

Zambians see corruption rising, government failing in anti-graft fight

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 213 | Thomas Isbell

Summary

Corruption is one of the largest impediments to economic growth, human development, and alleviation of poverty in Africa (Transparency International, 2015; United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2016; Bratton & Gyimah-Boadi, 2016). Studies have shown that corruption is particularly harmful to the poorest and most vulnerable, who depend most heavily on the state for services and lack the ability to vote with their wallets (Peiffer & Rose, 2014).

Zambia ranks 96th – toward the middle among 180 countries worldwide – on Transparency International's 2017 Corruption Perceptions Index, placing it 15th from the top (best) among sub-Saharan African countries. While the government has created a National Program on Governance and anti-corruption committees in all of its institutions, the country's Bribe Payers Index has made headlines with reported increases in the prevalence of bribe payments (Maingalia, 2015; Ngosa, 2018). For 2017, the Zambian Financial Intelligence Centre (2018) received reports of suspected corruption worth about U.S. \$622 million, many of them linked to public procurement contracts. In January, Foreign Minister Harry Kalaba cited slow government action against corruption as a reason for his resignation; even though some suspect Kalaba's decision was a political maneuver rather than a genuine protest, it emphasizes the high-profile role that corruption has assumed in Zambia's domestic policy narrative (Sharman, 2018).

How do ordinary Zambians view corruption in their country? Findings from an Afrobarometer/ Transparency International survey module show that a growing number of Zambians see corruption levels in the country as rising and give the government a failing grade on its anti-corruption efforts. An overwhelming majority of Zambians think that rich people can use corruption to gain illicit advantages. And only about half think that ordinary citizens can make a difference in the fight against corruption – perhaps in part because most fear retaliation if they report bribery to the authorities.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in African countries. Six rounds of surveys were conducted in up to 37 countries 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 interviewed 1,200 adult Zambians in April 2017. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. The survey module on corruption was supported by Transparency International.

Previous surveys were conducted in Zambia in 1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2014.

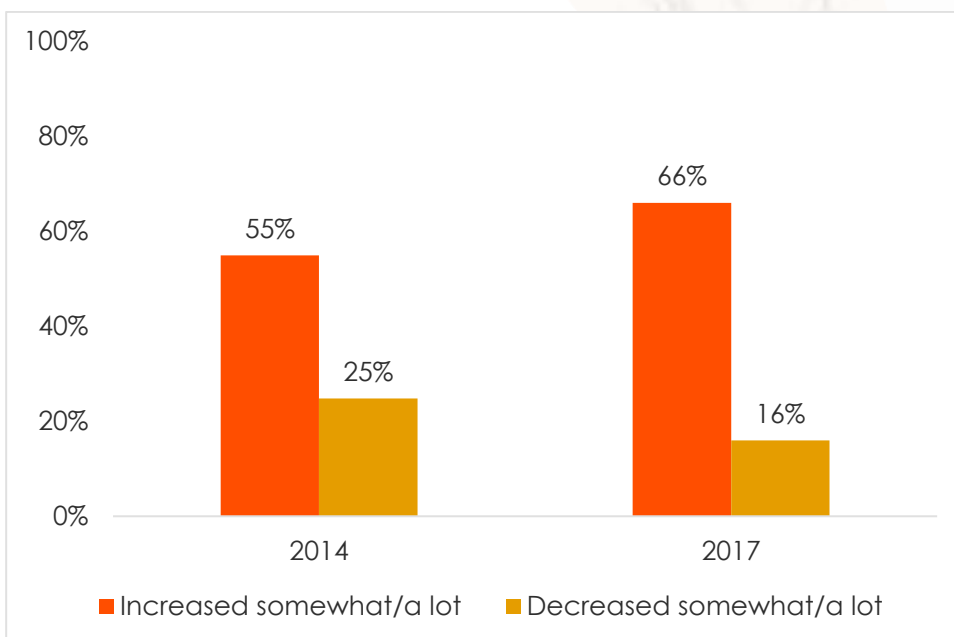
Key findings

- Two-thirds (66%) of Zambians say levels of corruption have increased over the past year, up from 55% in 2014.
- Seven in 10 Zambians (70%) say the government is handling the fight against corruption “fairly badly” or “very badly” – a huge increase from 42% recorded in 2013.
- The police are most widely perceived as corrupt: 54% of Zambians say “most” or “all” police officials are corrupt, and more than one in four respondents who had contact with the police during the preceding year say they paid a bribe to avoid problems or obtain assistance.
- Around one in three respondents say “most” or “all” government officials (37%), members of Parliament (MPs) (37%), local government councillors (34%), and officials in the Presidency (32%) are corrupt.
- More than eight in 10 Zambians say it's “somewhat likely” or “very likely” that rich people could use bribery or personal connections to avoid paying taxes (84%), avoid going to court (88%), or registering land that isn't theirs (88%).
- About half (49%) of Zambians think ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption. Two-thirds (68%) think they would risk retaliation if they reported corruption to the authorities.

Levels of corruption

In 2017, two out of three Zambians (66%) say that overall levels of corruption in their country increased “somewhat” or “a lot” over the previous year, compared to only 16% who feel that corruption has decreased. This is a significantly more negative view than in 2014, when 55% said corruption had increased (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Levels of corruption | Zambia | 2014-2017

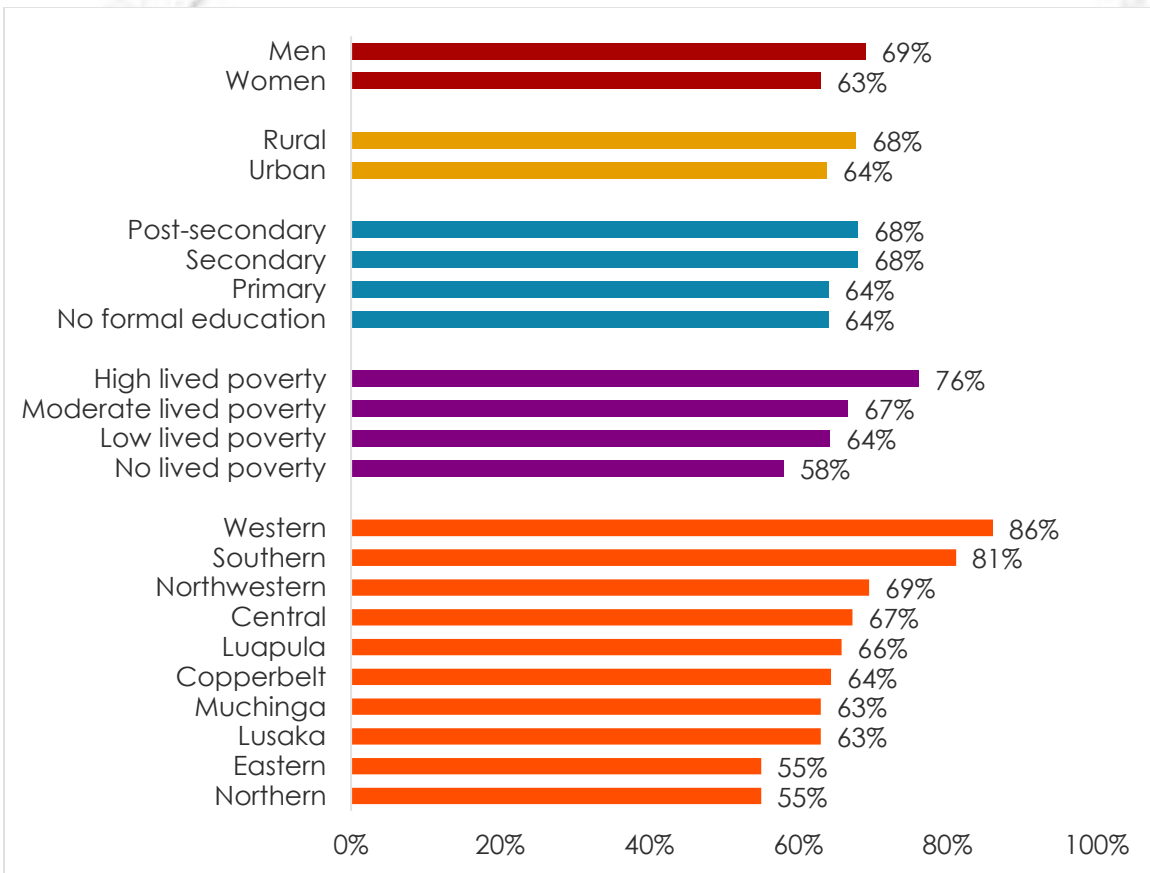


Respondents were asked: In your opinion, over the past year, has the level of corruption in this country increased, decreased, or stayed the same?

The poorest Zambians are especially likely to see corruption as having increased: Among those who experienced high levels of lived poverty,¹ 76% say corruption has increased, compared to 58% of the wealthiest respondents (Figure 2). Men, rural residents, and better-educated Zambians are somewhat more likely to report increased corruption than women, urbanites, and less-educated respondents.

Residents in the Western (86%) and Southern (81%) regions are far more likely to see corruption as having increased than their counterparts in the Northern and Eastern regions (both 55%).

Figure 2: Levels of corruption | by socio-demographic group | Zambia | 2017



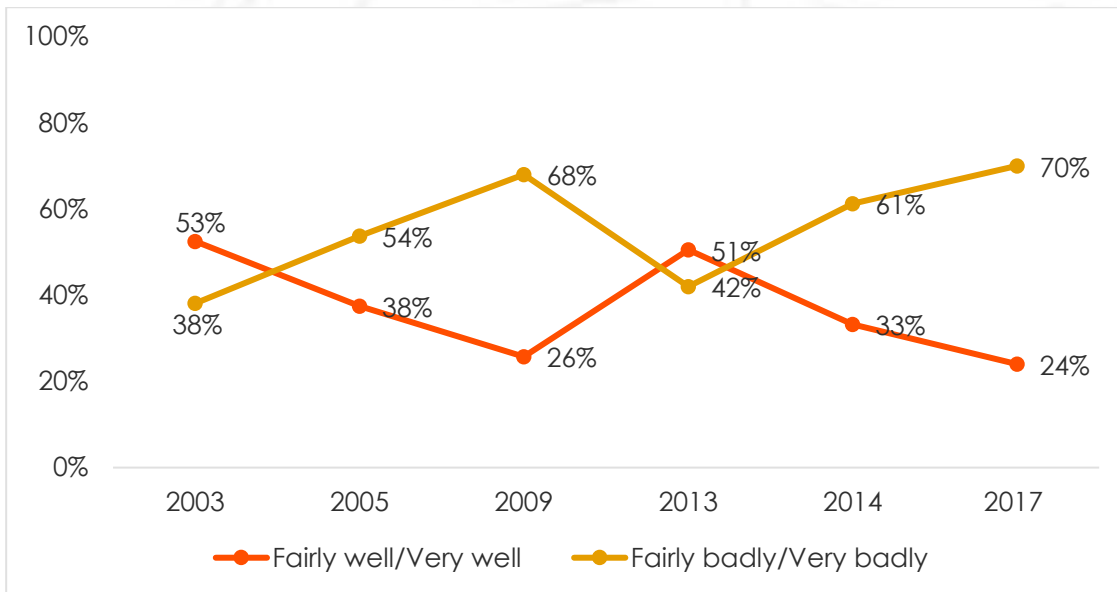
Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, over the past year, has the level of corruption in this country increased, decreased, or stayed the same?*

Government performance fighting corruption

Zambians' assessments of how well the government is handling the fight against corruption have shifted greatly over time – and reached their worst level in 2017. Only one in four respondents (24%) say the government is performing “fairly well” or “very well” in its anti-corruption efforts – less than half the approval level in 2013 (Figure 3). Meanwhile, the share of Zambians who say the government is handling corruption fairly/very badly has grown to 70%.

¹ Afrobarometer measures lived poverty based on responses to the questions, “Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: Enough food to eat? Enough clean water for home use? Medicines or medical treatment? Enough fuel to cook your food? A cash income?”

Figure 3: Government handling of the fight against corruption | Zambia | 2003-2017

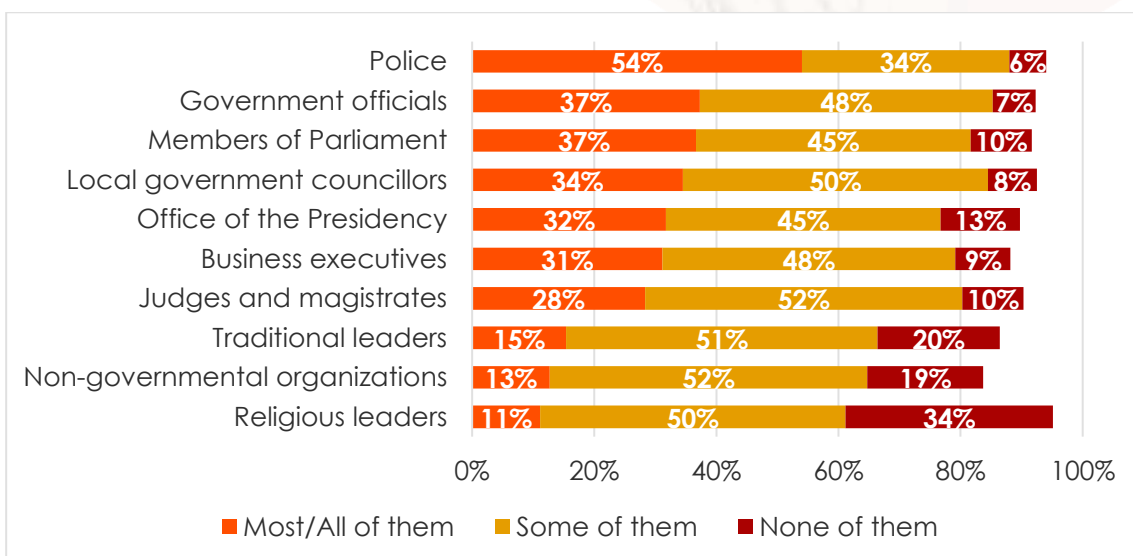


Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Fighting corruption in government?

Who is corrupt?

A majority of citizens see at least "some" corruption in all of 10 key categories of leaders (Figure 4). As in many African countries, the police are most widely perceived as corrupt: 54% of Zambians say "most" or "all" police officials are involved in graft, in addition to 34% who say "some" of them are corrupt. Around one in three respondents say "most" or "all" government officials (37%), members of Parliament (MPs) (37%), local government councillors (34%), officials in the Presidency (32%), and business executives (31%) are corrupt. Religious leaders get the best rating, with 34% of respondents saying "none" of them are corrupt, followed by traditional leaders (20%) and non-governmental organizations (19%).

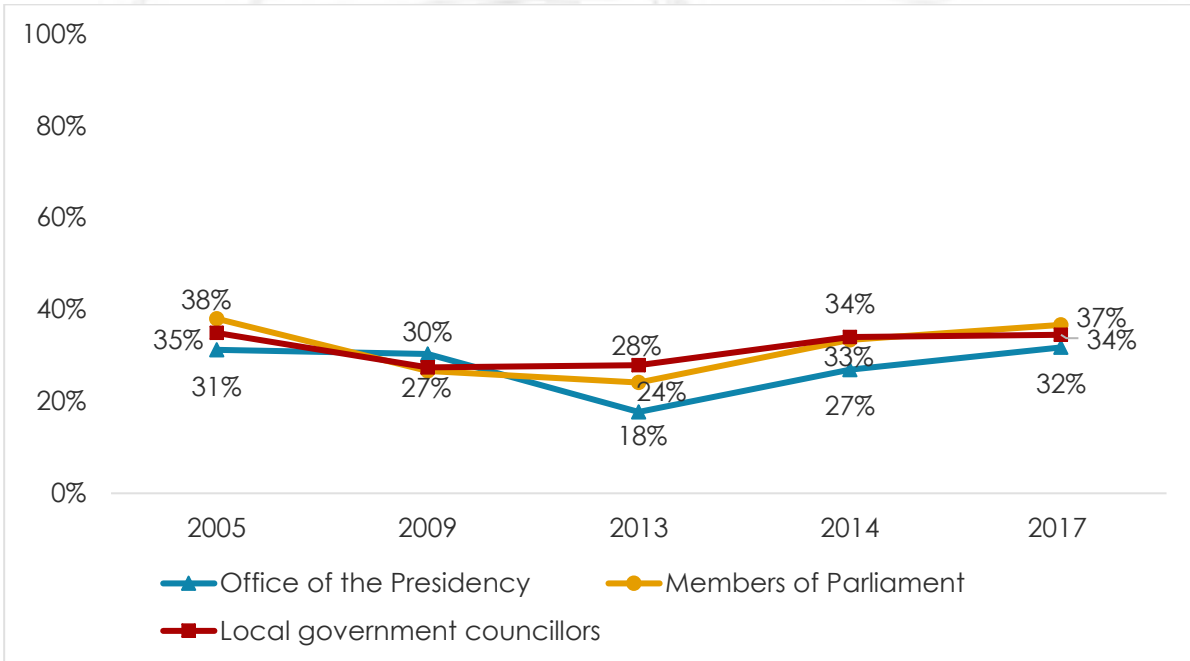
Figure 4: Perceived perpetrators of corruption | Zambia | 2017



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?

Perceived corruption in the Presidency, among MPs, and among local government councillors declined between surveys in 2005 and 2013 but has been rising since, reaching levels in 2017 that are about the same as those recorded in 2005 (Figure 5).

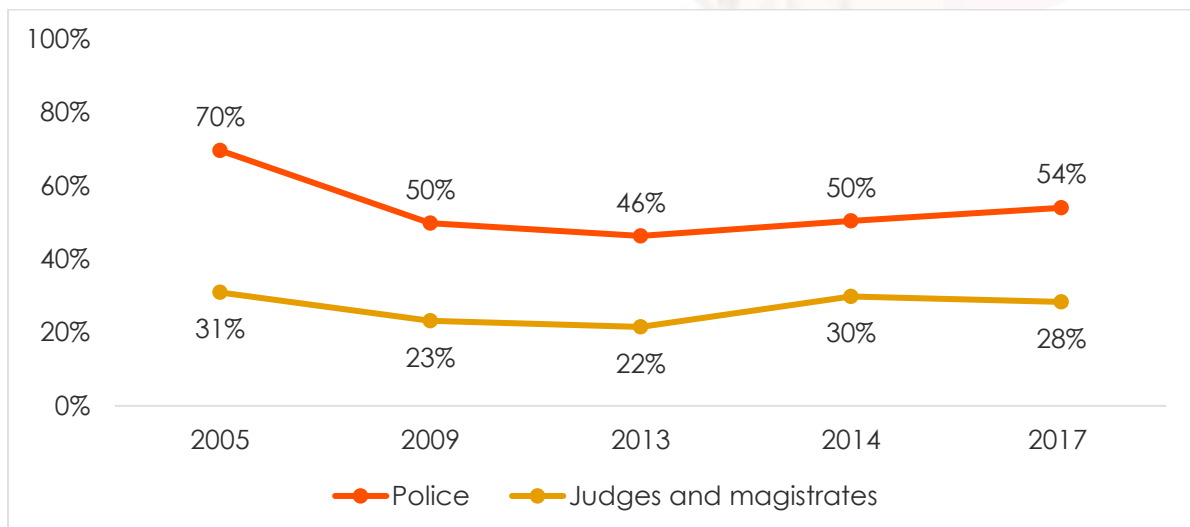
Figure 5: Most/all elected leaders corrupt | Zambia | 2005-2017



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 president and officials in his office? Members of Parliament? Local government councillors?

Similarly, perceived corruption among the police decreased from 70% (most/all) in 2005 to 46% in 2013 but has been climbing again since then. Perceptions of corruption among judges and magistrates follow a similar pattern, though at a considerably lower level (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Corruption among police and judges | Zambia | 2005-2017



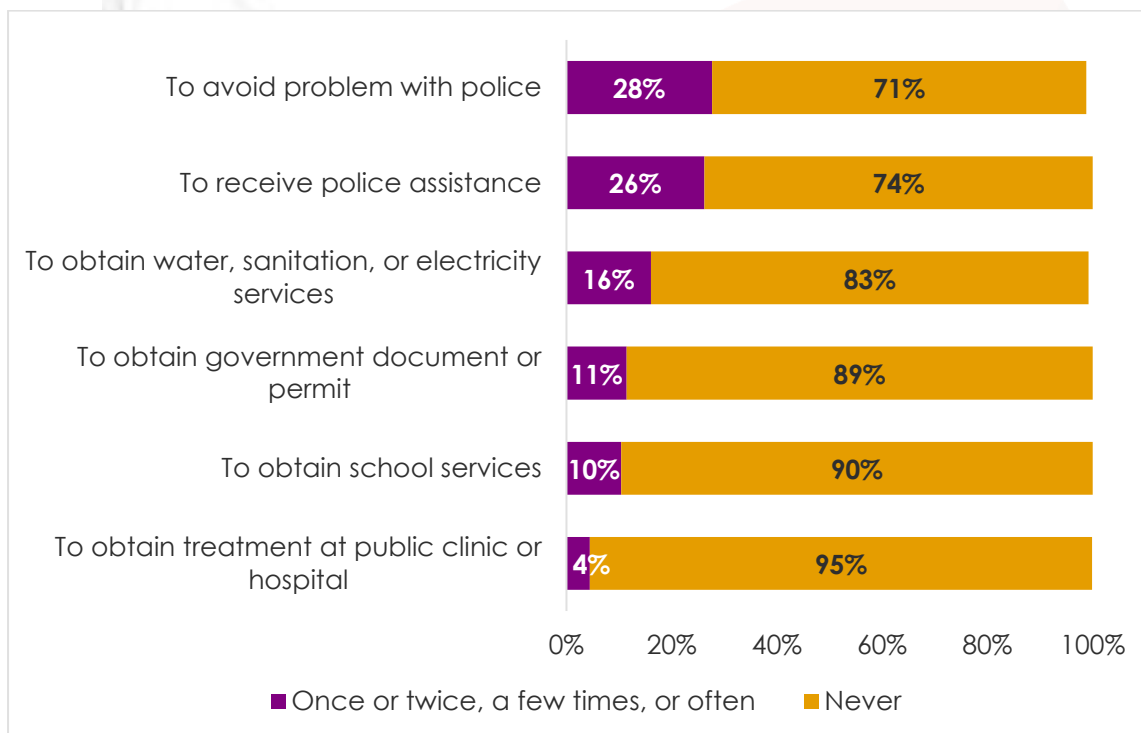
Respondents were asked: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Police? Judges and magistrates?

Experience of corruption

Afrobarometer asked respondents whether they had contact with key public services during the preceding year, and if so, whether they had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour to obtain the services they needed. The most frequent experience of having to pay a bribe was among respondents seeking to avoid a problem with the police or get help from the police: 28% and 26%, respectively, say they had to pay a bribe "once or twice," "a few times," or "often" (Figure 7).

About one in six (16%) say they had to pay a bribe to obtain water, sanitation, or electricity services, while one in 10 say they did so to obtain a government document or permit (11%) or to get school services (10%). One in 25 (4%) say they paid a bribe to get needed medical care.

Figure 7: Experience of paying bribes | Zambia | 2017

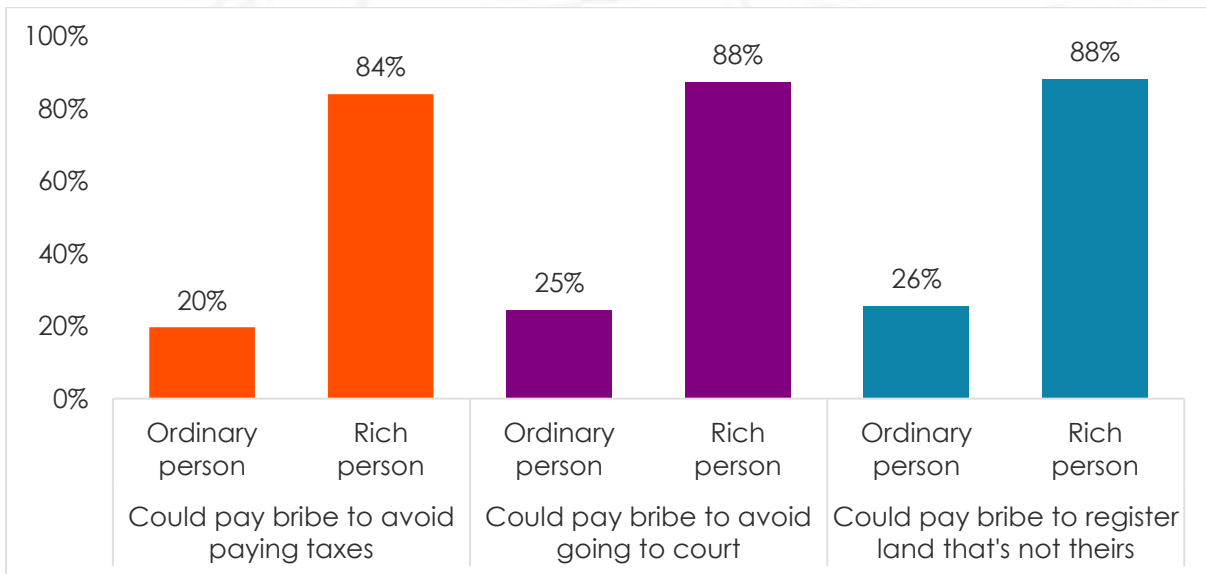


Respondents who said they had contact with key public services were asked: How often, if ever did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour:

- For a police officer in order to avoid a problem during one of these encounters?
- For a police officer in order to get the assistance you needed?
- For a government official in order to get the services you needed?
- For a government official in order to get the document you needed?
- For a teacher or school official in order to get the services you needed from the schools?
- For a health worker or clinic or hospital staff in order to get the medical care you needed?

Zambians express a strong sense that the rich can use corrupt methods to gain illicit advantages. More than eight in 10 respondents think it's "somewhat likely" or "very likely" that a wealthy person could pay a bribe or use personal connections to avoid paying taxes (84%), avoid going to court (88%), or register land that doesn't belong to him or her (88%) (Figure 8). By contrast, only about one-third to one-fourth as many respondents think that an ordinary person could use bribery or personal connections to the same effect.

Figure 8: Paying bribes to gain advantage: rich vs. poor | Zambia | 2017



Respondents were asked: In this country, how likely do you think it is that an ordinary person/a rich person could pay a bribe or use personal connections to get away with:

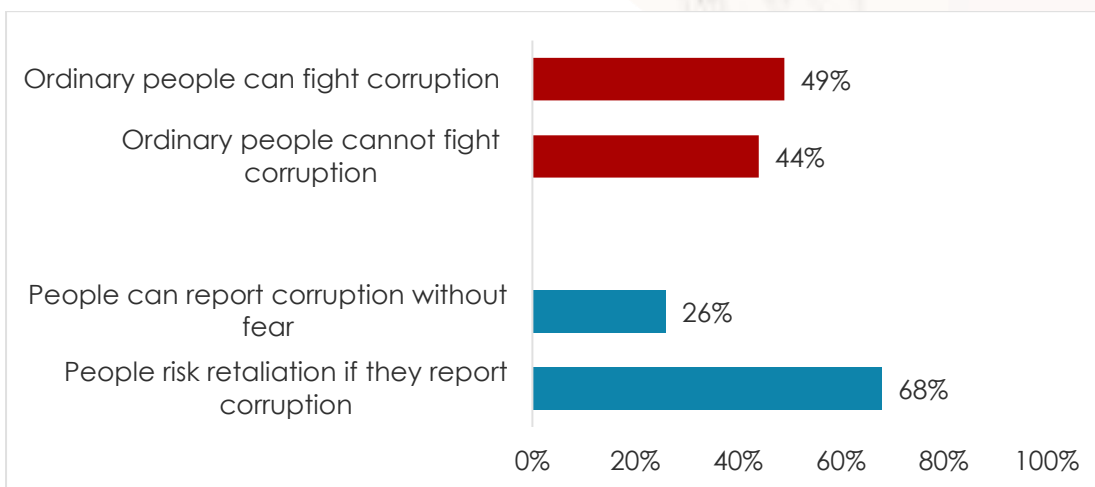
- Avoiding paying taxes?
- Avoiding going to court?
- Registering land that does not belong to them?

(% who say "somewhat likely" or "very likely")

What can ordinary people do?

Zambians are almost evenly divided as to whether ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption: 49% "agree" or "strongly agree" that they can, while 44% say they can't. More than two-thirds (68%) say ordinary people would face retaliation if they were to report corruption to the authorities (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Reporting corruption | Zambia | 2017



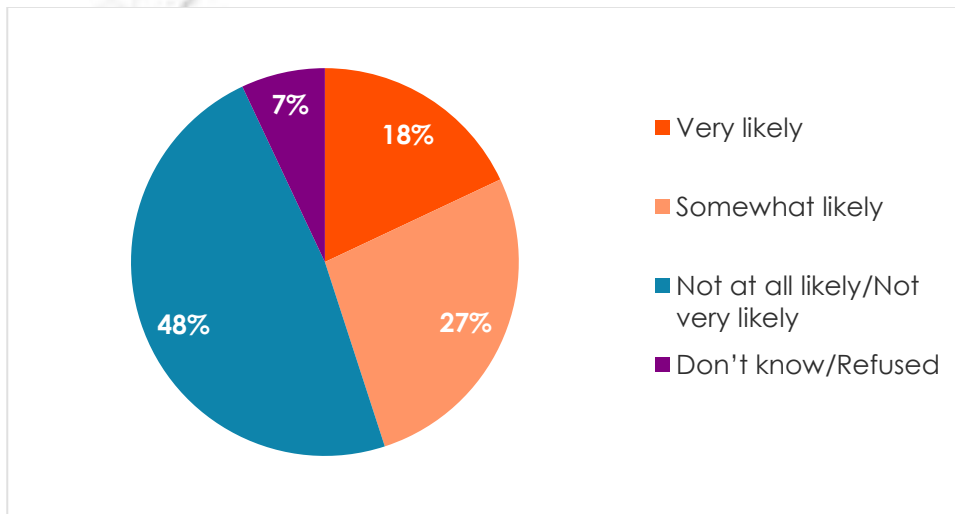
Respondents were asked:

- Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: Ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption? (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")
- 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?

Moreover, almost half (48%) of respondents think it is “not very likely” or “not at all likely” that they could get someone to take action if they went to their local government council to report corrupt behaviour by government officers, police, or school or clinic staff. Only 18% think government action would be “very likely,” while 27% say it would be “somewhat likely” (Figure 10).

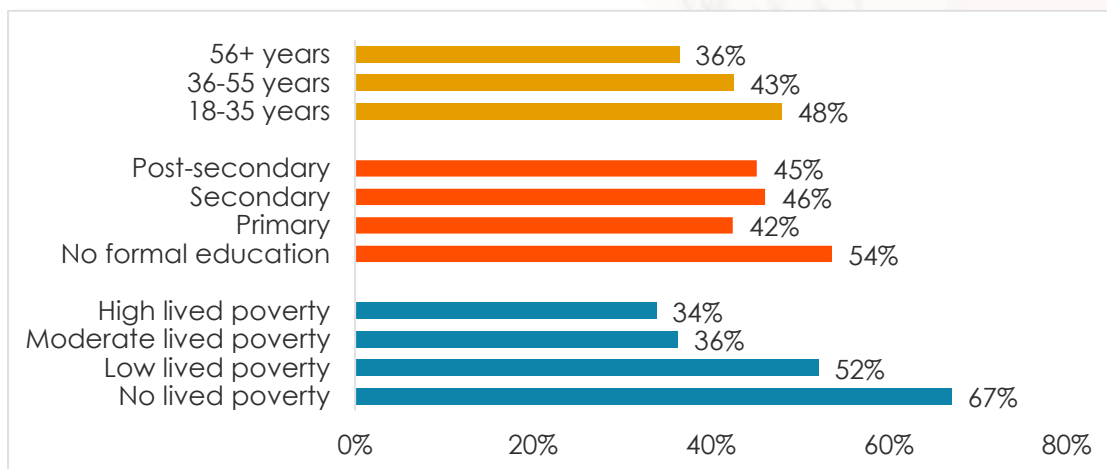
Optimism about getting government action is somewhat higher among younger respondents (48% of 18- to 35-year-olds old), respondents with no formal education (54%), and the wealthy (67%) (Figure 11).

Figure 10: Government response to reporting corruption | Zambia | 2017



Respondents were asked: How likely is it that you could get someone to take action if you went to a government office or other public institution to report the following problems, or haven't you heard enough to say: If you went to your local government council to report corrupt behaviour like misuse of funds or requests for bribes by government officers, police, or school or clinic staff?

Figure 11: Government would take action in response to reported corruption | by age, education, and lived poverty | Zambia | 2017



Respondents were asked: How likely is it that you could get someone to take action if you went to a government office or other public institution to report the following problems, or haven't you heard enough to say: If you went to your local government council to report corrupt behaviour like misuse of funds or requests for bribes by government officers, police, or school or clinic staff? (% who say “somewhat likely” or “very likely”)

Conclusion

To a growing majority of Zambians, corruption is on the rise, and the government is doing a poor job of fighting it. The police are seen as most corrupt, and rich people are perceived as gaining unfair advantages through corruption. If the government wants more than half of its citizens to believe they can make a difference, it may need to make sure that the population sees that reports of corruption are taken seriously and those who report incidents of corruption are protected.

Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It's easy and free at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

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