performance remains weak.

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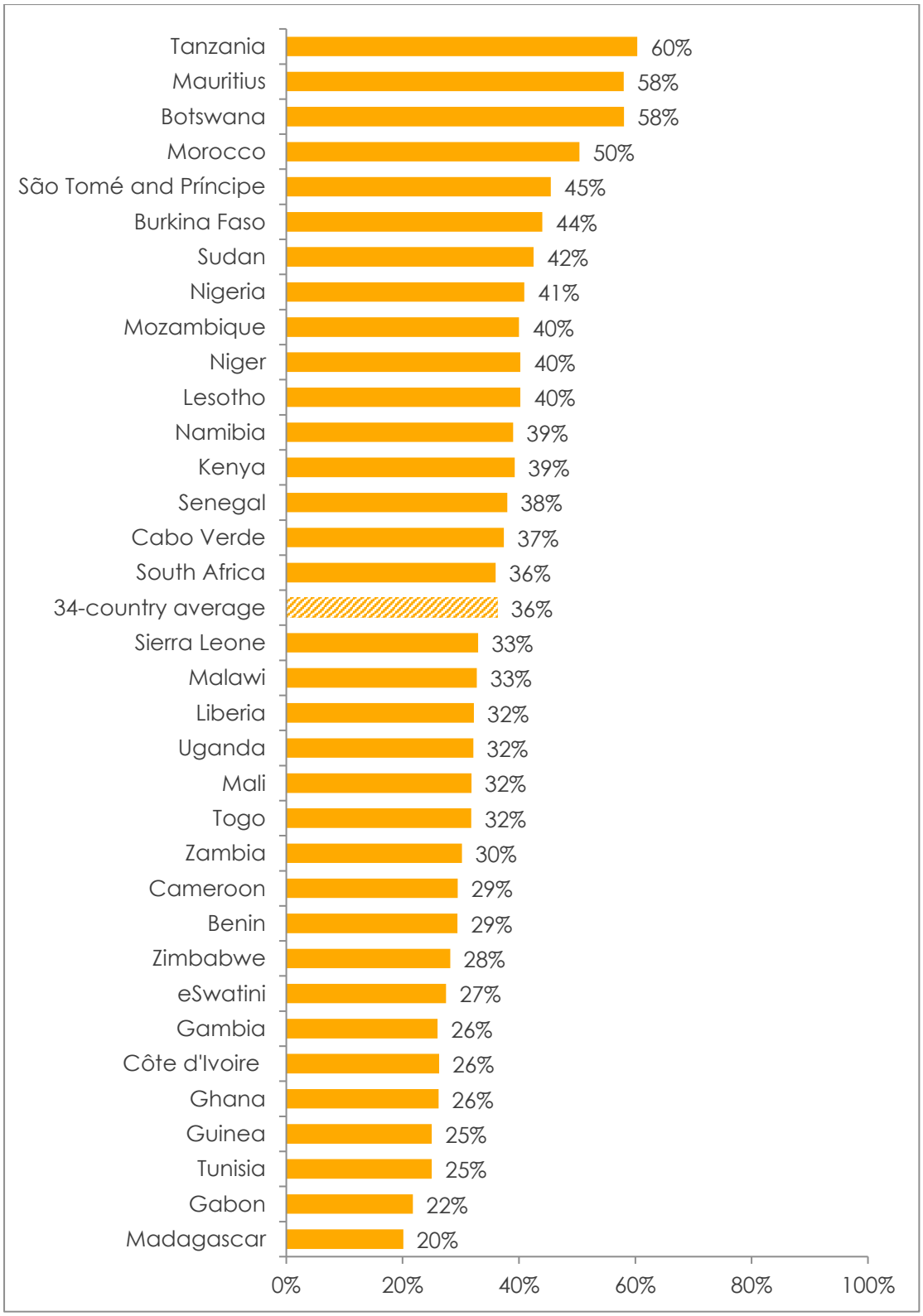
Appendix

Table A.1: Afrobarometer Round 7 fieldwork dates and previous survey rounds

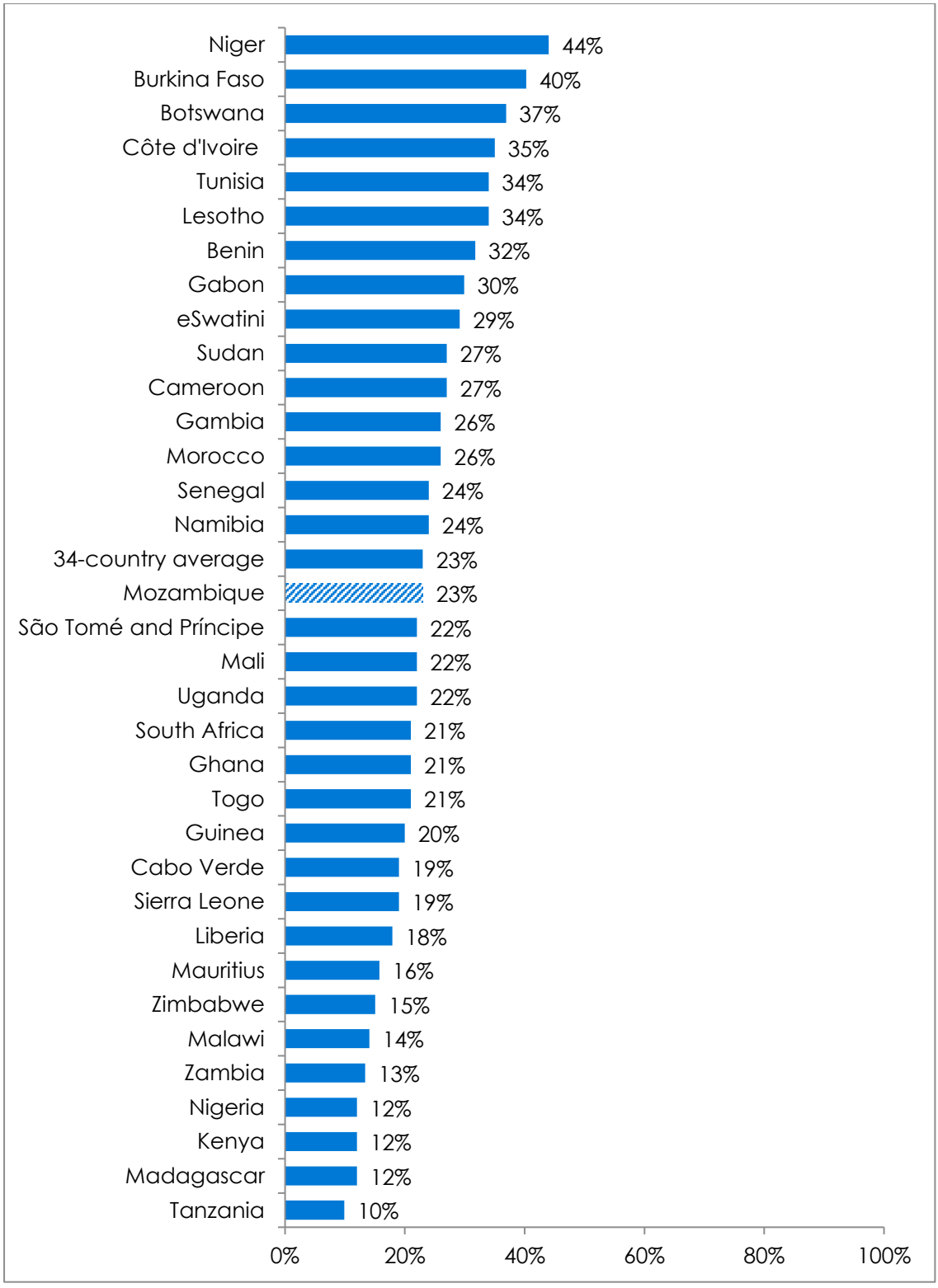
Country	Round 7 fieldwork	Previous survey rounds
Benin	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
Botswana	June-July 2017	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Burkina Faso	Oct 2017	2008, 2012, 2015
Cabo Verde	Nov-Dec 2017	2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
Cameroon	May 2018	2013, 2015
Côte d'Ivoire	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	2013, 2014
eSwatini (Swaziland)	March 2018	2013, 2015
Gabon	Nov 2017	2015
Gambia	July-August 2018	N/A
Ghana	Sept 2017	1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Guinea	May 2017	2013, 2015
Kenya	Sept-Oct 2016	2003, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
Lesotho	Nov-Dec 2017	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Liberia	June-July 2018	2008, 2012, 2015
Madagascar	Jan-Feb 2018	2005, 2008, 2013, 2015
Malawi	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Mali	Feb 2017	2001, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012,2013, 2014
Mauritius	Oct-Nov 2017	2012, 2014
Morocco	May 2018	2013, 2015
Mozambique	July-August 2018	2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015
Namibia	Nov 2017	1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2014
Niger	April-May 2018	2013, 2015
Nigeria	April-May 2017	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2015
São Tomé and Principe	July 2018	2015
Senegal	Dec 2017	2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014
Sierra Leone	July 2018	2012, 2015
South Africa	August-Sept 2018	2000, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2015
Sudan	July-August 2018	2013, 2015
Tanzania	April-June 2017	2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Togo	Nov 2017	2012, 2014
Tunisia	April-May 2018	2013, 2015
Uganda	Dec 2016-Jan2017	2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015
Zambia	April 2017	1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2014
Zimbabwe	Jan-Feb 2017	1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2014

Figure A.1: Reported ease of access to public utilities | by country | 34 countries | 2016/2018



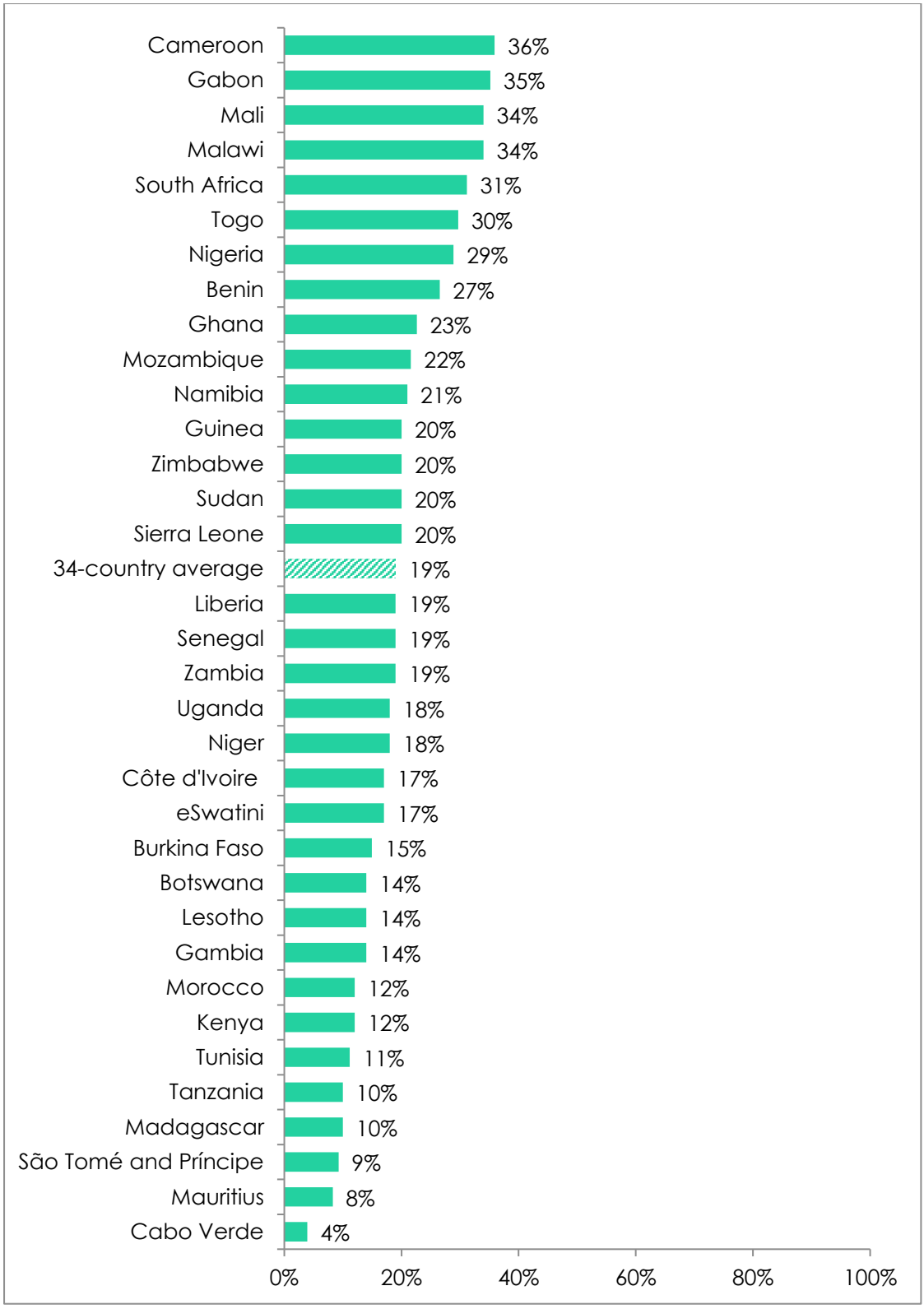
Respondents who had contact with key public utility services were asked: *How easy or difficult was it to obtain the services you needed? (% who say "easy" or "very easy")*

Figure A.2: Reported timeliness of police assistance: 'right away' | by country | 2016/2018



Respondents who had contact with key public services were asked: *How long did it take you to receive the help you needed from the police? (% who say "right away")*

Figure A.3: Perceived disrespectful treatment by public officials | by country | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: *In general, when dealing with public officials, how much do you feel that they treat you with respect? (% who say "not at all")*

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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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