Call the police? Across Africa, citizens point to police and government performance issues on crime

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Introduction

Crime and insecurity are major challenges in African countries, threats to both national development and individual quality of life. According to the Legatum Prosperity Index, which assesses countries' safety and security as part of national wealth and well-being, only 11 African countries rank in the top 100 countries worldwide in safety and security; the top-ranked African country (Benin) is at No. 50 (Legatum Institute, 2014). The U.S government rates crime in most African countries as either critical or high (U.S. Overseas Security Advisory Council, 2015).

This paper examines how Africans themselves perceive the problem, based on data from Afrobarometer surveys in 34 African countries: how safe they feel, whether they report crimes, how easy or difficult they find it to get help from the police, and how they think their governments are performing in fighting crime.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, 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 country-level results with a margin of sampling error of +/-3% (for 1,200) or +/-2% (for 2,400) at a 95% confidence level.

The present analysis is based mainly on data from 34 countries surveyed in Round 5 (2011-2013), with over-time comparisons for some countries back to Round 2 (2002-2003).

Key findings

- Close to four out of 10 Africans (38%) say they have felt unsafe walking in their neighbourhoods. South Africans are most likely to feel unsafe walking in their neighbourhoods and to fear crime in their homes, while residents of Niger, Ghana, and Mauritius feel safest.

- More than half (56%) of those who say they were victims of a crime in the past year did not report the crime to the police. The main reasons why victims do not report crimes to the police are issues related to police performance, such as their unwillingness to listen or care and the possibility that they would demand a bribe.

- Only about half (53%) of citizens say they would go to the police first for assistance if they were victims of a crime. Only about four in 10 Africans (41%), on average, say it is "easy" or "very easy" to get help from the police.

- Fewer than half (49%) of citizens say their governments are performing "fairly well" or "very well" in reducing crime. Across 16 countries tracked since 2002, average ratings of government performance in fighting crime have not fluctuated significantly, although assessments within individual countries have improved significantly in Botswana, Malawi, and South Africa, while performance ratings have declined by more than 20 percentage points in Kenya and Mali.

- On almost all indicators, average results across 34 countries mask enormous variation in the experiences and perceptions of individual countries.
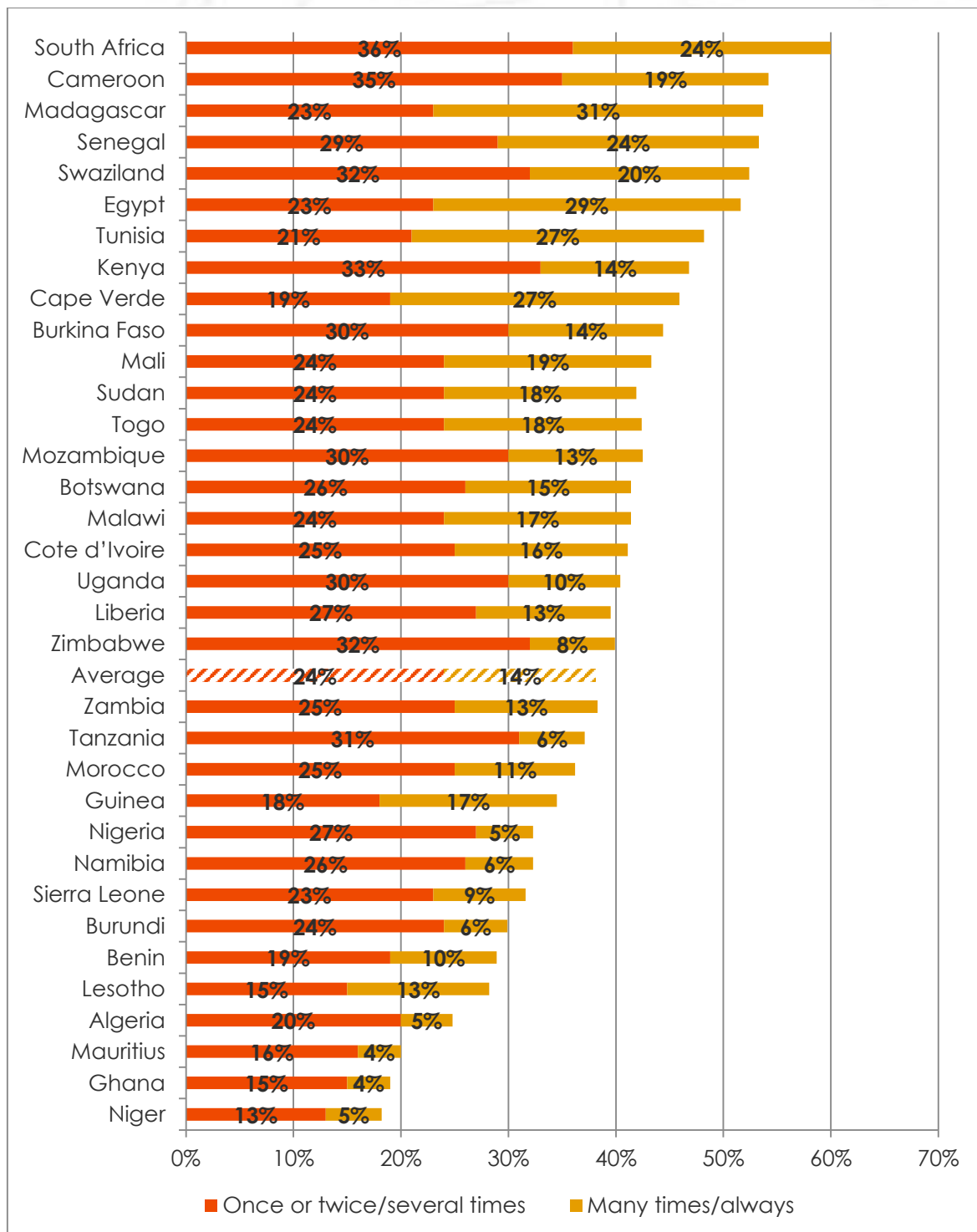
Experience of fear and crime

Close to four out of 10 Africans (38%) say they felt unsafe walking in their neighbourhood "once or twice," "several times," "many times," or "always" in the 12 months preceding the survey. More than half of respondents in South Africa (60%), Cameroon, (54%), Madagascar (54%), Senegal (53%), Swaziland (52%), and Egypt (52%) report having felt unsafe, compared to fewer than one in five citizens of Niger, Ghana, and Mauritius (Figure 1).

On average, 14% say they felt unsafe "many times" or "always," ranging from 4% in Mauritius and Ghana to 31% in Madagascar and 29% in Egypt.
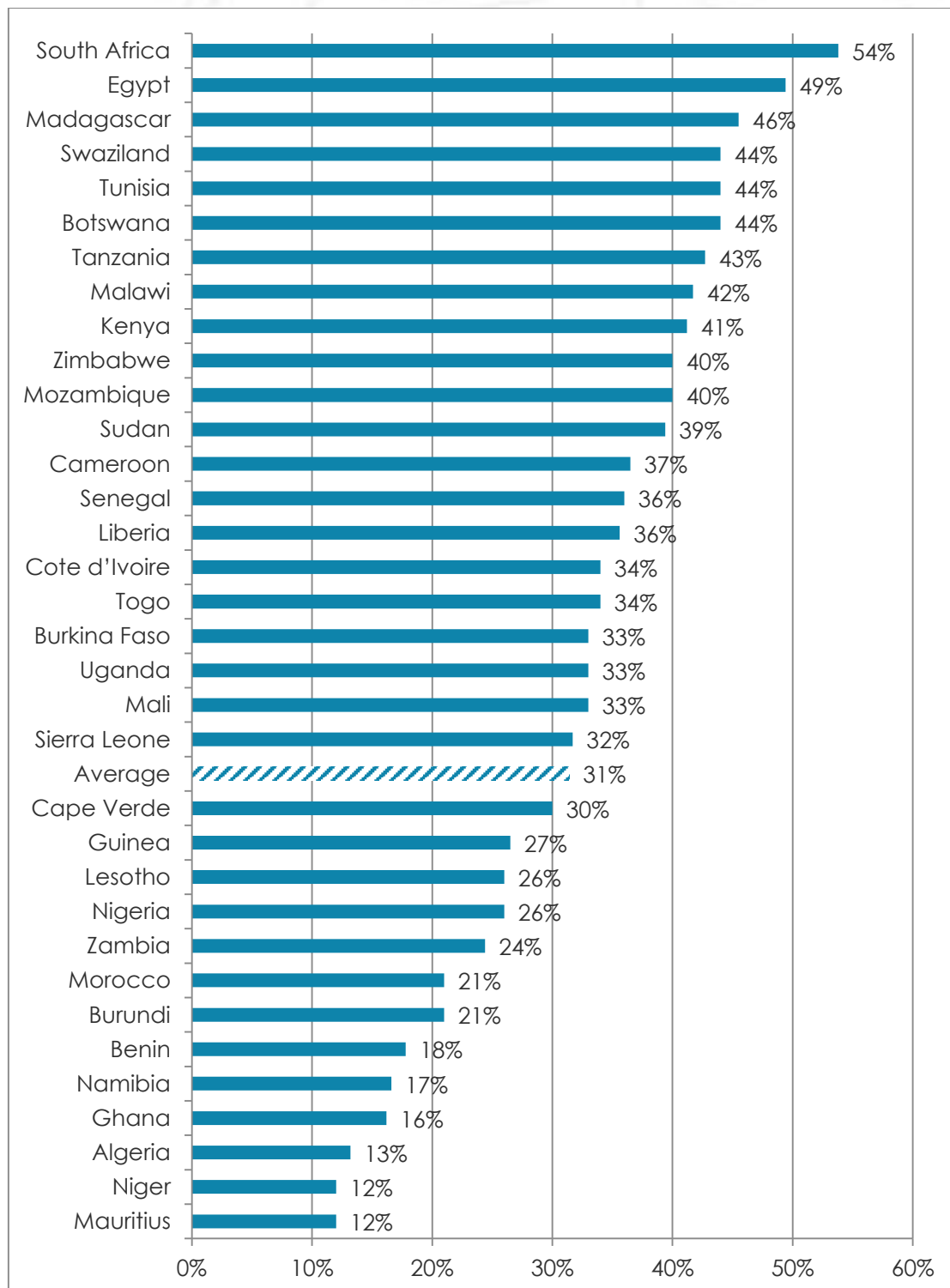
On average, 31% of citizens feared crime in their homes "just once or twice," "several times," "many times," or "always" in the preceding year. South Africans were most likely to fear crime (54%), while fewer than one in five residents of Niger, Mauritius, Algeria, Ghana, Namibia, and Benin feared crime in their homes (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Felt unsafe walking in the neighbourhood | 34 countries | 2011/2013

Country	Once or twice/several times	Many times/always
South Africa	36%	24%
Cameroon	35%	19%
Madagascar	23%	31%
Senegal	29%	24%
Swaziland	32%	20%
Egypt	23%	29%
Tunisia	21%	27%
Kenya	33%	14%
Cape Verde	19%	27%
Burkina Faso	30%	14%
Mali	24%	19%
Sudan	24%	18%
Togo	24%	18%
Mozambique	30%	13%
Botswana	26%	15%
Malawi	24%	17%
Cote d'Ivoire	25%	16%
Uganda	30%	10%
Liberia	27%	13%
Zimbabwe	32%	8%
Average	24%	14%
Zambia	25%	13%
Tanzania	31%	6%
Morocco	25%	11%
Guinea	18%	17%
Nigeria	27%	5%
Namibia	26%	6%
Sierra Leone	23%	9%
Burundi	24%	6%
Benin	19%	10%
Lesotho	15%	13%
Algeria	20%	5%
Mauritius	16%	4%
Ghana	15%	4%
Niger	13%	5%

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

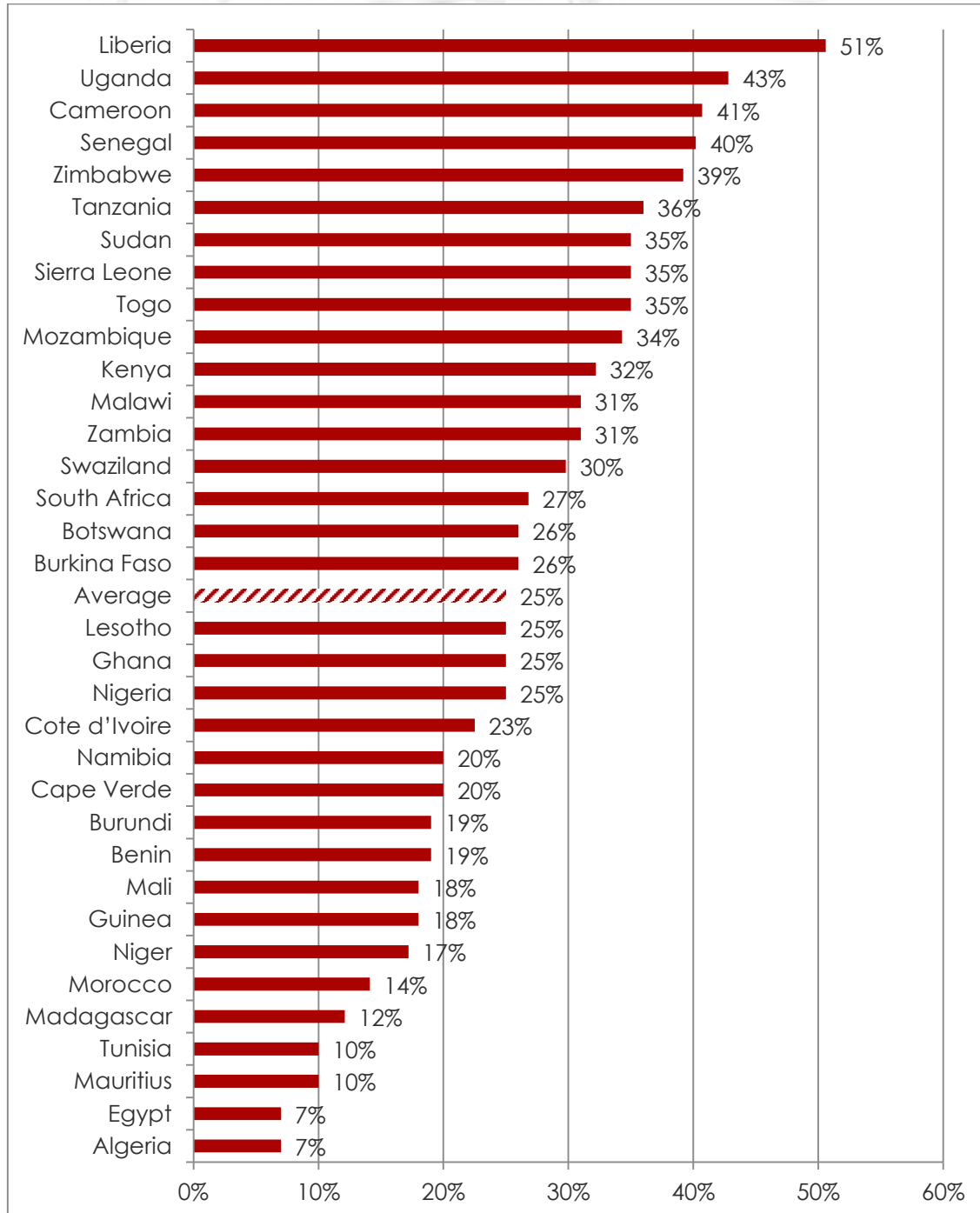**Figure 2: Fear of crime in the home** | 34 countries | 2011/2013

Country	%
South Africa	54%
Egypt	49%
Madagascar	46%
Swaziland	44%
Tunisia	44%
Botswana	44%
Tanzania	43%
Malawi	42%
Kenya	41%
Zimbabwe	40%
Mozambique	40%
Sudan	39%
Cameroon	37%
Senegal	36%
Liberia	36%
Cote d'Ivoire	34%
Togo	34%
Burkina Faso	33%
Uganda	33%
Mali	33%
Sierra Leone	32%
Average	31%
Cape Verde	30%
Guinea	27%
Lesotho	26%
Nigeria	26%
Zambia	24%
Morocco	21%
Burundi	21%
Benin	18%
Namibia	17%
Ghana	16%
Algeria	13%
Niger	12%
Mauritius	12%

Respondents were asked: *Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family feared crime in your own home?*
(% who say "just once or twice," "several times," "many times," or "always")

One-fourth (25%) of survey respondents say something was stolen from their house in the previous year. Liberians (51%) were more than twice as likely to be victims of theft as the 34-country average, while only 7% of Algerians and Egyptians say they suffered a theft (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Experience of theft from the home | 34 countries | 2011/2013

Country	%
Liberia	51%
Uganda	43%
Cameroon	41%
Senegal	40%
Zimbabwe	39%
Tanzania	36%
Sudan	35%
Sierra Leone	35%
Togo	35%
Mozambique	34%
Kenya	32%
Malawi	31%
Zambia	31%
Swaziland	30%
South Africa	27%
Botswana	26%
Burkina Faso	26%
Average	25%
Lesotho	25%
Ghana	25%
Nigeria	25%
Cote d'Ivoire	23%
Namibia	20%
Cape Verde	20%
Burundi	19%
Benin	19%
Mali	18%
Guinea	18%
Niger	17%
Morocco	14%
Madagascar	12%
Tunisia	10%
Mauritius	10%
Egypt	7%
Algeria	7%

Respondents were asked: *During the past year, have you or anyone in your family had something stolen from your house?*
(% who say "yes, once," "yes, twice," or "yes, three or more times")

About one in 12 respondents (8%) say they or a member of their family were physically attacked at least once during the preceding year. Ugandans and Cameroonians were most likely to say they had been attacked (17%), while only 1% of Mauritians suffered a physical attack (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Physically attacked during the previous year** | 33 countries | 2011/2013
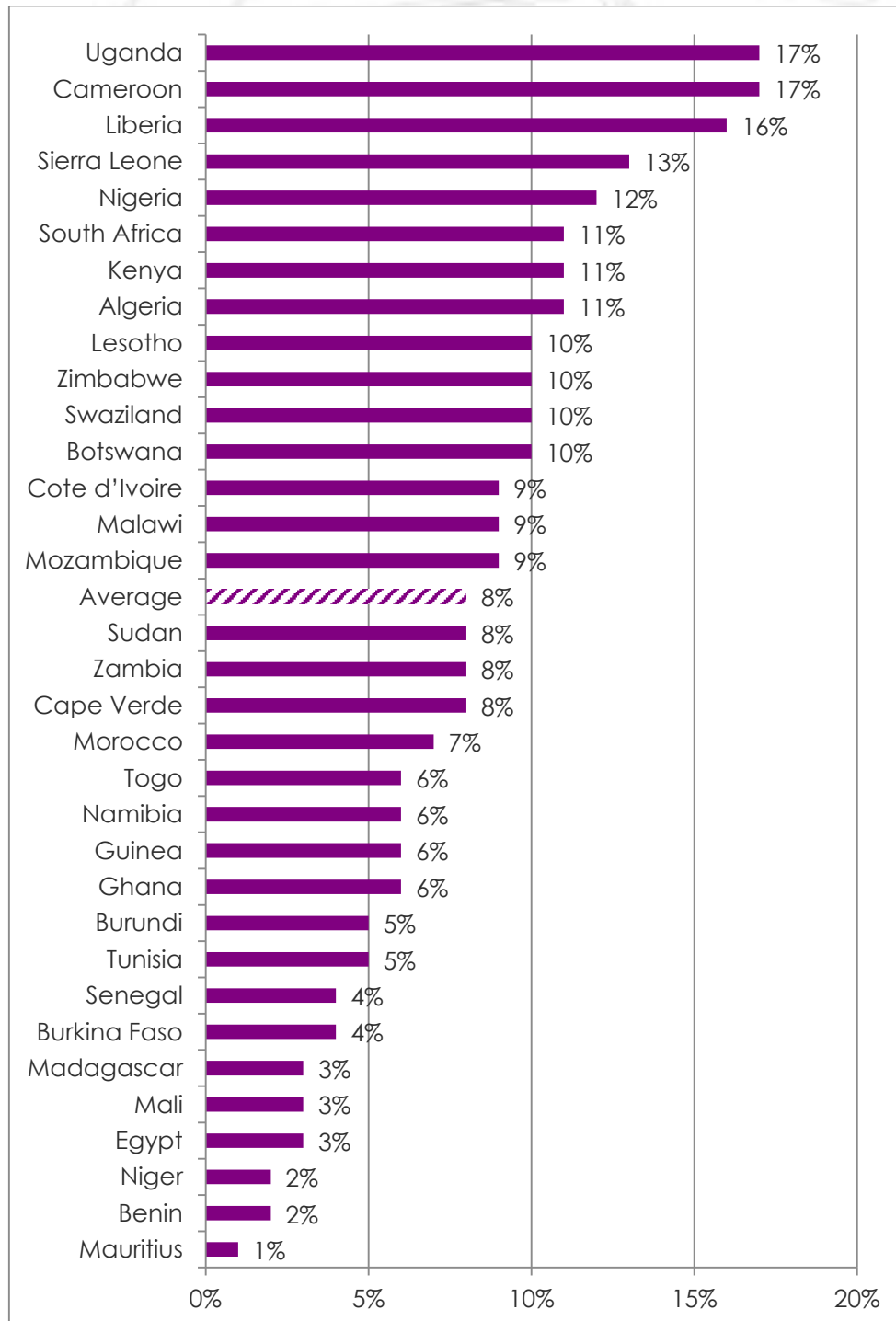
Respondents were asked: *During the past year, have you or anyone in your family been physically attacked? (% who say "yes, once," "yes, twice," or "yes, three or more times")*
Note: This question was not asked in Tanzania.

Reporting crime to the police

Among those who were victims of crime in the 34 countries, more than half (56%) did not report the crime to the police. Citizens of Togo and Benin were least likely to report crimes to the police (79% of victims did not), while Algerians were most likely to report crimes (25% did not) (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Crime victims not reporting crime to police | 34 countries | 2011/2013
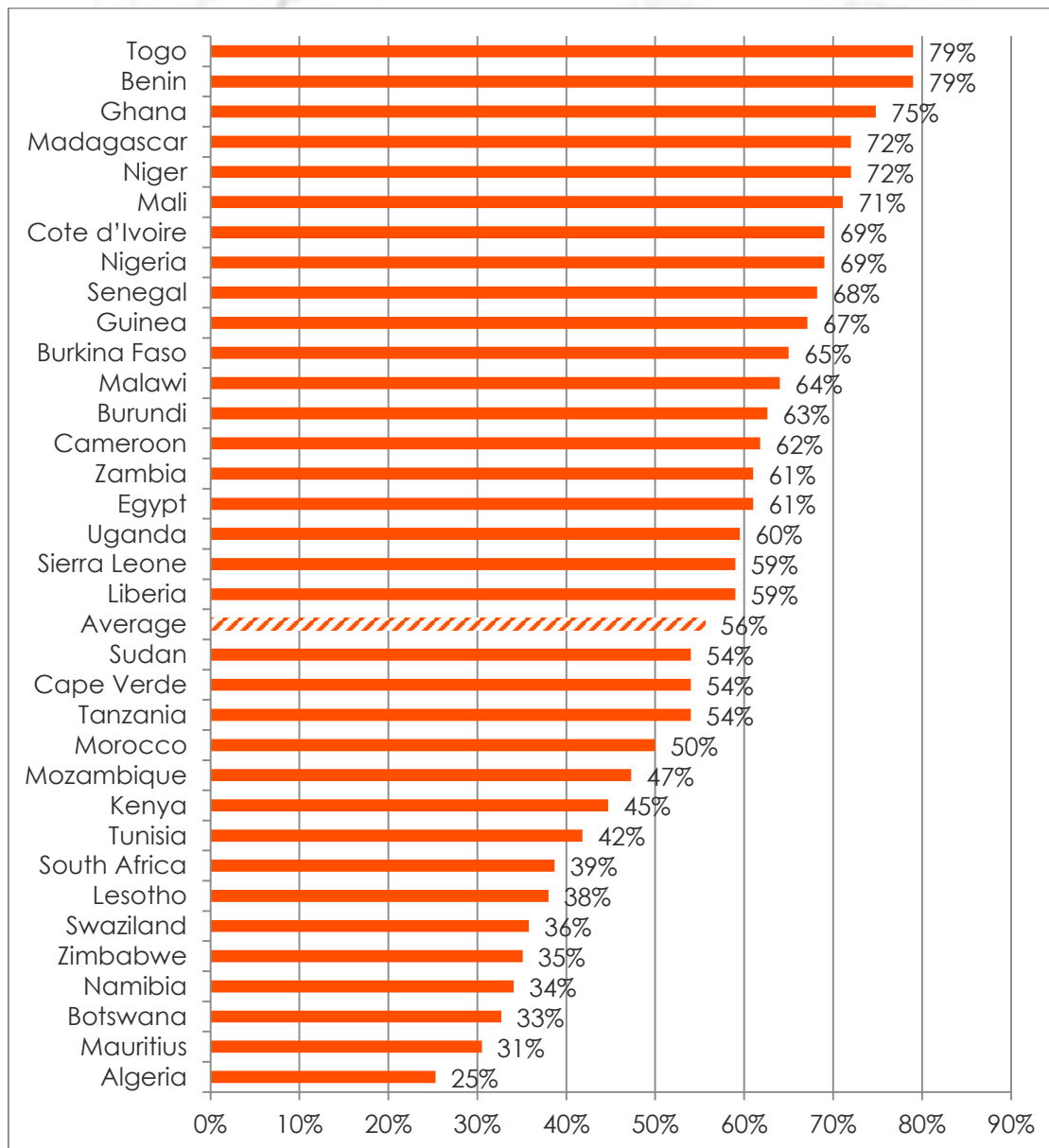

Respondents who were victims of crime during the previous year were asked: *Was such an incident reported to the police? (% who say "no")*

The main reasons why victims do not report crimes to the police, according to survey respondents, are issues related to police performance: Police don't listen or care (cited by 14% of respondents), police would demand a bribe (10%), police would not be able to do anything (8%), and police may be involved in the theft or assault (2%). Together, these issues related to police performance are cited by 34% of respondents across the 34 countries (Figure 6). Other reasons that are cited include that victims fear reprisal from the attacker (12%), that there is no

police station in the area (7%), and that the crime is reported to another authority (4%). About one in five respondents (18%) say that most people do report crimes to the police, while 18% cite other reasons, such as lack of time, feelings of shame on the victim's part, and lack of evidence.

Figure 6: Reasons why crimes are not reported to the police | 34 countries | 2011/2013
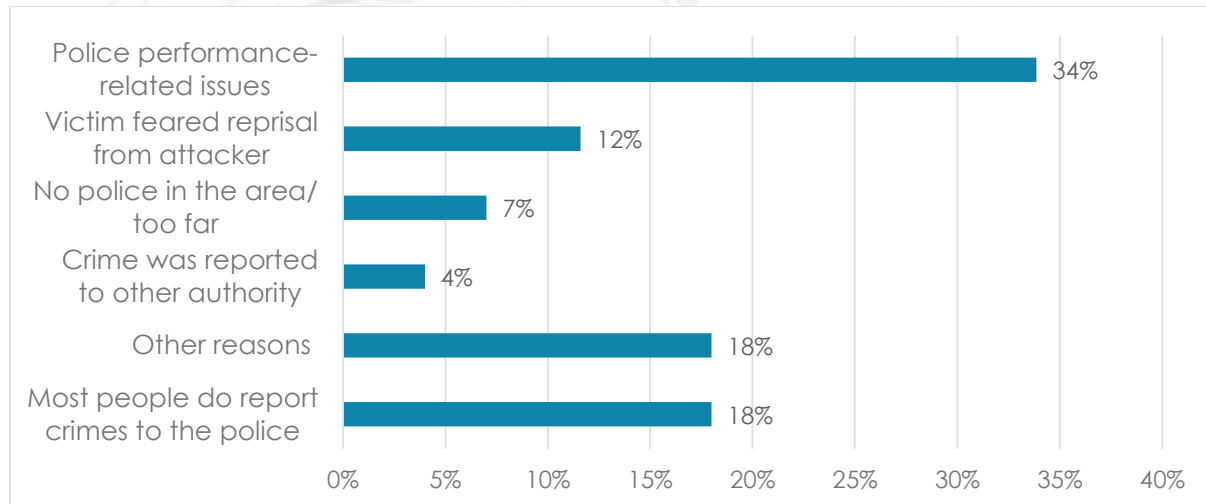
Respondents were asked: *Some people say that many crimes are never reported to the police. Based on your experience, what do you think is the main reason that many people do not report crimes like thefts or attacks to the police when they occur?*

Across 34 countries, about half (53%) of citizens say they would seek assistance first from the police, rather than from other people or organisations, if they were victims of a crime. North Africans are most likely to go to the police first for assistance (64%), while East Africans (43%) are least likely to seek police assistance first (Figure 7). Other frequently cited places for crime victims to go first for assistance include traditional leaders or courts, family and friends, local government officials, and street committees or local security organisations.

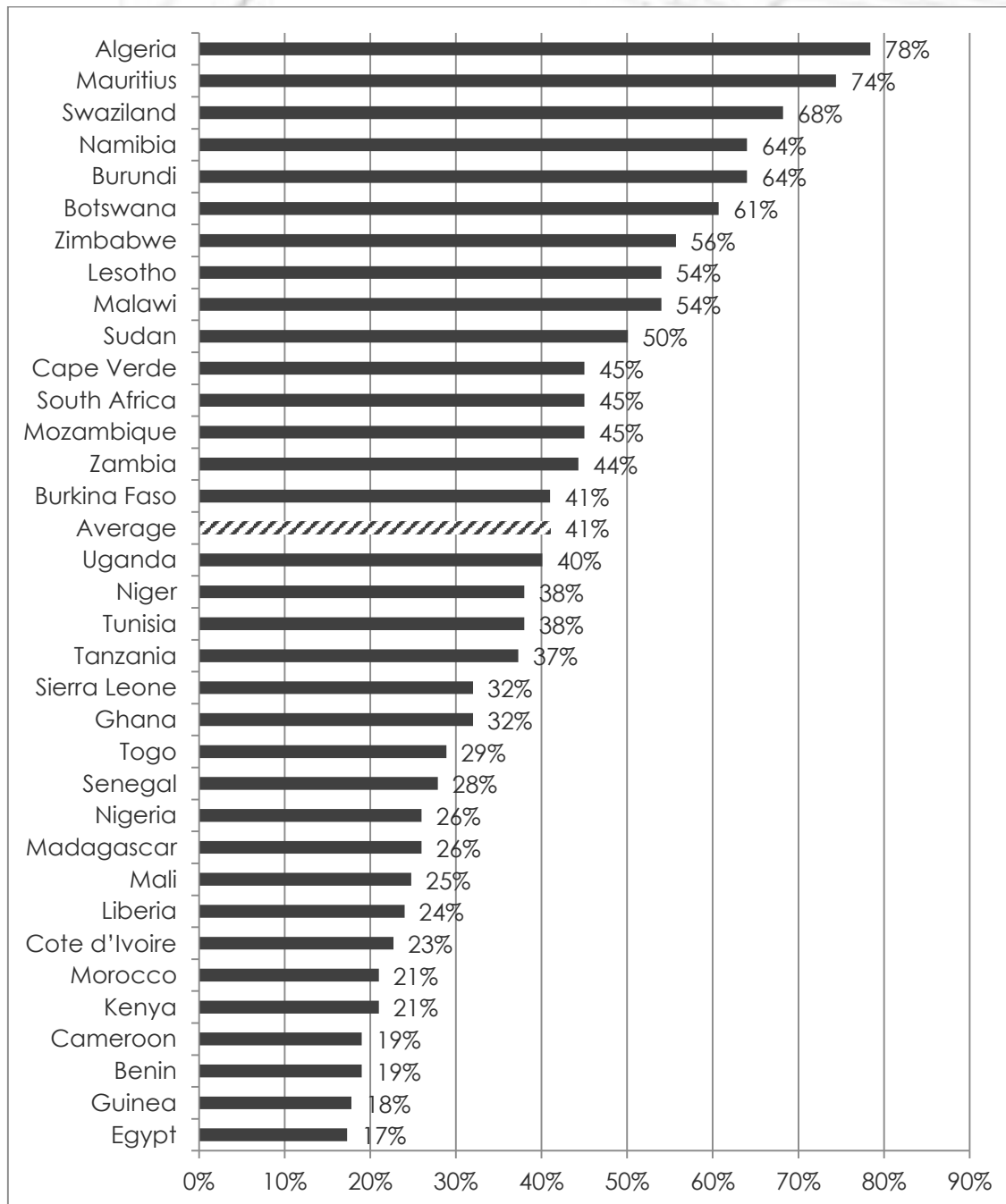**Figure 7: First place to seek assistance after a crime** | by region | 2011/2013
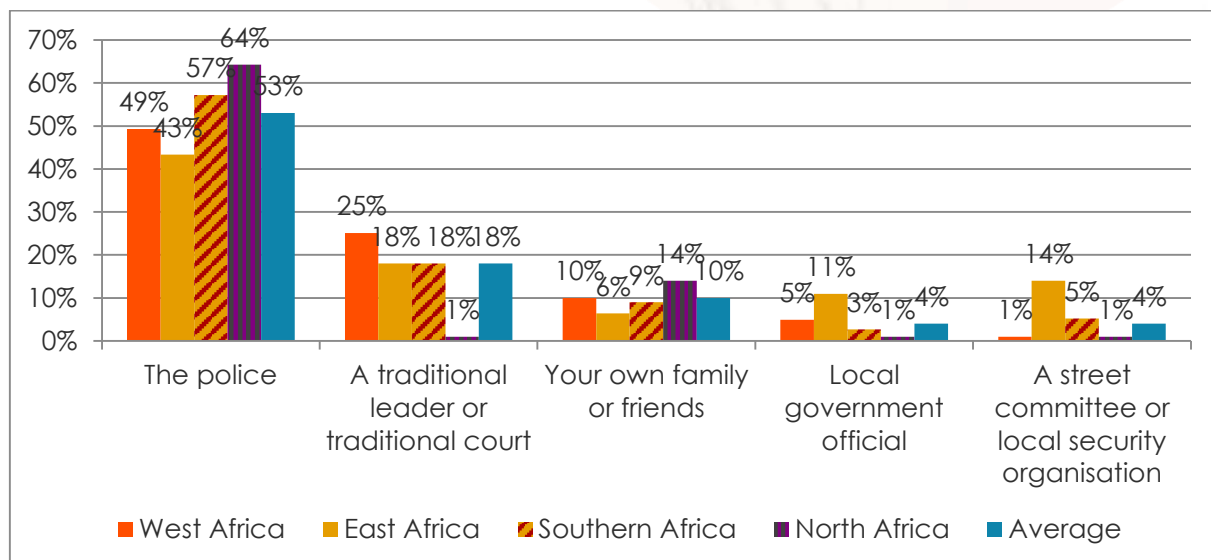
Respondents were asked: *If you were a victim of crime in this country, who, if anyone, would you go to first for assistance?*

Ease of obtaining help from police

Although a majority of Africans would seek assistance first from the police, only 41% of them say it is "easy" or "very easy" to get help from the police. As on other crime-related indicators, results vary widely among countries: In Algeria, more than three-fourths (78%) say it is "easy" or "very easy," compared to only 17% of Egyptians (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Ease of obtaining help from police | 34 countries | 2011/2013

Country	%
Algeria	78%
Mauritius	74%
Swaziland	68%
Namibia	64%
Burundi	64%
Botswana	61%
Zimbabwe	56%
Lesotho	54%
Malawi	54%
Sudan	50%
Cape Verde	45%
South Africa	45%
Mozambique	45%
Zambia	44%
Burkina Faso	41%
Average	41%
Uganda	40%
Niger	38%
Tunisia	38%
Tanzania	37%
Sierra Leone	32%
Ghana	32%
Togo	29%
Senegal	28%
Nigeria	26%
Madagascar	26%
Mali	25%
Liberia	24%
Cote d'Ivoire	23%
Morocco	21%
Kenya	21%
Cameroon	19%
Benin	19%
Guinea	18%
Egypt	17%

Respondents were asked: *In the past 12 months, have you requested assistance from the police? How easy or difficult was it to obtain the assistance you needed? (% who say "easy" or "very easy")*

Across the 16 countries tracked since 2002/2003,[1] the proportion of survey respondents who said it is "easy" or "very easy" to obtain help from the police increased from 33% in 2002/2003 to 42% in 2011/2013. Namibia registered the largest increase (32 percentage points), doubling from 32% in 2002 to 64% in 2013 (Figure 9). Kenya is the only country where the proportion who said it is "easy" or "very easy" to obtain help from the police decreased (from 23% to 20%).

Figure 9: Change in ease of getting help from police: Countries with greatest improvement | 2002-2013
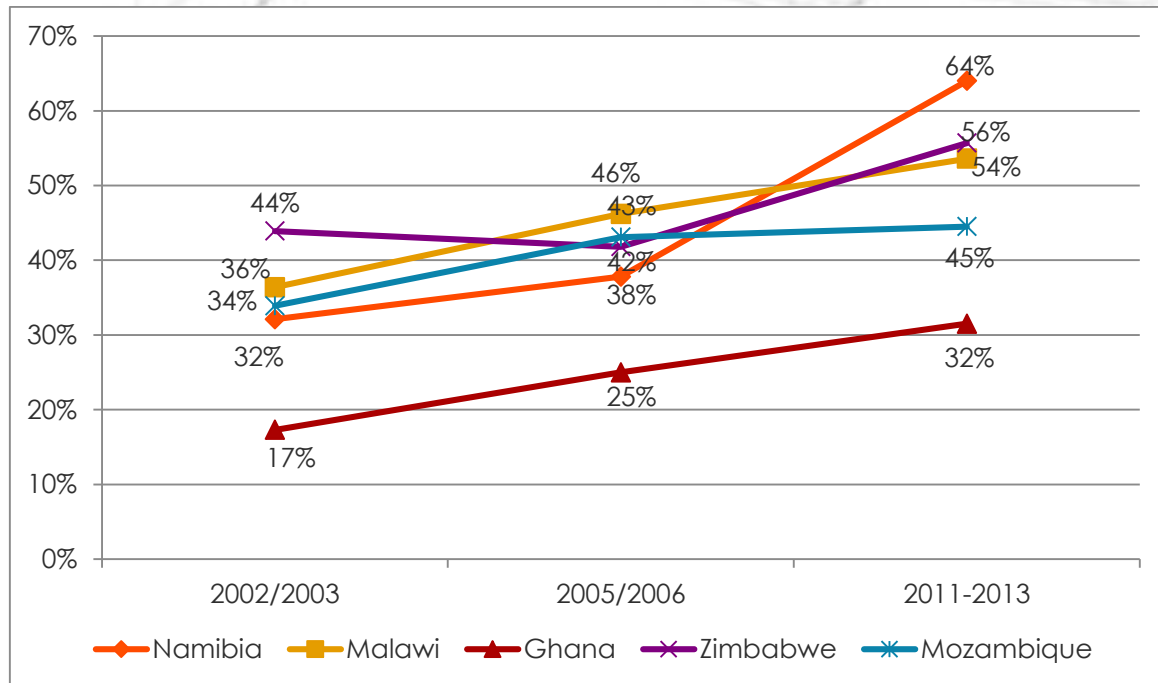
(% saying "easy" or "very easy")

Equality in treatment of women by police

About one-third (32%) of respondents say that police "often" or "always" treat women differently than men. More than half of citizens in Sierra Leone (56%), Morocco (55%), and Sudan (51%) report frequent unequal treatment, compared to fewer than one in five in Algeria (19%), Mauritius (18%), and Botswana (15%) (Figure 10).

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[1] The 16 countries tracked since Round 2 in 2002/2003 are Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

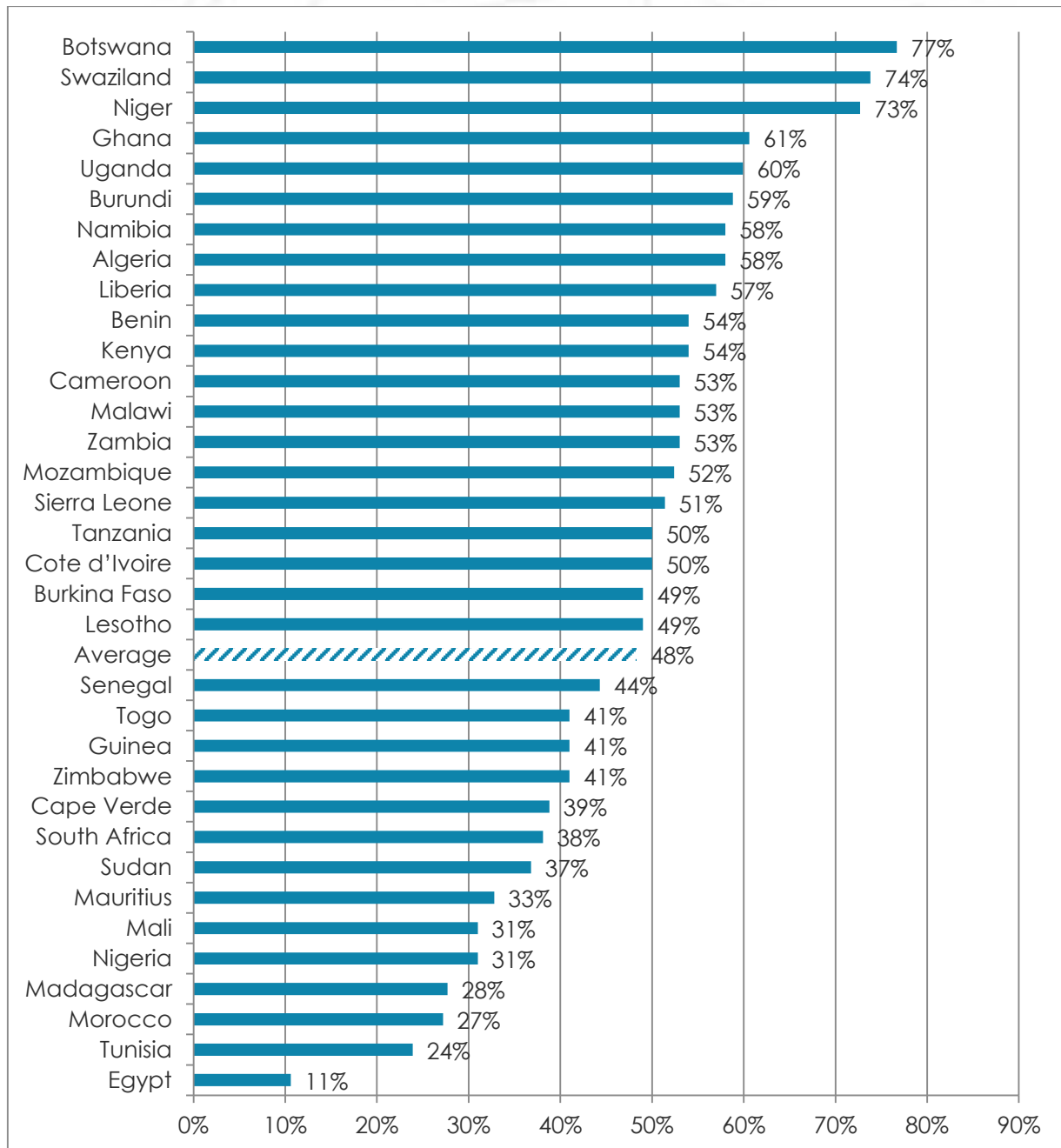**Figure 10: Women treated unequally by police** | 34 countries | 2011/2013

Country	Percentage
Sierra Leone	55%
Morocco	55%
Sudan	51%
Kenya	44%
Egypt	43%
Tunisia	43%
Mali	43%
Nigeria	41%
Cote d'Ivoire	40%
Swaziland	38%
South Africa	37%
Liberia	36%
Cape Verde	34%
Cameroon	34%
Lesotho	34%
Guinea	33%
Senegal	33%
Average	32%
Mozambique	32%
Uganda	31%
Burkina Faso	31%
Ghana	30%
Zimbabwe	29%
Benin	27%
Malawi	26%
Tanzania	25%
Madagascar	24%
Zambia	24%
Namibia	21%
Togo	21%
Algeria	21%
Burundi	21%
Niger	20%
Mauritius	18%
Botswana	15%

Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how often, in this country, are women treated unequally by the police and courts? (% who say "always" or "often")

Government performance in fighting crime

When asked about the most important problems in their country that government should address, the issue of crime/insecurity ranks eighth overall; on average across 34 countries, 5% of respondents cite it among their top three issues.

Fewer than half (48%) of respondents, on average, say their government is doing "fairly well" or "very well" in fighting crime. The Botswana government received the highest approval rating, with 77% of respondents giving it high marks, while the Egyptian government received the lowest (11%) (Figure 11).
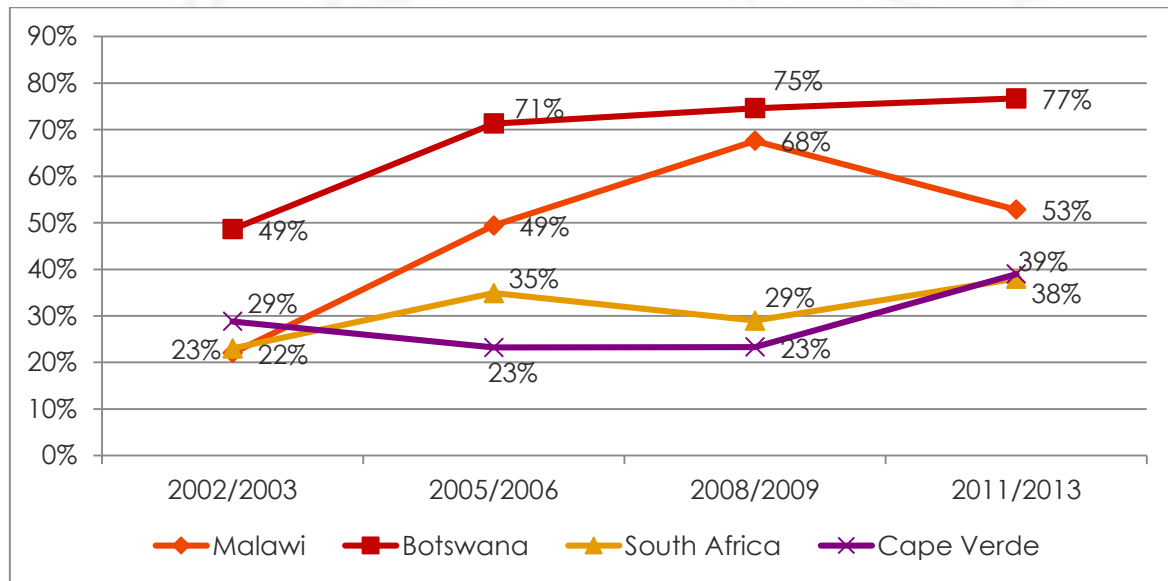
Figure 11: Government performance in fighting crime | 34 countries | 2011/2013

Country	Percentage
Botswana	77%
Swaziland	74%
Niger	73%
Ghana	61%
Uganda	60%
Burundi	59%
Namibia	58%
Algeria	58%
Liberia	57%
Benin	54%
Kenya	54%
Cameroon	53%
Malawi	53%
Zambia	53%
Mozambique	52%
Sierra Leone	51%
Tanzania	50%
Cote d'Ivoire	50%
Burkina Faso	49%
Lesotho	49%
Average	48%
Senegal	44%
Togo	41%
Guinea	41%
Zimbabwe	41%
Cape Verde	39%
South Africa	38%
Sudan	37%
Mauritius	33%
Mali	31%
Nigeria	31%
Madagascar	28%
Morocco	27%
Tunisia	24%
Egypt	11%

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 say "fairly well" or "very well")

Across the 16 countries in which Afrobarometer surveys have been conducted since 2002/2003, the proportion of citizens who approve of government performance in fighting crime has only fluctuated slightly over time, averaging between 49% and 53% across the four survey cycles. But some individual countries show either positive or negative trends. Malawi has the largest increase in public approval (31 percentage points), followed by Botswana, South Africa, and Cape Verde (Figure 12), while Kenya and Mali register the largest decreases (21 percentage points) (Figure 13).

Figure 12: Government performance in fighting crime: Countries with largest increase in public approval | 2002-2013

(% saying "fairly well" or "very well")

Figure 13: Government performance in fighting crime: Countries with largest decrease in public approval | 2002-2013
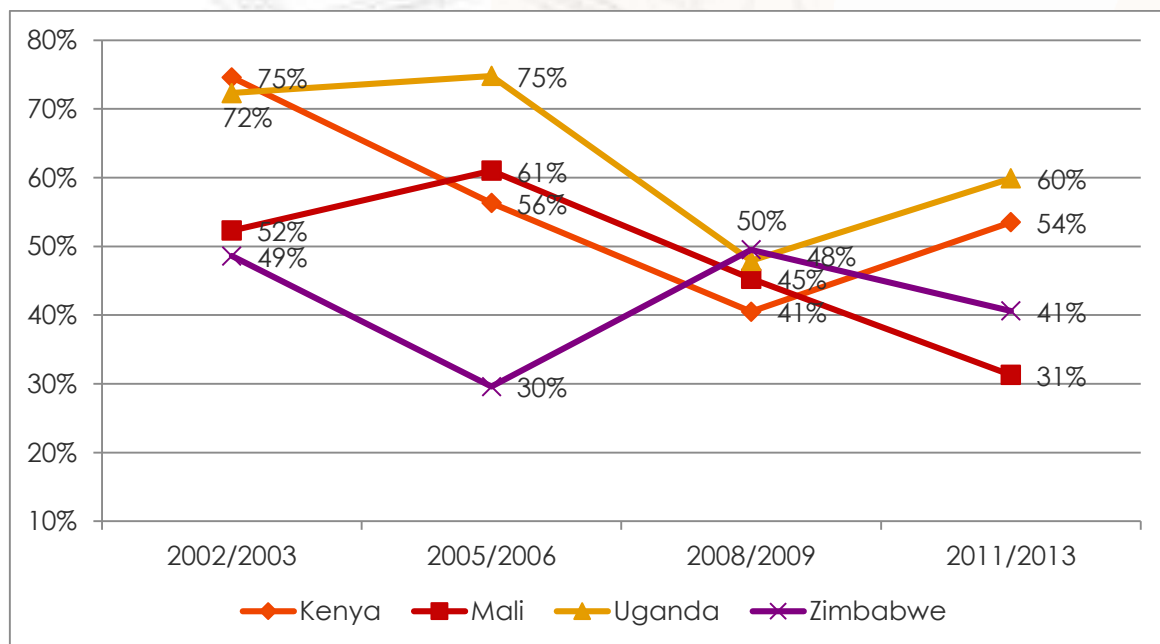
(% saying "fairly well" or "very well")

To further explore this data, please visit Afrobarometer's online data analysis facility at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

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Legatum Institute (2014). The 2014 Legatum prosperity report. Available at http://www.prosperity.com/#!/ranking.

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