

Center for Democratic Development
Accra, Ghana
19 March 2018

News release

Ghanaians strongly endorse rule of law but see inequities in how laws are applied

Most Ghanaians endorse the rule of law and the legitimacy of key state enforcement bodies, a recent Afrobarometer survey reveals, affirming that the rule of law should and in fact does anchor democratic practices in the country. Even so, there is a widespread – and growing – belief that inequities exist in how laws are applied, with unfair advantage given to officials and the wealthy.

These findings are being released at a time of high optimism among Ghanaians that the newly appointed Special Prosecutor will ensure that officials who commit crimes are brought to book without fear or favour.

Key findings

- Large majorities of Ghanaians affirm that:
 - Parliament should ensure that the president explains government spending (75%);
 - The president must obey the laws and courts, even if he thinks they are wrong (75%);
 - Citizens should obey the government, regardless of whether they voted for it (90%);
 - The police have the right to demand obedience to laws (88%), the tax authorities have the right to make people pay taxes (87%), and the courts have the right to make decisions that people always have to abide by (78%) (Figure 1).
- Three-fourths of Ghanaians also believe that in practice, the president “rarely” or “never” ignores Parliament (76%) or the courts and laws of the country (75%) in order to do as he pleases (Figure 2).
- A majority say that people are “often” or “always” treated unequally under the law (62%) and that officials who commit crimes are “somewhat” or “very” likely to go unpunished (67%) (Figure 3).
- More than eight in 10 citizens believe the rich are likely to be able to pay bribes or use personal connections to avoid going to court (83%), avoid paying taxes (84%), or register land that does not belong to them (88%) (Figure 4).

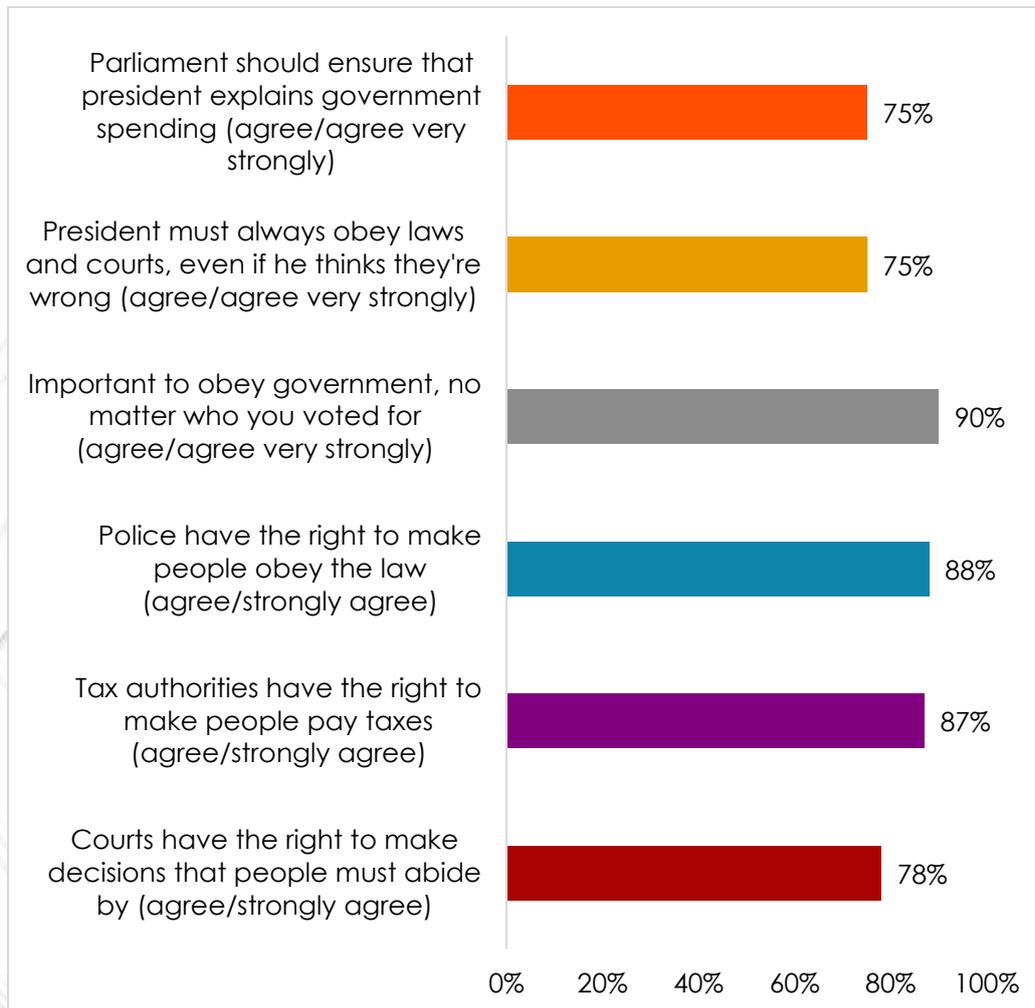
Afrobarometer

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across Africa. Six rounds of surveys were completed between 1999 and 2015, and Round 7 surveys are being conducted in 2016/2018. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent’s choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Ghana, led by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), interviewed 2,400 adult Ghanaians between September 9 and 25, 2017. A sample of this size yields results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Ghana in 1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, and 2014.

Charts

Figure 1: Citizens endorse the rule of law | Ghana | 2017



Respondents were asked:

- Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: Parliament should ensure that the president explains to it on a regular basis how his government spends taxpayers' money.

Statement 2: The president should be able to devote his full attention to developing the country rather than wasting time justifying his actions.

- Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: Since the president was elected to lead the country, he should not be bound by laws or court decisions that he thinks are wrong.

Statement 2: The president must always obey the laws and the courts, even if he thinks they are wrong.

- Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: It is important to obey the government in power, no matter who you voted for.

Statement 2: It is not necessary to obey the laws of a government that you did not vote for.

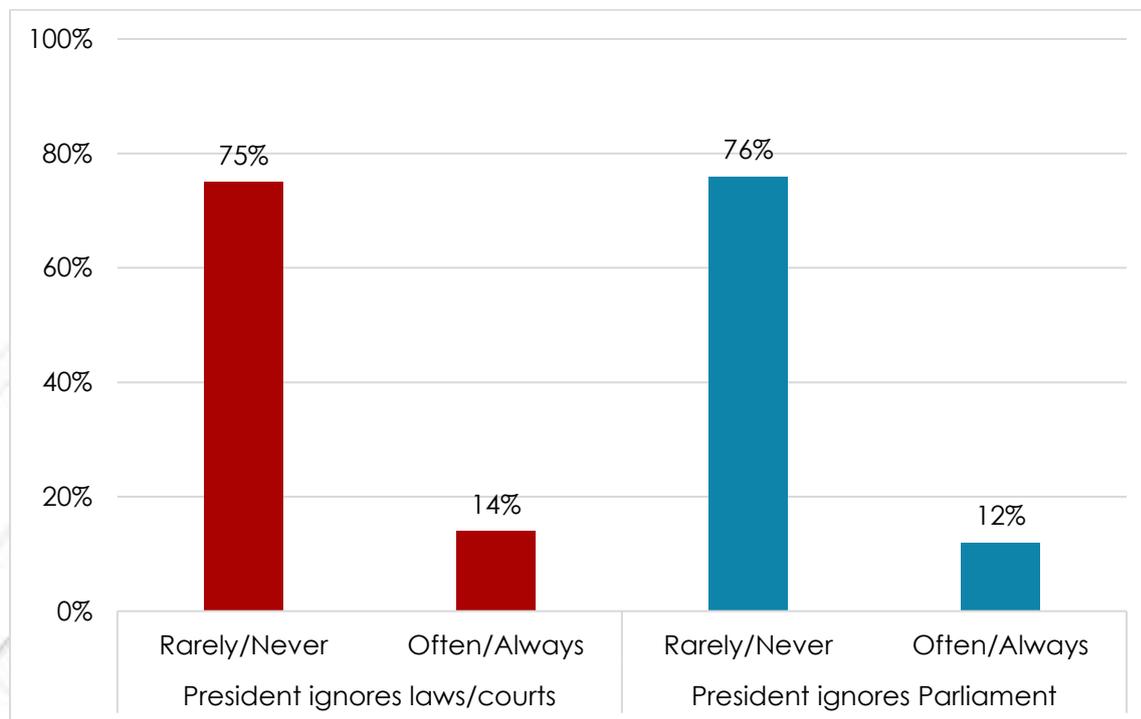
- For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree:

- The police always have the right to make people obey the law?

- The tax authorities always have the right to make people pay taxes?

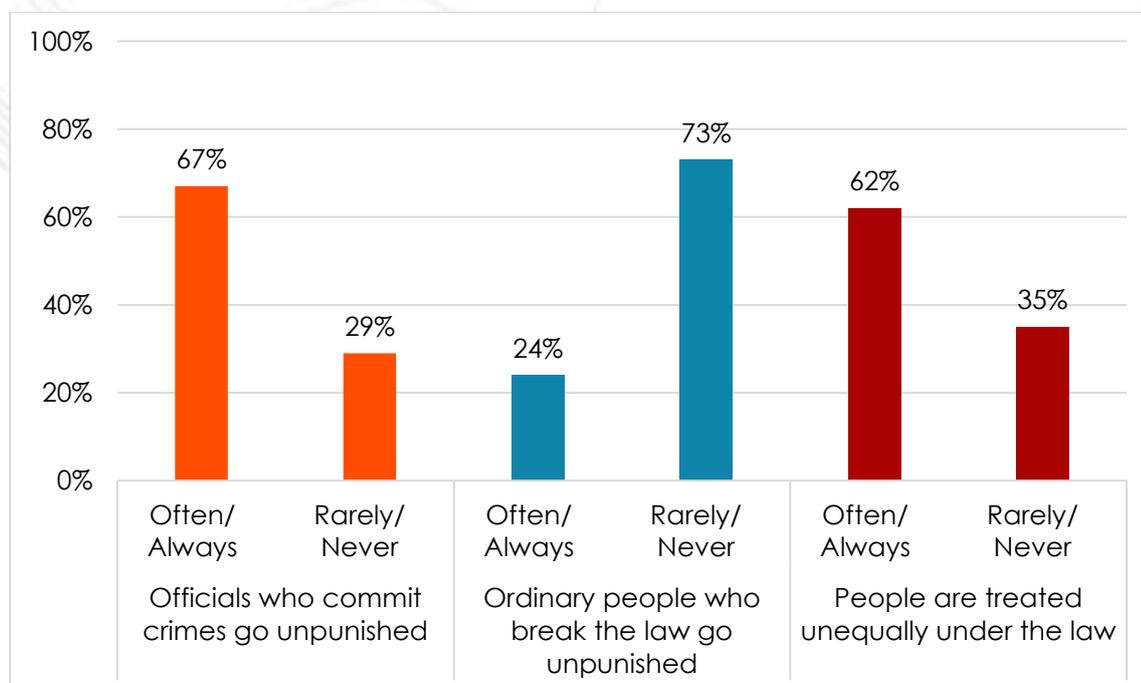
- The courts have the right to make decisions that people always have to abide by?

Figure 2: President's compliance with the rule of law | Ghana | 2017



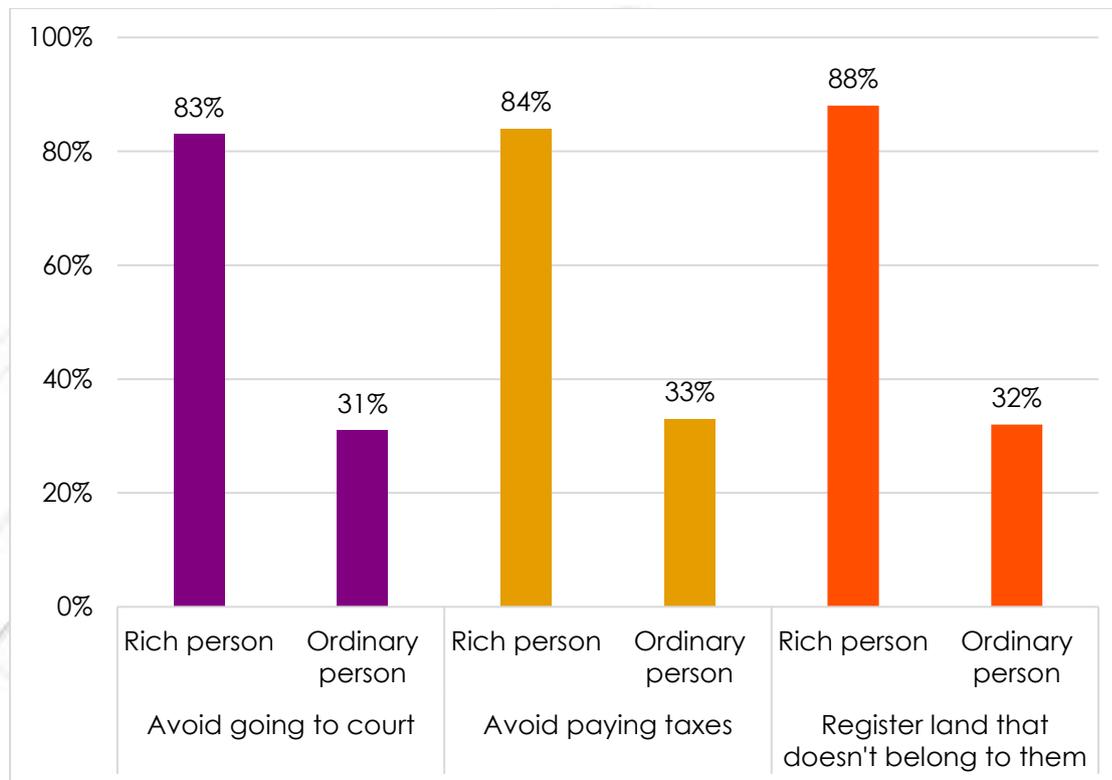
Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how often, in this country:
 - Does the president ignore the courts and laws of this country?
 - Does the president ignore Parliament and just do what he wants?

Figure 3: Perceived inequities in how laws are applied | Ghana | 2017



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how often, in this country:
 - Do officials who commit crimes go unpunished?
 - Do ordinary people who break the law go unpunished?
 - Are people treated unequally under the law?

Figure 4: Using bribery or personal connections to avoid legal obligations – rich vs. ordinary people | Ghana | 2017



Respondents were asked:

- In this country, how likely do you think it is that an ordinary person could pay a bribe or use personal connections to get away with: Avoiding paying taxes they owe to government? Avoiding going to court? Registering land that does not belong to them?
 - And in this country how likely do you think it is that a rich person could pay a bribe or use personal connections to get away with: Avoiding paying taxes they owe to government? Avoiding going to court? Registering land that does not belong to them?
 (% who say "very likely" or "somewhat likely")

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