

Mauritians trust their institutions but say corruption is growing

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 26 | Gilles Joomun

Summary

Mauritians trust their political institutions but are increasingly concerned about corruption, the latest Afrobarometer survey shows.

More than two-thirds (69%) of Mauritians say corruption increased “somewhat” or “a lot” over the year preceding the survey. This finding corroborates results of a survey commissioned in 2014 by the country’s Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), in which 60% of Mauritians said that high-level and small-scale corruption had increased over the past three years and that they expected it to worsen.

None of the respondents in the Afrobarometer survey admit to having had to pay a bribe to get access to public services. But most of them also say that victims of corruption would not report such cases for fear of the consequences.

In its 2014 Corruption Perceptions Index, Transparency International ranked Mauritius among the least-corrupt countries in Africa (No. 47 out of 175 countries worldwide), a slight improvement from the previous survey. The Mo Ibrahim Index of African Governance ranked Mauritius as the best-governed country in Africa in its 2014 report.

But the 2014 Afrobarometer survey suggests that ordinary Mauritian citizens perceive corruption as a growing problem.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is an African-led, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. Five rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and Round 6 surveys are currently under way (2014-2015). Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent’s choice with nationally representative samples of between 1,200 and 2,400 respondents.

The Afrobarometer team in Mauritius, led by StraConsult, interviewed 1,200 adult Mauritians in June and July 2014. A sample of this size yields results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. A previous survey was conducted in Mauritius in 2012.

Key findings

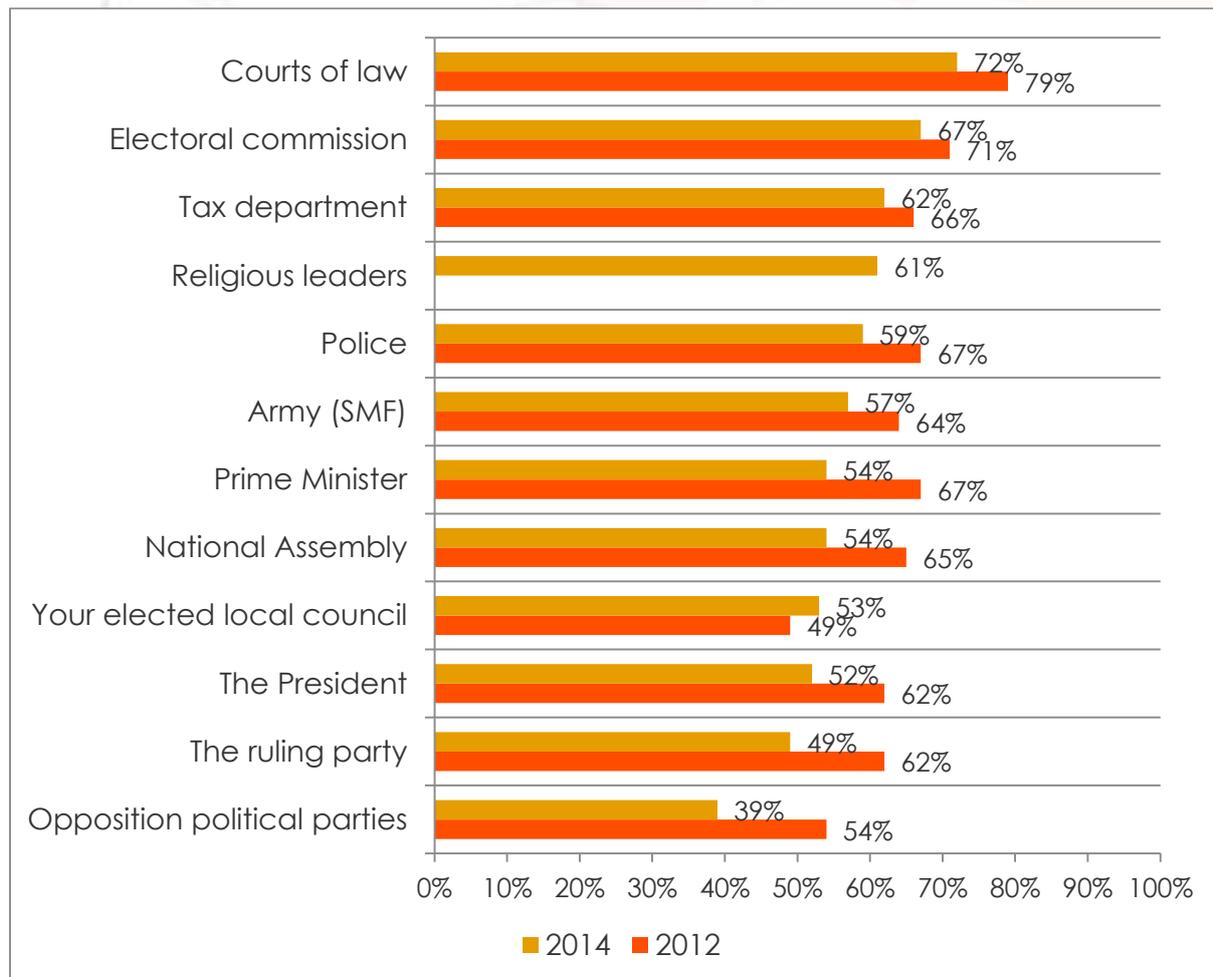
- A majority of Mauritians trust most of their public institutions, but trust levels for many institutions have declined since 2012. Seven of 10 respondents (70%) believe that at least some police officers are corrupt, yet nearly six of 10 (59%) say they trust the police “somewhat” or “a lot.”
- Non-political institutions enjoy higher levels of trust than political leaders and institutions. Opposition political parties are the only category that is not trusted by a majority of Mauritians.

- Almost seven of 10 Mauritians (69%) say that the level of corruption has increased in Mauritius over the past year, and majorities perceive some level of corruption in all institutions.
- No respondents admit to paying a bribe to get services from key public institutions, but at the same time, almost half (45%) of respondents say that many people would not report cases of corruption for fear of retaliation.

Trust in institutions high, but lower for politicians

Mauritians tend to respect and trust the main institutions of the country. But while most institutions are trusted “somewhat” or “a lot” by a majority of Mauritians, political institutions have lower levels of trust than non-political entities (Figure 1). Only slightly more than half of respondents trust the prime minister, the president, National Assembly members, and local government councillors. Political parties are the least trusted among political entities. Citizens are evenly divided (49% each) between those who trust and those who do not trust the ruling party, and 57% of Mauritians do not trust opposition political parties.

Figure 1: Trust in institutions | Mauritius | 2012-2014



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

Non-political institutions enjoy higher levels of trust, led by courts of law (trusted “somewhat” or “a lot” by 72% of citizens) and the Electoral Commission (67%). More than 60% of respondents say they trust the Tax Department and religious leaders.

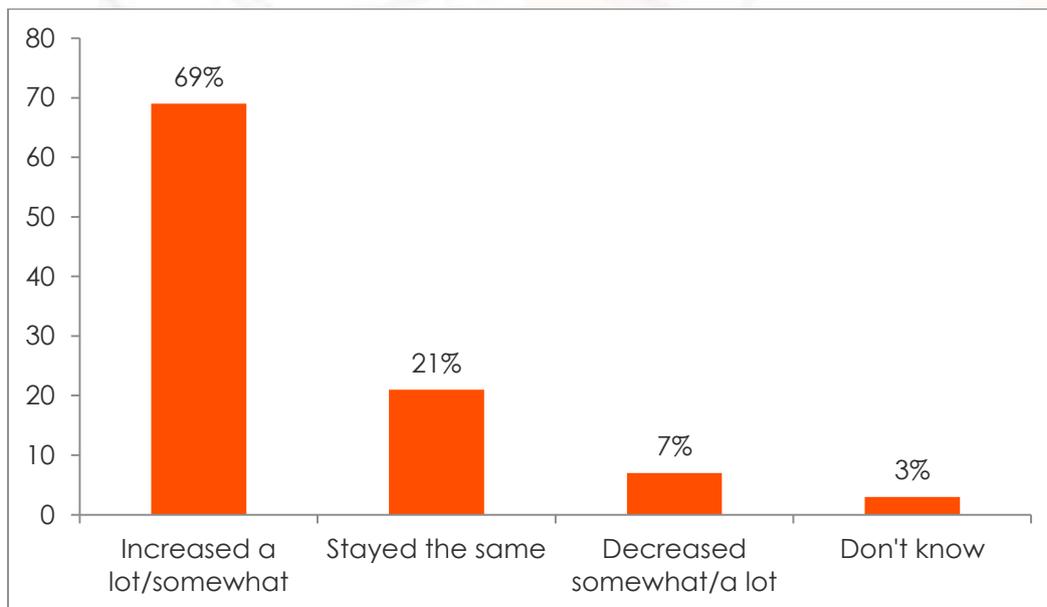
The police and the Special Mobile Force (SMF, the equivalent of the army, operating under the aegis of the Commissioner of Police) enjoy greater trust than the prime minister.

For most political institutions, public trust levels decreased between 2012 and 2014. While the prime minister enjoyed the trust of two-thirds (67%) of Mauritians in 2012, this proportion declined by 13 percentage points in 2014. Similar decreases in trust levels are recorded for the National Assembly (11 percentage points), opposition political parties (15 points), and the ruling party (13 points).

Mauritians' perceptions of corruption

Along with decreasing – though still relatively high – levels of trust, most Mauritians believe that corruption is on an increasing trend. Almost seven of 10 respondents (69%) say that corruption increased “somewhat” or “a lot” during the year preceding the survey (Figure 2). This question was asked for the first time in 2014.

Figure 2: Increased level of perceived corruption | Mauritius | 2014



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, over the past year, has the level of corruption in this country increased, decreased, or stayed the same?*

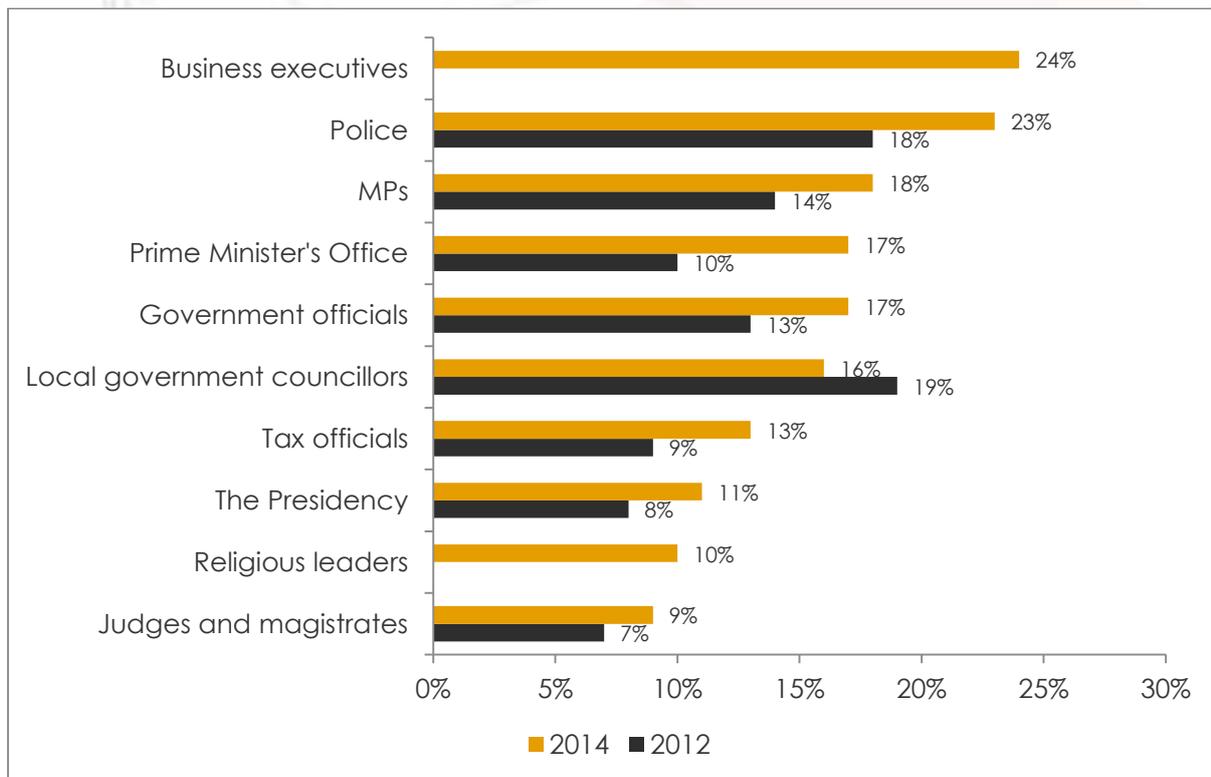
The contradiction between the levels of trust and of perceived corruption within certain institutions is surprising. Although most Mauritians trust the institutions or the persons heading them, a majority believe that corruption exists in these institutions. It is alarming to note that Mauritians believe that corruption exists everywhere, even among judges and magistrates. Indeed, if one sums the responses “some of them,” “most of them,” and “all of them,” a majority of Mauritians (76% on average) believe that corruption is present in all of these institutions.

As shown in Figure 2, about one-sixth of respondents say that most or all government officials, municipal/district councillors, and members of the National Assembly are corrupt. While a majority of Mauritians trust the police, about one-fourth (23%) of respondents believe that most or all police officers are corrupt. Judges and magistrates receive the best rating; 75% of respondent say that none or some of them are corrupt, while 9% believe that most or all of them are corrupt.

The biggest change in perceived levels of corruption since the 2012 survey concerned the prime minister’s office, with the proportion of those saying that “most of them” or “all of them” are corrupt increasing from 10% to 17%.

Two more categories were added in the 2014 survey: religious leaders and business executives. One in 10 respondents (10%) believe that most or all religious leaders are corrupt, while at the other extreme business executives take the lead in perceived corruption, with 24% of respondents saying that most or all of them are corrupt.

Figure 2: Perceived level of corruption in institutions | Mauritius | 2012-2014



Respondents were asked: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say “most of them” or “all of them” are corrupt)

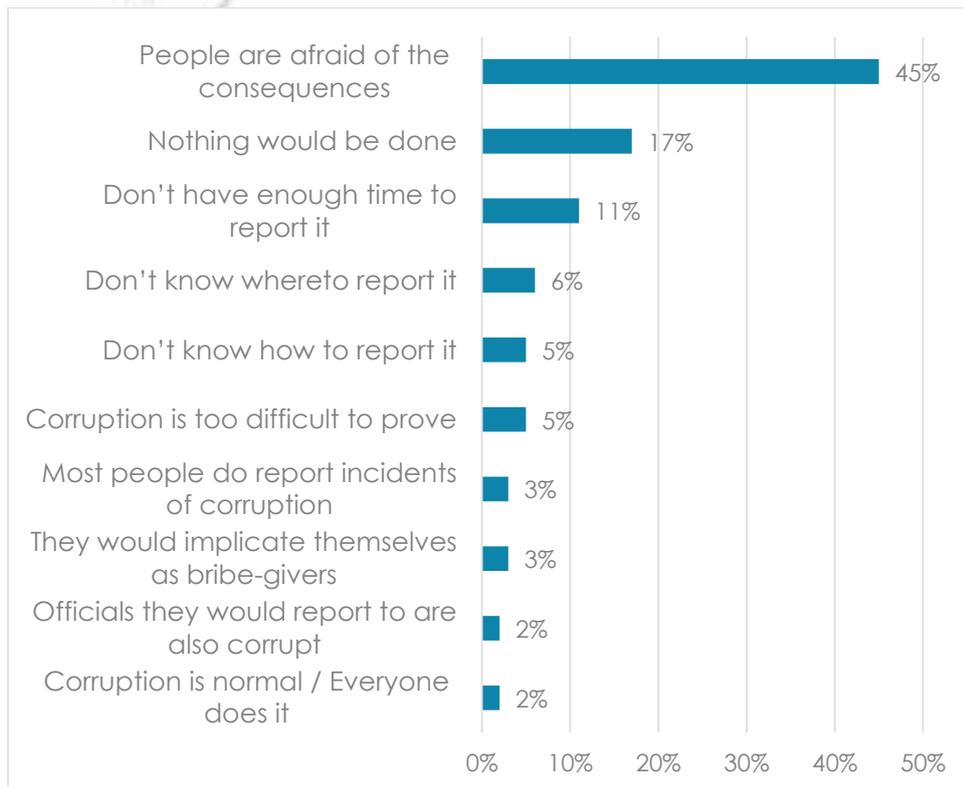
Mauritians say they don't pay bribes – or report them

While most Mauritians perceive corruption as existing everywhere, no survey respondents report having paid a bribe during the previous year to obtain services from public schools, public hospitals, the police, court officials, officers issuing documents and permits, or for water and sanitation services. Interestingly, the ICAC report says that one-fourth of Mauritians know someone who has paid a bribe.

Furthermore, no respondent in the Afrobarometer survey indicates having reported a case of corruption to the authorities in the previous year.

However, asked why many people do not report cases of corruption, only 3% of respondents assert that “most people do report incidents of corruption. Rather, 45% of respondents say that corruption is not reported because of fear of the consequences. The second-most-common response is that reporting cases of corruption would not lead to meaningful action by the authorities (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Reasons for not reporting cases of corruption | Mauritius | 2014



Respondents were asked: Some people say that many incidents of corruption are never reported. Based on your experience, what do you think is the main reason why many people do not report corruption when it occurs?

Gilles Joomun is a consultant for StraConsult Ltd in Port Louis, Mauritius.
Email: straconsultoff@intnet.mu

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.

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

For more information, please visit www.afrobarometer.org.

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 26 | 27 March 2015