

## Corruption crossroads?

Rising perceptions of graft weaken citizen trust,  
threaten Botswana's democratic standing

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## Introduction

Corruption is widely considered one of the greatest impediments to sustainable development in African countries (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2016; Bratton & Gyimah-Boadi, 2016). Corruption hinders macro-economic growth by weakening governance structures and diluting the positive effects of investments. At the micro level, corruption can trap the poorest, who are least likely to have alternatives to state provision of services, in a downward spiral (Peiffer & Rose, 2014).

Botswana has long been considered one of Africa's least corrupt countries and top performers in democratic practice and good governance. But while Transparency International's (2019) Corruption Perceptions Index continues to rank Botswana as best on the continent, other observers have questioned this reputation (Mogalakwe & Nyamnjoh, 2017; Good, 2017). Allegations have focused on, among other things, high-level corruption in military procurement contracts under former President Ian Khama, close ties between members of the ruling party and the agricultural sector, and charges that well-connected suspects are often cleared by the courts (Motlogelwa & Civillini, 2016; Konopo, 2017; Good, 2017; Norad, 2011; Sebudubudu 2014; Gasennelwe, 2018).

Recent corruption scandals have reached the highest levels of government, including the alleged looting of the National Petroleum Fund (Kgalemang, 2019; Motshegwa, Mutonono, & Mikazhu, 2019), and are still before courts of law (Shuma, 2020).

In this paper we use Afrobarometer survey data to explore citizens' perceptions of corruption in Botswana. We find that far more people see corruption increasing than decreasing and that perceptions of corruption in the Presidency and Parliament have risen sharply over the past decade. Fewer Botswana approve of how the government is handling the anti-corruption fight, and while many believe ordinary people can help fight corruption, a majority say that people risk retaliation if they report corruption to the authorities.

A correlation analysis suggests that perceptions of corruption, especially in the Presidency, are strongly associated with less popular trust in public institutions and less satisfaction with democracy.

## Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on Africans' experiences and evaluations of quality of life, governance, and democracy. Seven rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018. Round 8 surveys are planned in at least 35 countries in 2019/2021. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer National Partner in Botswana, Star Awards Ltd., interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,200 adult Botswana in July-August 2019. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Botswana in 1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2017.

## Key findings

- Half (50%) of Botswana say the overall level of corruption in the country increased during the previous year, while only 21% say it decreased.
- Among key state institutions, elected government leaders are most widely seen as corrupt. The proportion of citizens who say "most" or "all" officials in the Presidency are corrupt quadrupled over the past decade, from 9% in 2008 to 35% in 2019.
- While a majority (56%) of Botswana say the government is performing "fairly well" or "very well" in fighting corruption, this reflects a significant decline in positive assessments over the past decade (from 69% in 2008).

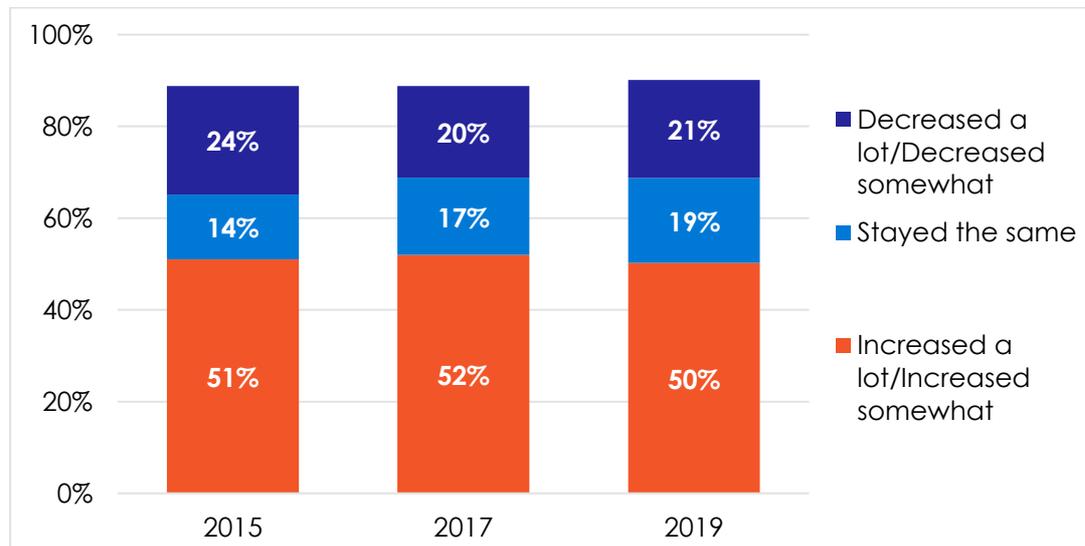


- Seven out of 10 Botswana (70%) say people risk retaliation if they report corruption to the authorities.
- Despite widespread media coverage, only about one-third of Botswana (35%) say they have heard of the National Petroleum Fund embezzlement scandal. Among those who were aware of the allegations, more than eight out of 10 (82%) say they are “very concerned” about the misappropriation of funds.
- However, many believe that those who are accused in the NPF scandal will not be taken to court or, if convicted, sent to prison. Respondents who see judicial corruption and official impunity as widespread are less likely to express confidence that prosecution and punishment are likely.
- Regression analyses show that perceptions of corruption in the Presidency and of increasing levels of overall corruption are significantly associated with less popular trust in government institutions and less perceived supply of democracy. We find no linkage between perceptions of corruption and how much Botswana want democracy.

### Perceived levels of corruption

Half (50%) of Botswana say corruption increased “somewhat” or “a lot” over the previous year, while only two out of 10 (21%) believe that it decreased and about the same proportion (19%) say it remained unchanged (Figure 1). These assessments have been fairly stable over the past five years and are close to the continental average in Afrobarometer surveys (across 34 countries surveyed in 2016/2018, 52% said corruption had increased).

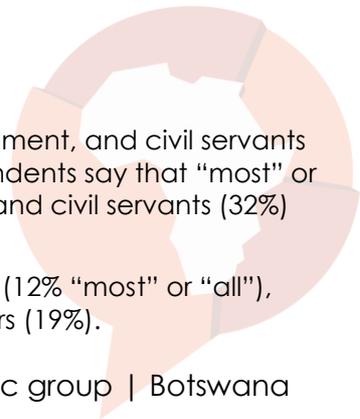
**Figure 1: Change in overall level of corruption | Botswana | 2015-2019**



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

Perceptions that corruption levels increased are similar across most key socio-demographic groups (Figure 2). But respondents with post-secondary education (59%) and those with high lived poverty<sup>1</sup> (59%) are more likely to report increasing levels of corruption than their less-educated and better-off counterparts.

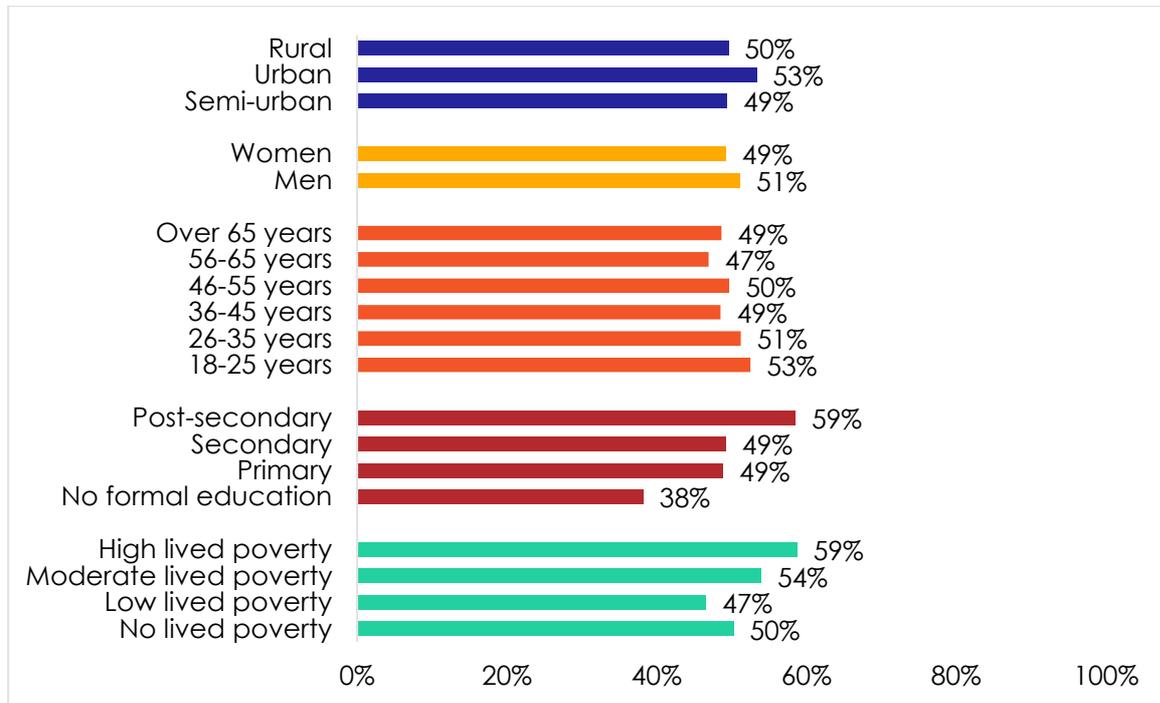
<sup>1</sup> Afrobarometer’s Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures levels of material deprivation by asking how often respondents or their families went without basic necessities (enough food and water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes (2020).



Among key elected and non-elected officials, the Presidency, Parliament, and civil servants are most widely seen as corrupt (Figure 3). About one-third of respondents say that “most” or “all” officials in the Presidency (34%), members of Parliament (32%), and civil servants (32%) are corrupt, followed closely by the police (30%).

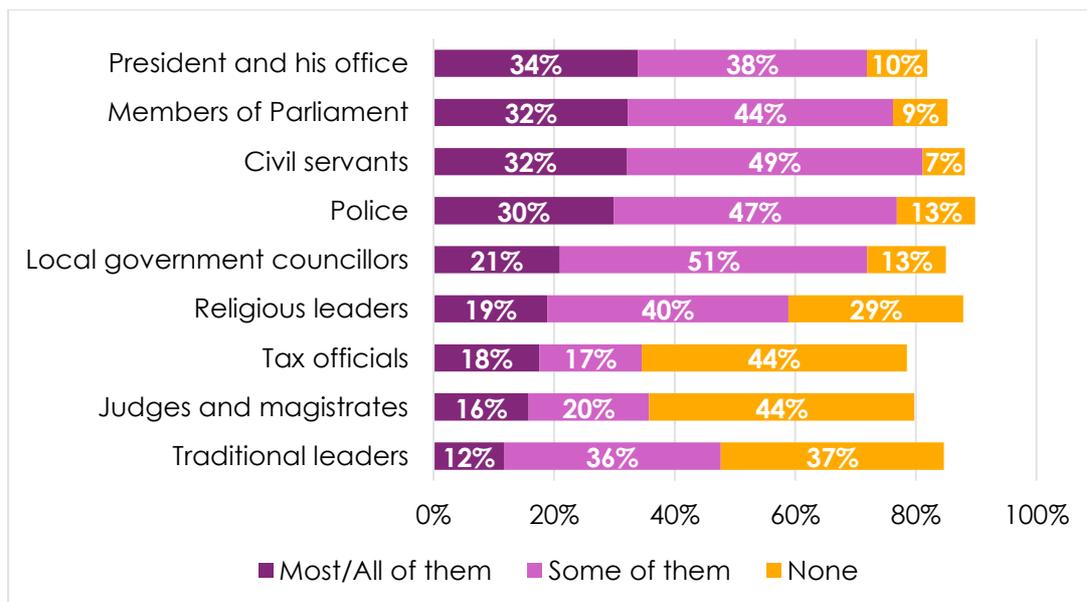
Fewer citizens see widespread corruption among traditional leaders (12% “most” or “all”), judges and magistrates (16%), tax officials (18%), and religious leaders (19%).

**Figure 2: Increased level of corruption** | by socio-demographic group | Botswana | 2019



**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, over the past year, has the level of corruption in this country increased, decreased, or stayed the same? (% who say “increased somewhat” or “increased a lot”)

**Figure 3: Perceived corruption among officials** | Botswana | 2019

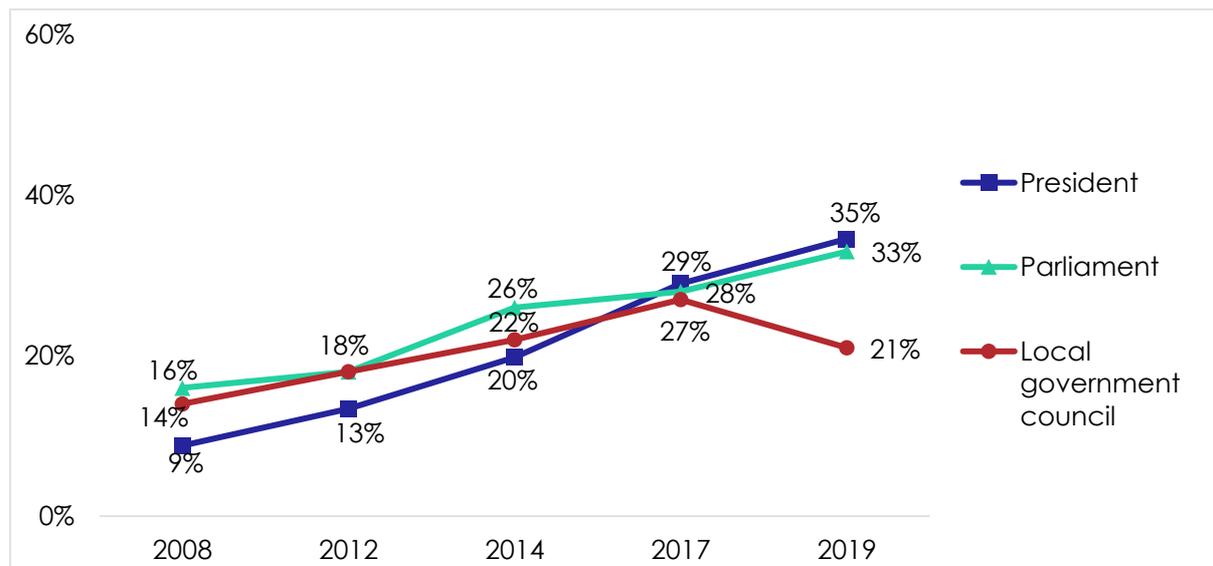


**Respondents were asked:** How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

Generally, there is an increasing trend, over the past decade, in the view that most/all officials in the presidential office, Parliament, and local councils are involved in corruption. Between 2008 and 2019, this view increased by 26 percentage points for the Presidency, 17 points for MPs, and 7 points for local councillors (despite a 6-point drop between 2017 and 2019) (Figure 4).

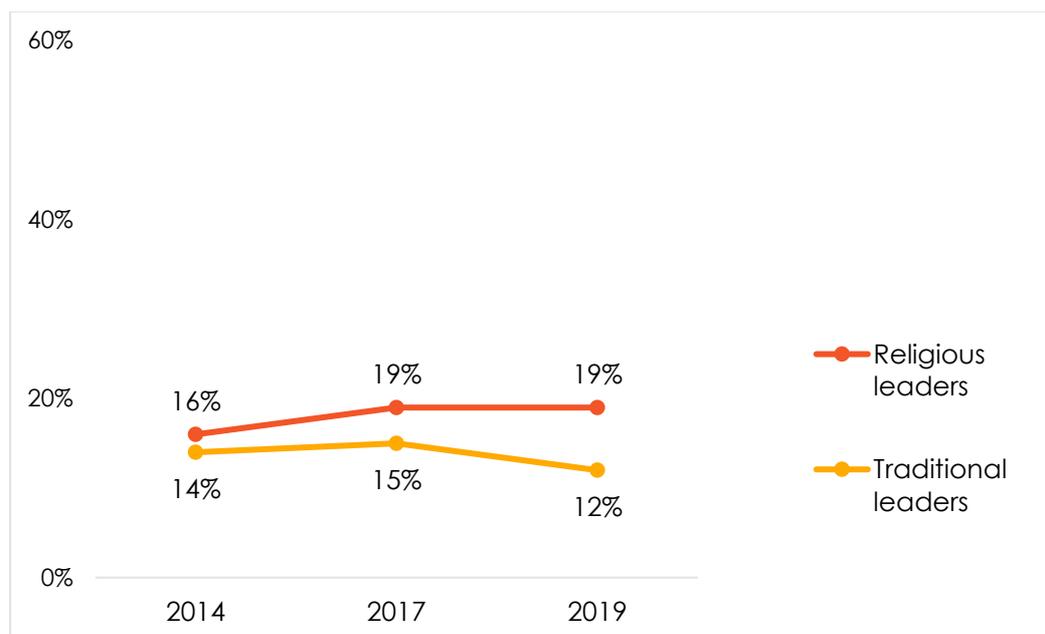
In contrast, perceptions of corruption among religious and traditional leaders have remained fairly stable in recent years (Figure 5).

**Figure 4: Perceived corruption in Presidency, Parliament, and local government council | Botswana | 2008-2019**



**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" or "all" of them are corrupt)

**Figure 5: Perceived corruption among traditional and religious leaders | Botswana | 2003-2019**

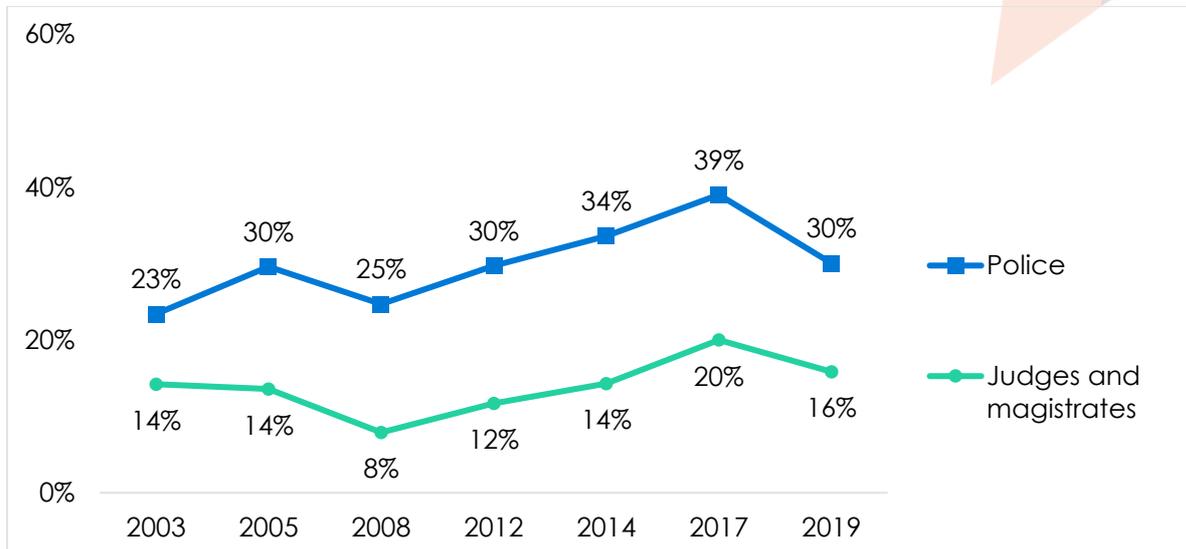


**Respondents were asked:** How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say "most" or "all" of them are corrupt)

Widespread corruption is about twice as commonly perceived among the police as among judges and magistrates (30% vs. 16%), but over time these perceptions follow similar patterns – climbing steadily from 2008 until 2017 before declining in the latest survey (Figure 6).



**Figure 6: Perceived corruption among police and judges/magistrates | Botswana | 2003-2019**



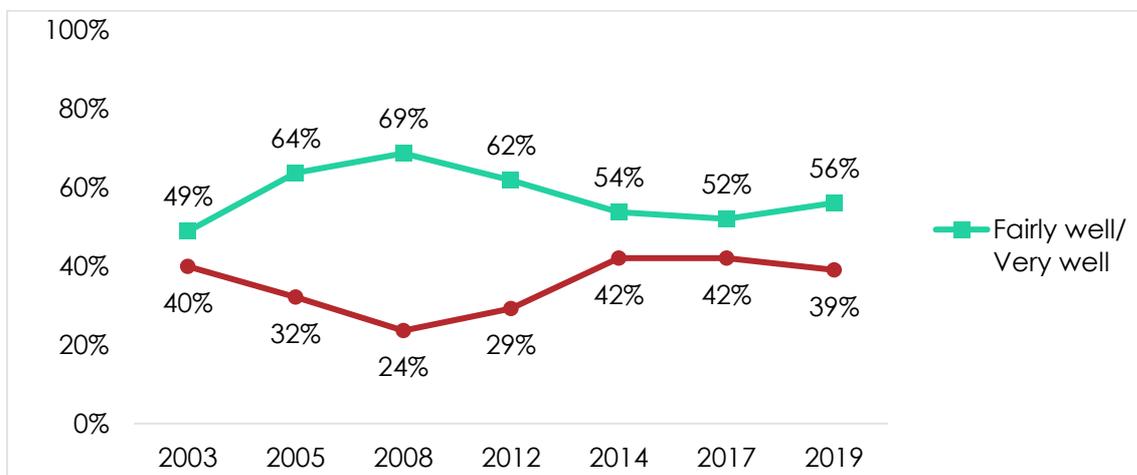
**Respondents were asked:** How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say "most" or "all" of them are corrupt)

### Combating corruption

Despite perceptions of increasing corruption, a majority (56%) of Botswana say the government is performing "fairly well" or "very well" in fighting corruption. But this reflects a significant decline in positive assessments over the past decade (from 69% in 2008) (Figure 7).

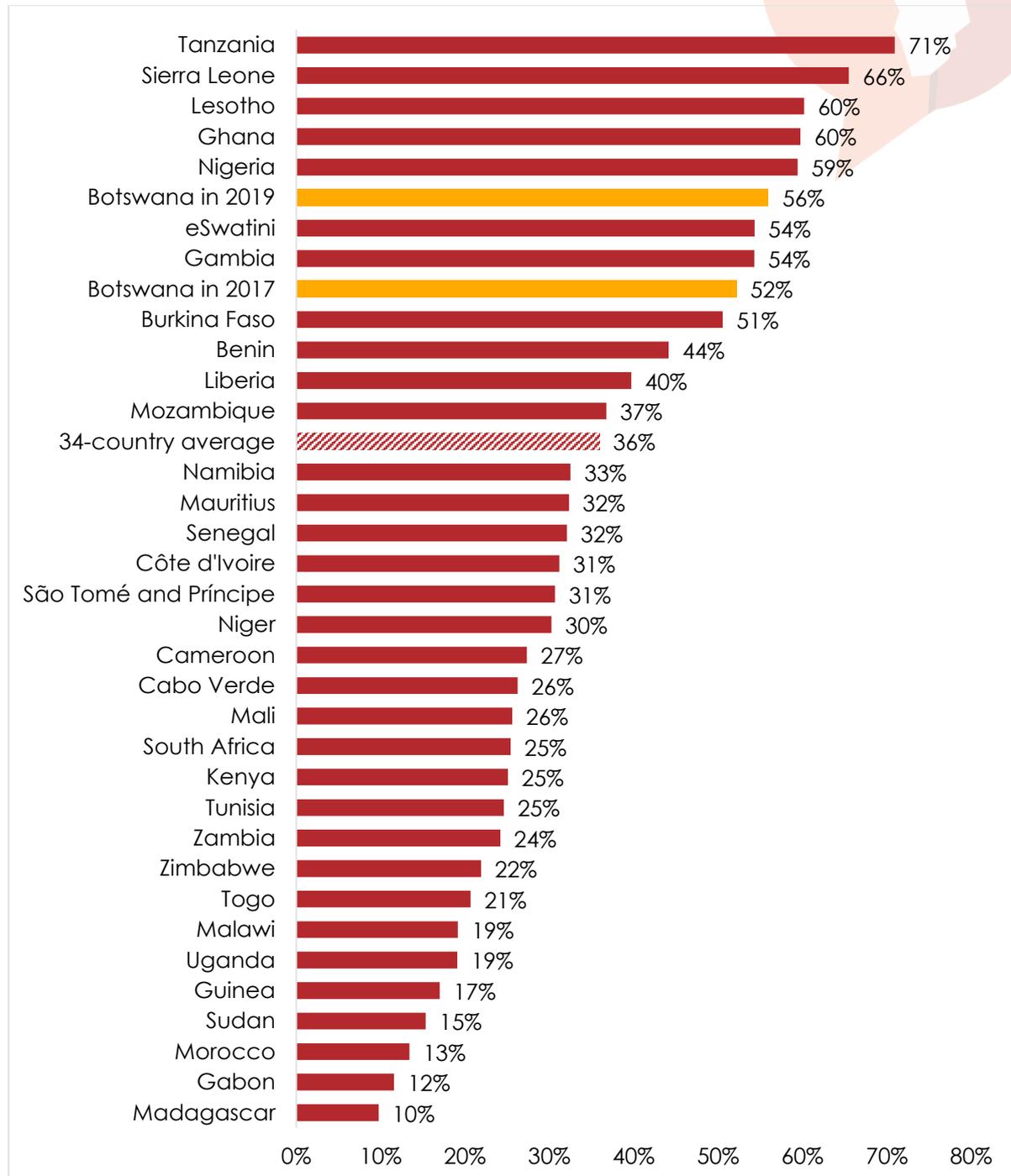
Still, the Botswana government's marks on fighting corruption are better than those in most countries across the continent. In the most recent complete round of Afrobarometer surveys (in 34 countries in 2016/2018), on average just 36% of respondents described their government's performance as "fairly" or "very" good (Figure 8). Several other Southern African governments received below-average ratings, including Madagascar (10% approval), Malawi (19%), Zimbabwe (22%), Zambia (24%), and South African (25%).

**Figure 7: Government performance in fighting corruption | Botswana | 2003-2019**



**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Fighting corruption in government?

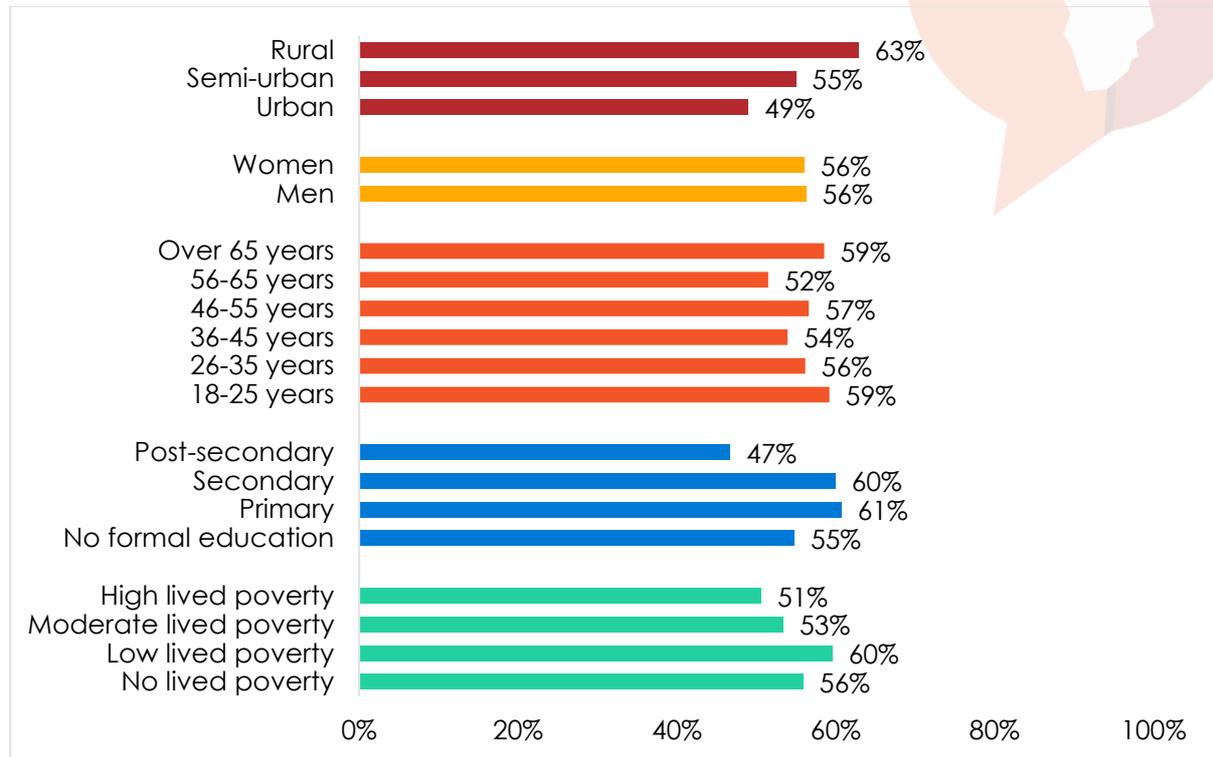
**Figure 8: Government performing well in fighting corruption | by country**  
 | 34 countries | 2016/2018



**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Fighting corruption in government? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")

Urban residents (49%) are less likely than rural residents (63%) to approve of the government's anti-corruption efforts, as are respondents with post-secondary education (47%) compared to their less educated counterparts (55%-61%) (Figure 9). However, better-off citizens (56%-60%) are more approving than poorer respondents (51%-53%).

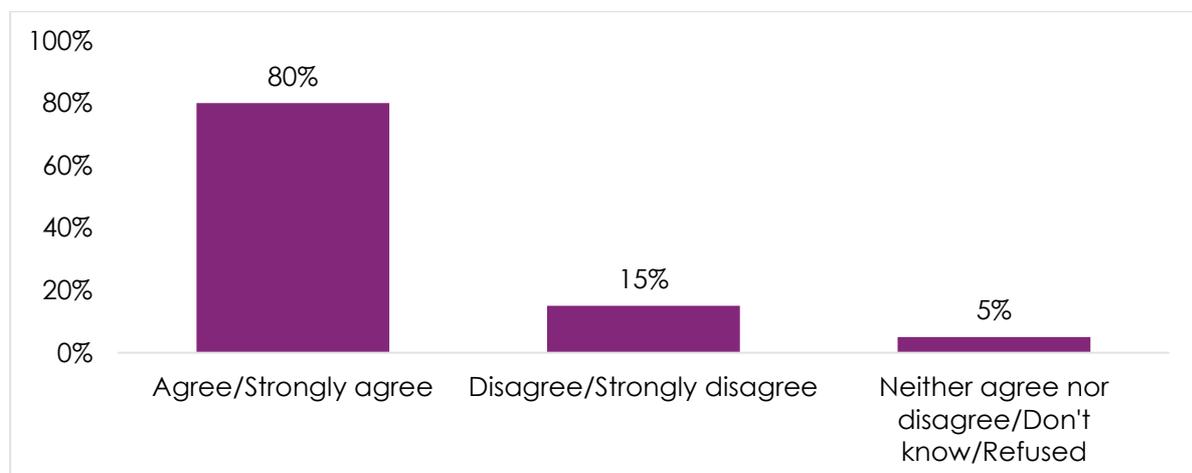
**Figure 9: Government performing well in fighting corruption** | by socio-demographic group | Botswana | 2019



**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Fighting corruption in government? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")

And most Batswana would support an additional step to reduce corruption in public procurement: 80% say politicians and senior public servants should be excluded from public tenders (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Politicians and senior public servants should be excluded from public tenders** | Botswana | 2019



**Respondents were asked:** Please tell me whether you disagree or agree with the following statements: Politicians and senior public servants should be disallowed from participating in public tenders in order to reduce cases of corruption in procurement?

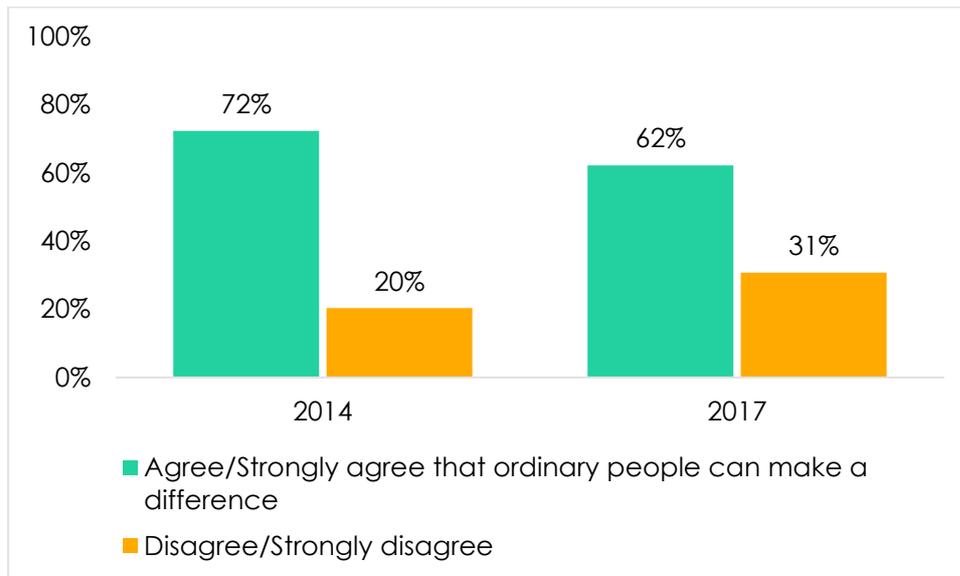
## Fighting corruption: Citizens' perspective

A majority of Batswana think that ordinary people can also help “make a difference” in the fight against corruption, although this belief lost ground between 2014 (72%) and 2017 (62%) (Figure 11), the last time this question was asked.

Compared to other African countries, Batswana expressed fairly high levels of faith in people's ability to help fight corruption; across 34 countries surveyed in 2016/2018, the average was 54%.



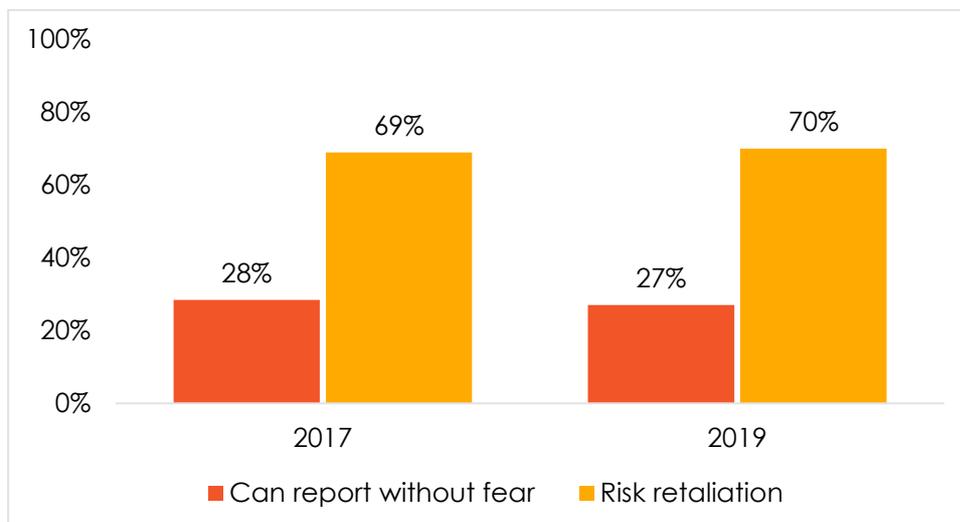
**Figure 11: Ordinary people can fight corruption | Botswana | 2014-2017**



**Respondents were asked:** Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: Ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption?

But fear of negative consequences could also prevent many Batswana from reporting corruption to the authorities. In 2019 as in 2017, seven out of 10 respondents say people risk retaliation if they speak out, while only three in 10 think they can report corruption without fear (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Do people risk retaliation for reporting corruption? | Botswana | 2017-2019**



**Respondents were asked:** In this country, can ordinary people report incidents of corruption without fear, or do they risk retaliation or other negative consequences if they speak out?

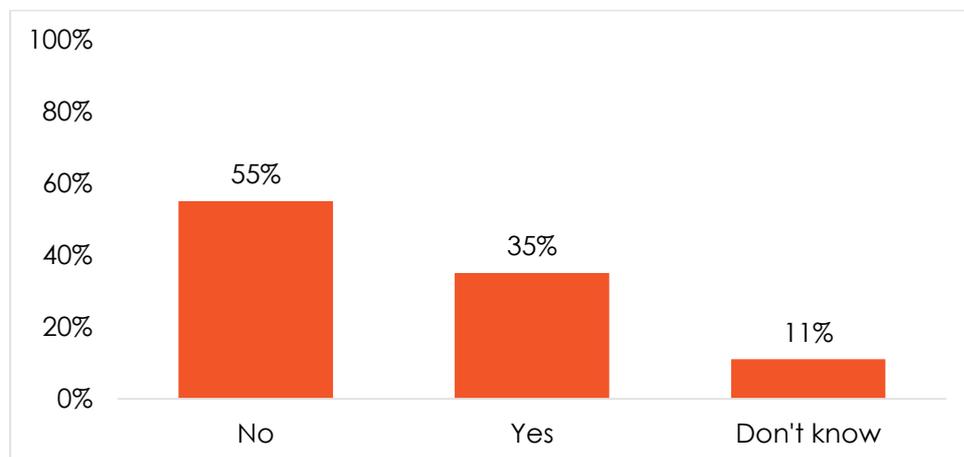
## National Petroleum Fund scandal

In 2017, the media broke a scandal concerning embezzlement of funds from the National Petroleum Fund (NPF). Former President Ian Khama, then-Vice President and current President Mokgweetsi Masisi, and some government ministers were alleged to have benefited from the fund, which was intended to cushion Botswana from inflationary increases in oil prices (Motshegwa, Mutoonono, & Mikazhu, 2019). The scandal is one of several high-profile corruption cases currently before courts of law in Botswana.

Despite considerable media coverage, only one in three Botswana (35%) say they have heard about the NPF scandal (Figure 13). Citizens with post-secondary education (69%) and urban residents (51%) are more likely to be aware of the allegations than their less-educated and rural counterparts (not shown).

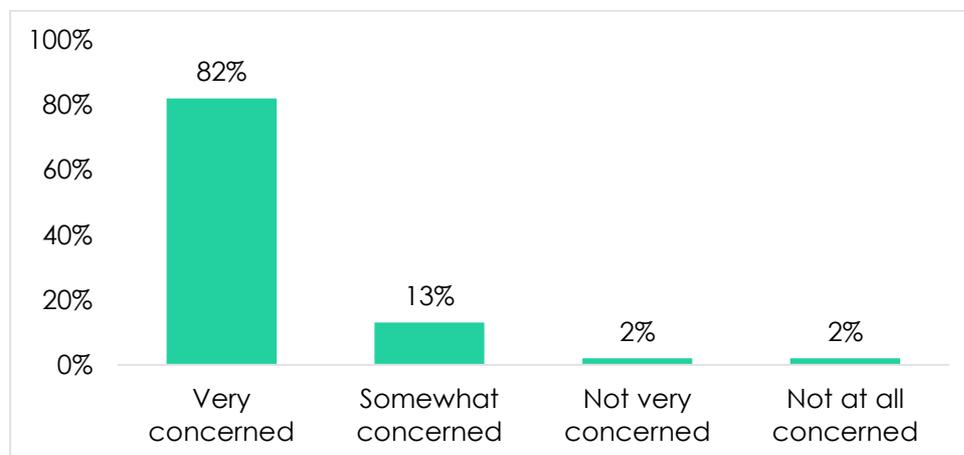
Among those who had heard about the scandal, the overwhelming majority (82%) say they are “very concerned” about the alleged embezzlements, in addition to 13% who say they are “somewhat concerned” (Figure 14).

**Figure 13: Heard about misappropriation of National Petroleum Fund money**  
| Botswana | 2019



**Respondents were asked:** Have you heard the reports about the misappropriation of funds from the National Petroleum Fund, or NPF, by some senior politicians and government officials, or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet?

**Figure 14: Concerned about misappropriation of National Petroleum Fund money**  
| Botswana | 2019



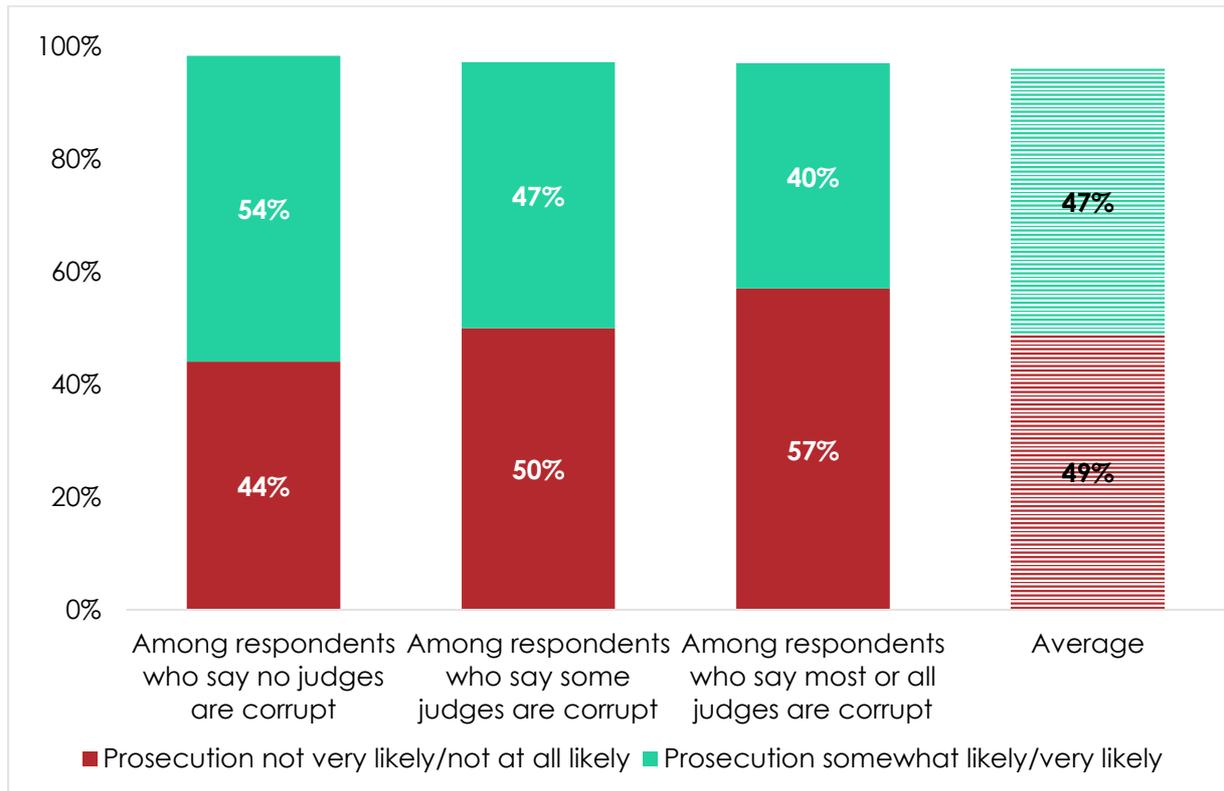
**Respondents who said they had heard of the NPF scandal were asked:** How concerned are you with the misappropriation of funds from the National Petroleum Fund or NPF?



Respondents who were aware of the scandal are about evenly divided between those who think it's likely ("somewhat" or "very") that those accused of misappropriating funds from the NPF will be prosecuted in court (47%) and those who consider prosecution unlikely (49%).

Perceived chances of the accused being prosecuted appear to be associated with perceived corruption in the courts. Among Batswana who say no judges or magistrates are corrupt, a majority (54%) think it's likely that the accused will be prosecuted. But among respondents who see widespread corruption among judges and magistrates, only 40% say prosecution in the NPF case is likely (Figure 15).

**Figure 15: Chances the accused will be prosecuted in a court of law** | by perceived corruption of judges and magistrates | Botswana | 2019



**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: Judges and magistrates?*

*How likely do you think that those accused of misappropriating funds from the National Petroleum Fund or NPF will be prosecuted in a court of law?*

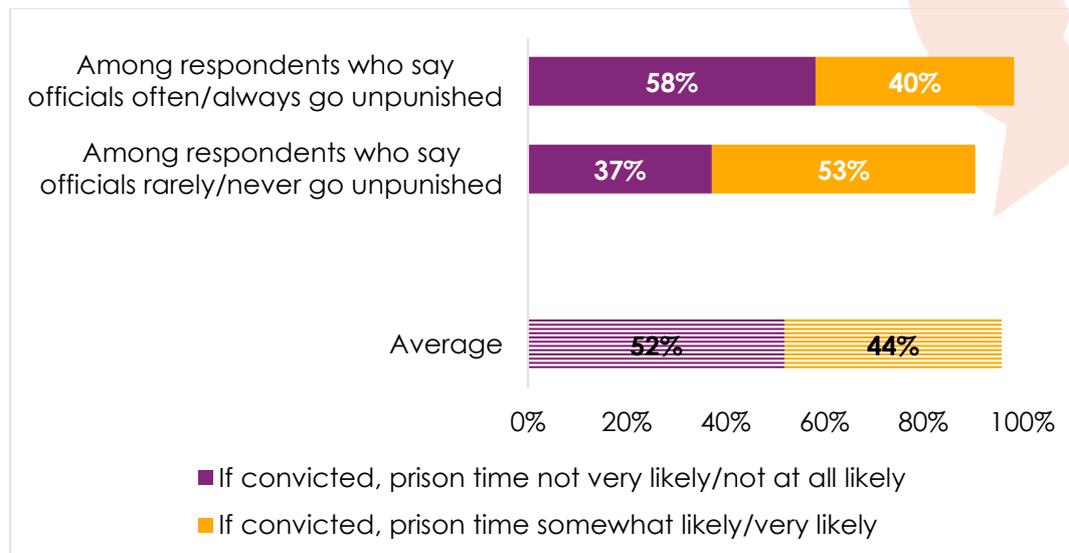
And how likely is it that, if prosecuted and found guilty, the perpetrators will go to prison? Fewer than half (44%) of respondents who were aware of the scandal see it as "somewhat" or "very" likely, while more than half (52%) say it's "not very likely" or "not at all likely."

**Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It's easy and free at [www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis](http://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis).**

Views on this question vary considerably by respondents' perceptions in general of impunity for officials who break the law.

Among those who say that officials who commit crimes "rarely" or "never" go unpunished, more than half (53%) think that those accused in the NPF scandal, if found guilty, are likely to go to prison. But among respondents who think that officials who commit crimes "often" or "always" go unpunished, only 40% think that guilty verdicts in the NPF scandal would lead to prison time (Figure 16).

**Figure 16: Chances those accused will be imprisoned if found guilty** | by views on how often officials who break the law go unpunished | Botswana | 2019



**Respondents were asked:**

*In your opinion, how often, in this country, do officials who commit crimes go unpunished?  
How likely do you think it is that those accused will be imprisoned if found guilty?*

**Implications of perceived corruption for Botswana's democracy**

Perceptions of corruption among elected leaders and officials may have important consequences for Botswana's democratic system. In a series of linear regression models, we examine how several indicators of perceived corruption affect trust in political institutions, trust in state institutions, the supply of democracy as perceived by citizens, and popular demand for democracy.

The variables whose potential influence we examine are:

1. Perceptions of changes in overall levels of corruption in the country
2. Perceived corruption in three specific institutions: the Presidency, Parliament, and local government councils
3. Assessments of government performance in fighting corruption
4. Control variables for perceptions of government performance on economic issues and social service delivery, respondents' identification as "feeling close to" the ruling political party ("incumbent partisan"), and socio-demographic factors such as urban-rural residency, gender, age, and education

We measure the outcome variables of interest as follows (see survey questions in the Appendix):

1. Trust in political institutions: Additive index (no rescaling) comprising trust in the president, trust in Parliament, trust in the elected local council, and trust in the ruling party
2. Trust in state institutions: Additive index (no rescaling) comprising trust in the police, trust in the army, and trust in courts of law
3. Supply of democracy: Average of perceived extent of democracy in the country and satisfaction with the way democracy is working
4. Demand for democracy: Average of support for democracy as a regime type and rejection of three non-democratic alternatives (one-man, one-party, and military rule)



The regression results, shown in Table 1, highlight the broad negative consequences of perceived corruption for various aspects of Botswana's democracy.

Perceived corruption in the Presidency is particularly strongly associated with less trust in political institutions (-0.194<sup>\*\*\*</sup>) and less perceived supply of democracy (-0.22<sup>\*\*\*</sup>).<sup>2</sup>

Perceived increases in corruption levels over time are significantly associated with less trust in political institutions (-0.106<sup>\*\*</sup>) and less trust in state institutions (-0.089<sup>\*</sup>). Moreover, perceived increases in levels of corruption are significantly associated with less perceived supply of democracy (-0.076<sup>\*</sup>). However, perceived changes in corruption do not appear to be associated with how much Botswana demand democracy.

How government is seen as handling corruption is important, too. The results suggest that more positive perceptions of government performance in the corruption fight are significantly associated with more trust in political institutions and state institutions. Likewise, people who hold more positive evaluations of government performance on corruption feel they are "getting" more democracy.

**Table 1: Linear regression models for political trust, supply of democracy, and demand for democracy | Botswana | 2019**

	Trust political institutions	Trust state institutions	Supply of democracy	Demand for democracy
	<i>Stand. B</i>	<i>Stand. B</i>	<i>Stand. B</i>	<i>Stand. B</i>
Level of corruption (decreased to increased)	-0.106 <sup>**</sup>	-0.089 <sup>*</sup>	-0.076 <sup>*</sup>	-0.014
Corruption: office of the Presidency	-0.194 <sup>***</sup>	-0.019	-0.22 <sup>***</sup>	-0.011
Corruption: members of Parliament	-0.023	-0.079	-0.078	0.008
Corruption: local government councillors	-0.026	-0.045	0.028	-0.036
Handling fighting corruption	0.143 <sup>**</sup>	0.16 <sup>**</sup>	0.137 <sup>**</sup>	-0.064
Economic performance	0.204 <sup>***</sup>	0.087	0.237 <sup>***</sup>	-0.135 <sup>*</sup>
Social services performance	0.013	0.103 <sup>*</sup>	-0.045	0.059
Incumbent partisan	0.182 <sup>***</sup>	0.057	0.08 <sup>*</sup>	-0.001
Urban or rural	0.036	0.062	0.053	-0.027
Gender of respondent	0.085 <sup>**</sup>	0.031	0.016	0.008
Age group	-0.010	0.061	0.036	0.095 <sup>*</sup>
Level of education	-0.064	-0.003	0.051	0.176 <sup>***</sup>
<i>R</i>	.654	.464	.554	.230
<i>R square</i>	0.428	0.215	0.307	0.053
<i>Adjusted R square</i>	0.417	0.201	0.294	0.036
<i>Std. error of the estimate</i>	2.911	2.387	0.666	0.798
<i>F</i>	41.039	14.876	24.937	3.144
<i>Sig.</i>	.000	.000	.000	.000

The results also demonstrate that economic performance and being a supporter of the incumbent party are significantly associated with more trust in elected representatives. Trust in state institutions, meanwhile, is not associated with either of these factors, but rather with more positive social service delivery performance. These results are plausible, as elected representatives are more likely linked to political parties than, say, judges and the police. Moreover, state institutions are unlikely to shape economic policy, but they are responsible for ensuring safety (which is part of the service delivery index).

However, economic performance, service delivery, and party affiliation are not significantly associated with trust in state institutions, though there is a significant positive relationship between economic performance and more trust in political institutions. Also, people who

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this section, we use commonly used classifications to indicate significance levels: \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\*p<.001.

hold positive views on economic performance feel that they are getting more democracy even as they are less insistent on demanding democracy. Moreover, people who identify with the ruling party have more trust in political institutions and even think that they are being supplied with more democracy.



## Conclusion

While Botswana has long enjoyed high international standing in terms of the rule of law and quality of democracy, ordinary Batswana feel that corruption is on the rise. Over the past decade, perceptions of corruption in the Presidency and Parliament have increased sharply, and only half of citizens approve of the government's performance in fighting corruption.

While a majority of Batswana say that ordinary citizens can do their part in reducing corruption, they believe that reporting corruption carries a risk of retaliation, and many have doubts about whether those accused of corruption will be prosecuted and punished.

Our findings suggest a number of insights for policy makers and activists:

1. *Increasing corruption lessens how much democracy Batswana feel they are getting.* Perceptions that corruption is increasing over time are significantly correlated with lower perceptions of Botswana as a functioning democracy and less satisfaction with the way its democracy is working (i.e. less perceived supply of democracy).
2. *Executive conduct matters most.* The regression models suggest that perceived corruption in the Presidency is strongly associated with less trust in government institutions as well as lower levels of perceived supply of democracy. We find no significant effect for perceived corruption among members of Parliament and local government councillors. The president must lead by example!
3. *Perceived corruption does not lessen demand for democracy.* People who perceive increasing corruption overall and in the Presidency may feel they are getting less democracy, but they are not significantly less likely to want democracy and reject authoritarianism. Perceived corruption and supply of democracy may rise or fall, but demand for democracy in Botswana appears resilient.
4. *Fighting corruption is important to garner trust in leaders and institutions.* Batswana who think the government is doing a good job of fighting corruption are more likely to feel that their democracy is working and that elected leaders and state institutions are trustworthy.

Botswana's exceptionalism as an example of democracy, good governance, and the rule of law is being questioned in the light of recent corruption and official misconduct scandals. Given the way that perceptions of corruption and of the government's anti-corruption efforts tie in with citizens' trust and views of democracy, addressing corruption will be important for how Botswana moves forward.



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## Appendix



### Survey questions used in the regression analysis

#### **Demand for democracy**

There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives:

Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office?

The army comes in to govern the country?

Elections and Parliament are abolished so that the president can decide everything?

Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?

Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.

Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.

Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.

#### **Supply of democracy**

Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Botswana?

In your opinion how much of a democracy is Botswana today?

#### **Trust in political institutions index**

How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say:

The president?

Parliament?

Your local government council?

The ruling party?

#### **Trust in state institutions**

How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say:

The police?

The army?

Courts of law?

#### **Economic performance index**

Now let's speak about the present government of this country. How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say:

Managing the economy?

Improving the living standards of the poor?

Creating jobs?

Keeping prices down?

#### **Service delivery index**

How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say:

Reducing crime?

Improving basic health services?

Addressing educational needs?

Providing water and sanitation services?

Ensuring everyone has enough to eat?

# AFRO BAROMETER

Let the people have a say



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