

## World Water Day: Despite progress, some Ghanaians still lack access to clean water

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**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 135 | Mina Okuru, Adu Kakra Duayeden, and Samuel Baaye**

### Summary

Water is a fundamental human need, yet 663 million people globally live without a safe water supply, according to the World Health Organization (2017). In Ghana, water shortages have forced citizens to queue for hours even after trekking to distant sources (Zoure, 2016). Despite efforts by successive governments to improve public access to potable water, the nation cannot yet claim to have met the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of ensuring that everyone has access to safe water.

The problem is compounded by the collective failure of the government and citizens to protect the nation's water bodies. In May 2016, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) predicted that the country will fall into a severe water crisis by 2025 if nothing is done to reduce the increasing pollution of water bodies and forest degradation (Bokpe, 2016). The agency also projected that without decisive action, the country's per-capita water availability will be 1,000 cubic metres per year, making Ghana a water-stressed country and presenting a potential source of inter-community conflict. A similar projection by the Water Research Institute of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research showed that potable-water sources are diminishing at an alarming rate and that the country faces a water crisis by 2030 if current conditions persist (Bokpe, 2016). In his Independence Day address to the nation on March 6, 2017, President Nana Akufo-Addo underlined this issue, saying, "There is nothing we can do better to pay homage to those who fought to free us from bondage than to dedicate this 60th independence anniversary to protecting our environment and regenerating the lands and water bodies" (Ghana News Agency, 2017).

On the occasion of World Water Day 2017 (March 22), this dispatch examines Ghanaians' access to water. Afrobarometer Round 6 (2014) survey data show that despite improvements in access to clean water, a significant proportion of the population still lacks adequate supplies of potable water. (For findings on water and sanitation across 36 African countries, see [Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 76](#) at [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org)).

### Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across Africa. Six rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2015, and Round 7 surveys are currently under way. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

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 country-level 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.

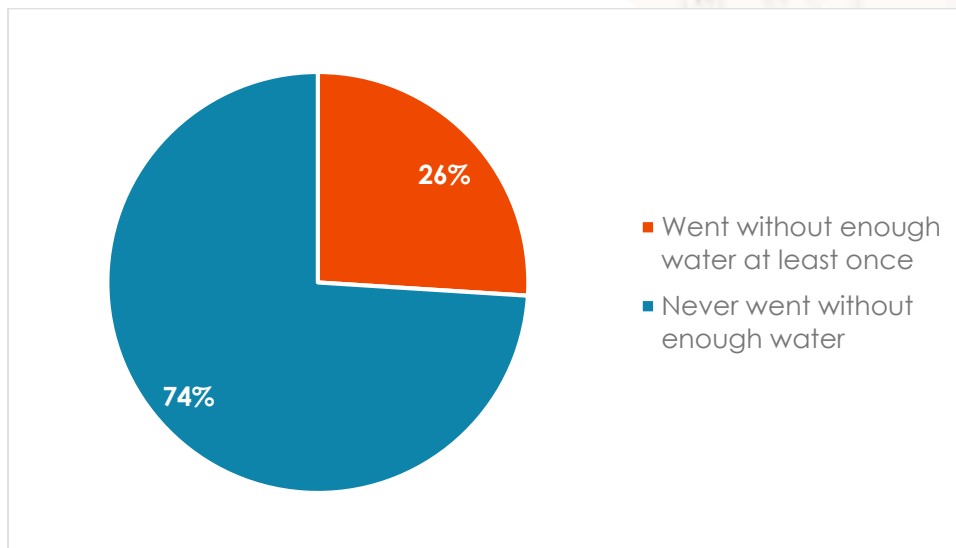
## Key findings

- About a quarter (26%) of Ghanaians went without enough clean water at least once during the year preceding the survey, including about one in 12 (8%) who experienced water shortages “many times” or “always.”
- The proportion of citizens going without enough clean water has gradually decreased over the past 15 years, from 42% in 2002 to 26% in 2014.
- Seven out of 10 Ghanaians (70%) live in areas served by piped-water systems, while three out of 10 (30%) do not. Urban residents are almost twice as likely to have access to a piped-water system as their rural counterparts (89% vs. 47%)
- More than eight out of 10 residents of Greater Accra (86%), Brong Ahafo (84%), Ashanti (84%), and Western (81%) regions have access to piped water, compared to fewer than one in five residents (19%) in the Upper West region.
- The primary source of water for most Ghanaians is outside their immediate compound (71%). Only one in seven Ghanaians (15%) get their water for household use inside their home.
- Two-thirds (66%) of Ghanaians in 2014 rated the then-government's performance on providing water and sewage services as “fairly bad” or “very bad.”

## Going without enough water

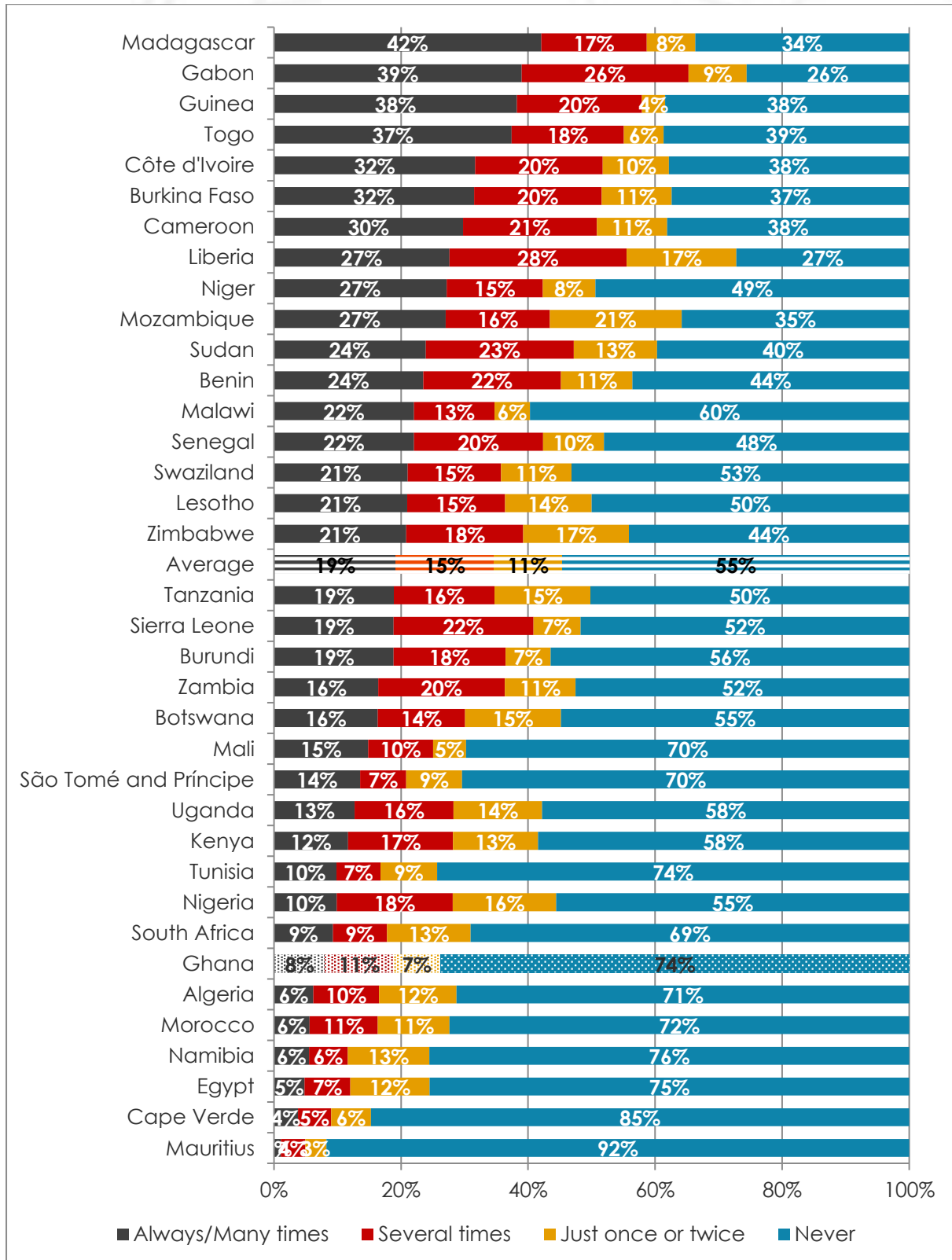
About one-fourth (26%) of Ghanaians say they went without enough clean water for home use at least once during the year preceding the survey (Figure 1). That includes 11% who say they experienced water shortages “several times” and 8% who went without enough water “many times” or “always.” These findings make Ghana one of the better-served populations among 36 countries surveyed in 2014/2015: On average, 45% of Africans say they went without enough water at least once (Figure 2).

**Figure 1: Went without enough clean water at least once | Ghana | 2014**



**Respondents were asked:** Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without enough clean water for home use? (“At least once” = “just once or twice,” “several times,” “many times,” or “always”)

**Figure 2: How often went without enough water | by country | 36 countries**  
 | 2014/2015

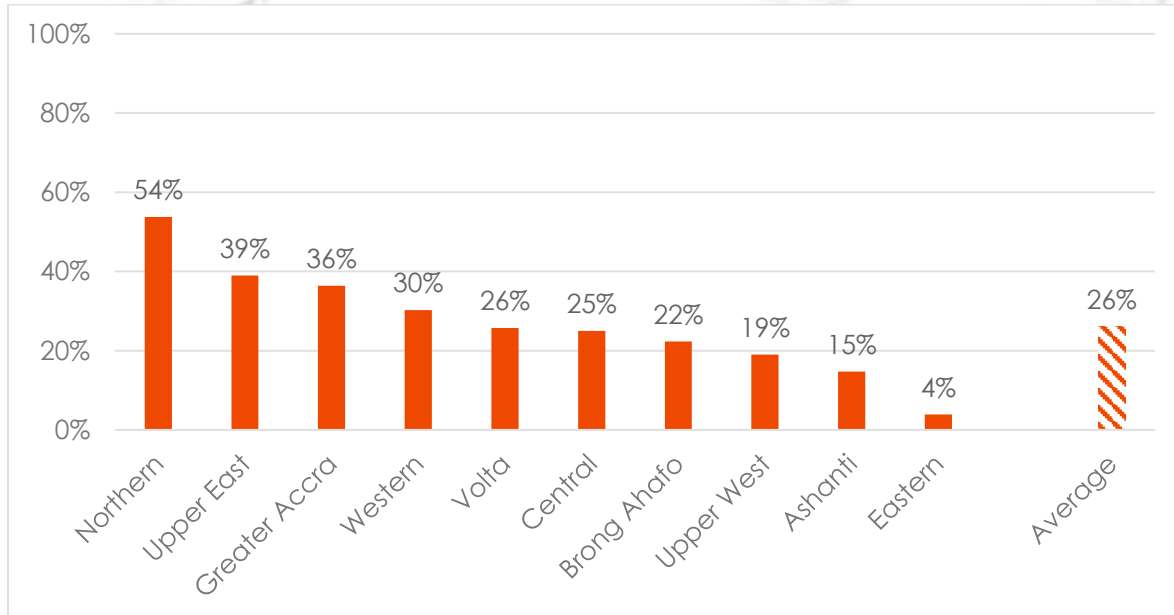


**Respondents were asked:** Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without enough clean water for home use?

By region, the experience of water shortages is most common in Northern (54%), Upper East (39%), and Greater Accra (36%) regions and least frequent in Eastern (4%), Ashanti (15%), and Upper West (19%) regions (Figure 3).

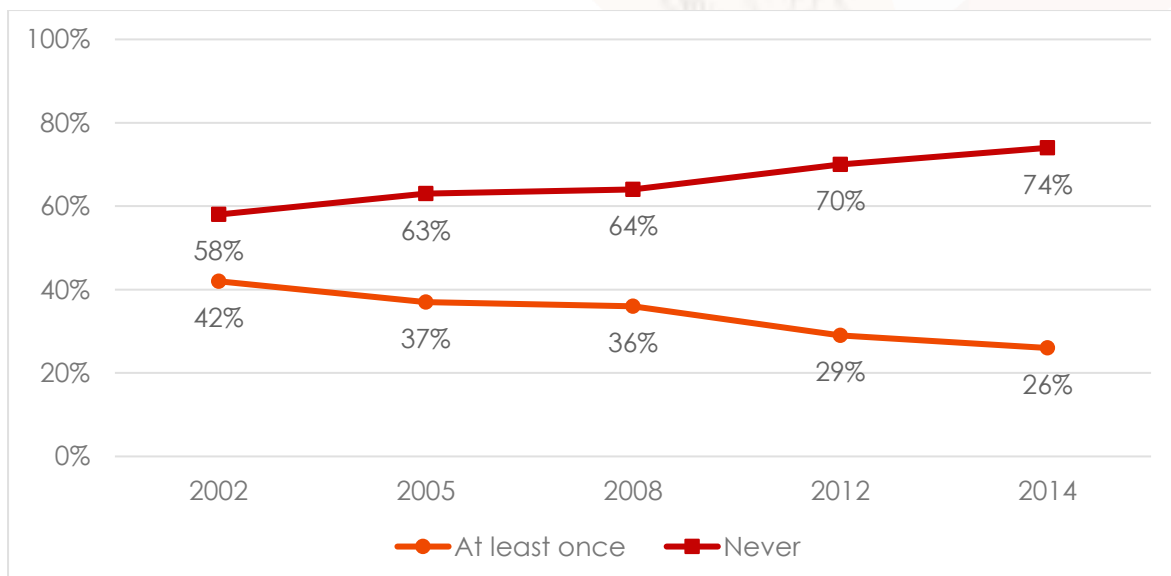
Over the past 15 years, the proportion of Ghanaians experiencing a water shortage at least once during the previous year has gradually decreased, from 42% in 2002 to 26% in 2014, while those who “never” suffered this deprivation increased from 58% to 74% (Figure 4).

**Figure 3: Went without enough clean water at least once | by region | Ghana | 2014**



**Respondents were asked:** Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without enough clean water for home use? (% who say “just once or twice,” “several times,” “many times,” or “always”)

**Figure 4: Trends in going without enough clean water | Ghana | 2002-2014**



**Respondents were asked:** Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without enough clean water for home use? (“At least once” = “just once or twice,” “several times,” “many times,” or “always”)

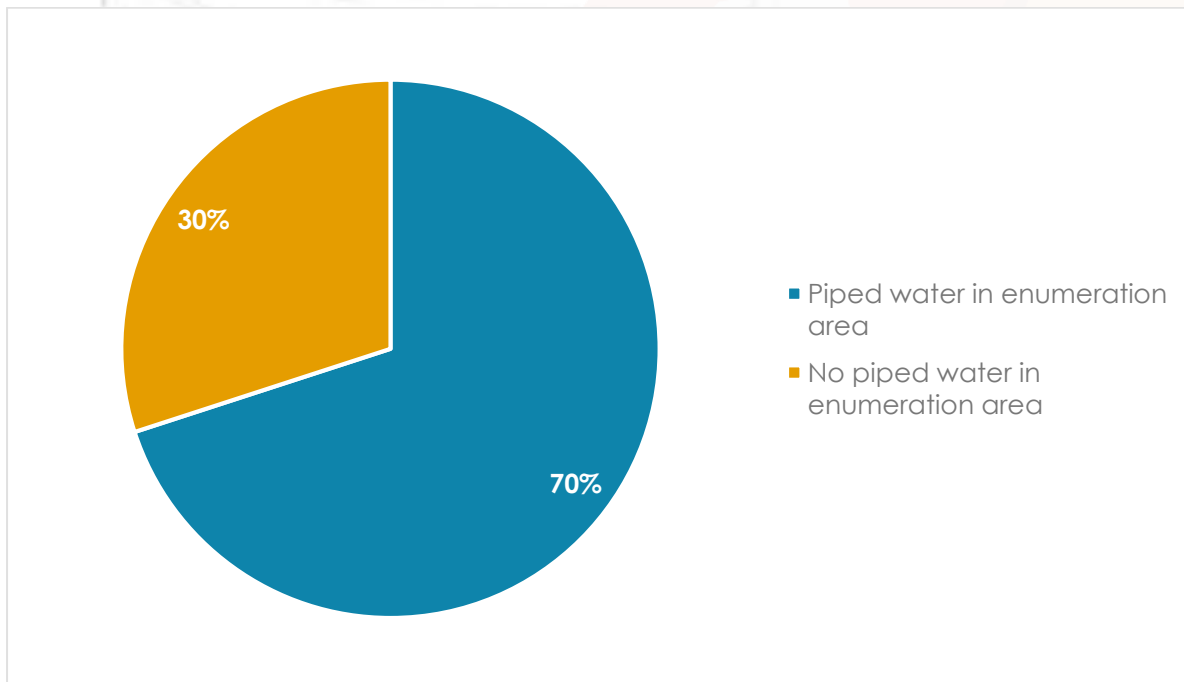
## Access to piped water

In examining why substantial numbers of Ghanaians still experience shortages of clean water, one factor to consider is access to basic infrastructure. Afrobarometer surveyors gather observational data about the availability of public services, including the presence of piped-water and sewerage systems "that most houses could access" in the enumeration areas where they conduct surveys.

In Ghana, seven out of 10 citizens (70%) live in areas that have piped-water systems, slightly above the 36-country average of 64%, while three out of 10 Ghanaians (30%) do not (Figure 5 and Figure 6).

Urban Ghanaians are almost twice as likely to have access to a piped-water system as their rural counterparts (89% vs. 47%) (Figure 7). More than eight out of 10 residents of Greater Accra (86%), Brong Ahafo (84%), Ashanti (84%), and Western (81%) regions have access to piped water, compared to fewer than one in five residents (19%) in the Upper West region (Figure 8).

**Figure 5: Access to piped-water system | Ghana | 2014**



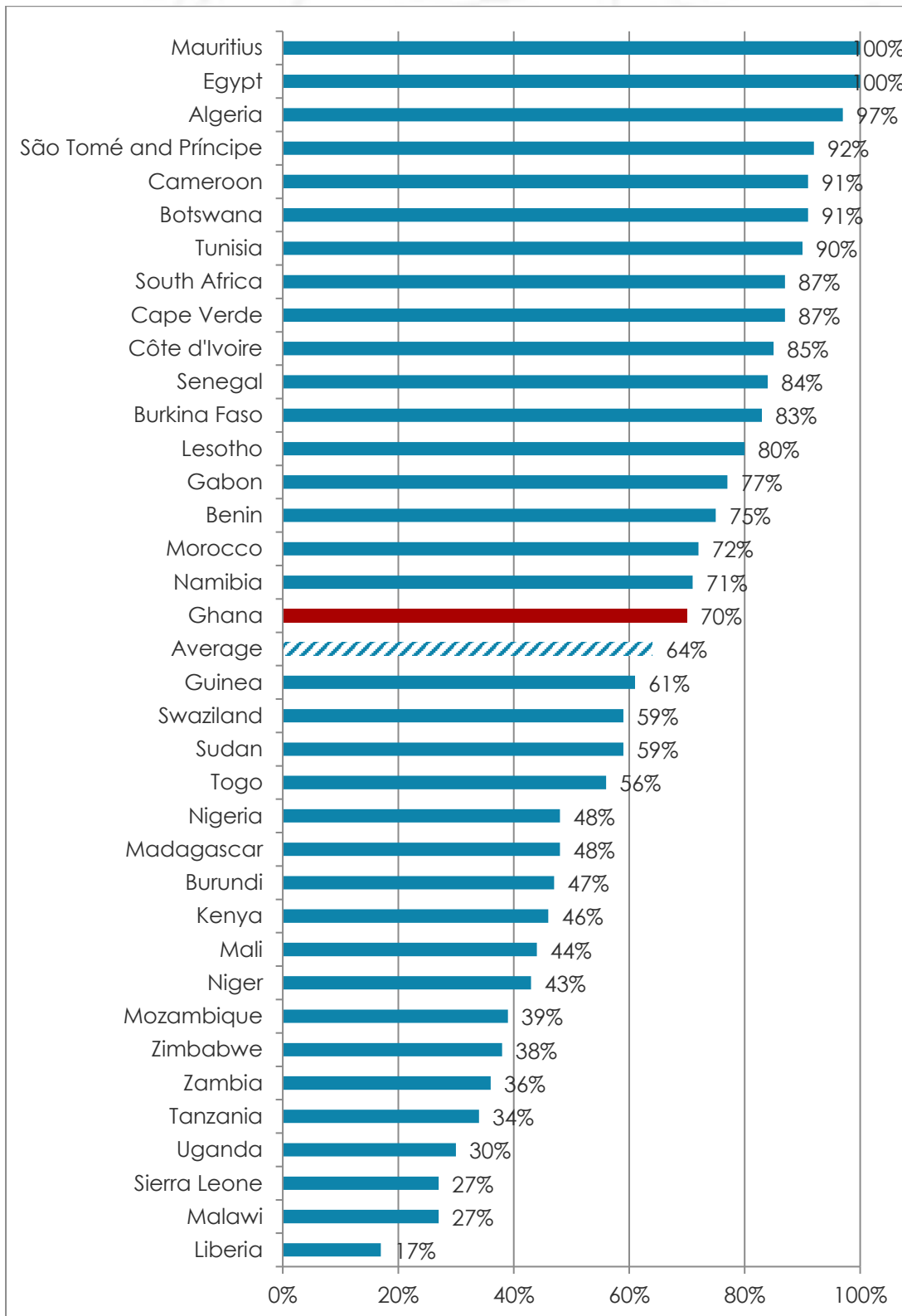
**Afrobarometer interviewers were asked to record:** *Are the following services present in the primary sampling unit/enumeration area: A piped-water system that most houses could access?*

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To further explore water-related data, please visit  
Afrobarometer's online data analysis facility at  
[www.afrobarometer-online-analysis.com](http://www.afrobarometer-online-analysis.com).

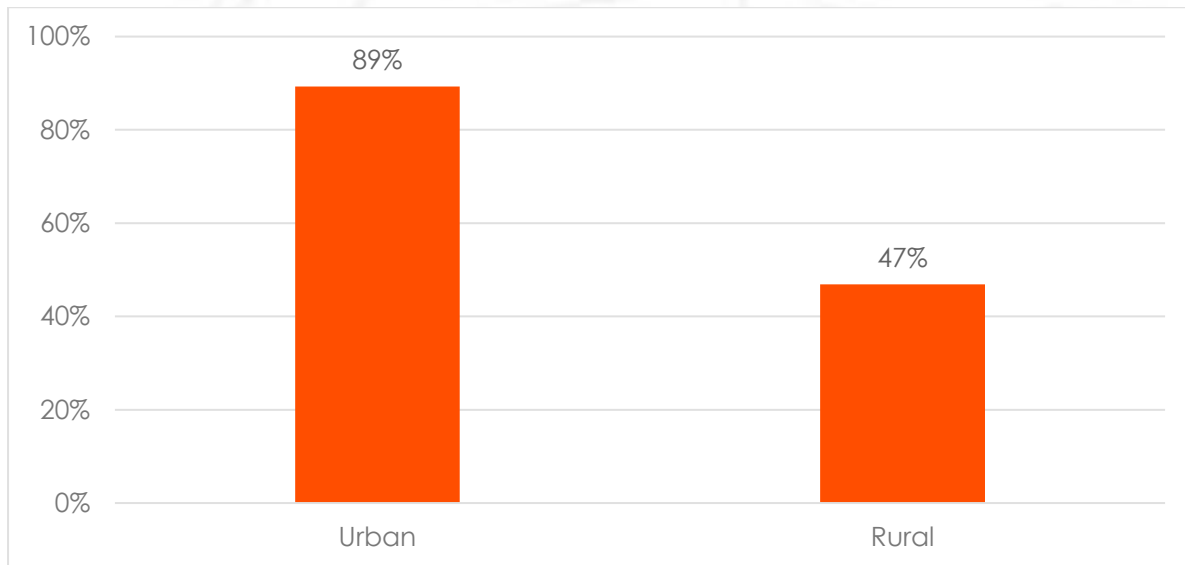
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**Figure 6: Access to piped-water system** | 36 countries | 2014/2015



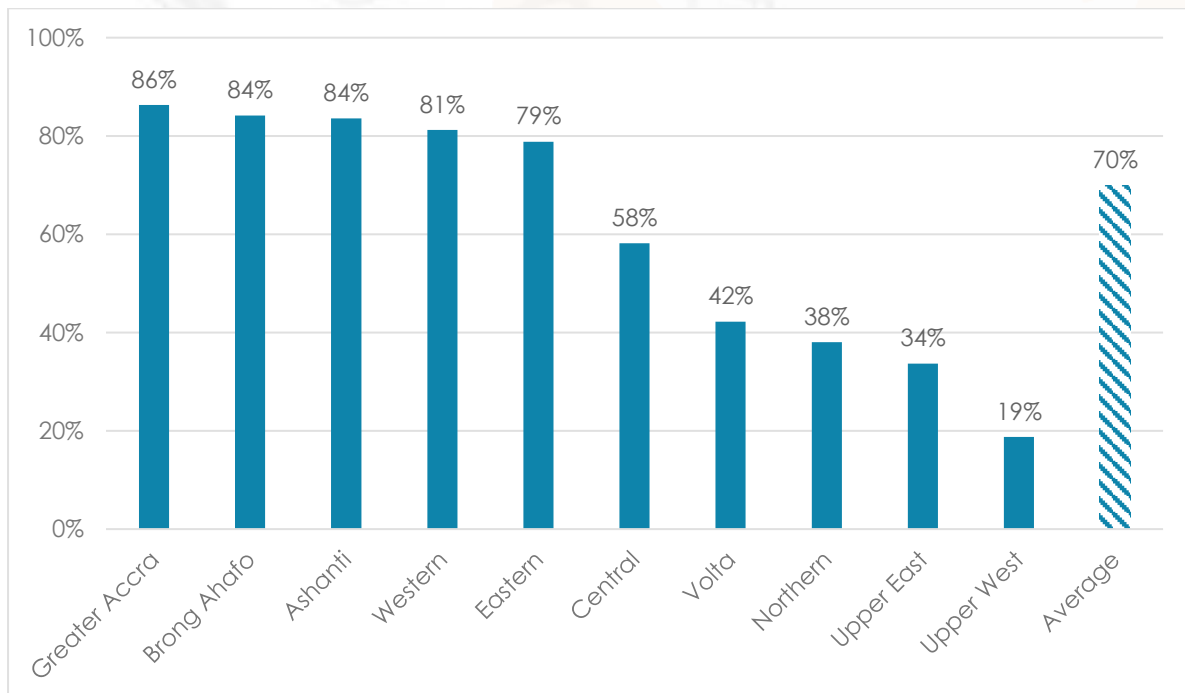
**Afrobarometer interviewers were asked to record:** Are the following services present in the primary sampling unit/enumeration area: Piped-water system that most houses could access? (% "yes")

**Figure 7: Access to piped-water system | urban vs. rural areas | Ghana | 2014**



**Afrobarometer interviewers were asked to record:** Are the following services present in the primary sampling unit/enumeration area: A piped-water system that most houses could access? (% "yes")

**Figure 8: Access to piped-water system | by region | Ghana | 2014**

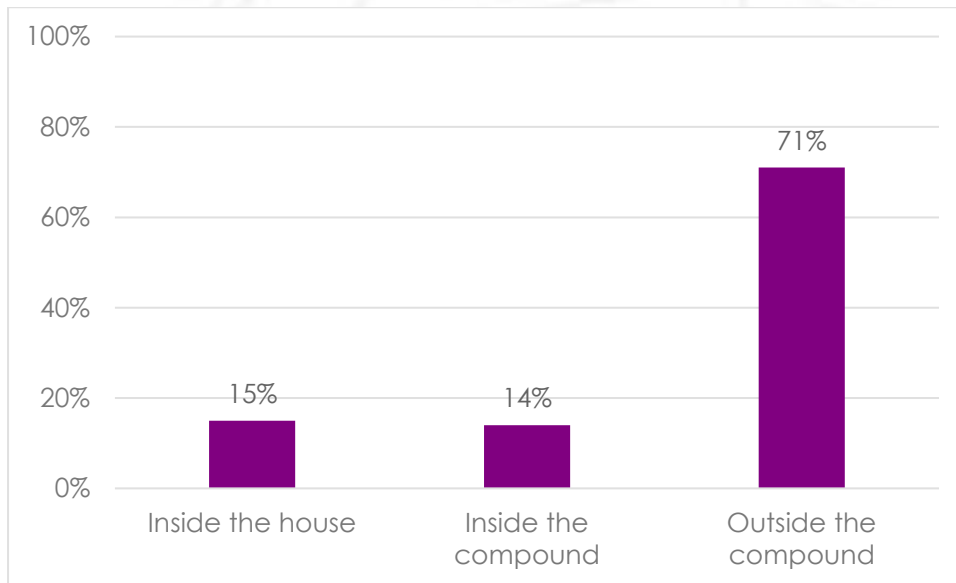


**Afrobarometer interviewers were asked to record:** Are the following services present in the primary sampling unit/enumeration area: A piped-water system that most houses could access? (% "yes")

### Primary source of water

Seven of 10 Ghanaians (71%) have to go outside their compound to access clean water. Only one in seven (15%) say their primary source of water for home use is inside their home, and about the same proportion (14%) have water outside the home but inside their compound (Figure 9).

**Figure 9: Primary source of water | Ghana | 2014**



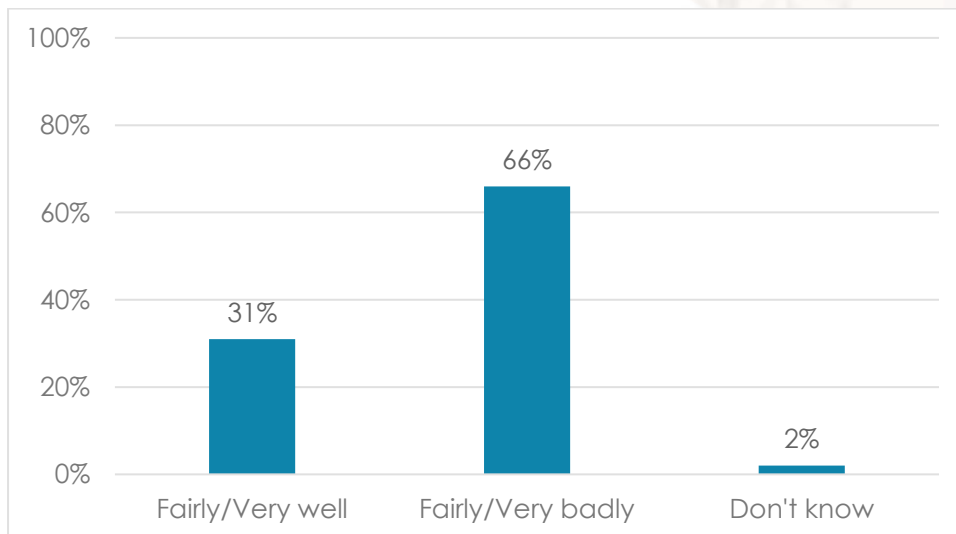
**Respondents were asked:** Please tell me whether each of the following are available inside your house, inside your compound, or outside your compound: Your main source of water for household use?

### Government's performance on providing water and sanitation services

Even though a majority of Ghanaians have steady access to water, two-thirds (66%) of citizens in 2014 rated the then-government's performance on providing water and sanitation services as "fairly bad" or "very bad" (Figure 10). (Only a slim majority (54%) of Ghanaians live in communities with a sewage system that most houses can access.)

Citizens' ratings of the government's efforts to provide water and sanitation services have deteriorated dramatically over the past decade: The proportion describing them as fairly/very bad climbed from 39% in 2005 to 66% in 2014 (Figure 11).

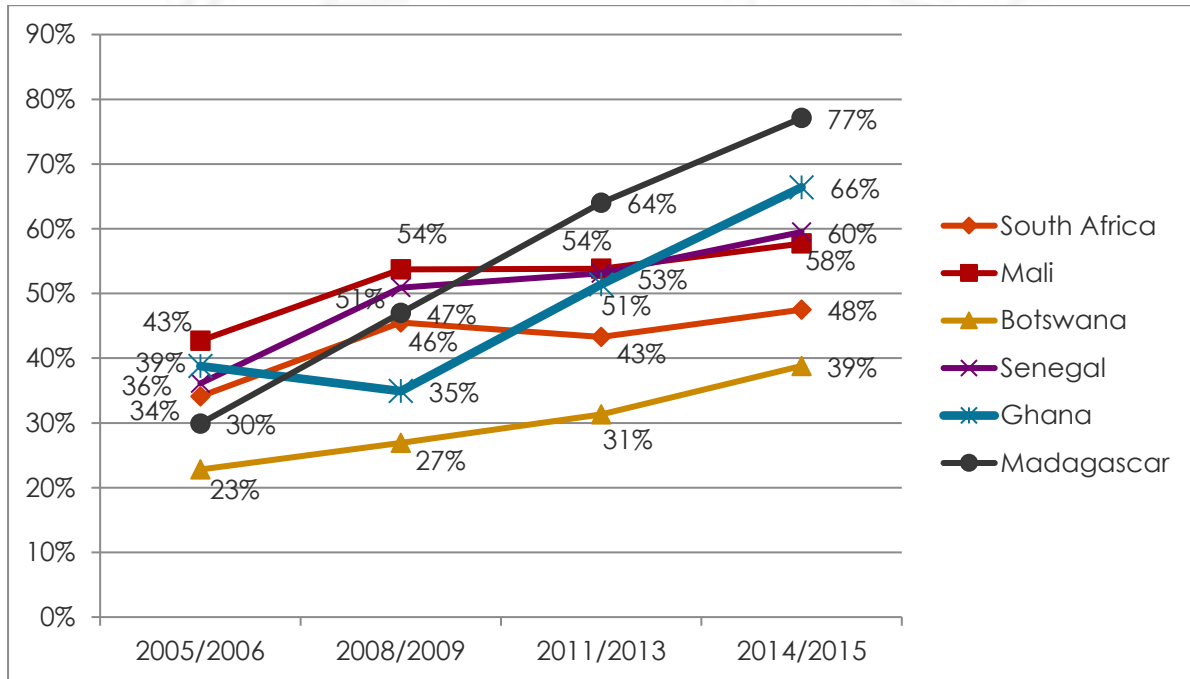
**Figure 10: Government's handling of providing water and sanitation services | Ghana | 2014**



**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the government is handling the following matters: Providing water and sanitation services?



**Figure 11: Poor government performance: Countries with increased negative ratings**  
 | 2005-2015



**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the government is handling the following matters: Providing water and sanitation services? (% who say "fairly badly" or "very badly")

## Conclusion

For developing countries like Ghana, providing access to safe water is an important instrument for promoting population health and reducing poverty. Ghana's commitment to the various elements of SDG 6 – including achieving universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water, improving water quality by reducing pollution, eliminating dumping and minimizing the release of hazardous chemicals and materials, halving the proportion of untreated wastewater, and substantially increasing recycling and safe reuse of water – will require creative solutions from all stakeholders, with the government in the lead and citizens insisting on protecting their sources of this precious resource.

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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.

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