

Ghanaians perceive increase in corruption level, give government low marks on fighting graft

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 333 | Lionel Osse and Newton Norviewu

Summary

Fighting corruption was one of the main campaign planks of Ghana's current government. During his inauguration speech in 2017, President Nana Akufo-Addo cited the war on graft as his top priority, pledging to protect the public purse and rejecting the idea that the public service is an avenue for making money (BBC, 2017; Forson, 2017).

Among steps to fight corruption, the government in 2017 created the Office of the Special Prosecutor, designed as a politically independent office to investigate and prosecute certain categories of cases, including allegations of corruption (Finder, 2019). Though launched with high public expectations, the office has been bedeviled by bottlenecks, especially what the special prosecutor has called the "wanton disregard of statutory requests made by the office for information and production of documents to assist in the investigation of corruption and corruption-related offences" (Amidu, 2019). Critics complain that corruption remains pervasive and accuse the government of clearing some of its appointees of corruption charges (Asante, 2019; Ghanaweb, 2019).

Ghana ranks 78th out of 180 countries on Transparency International's (2018) Corruption Perceptions Index, three places down from its 2017 position.

Afrobarometer's recent survey in Ghana indicates that a majority of Ghanaians say the level of corruption in the country has increased and the government is doing a poor job of fighting it. Most Ghanaians perceive at least "some" corruption in key public institutions, and a majority fear retaliation if they report graft to the authorities.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer heads a pan-African, nonpartisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across Africa. Seven rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018. Round 8 surveys are planned in at least 35 countries in 2019/2020. 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 Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), interviewed 2,400 adult Ghanaians in September 2019. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Ghana in 1999, 2002, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2017.

Key findings

- Among key public officials in Ghana, the police, judges and magistrates, members of Parliament, civil servants, and tax officials are most widely perceived as corrupt. Perceived corruption among the police has declined slightly compared to 2017.
- Still, the police are the institution that the largest number of citizens report bribing to access services. Among those who had contact with key public services during the previous year, four in 10 say they paid a bribe to avoid problems with the police (42%) or to obtain police assistance (39%).
- The army, religious leaders, and the presidency are the most trusted public institutions (by 72%, 63%, and 58%, respectively, who say they trust them “somewhat” or “a lot”). Opposition political parties (37%), local government officials (38%), and tax officials (39%) are least trusted.
- More than half (53%) of Ghanaians say corruption in the country has worsened “somewhat” or “a lot” during the year preceding the survey, a 17-percentage-point increase compared to 2017. This follows a huge (47-percentage-point) improvement between 2014 and 2017.
- Six in 10 Ghanaians (61%) believe they risk retaliation or other negative consequences if they report incidents of corruption. Only one-third (34%) say they can report corruption without fear of retaliation.
- Compared to 2017, there has been a 27-percentage-point drop in popular approval ratings of the government's performance in fighting corruption – a dramatic reversal of earlier gains. Only a minority (40%) say the government is doing a “fairly” or “very” good job on corruption.

Perceived corruption and trust in institutions

Large majorities of Ghanaians perceive at least “some” officials in key state institutions as corrupt (Figure 1). Most widely seen as corrupt are the police (57% of respondents say “most” or “all” are corrupt), judges and magistrates (40%), members of Parliament (MPs) (36%), civil servants (34%), and tax officials (34%). One in three respondents (33%) say “most” or “all”

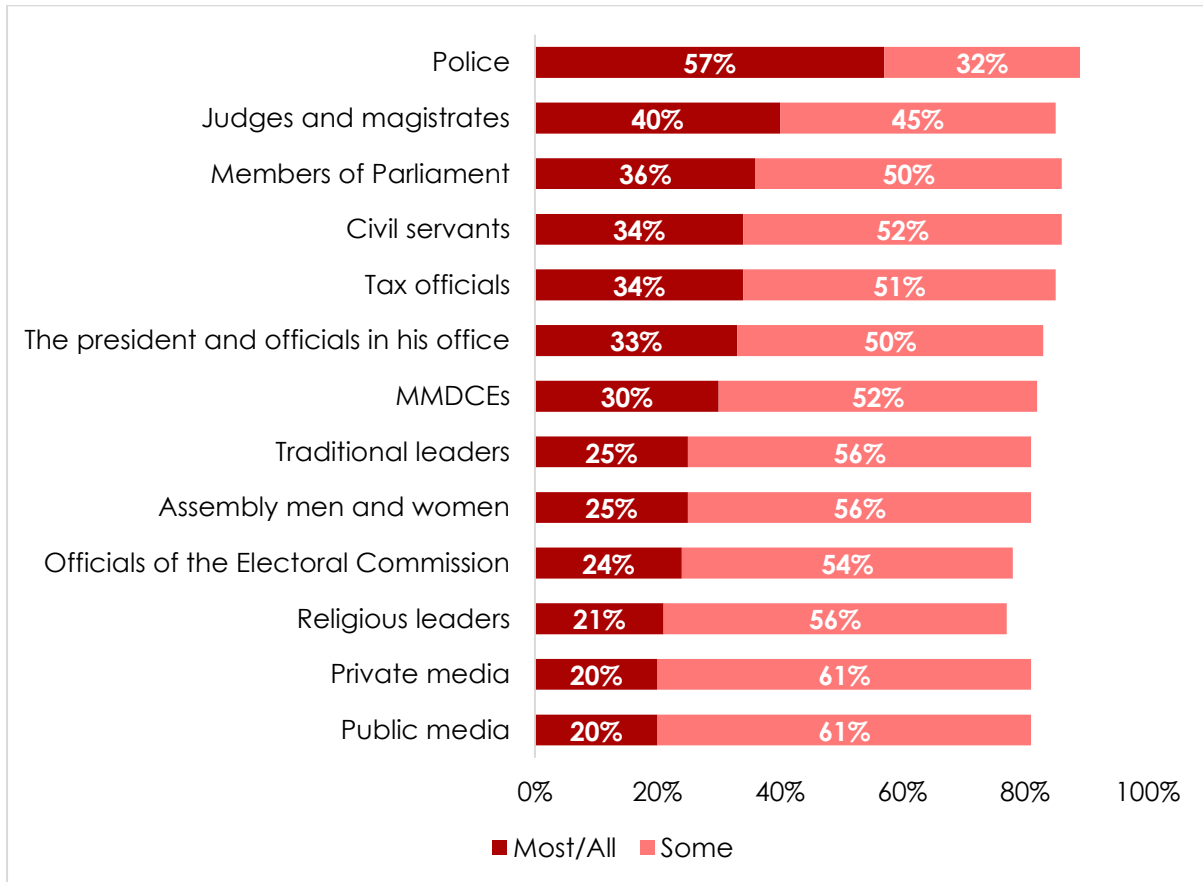
officials in the Presidency are involved in corruption. Journalists and religious leaders are considered least corrupt.

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Compared to 2014, the perceived level of corruption among the police, judges, MPs, and Presidency officials has declined significantly, though only the police show a decrease in perceived corruption (by 5 percentage points) since 2017 (Figure 2).

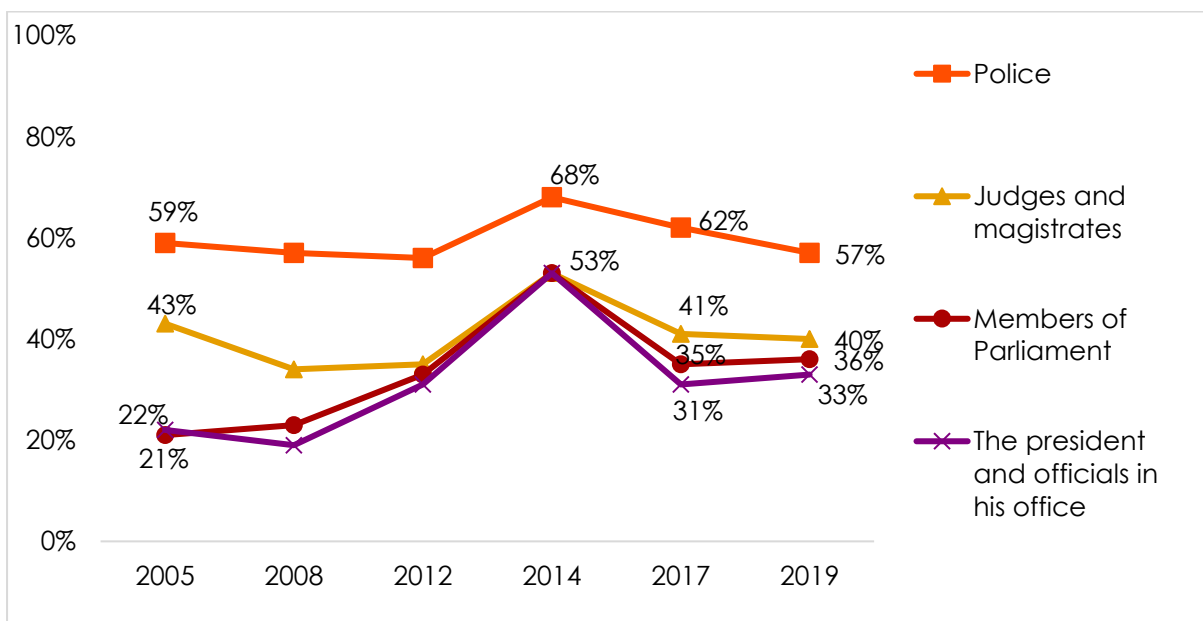
The police are the institution that the largest number of citizens report bribing to access services. Among those who had contact with key public services during the previous year, four in 10 say they paid a bribe at least once to avoid problems with the police (42%) or to obtain police assistance (39%). Close to three in 10 (28%) paid a bribe to obtain an identity document, while fewer than two in 10 paid a bribe to obtain medical care (17%) or public school services (15%) (Figure 3).

Figure 1: Who is corrupt | Ghana | 2019



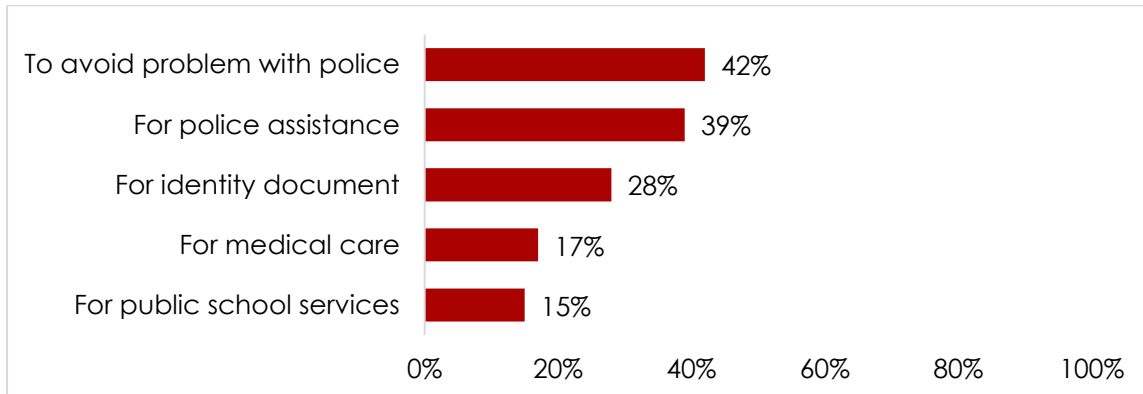
Respondents were asked: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

Figure 2: Trends in perceived institutional corruption | Ghana | 2005-2019



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? (% who say "most" or "all")

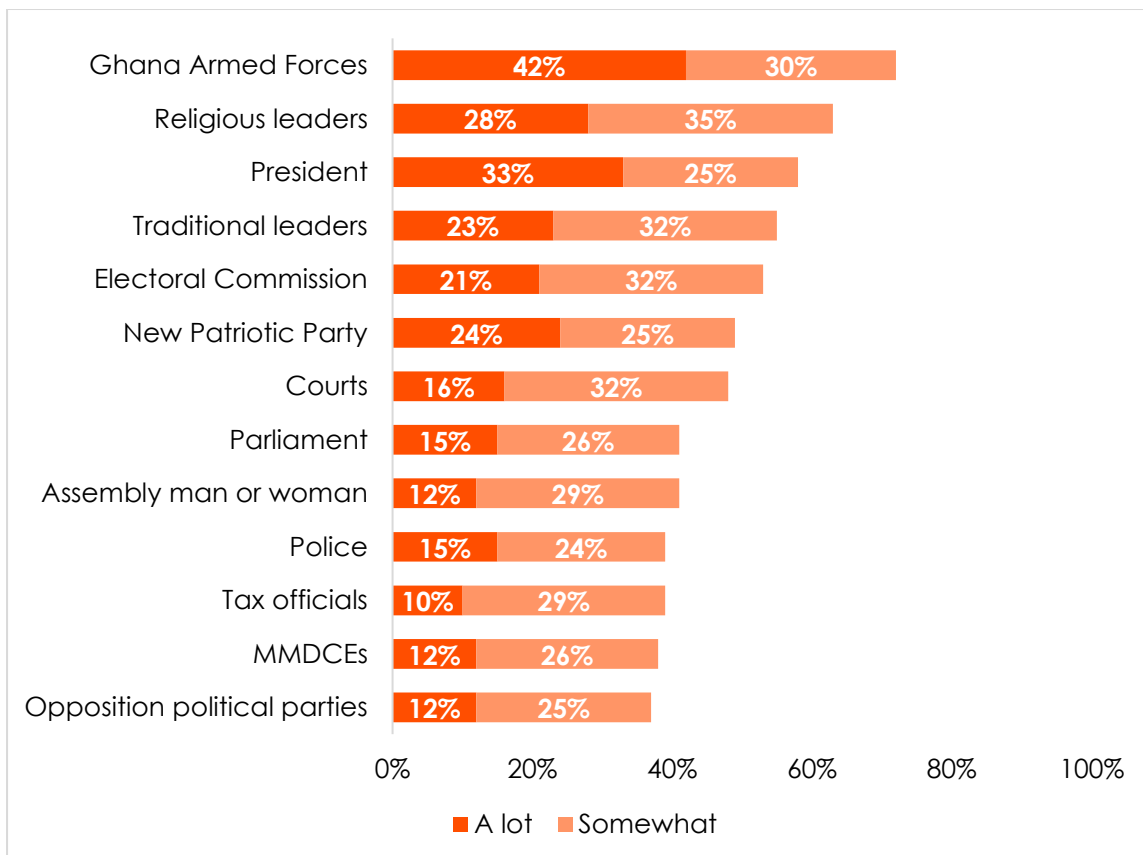
Figure 3: Paid bribes to access public services | Ghana | 2019



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 favour [for a public official to obtain the needed assistance or avoid problems]? (% who say “once or twice,” “a few times,” or “often”)

Among key public institutions, the army, religious leaders, and the president are the most trusted, with 72%, 63%, and 58% of respondents, respectively, who say they trust them “somewhat” or “a lot” (Figure 4). Fewer than half of Ghanaians say they trust the ruling and opposition parties, courts, parliamentarians, assembly men and women, police, tax officials, and metropolitan, municipal, and district chief executives (MMDCEs).

Figure 4: Popular trust in institutions | Ghana | 2019



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

The proportion of citizens who say they trust the president has declined by 15 percentage points since 2017 (and by 11 points compared to 2002). Trust in MPs shows a similar decline (17 points since 2017, 12 points since 2002). While the courts have suffered a short-term decline in popular trust (by 11 points) but held stable over the longer term, this pattern is reversed for the police (Table 1).

Table 1: Trends in institutional trust | Ghana | 2002-2019

	2002	2005	2008	2012	2014	2017	2019	Change 2017-2019 (pct. points)	Change 2002-2019 (pct. points)
President	69%	78%	76%	56%	41%	73%	58%	-15	-11
Courts	48%	68%	60%	57%	44%	59%	48%	-11	0
MPs	53%	73%	64%	49%	37%	58%	41%	-17	-12
Police	52%	67%	48%	42%	36%	41%	39%	-2	-13

Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

As shown by the negative correlation coefficients in Table 2, the data confirm the negative relationship between perceived corruption and public trust, i.e. that high perceptions of corruption are correlated with low levels of trust (see Bratton & Gyimah-Boadi, 2016).

Table 2: Trust and corruption | citizen perceptions | Ghana | 2019

Perceived corruption vs. trust	Correlation coefficients
President	-0.327**
Parliament	-0.238**
Electoral Commission	-0.255**
MMDCEs	-0.228**
Local government council	-0.182**
Courts of law	-0.224**
Police	-0.316**
Tax office	-0.259**
Traditional leaders	-0.298**
Religious leaders	-0.332**

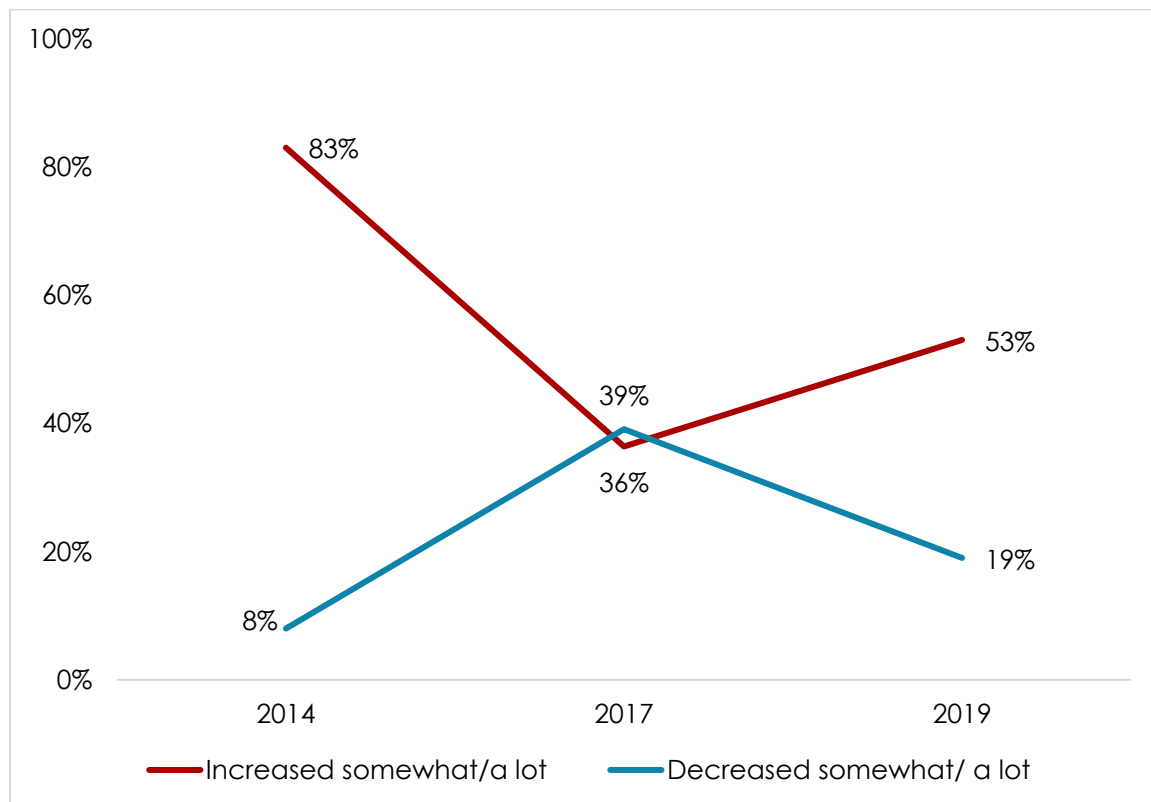
Pearson correlation coefficients (1-tailed)

** significant at 0.01 level

Is Ghana making progress in the fight against corruption?

More than half (53%) of Ghanaians say the level of corruption in the country got “somewhat” or “a lot” worse during the year preceding the survey, a 17-percentage-point increase compared to 2017 (Figure 5). This followed a huge (47-percentage-point) improvement between 2014 to 2017, from 83% to 36% who said corruption had increased.

Figure 5: Level of corruption | Ghana | 2014-2019

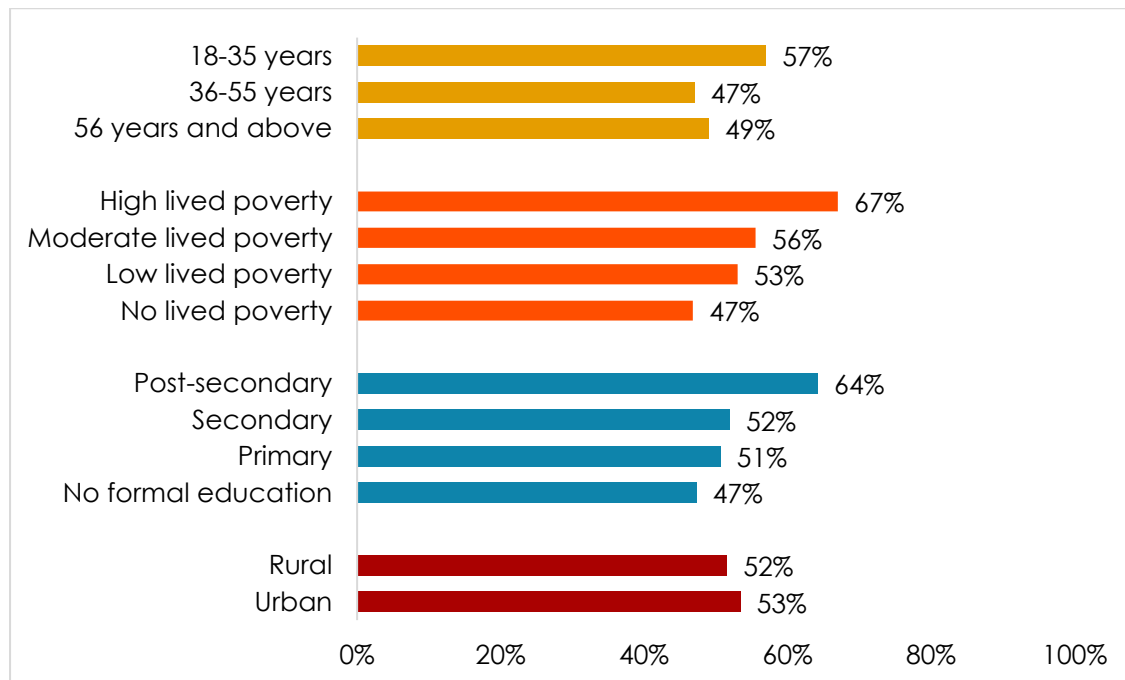


Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, over the past year, has the level of corruption in this country increased, decreased, or stayed the same?*

Perceptions of worsening corruption decrease with age (57% among those aged 18-35 vs. 49% among those aged 56 and above) (Figure 6). But they increase with respondents' education level (47% of those with no formal education vs. 64% of those with post-secondary education) and experience of poverty.¹

¹ Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes, Dulani, & Gyimah-Boadi (2016).

Figure 6: Level of corruption has increased | by socio-demographic group | Ghana | 2019

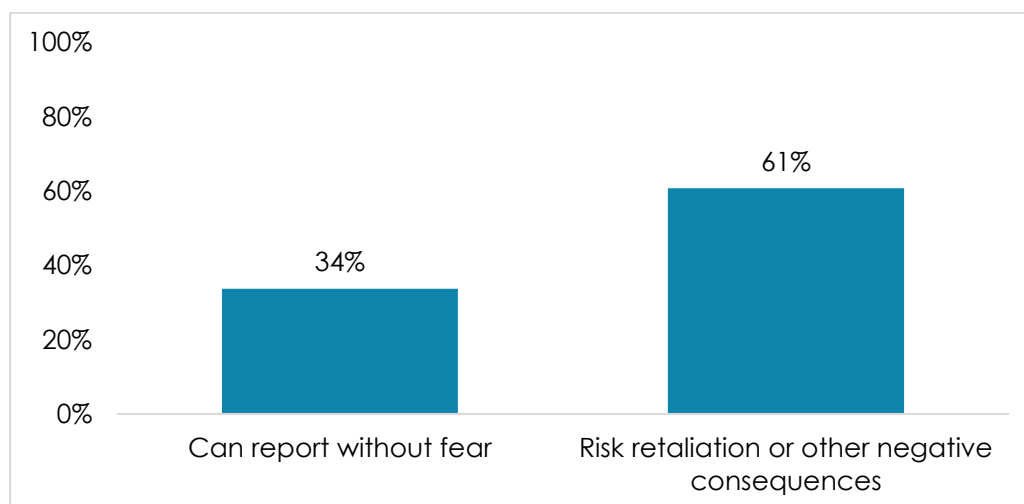


Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, over the past year, has the level of corruption in this country increased, decreased, or stayed the same? (% who say it has increased "somewhat" or "a lot")*

During his inauguration in January 2017, President Akufo-Addo urged Ghanaians to be active participants, rather than spectators, to help expose and combat misuse and waste of public funds. However, only one-third (34%) of Ghanaians believe they can report incidents of corruption without fear of retaliation or other negative consequences (Figure 7).

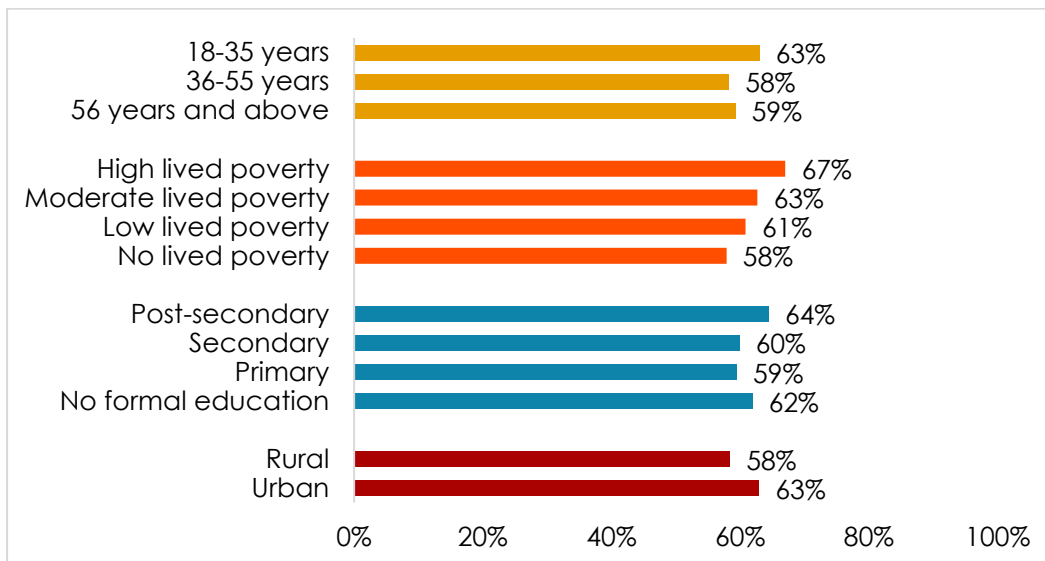
The fear of reprisal is widespread across key socio-demographic groups but is somewhat stronger than average among young adults (63%), urban residents (63%), respondents with post-secondary education (64%), and poor citizens (67%) (Figure 8).

Figure 7: Can people report corruption without fear of retaliation? | Ghana | 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?*

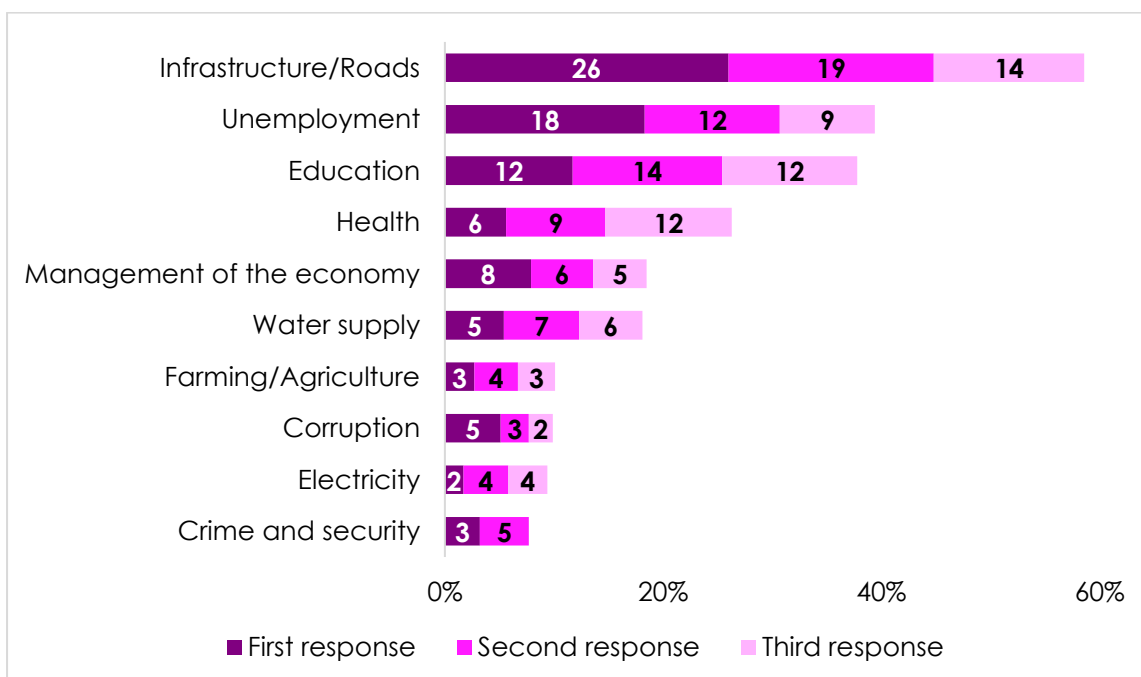
Figure 8: Risk retaliation for reporting corruption | by socio-demographic group
 | Ghana | 2019



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? (% who say they risk retaliation)

In spite of perceptions of increasing graft, corruption ranks only eighth (cited by 10% of respondents) among the most important problems that Ghanaians want their government to address (Figure 9). Even so, it outranks electricity supply and crime/security as citizen priorities for government action.

Figure 9: Most important problems (%) | Ghana | 2019

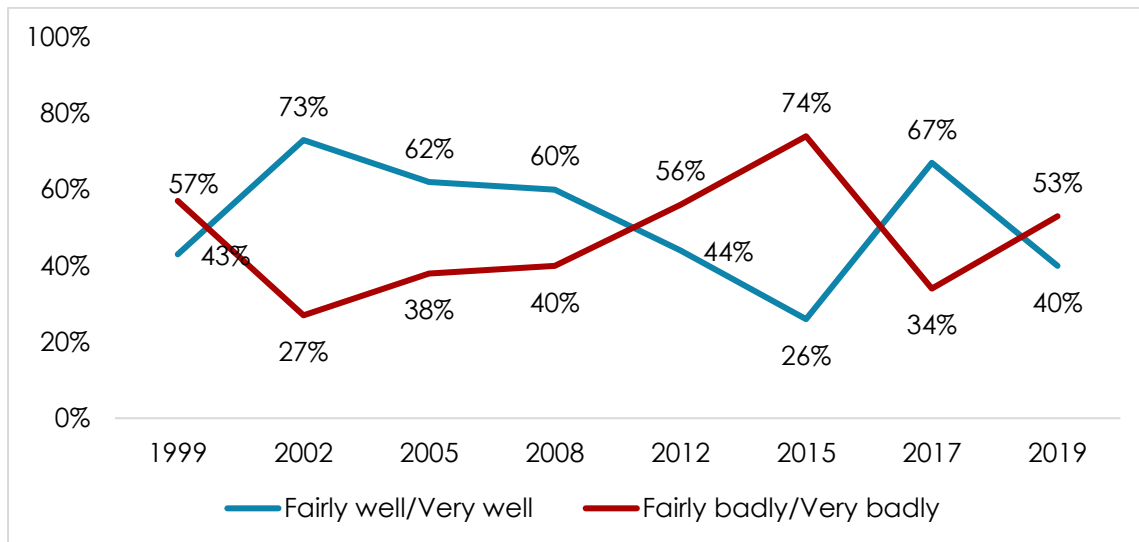


Respondents were asked: In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Respondents could give up to three answers.)

And only a minority (40%) of Ghanaians think the government is performing “fairly well” or “very well” in the fight against corruption in the government – a dramatic drop from 67% approval in 2017 (Figure 10).

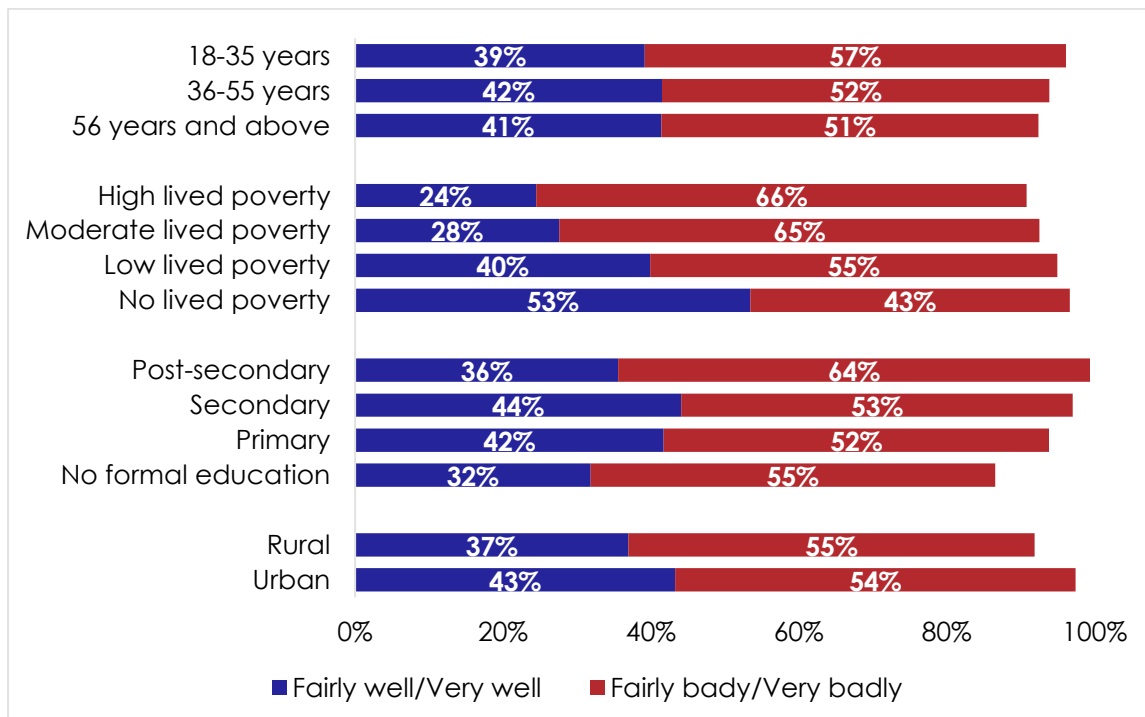
Poor approval ratings for the government's performance are highest among the poorest citizens (66%), the highly educated (64%), and young adults (57%) (Figure 11).

Figure 10: Government performance in fighting corruption | Ghana | 2002-2019



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?

Figure 11: Government performance in fighting corruption | by socio-demographic group | Ghana | 2019



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?

Conclusion

The latest Afrobarometer survey shows that most Ghanaians see at least some of their public officials as corrupt, with the police again taking the top spot in perceived corruption. A majority of citizens say corruption has gotten worse and the government is doing a poor job of fighting it. But if the government wants to enlist citizens in this fight, it will first have to convince them that they can report corruption to the authorities without fear of reprisal.

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Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, heads a pan-African, non-partisan research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 35 countries is provided by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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