

## In Angola's COVID-19 fight, trusted religious and traditional leaders, military can be allies

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**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 401 | David Boio and Carlos Pacatolo**

### Summary

As Angola continues under a “situation of public calamity” to limit the spread of the coronavirus, reliable information remains an essential tool in the fight to protect the country. Despite early lockdowns, the number of confirmed infections in the country has climbed to more than 8,300, with more than 250 deaths, and restrictions on travel, gatherings, and businesses remain in effect, including a sanitary “fence” limiting movement in and out of Luanda, the pandemic's epicenter in Angola (World Health Organization, 2020; Ministério da Saúde, 2020; O País, 2020).

A public opinion study published in April found that a majority of Angolans supported the country's first state of emergency (27 March-10 April) as well as its extension, were following information about COVID-19 carefully, but had the perception that most of their fellow citizens were not taking the pandemic seriously enough (Boio, Pacatolo, & Mbangula, 2020).

A strategy of building community awareness to effectively combat the community dissemination of COVID-19 may need to look to allies in past polio vaccination campaigns, as well as in COVID-19 pandemic responses in other countries (see the example of Ghana in Sanny & Asiamah, 2020): religious leaders, the Angolan Armed Forces, and traditional authorities.

Afrobarometer's first survey in Angola, carried out in November-December 2019, shows that citizens trust these three groups more than other key institutions and officials. This trust can be a strategic asset in raising citizens' awareness of individual- and community-level COVID-19 prevention measures.

### Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Seven rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018. Round 8 surveys in 2019/2021 are planned in at least 35 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

In Afrobarometer's first survey in Angola, Ovulongwa – Estudos de Opinião Pública interviewed 2,400 adult Angolans between 27 November and 27 December 2019. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

## Key findings

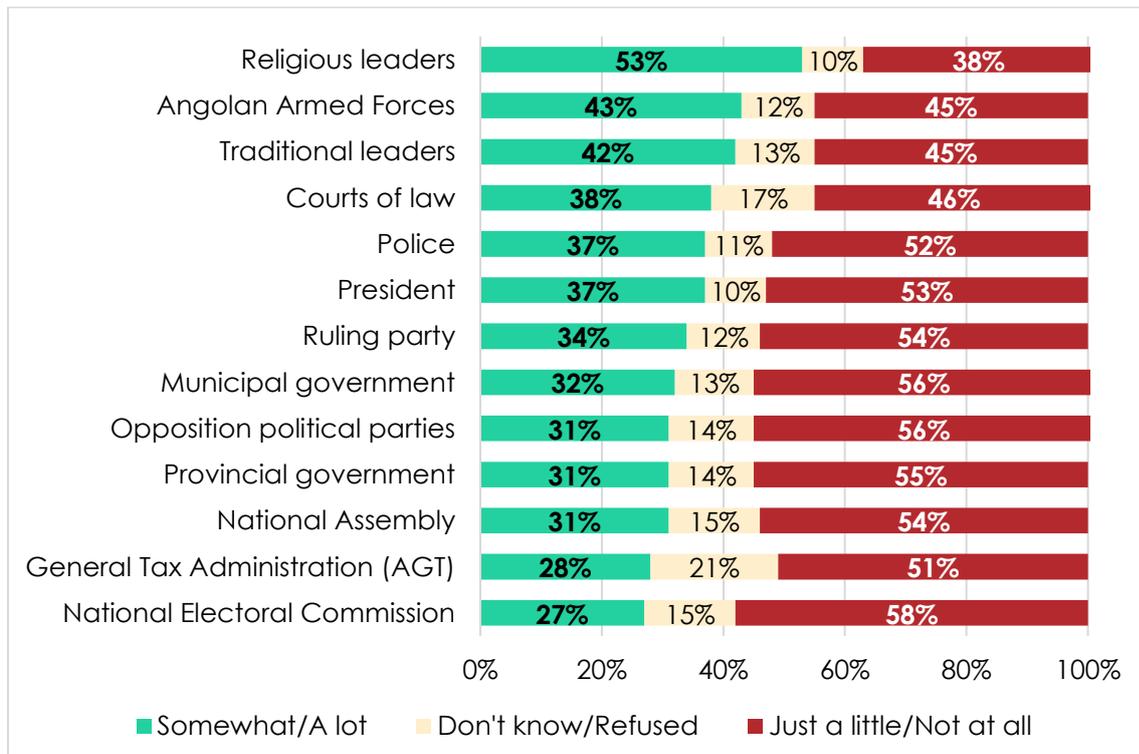
- More than half (53%) of Angolans say they trust religious leaders “somewhat” or “a lot,” followed by the military (43%) and traditional authorities (42%). Fewer than four in 10 respondents express trust in the courts (38%), police (37%), president (37%), and other institutions.
- Popular trust in religious leaders, the military, and traditional authorities is generally stronger among rural, older, poorer, and less educated respondents – some of the very groups that may be difficult to reach with information about the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Residents in Luanda Province, which concentrates about one-third of the Angolan population and has recorded the majority of the country’s COVID-19 cases and deaths to date, express the lowest levels of popular trust in religious leaders, the armed forces, and traditional authorities.

## Trust in institutions

When asked how much they trust key public leaders and officials, Angolans are most likely to say they trust religious leaders (53%), the Angolan Armed Forces (43%), and traditional leaders (42%) “somewhat” or “a lot” (Figure 1). Notably, religious leaders are the only group in which more than half of respondents indicate trust.

A majority of respondents indicate little or no trust in the police (52%), the president (53%), the ruling and opposition political parties (54% and 56%, respectively), the National Assembly (54%), and the National Electoral Commission (58%), among others.

**Figure 1: Popular trust in institutions** | Angola | 2019

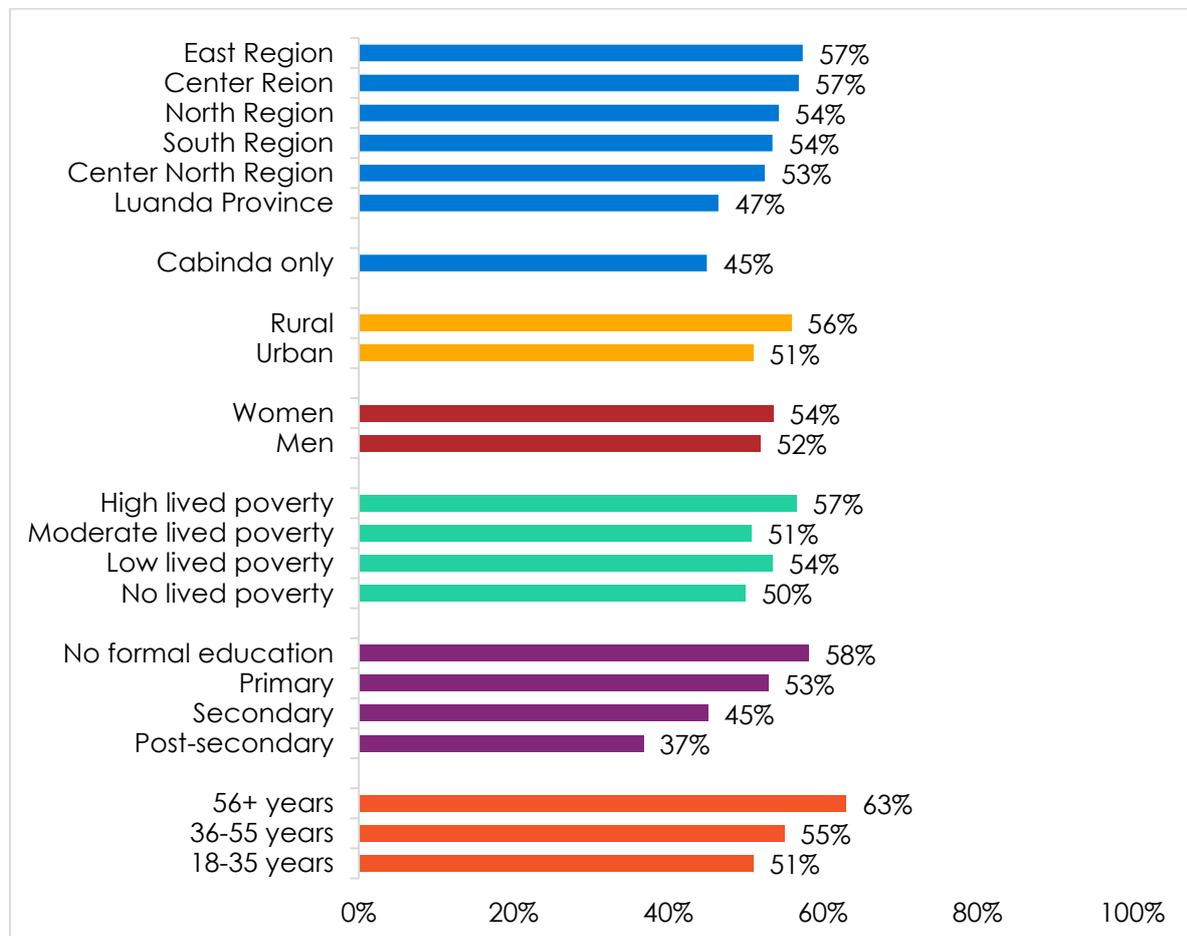


**Respondents were asked:** How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

Popular trust in religious leaders increases with age but decreases with education level (Figure 2). Among older respondents (aged 56 or more), 63% say they trust religious leaders “somewhat” or “a lot,” compared to 51% of those aged 18-35. And citizens with post-secondary education are far less likely to express trust (37%) than their less educated counterparts.

Urban residents are slightly less trusting in religious leaders than rural dwellers (51% vs. 56%), and Luanda Province, the most urban in the country, records the lowest level of trust (47%). The poorest<sup>1</sup> respondents are somewhat more likely to express trust in religious leaders than better-off citizens.

**Figure 2: Trust in religious leaders** | by socio-demographic group<sup>2</sup> | Angola | 2019



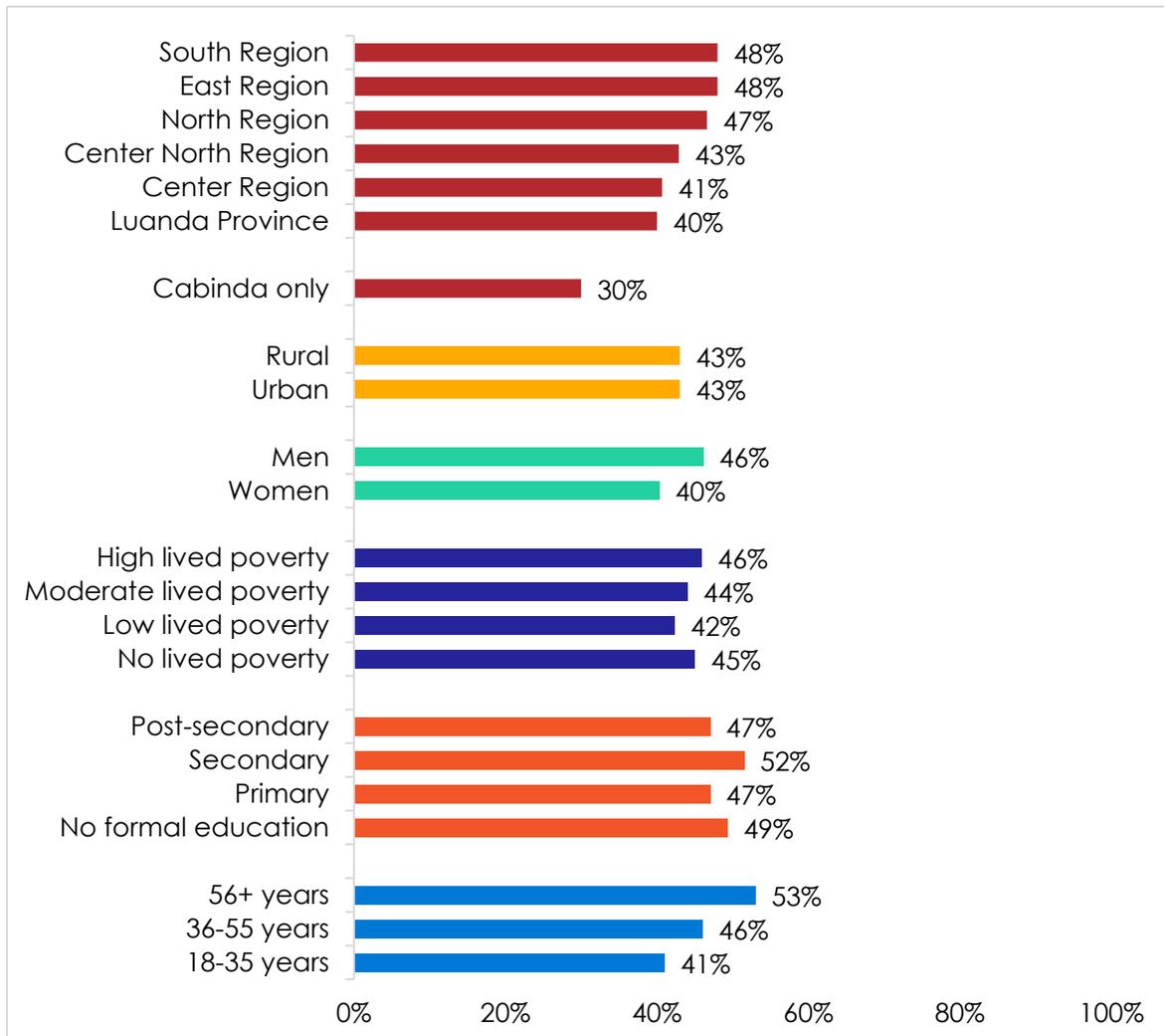
**Respondents were asked:** How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Religious leaders? (% who say “somewhat” or “a lot”)

<sup>1</sup> 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 (2020).

<sup>2</sup> In accordance with National Statistics Institute classifications, regions include the following provinces: North (Cabinda, Uíge, Zaire), Center North (Bengo, Cuanza Norte, Malange), Luanda, Center (Benguela, Bié, Cuanza Sul, Huambo), East (Cuando Cubango, Lunda Sul, Lunda Norte, Moxico), and South (Cunene, Huíla, Namibe). Results for Cabinda Province, which are included in the North Region average, are also shown separately.

Trust in the military, the second-most-trusted group, varies somewhat by region, ranging from 40% in Luanda Province to 48% in the South and East regions (Figure 3). Men (46%) and elders (53%) are more likely to express trust in the armed forces than women (40%) and young people (41% of 18- to 35-year-olds).

**Figure 3: Trust in the military** | by socio-demographic group | Angola | 2019

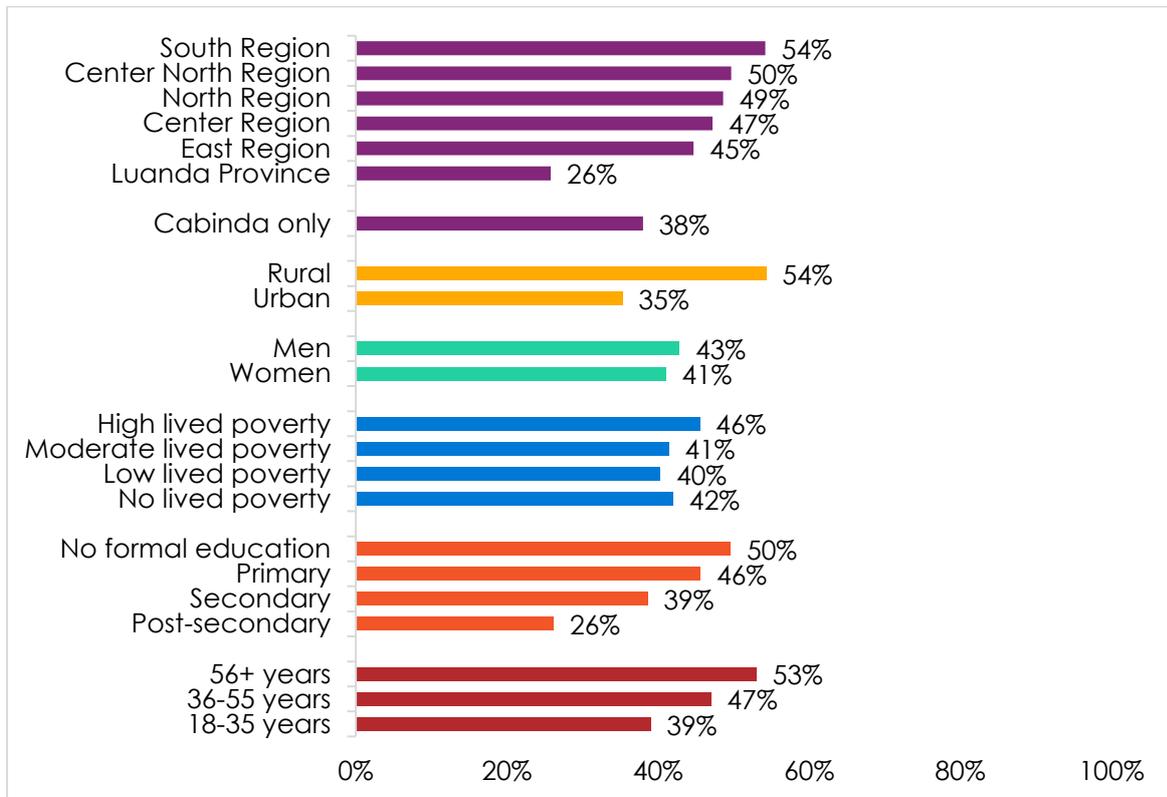


**Respondents were asked:** How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Angolan Armed Forces? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

Traditional authorities, Angolans' third-most-trusted institution, are a pillar of a society governed by legal pluralism, that is, positive law and customary law. Again, popular trust increases with age and decreases with education (Figure 4). Trust in traditional leaders is significantly stronger in rural areas (54%) than in cities (35%), and is highest in the largely rural South Region (54%).

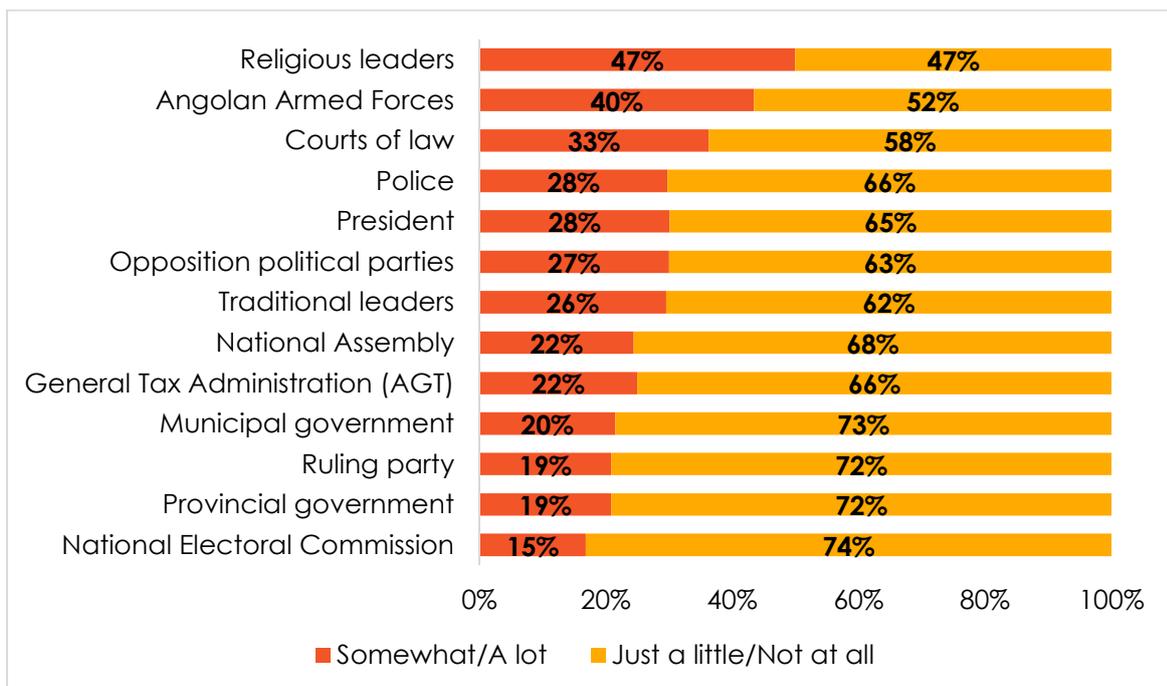
Luanda Province is the place of the country that has by far the lowest level of confidence in traditional authorities (26%), exceeded by trust in the courts (33%) (Figure 5).

**Figure 4: Trust in traditional leaders** | by socio-demographic group | Angola | 2019



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

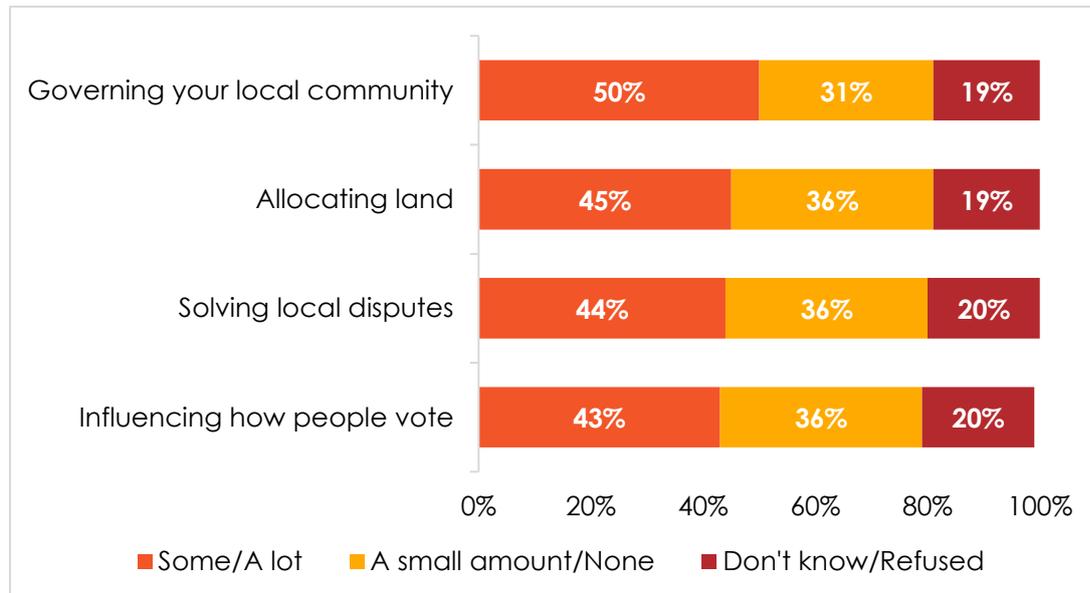
**Figure 5: Popular trust in institutions among Luanda residents** | Angola | 2019



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

In terms of the role that traditional leaders play in Angola, half (50%) of respondents say they have “some” or “a lot” of influence in governing local communities. Pluralities also see traditional leaders as influential in allocating land (45%), solving local disputes (44%), and impacting how people vote (43%) (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Influence of traditional leaders | Angola | 2019**



**Respondents were asked:** How much influence do traditional leaders currently have in each of the following areas: Governing your local community? Allocating land? Influencing how people in their communities vote? Solving local disputes?

The influence of traditional authorities on the governance of the local community is more strongly perceived in rural areas (57%) than in cities (46%) and among poor (54%) and uneducated (54%) respondents than among their better-off and more education counterparts (Figure 7). Residents in the North (60%) and South (59%) regions are more likely to see traditional leaders as influential in governing local communities than are citizens in other regions.

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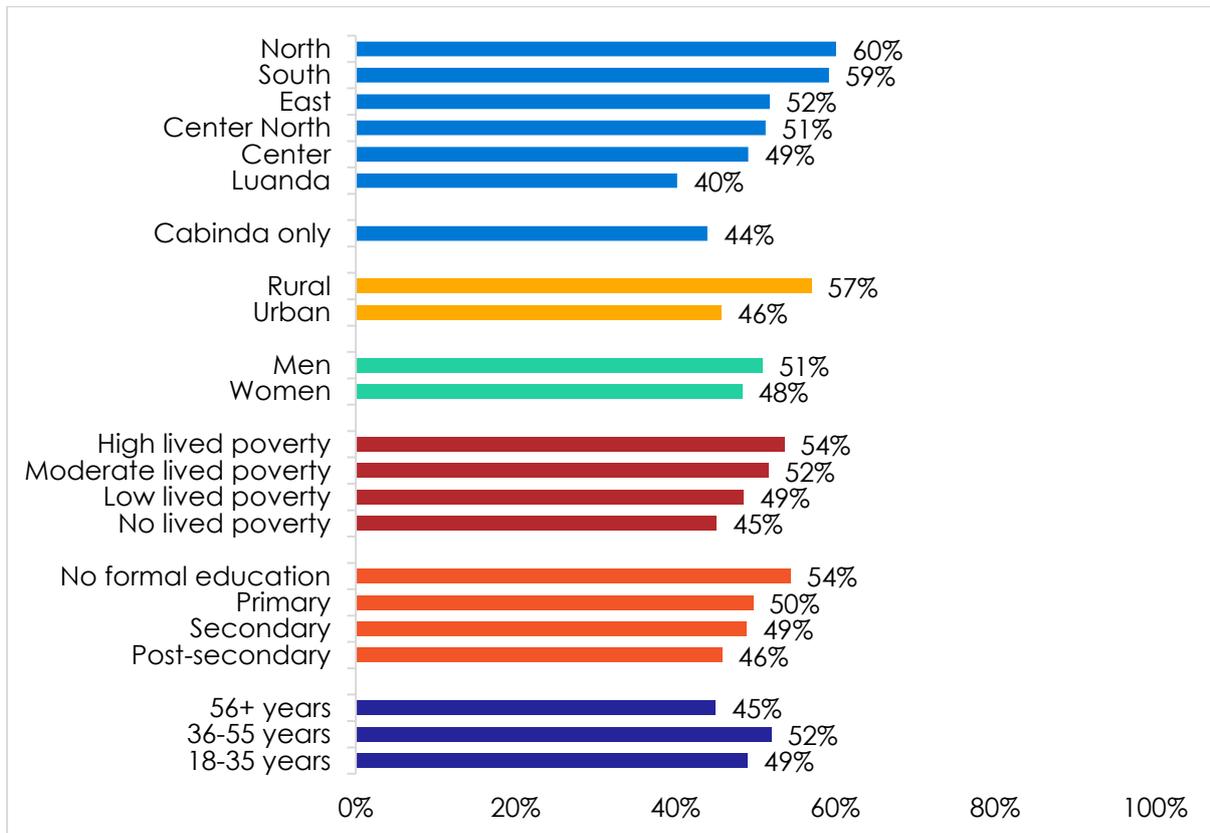
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A plurality (45%) of Angolans think that the influence of traditional authorities in the management of community affairs should

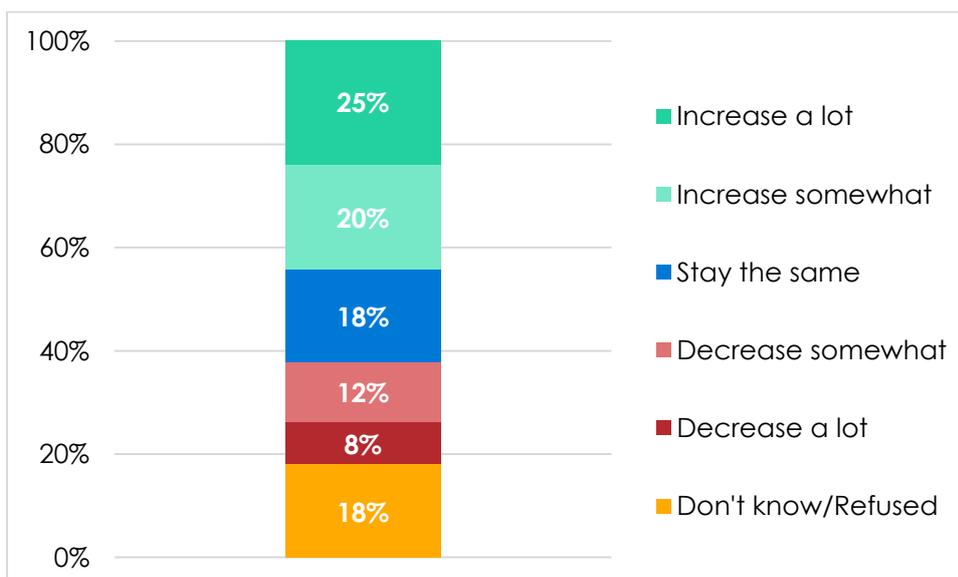
increase, while one about half as many would prefer to see it decrease (20%) or stay the same (18%) (Figure 8).

**Figure 7: Influence of traditional leaders in governing the local community | by socio-demographic group | Angola | 2019**



**Respondents were asked:** How much influence do traditional leaders currently have in each of the following areas: Governing your local community? (% who say "some" or "a lot")

**Figure 8: Should traditional leaders' influence increase or decrease? | Angola | 2019**



**Respondents were asked:** Do you think that the amount of influence traditional leaders have in governing your local community should increase, stay the same, or decrease?

## Conclusion

The Afrobarometer survey shows that Angolans trust religious leaders, the Angolan Armed Forces, and traditional leaders more than other key institutions and officials. These three groups, which have contributed to health campaigns in the past, thus represent potential assets in the current fight to limit COVID-19.

This trust tends to be higher than average among Angolans who live in rural areas, are in situations of extreme poverty, lack formal education, and are elderly. Considering that these groups may find it particularly difficult to stay informed about the risks of COVID-19 and to follow health measures due to deprivations of various kinds, there is an excellent opportunity here to massively involve religious leaders, the military, and traditional authorities in community awareness campaigns targeting hard-to-reach audiences.

On the other hand, trust in these officials is weaker in Luanda. As the capital with one-third of the Angolan population, 368 inhabitants per square kilometer (about 18 times above the country's average), and the overwhelming majority of COVID-19 cases to date, Luanda may require support for a community awareness and mobilization strategy from other informal influencers, such as musicians, actors, comedians, and athletes.

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Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is 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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