

Despite gains, Angolans dissatisfied with government anti-corruption efforts

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 396 | Carlos Pacatolo and David Boio

Summary

In just one year, Angola improved from 167th to 146th on Transparency International's (2020) Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), largely on the strength of anti-corruption reforms introduced after President João Lourenço took office in 2017 (Jornal de Angola, 2020; O Observador, 2020a).

While the country's CPI score still trailed the sub-Saharan African and global averages, corruption investigations pressed ahead, and courts froze the assets of Isabel dos Santos and Irene Neto (daughters of former presidents José Eduardo dos Santos and António Agostinho Neto). Yet João Lourenço and his attorney general, who have denounced corruption and appealed to citizens to join a national crusade against it, have remained silent in the face of recent news reports accusing the president's cabinet director of graft (Voz da América, 2019; Público, 2020; O Observador, 2020b; TVI24, 2020).

How do citizens perceive anti-corruption efforts in Angola?

Findings from the first Afrobarometer survey in Angola show that a substantial proportion see corruption declining, but even more rate the government's anti-corruption performance as poor. In part, this may be because a plurality say the president is using the anti-corruption fight as a political weapon. In addition, a majority fear retaliation or other negative consequences if they get involved by reporting corruption to the authorities.

Despite these reservations, a majority of Angolans are opposed to a blanket pardon for pre-2017 corruption and want the government to recover ill-gotten gains.

Afrobarometer surveys

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

In Afrobarometer's first survey in Angola, Ovilongwa – Estudos de Opinião Pública interviewed 2,400 adult Angolans between 27 November and 27 December 2019. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

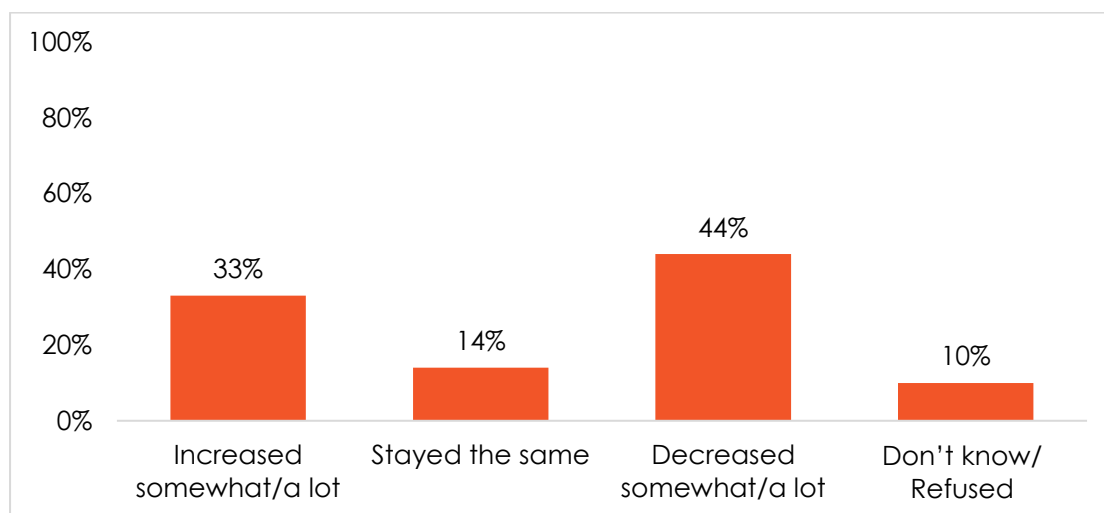
Key findings

- Almost half (44%) of Angolans say the level of corruption in the country decreased during the 12 months preceding the survey, outnumbering those who say it increased (33%).
- However, a majority (54%) of Angolans say the government is doing a poor job of fighting corruption.
- And a plurality (39%) say the president is using the fight against corruption as a tool for removing political opponents within the ruling People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA).
- More than half (55%) of Angolans believe that people who report corruption to the authorities risk retaliation or other negative consequences.
- Among Angolans who had contact with key public services during the previous year, about four out of 10 say they had to pay bribes to obtain police assistance (42%) or avoid problems with the police (42%), to get an identification document from the government (39%), or to obtain public school services (39%).
- The National Police are more widely perceived as corrupt than other key public officials. Four in 10 Angolans (39%) say "most" or "all" police officials are corrupt.
- Slightly more than half (51%) of respondents oppose the idea of pardoning all those involved in corruption before 2017, and a larger majority (58%) say the government should recover all assets stolen through corruption.

Corruption level and government performance in fighting corruption

A plurality (44%) of Angolans say the level of corruption in the country decreased "somewhat" or "a lot" during the year preceding the survey, while 33% say it increased and 14% say it remained the same (Figure 1).

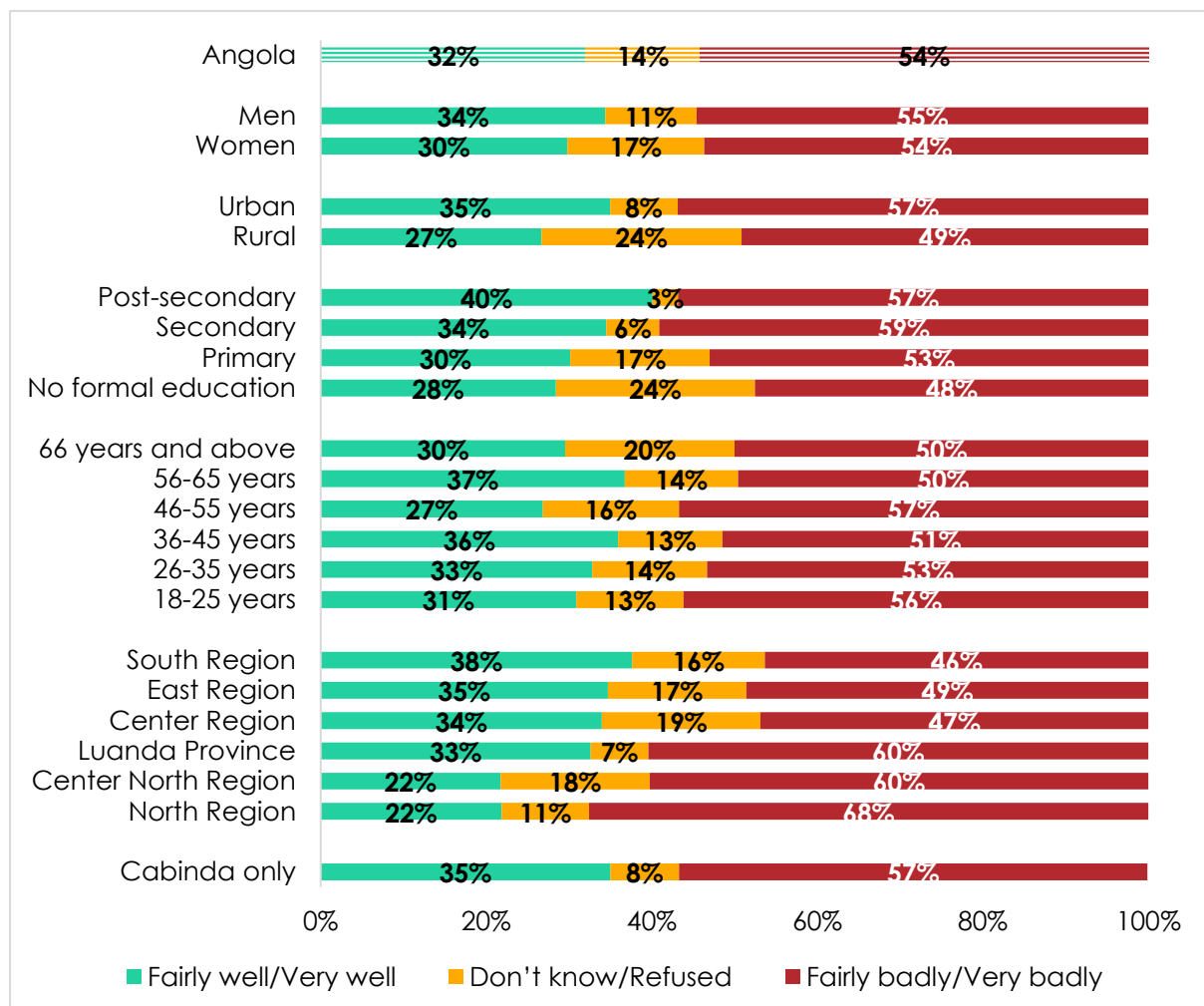
Figure 1: Level of corruption in the country | Angola | 2019



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

However, only one-third (32%) of Angolans rate the government's performance in the fight against corruption as "fairly" or "very" good (Figure 2), while a majority (54%) say it is doing a poor job. Urban residents and more educated respondents are more likely to offer positive assessments of the government's performance, but they are also more likely to be critical, while rural and less educated respondents are more likely to say they "don't know." The North and Center North regions are least likely to approve of the government's performance on corruption (22% each).

Figure 2: Government performance in fighting corruption | by socio-demographic group | Angola | 2019¹



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?

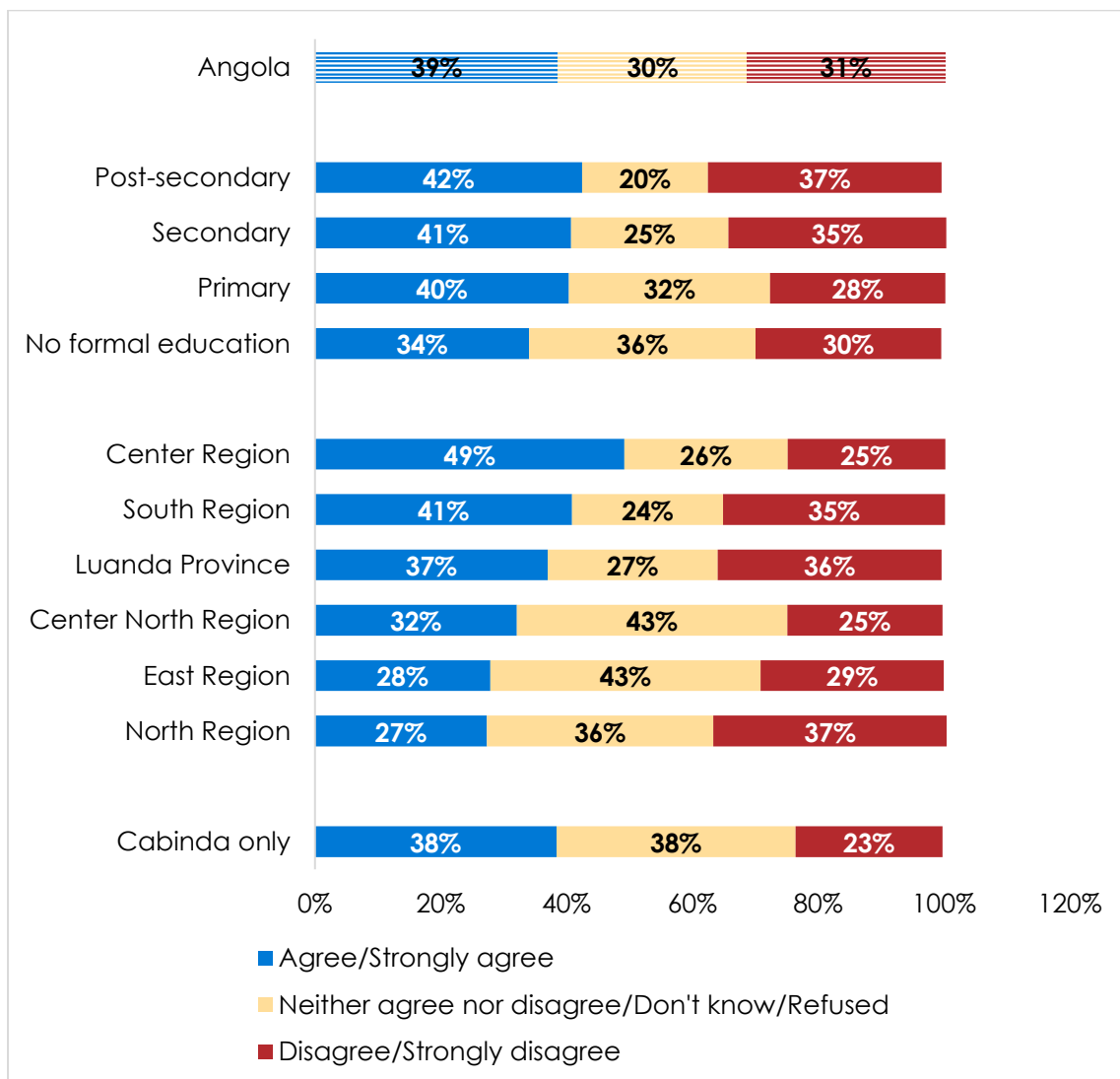
But many Angolans suspect the government's motives in the fight against corruption. Four out of 10 respondents (39%) "agree" or "strongly agree" that the president is using the issue as

¹ In accordance with National Statistics Institute classifications, regions include the following provinces: North (Cabinda, Uíge, Zaire), Center North (Bengo, Cuanza Norte, Malange), Luanda, Center (Benguela, Bié, Cuanza Sul, Huambo), East (Cuando Cubango, Lunda Sul, Lunda Norte, Moxico), and South (Cunene, Huíla, Namibe). Results for Cabinda province, which are included in the North region average, are also shown separately.

an instrument of political combat to get rid of political opponents within the ruling MPLA. About three in 10 (31%) disagree, and about the same proportion (30%) neither agree nor disagree or “don't know” (Figure 3).

Respondents with no formal education are less likely to assert that the president is using the anti-corruption as a political tool (34%), as are residents in the North (27%) and East (28%) regions.

Figure 3: Is the president using the fight against corruption to remove political opponents? | by socio-demographic group | Angola | 2019



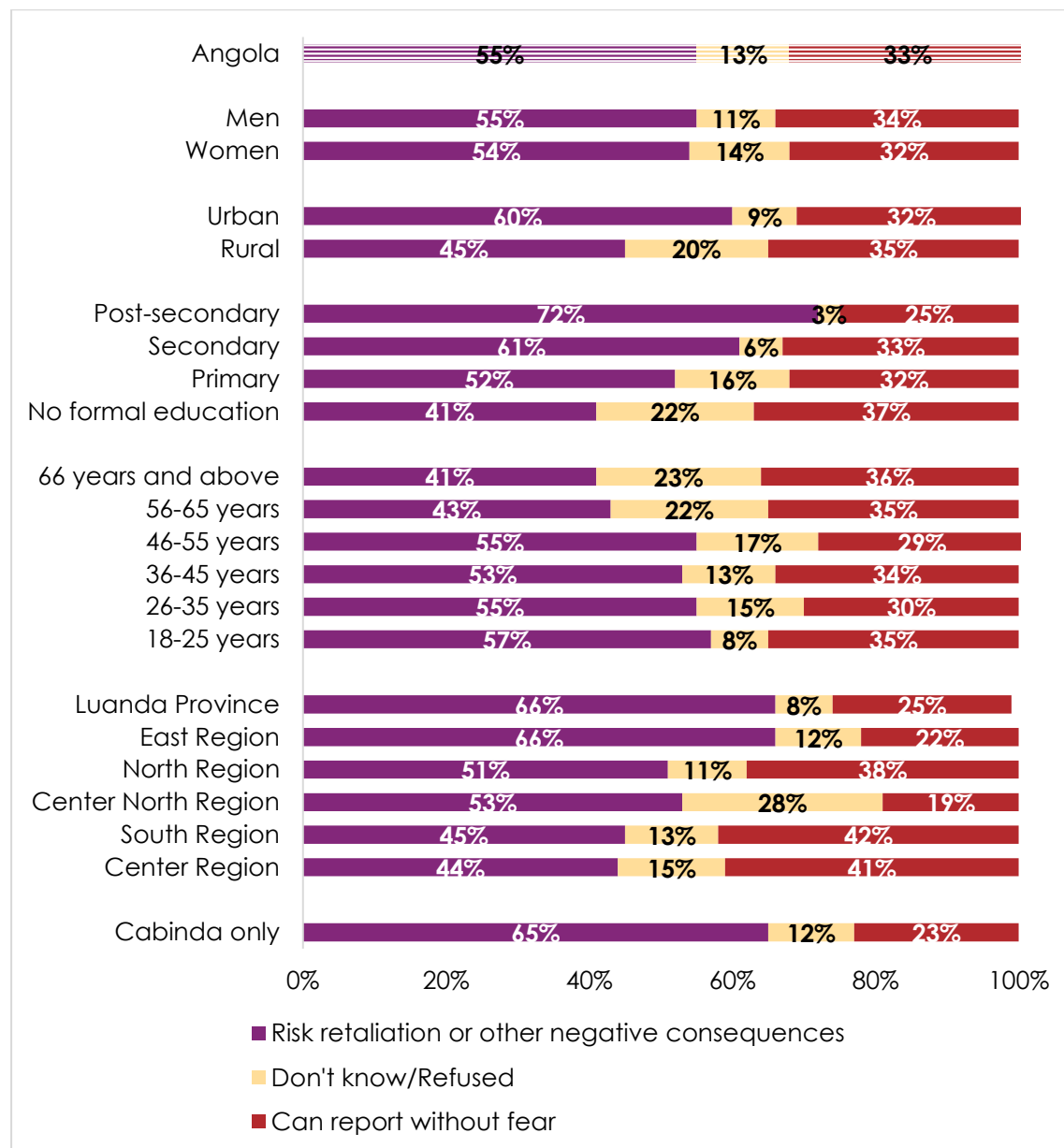
Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you disagree or agree with the following statement: The present fight against corruption is simply a way for the country's president to remove political opponents within the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA)?

Experience with corruption

More than half (55%) of Angolans say that people who report acts of corruption to the authorities are at risk of retaliation or other negative consequences. Only one-third (33%) believe that they can report corruption without fear (Figure 4).

The perception of the risk of retaliation is higher among the most educated Angolans (72%), among urban respondents (60%), and among residents of Luanda Province (66%), the East Region (66%), Cabinda Province (65%), and urban areas (60%).

Figure 4: Can people report incidents of corruption without fear? | by socio-demographic group | Angola | 2019

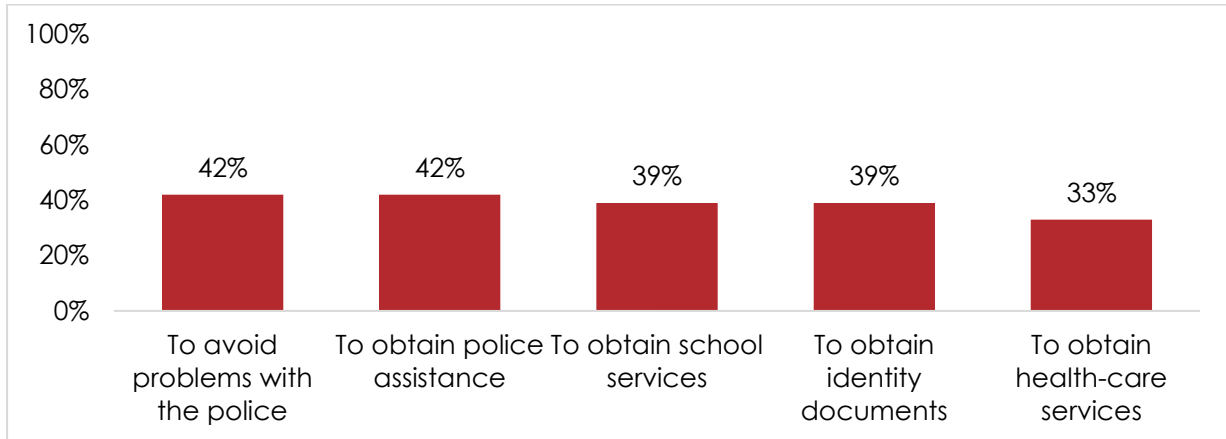


Respondents were asked: In this country, can ordinary people report incidents of corruption without fear, or do they risk retaliation or other negative consequences if they speak out?

Reported levels of personal experience with corruption in obtaining public services are quite remarkable, as they suggest a systemic, institutionalized practice in the daily lives of Angolan citizens. Among respondents who had contact with key public services during the previous 12 months, about four out of 10 say they had to pay bribes “once or twice,” “a few times,” or “often” to obtain police assistance (42%) or avoid problems with the police (42%), to get a personal identification document (39%), or to obtain public school services (39%). One-third

(33%) say they had to pay a bribe to get health-care services at a public clinic or hospital (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Paid a bribe to obtain public services | Angola | 2019

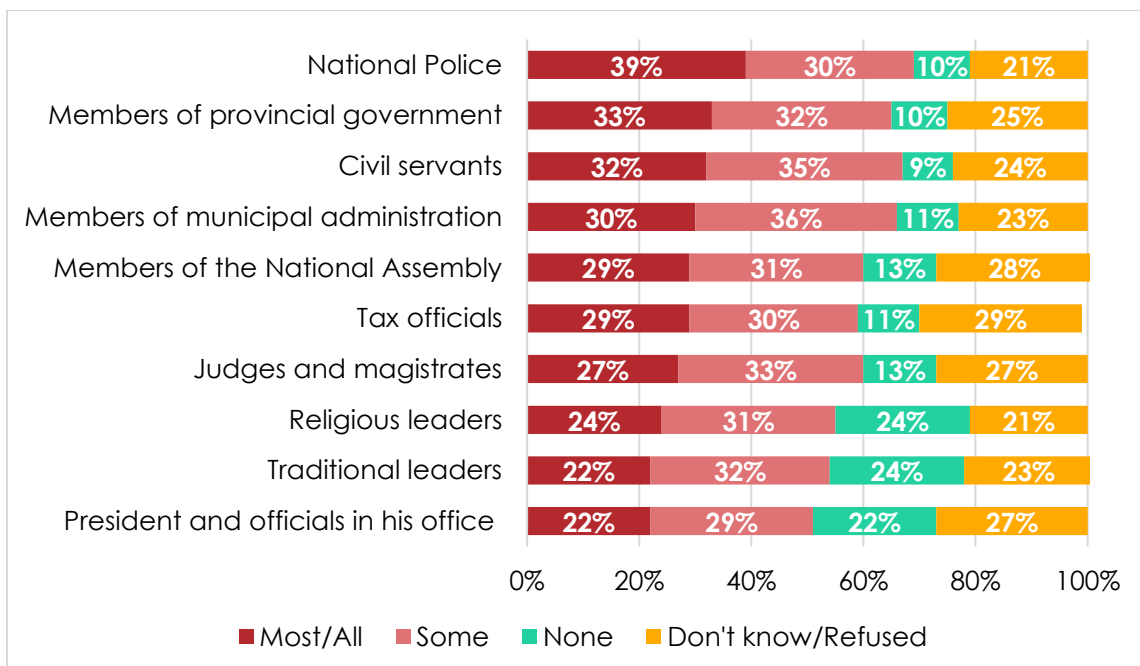


Respondents who had contact with key public services during the previous year were asked: And how often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favor [to obtain the needed services]?

Who is corrupt?

Among key public leaders and officials, the National Police are most widely perceived as corrupt: Four in 10 Angolans (39%) say “most” or “all” police officials are corrupt, in addition to 30% who say “some” of them are. Most other institutions fare only slightly better, including provincial government officials (33% most/all), civil servants (32%), members of the National Assembly (29%), and judges (27%). The Presidency ranks among the least corrupt among key institutions, about the same level as traditional and religious leaders (Figure 6).

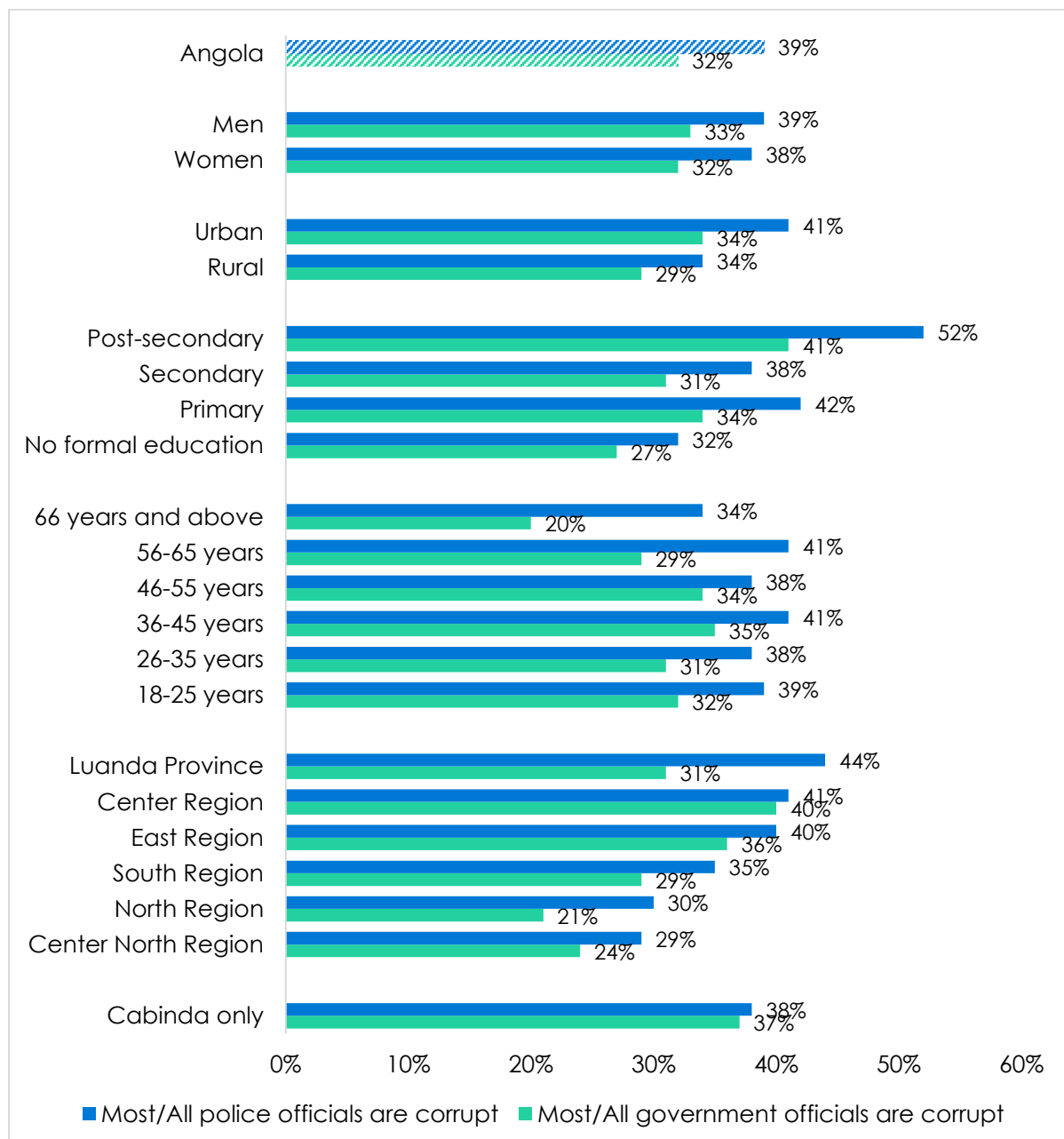
Figure 6: Who is involved in corruption | Angola | 2019



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?

With regard to both the police and government officials, the most educated respondents and urban residents are more likely than less educated and rural citizens to say that “most” or “all” of them are corrupt (Figure 7). Men and women share similar perceptions of corruption among the police and government officials, while elderly citizens are less likely than younger respondents to see them as corrupt – perhaps because elders are less likely to be asked to pay bribes or to be in situations where bribes are demanded. Residents in the North and Center North regions are less likely than their counterparts in other regions to see the police and government officials as corrupt.

Figure 7: Perceptions of corruption among national police and government officials
 | by socio-demographic group | Angola | 2019

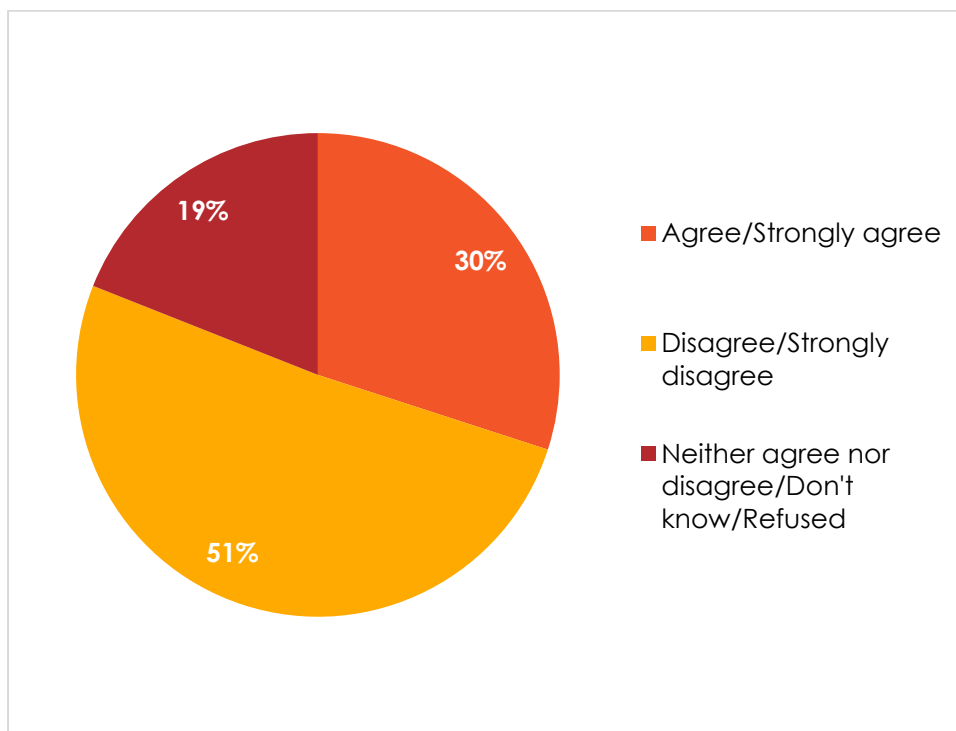


Respondents were asked: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The National Police? Government officials? (% who say “most” or “all”)

Options in the fight against corruption

Angolans appear to place some hope in the future of the fight against corruption, calling on the government to work to recover stolen assets and not to pardon wrongdoers. A slim majority (51%) of respondents “disagree” or “strongly disagree” with the idea that the government should pardon all those involved in corruption prior to 2017 (i.e. under the regime of the previous president, José Eduardo dos Santos), compared to three in 10 (30%) who would support such a policy in order to ensure political stability in the country (Figure 8). Respondents with secondary (58%) or post-secondary (64%) education and urban residents (54%) are more likely to oppose pardons than are citizens who are less educated (45%) or live in rural areas (45%) (not shown).

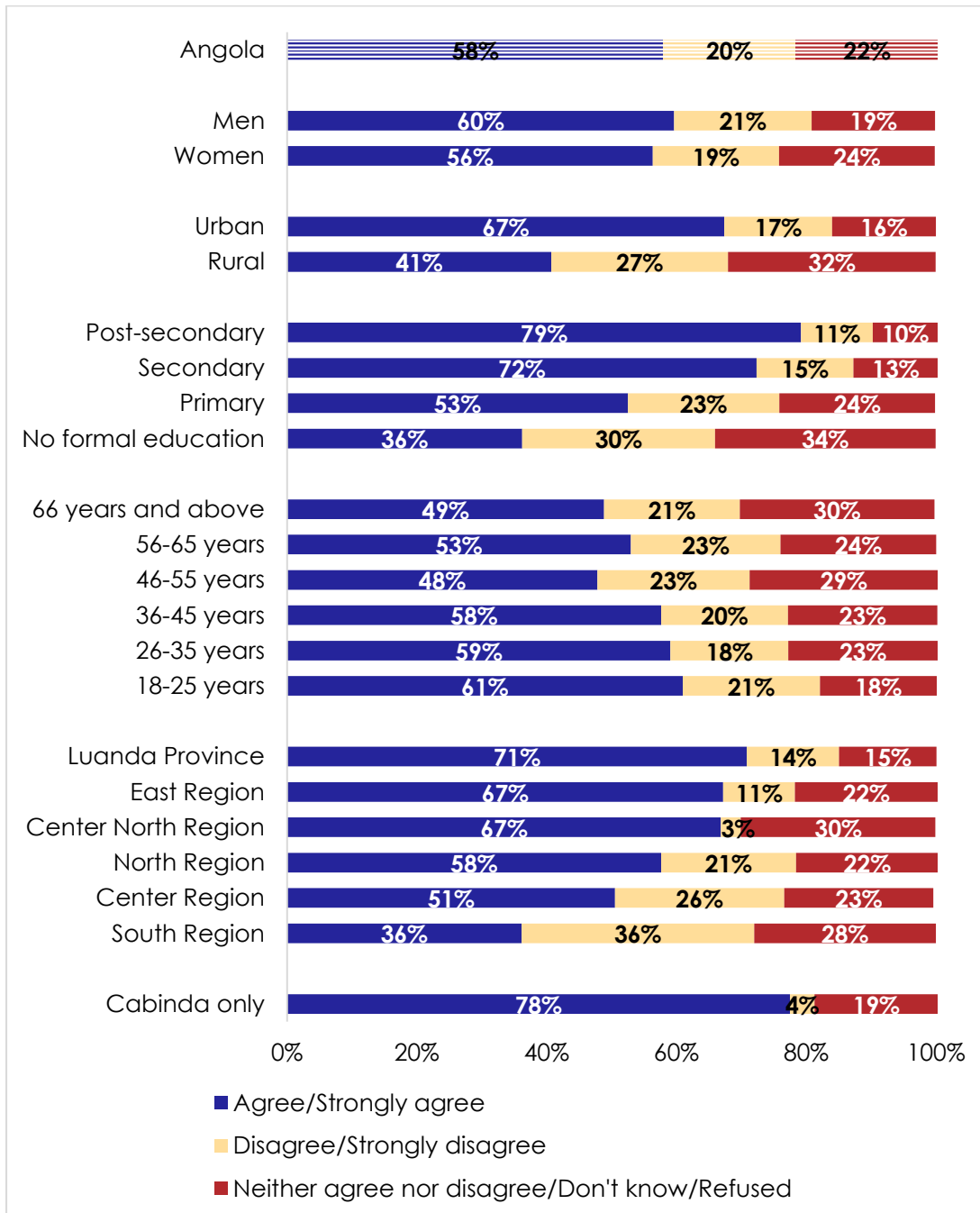
Figure 8: Pardon those involved in corruption before 2017? | Angola | 2019



Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you disagree or agree with the following statements: To ensure political stability, the government should pardon all those involved in corruption prior to 2017?

Similarly, a majority (58%) of Angolans “agree” or “strongly agree” that the government must recover all assets acquired through acts of corruption, while only one-fifth (22%) disagree (Figure 9). Again, more educated and urban respondents are more likely to favor recovering such assets than are less educated and rural citizens. More than two-thirds of respondents agree in Luanda Province (71%), East Region (67%), and Center North Region (67%), as well as in Cabinda (78%).

Figure 9: Should the government recover all assets stolen through corruption? | by socio-demographic group | Angola | 2019



Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you disagree or agree with the following statement: The government should recover all assets acquired by citizens through corrupt means?

Conclusion

Angola recorded a remarkable improvement in its Transparency International ranking but still remains worse than average in perceived corruption. Afrobarometer data suggest that this perception is shared by Angolans themselves. Many citizens feel that the government is not doing enough to fight corruption, that the president is using the anti-corruption fight as an instrument of political combat within the ruling MPLA, and that the state is unable or unwilling to protect whistleblowers.

But they clearly place some hope in the country's judicial bodies, which they want to punish the corrupt and recover assets acquired through corruption.

For policy makers and civil society, these findings also point to a need for strategies to increase citizens' feeling of personal safety if they get involved in the anti-corruption campaign.

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Financial support for Afrobarometer Round 8 has been provided by Sweden via the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Open Society Foundations, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) via the U.S. Institute of Peace.

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Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 396 | 9 October 2020