AFRO BAROMETER
LET THE PEOPLE HAVE A SAY

Who gets involved?

Insights on civic engagement in Africa and implications for fostering volunteerism in pursuit of development goals

By Carolyn Logan, Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny, and Kangwook Han

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Introduction[1]

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set ambitious targets for countries and societies to improve lives and livelihoods around the world. While the expectations of meeting these goals largely fall on governments, it is widely recognized that joint efforts by citizens and their governments will be needed to achieve the best outcomes. Citizen action takes place in many forms and forums, including organizing and working together on shared goals, providing mutual support and assistance, campaigning or advocating for shared needs, and engaging with governments, making demands on them, and holding them to account. While some citizens may become involved in a formal capacity, such as through paid employment in nongovernmental advocacy or service organizations and through employment with governments or other service providers, large numbers will – and must – be engaged in a voluntary capacity. Understanding the nature of this voluntary engagement is a key goal of this analysis.

Advocates of volunteerism in Africa have been plagued by a lack of data on who engages in voluntary service, how much they contribute, in what formats, and what the outcomes are. Only a handful of governments have collected data on this topic. Yet our ability to foster and build support for volunteerism is partly dependent on how well we understand the ways people are already engaging every day in these critical but uncompensated contributions in pursuit of the public good.

Afrobarometer data can help to fill this void. Although Afrobarometer has not collected data with the explicit aim of studying volunteerism, for more than 20 years it has captured extensive, nationally representative data on respondents' levels of political and civic participation (much of which can be classed as volunteerism) across seven rounds of surveys in 38 countries. This includes membership in religious and civic organizations and participation in individual and collective efforts to engage with leaders and to voice community needs. In particular, in addition to membership in associations, Afrobarometer tracks the contact of respondents with political and community leaders, their attendance at community meetings, and their efforts to join with others to address issues or express their views. These kinds of civic engagement are the cornerstone of volunteerism to solve problems and improve lives.

Understanding who engages, under what circumstances, and why provides a foundation on which to more effectively promote civic engagement and volunteerism in pursuit of the SDGs and other development objectives. This paper explores Afrobarometer data on civic engagement with four main goals:

- specify how Afrobarometer indicators of civic engagement link to core understandings of volunteerism and its various typologies;
- map profiles and patterns of the people who engage in volunteerism, especially at the country level;
- model voluntary civic engagement to identify the key factors and contexts that facilitate or inhibit it at both the individual and country levels; and
- use these profiles and models to identify entry points for activists who want to foster or support voluntary civic engagement.

[1] A condensed version of this paper, one of seven shortlisted proposals for the United Nations Volunteers Innovation Challenge Fund on Measuring Volunteering and the 2030 Agenda, was published in an anthology titled *Measuring the Economic and Social Contributions of Volunteering*.

Our analysis identifies several factors that shape voluntary civic engagement, from socio-demographic ones such as education and wealth to citizens' socio-political engagement, their personal sense of efficacy, and their overall trust in their governments. Country contexts are important, as we see wide cross-country differences in levels of volunteerism. Among other aspects, wealthier countries, on average, report less volunteerism, while democracies report more. We have found evidence that confronting unmet needs – whether one's own or those of others – is a major motivating factor of voluntary engagement. These findings suggest a number of opportunities and entry points for increasing citizen engagement.

The paper is organized in four parts. Part A begins with a discussion of knowledge on volunteerism and participation, highlighting the lack of evidence and data sources on Africa and how civic engagement intersects with volunteerism. Part B develops descriptive profiles of the participants in voluntary civic engagement. Part C explores key driving factors at the individual and country levels. The final section presents recommendations for acting on these findings.

Part A: How civic engagement maps to volunteering

Linking volunteerism to civic and political participation

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) program and the International Labour Organization (ILO) describe volunteer work as "unpaid work carried out for the benefit of those outside the household," while for CIVICUS it involves "contributing time, skills, ideas and talents for charitable, educational, social, political, economic, humanitarian or other worthwhile purposes" (UNV & ILO, no date; CIVICUS, 2011). To be voluntary, these contributions must be uncompensated and undertaken freely (not coerced) and serve the common or collective good, rather than private or personal gain.

In 1999, UNV identified four categories of volunteerism (UNV, 1999):

- **Mutual aid/self-help** – joining informally with others to meet a perceived need.
- **Philanthropy and service to others** – working together to provide services to others in need.
- **Civic participation** – for example, involvement in political or policy processes.
- **Advocacy and campaigning** – to secure change.

In 2020, a fifth category of **"volunteering as leisure"** was added to reflect how volunteers in other areas, such as environmental conservation or in the arts and sports, can contribute to building a better world (Plan of Action, 2020).

Volunteerism can be informal and based on direct action and engagement with recipients, or it can be more formal and indirect, mediated through voluntary organizations or associations.

While we have a robust analytical framework and a solid typology, sound and specific data on levels of volunteerism, especially data that can be disaggregated into these categories, are often still difficult to come by, especially in Africa (UNV & ILO, no date). The ILO has found that between 2007 and 2017, just 13 countries on the continent captured any measure of volunteerism in their official statistics. The lack of data makes it hard to build up a full picture of the modes and mechanisms of volunteerism, its contributions to social development, and its potential to help achieve the SDGs and other core development goals.

There is, however, a rich body of research and evidence on civic and political participation that can be brought to bear on the study of volunteerism, as there is significant overlap between these forms of engagement. Civic and political participation can take many forms, from contacting leaders to working for a political campaign, voting, and protesting. Clearly not all of these constitute volunteerism. Yet a large amount of the engagement commonly

described as civic or political participation also falls under the umbrella of volunteerism. This can include collective efforts (both formal and informal) to secure resources and services to meet community needs, to fight to protect a right, or to advocate on behalf of underserved groups.

Using the category of civic and political participation to describe volunteerism is not without its challenges. Some of the activities that we describe as civic or political participation – voting or protesting, for example – clearly fall outside the scope of volunteerism as described above. In contrast, other types of behaviour may constitute volunteerism when they serve a collective purpose – for example, contacting a leader to advocate for a new school or health clinic – but not when undertaken in pursuit of more personal or private interests, such as asking for a job or scholarship. As such, categories and boundaries do not always align easily.

Given the lack of data on volunteerism in Africa, it is important to focus on the extensive overlap between these categories of behaviour, rather than the differences. The overlaps are particularly strong, and the alignments are clearest, when we consider participation in voluntary associations.

The literature on civic and political participation tells us a number of key things that can broadly be applied to our understanding of volunteerism. The first concerns the scope and density of engagement. Even before the political openings that swept across the continent in the early 1990s, associational life in Africa was "vibrant" (Bratton, 1989), encompassing engagements ranging from ethnic welfare associations and "hometown" associations (Barkan, McNulty, & Ayeni, 1991) to nascent labor, political, and advocacy groups. The number and scope of these organizations grew in the 1990s as political openings empowered citizens to engage in new and more autonomous ways (Tripp, 1994, 2019), led by independent women's groups, human rights and democracy promotion organizations, and a host of others. Based on self-assessment data collected from their partners in eight countries in Africa in 2008-2011, CIVICUS's Civic Society Index reports that civil society activism and volunteerism are quite high in Africa relative to other regions, while also noting that engagement is generally higher in socially-oriented rather than politically-oriented organizations (CIVICUS, 2011). Some retreat of political opening over the past decade, and declining popular support for associational freedom, have raised concerns that the political space for these engagements may be closing (Logan & Penar, 2019; Tripp, 2019), but on balance Africans continue to enjoy a wide range of opportunities for formal and informal engagement and action.

A growing literature also examines factors associated with civic and political participation, although there is not always consensus on the findings. Among individual-level characteristics, the most widely studied has been the impact of education. While many have concluded that higher levels of education are associated with higher levels of engagement (Mattes & Mughogho, 2009), others have found this relationship to be conditional on the political context, with participation actually decreasing among those with higher education in electoral authoritarian regimes, where participation may be less autonomous and less productive (Croke, Grossman, Larreguy, & Marshall, 2015). Wealth and access to resources have similarly shown mixed impacts. On the one hand we might expect that engagement will be high, because needs are so great, in poorer communities with fewer public services. But analysts have found that wealth and resources can either enable greater participation (Wantchekon, Klašnja, & Novta, 2015) or greater self-reliance and disengagement (Croke *et al.*, 2015). With regard to country context, some have found that democracy and an open political environment foster engagement to express popular demands (Hern, 2017), while others suggest it may instead produce complacency and disengagement (Brass, Harris, & MacLean, 2019). Access to social services, too, may promote greater participation as states fulfill the social contract and stimulate rising expectations (Bleck, 2015; MacLean, 2011) or inhibit it (Brass *et al.*, 2019).

In short, given limited data on volunteerism *per se* in Africa, the wealth of available data on civic and political participation offers an essential starting point for exploring many

unanswered questions about voluntary civic engagement. While the push to gather more direct data on volunteerism must be pursued (UNV & ILO, n.d.), there is much that can be learned from existing data resources such as Afrobarometer surveys, which we will explore in the remainder of this paper.

Measuring volunteerism as voluntary civic engagement using Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Seven rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018. Round 8 surveys (2019/2021) are underway, planned in at least 35 countries.

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 between ±2 and ±3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. The national surveys use the same questionnaires and methods, allowing both longitudinal and cross-sectional comparisons of data on voluntary civic engagement.

This paper draws primarily on data from 45,823 interviews completed in 34 countries between September 2016 and September 2018, during Afrobarometer Round 7, and makes comparisons with data from previous rounds. (See Appendix A for a list of countries and survey dates.) The countries covered are home to almost 80% of the continent's population. The data are weighted to ensure nationally representative samples. When reporting multi-country findings, such as regional or Africa-wide averages, all countries are weighted equally (rather than in proportion to population size).

Afrobarometer asks respondents about a number of different kinds of civic engagement and political participation. Despite the fact that these questions were designed with the goal of understanding political and social engagement broadly, rather than volunteerism specifically, the findings provide significant insights into patterns of voluntary civic engagement. Specific modes of participation captured by Afrobarometer include attending a community meeting; joining forces with others to raise an issue; contacting government, political, or civil society leaders; and being involved in a community group or voluntary association.

Table 1 shows some key characteristics of the modes of participation measured by Afrobarometer, including whether the participation takes place formally through an organization or is a form of informal engagement. We also record whether for our purposes the mode of participation can be considered a form of volunteerism or may also take place for personal or private reasons. In addition, we map these measures of participation onto the UNV typology of volunteerism described above.

Among the Afrobarometer indicators, active engagement with a voluntary organization is the only mode of participation that can be consistently described as being formal or organized. Moreover, this mode of volunteering is, almost by definition, consistently for the community, rather than for the pursuit of private objectives. In contrast, the other three measures capture informal, non-organizational forms of volunteerism or participation. Perhaps more importantly for our purposes, all three can take place either for purposes that benefit the community and others outside the household or in pursuit of more personal agendas. As such, while we might anticipate that the bulk of participation captured by these measures reflects the principles of volunteerism, they may also capture other non-volunteering participation.

In terms of linkages to the typology of volunteerism, like association membership, getting together with others more informally can also be associated with any type of volunteerism. However, the other two measures (attending a community meeting and contacting leaders) link more selectively. When leaders are contacted by volunteers, for example, it is likely to be in pursuit of a local or community self-help need or to advocate for a policy or action. Community meetings are also likely to be narrower in terms of the scope of their intended impacts.

Table 1: Mapping Afrobarometer civic participation indicators onto modes of volunteerism

			Typology of volunteerism				
Afrobarometer civic participation indicators	**Formal or informal**	**Can have non-volunteer purpose**	**Mutual aid/ self-help**	**Philanthropy and service to others**	**Civic participation**	**Advocacy and campaigning**	**Volunteering as leisure**
Active member in or official leader of a voluntary association or community group	Formal		X	X	X	X	X
Attend a community meeting	Informal	X	X		X		
Get together with others to raise an issue	Informal	X	X	X	X	X	X
Contact leaders	Informal	X	X			X	

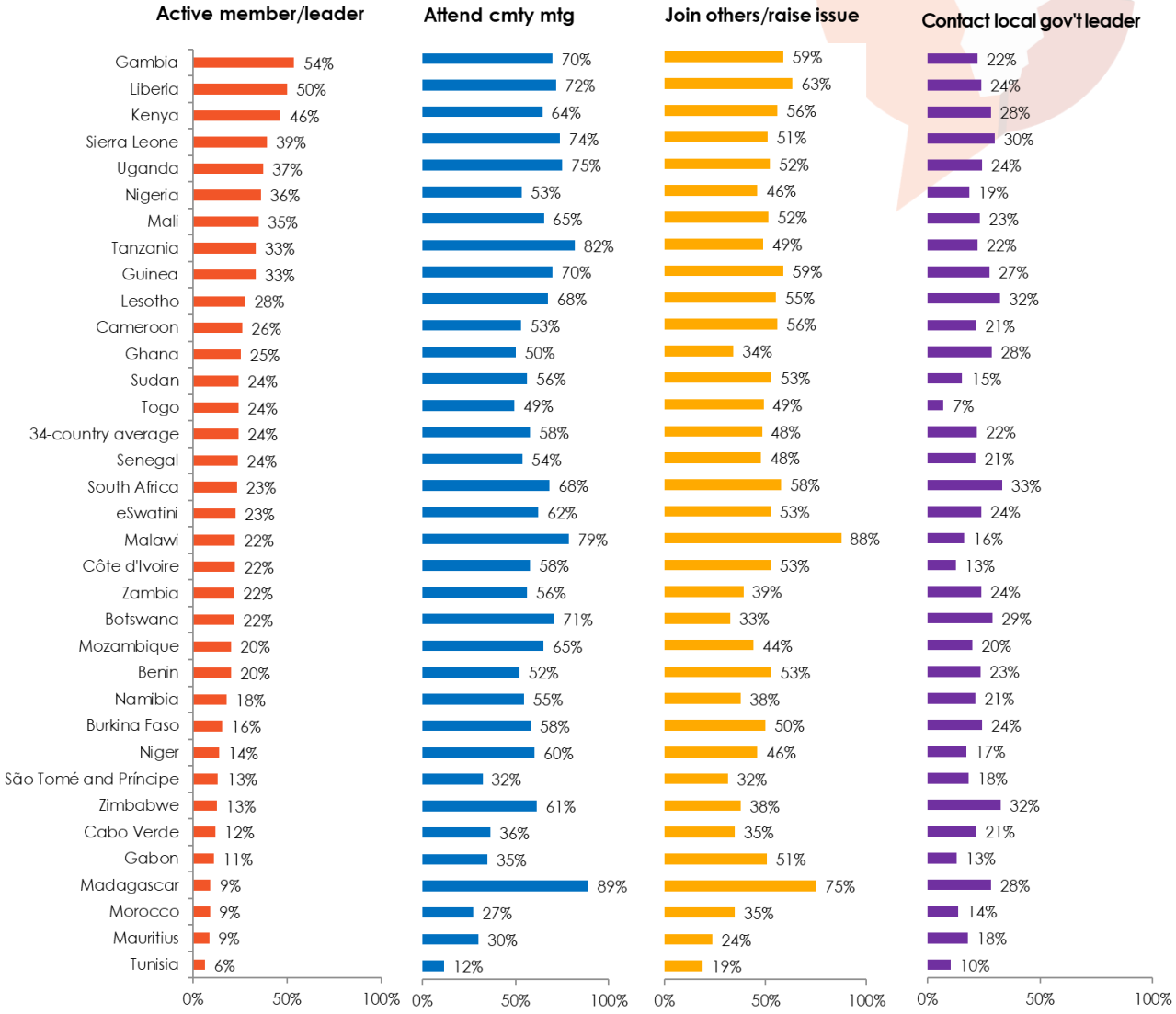
Across 34 countries, attending community meetings is on average the most common form of civic participation (Figure 1): Nearly six in 10 Africans (58%) attended a community meeting during the previous year. Nonetheless, there are wide variations across countries, from as high as 89% in Madagascar, 82% in Tanzania, and 79% in Malawi to just 12% in Tunisia. Half of respondents (48%) joined others to raise an issue at least once during the previous year, a practice that is extremely common in Malawi (88%) and Madagascar (75%). Yet fewer than a quarter of respondents in Mauritius (24%) and Tunisia (19%) reported having done so.

About one in four Africans (24%) say they are either leaders or active members of voluntary associations or community groups. This proportion is highest in the Gambia (54%), Liberia (50%), and Kenya (46%), where around half of citizens report active membership or leadership of voluntary associations, compared to fewer than one in 10 in Morocco (9%), Mauritius (9%), Madagascar (9%), and Tunisia (6%).

We also asked how often respondents contacted key officials to discuss important problems or give them their views. One in five (22%) say they contacted local government councillors about important problems at least once during the previous year, while just half as many (11%) contacted a member of Parliament (MP). Government officials (15%) and political party officials (16%) were contacted more often than MPs but less often than local government representatives. Contact rates with informal leaders from outside government and politics were significantly higher: 29% contacted a traditional leader, and more than four in 10 (43%) contacted a religious leader at least once in the past year. Contact with local government councillors was highest South Africa (33%) and two of its neighbors, Lesotho and Zimbabwe (32% each). It was lowest in Togo and Tunisia, where only one in 10 did so at least once during the previous year.

Tunisia records very low proportions on all four indicators of civic participation, while Mauritius, Morocco, Cabo Verde, and São Tomé and Príncipe are consistently below average on at least three indicators. Other countries show mixed patterns. Malagasy, for instance, are among the least likely to be leaders or active members of voluntary associations or community groups, but have very high levels of attending community meetings and joining others to raise issues.

Figure 1: Participation in Africa across 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked:

Now I am going to read out a list of groups that people join or attend. For each one, could you tell me whether you are an official leader, an active member, an inactive member, or not a member: Some other voluntary association or community group? (% "official leader" or "active member")
(Note: The other group asked about was "religious group that meets outside of regular worship services," so engagement in religious organizations is not captured by this indicator.)
Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year: Attended a community meeting? Got together with others to raise an issue?" (% who say "once or twice," "several times," or "often")
During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views: A local government councillor? (% who say "only once," "a few times," or "often")

For the purposes of this analysis, we wish to focus on the form of participation that best represents the concept of volunteerism or voluntary civic engagement. In making this selection, we consider what each indicator captures, as well as how it is linked to other forms of participation and to the typologies of volunteerism as described above.

Correlations among the indicators are shown in Table 2. Attending a community meeting is significantly correlated with all the other indicators. However, as already noted, we expect

that this indicator may substantially overstate volunteerism or even capture the concept poorly. Community meetings are held for various reasons, including for information gathering or information sharing and for government to organize community activities or action. They may be social or civic events and can be called by political leaders or organized by community members. Similarly, participation may be entirely voluntary, or it may be partially or substantially coerced through some degree of social or political sanction. This means that despite its correlation with other indicators, this indicator is too broad to serve as an adequate proxy for volunteerism.

Table 2: Correlations among different forms of civic participation (Pearson's r)

	Active member or official leader of a voluntary association or community group	Attend a community meeting	Get together with others to raise an issue	Contact local government councillor
Active member or official leader of a voluntary association or community group	1.000			
Attend a community meeting	**.555****	1.000		
Get together with others to raise an issue	**.439****	**.727****	1.000	
Contact local government councillor	0.306	**.573****	0.182	1.000

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

For the purposes of this study, using contact with local government councillor as an indicator also has some weaknesses. Aside from attending a community meeting, it is not significantly correlated with other indicators. In addition, the question asks whether respondents made contact about an important problem or to voice their views. This means this indicator captures both contact made by individuals seeking to address community problems and contact that occurs to solve personal problems, which would fall outside our definition of volunteerism. In fact, when Afrobarometer asked respondents in Round 6 (2014/2015) about why they had contacted their leaders, nearly 40% of those making contact said they had done so to discuss a personal problem (this question was not asked in Round 7).

In contrast, the other two indicators capture forms of participation more closely aligned with the definitions of volunteerism or voluntary civic engagement of interest here. The two variables are significantly correlated – and in fact, one thing that formal organizations may do is help people join forces to raise issues. However, as noted, absolute levels reported for "getting together with others to raise an issue" (48%) are approximately double the rates at which people report being active in or leading voluntary or civic organizations. This is perhaps not surprising, as engaging with an association or organization requires more commitment than the more informal and perhaps more episodic engagement that may be captured by getting together with others. It is also consistent with findings reported elsewhere that people are significantly more likely to participate in informal forms of volunteerism than in formal, organizational engagement (CIVICUS, 2011). Both indicators clearly capture participation whose nature and goals are shared. They also exclude the sort of engagement aimed only at addressing personal issues that might be captured by the "contact" indicator.

Although either variable could potentially serve our purposes for exploring volunteerism, we have opted for the more stringent indicator of active membership in or leadership of a voluntary association or community group. This suggests ongoing voluntary civic engagement, as opposed to potentially short-term activity around a single issue or event. It also excludes protest and related activities.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of focusing on this indicator, particularly as it only captures formal associational volunteering, rather than the full scope of both formal and informal engagement. Due to the higher demands that formal volunteering places on individuals, focusing only on this type may under-represent the engagement of some categories of participants, especially women and those with less ability to commit time or resources on an ongoing basis. This weakness is exacerbated by the fact that none of the Afrobarometer indicators capture time invested in this voluntary work, a critical factor to consider, especially for poorer and female respondents. Nonetheless, while membership or leadership in an association is not a perfect indicator, the wealth of data available on this indicator has a great deal to tell us not only about formal volunteerism but about volunteerism more generally.

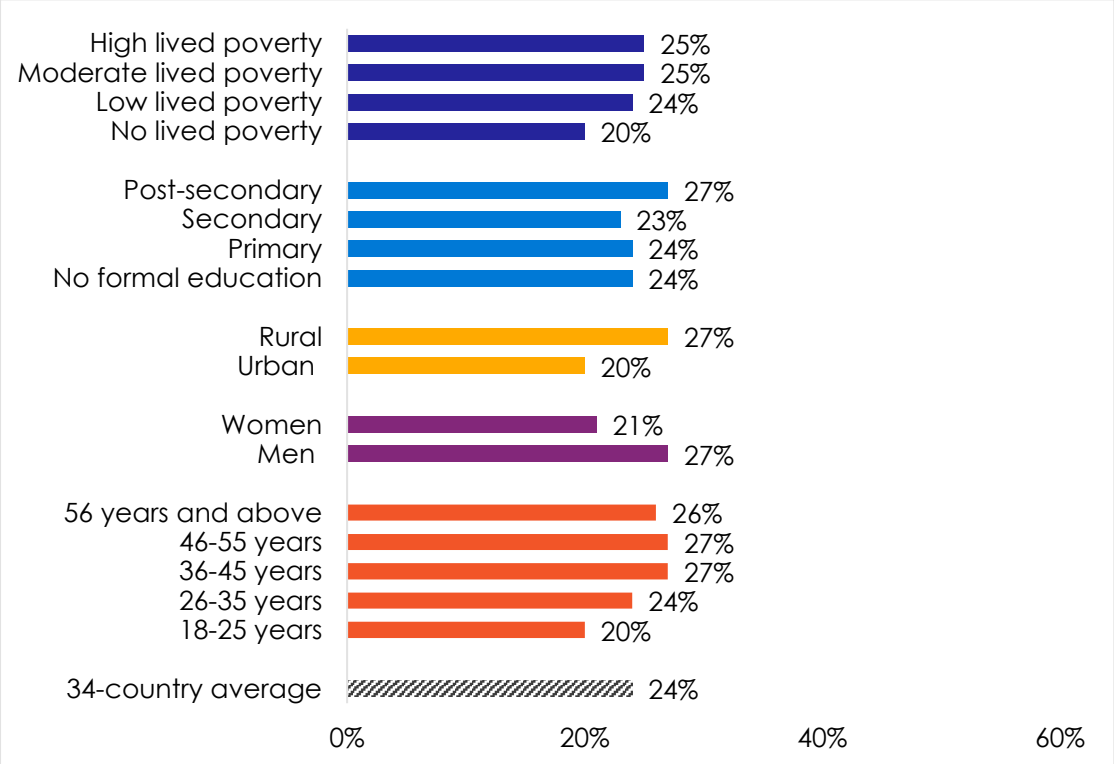
The remainder of this paper will focus on membership or leadership in a voluntary association or community group as a key indicator of voluntary civic engagement. The following sections will first offer a descriptive analysis of who volunteers in this way. We will then continue with a more comprehensive statistical analysis of various factors at both the individual and country levels that may shape the propensity of individuals to engage. Finally, we will conclude with some thoughts on entry points for encouraging and supporting voluntary civic engagement based on these findings.

Part B: Findings of Afrobarometer data

Who participates?

We begin our assessment of who participates with an overview of the socio-demographic profile of individuals who identify as participating in voluntary civic engagement. The findings for the 34 countries reveal several patterns (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Average profile of participants in voluntary civic engagement (group members/leaders) | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: *Now I am going to read out a list of groups that people join or attend. For each one, could you tell me whether you are an official leader, an active member, an inactive member, or not a member: Some other voluntary association or community group?" (% "official leader" or "active member")*

Men engage at significantly higher levels than women (27% compared to 21%). Rural inhabitants are also considerably more engaged than urban residents (27% compared to 20%). The patterns for other socio-demographic characteristics are more subtle: The differences among older age cohorts (36-45 years of age, 46-55, and 56 and above) are not significant (26%-27%), while the youngest cohort (18-25 years of age) is significantly less likely to participate (20%).

The statistics show a similar pattern for poverty: There are no significant differences among those with low, moderate, or high lived poverty (24%-25%), while people with no lived poverty are significantly less engaged (20%).[2] Regarding education, respondents with post-secondary qualifications (27%) are significantly more likely to engage than those with less education (23%–24%).

It is also worth noting the apparently contradictory findings that low levels of poverty and high levels of education seem to have contrasting effects. Respondents with no lived poverty participate at the lowest rate, while respondents with the highest levels of education participate at the highest rate. As we will see later in this paper, the negative effects of rising incomes on participation may be counterbalanced by the positive effects of rising education.

Gaps in voluntary civic engagement

One way to examine these differences descriptively is to compare the gaps between the highest and lowest categories across countries. For example, on average across the 34 countries, there is a rural-urban gap in voluntary civic engagement of 8 percentage points, the largest difference across all the socio-demographic factors examined.[3] However, this average hides significant variations across countries (Figure 3). The gap is much wider in Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Togo, and Zambia, where urban residents are 17-22 percentage points behind their rural counterparts. In contrast, urban residents in Burkina Faso, the Gambia, and Morocco are 4 percentage points more likely than rural residents to participate in voluntary civic engagement. These significant differences highlight the importance of distinctive country features and profiles in understanding individual decisions to engage in this form of volunteerism. Note that gaps of 2 percentage points or less are within the margin of error and not considered significant.

The findings are similar for gender (Figure 4). The average gap between men and women is 7 percentage points, but it is much wider in Liberia (20 percentage points), Sierra Leone (18 points), Guinea (17 points), and Nigeria (15 points). There is no country where women participate more than men in this particular measure of formal volunteerism, although in Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Morocco, Namibia, Tunisia, and Tanzania, participation by men and women is statistically equal.

The findings are also mixed when it comes to age (Figure 5). Lesotho and Liberia have the largest gap in participation (26 percentage points) between the oldest age cohort (56 years and above) and the youngest (18-25 years). In contrast, in Cabo Verde, Gabon, Morocco,

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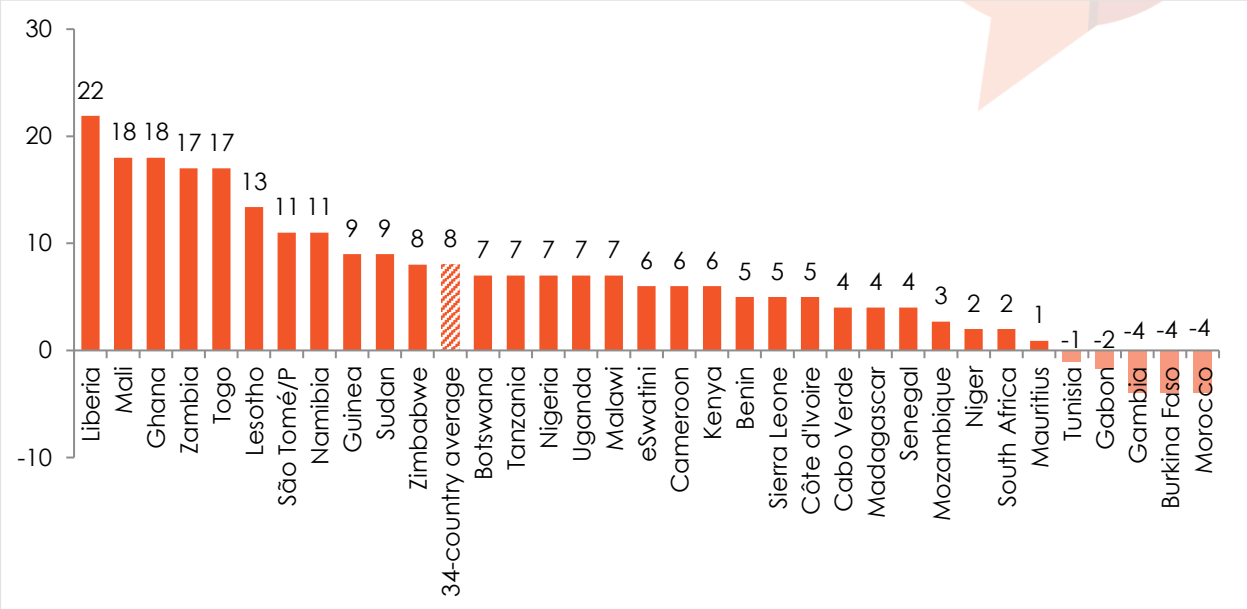
[2] The Afrobarometer Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) in the preceding year. An average score is calculated for each respondent, ranging from 0 for those who never went without any necessary item to 4 for an individual who reports always going without all the items. For our purposes, these scores are condensed into categories of "no lived poverty" (LPI of 0, reported for around 13% of all respondents), "low lived poverty" (LPI of 0.2-1.0, reported for 37% of respondents), "moderate lived poverty" (LPI of 1.2-2.0, reported for 32% of respondents), and "high lived poverty" (LPI of 2.2 or greater, reported for 19% of respondents). For more on lived poverty, see Mattes, 2020.

[3] The rounding of the numbers in Figure 2 suggests the difference is only 7 percentage points, but the actual difference is closer to 8 percentage points.

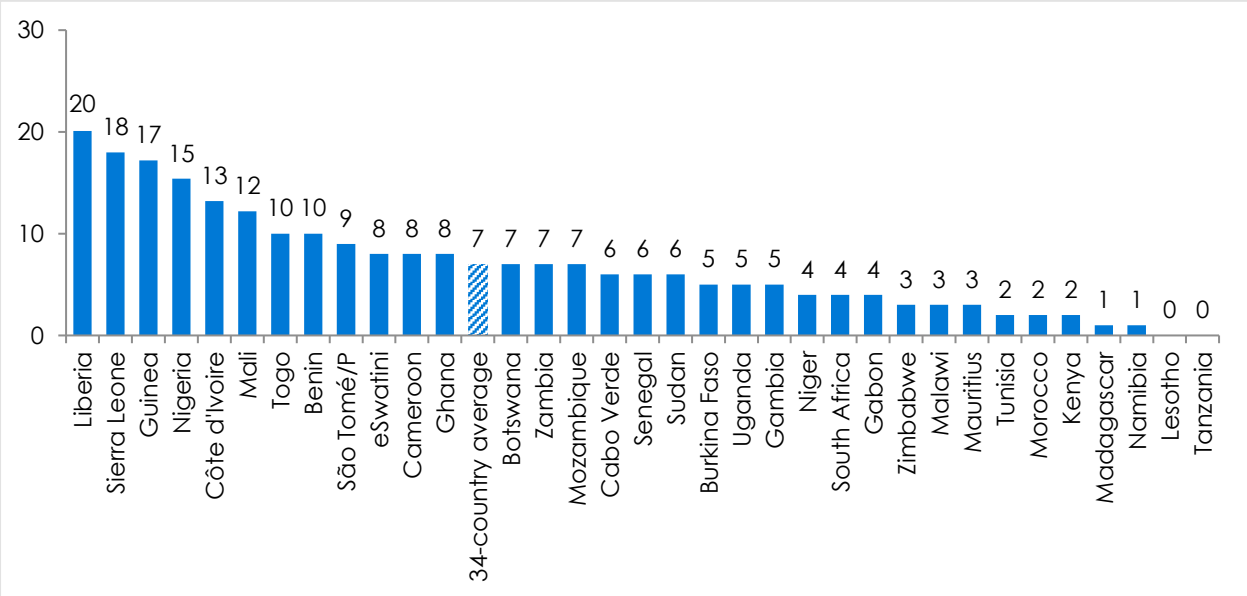
and Tunisia, young adults are more likely than older citizens to be active members or leaders of voluntary associations.

Figure 3: Gaps in rural-urban participation (percentage points) | 34 countries | 2016/2018



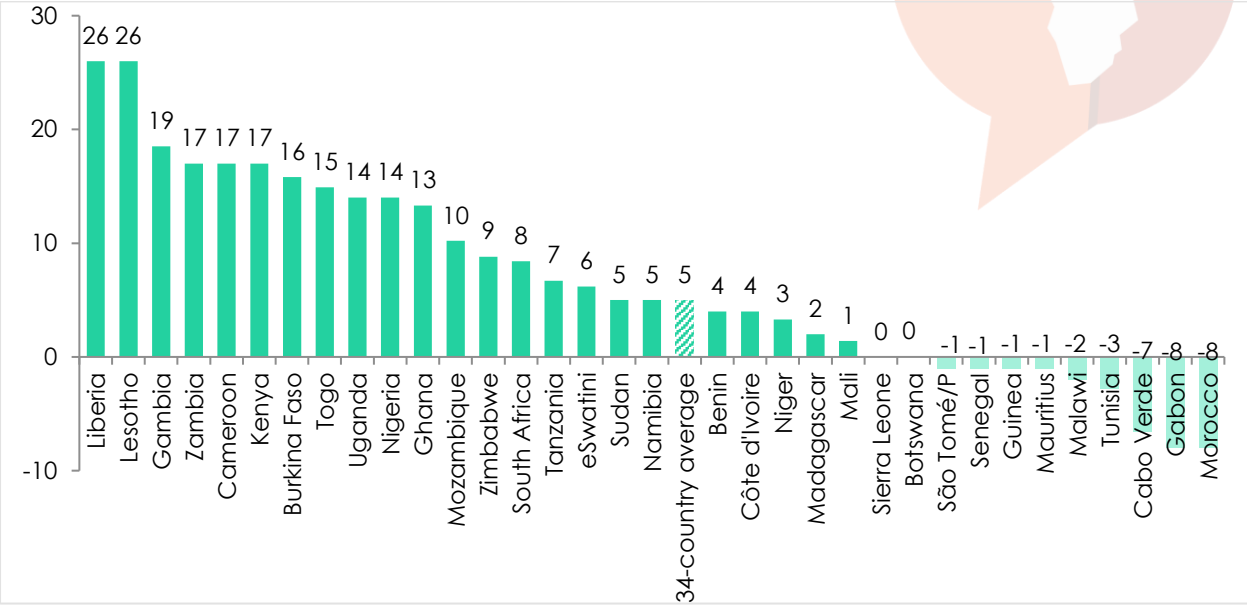
Respondents were asked: *Now I am going to read out a list of groups that people join or attend. For each one, could you tell me whether you are an official leader, an active member, an inactive member, or not a member: Some other voluntary association or community group? (% "official leader" or "active member")*
Note: *Numbers shown are rural minus urban participation rates. A negative number means participation was higher in urban compared to rural areas.*
Note: *Small differences between charts can occur due to rounding (e.g. in Figure 2, the rural-urban gap appears to be 7 percentage points because of rounding, but in this chart, the gap between unrounded percentages shows as 8 points).*

Figure 4: Gaps in male-female participation (percentage points) | 34 countries | 2016/2018



(% "official leader" or "active member" of a voluntary association or community group)
Note: *Numbers shown are male minus female participation rates.*

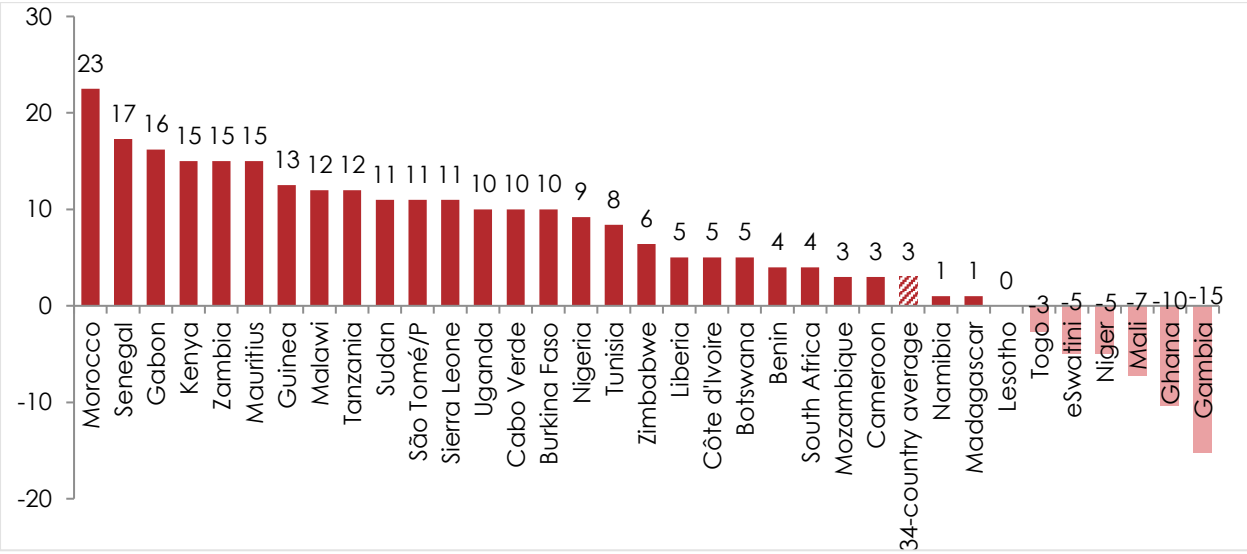
Figure 5: Gaps in oldest-youngest participation (percentage points) | 34 countries | 2016/2018



(% "official leader" or "active member" of a voluntary association or community group)
Note: *Numbers shown are oldest minus youngest age-group participation rates. A negative number means participation was higher among the youngest age cohort compared to older cohorts.*

Although the average gap between the most and least educated respondents is marginal, the country-level results show some of the widest variations (Figure 6). While in general participation is more common among respondents with a higher level of education, especially in Morocco (23 percentage points), Senegal (17 points), and Gabon (16 points), in several countries the opposite is true. Citizens with no formal education in eSwatini, the Gambia, Ghana, Mali, Niger, and Togo are more likely than those with post-secondary education to participate (3-15 percentage points). There is no significant difference between the highest and lowest levels of education in Lesotho, Madagascar, and Namibia.

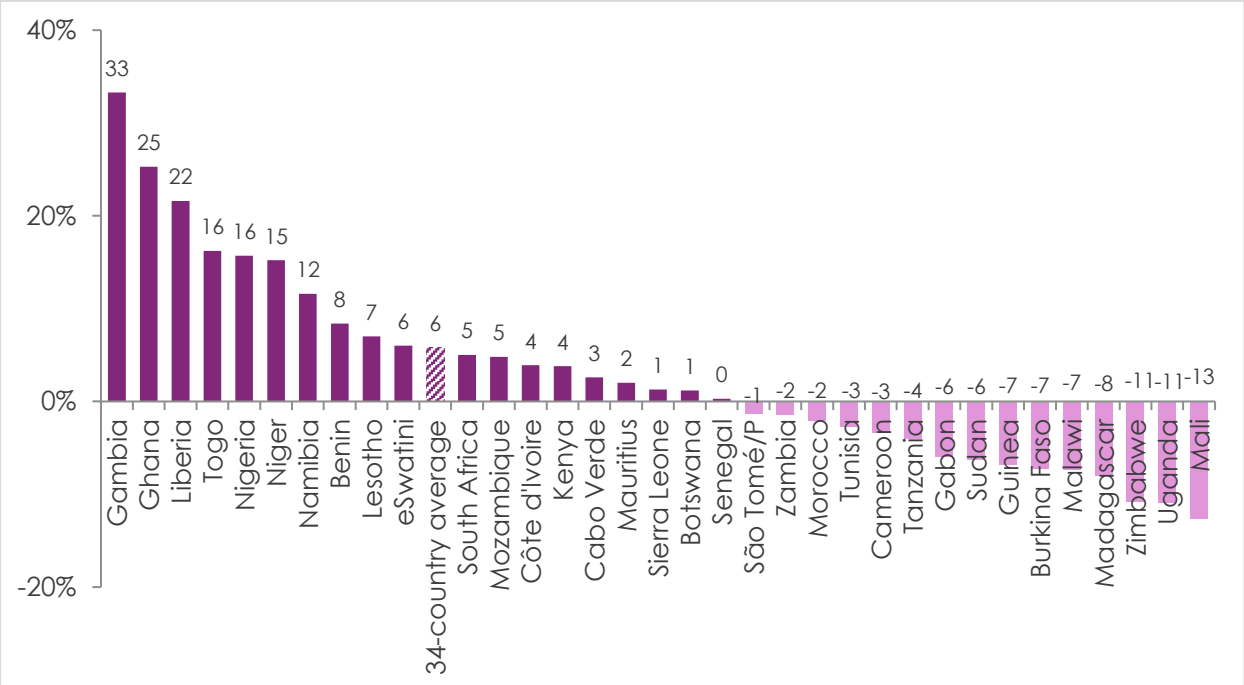
Figure 6: Gaps in most-least educated (percentage points) | 34 countries | 2016/2018



(% "official leader" or "active member" of a voluntary association or community group)
Note: *Numbers shown are post-secondary minus no-formal-education participation rates. A negative number means participation was higher among respondents with no formal education compared to those with post-secondary education.*

The relationship between wealth and levels of engagement is the least consistent across countries (Figure 7). On average, people with lower levels of wealth participate more than people with higher levels. However, this is only true in 15 of the 34 countries. The gap reaches 33 percentage points in the Gambia and 25 points in Ghana. In contrast, there are 12 countries where people with higher levels of wealth are actually more likely to participate, albeit by generally narrower margins. In another seven countries, there is no statistically significant gap. This somewhat counterintuitive finding may reflect the contradictory effects of increasing wealth. On the one hand, wealth is typically linked to higher levels of education and the associated awareness and efficacy that go with it. On the other, it is also linked to greater levels of comfort and thus, perhaps, complacency. The interplay among these factors at different levels of both personal and national wealth may explain these diverse patterns.

Figure 7: Gap in voluntary civic engagement between people with high lived poverty and no lived poverty (percentage-point difference in participation rate) | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Note: *Numbers shown are high-lived-poverty minus no-lived-poverty participation rates. A negative number means participation was higher among respondents experiencing no lived poverty, compared to those experiencing high lived poverty.*

Country profiles

While we can build a general profile of who participates based on our 34-country data, there are significant differences across countries. We have generated profiles for each of the 34 countries in the sample (see Appendix B). Comparing just a few of them highlights these differences.

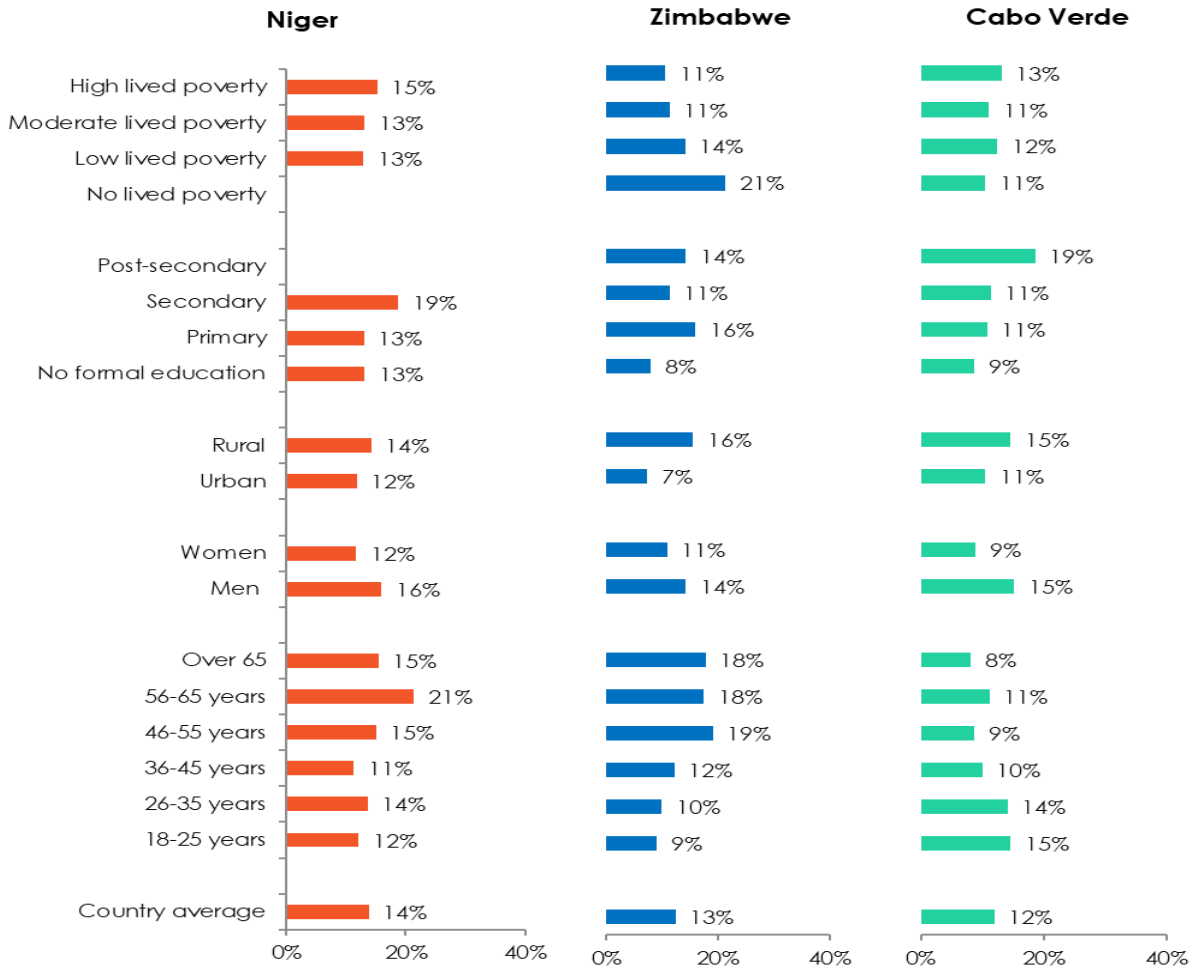
For example, comparing three countries at relatively low levels of participation (Figure 8), we see the contrast between Niger, where participation increases with poverty, and Zimbabwe, where participation is significantly higher among the wealthiest. In Cabo Verde, on the other hand, there is no clear pattern relative to levels of wealth.

Similarly, patterns are reversed between Cabo Verde, where participation is highest among the youngest age cohorts, and Zimbabwe and Niger, where older respondents are more engaged. Note also that while rural respondents participate more in most countries, the

margin is more than 2 to 1 in Zimbabwe, whereas the difference is relatively small in Niger and Cabo Verde.

Trends vis-à-vis education tend to be somewhat "muddier." A few countries show a clear trend of participation increasing with education (e.g. Cabo Verde in Figure 8, as well as Senegal, Sudan, Morocco, and Gabon (see Appendix B)). Ghana (in Figure 9) is unusual in reflecting a clear decreasing pattern. But many countries either show relatively consistent participation across all education levels or, like Zimbabwe, show variation across levels but without a clear trend.

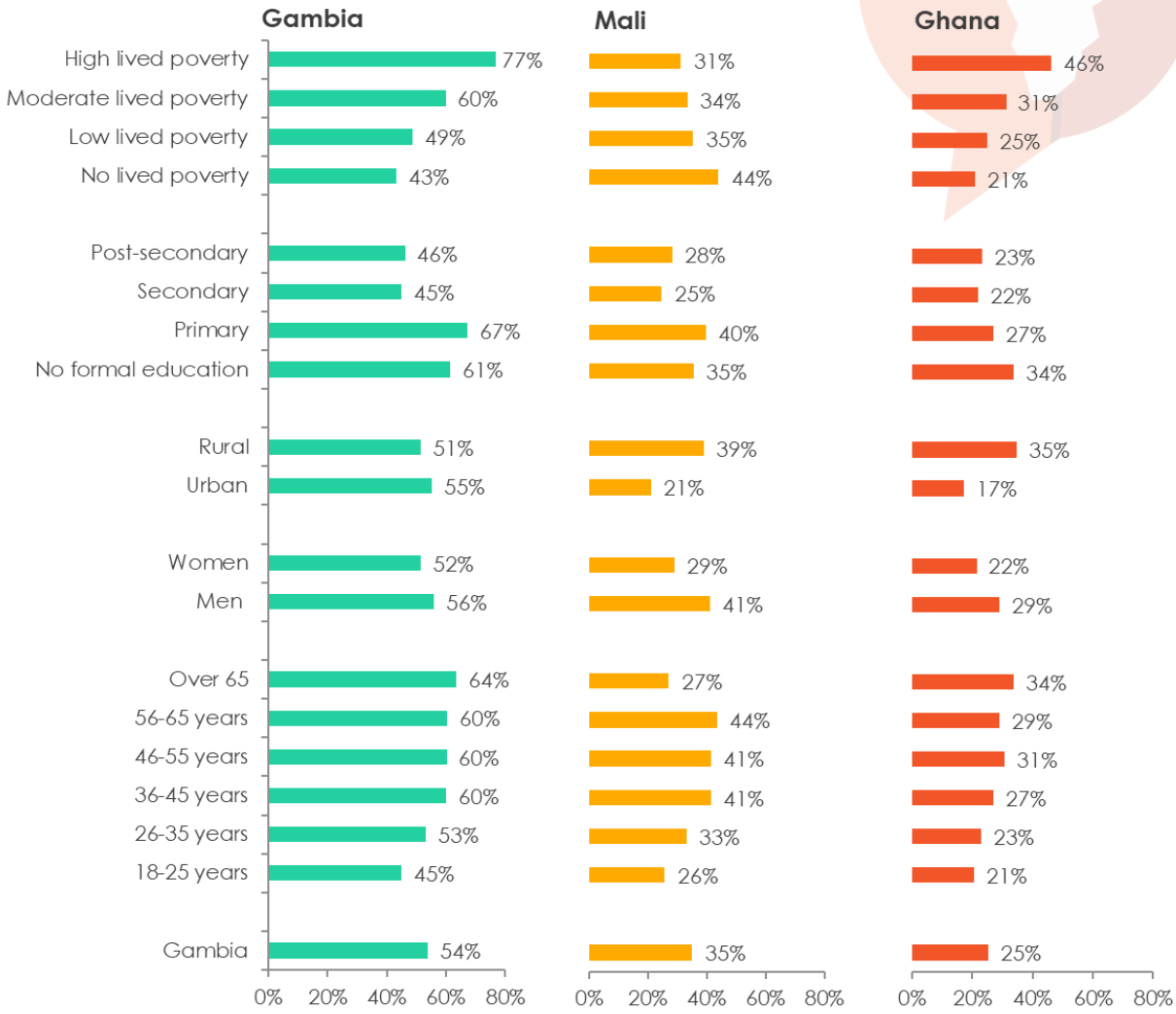
Figure 8: Country profiles: Low participation | 2016/2018



(% "official leader" or "active member" of a voluntary association or community group)
Note: *Results for some categories are not shown due to small sample sizes.*

Similarly divergent patterns are evident among countries at moderate to high levels of participation (Figure 9). The Gambia and Ghana follow the most common trend of higher participation among groups with higher lived poverty, while Mali displays the opposite pattern. The Gambia also stands out as one of the few countries where urban participation rates are higher than those in rural areas. All three of these countries show fairly typical patterns for age (middle and/or oldest cohorts participate more), while patterns for education vary, with higher engagement among groups with lower levels of education.

Figure 9: Profiles of countries with moderate to high participation | 2016/2018



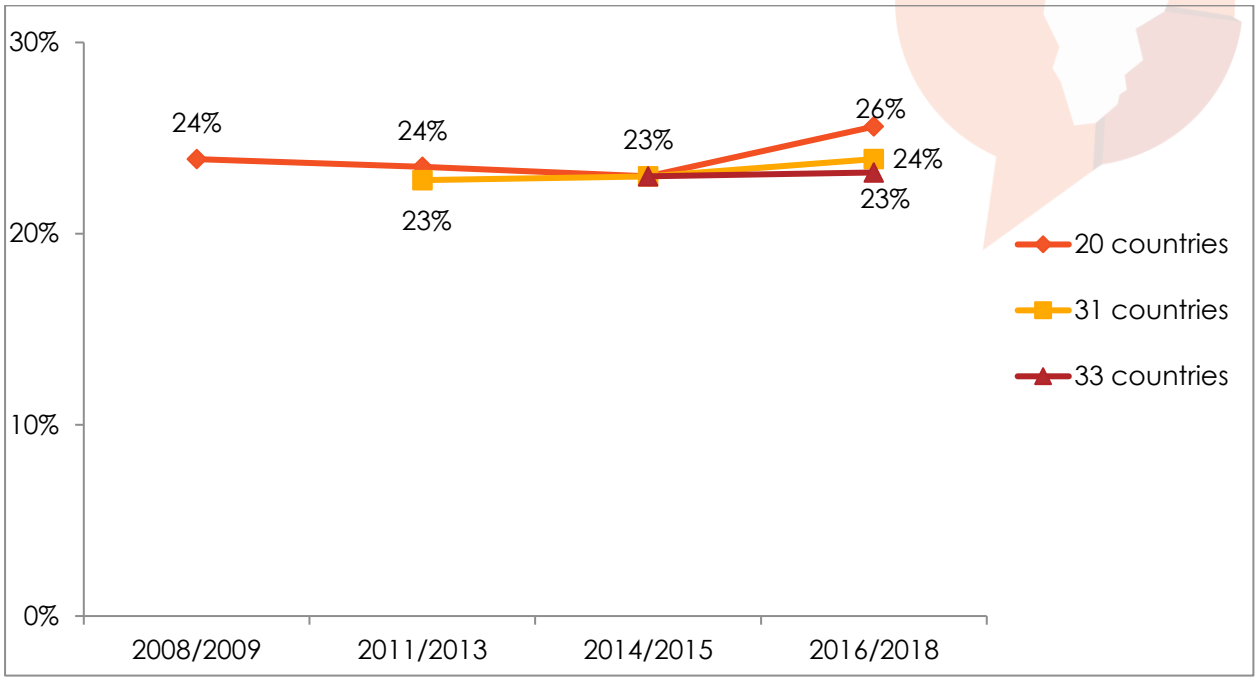
(% "official leader" or "active member" of a voluntary association or community group)

Trends over time

A key question when it comes to studying volunteerism is whether the practice is increasing or decreasing: Have economic, social, or political trends over the past decade resulted in more or less voluntary civic engagement? If people with higher lived poverty are more likely to participate in voluntary organizations, as shown by the aggregate data, have the economic gains that have reduced levels of poverty across many countries in Africa also resulted in lower levels of volunteerism? Or does increasing urbanization – where engagement levels are typically lower – mean less engagement? Or are these factors potentially countered by higher levels of education, which are associated with higher levels of voluntary civic engagement (Krönke & Olan'g, 2020)?

Afrobarometer data suggest that levels of associational membership have been remarkably stable over time, at least as a whole (Figure 10). Whether we compare the 33 countries included in the sixth and seventh rounds or the 31 countries in Rounds 5-7, there is very little variation over time. When we compare just the 20 countries included since Round 4, there appears to be a small uptick between Round 6 and Round 7, but even this only amounts to a gain of 3 percentage points, and the cumulative change since Round 4 is only 2 percentage points and thus does not exceed the margin of error. In short, there is no evidence of an aggregate trend in voluntary civic engagement.

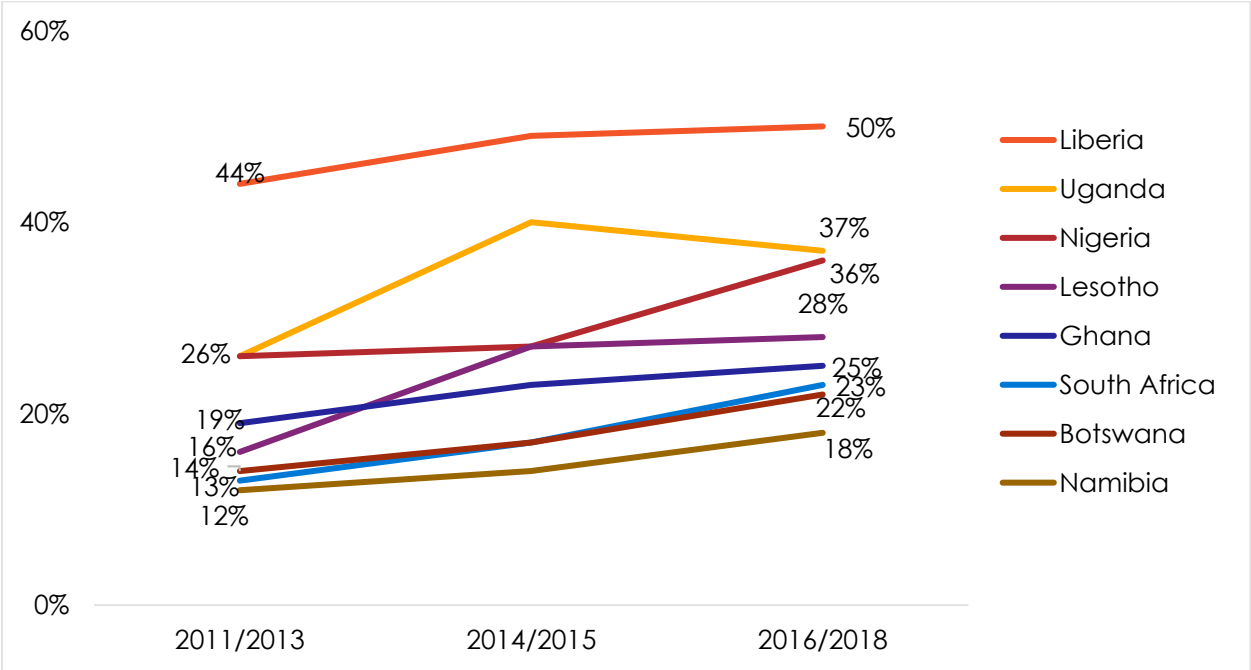
Figure 10: Trends over time in voluntary civic engagement | 33 countries | 2008-2018



(% "official leader" or "active member" of a voluntary association or community group)

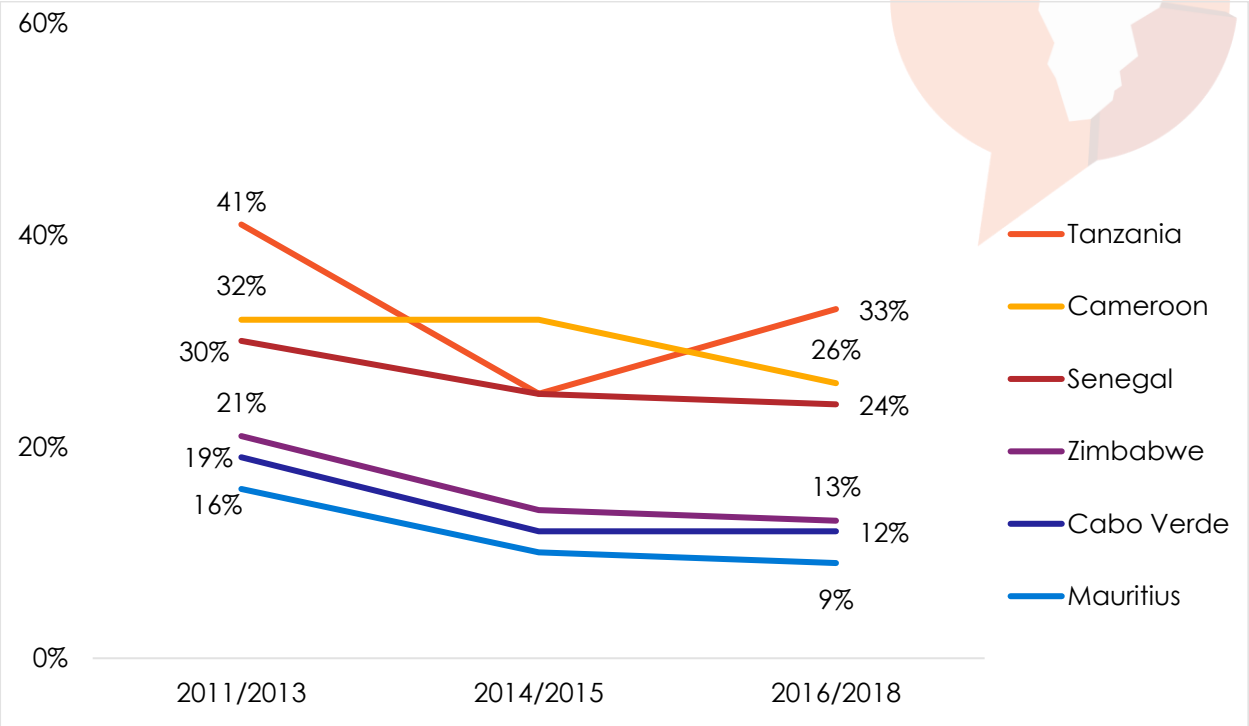
However, when we examine trends at the country level, this apparently stable average obscures a number of modest country-level gains and losses. Starting with the levels of participation recorded in Round 5 (2011/2013), the sharpest increases are recorded in Lesotho (+12 percentage points), Uganda (+11 points), South Africa (+10 points), and Nigeria (+10 points) (Figure 11). In contrast, Zimbabwe (-8 points), Tanzania (-8 points), Cabo Verde (-7 points), Mauritius (-7 points), and Senegal (-6 points) record the largest declines (Figure 12). Smaller changes are observed elsewhere, and there were no significant changes in eSwatini, Kenya, Morocco, Niger, Togo, and Zambia.

Figure 11: Increasing voluntary civic engagement | 8 countries | 2011-2018



(% "official leader" or "active member" of a voluntary association or community group)

Figure 12: Decreasing voluntary civic engagement | 6 countries | 2011-2018



(% "official leader" or "active member" of a voluntary association or community group)

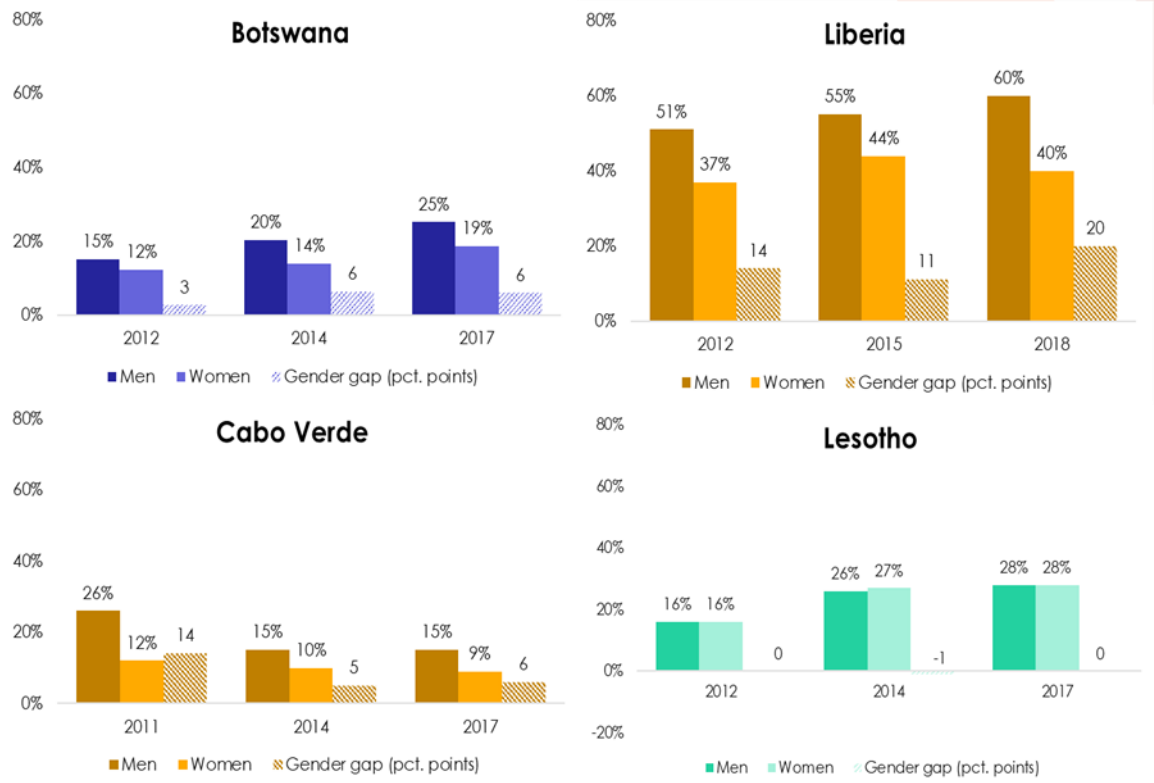
Trends in gender gaps

Given the critical role women play in fighting for better services and bringing about change in their communities, together with their under-representation in formal voluntary civic engagement via associational membership, we are particularly interested in tracking trends in participation over time by gender. However, again there is limited evidence of aggregate change over time: The gap in levels of engagement between men and women has consistently remained at 5-6 percentage points across the past decade.

Here, too, there is some variation at the country level. For example, despite recording the largest increase overall, Lesotho has consistently shown no gender gap in voluntary membership since 2011, with both men and women becoming more engaged at approximately equal rates (Figure 13). In contrast, while participation has also increased in Botswana (albeit to a much lower degree), the gender gap has more than doubled over the same period, rising from just 3 percentage points in 2012 to 6 in 2017. Similarly, Liberia has recorded substantial increases in already very high levels of participation, although the gender gap has also increased substantially.

In contrast, Cabo Verde has reported an 8-point fall in the gender gap (from 14 percentage points to 6 points). However, this is largely a result of decreasing participation over the past decade, a trend that was more pronounced among men. (Full results for gender gaps in all countries are available in Appendix C.) Similar patterns are observed in Burkina Faso (where the gender gap has shrunk by 6 percentage points), Côte d'Ivoire (5 points), Mauritius (5 points), Tanzania (5 points), Cameroon (3 points), Malawi (2 points), and Senegal (2 points). All these countries recorded declines in both overall levels of participation and in gender gaps.

Figure 13: Changes over time in the gender gap in voluntary civic engagement | 2011-2018



(% identifying as an "official leader" or "active member" of a voluntary association or community group)

Part C: Modeling participation at the individual and country levels

Socio-demographic factors are clearly not sufficient to fully describe and understand who participates in volunteering and who does not. While they provide readily identifiable characteristics of individuals that can be used to help define priorities and guide interventions, we must develop a deeper understanding of the factors that shape voluntary civic engagement, looking beyond these descriptive features to individual attitudes and preferences, as well as to societal characteristics that can shape an individual's propensity to engage in civic action.

Individual-level factors

There are several aspects of individual attitudes and preferences that may be directly relevant to levels of civic engagement. We incorporate these factors in three broad categories: socio-political engagement, personal efficacy, and system confidence.

With regard to socio-political engagement, Afrobarometer captures three key indicators: individuals' stated interest in discussing politics with others, their consumption of news via traditional media sources (using an average index score for radio, television, and newspapers), and news consumption through the Internet. We anticipate that individuals who are more aware and socially and politically engaged will also be more inclined toward voluntary civic engagement.

We also expect that individuals with a stronger sense of personal efficacy, i.e. of their ability to effect change and influence outcomes, are more likely to be civically engaged. We test the influence of personal efficacy using two indicators. The first captures the extent to which respondents report that "ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against

corruption." The second records leadership responsiveness by asking how often elected leaders "listen to what people like you have to say." While Afrobarometer captures data on how well both MPs and local government councillors listen, for the purposes of this analysis we will focus on local government, as this is likely to be the most frequent locus of citizen engagement.

Finally, we consider the effects of overall confidence in government institutions, captured by respondents' level of trust in their local government council. We anticipate that higher levels of trust in the system will be associated with higher levels of voluntary civic engagement.

Country-level factors

It is also clear that there are significant cross-country differences in patterns of engagement, both in terms of the overall propensity to engage and in how factors such as wealth and education affect it. We will therefore also consider several country-level indicators that may be significant explanatory factors.

Given the evidence of individual-level effects of poverty or wealth on engagement, we will examine whether national wealth has an aggregate impact. We will use both the log of gross national income per capita (GNIpc) and the more multifaceted Human Development Index (HDI), which captures not just wealth but also key aspects of quality of life, including health, longevity, and access to education.

Similarly, just as we expect that individuals may be influenced by their own sense of personal efficacy, we anticipate that national political regimes, and the extent to which they are open and responsive – or closed and resistant – to citizen input, may affect societal levels of engagement. As a suitable indicator we selected the Polity IV index, which scores each country's level of democracy, and anticipate that more democratic countries will enjoy higher levels of voluntary civic engagement.

Finally, we consider the types of needs or issues that might instigate engagement, especially in pursuit of government action. Given the general propensity of poorer respondents to engage more than wealthier ones, and more poorly served rural respondents to engage more than urbanites, we anticipate that one key factor motivating participation and engagement may be a demand for more and better services from government. We therefore incorporate an indicator of the national supply of key infrastructure and services, in this case the extent of access to a piped water supply, measured as the percentage of enumeration areas visited by Afrobarometer that have a piped water system in the community.

Models and methods

Since our dependent variable is binary (1=engaged, 0=not engaged) and the units of analysis are individual respondents grouped within countries, we tested the relative importance of each of these explanatory factors using a multi-level logistic regression analysis. Our models include varying intercepts to account for the likelihood that respondents within the same country share similar characteristics. We ran three models (Table 3):

- The first includes only the socio-demographic indicators described above and a measure of employment status (unemployed, part time, or full time).
- The second model adds the other individual-level variables.
- The third model also includes the country-level indicators.

Here we will focus on the results of the third model, which are consistent with the results in the first two. Note that São Tomé and Príncipe is not included in Model 3 because no Polity IV rating is available for the country. This leaves 33 countries.

Table 3: Factors driving membership or leadership in a voluntary or community organization (logistic regression) | 33 countries | 2016/2018

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Education	0.140***	0.068***	0.074***
	(0.014)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Lived poverty	0.085***	0.104***	0.092***
	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Age	0.131***	0.124***	0.135***
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.010)
Female	-0.295***	-0.188***	-0.163***
	(0.023)	(0.025)	(0.025)
Rural	0.449***	0.480***	0.457***
	(0.025)	(0.027)	(0.028)
Employment	0.072***	0.033*	0.061***
	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Discusses politics		0.372***	0.371***
		(0.018)	(0.018)
Uses traditional news media		0.075***	0.095***
		(0.014)	(0.014)
Consumes Internet news		0.004	-0.001
		(0.010)	(0.010)
Believes ordinary people can fight corruption		0.015+	0.019*
		(0.008)	(0.008)
Says local government councillors listen		0.145***	0.139***
		(0.013)	(0.013)
Trusts local government council		0.031***	0.028***
		(0.008)	(0.008)
Gross National Income per capita (logged)			-0.080
			(0.064)
Human Development Index			-1.354**
			(0.520)
Polity IV			0.038***
			(0.008)
Access to water in enumeration area (country average)			-0.006***
			(0.001)
Constant	-1.622***	-2.393***	-1.098***
	(0.074)	(0.091)	(0.256)
Country-level variance	1.155**	1.012***	0.695***
	(0.352)	(0.297)	(0.210)
Countries	34	34	33
Observations	44,929	40,990	39,870

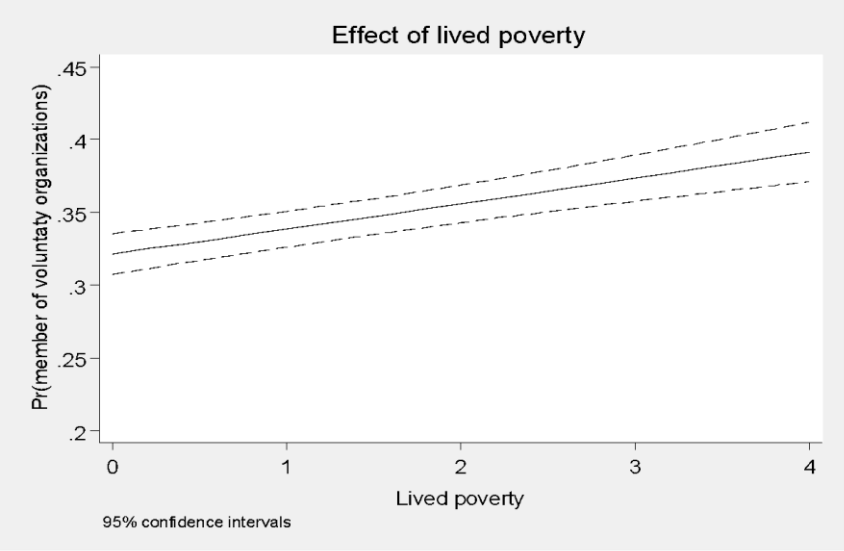
*+ p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001*

Standard errors in parentheses

Results and discussion

We note first that all of the socio-demographic factors are significant and operate in the expected directions, as outlined in the discussion of the descriptive findings above. Specifically, voluntary civic engagement increases with education but also with poverty: While respondents with no formal education have a 32.2% likelihood of being a member of a voluntary organization, the figure rises to 36.4% for those with post-secondary education. Moving from the lowest level of lived poverty (no lived poverty) to the highest (high lived poverty) increases the likelihood of participation by 7 percentage points (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Predicted probability of voluntary civic engagement (member/leader) and poverty



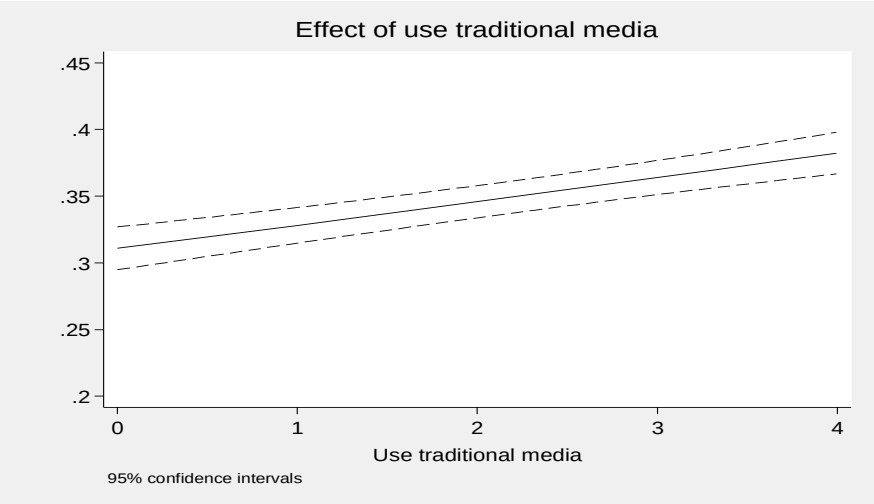
Age also has a strong effect: Citizens 56 years of age or older are 10 percentage points more likely to engage than young people. Gender effects are significant but only produce a difference in the likelihood of participation between men and women of 3 percentage points. Consistent with the discussion of descriptive patterns of engagement above, significant differences are observed regarding urban-rural location: Predicted engagement is much higher in rural areas (38.0%, compared to 29.4% in urban areas).

Finally, we find that employment status has significant albeit modest effects: Individuals with a full-time job that pays a cash income are 2.3 percentage points more likely to participate in voluntary civic engagement compared to those with no employment.

Turning to the other individual-level predictors, we note first that the associations measured here do not necessarily imply causality, which could work in either direction (or both). For example, a significant association between efficacy and participation could mean that greater efficacy drives increased participation, but volunteering may also increase an individual's sense of efficacy. In short, the direction of causality should not be assumed.

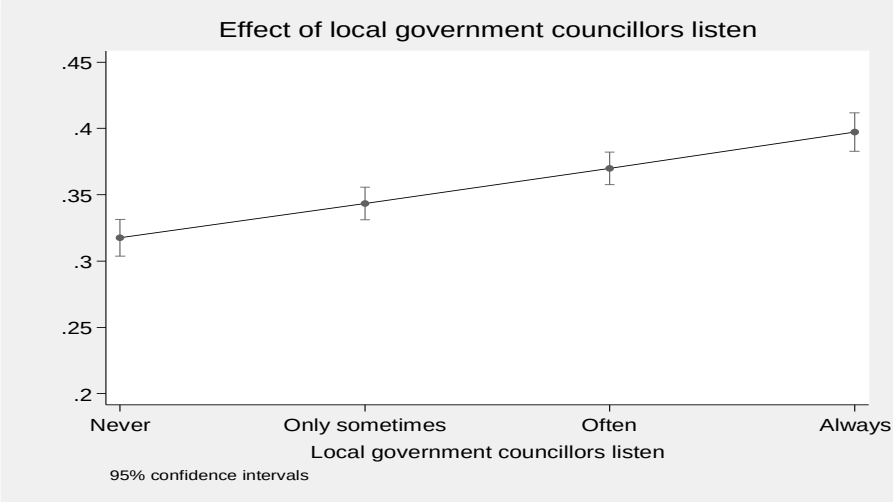
We find that individuals' inclination toward socio-political engagement is an important predictor of voluntary civic engagement. A propensity to discuss politics has a substantial relationship to predicted probabilities, with those who say they discuss politics frequently predicted to be almost 50% more likely to be active members or leaders of voluntary organizations (28.6% for "never" compared to 42.7% for "frequently"). Exposure to news via traditional media is also significant (Figure 15), but Internet news exposure is not.

Figure 15: Predicted probability of voluntary civic engagement (member/leader) and news from traditional media



Efficacy also matters. When local leaders are perceived to be more receptive to hearing from constituents, individuals are 8 percentage points more likely to participate (Figure 16). Individuals' sense of personal efficacy in fighting corruption is significant and positive, but the impact on predicted probability is negligible. The same can be said for trust in government: The relationship is significant and positive but modest. A change in trust in government from the lowest level (not trusted at all) to the highest level (trusted a lot) increases predicted engagement by 2.1 percentage points.

Figure 16: Predicted probability of voluntary civic engagement (member/leader) and responsiveness of local leaders



With regard to the country-level factors, as expected, we see that country context also has important effects on individuals' voluntary civic engagement. A higher national Human Development Index is associated with a substantially lower likelihood of voluntary civic engagement, with an 11-percentage-point difference in predicted probability between countries with the highest value (27.9%) and those with the lowest (39.3%) (Figure 17). This could suggest that individuals' desire to meet basic human needs – for themselves or for others – is a major driver of voluntary engagement. As basic needs are increasingly met for

individuals and societies with higher levels of human development, this key driver of civic participation declines substantially. This finding is also consistent with the finding that increased access to a piped water supply is associated with substantial declines in engagement (Figure 18), although ideally a deeper exploration of individual motivations for engaging in voluntary civic engagement could help to shed further light on this dynamic. Gross national income per capita, which is also captured in the Human Development Index, is not significant in its own right.

Figure 17: Predicted probability of voluntary civic engagement (member or leader) and Human Development Index (HDI) | 33 countries | 2016/2018

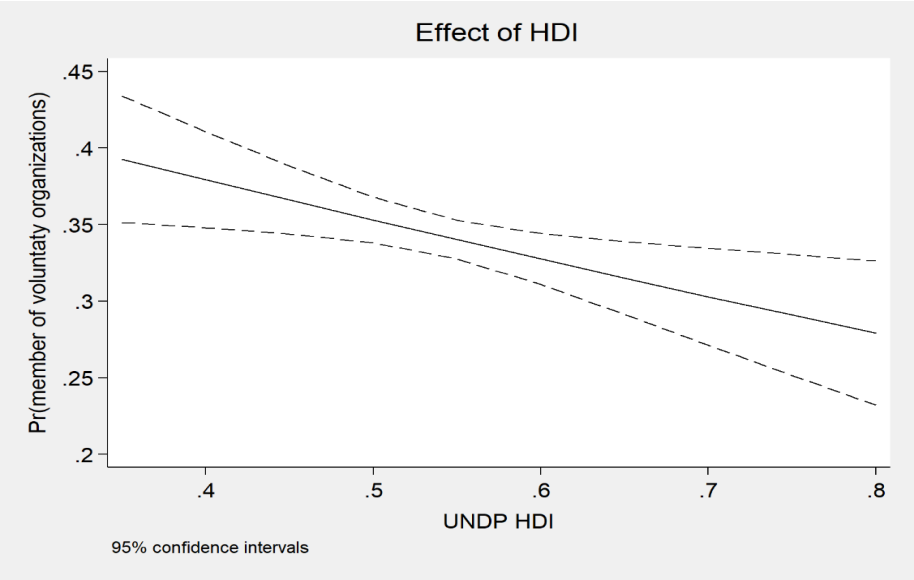
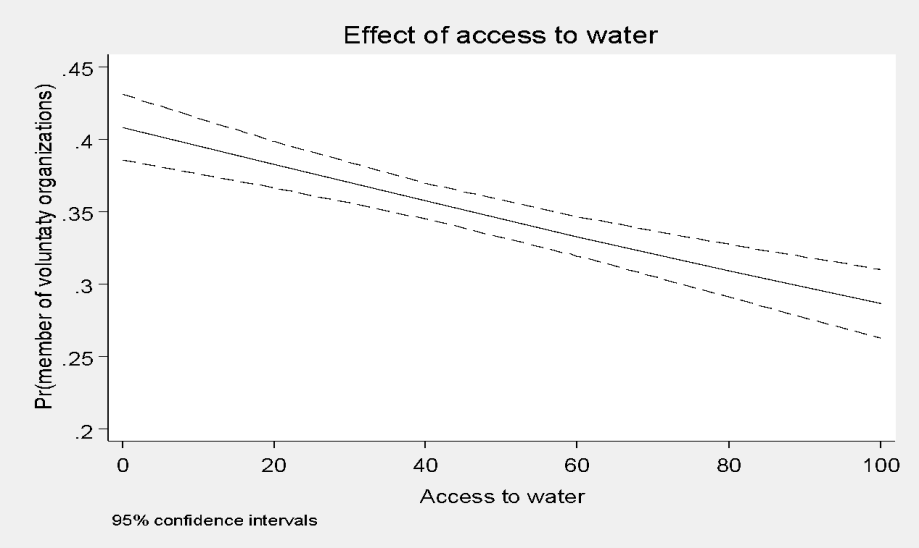
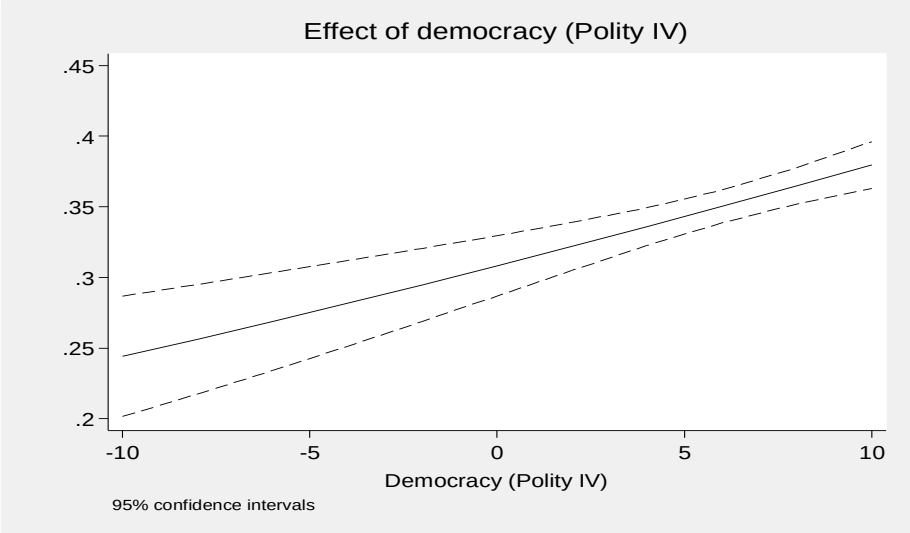


Figure 18: Predicted probability of voluntary civic engagement (member/leader) and access to piped water (national average)



Finally, we find that people are also more likely to engage when they live in societies that are more politically open and receptive (Figure 19), as shown by the positive sign and significance of the Polity IV indicator. This is consistent with the individual-level finding that the responsiveness of leaders – which is generally, though not always, better in democracies – is also a strong predictor of citizens' propensity to engage.

Figure 19: Predicted probability of voluntary civic engagement (member/leader) and level of democracy (Polity IV index)



Entry points: Can we increase voluntary civic engagement?

Voluntary citizen participation is a critical component of efforts to improve lives and livelihoods both in Africa and globally, as well as of meeting the basic human needs captured by the SDGs. There are two main goals in developing these country profiles and models of voluntary civic engagement. First, they aim to help activists, practitioners, and promoters of volunteerism better understand it in the country or countries where they work. The significant differences in overall levels of volunteerism across countries and in the specific profiles of those who participate make this understanding essential for both analysis and action. Second, once we understand these profiles and the individual- and country-level factors that can foster or inhibit voluntary civic engagement, we can begin to identify entry points for enhancing volunteerism.

As a starting point, it is important to note that while the data show differences across groups in society, they also confirm that people from all walks of life engage in volunteerism. This engagement is not only among people with higher levels of education or older people; people from all socio-economic backgrounds participate.

It is also worth noting that cases where the participation of certain groups is lower (for example, young people) can be regarded as an opportunity, rather than a deficiency. Promotors of volunteerism could target these groups first, identifying ways to encourage them to join their more active counterparts. In short, knowing that the stratum of youngest people or those with the highest levels of wealth or lowest levels of education in a given society is currently least likely to engage in volunteerism does not mean efforts to engage it should be sidelined; rather, their engagement should be prioritized. They are the greatest untapped resource.

Identifying factors that favor greater voluntary engagement (for example education, efficacy, and interest in politics) and some that discourage it (particularly increased service provision, wealth, and socio-economic security) allows us to learn several lessons from the findings and identify a number of possible entry points:

- **Promoting education** – Generally speaking, education is linked to higher levels of engagement. Special attention should be paid to approaches that build confidence and capacity. Building an individual's sense of efficacy is likely to further increase engagement. This may mean strengthening educational content on government

decision-making processes, such as how legislation is made and how budgets are managed and accounted for. It can also mean incorporating experiential learning to directly expose students to engaging with leaders.

- **Promoting equal access and achievement for education** – Women's engagement is essential to securing the best outcomes for their families and communities. However, we have seen that gender gaps in voluntary engagement tend to mirror those observed elsewhere, such as in education, workforce participation, and access to resources. Closing the gender gap in educational achievement is a key starting point for closing gender gaps throughout society. Equal access to education exposes women to decision-making structures and builds their confidence and skills to engage.
- **Understanding women's engagement in order to better promote it** – We need to further explore the obstacles to women's voluntary participation, especially via formal organizational channels such as those examined here. This will allow the identification of ways to overcome gender gaps in participation and volunteerism. Are they caused by a lack of time or a lower sense of efficacy? Can they be explained by social norms regarding men's and women's roles, and/or a concern about social sanctions and risks? Or even fear of retaliation if women try to organize to bring about change in their communities? Time studies, focus group analysis, and more in-depth surveys on these questions could help us better understand the issues. Organizational training and engagement should highlight the tendency toward male dominance in organizations and associations and promote women's opportunities and access to leadership positions, especially at senior levels.
- **Engaging youth** – Young people are under-represented in voluntary engagement. New messaging, using new formats such as social media, to capture their interest and promote voluntary engagement may help to close this generational gap.
- **Efficacy matters** – A sense of efficacy – that is, believing that one's actions can make a difference – makes people more likely to engage. Educating citizens, especially women, about how to effectively engage with the state to achieve community goals, alongside sharing success stories, can increase engagement. Information also enhances efficacy: Promoting open government initiatives and related programs that put more information into the hands of citizens will increase the effectiveness of volunteers and is likely to increase the incidence of volunteerism.
- **Democracy, governance, and leadership also matter** – Citizens are more likely to engage when they expect their efforts to be effective. Governments that strengthen their capacity to listen and respond are likely to see a growth in volunteerism and engagement. Governments that recognize they will achieve better results by engaging their citizens in working toward the SDGs and other goals can start by ensuring that elected leaders and government officials – especially at the local level – are open and responsive to citizen input.
- **Identifying community needs and priorities for action** – Our evidence suggests that engagement follows needs, meaning working with communities to identify and build engagement around their priority needs is a key starting point. This may be relatively easy in communities with more needs. The absence of clean water or accessible schools and health care services does not need to be "discovered." In better-off communities, where needs are less obvious, one starting point for building participation may be to identify common goals and priorities. Once a community's most basic needs are met, can people agree on what comes next? Is their focus on further improving life in their own communities or on advocacy for others?
- **Doing more to measure volunteerism explicitly** – In addition to using surveys such as Afrobarometer, household surveys, and other opportunities, analysts, practitioners, and promoters of volunteerism should advocate more explicit measures of volunteer

engagement that would ideally include measures of time commitment and other indicators (UNV & ILO, no date).

- **Building an enabling environment for volunteerism** – Understanding patterns of volunteerism can guide policies on equality, social care and support, labour, and related matters, helping reduce obstacles to volunteering and promote an enabling environment.

In short, the findings of this analysis help us better understand the decision to participate in civic engagement and identify entry points for enhancing it. Lower levels of engagement among some groups and even certain countries can be seen as opportunities rather than obstacles, by identifying ways to capture the interest and action of people who have yet to engage.

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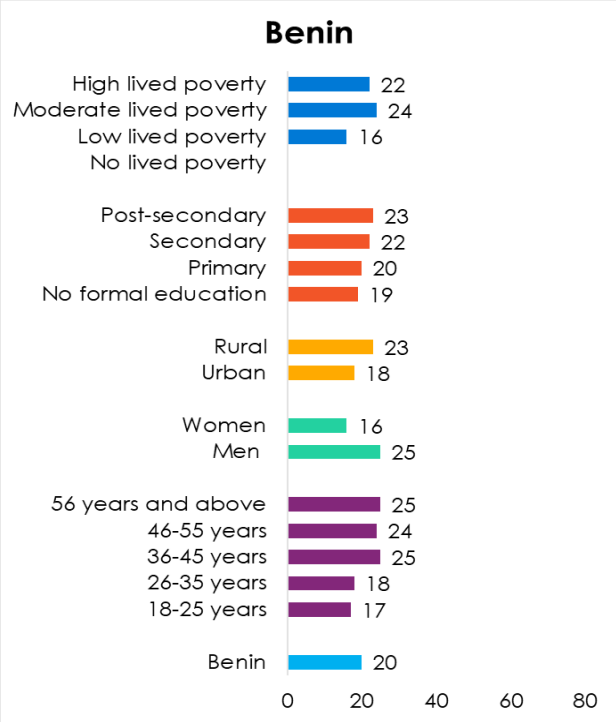
Appendix A

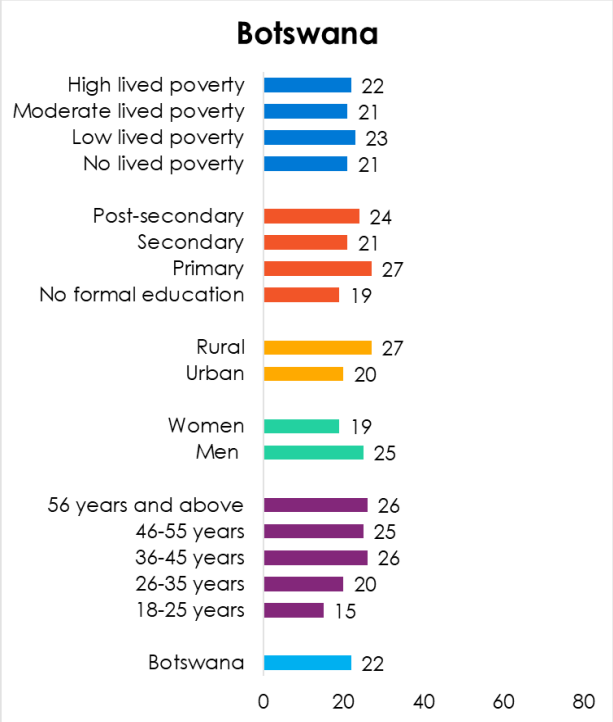
Table A.1: Afrobarometer Round 7 fieldwork dates and previous survey rounds

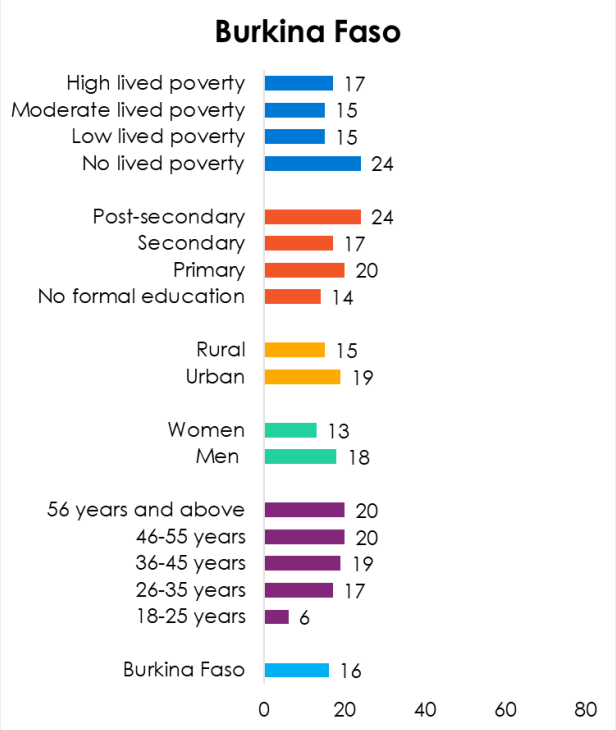
Country	Months when Round 7 fieldwork was conducted	Previous survey rounds
Benin	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
Botswana	June-July 2017	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Burkina Faso	Oct 2017	2008, 2012, 2015
Cameroon	May 2018	2013, 2015
Cape Verde	Nov-Dec 2017	2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
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, 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 Príncipe	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-Jan 2017	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

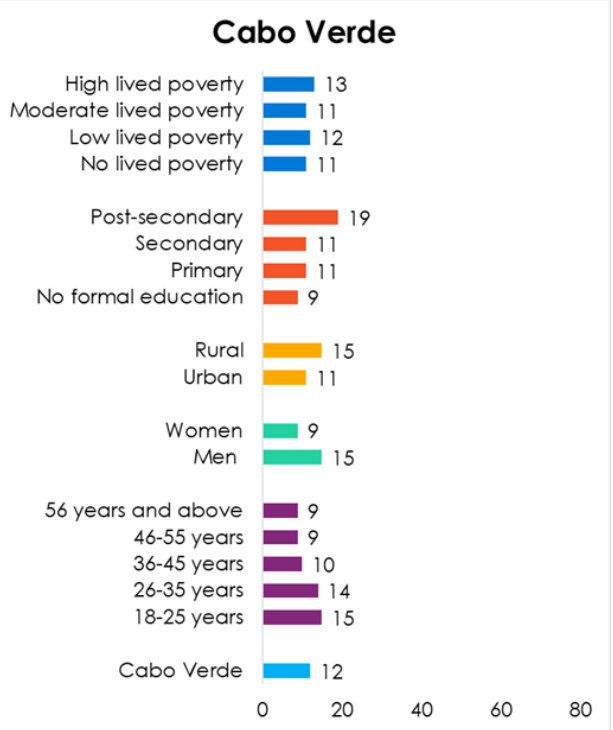
Appendix B: Voluntary civic engagement: Country profiles

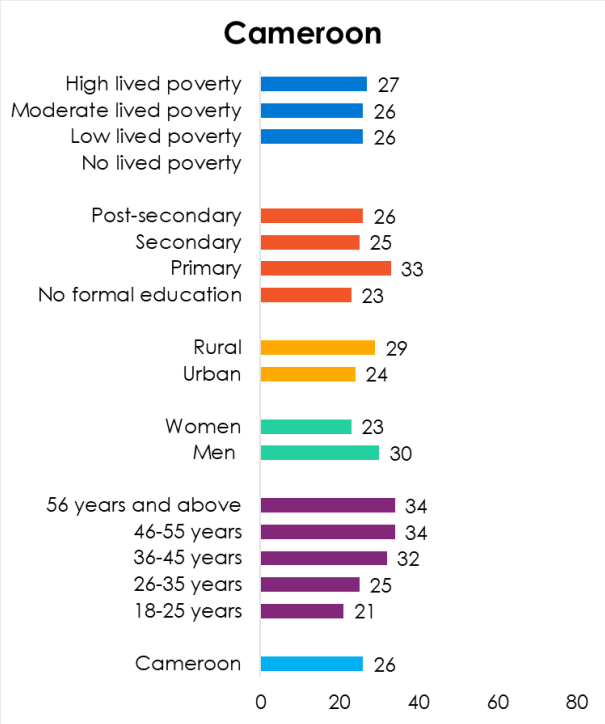
Respondents were asked: *Now I am going to read out a list of groups that people join or attend. For each one, could you tell me whether you are an official leader, an active member, an inactive member, or not a member: Some other voluntary association or community group? (% "official leader" or "active member") (Note: For some categories no bar is shown due to small sample size in that category.)*

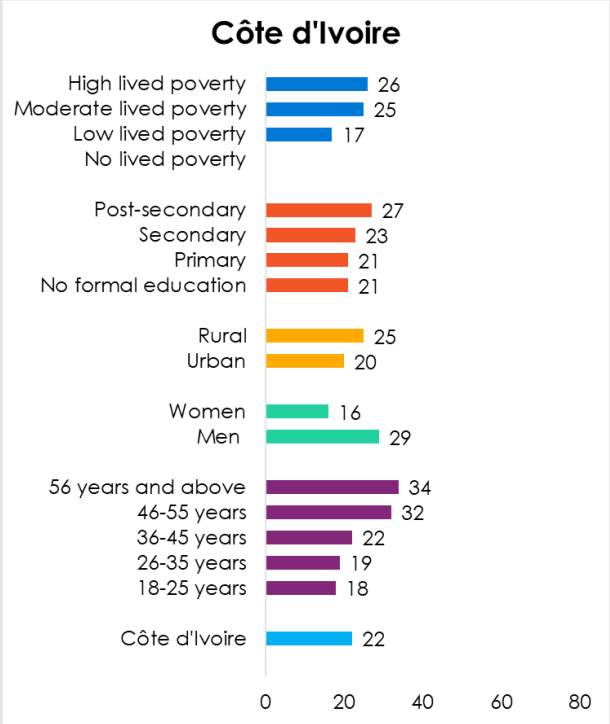


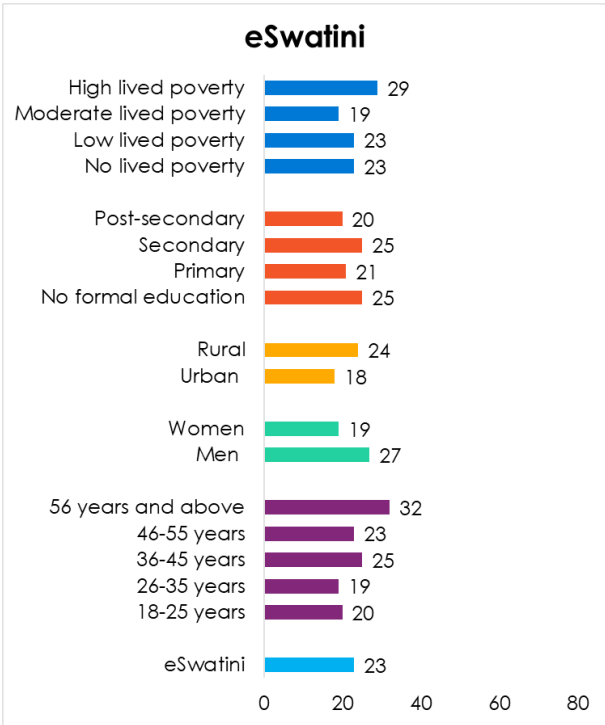


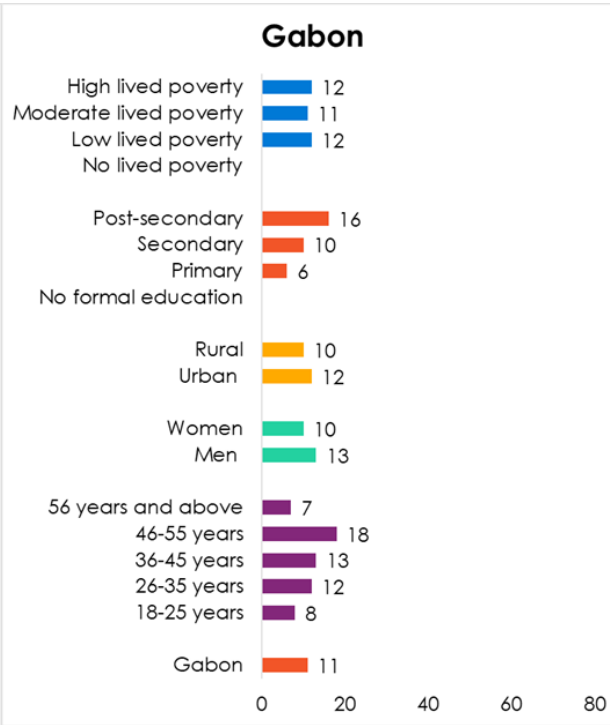


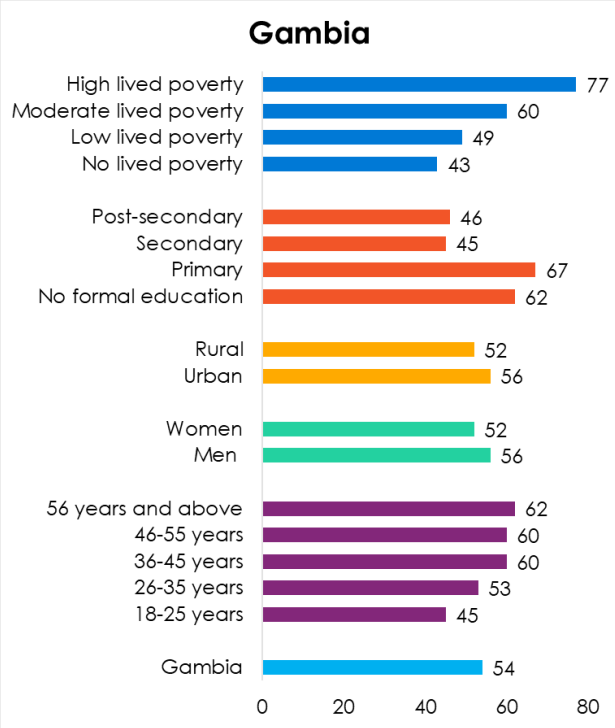


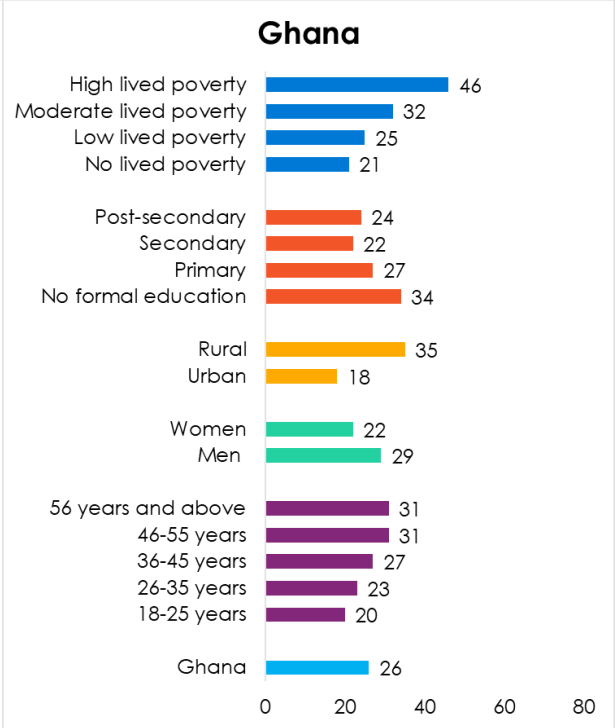


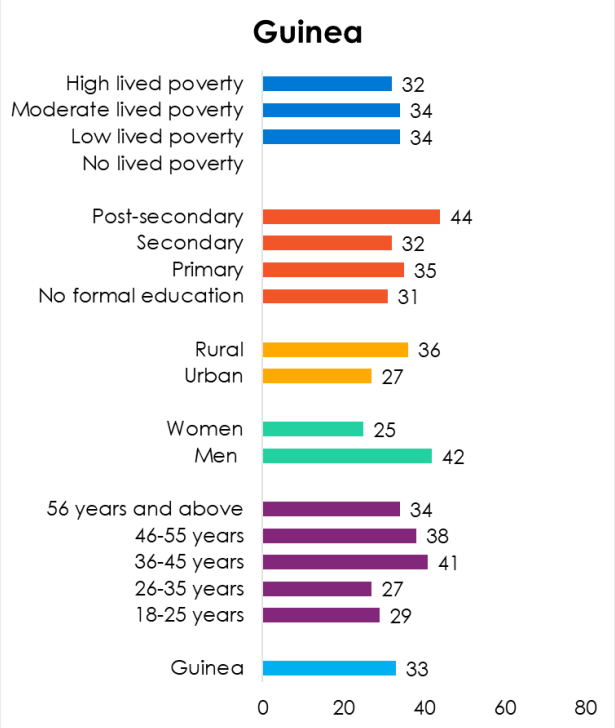


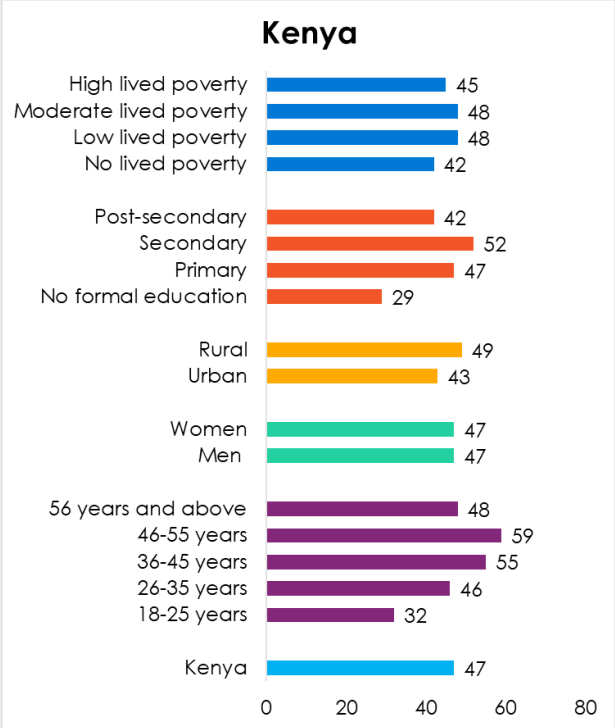


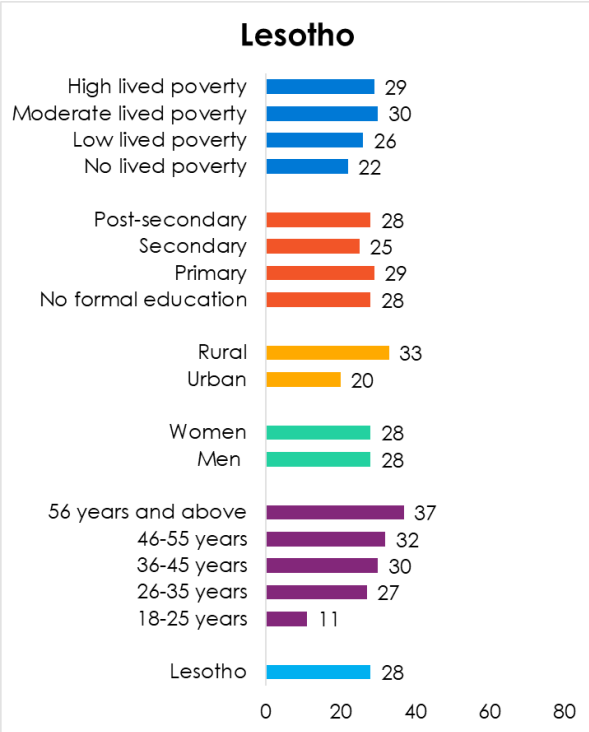


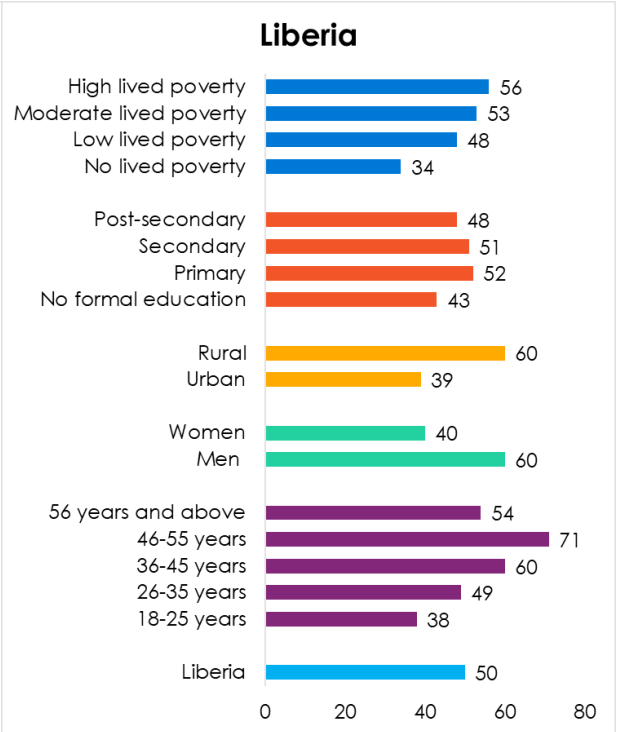


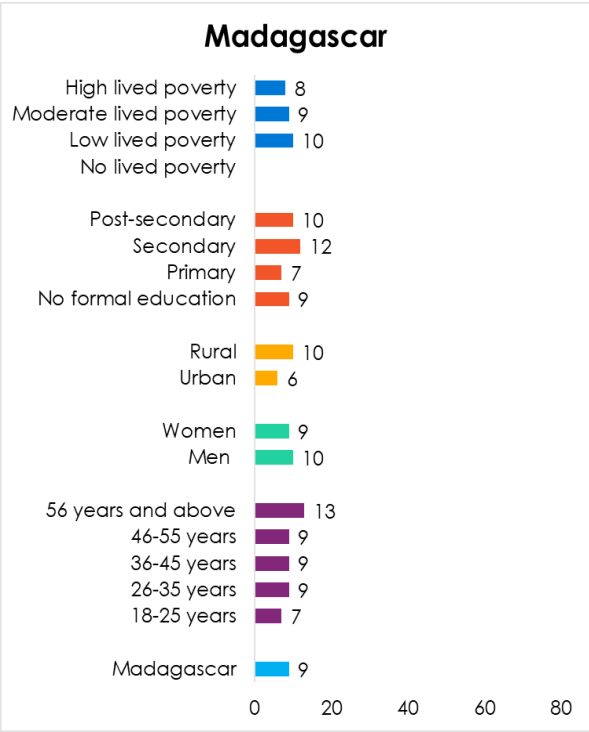


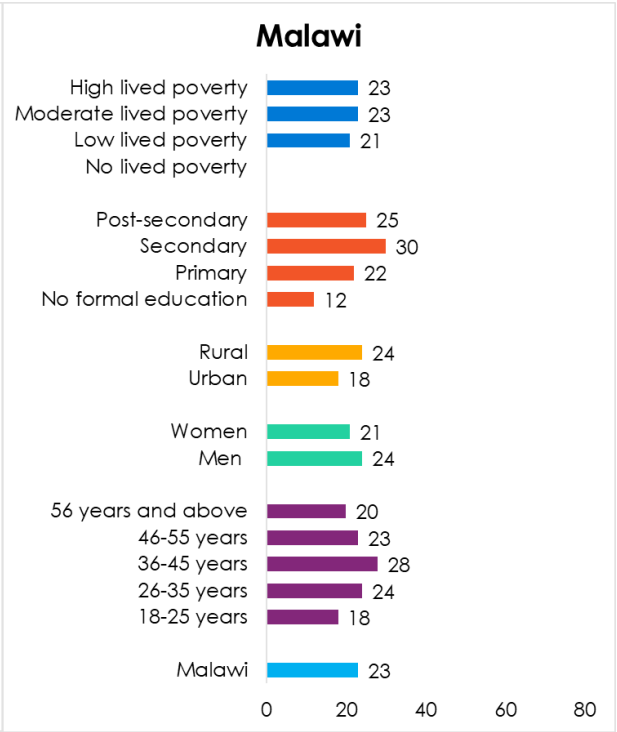


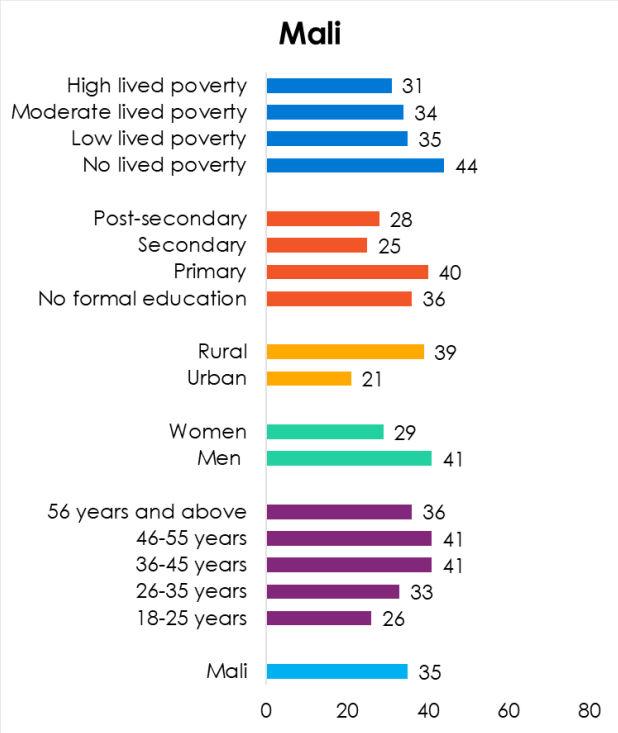


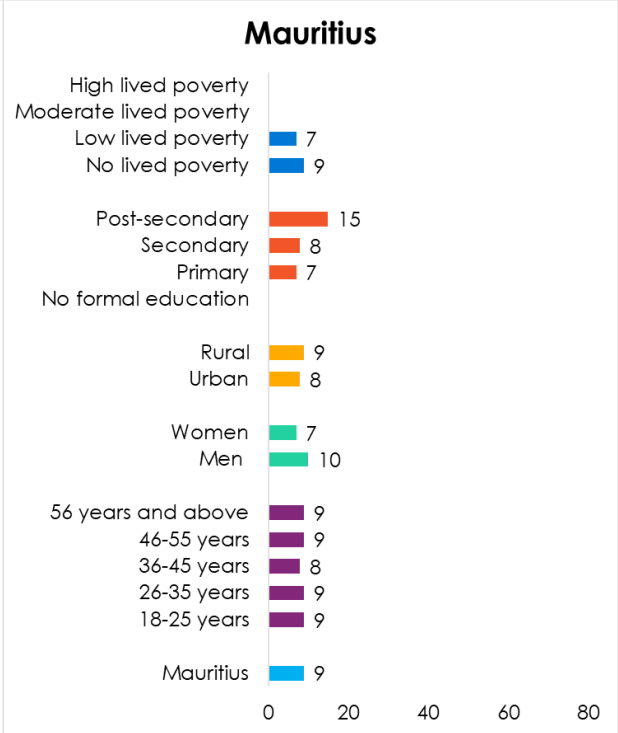


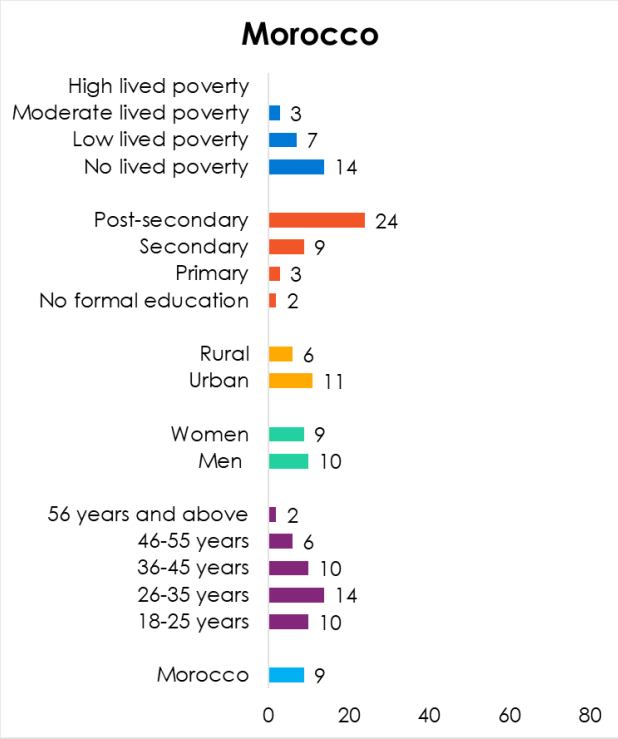


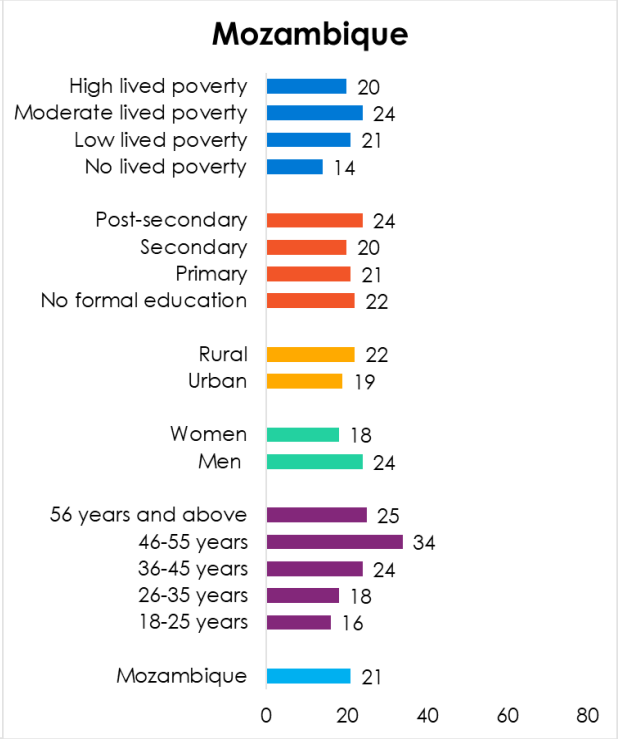


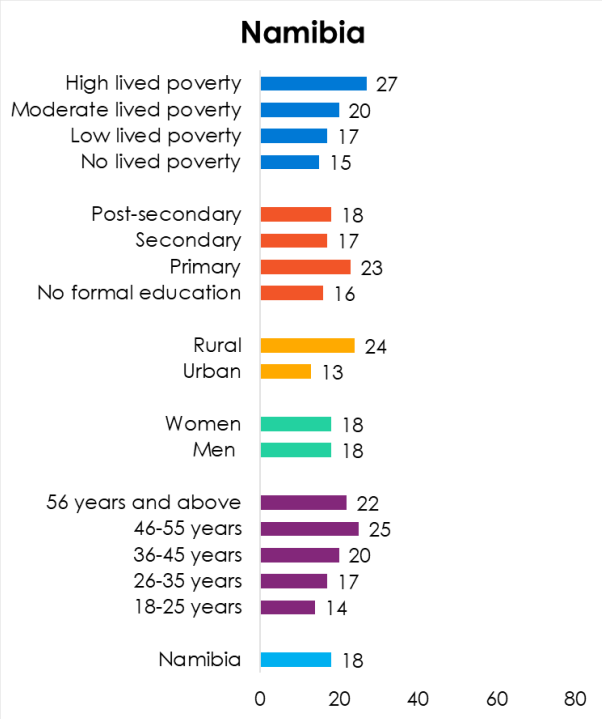


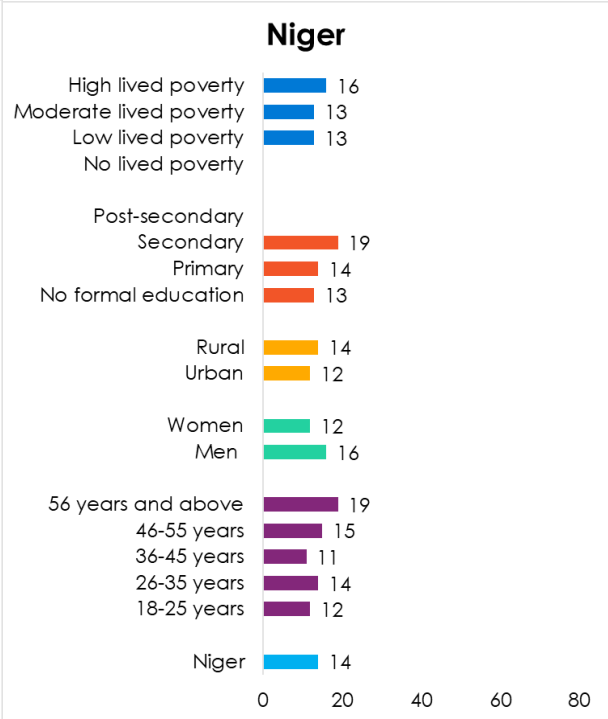


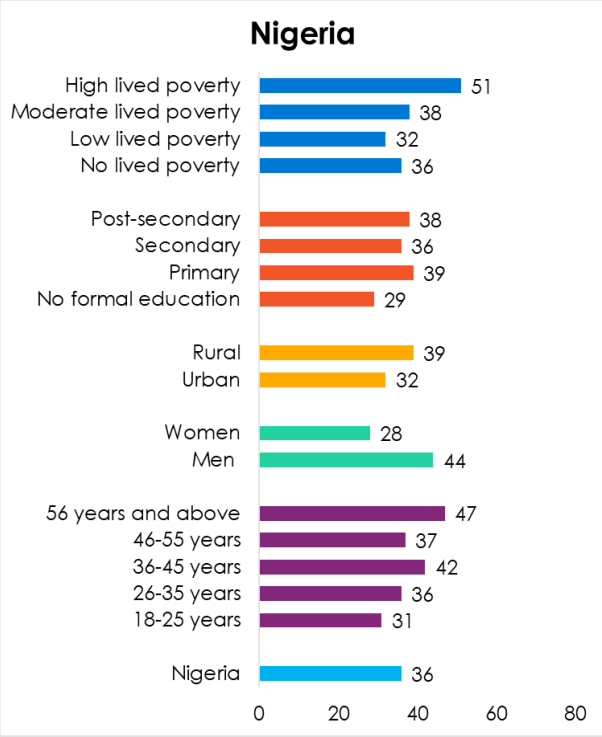


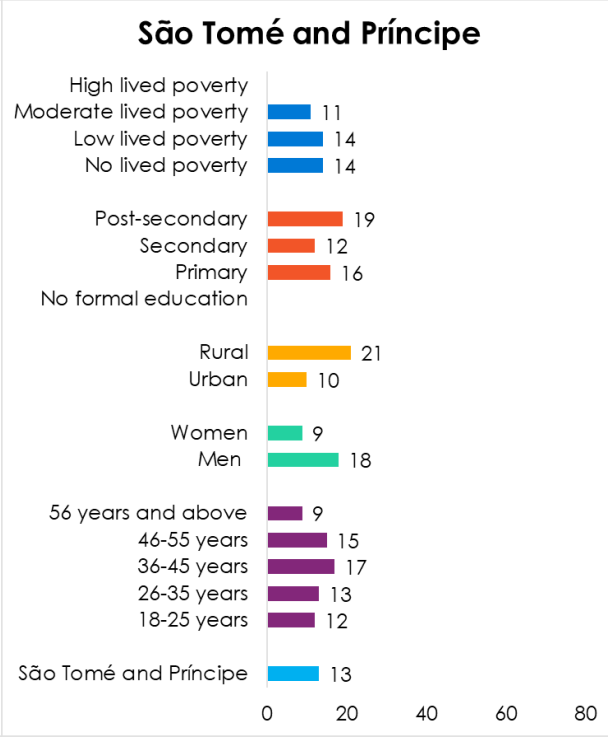


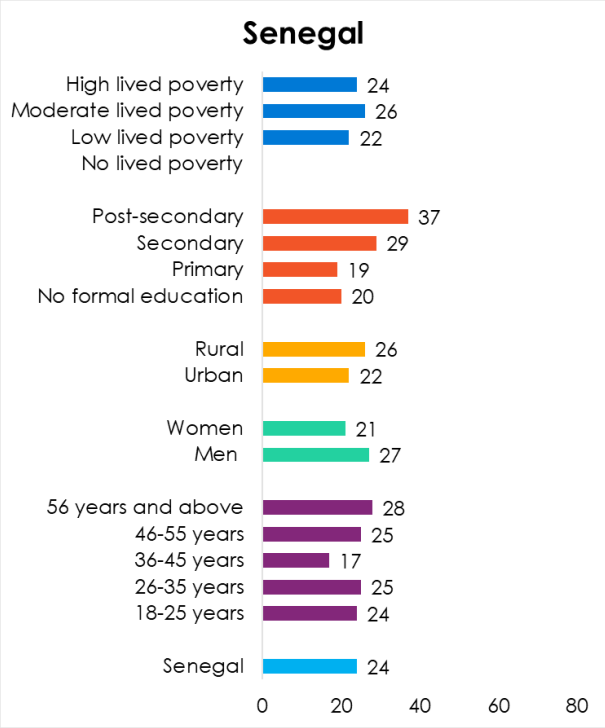


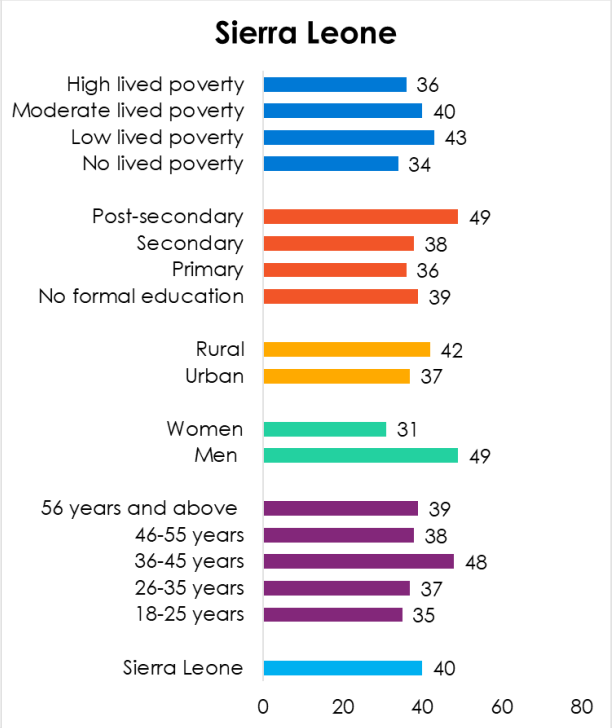


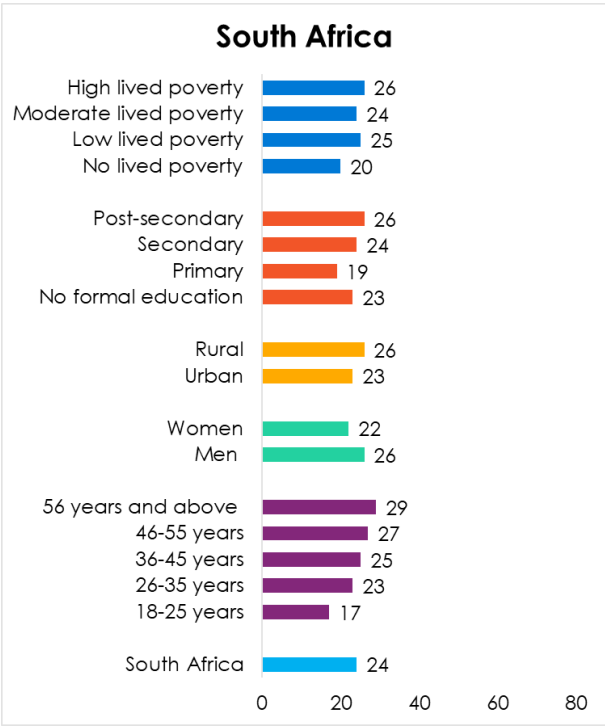


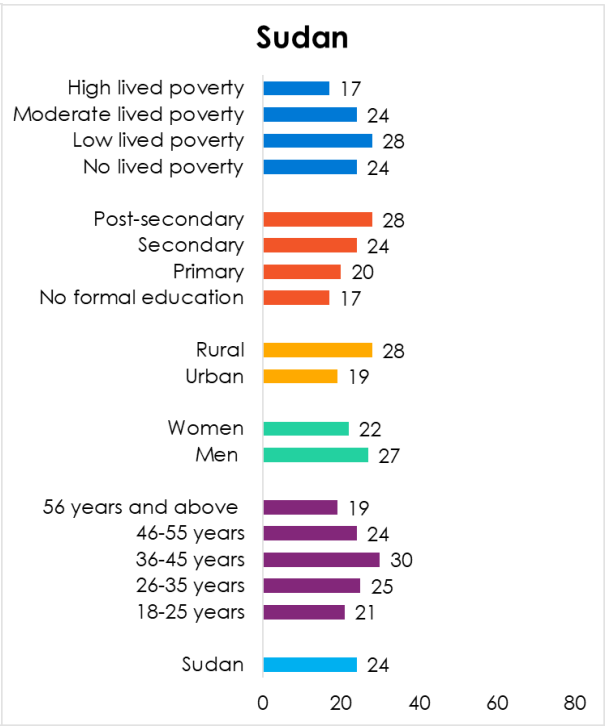


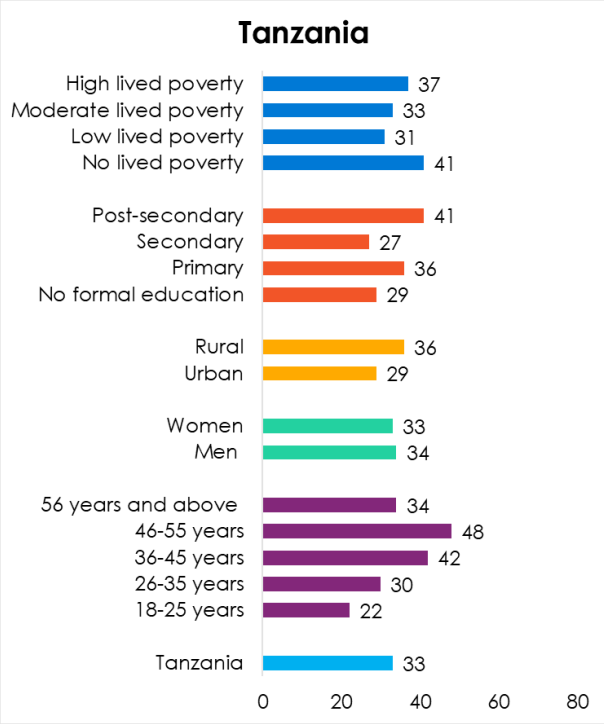


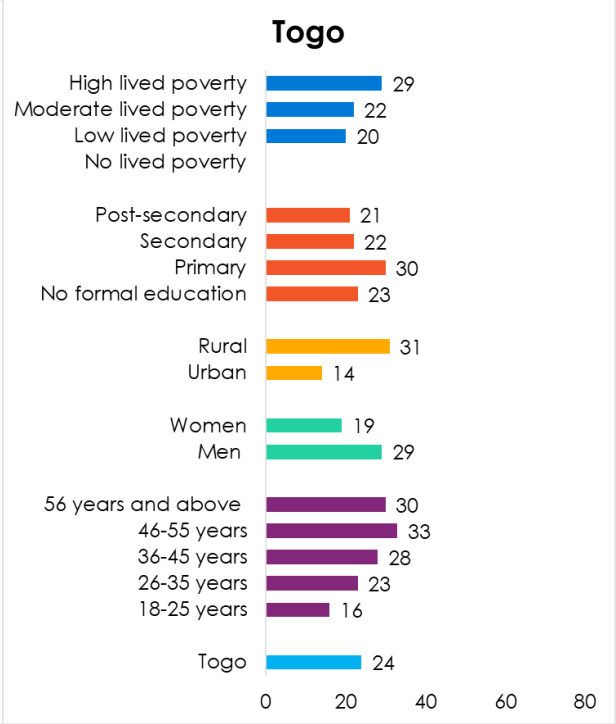


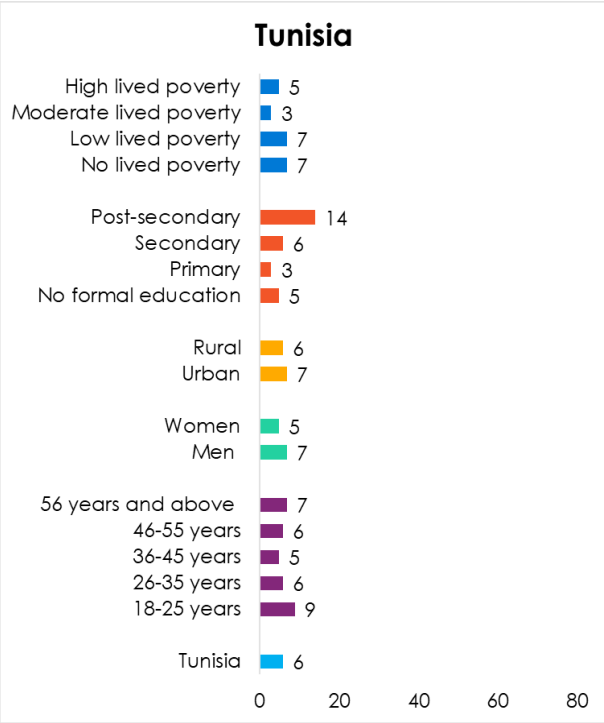


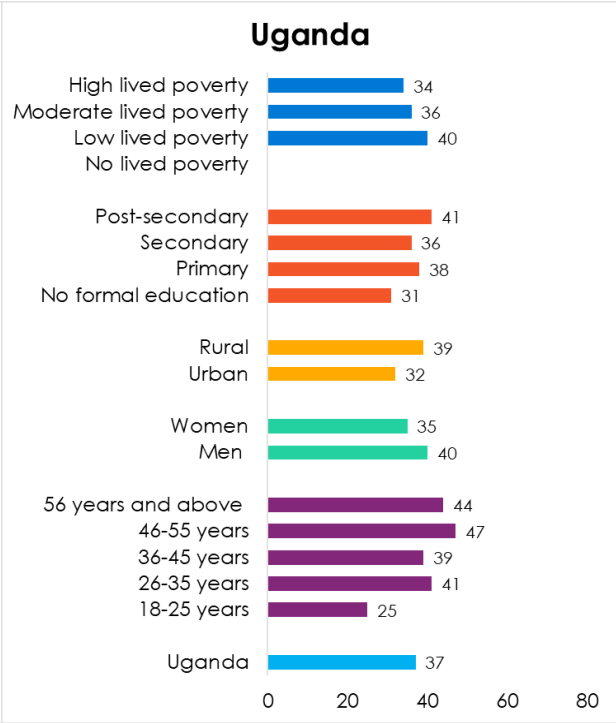


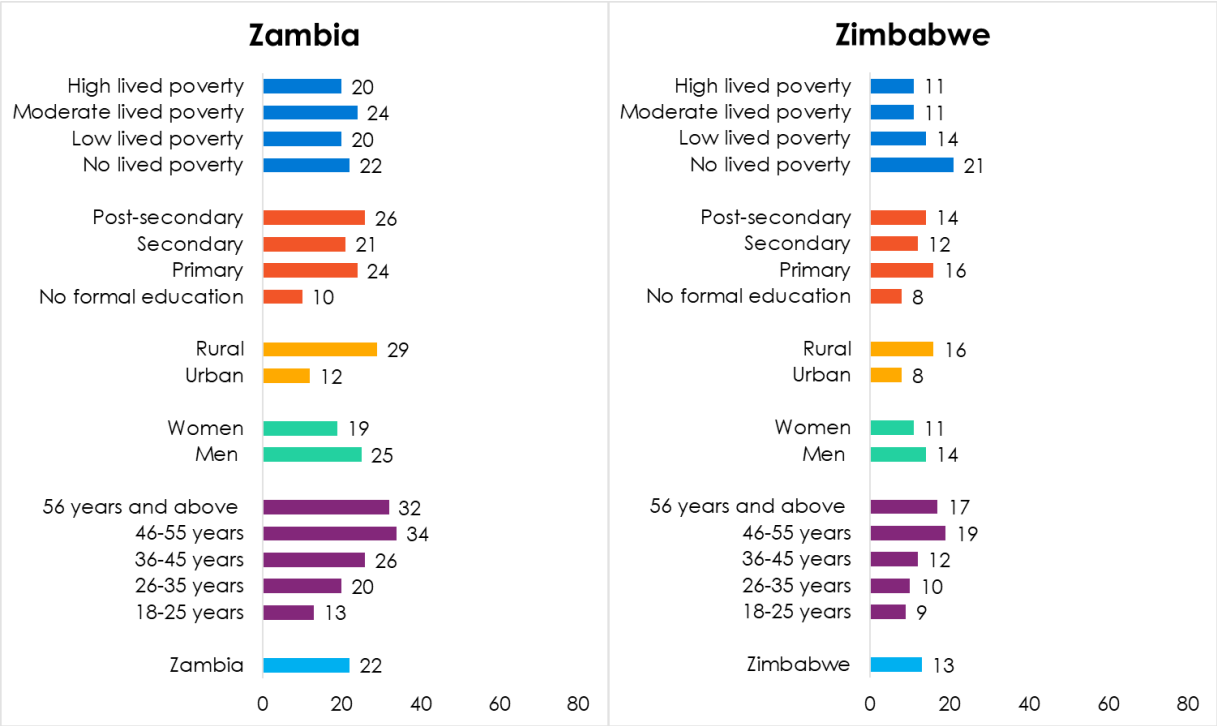




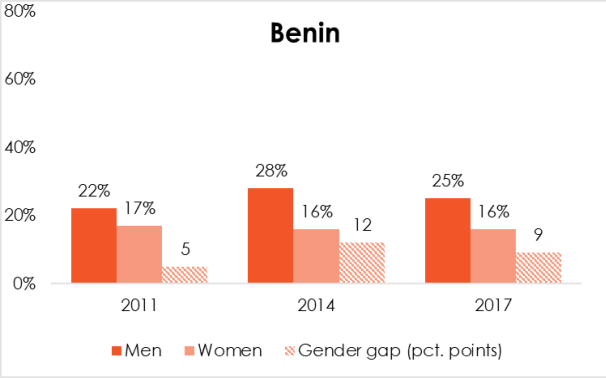


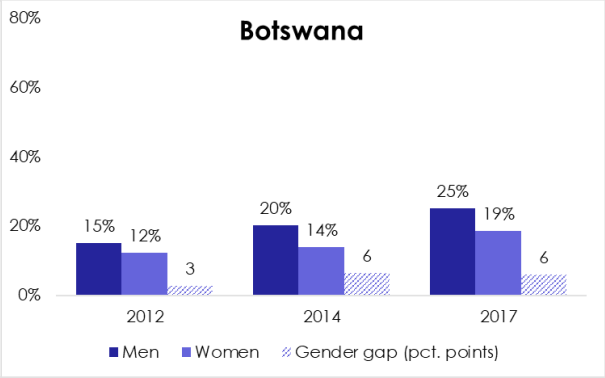


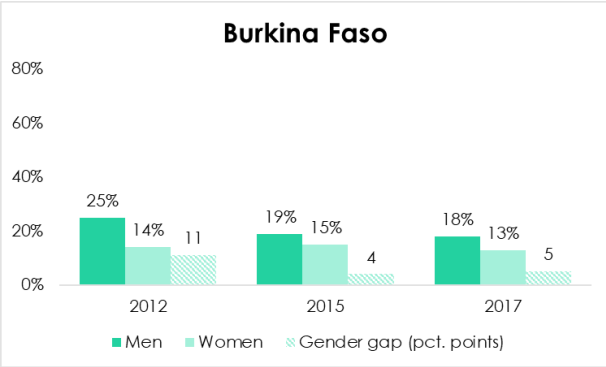


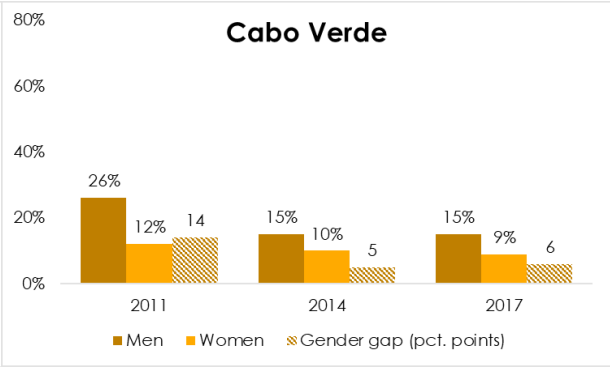


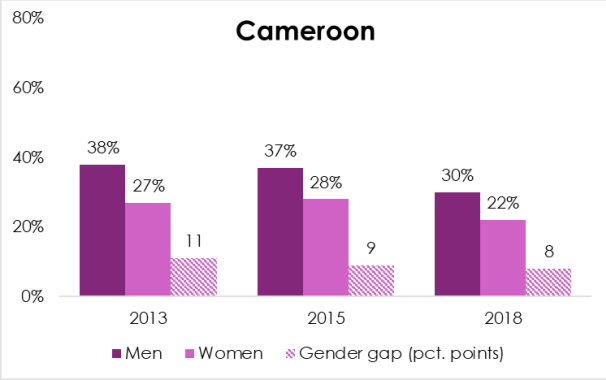
Appendix C: Gender gaps in voluntary civic engagement over time, by country

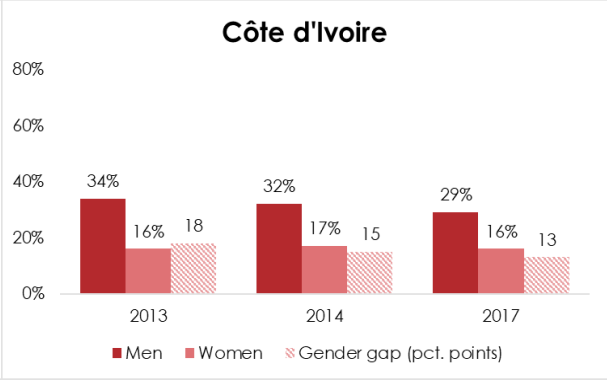


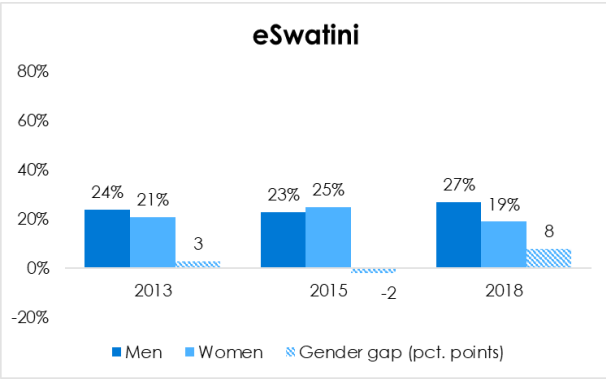


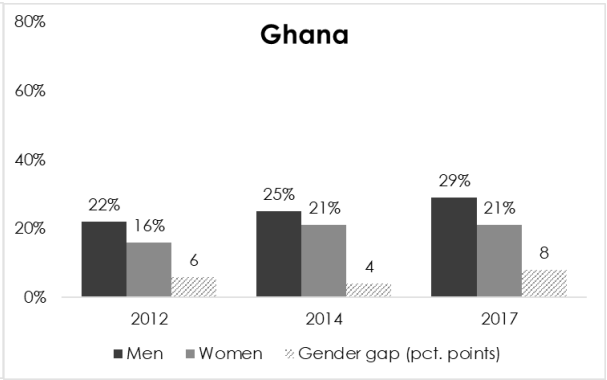


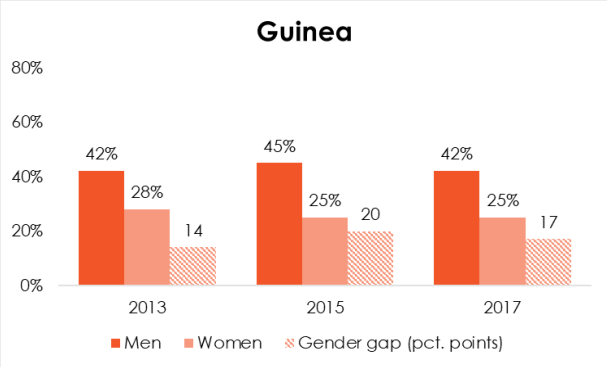


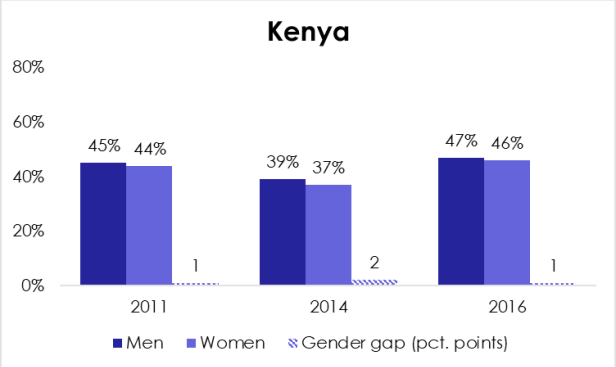


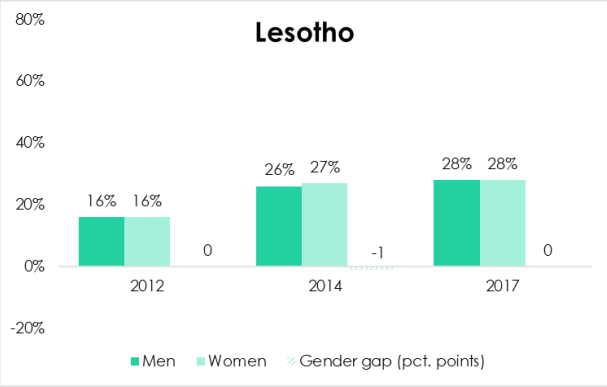


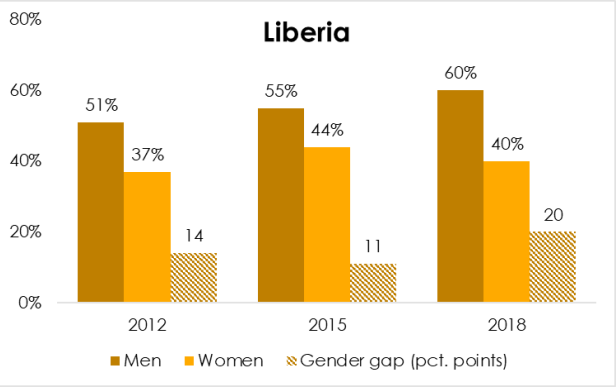


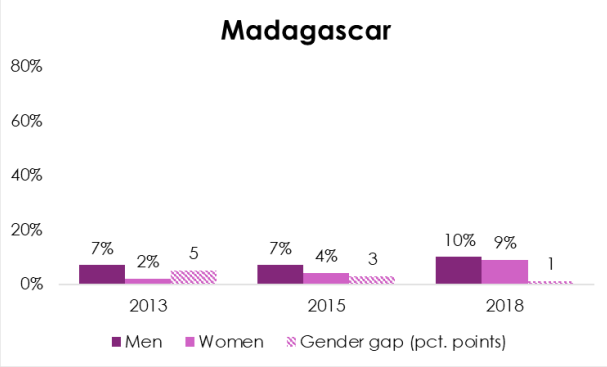


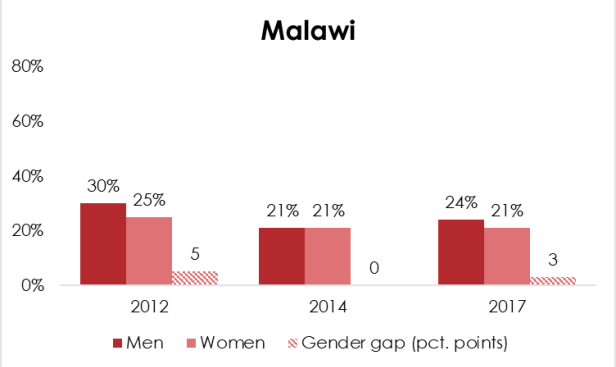


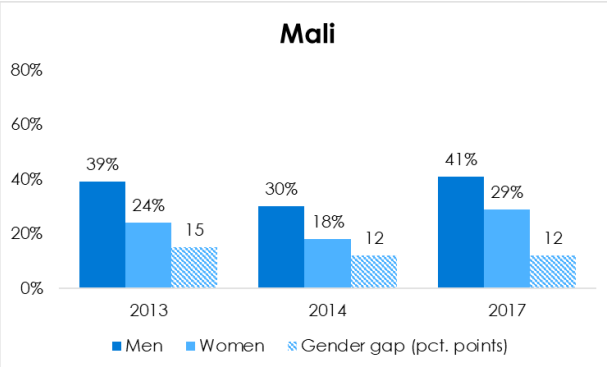


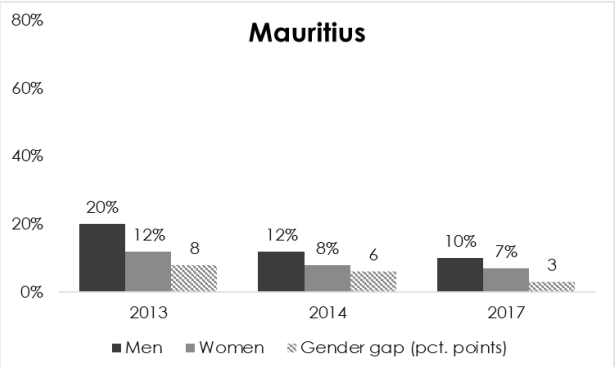


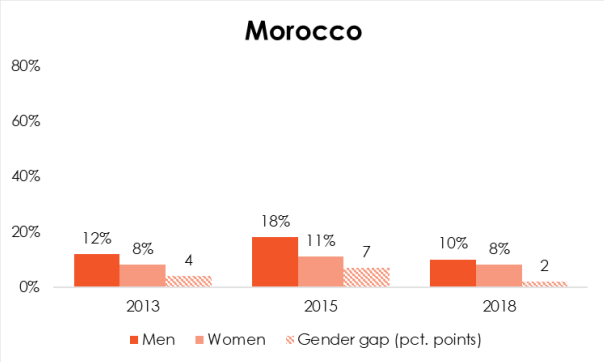


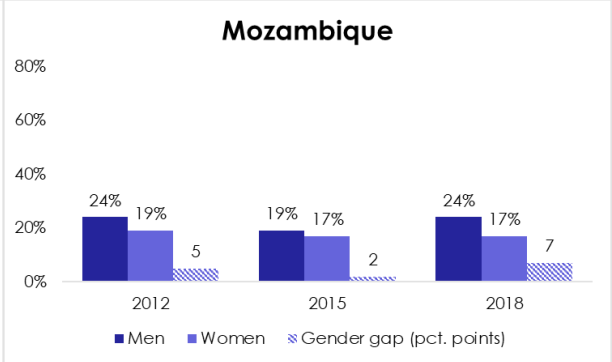


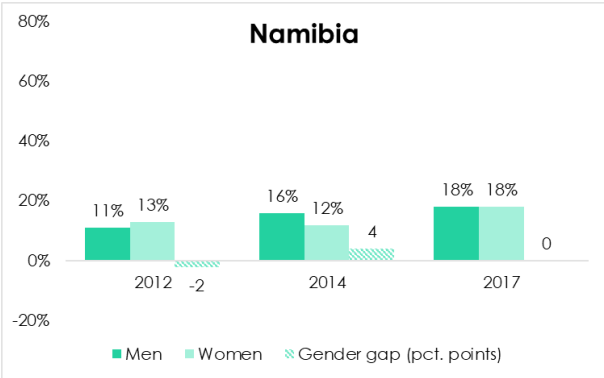


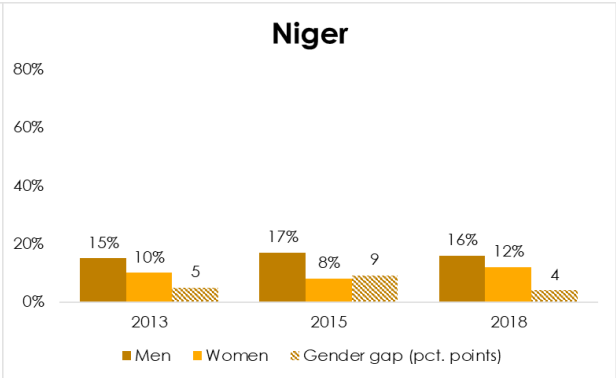


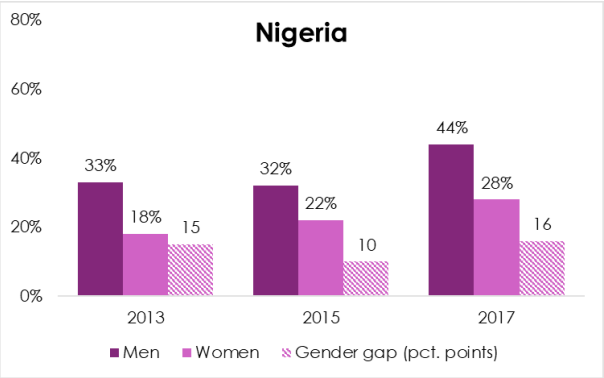


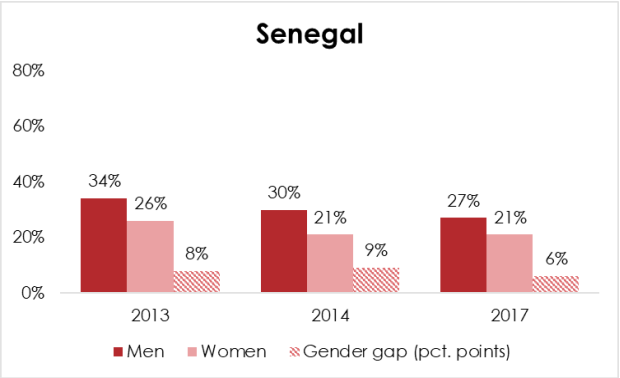


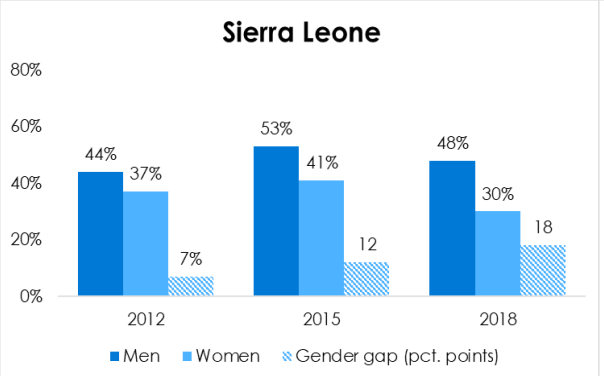


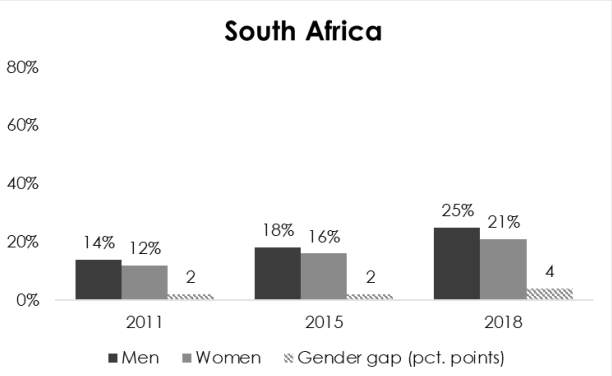


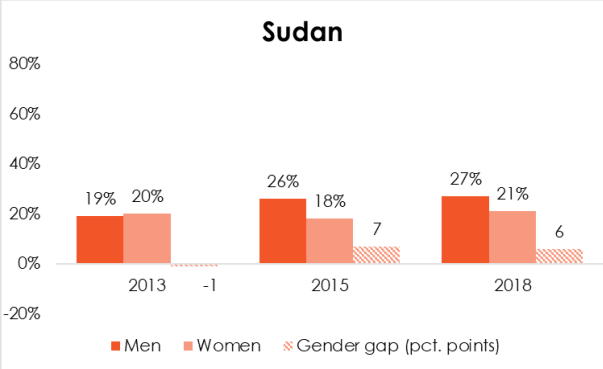


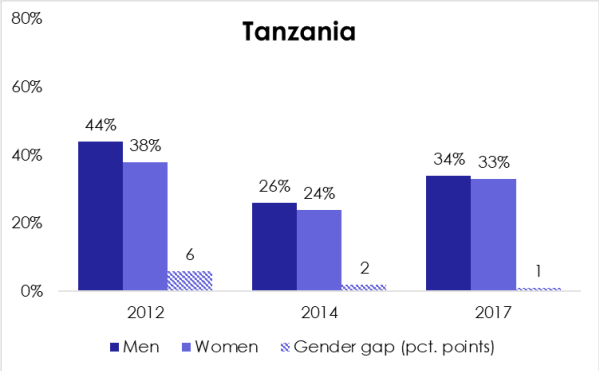


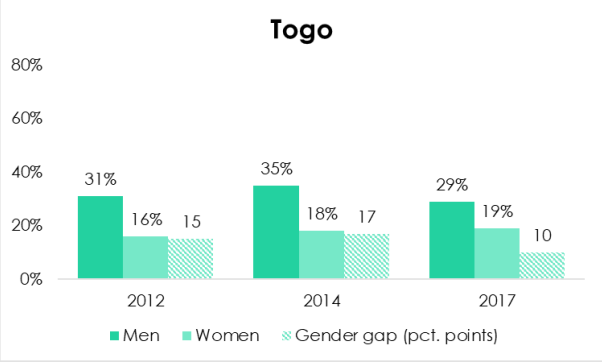


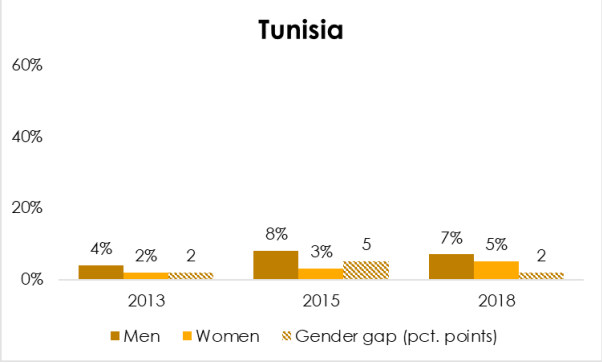


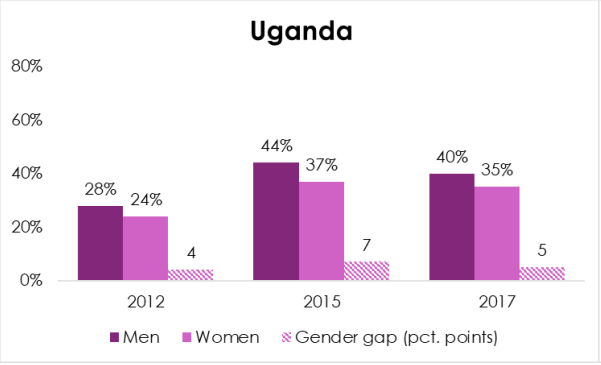


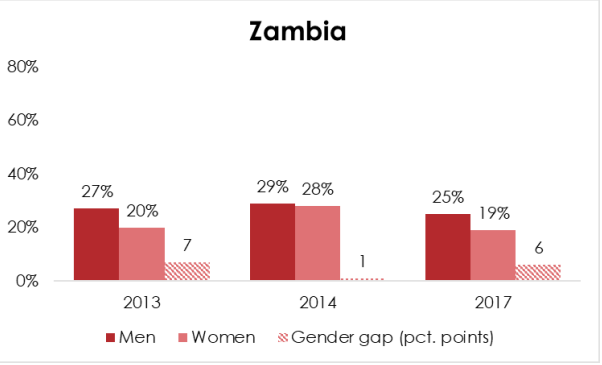


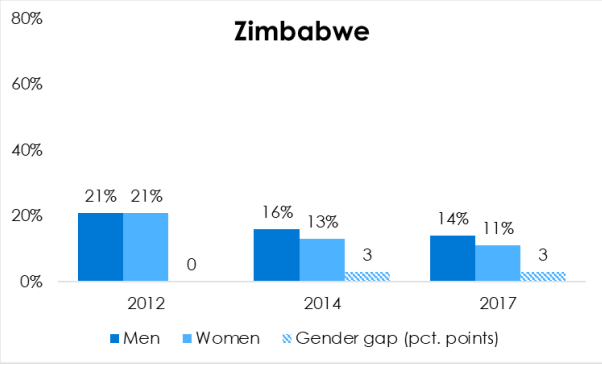












Carolyn Logan is director of analysis for Afrobarometer and associate professor in the Department of Political Science at Michigan State University (MSU).

Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny is the Afrobarometer regional communications coordinator for anglophone West Africa, based at the Ghana Center for Democratic Development.

Kangwook Han received his PhD in political science at Michigan State University and will join the Department of Political Science and International Relations at Jeonbuk National University in South Korea in March 2021 as an assistant professor.

Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, non-partisan research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 35 countries is provided by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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Contact: clogan@afrobarometer.org
jappiah@afrobarometer.org
hakawoo@gmail.com