

How trustworthy and professional is Togo's military? Depends on whom you ask

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 282 | David Jacobs and Thomas Isbell

Summary

In Togo, the military is a very influential political actor. In 1967, a military coup installed Eyadema Gnassingbé as president, and he held power until his death in 2005. Immediately after his death, Eyadema's son, Faure Gnassingbé, was declared president with the support of the Army. He resigned under regional pressure but ascended once more to the office after winning the April 2005 election, which was judged "free and fair" by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) but led to violent clashes that were quelled by the Togolese Armed Forces (Venkatachalam, 2017; Wong, 2017). The military's proximity to executive power has long been decried by opposition parties, who charge that the armed forces have a stranglehold not just on government authority but even on prominent financial institutions in Togo (IRIN, 2005).

Key to the military's close relationship with power is its ethnic makeup, consisting mainly of members of the president's ethnic group, the Kabyè tribe from the North (Venkatachalam, 2017). At the time of the military coup in 1967, the dominant ethnic group in Togolese politics was the Ewé, who held about 70% of cabinet positions. Since the coup – which was led by a Kabyè military colonel – the Kabyè have dominated the political landscape, despite making up only 13% of the population (Crux, 2018).

Amnesty International has criticized the Togolese security forces for excessive use of force against protesters, journalists, and political opposition members. Under Faure Gnassingbé, the army has been accused of aggressively seeking out media outlets that show any sign of political dissent (Amnesty International, 2017a). In many forums over many years, the Togolese government has publicly expressed a commitment to curbing human-rights abuses by the security apparatus, but it has produced little evidence of any real effort beyond rhetoric (Amnesty International, 2017b).

Given the military's controversial domestic role, how do Togolese citizens see their military? Findings from the most recent Afrobarometer survey show that fewer than half of Togolese trust the army, think it effectively protects the country, and say it acts with professionalism and respect for citizens' rights – all assessments marked by strong ethnic, regional, and socio-economic cleavages.

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 were completed in 2018. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Togo, led by the Center for Research and Opinion Polls (CROP), interviewed 1,200 adult Togolese in November 2017. A sample of this size yields country-level

results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Togo in 2012 and 2014.

Key findings

- Four in 10 Togolese (42%) say they trust the army “somewhat” or “a lot,” while a majority (56%) express only “a little” or no trust at all.
- Trust in the military is lower than average among urban residents, the less educated, and the poor, as well as among members of the Mina, Ouatchi, and Ewé ethnic groups.
- Fewer than half of respondents believe that the armed forces “often” or “always” protect the country from external and internal security threats (48%) or receive the equipment and training they need to be effective (44%).
- Only about three in 10 (28%) think the military “often” or “always” acts with professionalism and respects the rights of all citizens.
- Urban respondents, poor citizens, and residents in southern regions of the country are less likely to see the military as effective and professional.
- On broader questions of security, a majority (58%) of Togolese say they fear political intimidation or violence during election campaigns at least “a little bit,” including 28% who say they fear it “a lot.” The proportion of citizens who express no such fear declined from 47% in 2014 to 41%.
- About half of Togolese citizens say they experienced (23%) or feared (26%) violence at a public protest during the past two years.
- A plurality (41%) of citizens say their personal safety from crime and violence is “better” or “much better” now than it was “a few years ago,” while the rest say it is worse (31%) or unchanged (26%).
- A majority (59%) of Togolese say the government should have the right to impose roadblocks and curfews when public safety is threatened.

Trust in Togo’s army

Four in 10 Togolese (42%) say they trust the army “somewhat” or “a lot,” while a majority (56%) express “just a little” or no trust at all in the military. Though far below the average level of trust in the military (64%) across 34 African countries surveyed in 2016/2018, more Togolese trust the military than the president (37%), other elected officials, political parties, and the courts (Figure 1). Trust in the military has remained constant since Afrobarometer’s first survey in Togo in 2012 (Figure 2).

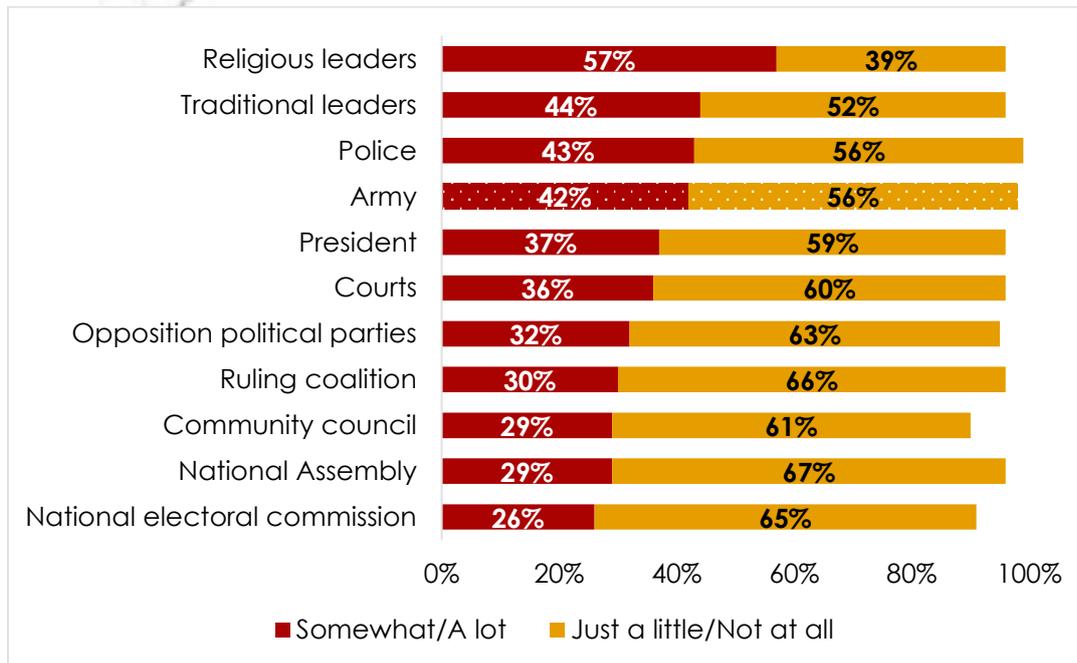
Trust in the military varies considerably by socio-demographic group (Figure 3). Urban residents are much less likely to trust the army somewhat/a lot than their rural counterparts (32% vs. 48%). But trust is higher – though still in the minority – among younger citizens (45% of those aged 18-35) than among their elders.

And trust in the army appears to increase with education level and wealth. Among the poorest respondents, only 34% express at least some trust, compared to 58% and 56%, respectively, among those experiencing low or no lived poverty.¹

¹ Afrobarometer assesses lived poverty based on responses to the following 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?*

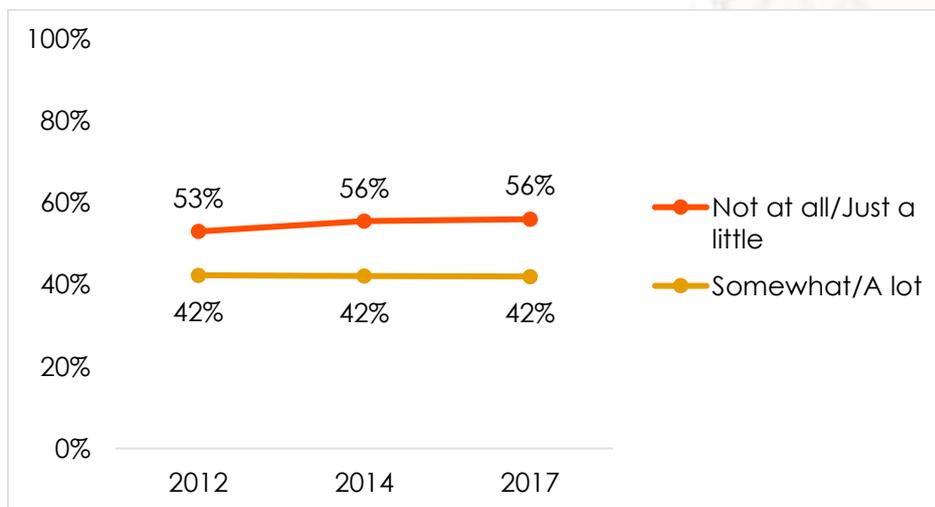
As might be expected given the ethnic composition of the army, levels of trust in the military vary widely by respondents' ethnic group (Figure 4). It is important to note that breaking down survey responses by ethnic group requires analyzing small sub-samples, producing results with very large margins of error. Thus, except for the Ewé and Kabyè groups, reported percentages should be considered indicative and interpreted with caution. With this caveat in mind, we see that a majority of respondents trust the army somewhat/a lot among the Ben (Moba), Kabyè, Lama (Lamba), and Nawdem (Losso) while fewer than three in 10 respondents trust the military among the Mina (Guen), Ouatchi, Ikposso (Akposso), Adja, and Ewé.

Figure 1: Popular trust in institutions and leaders | Togo | 2017



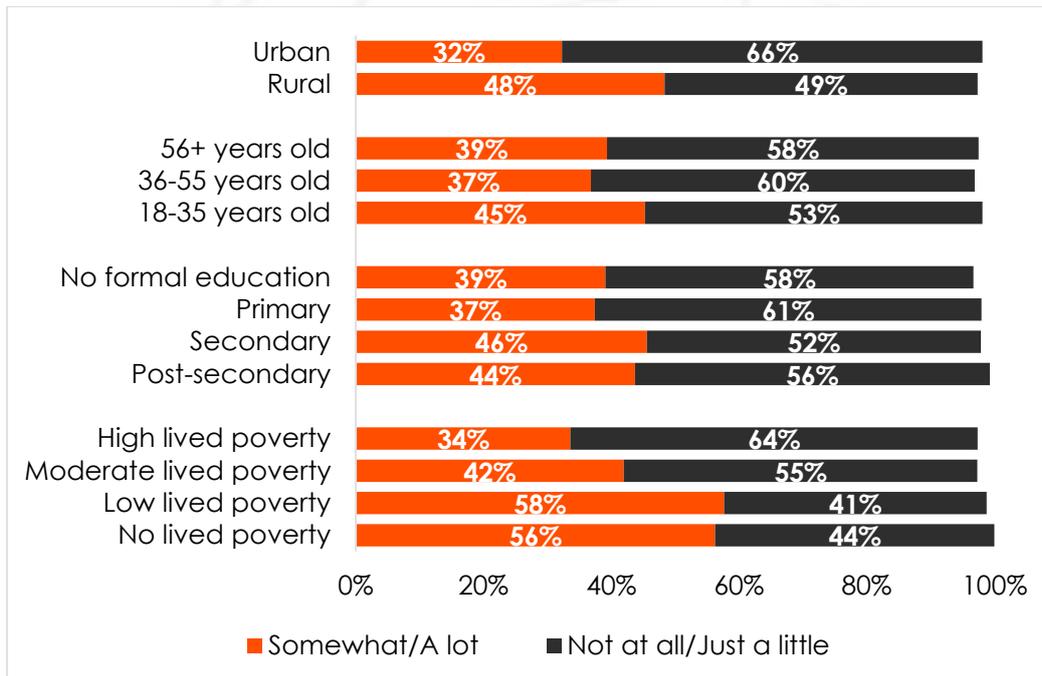
Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

Figure 2: Popular trust in the army | Togo | 2012-2017



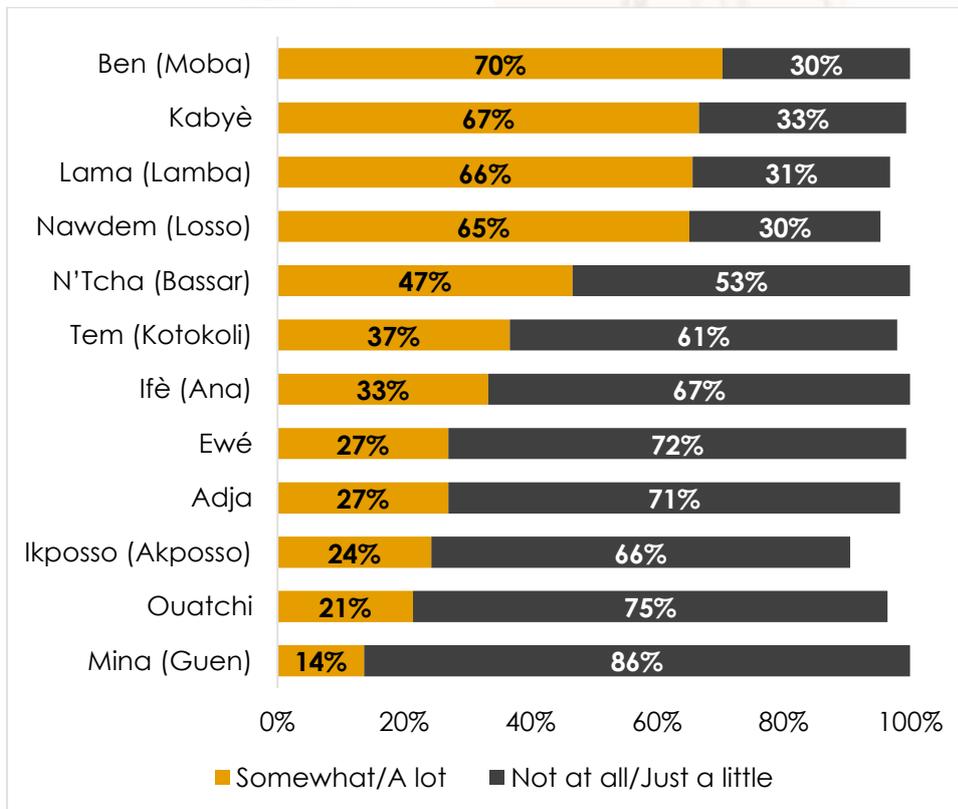
Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The Army?

Figure 3: Popular trust in the army | by socio-demographic group | Togo | 2017



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

Figure 4: Popular trust in the army | by ethnic group | Togo | 2017



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

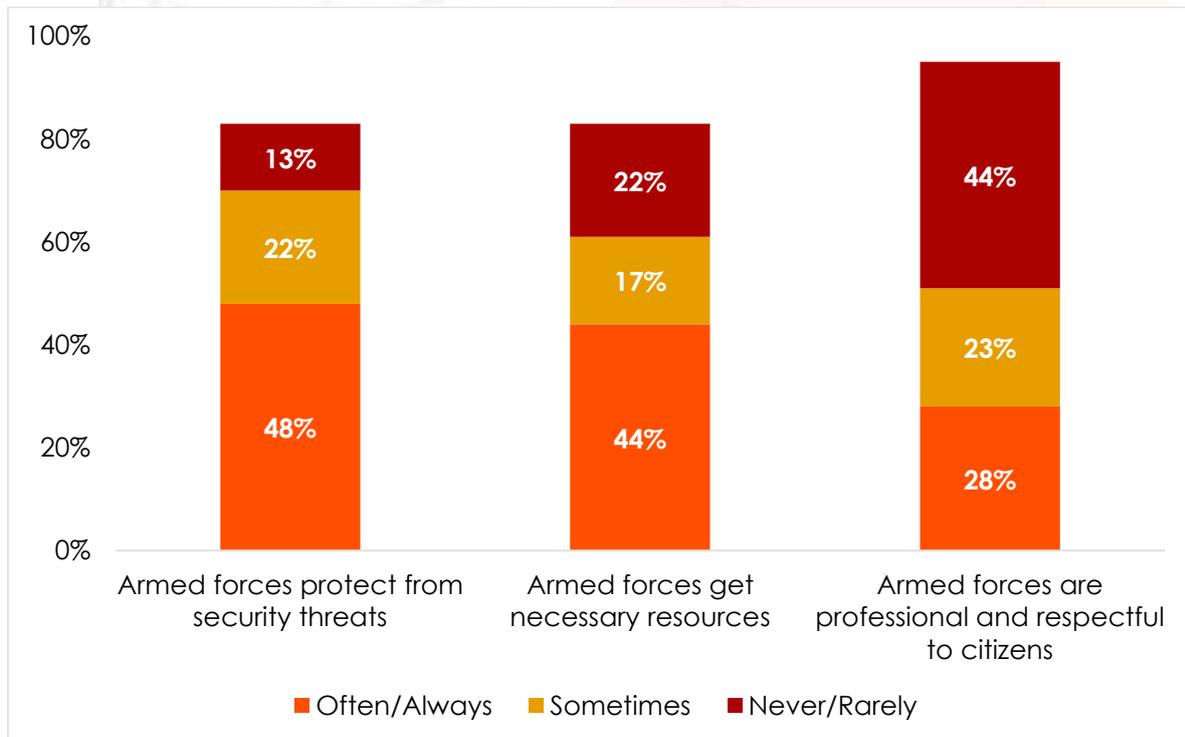
Performance and conduct of the army

Like popular trust, Togolese perceptions of the capacities and conduct of the army are mixed. About half (48%) of respondents believe that the armed forces “often” or “always” protect the country from external and internal security threats, while 22% say they do so only “sometimes” and 13% assert that they “rarely” or “never” protect the country (Figure 5).

Fewer than half (44%) say the armed forces “often” or “always” get the training and equipment they need to be effective, while 17% say this is “sometimes” the case and 22% say these resources are “rarely” or “never” adequate.

With regard to the military’s conduct, fewer than three in 10 respondents (28%) say the armed forces “often” or “always” act with professionalism and respect the rights of all citizens. About one in four (23%) say they “sometimes” meet this standard, while 44% believe they “rarely” or “never” do.

Figure 5: Perceptions of armed forces performance, resources, and conduct | Togo | 2017

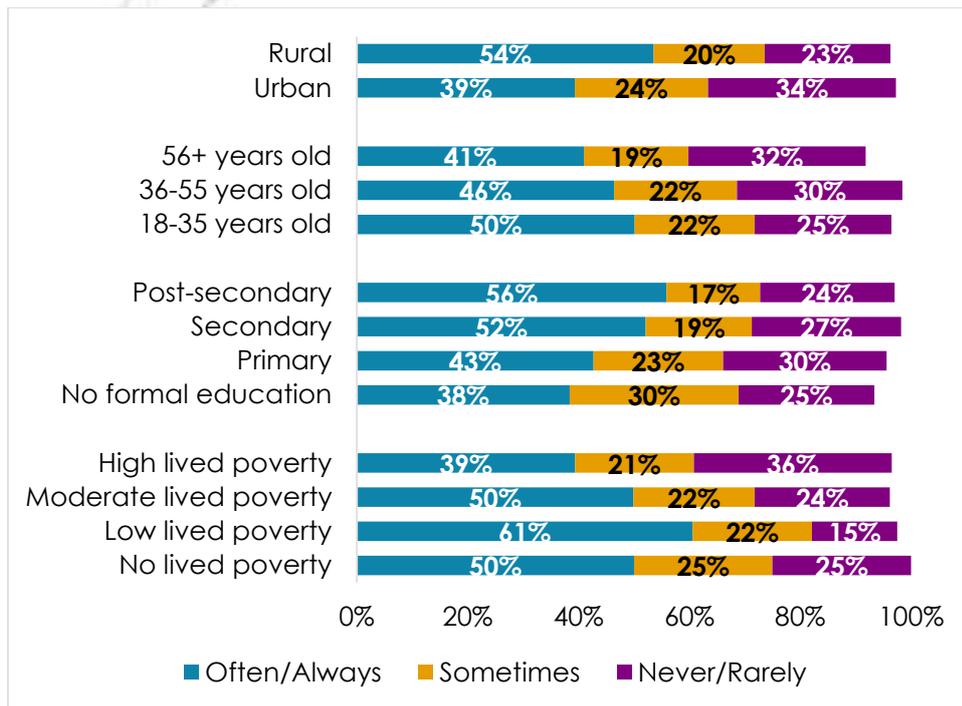


Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, to what extent do the armed forces of our country:*
 Keep our country safe from external and internal security threats?
 Get the training and equipment needed to be effective?
 Operate in a professional manner and respect the rights of all citizens?

Considering the extent to which different socio-demographic groups see the armed forces as protecting the country from security threats (Figure 6), we find that rural residents are more likely than their urban counterparts to think they “often” or “always” perform this function (54% vs. 39%). This perception diminishes with age, ranging from 50% of youth (ages 18-35) to 41% of those aged 56 or older, but increases with education level, from 38% of those without education to 56% of those with post-secondary qualifications. The poorest citizens are less likely (39%) than their better-off counterparts to see the military as often/always protecting the country.

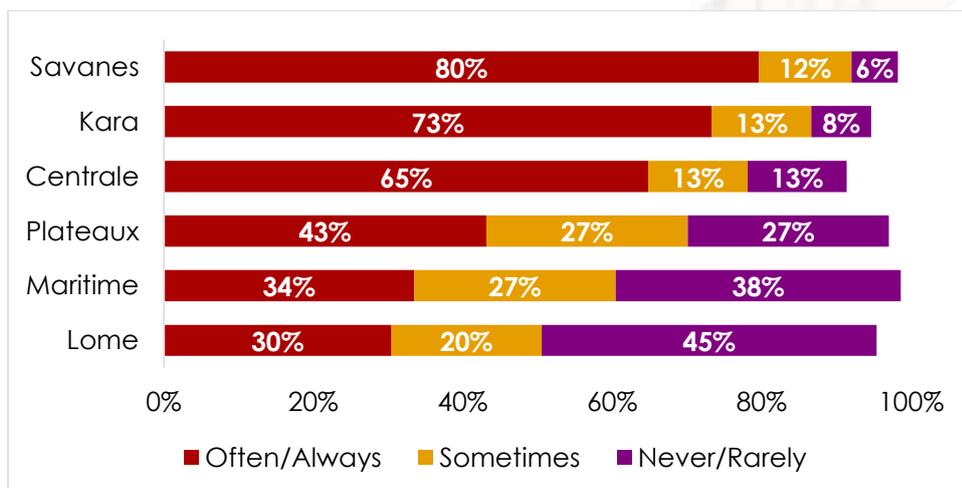
By region, perceptions of the military's performance in protecting the country from external and internal security threats show a clear pattern of declining appreciation as one moves from North – home of the Kabyè – to South (Figure 7). In the Savanes, the northernmost region, eight out of 10 citizens (80%) say the armed forces often/always protect the country. Farthest south, this positive assessment is shared by only about one-third of residents in Lomé (30%) and the Maritime region (34%), while two-thirds (65%) say the armed forces fulfill this function at best “sometimes.”

Figure 6: Armed forces protect from security threats | by socio-demographic group | Togo | 2017



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, to what extent do the armed forces of our country keep our country safe from external and internal security threats?

Figure 7: Armed forces protect from security threats | by region | Togo | 2017

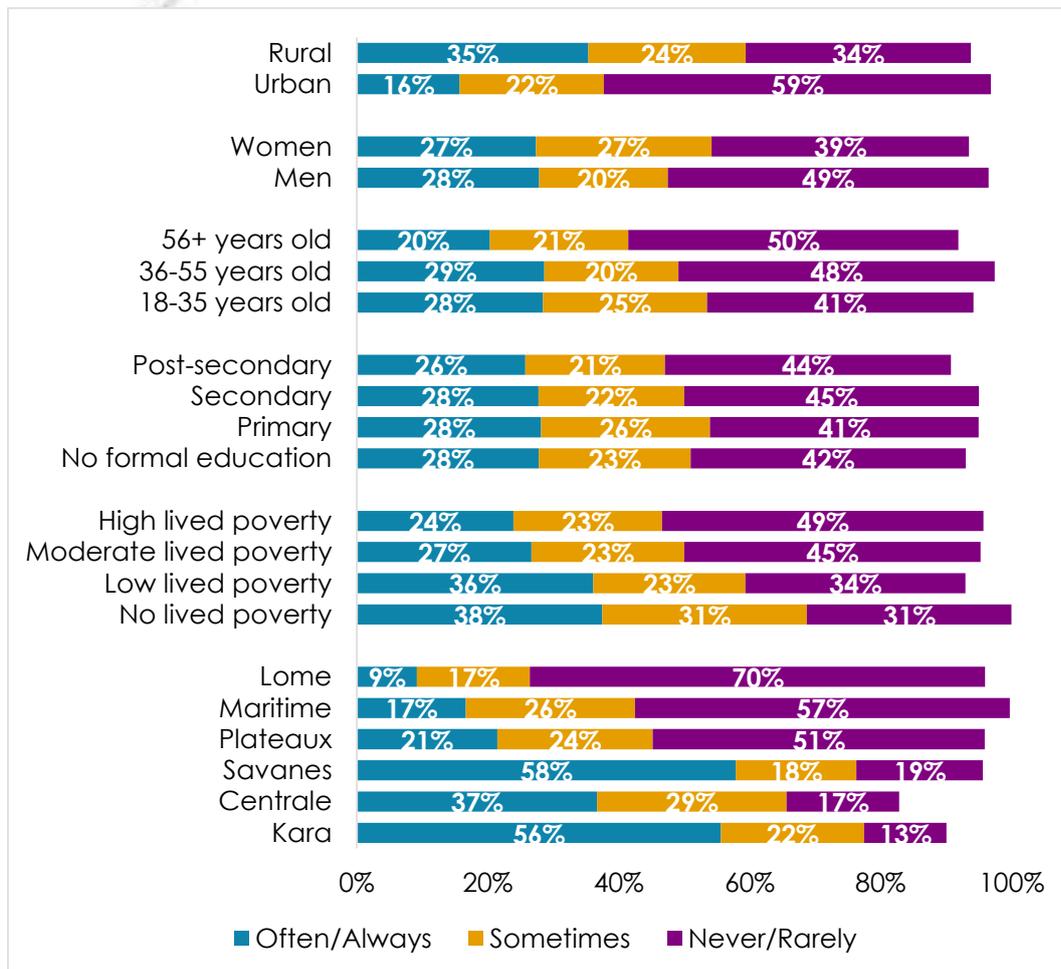


Respondents were asked: In your opinion, to what extent do the armed forces of our country keep our country safe from external and internal security threats?

Looking at how different socio-demographic groups perceive the conduct of the military, we find a similar pattern (Figure 8). The perception that the armed forces “often” or “always” act professionally and respect all citizens’ rights is less common among city dwellers (16% vs. 35% of rural residents), senior citizens (20% of those aged over 55 vs. 28%-29% of younger respondents), and the poorest (24% vs. 38% of the wealthiest) less likely to see. Respondents’ gender and education level make no difference here.

Again approval drops sharply from North to South, ranging from 56% in the Savanes to just 9% in Lomé.

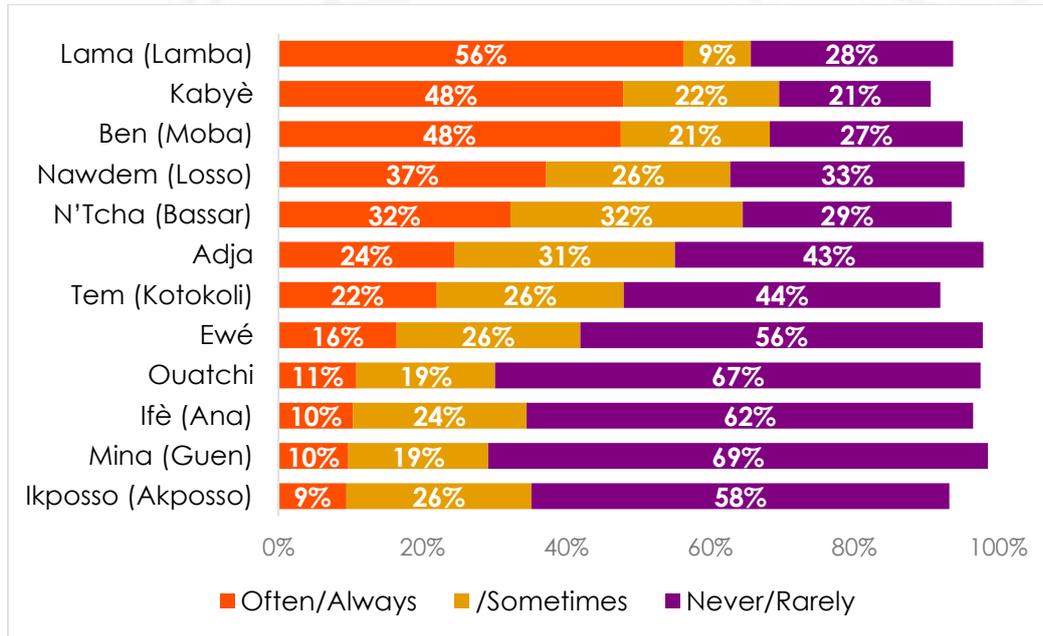
Figure 8: Armed forces are professional and respectful to citizens | by socio-demographic group | Togo | 2017



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, to what extent do the armed forces of our country operate in a professional manner and respect the rights of all citizens?*

Given the high variance in attitudes by region, we would expect to find those differences reflected when we divide respondents according to ethnicity. Indeed, on the whole, those ethnic groups that expressed the highest levels of trust in the armed forces (see Figure 4) are also most likely to see the armed forces as respectful and professional (Figure 9). But even among the Lama (Lamba), Kabyè, and Ben (Moba), only about half of respondents assert that the military often/always acts professionally and with respect. Only about one in 10 see professional and respectful conduct by the military as routine among the Ikposso (Akposso), Mina (Guen), Ifé (Ana), and Ouatchi.

Figure 9: Armed forces are professional and respectful to citizens | by ethnic group
 | Togo | 2017

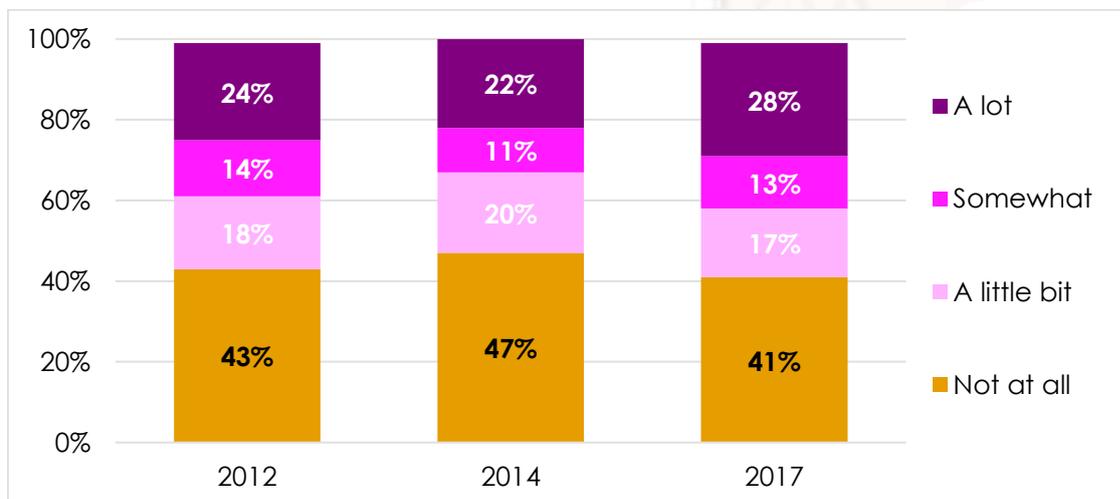


Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, to what extent do the armed forces of our country operate in a professional manner and respect the rights of all citizens?*

Wider perceptions of security

Low trust in the army may reflect wider perceptions and experiences of insecurity among ordinary Togolese, although domestically the police is likely more strongly associated with security and safety. A majority (58%) of Togolese say they fear political intimidation or violence during election campaigns at least “a little bit,” including 28% who say they fear it “a lot,” up from 22% in 2014 (Figure 10). The proportion of citizens who say they don’t fear such intimidation “at all” declined from 47% in 2014 to 41%.

Figure 10: Fear political intimidation or violence during election campaigns | Togo
 | 2012-2017

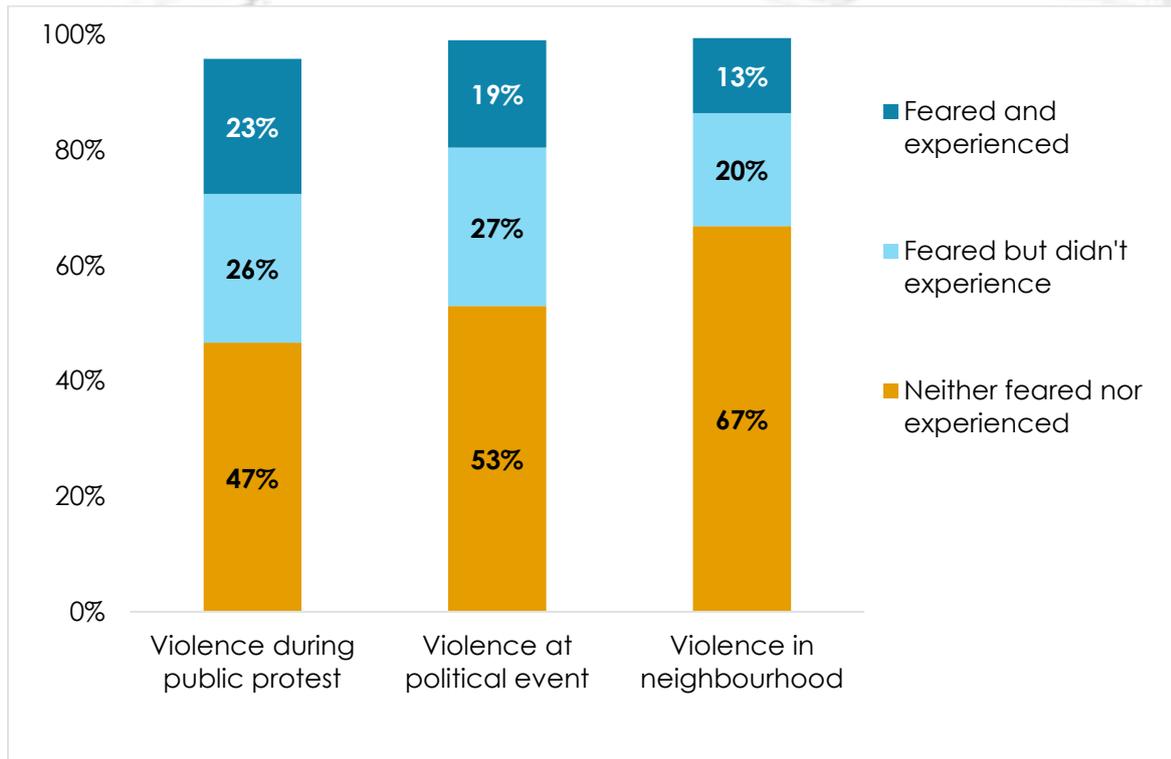


Respondents were asked: *During election campaigns in this country, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence?*

Asked whether they had experienced and/or feared violence in specific circumstances during the previous two years, about one-quarter (23%) of respondents say they experienced violence at a public protest, while 26% say they feared but didn't experience such violence and about half (47%) say they had not experienced such fear (Figure 11).

Somewhat smaller proportions say they experienced violence at a political event (19%) or among people in their neighbourhood or village (13%).

Figure 11: Experience and fear of violence | Togo | 2017



Respondents were asked: *In any society, people will sometimes disagree with one another, These disagreements occasionally escalate into physical violence, Please tell me whether, in the past two years, you have ever personally feared any of the following types of violence? [If yes:] Have you actually personally experienced this type of violence in the past two years?*

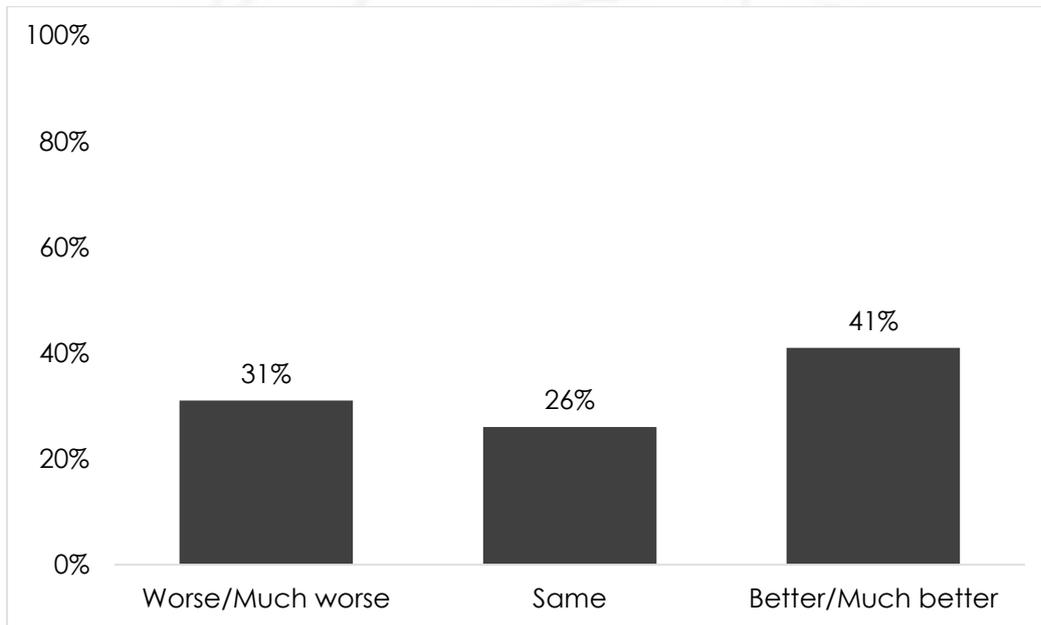
- Violence occurring during a public protest or march?*
- Violence at a political rally or campaign event?*
- Violence among people in your neighbourhood or village?*

Given that a substantial proportion of respondents indicate fear of violence, especially during public protests and political events, do Togolese consider their personal safety worse than in previous years? Not quite one-third (31%) say their personal safety from crime and violence is now "worse" or "much worse" than "a few years ago), but more say personal safety has improved (41%) or remained unchanged (26%) (Figure 12).

A majority (59%) of Togolese support the government's right to impose roadblocks and curfews when public safety is threatened. About four in 10 (38%) say that people should be free to move around at any time, regardless of the security situation (Figure 13).

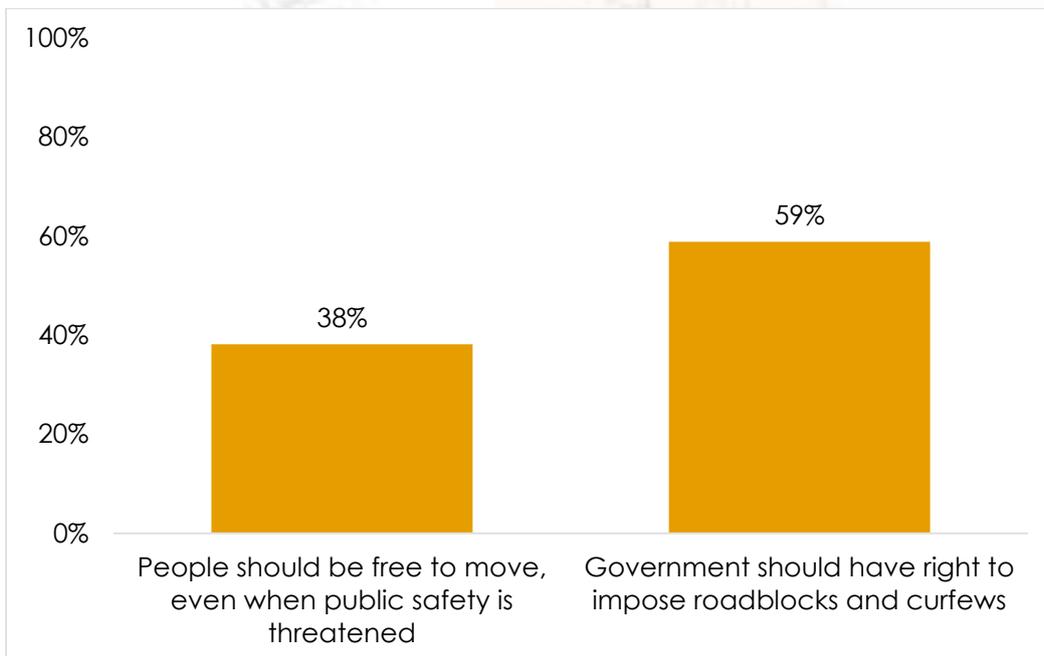
Majority support for the government's right to impose roadblocks and curfews holds across all key socio-demographic groups, although the wealthiest (50%) and the most educated (52%) respondents are least likely to agree (Figure 14).

Figure 12: Is personal safety better or worse than 'a few years ago'? | Togo | 2017



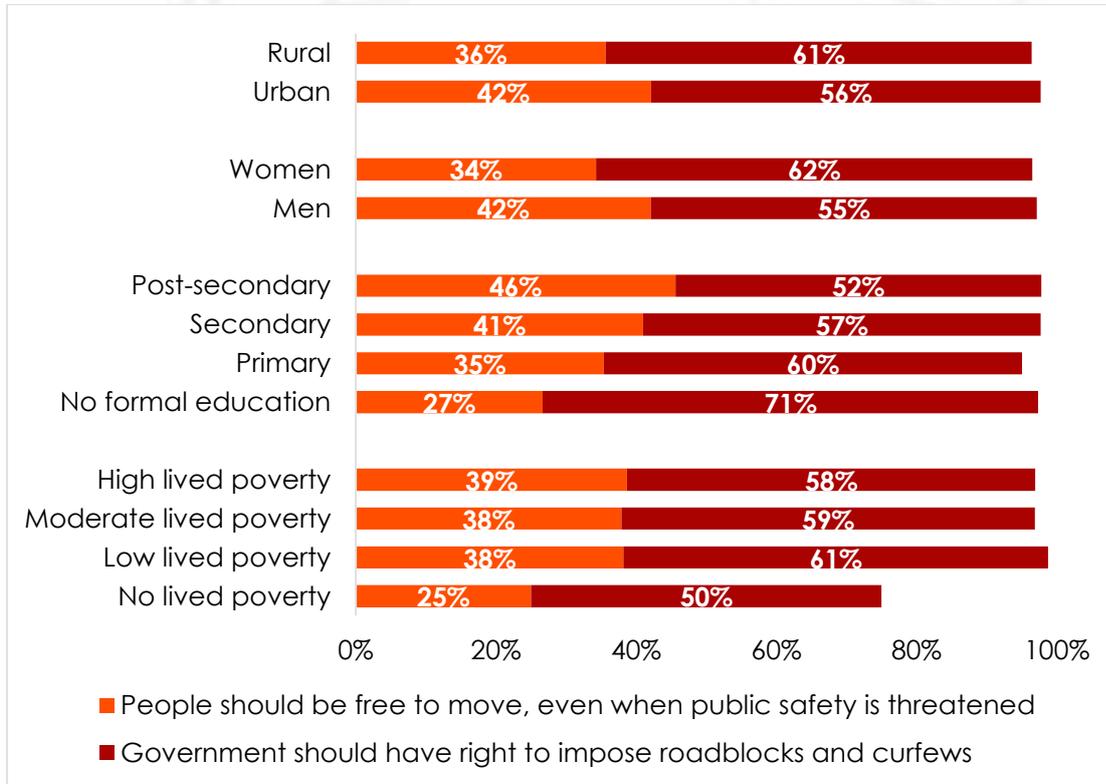
Respondents were asked: Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same: Your personal safety from crime and violence?

Figure 13: Free movement vs. curfews and roadblocks when public security is threatened | Togo | 2017



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Even if faced with threats to public security, people should be free to move about the country at any time of day or night.
 Statement 2: When faced with threats to public security, the government should be able to impose curfews and set up special roadblocks to prevent people from moving around.
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

Figure 14: Free movement vs. curfews and roadblocks when public safety is threatened | by socio-demographic group | Togo | 2017



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: Even if faced with threats to public security, people should be free to move about the country at any time of day or night.

Statement 2: When faced with threats to public security, the government should be able to impose curfews and set up special roadblocks to prevent people from moving around.

(% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with each statement)

Conclusion

Although Togolese trust their military less than most other Africans, distrust is not uniform across the population. To a considerable extent, Togolese citizens' trust in their military and assessments of its effectiveness and conduct depend on where respondents live, which ethnic group they belong to, and whether they are poor or wealthy. These results challenge the government and military establishment to take steps to forge a professional force seen as protecting, serving, and respecting all citizens.

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

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