

Perceived corruption escalates, trust in institutions drops: A call for ordinary Ghanaians to get involved in the fight

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 6 | Daniel Armah-Attah

Summary

Most Ghanaians perceive some or all of their government, law enforcement, and judiciary officials, as well as business executives and traditional and religious leaders, as corrupt, according to new Afrobarometer survey data. Over-time analysis reveals rising trends in the level of perceived corruption among public officials and informal leaders. Indeed, a majority of citizens believe corruption has increased over the past year.

These findings come at a time when Ghanaians are crying foul over numerous corruption scandals involving public officials,¹ with citizens in the news and on protest marches demanding accountability and action from the government.

Reflecting the mutually reinforcing negative association between corruption and trust,² significant numbers of Ghanaians express little or no trust in most of the same institutions and officials. The only public institution that enjoys some amount of trust, alongside religious and traditional leaders, is the military. Over time, the number of Ghanaians who trust public institutions or officials has declined significantly.

A majority of respondents say that the government has performed poorly in arresting the canker of corruption. Amid these discouraging assessments, one bright spot is the survey finding that a majority of Ghanaians believe that ordinary citizens can make a difference in the fight against corruption, most effectively by refusing to pay bribes and by reporting corruption when it occurs. This suggests that the fight against corruption and public mistrust must be a collaboration between the government and citizens. While the government needs to re-strategize and confront corruption head-on, ordinary Ghanaians should also get directly involved, because they can make a difference.

¹ Examples of these scandals are those involving the Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurial Development Agency (GYEEDA), the Savannah Accelerated Development Authority (SADA) project, Subah Info Solution, and the Woyome scandals as well as other judgment debts graft. In addition, Parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) sittings on the Auditor General audit reports continually reveal mismanagement and in some cases outright plundering of state resources by public officials.

² One perspective on the mutually reinforcing relationship posits that a lack of institutional trust drives citizens to bribe in order to gain access to decision makers. The other perspective argues that corruption erodes citizens' trust and confidence in state institutions. See the following references: Chang, E., & Yun-han, C. (2006). Corruption and trust: Exceptionalism in Asian democracies? *Journal of Politics*, 68(2): 259-227; Anderson, C., & Yuliya, T. (2003). Corruption, political allegiances and attitudes toward government in contemporary democracies. *American Journal of Political Science*, 47(1): 91-109; Seligson, M. (2002). The impact of corruption on regime legitimacy: A comparative study of four Latin American countries. *Journal of Politics*, 64(2): 408-433; and Della Porta, D. (2000). Social capital, beliefs in government and political corruption. In *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries?* Pharr, S. J., & Putnam, R. D., eds. (pp. 202-230). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

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 Ghana, led by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), interviewed 2,400 adult Ghanaians between May 24 and June 10, 2014. 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, and 2012.

Key findings

- Large majorities (ranging from 69% to 89%) of Ghanaians perceive corruption among “some,” “most,” or “all” of the police, national government officials, members of Parliament, judges and magistrates, tax officials of the Ghana Revenue Authority, district chief executives, the president and officials in his office, local government representatives, officials of the Electoral Commission, business executives, traditional leaders, and religious leaders. Except for a slight decline from 2012 to 2014, trends reveal that this negative perception has increased significantly over time.
- Three-fourths (75%) of citizens say corruption has increased over the past year, and 71% think the government has performed badly in fighting corruption in the government.
- More than half (53%) say that ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption.
- The military and traditional and religious leaders are the only public institutions/persons that enjoy a substantial level of trust among Ghanaians. Over time, there has been a significant loss of trust in most public institutions.

High levels of perceived corruption

Large majorities of Ghanaians believe there is corruption among “some,” “most,” or “all” of their formal and informal leaders (Table 1).

Over time, despite a slight decrease from 2012 to 2014, the proportion of Ghanaians who think their leaders are involved in corruption has witnessed remarkable percentage-point increases – up to a 36-point gain in the negative assessment of the president and officials in his office (see far-right column in Table 1).

Table 1: Trends in corruption perceptions | 2002-2014

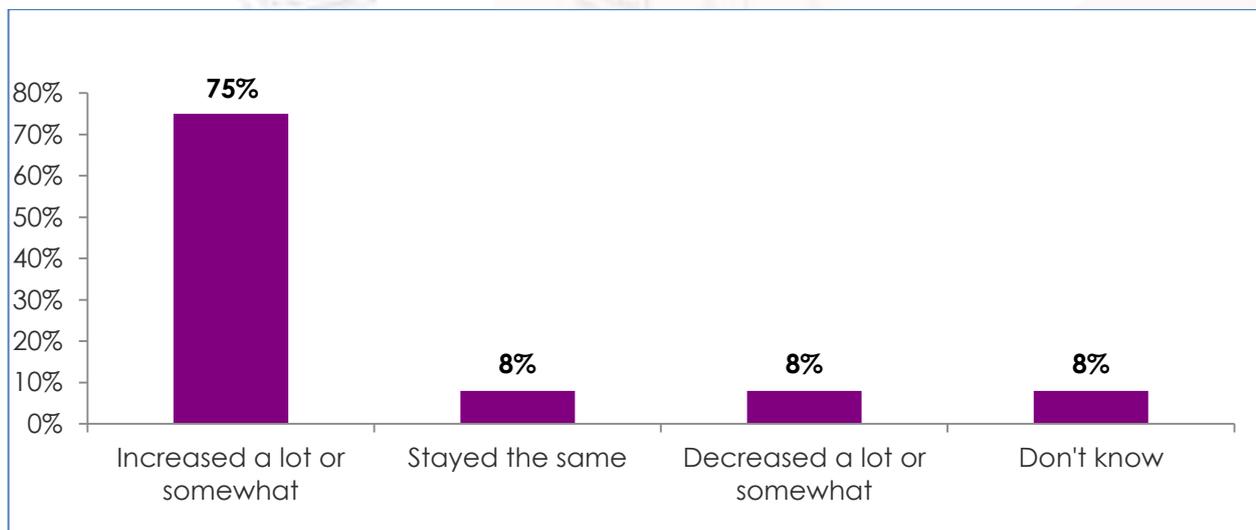
	2002	2005	2008	2012	2014	Change 2012 - 2014	Change since question was first asked
The police	79	81	86	94	89	-5	+10
National government officials	--	66	77	91	86	-5	+20
Members of Parliament	--	59	74	90	85	-5	+26
Judges and magistrates	70	72	79	90	85	-5	+15
Tax officials of Ghana Revenue Authority	--	70	79	90	85	-5	+15
District chief executives	--	--	--	89	84	-5	--
President and officials in his office	47	56	70	87	83	-4	+36
Local government representatives	--	60	71	86	83	-3	+23
Officials of Electoral Commission	--	--	--	--	81	--	--
Business executives	63	--	--	--	82	--	+19
Traditional leaders	--	--	68	--	78	--	+10
Religious leaders	41	--	--	--	69	--	+28

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: (a) the president and officials in his office? (b) members of Parliament? (c) Electoral Commission officials? (d) government officials? (e) assembly men and women? (f) district chief executives? (g) police? (h) tax officials (i.e. Ghana Revenue Authority officials)? (h) judges and magistrates? (i) traditional leaders? (j) religious leaders? (k) business executives? (% saying "some", "most" or "all" corrupt).

Note: In years for which no percentages are reported, those specific questions were not included in the survey.

Moreover, three-fourths (75%) of Ghanaians believe that corruption increased "somewhat" or "a lot" over the past year (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Perceived changes in the level of corruption over the past year | 2014

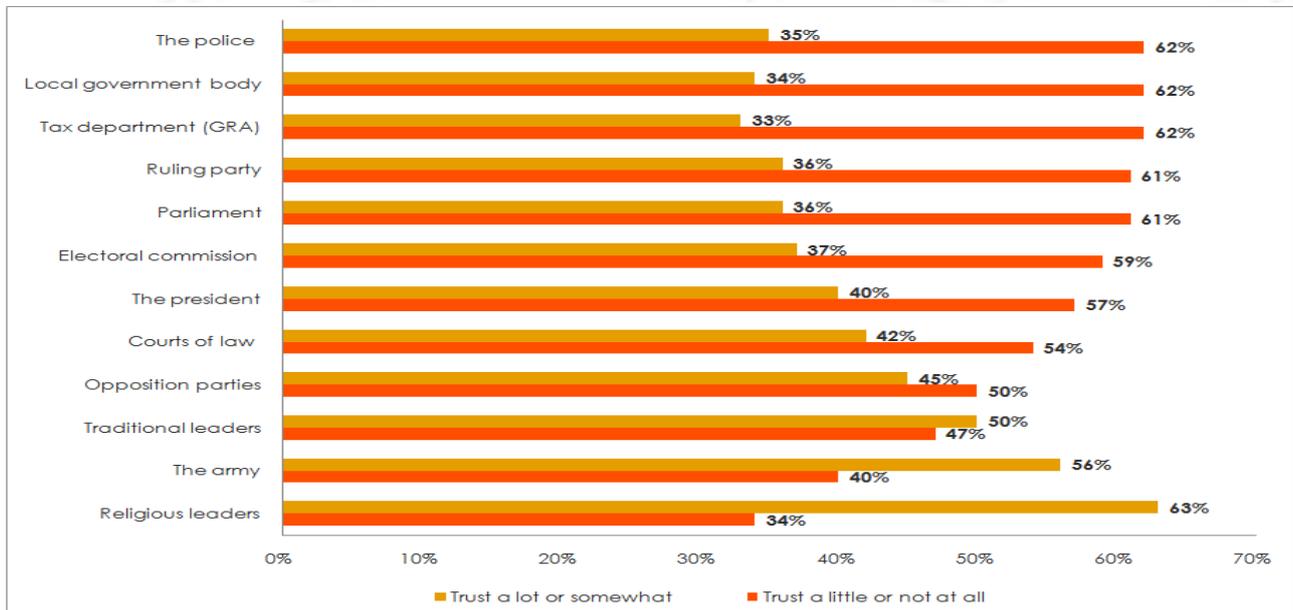


Respondents were asked: In your opinion, over the past year, has the level of corruption in this country increased, decreased, or stayed the same?

Declining levels of trust in public institutions/officials

Probably mirroring the impact of corruption on institutional trust, most Ghanaians do not trust public institutions/officials except for the military or army. Six of every 10 respondents say they have "a little" or "no" trust at all in the police (62%), local government body (62%), tax department (62%), ruling political party (61%), and Parliament (61%). Half or more of those interviewed express similar sentiments about other public institutions (Figure 2). The only public institution that citizens consider trustworthy is the army (56%). Ghanaians also trust religious leaders (63%) and traditional leaders (50%) "a lot" or "somewhat."

Figure 2: Trust in public institutions/officials | 2014



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

Over time, the percentages of citizens who say they trust public institutions/officials "a lot" or "somewhat" witnessed remarkable declines – by 25 percentage points for the president (Table 2a).

Table 2a: Trends in trust in public institutions/officials | % saying 'somewhat' or 'a lot' | 2002 – 2014

	2002	2005	2008	2012	2014	Change 2012 - 2014	Change 2002 - 2014
The president	65%	75%	75%	56%	40%	-16%	-25%
Parliament	48%	68%	62%	49%	36%	-13%	-12%
Courts of law	45%	62%	58%	56%	42%	-14%	-3%
Electoral Commission	49%	75%	67%	59%	37%	-22%	-12%
Ruling party	51%	67%	67%	47%	36%	-11%	-15%
Opposition parties	28%	51%	49%	54%	45%	-9%	+17%
Tax department	--	--	--	40%	33%	-7%	--
Local government body	38%	54%	54%	42%	34%	-8%	-4%
The police	51%	64%	47%	42%	35%	-7%	-16%
The army	54%	72%	--	72%	56%	-16%	+2%
Traditional leaders	54%	--	67%	--	50%	--	-4%
Religious leaders	--	--	--	--	63%	--	--

The over-time reductions in trust appear to have fed into the increasing levels of "little" or "no" trust at all in these institutions/officials (Table 2b).

Table 2b: Trends in trust in public institutions/officials | % saying 'not at all' or 'a little'
| 2002 – 2014

	2002	2005	2008	2012	2014	Change 2012 - 2014	Change 2002 - 2014
The president	30%	21%	24%	43%	57%	+14%	+27%
Parliament	43%	25%	34%	50%	61%	+11%	+18%
Courts of law	49%	30%	38%	42%	54%	+12%	+5%
Electoral commission	41%	21%	29%	40%	59%	+19%	+18%
Ruling party	42%	28%	31%	52%	61%	+9%	+19%
Opposition parties	62%	41%	46%	43%	50%	+7%	-12%
Tax department	--	--	--	58%	62%	+4%	--
Local government body	49%	41%	42%	55%	62%	+7%	+13%
The police	46%	32%	51%	58%	62%	+4%	+16%
The army	41%	23%	--	27%	40%	+13%	-1%
Traditional leaders	41%	--	30%	--	47%	--	+6%
Religious leaders	--	--	--	--	34%	--	--

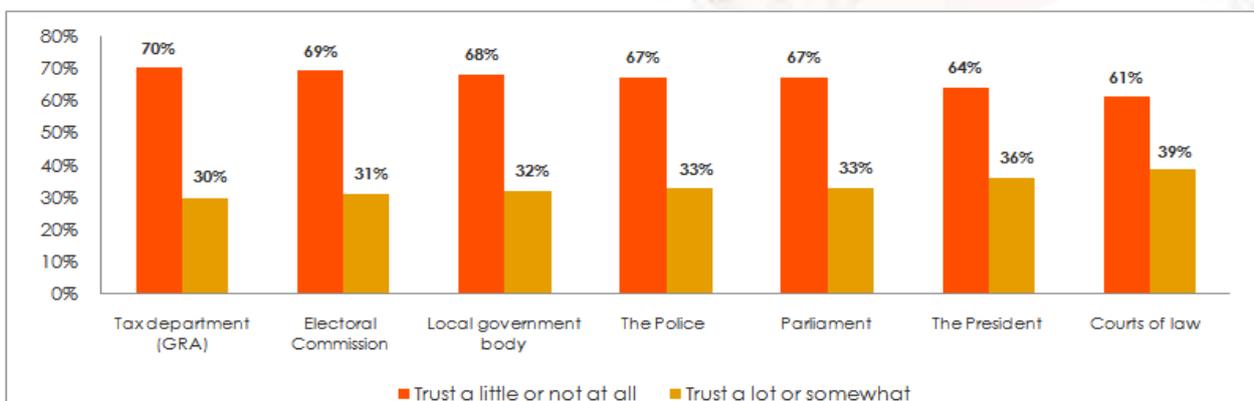
Relationship between perceived corruption and institutional trust

Findings about perceptions of corruption and trust in public institutions/officials appear to reflect the negative mutually reinforcing association found between these two variables in other research. A previous Afrobarometer analysis tested and confirmed this relationship (i.e. corruption eroding trust and loss of trust engendering corruption) using Afrobarometer data from 18 African countries.³

The present paper tests the hypothesis that corruption undermines trust in public institutions/officials using a simple cross-tabulation and confirms the significance and direction of the observed relationship with specific statistical tests.⁴

The analysis reveals that among Ghanaians who hold the opinion that "some," "most," or "all" of the public officials referred to earlier are corrupt, a majority have "a little" or "no" trust in the institutions those officials represent. For instance, among those who think that "some," "most," or "all" tax officials and local government representatives are involved in corruption, a majority express "little" or "no" trust in the tax department (70%) and local government body (68%) (Figure 3a).

Figure 3a: Trust in public officials, among those who believe that 'some,' 'most,' or 'all' of these officials are corrupt | 2014

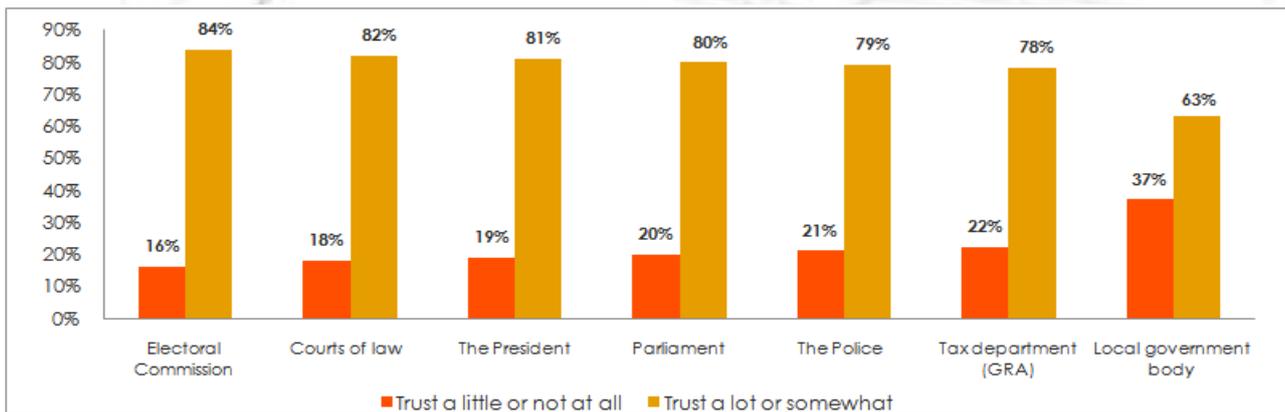


³ See Armah-Attoh, D., Gyimah-Boadi, E., and Chikwanha, A. B. (2007). Corruption and institutional trust in Africa: Implications for democratic development. Afrobarometer Working Paper No. 81 Available at www.afrobarometer.org.

⁴ A Chi-square test was used to confirm the significance of the observed differences in the cross-tabulation percentages, while the Somer's d was used to determine the direction of the relationship on the assumption that corruption variables predict those of trust.

Conversely, among those who think that "none" of these public officials are involved in corruption, a majority trust the institutions that these "clean" officials represent. For instance, 82% of those who think judges and magistrates are not involved in corruption trust the courts of law "a lot" or "somewhat" (Figure 3b).

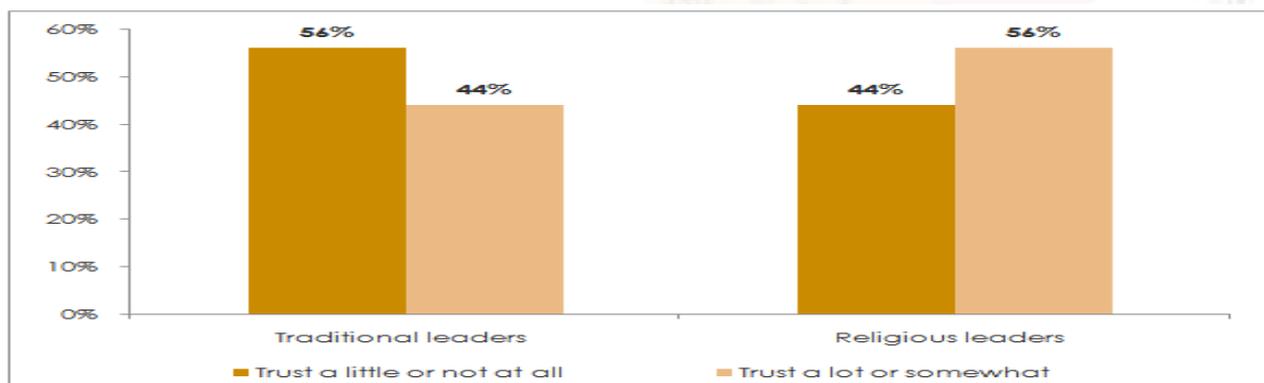
Figure 3b: Trust in public officials, among those who believe that 'none' of these officials are corrupt | 2014



Similar corrosive effects of corruption on trust are observed in the case of traditional leaders. Whereas 56% of those who think these leaders engage in corruption express "a little" or "no" trust in them (Figure 4a), 84% of those who consider them to be "clean" trust them "a lot" or "somewhat" (Figure 4b).

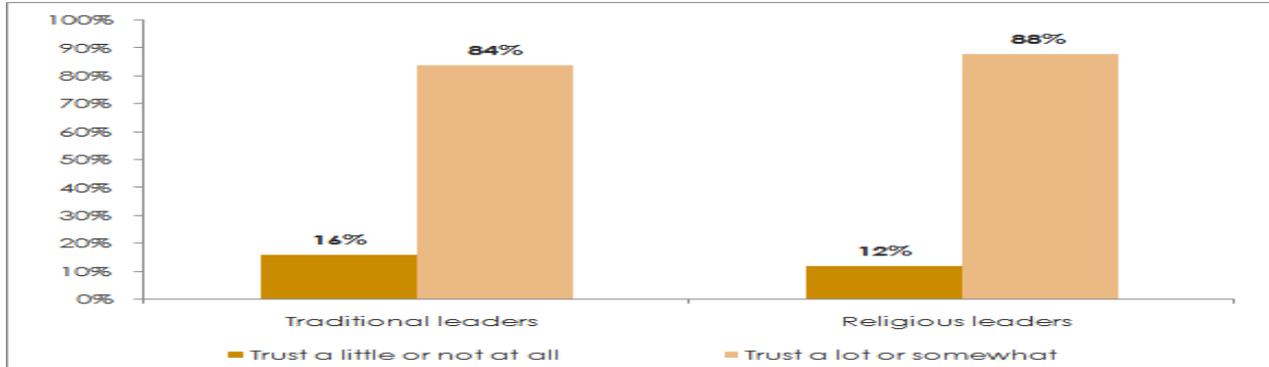
With respect to religious leaders, the trust-eroding consequences of corruption are less pronounced (figures 4a and 4b). More than half (56%) of those who think that "some," "most," or "all" of these leaders are corrupt still trust them "a lot" or "somewhat." As expected, a much higher percentage (88%) of those who say that "none" of these leaders is corrupt also trust them "a lot," or "somewhat."⁵

Figure 4a: Trust in religious and traditional leaders, among those who believe that 'some,' 'most,' or 'all' of these leaders are corrupt | 2014



⁵ The values of the Chi-square (χ) and Somer's d (Sd) statistics for each pair of corruption and trust variables are as follows: tax officials/department ($\chi = 144.2$; Sd = -0.479); Electoral Commission ($\chi = 247.0$; Sd = -0.528); local government council ($\chi = 73.9$; Sd = -0.308); police ($\chi = 99.7$; Sd = -0.460); legislature ($\chi = 127.2$; Sd = -0.473); presidency ($\chi = 145.4$; Sd = -0.453); judiciary ($\chi = 101.4$; Sd = -0.424); traditional leaders ($\chi = 179.9$; Sd = -0.400); and religious leaders ($\chi = 181.3$; Sd = -0.317). Both the Chi-square and Somer's d statistics for all paired variables are significant ($p < 0.001$).

Figure 4b: Trust in religious and traditional leaders, among those who believe that 'none' of these leaders are corrupt | 2014

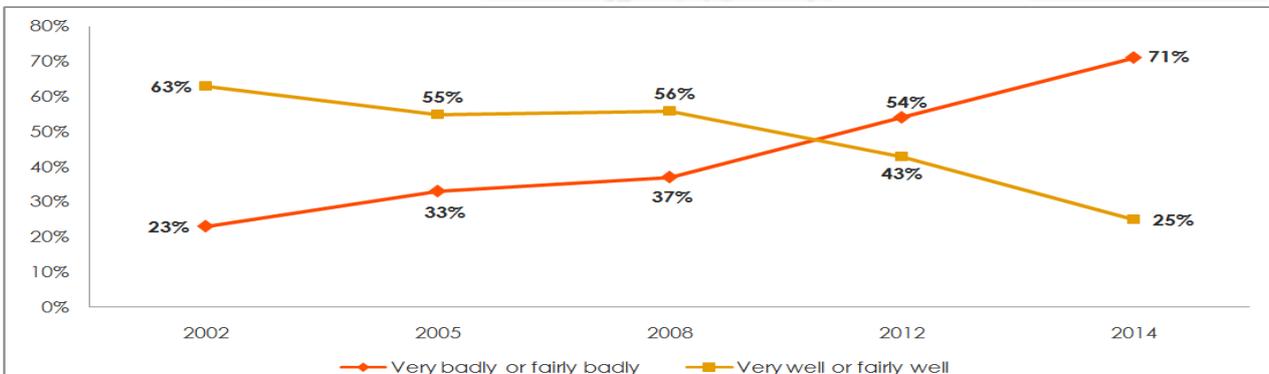


Combating corruption

When asked how well or badly they think the government has performed in fighting corruption in the government, seven out of every 10 Ghanaians (71%) say the government has performed "very badly" or "fairly badly." One-fourth (25%) say the government has performed "very well" or "fairly well."

From 2002 to 2014, the percentage of Ghanaians who rate government's anti-corruption efforts negatively shot up by 48 points, including a 17-point increase since 2012 (Figure 5).

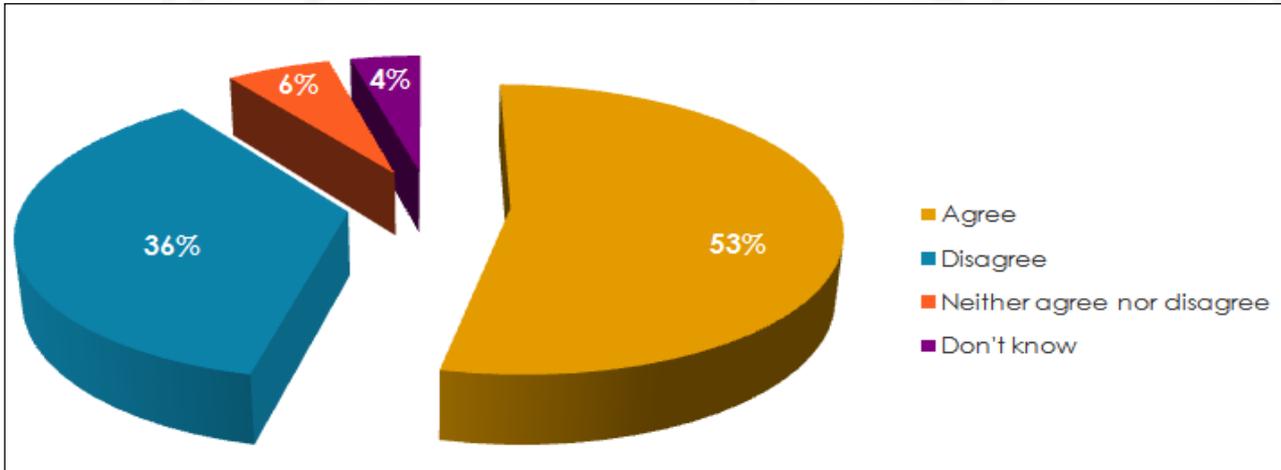
Figure 5: Combating corruption, trends over time | 2002-2014



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: (a) fighting corruption in government?

A majority of Ghanaians (53%) "strongly agree" or "agree" that ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption. A sizeable minority (36%) "strongly disagree" or "disagree" with this assertion (Figure 6).

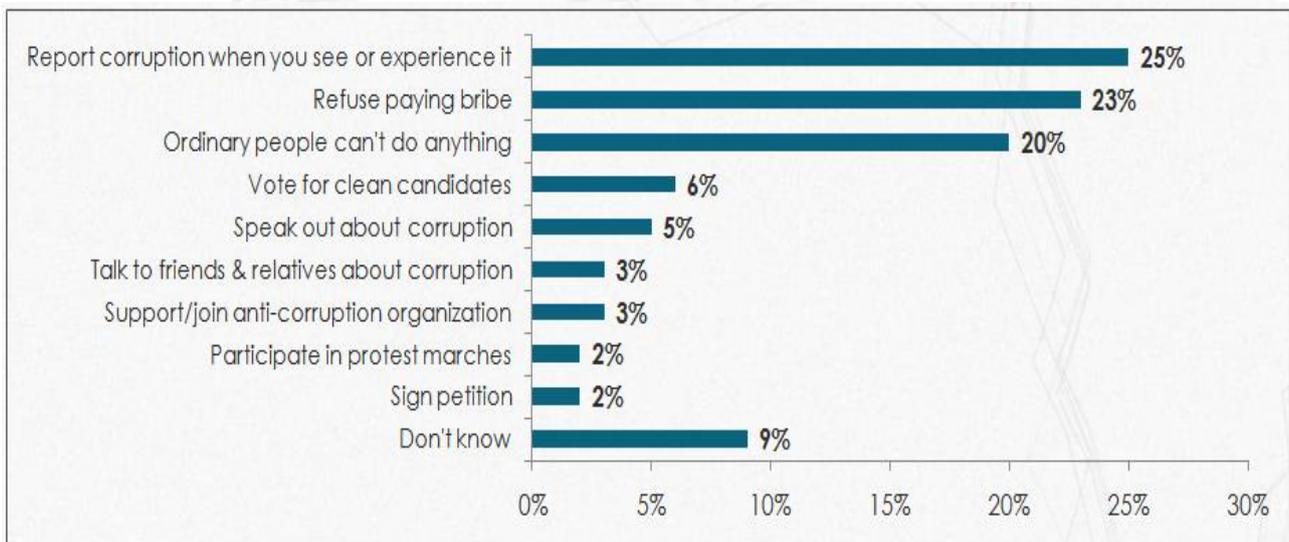
Figure 6: Ordinary people making a difference in fighting corruption | 2014



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."

Ghanaians believe the most effective things that citizens can do to combat corruption are reporting corruption when it happens (25%) and refusing to pay bribes (23%). However, 20% think there is nothing that ordinary citizens can do to combat corruption (Figure 7).

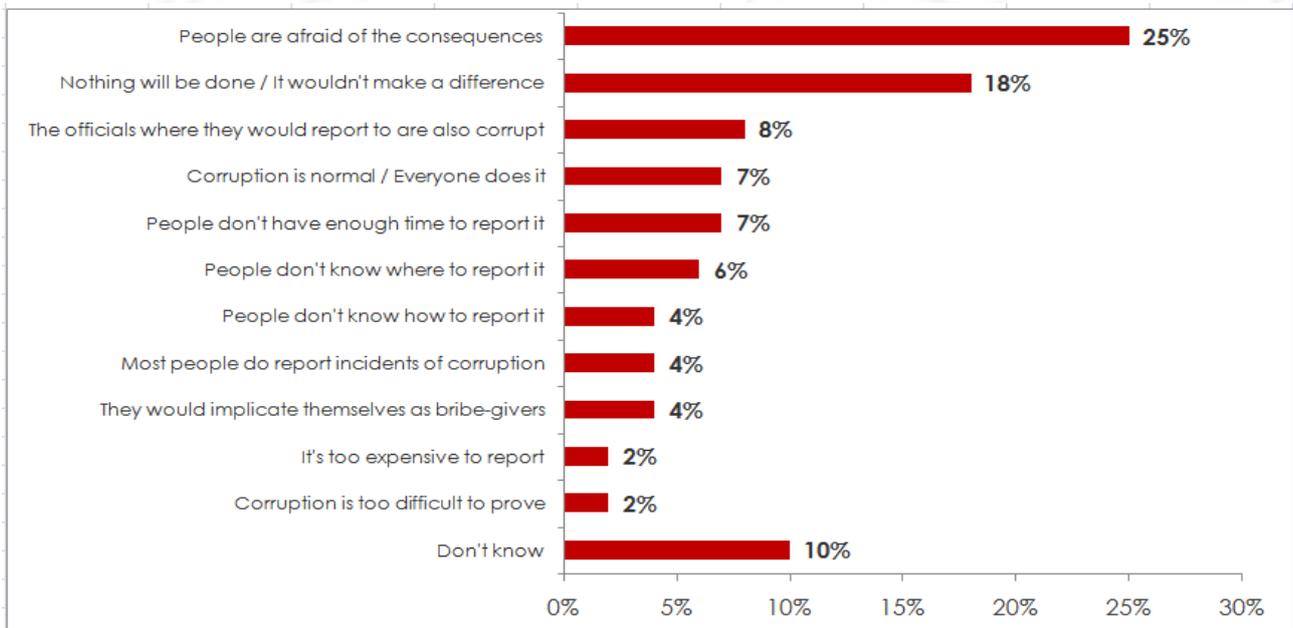
Figure 7: Most effective thing ordinary person can do to combat corruption | 2014



Respondents were asked: What is the most effective thing that an ordinary person like you can do the help combat corruption in this country?

Despite the belief that reporting corruption is one way of fighting the canker, those interviewed say the most common reasons that Ghanaians do not report corruption are because they are afraid of the consequence (25%), they believe nothing will be done even if they report it (18%), officials to whom a corruption report could be made are also corrupt (8%), and they believe that corruption is normal or everyone does it (7%) (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Reasons for not reporting corruption | 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?

Daniel Armah-Attoh is the Afrobarometer project manager for Anglophone West Africa at the Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) in Ghana. Email: daniel@cddgh.org.

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.6 | 2 December 2014