

# Crime and security in East Africa: Burundians feel most secure

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Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 10 | Pauline M. Wambua

## Introduction

The East African Community (EAC) is an intergovernmental organisation comprising five countries in the Great Lakes region: Burundi, Rwanda, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. The EAC has a protocol that identifies objectives for fostering regional peace and security. These include combating terrorism and piracy, prevention of genocide, disaster management and crisis response, management of refugees, control of proliferation of small arms and light weapons, combating transnational and cross-border crimes, dispute settlement, and regional and international co-operation in peace and security matters. At the national level, each country has put in place mechanisms to fight crime so as to promote peace and security.

Despite these measures, crime and insecurity remain challenges in East Africa countries. According to the U.S. Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) 2014 Crime and Security Report, the U.S. government rates Kenya as critical for crime and terrorism and Uganda as critical for crime and high for terrorism. Crime and terrorism are also cited as concerns in Tanzania. The report describes the overall security situation in Burundi as stable but cites concerns about violent crime and targeted political violence.

One important aspect of security not reflected in the report is how safe citizens themselves feel. This paper adds the voices of East Africans through a comparative analysis of perceptions of crime and security in four EAC countries – Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, and Burundi – based on Afrobarometer surveys carried out between 1999 and 2012.

## Afrobarometer surveys

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 adults. Samples of this size yield results with a margin of error of +/-3% (for 1,200 respondents) or +/-2% (for 2,400 respondents) at a 95% confidence level.

Uganda and Tanzania have been part of the surveys since Round 1 (1999-2001), while Kenya has participated since Round 2 (2002-2003). Burundi was first surveyed in 2012 and therefore is not included in over-time comparisons. Rwanda has not been part of the surveys.

## Key findings

- Burundians are more likely to feel safe than Kenyans, Ugandans, and Tanzanians.
- Kenyans are more likely than other East Africans to report crime to the police even though they trust the police less.

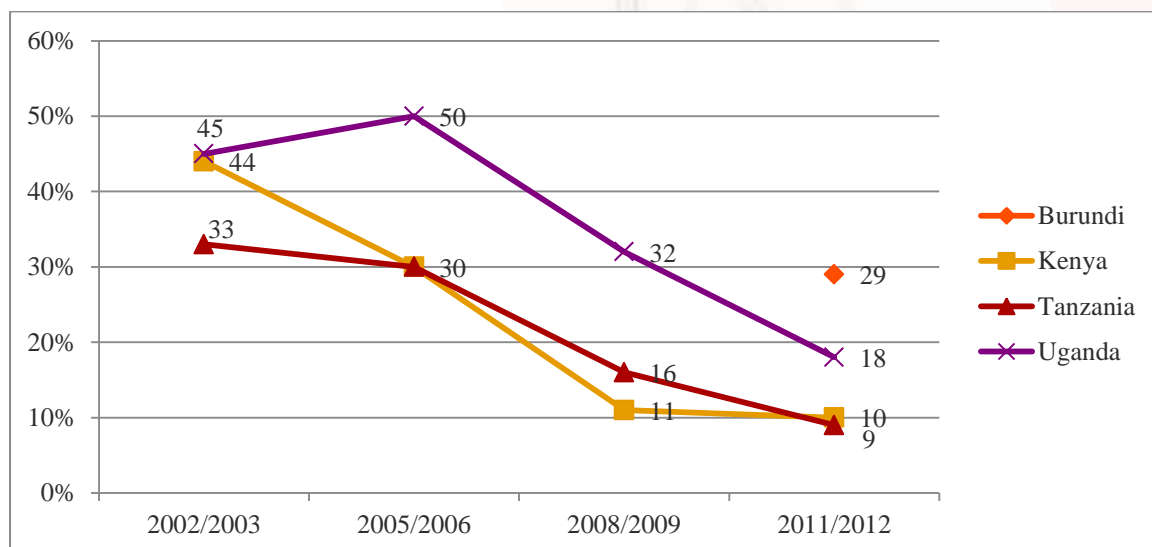
- Tanzanians and Kenyans perceive corruption among the police to have increased since 2002.
- Ratings of government performance in fighting crime have fluctuated, but in Kenya and Uganda they are significantly lower than a decade ago.
- East Africans trust the army more than the police.

### The economic context

Economic stress may increase the incentive for people to engage in illicit behaviours. A 20-year (1990-2009) time-series study in 15 countries by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) found that economic factors play an important role in the evolution of crime trends. According to the study, financial crisis as manifested through decreased economic growth and widespread unemployment may increase the proportion of the population with higher motivation to identify illicit solutions, such as crime, to their immediate problems. Similarly, discontent with economic and political conditions may contribute to other forms of instability and insecurity.

According to Afrobarometer survey results, East Africans' assessment of economic conditions in their countries has been growing increasingly negative (Figure 1). In 2005/2006, 50% of Ugandans rated the economic condition of the country as either "fairly good" or "very good," but this proportion declined to 18% by 2011/2012. In Kenya, it has been declining as well: from 44% in 2002/2003 to 10% in 2011/2012. In Tanzania, the "fairly/very good" rating declined from 33% in 2002/2003 to 9% in 2011/2012. Burundians are the most satisfied with their country's economic conditions, though still only 29% assess them as "fairly good" or "very good."

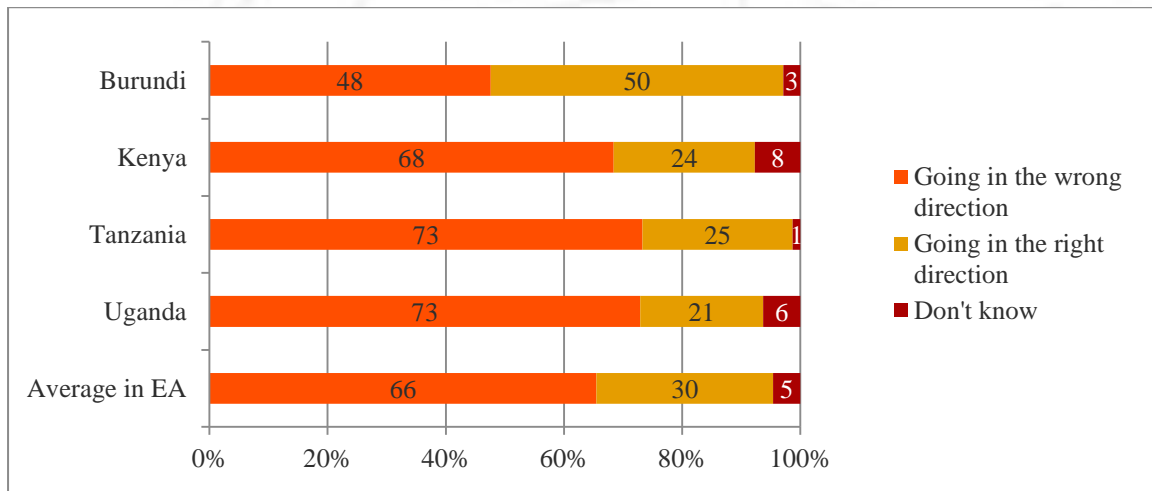
**Figure 1: Perceptions of economic conditions in East Africa | 4 countries | 2002-2012**



**Respondents were asked:** *In general, how would you describe the present economic condition of this country? (% who said "fairly good" or "very good")*

More generally, East Africans are concerned about the overall direction in which their countries are moving. Burundians are most optimistic, with 50% saying their country is going in the right direction. Among Kenyans, Tanzanians, and Ugandans, only 21% to 25% say their countries are going in the right direction (Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Direction in which country is moving** | 4 countries | 2011/2012

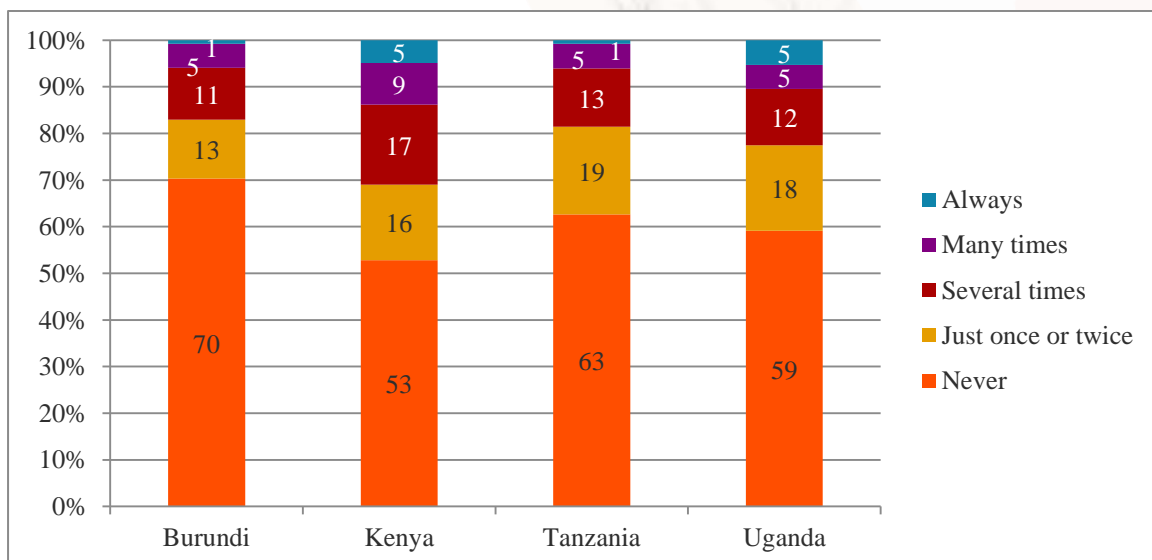


**Respondents were asked:** What about the overall direction of the country? Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction?  
 (Note: Due to rounding, the sum of category percentages may not always total 100%, and sums within combined categories may differ by 1 percentage point from reported sub-totals.)

### Experience of fear and crime

A majority of East Africans generally feel safe and have not suffered theft or violent attack. But sizeable minorities are not so fortunate, especially in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. Six out of 10 East Africans (60%) say they “never” feel unsafe walking in their neighbourhoods. More Burundians (70%) “never” feel unsafe walking in their neighbourhoods than citizens in the other countries, while Kenyans feel least secure (53% who “never” feel unsafe) (Figure 3).

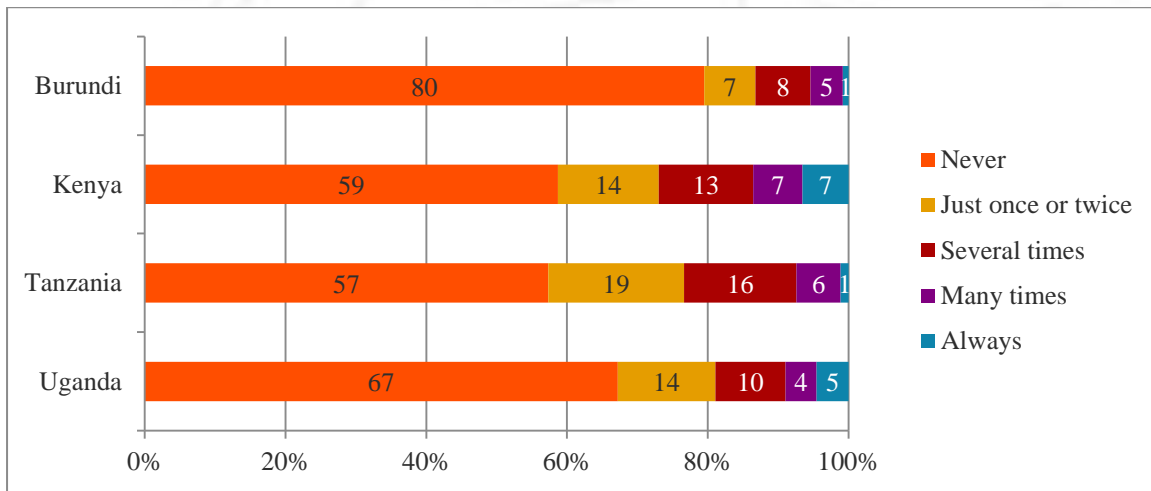
**Figure 3: Feeling unsafe walking in the neighbourhood** | 4 countries | 2011/2012



**Respondents were asked:** Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family felt unsafe walking in your neighbourhood?

Burundians are least likely to fear crime in their homes: 21% say that they or a family member felt afraid “just once or twice,” “several times,” “many times,” or “always” during the previous year. Tanzanians (43%) are most likely to fear crime in their homes (Figure 4).

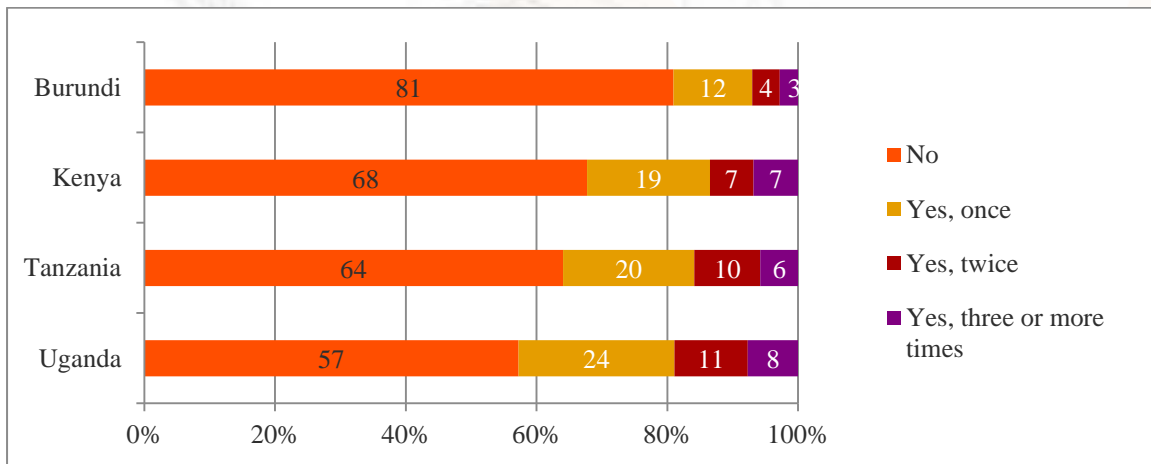
**Figure 4: Fear of crime in their homes** | 4 countries | 2011/2012



**Respondents were asked:** Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family feared crime in your own home?

In Burundi, 19% of respondents say a theft occurred at their homes during the previous year, compared to 43% of Ugandans, 36% of Tanzanians, and 32% of Kenyans (Figure 5).

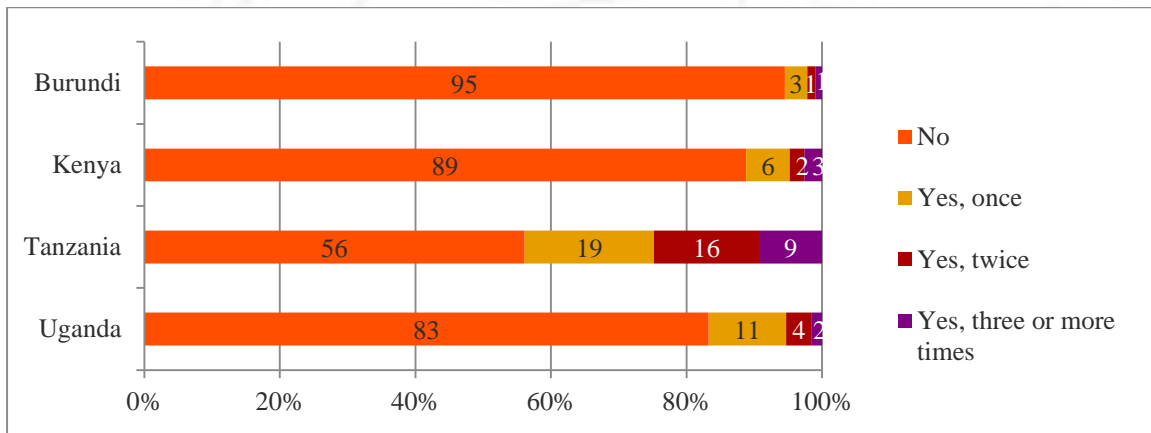
**Figure 5: Theft from home** | 4 countries | 2011/2012



**Respondents were asked:** During the past year, have you or any one in your family had something stolen from your house?

Burundi also has the lowest proportion of respondents who report that they or someone in their families were physically attacked during the previous year (5%) – about one-ninth the proportion in Tanzania (44%) (Figure 6).

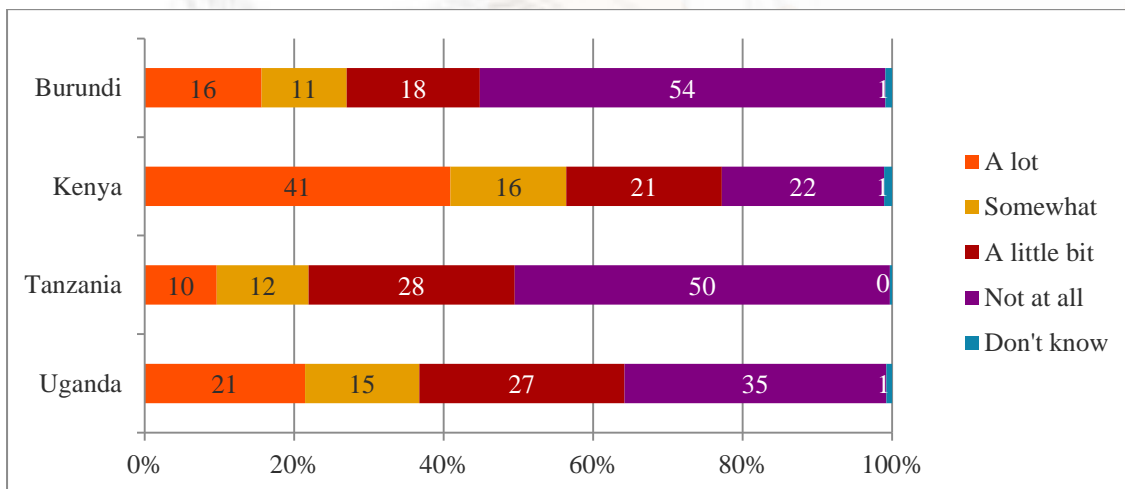
**Figure 6: Physically attacked in previous year | 4 countries | 2011/2012**



**Respondents were asked:** During the past year, have you or anyone in your family been physically attacked?

During election campaigns, 78% of Kenyans say they fear “a little bit,” “somewhat,” or “a lot” becoming victims of political intimidation or violence – a much higher proportion than in the other three countries (Figure 7). The lowest proportion expressing at least “a little bit” of fear of political intimidation or violence is in Burundi (45%).

**Figure 7: Fear of political intimidation or violence | 4 countries | 2011/2012**

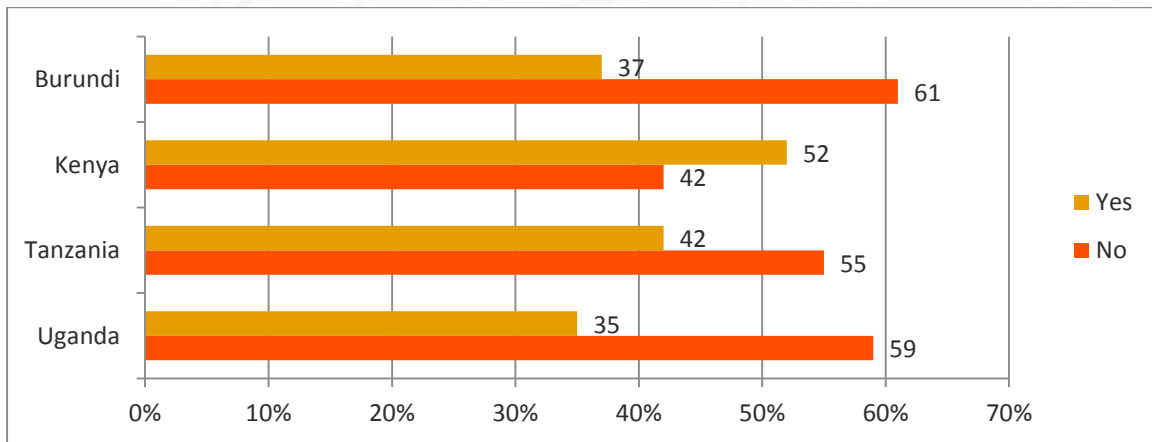


**Respondents were asked:** During election campaigns in this country, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence?

### Reporting crime

Among those who were victims of crime, Kenyans are most likely to report the crimes to the police (52%) (Figure 8) even though (as discussed below) they trust the police less than other East Africans.

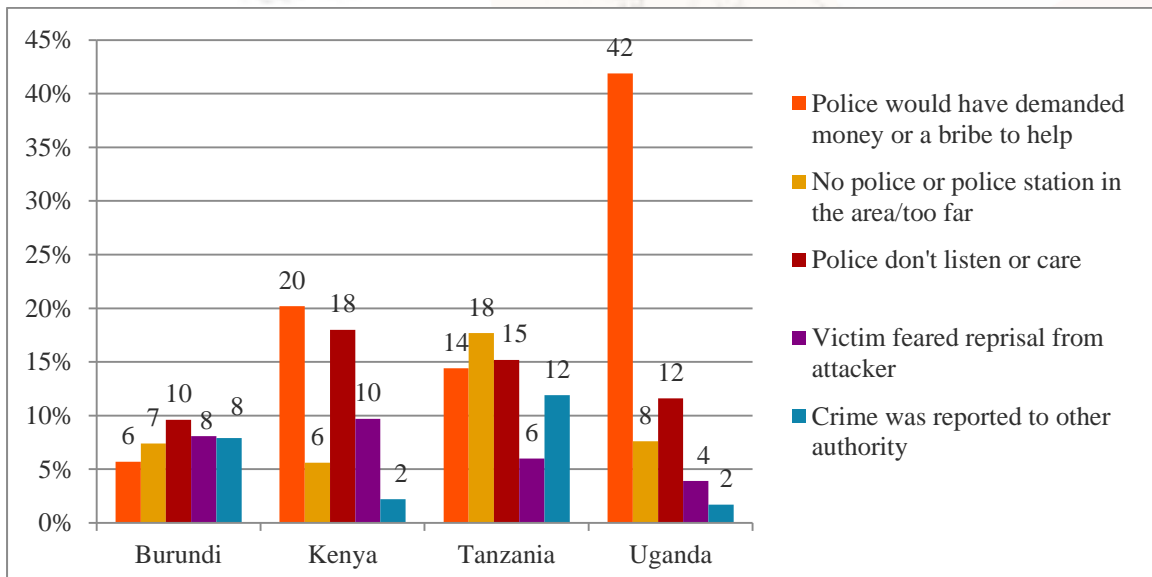
**Figure 8: Reporting crimes to the police** | 4 countries | 2011/2012



**Respondents who were victims of crimes were asked:** *Was any such incident reported to the police?*

The reasons why crimes are not reported to the police vary across the countries (Figure 9). In Uganda, the main reason cited by respondents is that the police would have demanded money or bribes to help. This is also the top reason cited in Kenya. In Burundi, the main reason is that the police don't listen or care, while in Tanzania, the main reason cited is that there is no police or the police station is too far away. Other top reasons cited are that the victim feared reprisal from the attacker and the crime was reported to some other authority, such as local government or traditional leaders.

**Figure 9: Reasons why crimes are not reported to police** | 4 countries | 2011/2012

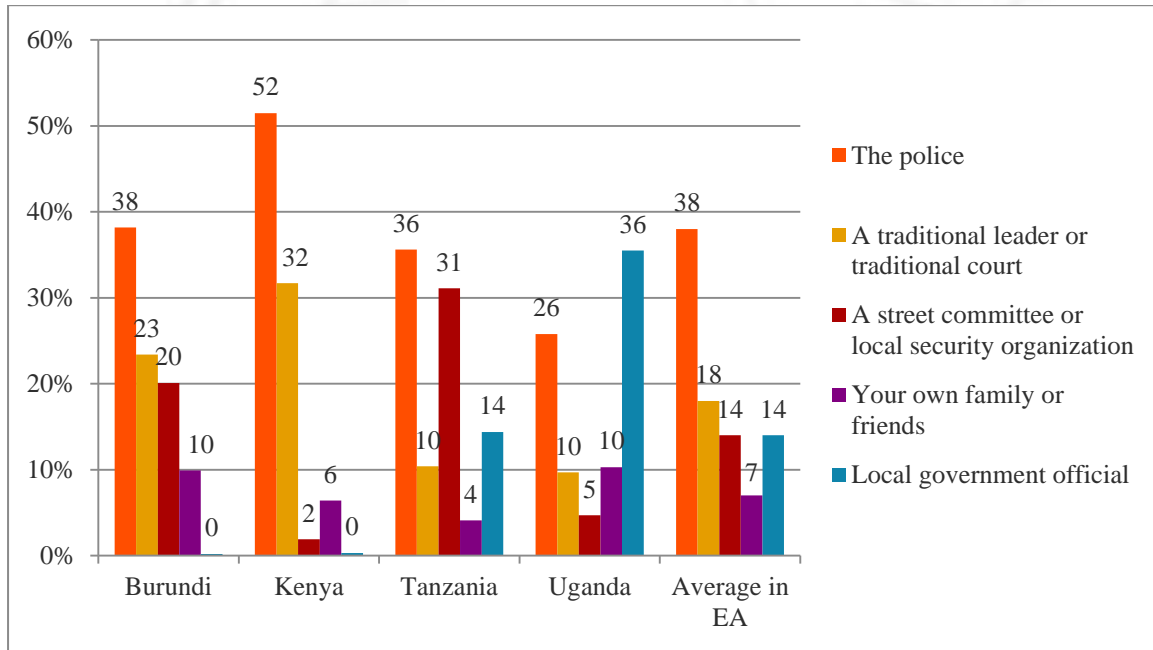


**Respondents were asked:** *Some people say that many crimes are never reported to the police. Based on your experience, what do you think is the main reason that many people do not report crimes like thefts or attacks to the police when they occur?*

If victims of crime, a majority of East Africans would first go to someone other than the police for assistance (Figure 10). Only in Kenya does a majority (52%) say they would go to the police first for assistance. Ugandans are more likely to go to a local government official than to the police.



**Figure 10: If victims of crime, top five institutions or people to go to for assistance**  
 | 4 countries | 2011/2012

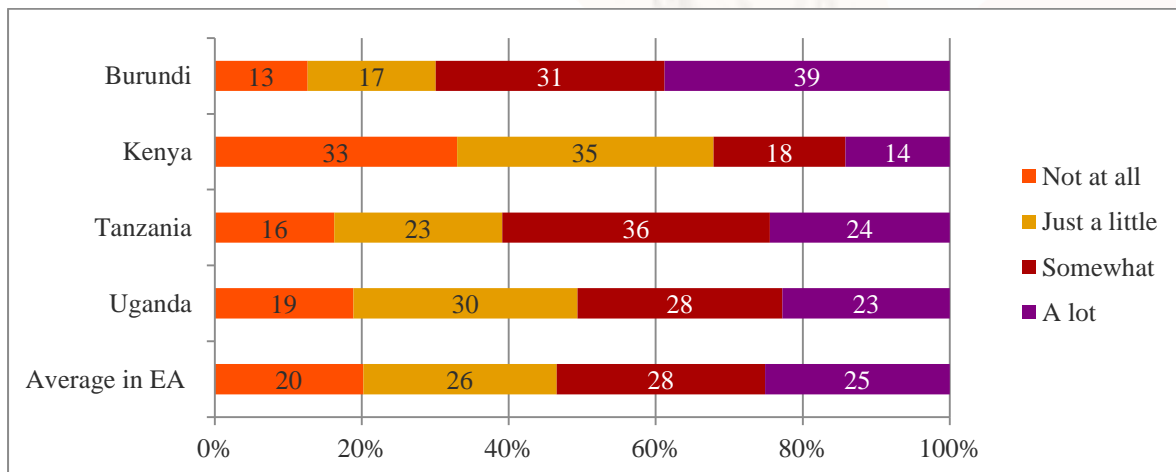


**Respondents were asked:** *If you were a victim of crime in this country, whom, if anyone, would you go to first for assistance?*

### Trust and corruption in security institutions

Only half (51%) of East Africans say they trust the police “somewhat” or “a lot” (Figure 11). Burundians are most likely to trust the police (70%), while Kenyans are least likely to trust them (32%).

**Figure 11: Trust in police** | 4 countries | 2011/2012

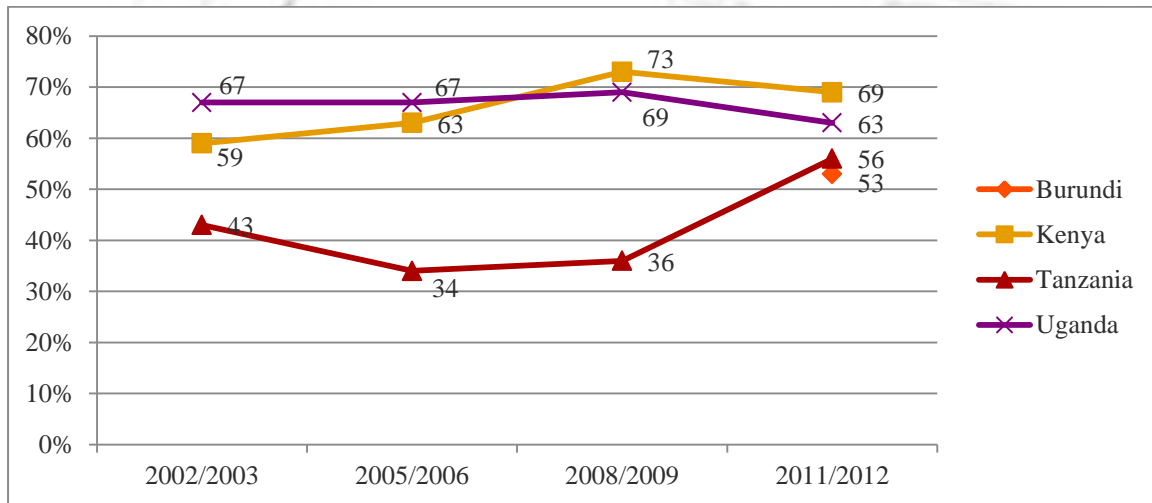


**Respondents were asked:** *How much do you trust each of the following, or you haven't heard enough about them to say: The police?*

The army is trusted more in East Africa than the police. Overall, 76% of East Africans trust the army “somewhat” or “a lot.” Burundians are most likely to trust the army “somewhat” or “a lot” (87%), followed by Tanzanians (83%), Kenyans (72%), and Ugandans (68%).

In line with low levels of trust in the police, 63% of East Africans say that “most” or “all” of the police are corrupt. Police in Burundi are least likely to be seen as corrupt (53% of respondents), while the police in Kenya are most likely to be seen as corrupt (69%). Over time, public assessments of corruption among the police have fluctuated but are higher in Kenya and Tanzania than they were in 2002/2003 (Figure 12).

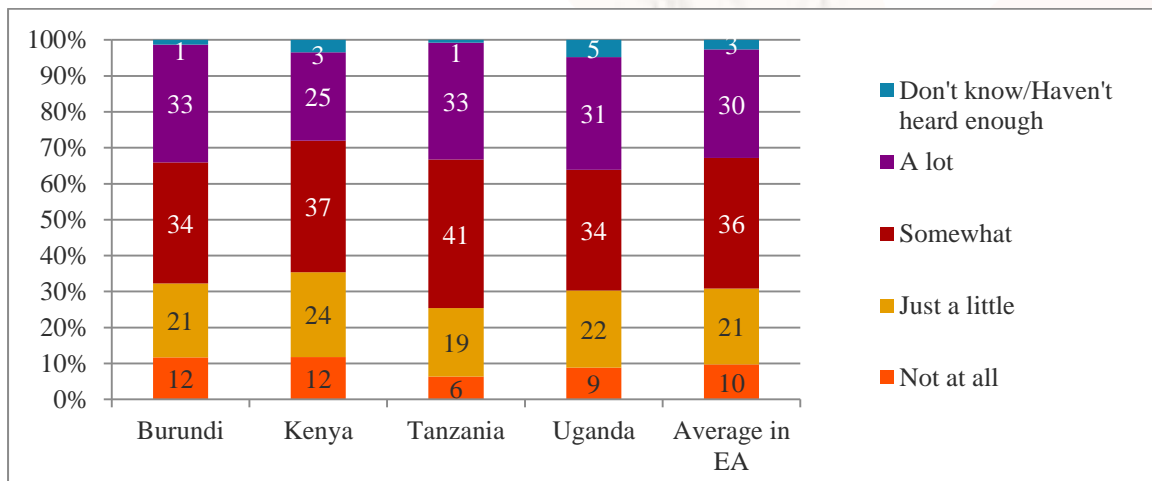
**Figure 12: Perceptions of police corruption in East Africa | 4 countries | 2002-2012**



**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: Police? (% who said “all of them” or “most of them”)

Courts of law are less trusted than the army but more trusted than the police, with two-thirds (66%) of East Africans saying they trust courts “somewhat” or “a lot.” More Tanzanians (74%) trust courts of law than do other East Africans (67% of Burundians, 65% of Ugandans, and 62% of Kenyans) (Figure 13).

**Figure 13: Trust in courts of law | 4 countries | 2011/2012**



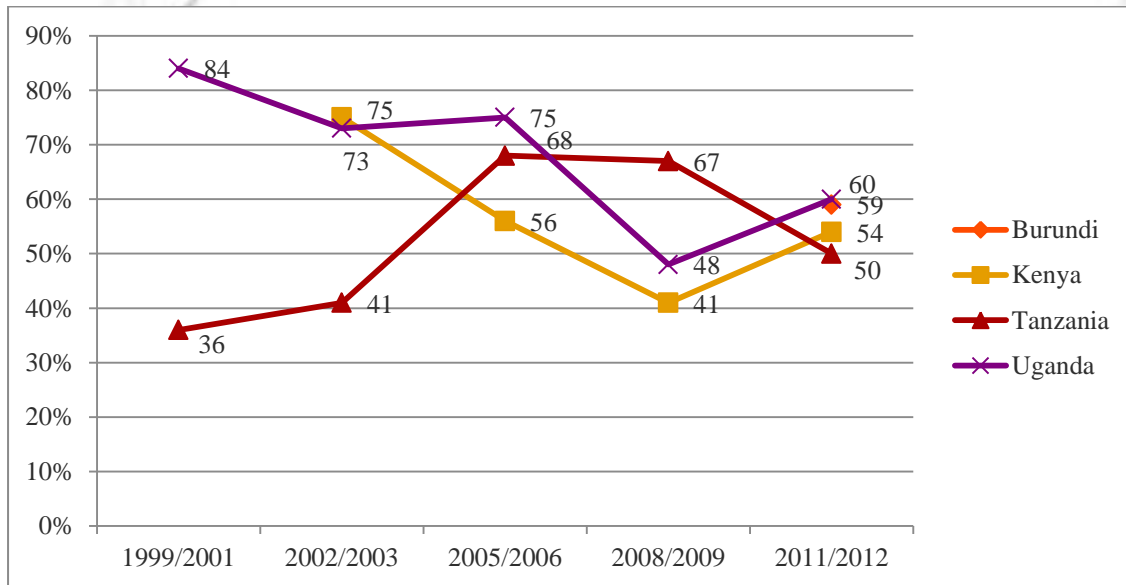
**Respondents were asked:** How much do you trust each of the following, or you haven't heard enough about them to say: Courts of law?



## Government performance in fighting crime

More than half of East Africans (55%) say their governments are doing “fairly well” or “very well” in fighting crime (Figure 14). The Ugandan government received the highest approval rating, by 60% of respondents. Over time, however, public assessments of government performance in fighting crime have shown significant declines. In Uganda and Kenya, ratings dropped by more than 30 percentage points by 2008/2009 before recovering about one-third of that loss. Tanzanians’ ratings of how their government handles crime improved between 1999 and 2006 (from 36% to 68% approval) but have been declining since 2008.

**Figure 14: Governments’ performance in fighting crime | 4 countries | 1999-2012**



**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: Reducing crime? (% who said “fairly well” or “very well”)

## Conclusion

A summary comparing findings across countries (Table 1) shows that Burundi ranks highest among these four East African countries on positive indicators related to crime and security, with Tanzania following as a distant second. This is consistent with the OSAC report's comparatively less negative portrayal of Burundi's crime and security situation. Assuming the UNODC study's link between economic conditions and crime, it is also consistent with Burundians' relatively positive assessments of their country's economic condition and direction. Further research might help clarify reasons for Burundi's more positive perceptions and potential lessons to be learned. In Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, lower ratings of government performance in the fight against crime and fairly negative perceptions of the police represent challenges for internal and regional peace and security efforts.

**Table 1: Country rankings on crime and security indicators** | 4 countries | 2011/2012

	Burundi	Kenya	Tanzania	Uganda
Country moving in the right direction	1	2	2	3
No fear of political intimidation and crime	2	4	1	3
Safe walking in the neighbourhood	1	4	2	3
Did not fear crime in their home	1	3	4	2
Did not have something stolen	1	2	3	4
Not physically attacked	1	2	4	3
Reported crime to police	3	1	2	4
Trust in police	1	4	2	3
No corruption in police	1	4	2	3
Trust in the army	1	3	2	4
Trust in courts of law	3	4	1	2
High government performance in fighting crime	2	3	4	1
Sum of rankings	18	36	29	35

(1=highest percentage among these four countries, 4=lowest percentage)

## References

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2012). Monitoring the impact of economic crisis on crime. Available at [http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/crime/GIVAS\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/crime/GIVAS_Final_Report.pdf).

U.S. Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC). (2014). Crime and Security Report. Available at <https://www.osac.gov/Pages/ContentReports.aspx?cid=2>.

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Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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.

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**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 10 | January 2015**