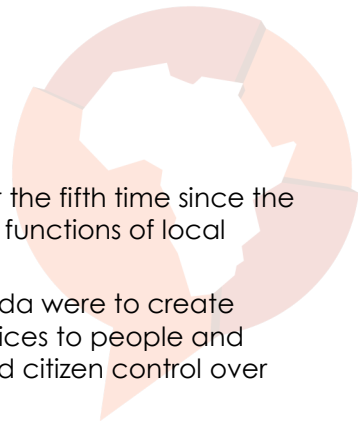# More, not better?

As local government councils proliferate, Ugandans voice growing dissatisfaction with councillors

By Matthias Krönke and Makanga Ronald Kakumba

Introduction

In January 2021, Ugandans elected local government councillors for the fifth time since the 1997 Local Governments Act provided for the formation, setup, and functions of local government councils (Republic of Uganda, 1997).

Key aims driving the legislation regulating local government in Uganda were to create decentralised local structures that would be better at providing services to people and would help ensure good governance, democratic participation, and citizen control over decision-making (Republic of Uganda, 1995, 1997).

Through the devolution of functions, powers, and services from the national to the local level, local government councils (or district councils) became responsible for a variety of tasks in their jurisdictions, including financial management and oversight, representation of citizens, legislation, development of strategic plans, and monitoring the performance of government employees and the provision of government services (Adoch, Emoit, Adiaka, & Ngole, 2011). These functions are in part undertaken by political leaders directly elected at all levels of local government, including local government councillors, who are charged with ensuring that government services are effectively delivered to their electorate.

As is true of members of Parliament, the number of local government councillors has increased dramatically over the past two decades due to the creation of new districts, city councils, municipalities, town councils, and sub-counties. While some prominent political leaders argue that additional lower administrative units are necessary to satisfy citizens' demands and bring services closer to the people, others argue that they unnecessarily strain the government's coffers (Monitor, 2021; Independent, 2021) and constitute a form of political patronage (Green, 2010).

As Figure 1 shows, the number of districts has increased drastically since the enactment of Uganda's new Constitution and the Local Governments Act in the mid-1990s, and so has the country's population. Although this suggests that increasing the number of districts is necessary to ensure that the delivery of services is "close to the people," previous research (e.g. Greene, 2010) and an analysis of where the districts have been created (see below) suggest that this process is less driven by demographic changes than by political arithmetic.

Figure 1: Number of districts and population size in Uganda, by year
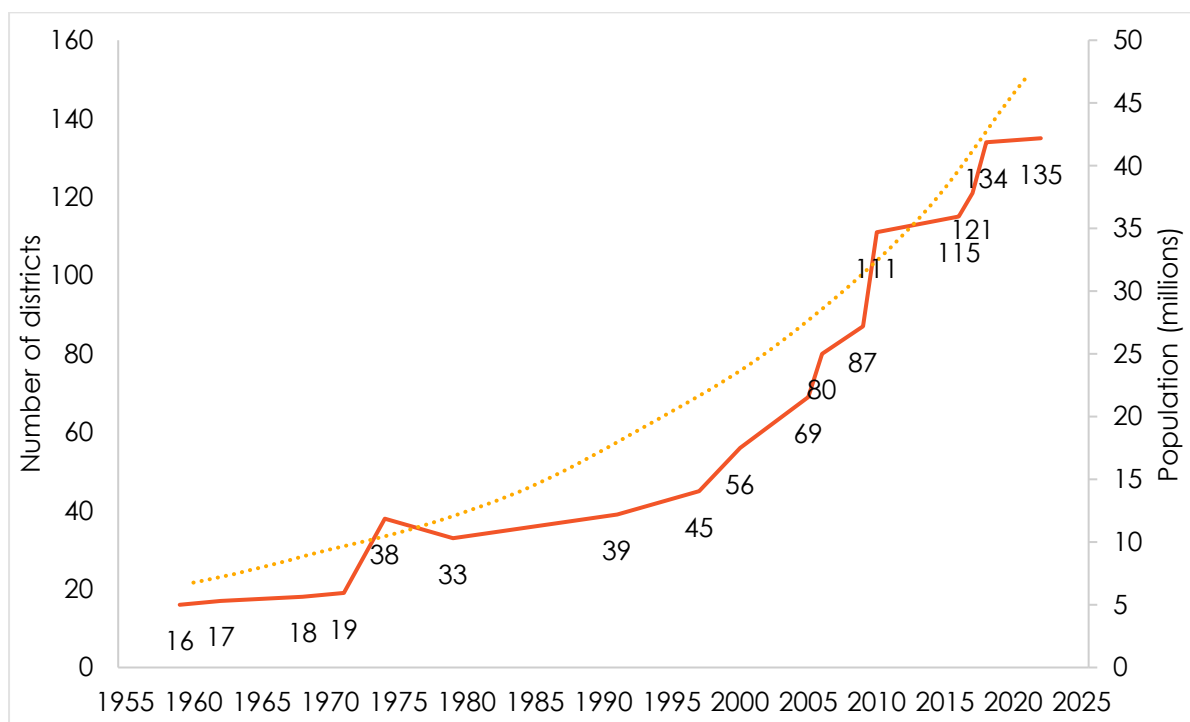
Source: Republic of Uganda (2019), World Bank (2021)
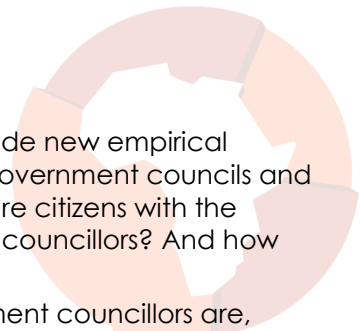
While this policy paper is not intended to settle this debate, we provide new empirical evidence to answer several important related questions: Are local government councils and their representatives accessible to their constituents? How satisfied are citizens with the performance and responsiveness of their elected local government councillors? And how have citizens' evaluations changed over time?

We show that a majority of Ugandans know who their local government councillors are, though fewer and fewer citizens contact them. Our data also reveal that citizens are becoming increasingly disenchanted with their political representatives, think they do a poor job of listening to constituents' concerns, and perceive many of them as corrupt. The proportion of Ugandans who are satisfied with the performance of their local government councillors has dropped significantly since 2005, and fewer than half of citizens rate their local government positively on the provision of basic services, financial management, and transparency.

A broader finding that emerges from our statistical analysis is that citizens' experiences with councillors are far more important drivers of their performance evaluations than their personal circumstances. The upshot of this finding is that councillors have it in their hands to improve their relationship with their constituents.

Throughout the paper we also compare Ugandans' relationship with their councillors to that of their peers elsewhere in Africa. It is striking that despite many of the negative trends over the past 15 years, Ugandans have not only been more likely than citizens in other African countries to know and engage with their councillors, but also more inclined to hold them accountable between elections. Similarly, Ugandan councillors have been seen as more responsive to citizens' needs and received better overall performance evaluations than their counterparts in most other countries. There is little cause to celebrate, however, as Uganda's comparatively high ranking seems to be at least in part a result of a continent-wide deterioration of citizen-councillor relationships.

Lastly, we conduct a preliminary analysis of whether citizens in less populous districts are more satisfied with their councillors' performance than citizens in more populous districts. In contrast to what proponents of decentralisation and the creation of new districts would expect, we find no meaningful difference – a result that casts doubt on the argument that decentralization has a universally positive effect on local governance, at least as it is currently implemented in Uganda.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Eight survey rounds in up to 39 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2022) are currently underway. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of 1,200-2,400, which yield country-level results with a margin of sampling error of +/-2 to +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

The Afrobarometer team in Uganda, led by Hatchile Consult Ltd., interviewed 2,400 adult Ugandans in January 2022 (Round 9) in 300 enumeration areas across 110 districts. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Afrobarometer has conducted 11 previous surveys in Uganda dating back to 2000.

This policy paper draws mainly on over-time comparisons on issues that have been tracked in Uganda between Round 3 (2005) and Round 9 (2022), as well as Round 8 data from up to 34 African countries.

Key findings

- **Knowing your local councillor:** Seven in 10 Ugandans (70%) were able to correctly identify their local government councillors in a 2005 survey – well above an 18-country average of 46%. Men, more educated citizens, and committed democrats and partisans were particularly likely to know their councillor's name.

- **Contacting local councillors:** Between 2005 and 2022, the share of Ugandans who contacted a local councillor during the previous year dropped from 62% to 25%.

- **Councillor responsiveness:** In 2005, 40% of Ugandans said that councillors "often" or "always" try their best to listen to what citizens have to say. This number dropped to 22% in 2022. Although Ugandan councillors seem to have been more responsive than most of their counterparts in other African countries, this gap has narrowed over time.

- **Local government corruption:** About four in 10 Ugandans (39%) say that "most" or "all" local government councillors are corrupt, a perception that has been fairly stable over time.

- **Local government performance:** Public approval of local government councillors' performance has dropped from 71% in 2005 to 54% in 2022. Fewer than half of Ugandans are satisfied with how local governments provide basic services, and even fewer are satisfied with their financial management and transparency.

- **What matters most for performance evaluations of local councillors?** Citizens who see their local government councillors as corrupt and unwilling to listen to their concerns are least likely to be satisfied with councillors' performance. In contrast, contacting a councillor has a positive effect on performance evaluations.

## Election, structure, and tasks of local government in Uganda

Thanks to various decentralisation reforms in the 1990s and early 2000s, Uganda has a multi-layered local government structure. As can be seen in Table 1, popularly elected local councils exist at the village (LC1), parish/ward (LC2), sub-county/town/division (LC3), municipality (LC4), and district (LC5) levels. City and district councils are referred to as higher local government, while municipality, town, division, and sub-county councils are referred to as lower local government (Republic of Uganda, 1997).

Table 1: Structure of local government | Uganda

Level	Urban	Rural		
LC5	City council	District local council		
LC4		Municipality	Town council	
LC3	City division council	Municipality division		Sub-county
LC2	Parish/Ward			
LC1	Village			

Source: Adoch et al. (2011).

Each council consists of a district chairperson, one councillor directly elected to represent each constituency within a district, and special representatives for youth and people with disabilities. In general, council chairpersons are elected by universal adult suffrage through a secret ballot. However, election of village, parish, and sub-county council chairpersons and
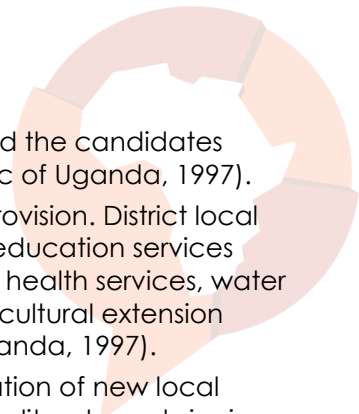
other officials is conducted by having voters physically line up behind the candidates nominated for the office or their representatives or portraits (Republic of Uganda, 1997).

Higher local government councils play a key role in public service provision. District local government councils are responsible for, among other things, most education services (primary, secondary, trade, and technical education), medical and health services, water services, the construction and maintenance of roads, as well as agricultural extension services and community development (OECD, 2016; Republic of Uganda, 1997).

As mentioned above, the most common justification for the proliferation of new local government units is based on a common idea in the decentralisation literature – bringing government closer to the people to improve service delivery. Yet even a cursory analysis of where and how these new councils have been established suggests that other considerations might have been at play, too. For example, of the 79 councils established between 2005 and 2022, 17 were created in the Northern region and 16 in the Western region, while the Central and Eastern regions gained only 10 and 13 councils, respectively (Table 2). In the Northern and Western regions, this has had the intended effect of decentralisation – the average number of citizens per council decreased by 20% and 23%, respectively. However, the opposite is the case in the other two regions, where the citizen-to-council ratio increased by 13% (Central) and 11% (East), respectively.

Table 2: Increase in local government councils | by region | 2006-2022

| Region	No. of councils in 2006	No. of councils in 2022	Absolute increase	% increase	Average population per council in 2006†	Average population per council in 2021†	% change in average population per council
Central	16	26	10	63%	418	437	+13%
East	24	37	13	54%	257	284	+11%
North	21	38	17	81%	255	203	-20%
West	19	35	16	84%	338	259	-23%

† Average population in 1,000. Source: City Population (2022).

Another way to gauge whether new districts have primarily been created to keep up with the country's growing population (see Figure 1) is to compare their population sizes in a given year. Arguably, one sign of successful decentralisation efforts would be to achieve fairly similar population sizes across district councils, irrespective of when a district was created. However, this is not what our data reveal. In Figure 2, we map the 2020/2021 population size of a district (vertical axis) by when a district was created (horizontal axis). On average, about 289,000 Ugandans lived in a district in 2020/2021, but this number masks important variation. For example, we observe that 14 of the 23 districts created since 2016 had a population of fewer than 200,000 people in 2020/2021, substantially below the country average, and less than half of the average population size for districts in the Central region (as shown in Table 2). Moreover, only two of the 23 councils created since 2016 are in the Central region, despite its exceptionally high citizen-to-council ratio.[1] Taken together, these findings suggest a bias toward creating new councils in some regions rather than others based on criteria other than population size.

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[1] A similar trend can be observed when looking at the creation of councils between 2010 and 2020. Only seven of 49 districts were created in Uganda's Central region even though it had larger average populations per council in 2006 than the other three regions.

Figure 2: District creation date and population estimate per district ca. 2020/2021
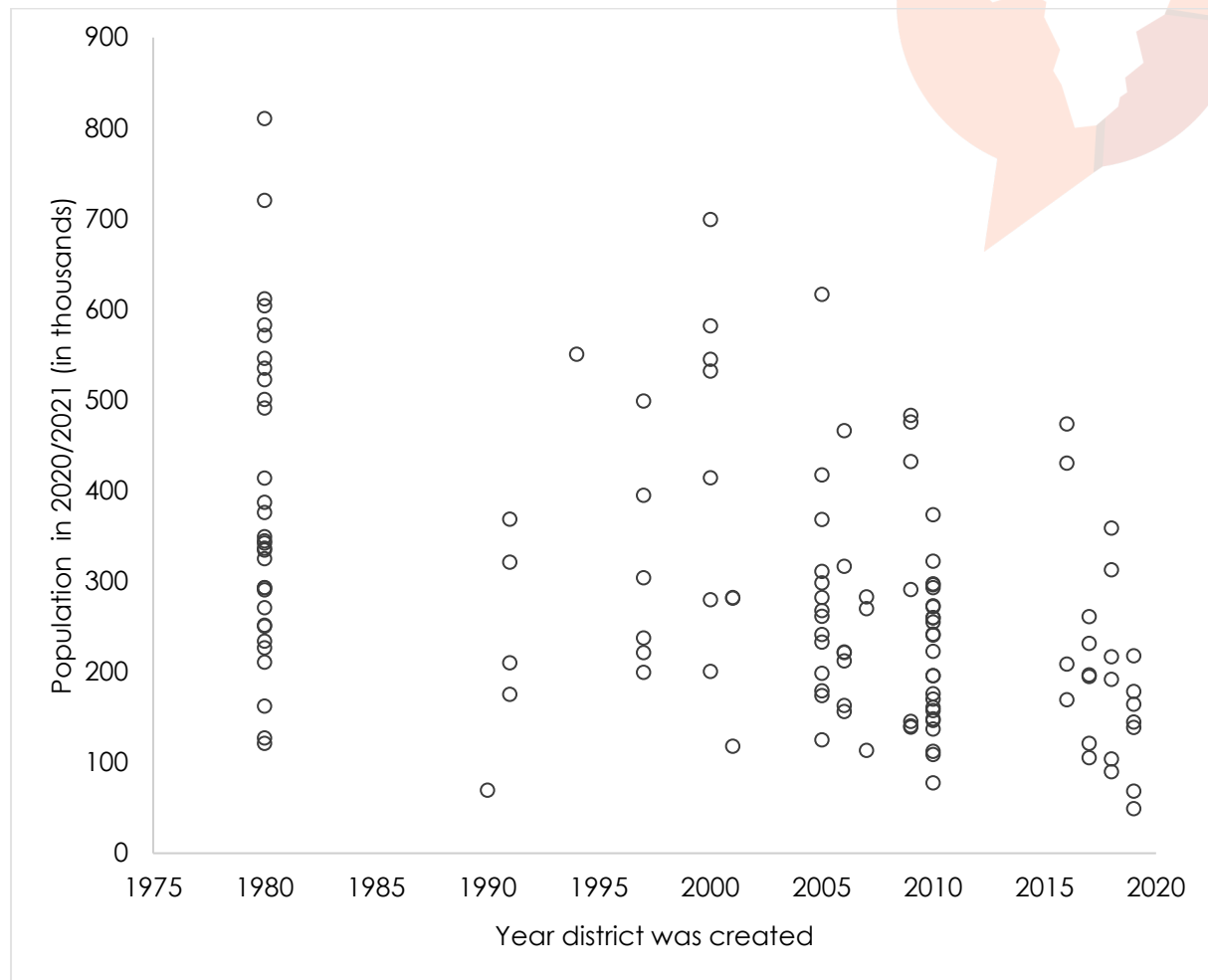
Notes: N=133. This chart excludes Kampala (1980) and Wakiso (2000) because they are clear outliers with populations of 3,105,700 and 1,709,900, respectively. Terego is excluded because population data were4s not available. Source: City Population (2022), Law Usry (2022), Wikipedia (2022).

Local councillors and their constituents

Over the past few decades, various forms of administrative decentralisation have been implemented around the world, especially in low-income countries with poor track records of basic service delivery (Green, 2015). Citizen participation in local governance and development has remained among the top priorities for many countries and international development agencies (Kakumba & Nsingo, 2008).

In Uganda, the decentralisation reforms of the 1990s were meant not only to improve service delivery, but also to strengthen the connection between local communities and their elected representatives. In this section, we focus on how this relationship has changed over time before analysing citizen performance assessments of local government.

The extent of vertical accountability

Local government councillors are democratically elected by their constituents. In addition to removing and replacing underperforming elected representatives on Election Day, however, voters can also hold their councillors accountable between elections by actively engaging in local politics. An important question, therefore, is whether Ugandans see themselves as the ones who are responsible for holding their councillors to account in these interim periods.

We probe this type of vertical accountability by analysing Afrobarometer data between 2005 and 2017 (Figure 3). In 2005, toward the end of councillors' four-year term that started in

2002, 61% of Ugandans said that it is voters' responsibility to make sure that councillors do their job. At the time, only 20% of respondents assigned this responsibility to the district council.

Over the next decade, fewer and fewer citizens saw it as their job to oversee councillors between elections. In 2015, 46% said that it is their job to hold local councillors to account, while 28% saw it as the responsibility of the district councillors. Since then, the trends have been reversed and basically returned to the 2005 levels (60% and 22%, respectively).[2]

Figure 3: Who is responsible for making sure local councillors do their job? | Uganda | 2005-2017
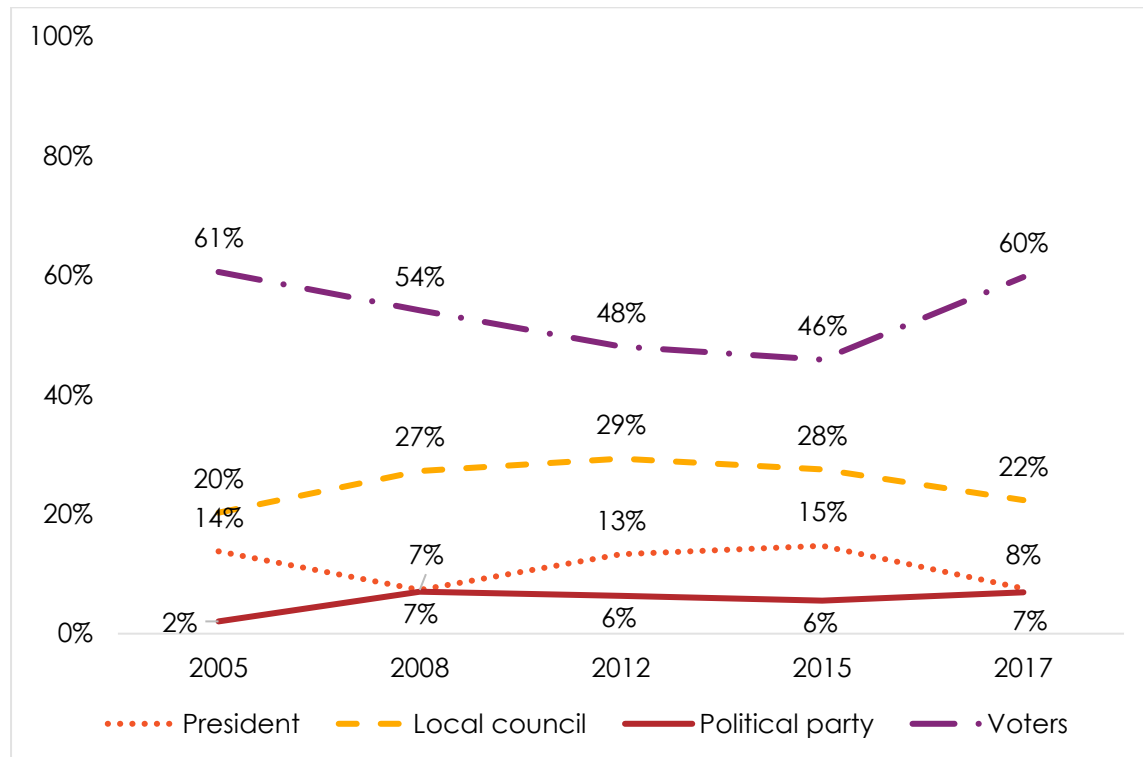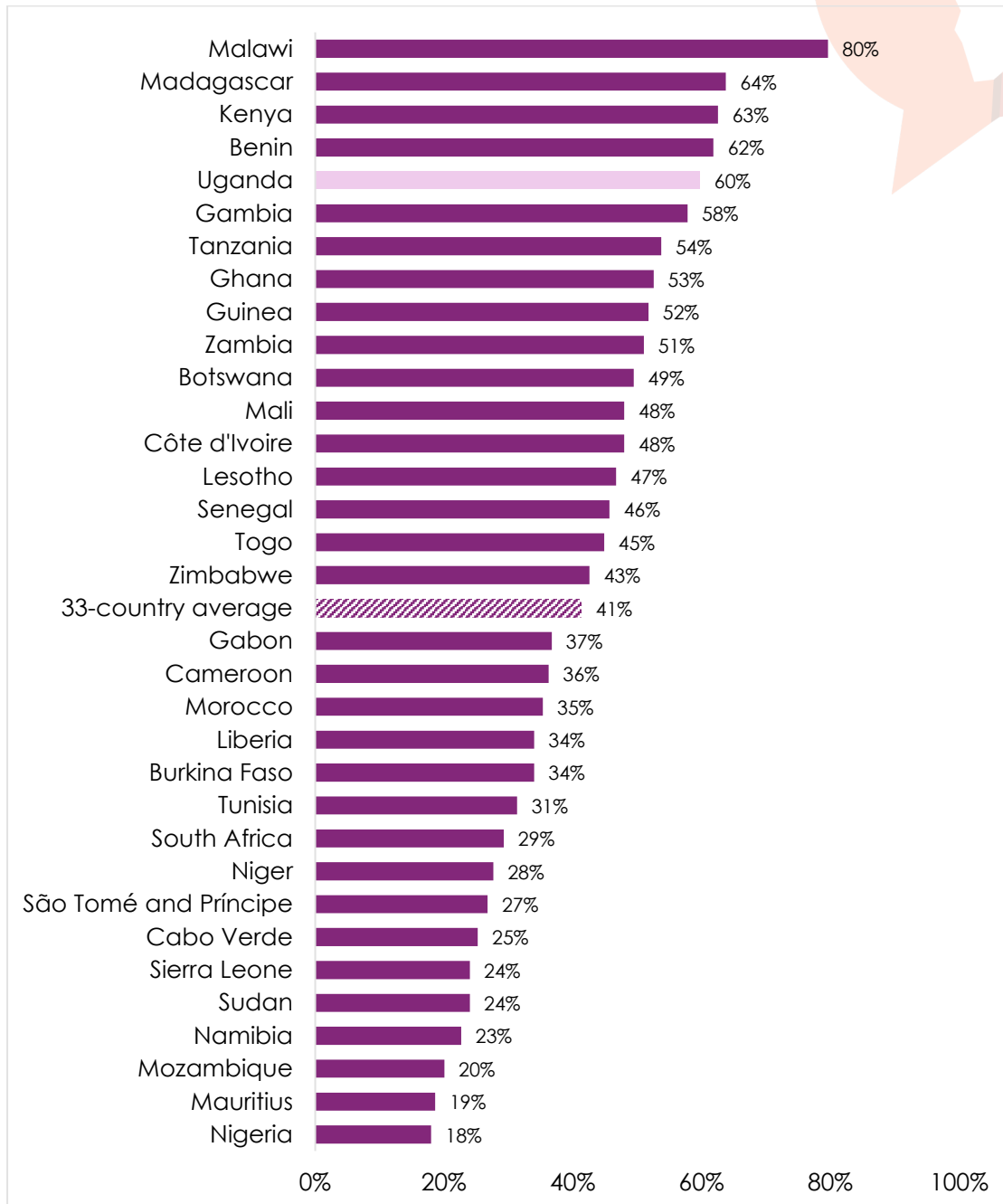

Respondents were asked: *Who should be responsible for making sure that, once elected, local government councillors do their jobs?*

A comparison across 33 countries where this question was asked in Round 7 (2016/2018) allows us to situate these findings in a larger context (Figure 4). Ugandans displayed comparatively high levels of this type of vertical accountability, placing fifth after Malawi (80%), Madagascar (64%), Kenya (63%), and Benin (62%). Notwithstanding the positive cross-country comparison, the substantial over-time variation in vertical accountability in Uganda raises some concerns about how effective citizens are in holding their local elected officials to account.

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[2] The trend is very similar with regard to citizens' views about vertical accountability vis-à-vis members of Parliament (Krönke & Kakumba, 2022).

Figure 4: Voters responsible for making sure local councillors do their job
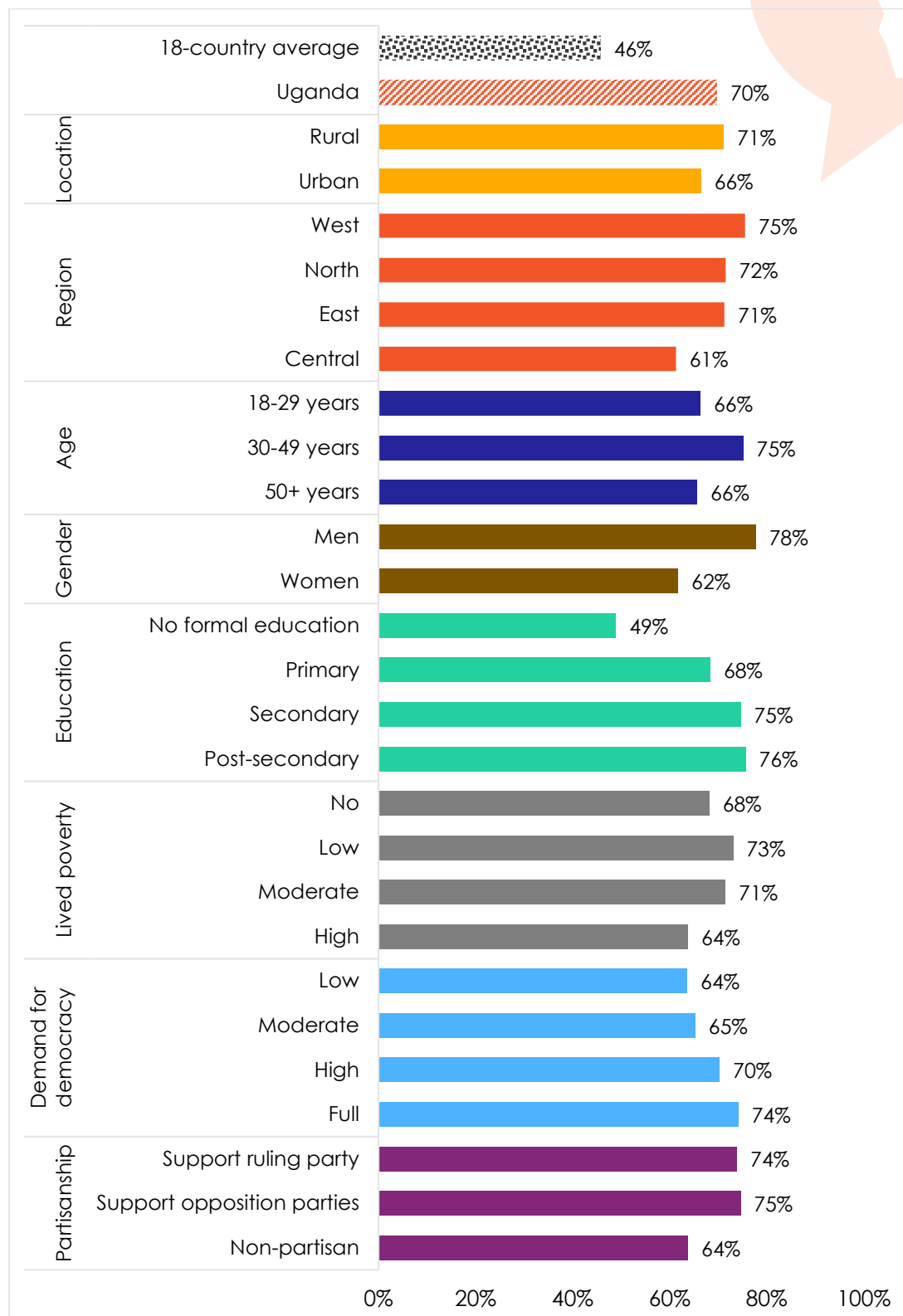| 33 countries* | 2016/2018

Malawi — 80%
Madagascar — 64%
Kenya — 63%
Benin — 62%
Uganda — 60%
Gambia — 58%
Tanzania — 54%
Ghana — 53%
Guinea — 52%
Zambia — 51%
Botswana — 49%
Mali — 48%
Côte d'Ivoire — 48%
Lesotho — 47%
Senegal — 46%
Togo — 45%
Zimbabwe — 43%
33-country average — 41%
Gabon — 37%
Cameroon — 36%
Morocco — 35%
Liberia — 34%
Burkina Faso — 34%
Tunisia — 31%
South Africa — 29%
Niger — 28%
São Tomé and Príncipe — 27%
Cabo Verde — 25%
Sierra Leone — 24%
Sudan — 24%
Namibia — 23%
Mozambique — 20%
Mauritius — 19%
Nigeria — 18%

Respondents were asked: Who should be responsible for making sure that, once elected, local government councillors do their jobs? (% who say "voters") *Question was not asked in Eswatini.*

Identifying local councillors

All else being equal, it is easier for citizens to effectively participate in local development and exercise vertical accountability if they can identify their local representatives. Based on data from Afrobarometer Round 3, we know that in 2005, 70% of Ugandan adults were able to correctly name their local councillors (Figure 5). This was far above the 18-country average of 46% and shows that a few years after the first local government elections in the multi-party era, most Ugandans were able to identify this important group of actors meant to improve service delivery.
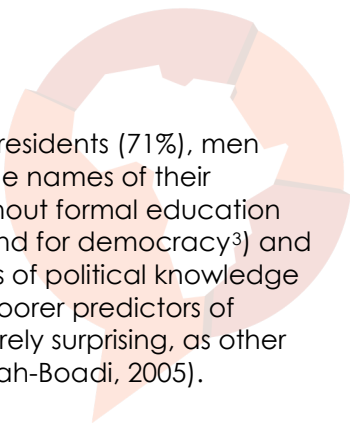
Figure 5: Can identify local councillors | by socio-demographic group | Uganda | 2005

Category	Group	Value
	18-country average	46%
	Uganda	70%
Location	Rural	71%
	Urban	66%
Region	West	75%
	North	72%
	East	71%
	Central	61%
Age	18-29 years	66%
	30-49 years	75%
	50+ years	66%
Gender	Men	78%
	Women	62%
Education	No formal education	49%
	Primary	68%
	Secondary	75%
	Post-secondary	76%
Lived poverty	No	68%
	Low	73%
	Moderate	71%
	High	64%
Demand for democracy	Low	64%
	Moderate	65%
	High	70%
	Full	74%
Partisanship	Support ruling party	74%
	Support opposition parties	75%
	Non-partisan	64%

Respondents were asked: Can you tell me the name of your local government councillor? (% who provided the correct name)
Lived poverty: 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. Note: N=45 for the "No lived poverty" category, resulting in a large margin of error.

But there are also considerable differences among Ugandans. Rural residents (71%), men (78%), and more educated citizens (76%) were more likely to know the names of their councillors than urbanites (66%), women (62%), and respondents without formal education (49%). Committed democrats (i.e. those expressing high or full demand for democracy[3]) and those who identified with a political party also displayed higher levels of political knowledge than their counterparts. In contrast, age and material wealth were poorer predictors of citizens' ability to identify their councillors. These patterns are not entirely surprising, as other research has found similar relationships (e.g. Bratton, Mattes, & Gyimah-Boadi, 2005).

Contacting local councillors

Local councillors are expected to serve their local communities and to be available and accessible to their constituents. One way to measure how well councillors perform on this dimension is by tracking councillor-citizen interactions over time. Although we are unable to investigate why citizens contact their councillor, for example to complain about absent teachers, or missing medication at a nearby clinic, it is nevertheless instructive to track how often citizens seek out their representatives.

As can be seen in Figure 6, in 2005 a staggering 62% of adult Ugandans said they had contacted their local councillor about an important problem or to give them their views on a particular issue. This number is even more remarkable when compared to an average of 24% across all 18 countries surveyed by Afrobarometer in Round 3.[4] Given Uganda's population of 27.7 million at the time (World Bank, 2021), the results suggest that approximately 8 million Ugandans contacted a councillor at least once during the year preceding the 2005 Afrobarometer survey.

Since then, however, the share of Ugandans who contacted their councillors has dropped significantly. In the decade following the 2005 survey, citizens' contacting rate decreased continuously, reaching 21% in 2015. Although the contacting rate rose to 38% in the aftermath of the 2018 local elections, it then dropped again to 25% in 2022. We pick up on this trend below when we analyse how responsive councillors have been over time. For now, we compare the recent results to those of the larger sample of countries surveyed by Afrobarometer. Among the 31 countries where this question was asked in Round 8 (2019/2021), Ugandans (38%) were most likely to report contacting their local elected representatives, well above the 26% average (Figure 7). However, Uganda is likely to be closer to the average in Round 9 comparisons, given its 25% rate in 2022.

Despite the recent drop, Ugandans are still more likely to contact their councillor than their member of Parliament (MP) (15%) or a political party official (18%), and just as likely to contact a councillor as they are to contact a traditional leader (26%). In short, councillors remain important stakeholders in citizens' lives and very much part of communities' political fabric.

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[3] **Demand for democracy:** This Afrobarometer index combines the following questions:
1. *There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives? (% who "disapprove" or "strongly disapprove" of each alternative)*
   Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office.
   The army comes in to govern the country.
   Elections and the National Assembly are abolished so that the president can decide everything.
2. *Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion? (% who choose Statement 1)*
   Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.
   Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.
   Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.

Demand for democracy: % who prefer democracy and reject all three authoritarian alternatives. The category "No demand for democracy" was excluded from this and subsequent analyses because it contained very few respondents.

[4] The 18 countries are Benin, Botswana, Cabo Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Figure 6: Contacted local councillors | Uganda and 18-country average
| 2005-2022
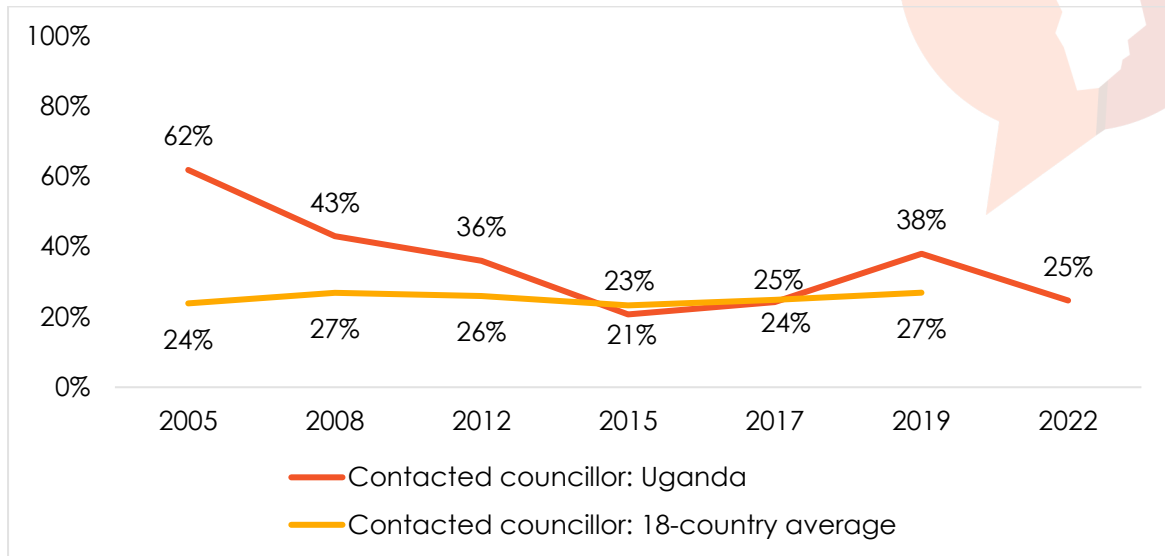
Respondents were asked: During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views: A local government councillor (% who say "only once," "a few times," or "often")
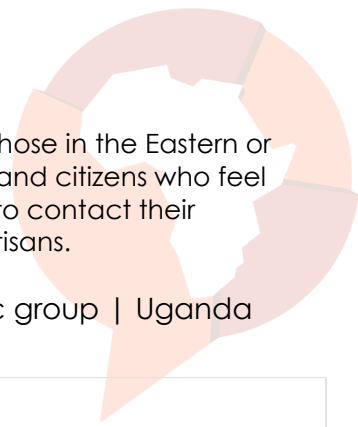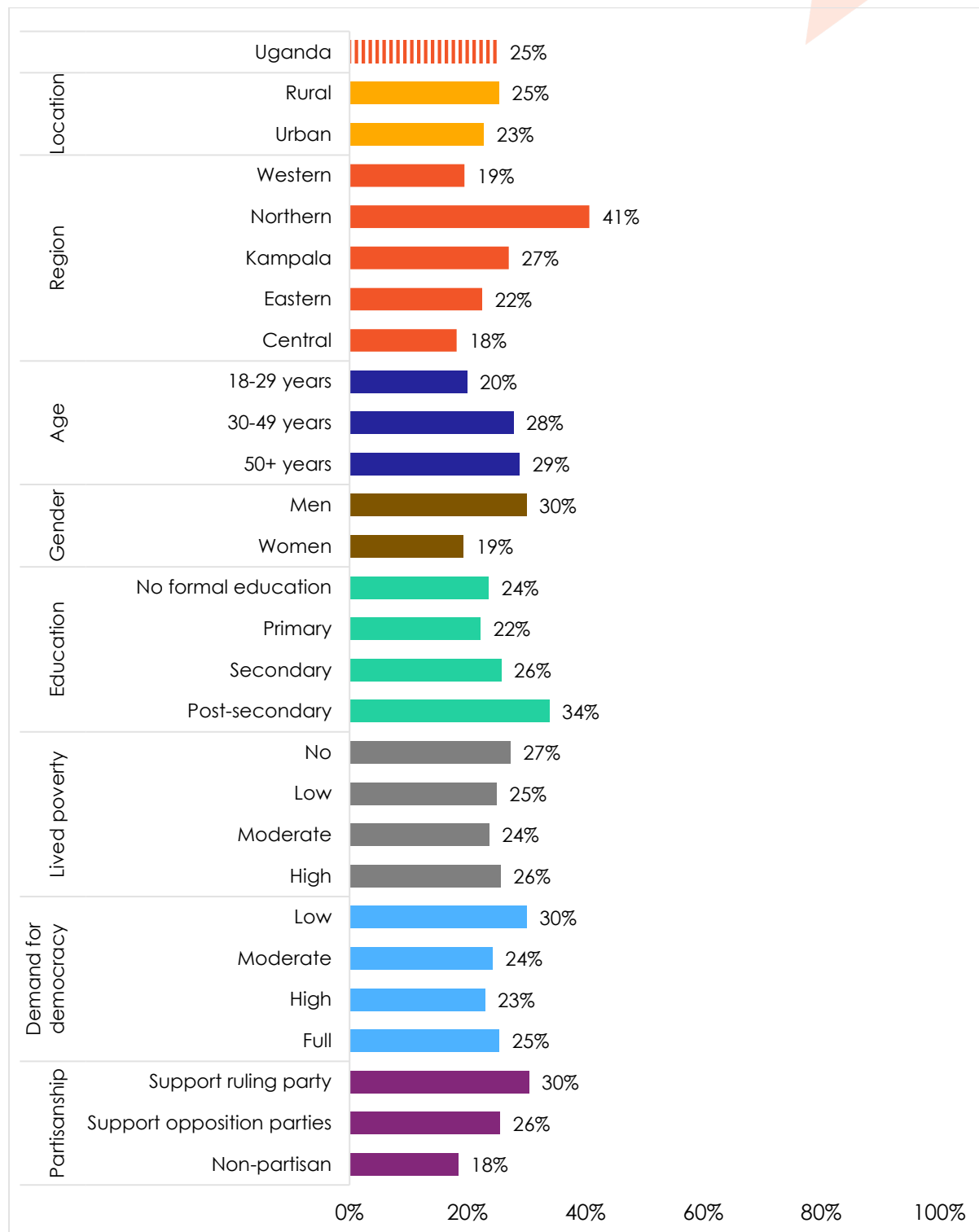
Figure 7: Contacted local councillors | 31 countries* | 2019/2021
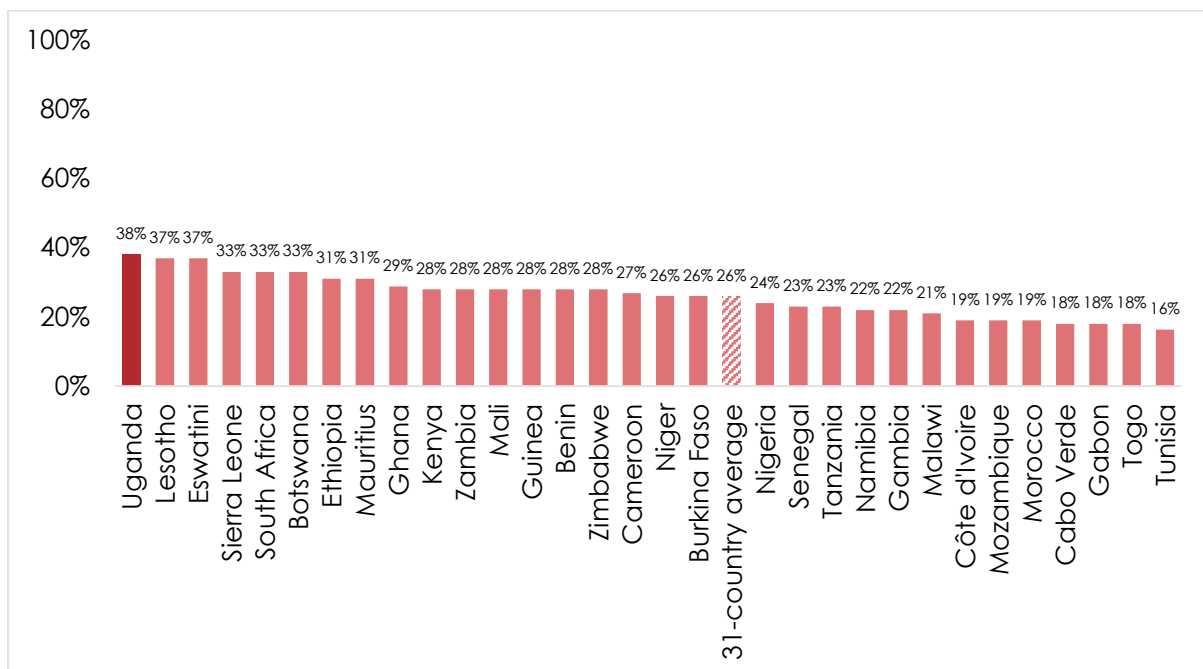
*Respondents were asked: During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views: A local government councillor (% who say "only once," "a few times," or "often") *Question was not asked in Angola, Liberia, or Sudan.*

Whether citizens contact their elected representatives depends at least in part on whether citizens are engaged in politics, their material resources, and their social capital, as well as demographic characteristics (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995; Bratton et al., 2005). In the case of Uganda's local councillors, urban and rural residents contact their councillors at similar rates (25% vs. 23%), and neither poverty level nor democratic commitment are good predictors of contacting rates (Figure 8). But we do see meaningful variation along other dimensions. As in contact with MPs (Krönke & Kakumba, 2022), Ugandans living in the

Northern region are far more likely to contact their councillors than those in the Eastern or Central regions. And older respondents, men, the highly educated, and citizens who feel close to a political party (especially the ruling party) are more likely to contact their councillors than youth, women, less educated citizens, and non-partisans.

Figure 8: Contacted local councillors | by socio-demographic group | Uganda | 2022

Respondents were asked: *During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views: A local government councillor (% who say "only once," "a few times," or "often")*

Do local councillors listen to their constituents?

In his analysis of 20 African countries, Bratton (2012) showed that only a minority of survey respondents were satisfied with several procedural aspects of councillors' work. For example, fewer than a third of interviewees said that local government consults others before making decisions (30%), handles complaints effectively (26%), and allows citizens to participate in decision making (25%). An important related question, then, is whether Ugandans think elected leaders listen to their views.

As can be seen in Figure 9, the share of Ugandans who believe that their local councillors do their best to listen to what people have to say has dropped precipitously between 2005 and 2022. Interestingly, the pattern is similar to what we saw with regard to contacting local councillors. From a high of 40% of respondents who said in 2005 that councillors "often" or "always" try their best to listen, the proportion dropped to 23% in 2015, then spiked briefly in 2017 (32%) before dropping again, to 22% in 2022. Although the 18-country average shows that Ugandan councillors have been perceived as more responsive than their counterparts in most other countries, this gap has narrowed over time.[5]

As Chiweza, Chunga, and Chunga (2021) have suggested in the case of Malawi, these dwindling rates of perceived responsiveness can have dire consequences for the re-election prospects of councillors. Moreover, they also point toward a mismatch between expectations for a decentralised government – increasing levels of responsiveness – and citizens' lived reality.

Figure 9: Local councillors listen | Uganda and 18-country average | 2005-2022
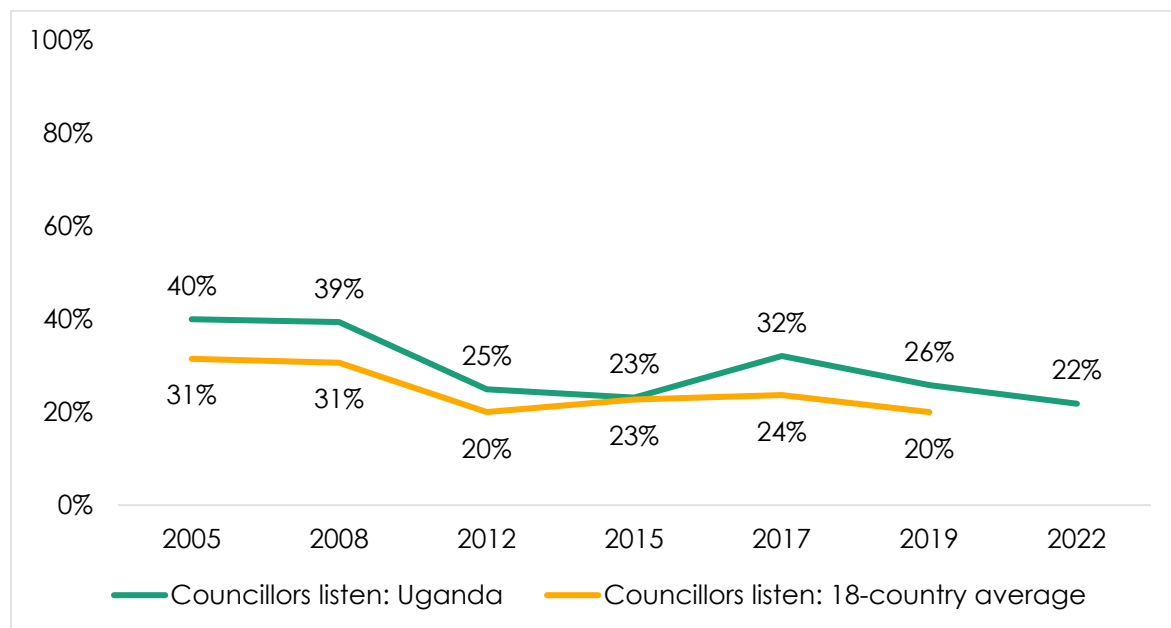
Respondents were asked: *How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what people like you have to say: Local councillors? (% who say "often" or "always")*

Within Uganda, we see patterns that resemble those of MP responsiveness (Krönke & Kakumba, 2022). Respondents from the Northern region (31%) are more likely to say that councillors try their best to listen than their counterparts in other regions (17%-25%) (Figure 10). We also see differences of more than 5 percentage points across different levels of

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[5] Compared to a larger set of countries (31 countries surveyed in 2019/2021), Ugandans still see their councillors as more responsive than many of their peers in other countries (see Figure A.1 in the appendix). However, as with contacting councillors, Uganda's assessment of councillor responsiveness in Round 9 (22%) is likely to move toward the continental average.

education, lived poverty, and democratic commitment, as well as across partisan lines and between rural and urban areas.

Figure 10: Local councillors listen | by socio-demographic group | Uganda | 2022
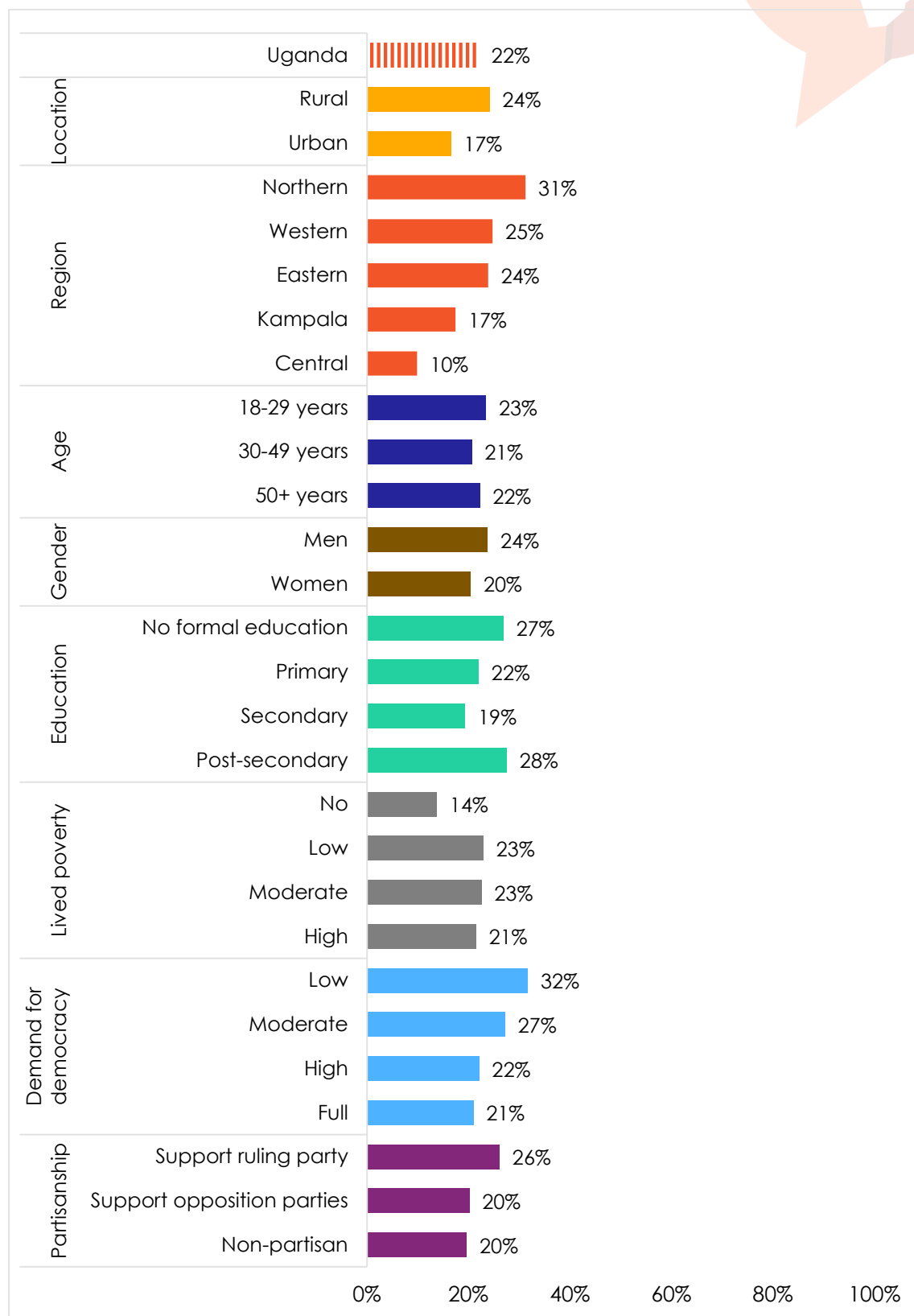
Respondents were asked: *How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what people like you have to say: Local councillors? (% who say "often" or "always")*

Corruption among local councillors

Even though elected representatives are expected to promote good governance and uphold the rule of law, perceptions of corruption among councillors remain stubbornly high across the continent (Keulder, 2021). And while local councillors were less widely seen as corrupt than the police, MPs, or civil servants, on average across 34 countries surveyed in Round 8 (2019/2021), still three out of 10 respondents (31%) said that "most" or "all" local councillors are involved in corruption. This is worrisome, because research shows a clear negative connection between citizens' perception of state corruption and their trust in these public institutions (Armah-Attoh, Gyimah-Boadi, & Chikwanha-Dzenga, 2007; Lavallée, Razafindrakoto, & Roubaud, 2008).

In Uganda, elected officials (president, MPs, and local councillors) are generally seen as less corrupt than the police, tax officials, and other government officials (Kewaza, 2016). Compared to councillors elsewhere, Ugandan councillors have regularly scored around or above the continental average in perceived corruption (Figure 11 and Figure 12).

Poorer and less educated Ugandans, opposition supporters, and Kampala residents are particularly likely to view local elected representatives as corrupt (Figure 13). In contrast, perceptions of corruption are more evenly distributed across genders, age groups, and geographic locations.

Figure 11: Most/All local councillors are corrupt | Uganda and 18-country average | 2005-2022
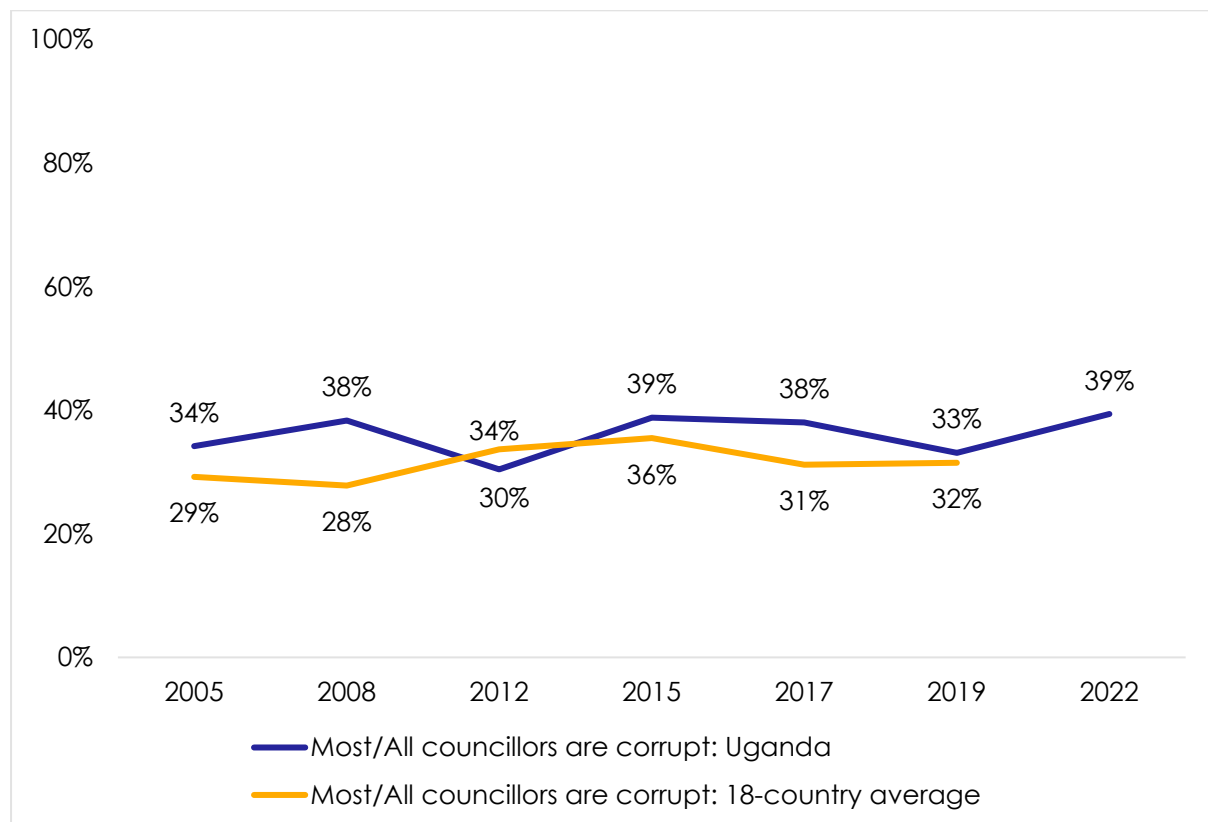

Respondents were asked: *How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to: Local government councillors? (% who say "most" or "all")*

Figure 12: Most/All local councillors are corrupt | 32 countries* | 2019/2021
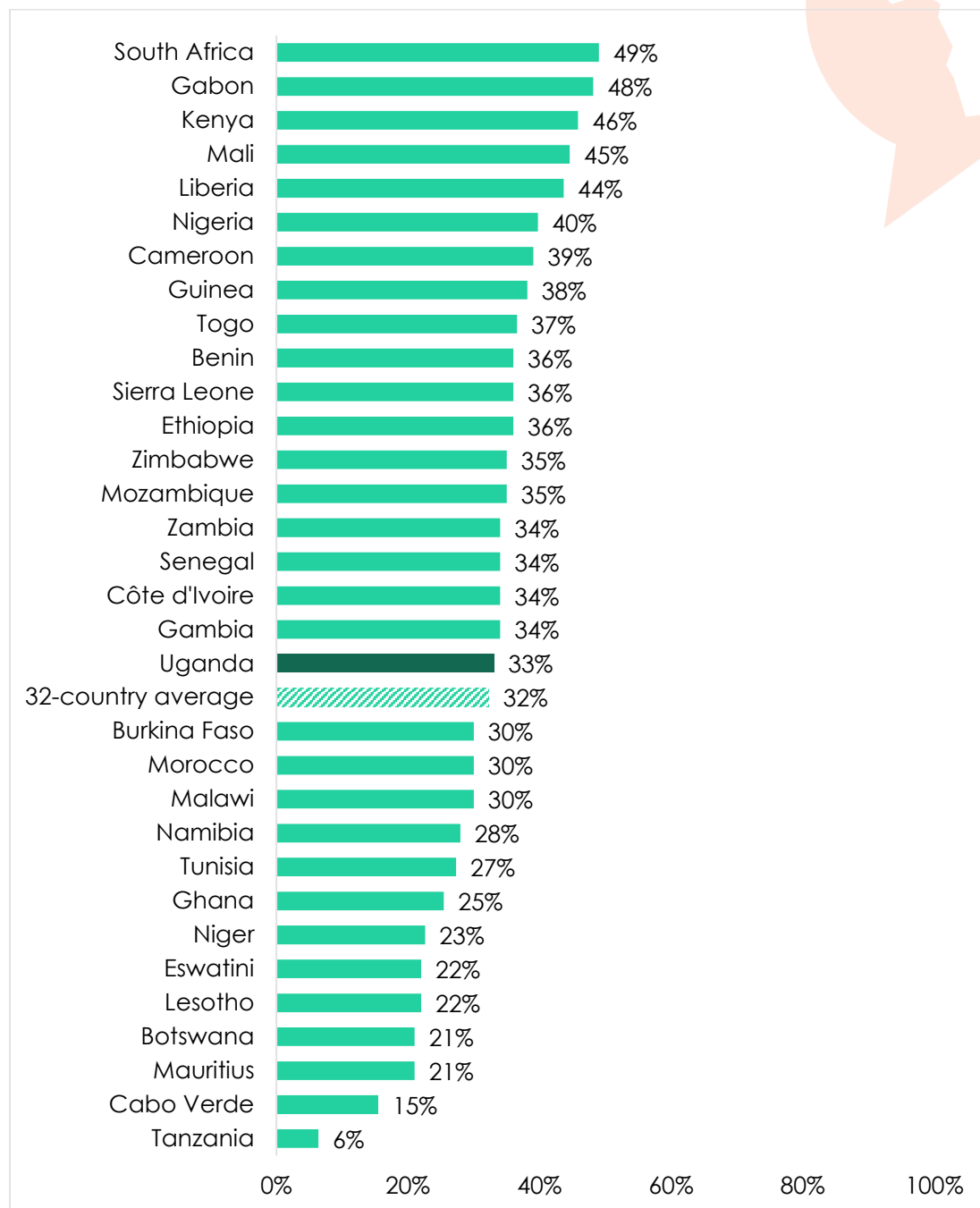
Country	%
South Africa	49%
Gabon	48%
Kenya	46%
Mali	45%
Liberia	44%
Nigeria	40%
Cameroon	39%
Guinea	38%
Togo	37%
Benin	36%
Sierra Leone	36%
Ethiopia	36%
Zimbabwe	35%
Mozambique	35%
Zambia	34%
Senegal	34%
Côte d'Ivoire	34%
Gambia	34%
Uganda	33%
32-country average	32%
Burkina Faso	30%
Morocco	30%
Malawi	30%
Namibia	28%
Tunisia	27%
Ghana	25%
Niger	23%
Eswatini	22%
Lesotho	22%
Botswana	21%
Mauritius	21%
Cabo Verde	15%
Tanzania	6%

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: Local government councillors? (% who say "most" or "all") *Question was not asked in Angola or Sudan.

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.

Figure 13: Most/All local councillors are corrupt | by socio-demographic group
| Uganda | 2022
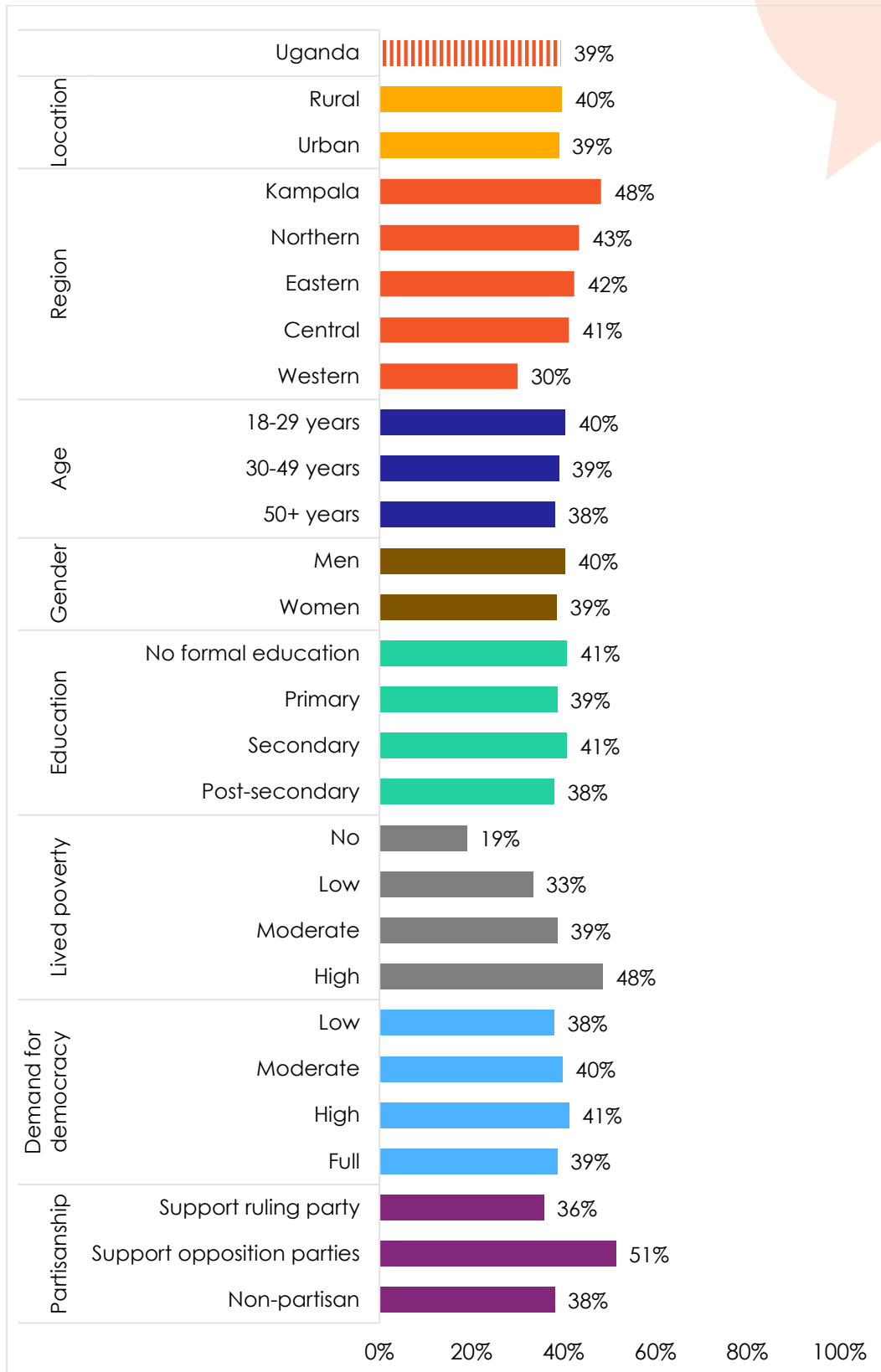
Category	Group	Value
	Uganda	39%
Location	Rural	40%
	Urban	39%
Region	Kampala	48%
	Northern	43%
	Eastern	42%
	Central	41%
	Western	30%
Age	18-29 years	40%
	30-49 years	39%
	50+ years	38%
Gender	Men	40%
	Women	39%
Education	No formal education	41%
	Primary	39%
	Secondary	41%
	Post-secondary	38%
Lived poverty	No	19%
	Low	33%
	Moderate	39%
	High	48%
Demand for democracy	Low	38%
	Moderate	40%
	High	41%
	Full	39%
Partisanship	Support ruling party	36%
	Support opposition parties	51%
	Non-partisan	38%

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: Local government councillors? (% who say "most" or "all")*
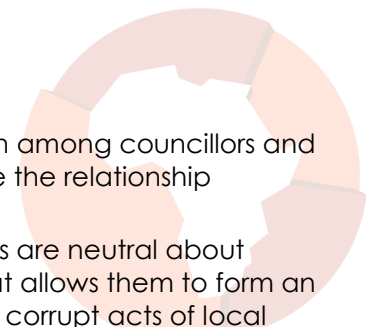
Before testing the connection between how citizens view corruption among councillors and various measures of councillors' job performance, we briefly explore the relationship between perceived corruption and institutional trust.

Following Bratton and Gyimah-Boadi (2016), we assume that citizens are neutral about matters of institutional trust until they are exposed to information that allows them to form an opinion on the issue. Consequently, citizens who personally observe corrupt acts of local councillors – or, more likely, hear stories about dishonest councillors from family, friends, or the news media – are more likely to distrust the broader institution as well, in this case local government councils. One way of testing this connection is by using a simple bivariate correlation for the corruption question and a separate question that asks citizens "How much do you trust the local government council?"[6] As can be seen in Table 3 below, we find a consistent negative correlation between these two variables, ranging from -.142 in 2005 to -.307 in 2015.[7] Though this analysis is not well suited to isolate the effect of corruption on trust from other factors, such as demographic characteristics or partisan affiliation, it nevertheless provides useful preliminary evidence for the negative effect of the former on the latter.[8]

Table 3: Perceived corruption among local councillors and trust in local government councils | Uganda | 2005-2022

	2005	2008	2012	2015	2017	2019	2022
Pearson correlation coefficient	-.142**	-.275**	-.186**	-.307**	-.298**	-.246**	-.245**
N	1066	1098	1145	1070	1081	1063	1143

*Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Job performance of local councillors

Are Ugandans satisfied with the performance of their local councillors? While the preceding sections have primarily focused on councillor-citizen engagement, we now turn to analysing the substantive and overall performance of local councillors as seen through the eyes of their constituents. We start by assessing two functions of local government councils, the delivery of basic services and financial management with public participation. The section closes by examining patterns of councillors' overall performance.

Local service delivery

According to the Local Governments Act, district councils are supposed to play a key role in the delivery of basic services, such as educational and medical services, water, sanitation, and the construction and maintenance of roads. In the most recent Afrobarometer survey, Ugandans were asked how satisfied they are with the way their district or city council is delivering on these services. Overall, fewer than half of respondents say they are "fairly" or "very" satisfied with their council's performance on any of these services (Figure 14). More citizens are satisfied with how councils deliver educational services (45%) and ensure that local market facilities are clean and well managed (45%) than they are with how they handle the planning and management of land use in the municipality (36%).

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[6] The response options range from 0 to 3: 0=Not at all, 1=Just a little, 2=Somewhat, and 3=A lot. Respondents could also say "Don't know/Haven't heard enough," but respondents who gave this answer – generally less than 5% of respondents per survey – were excluded from this analysis.

[7] The test of association is the Pearson correlation coefficient, in which 0=no association and 1=perfect association. A coefficient that is significant at .01 has only a 1% chance of being wrong.

[8] By way of comparison, across their 36-country sample surveyed in 2014/2015, Bratton and Gyimah-Boadi (2016) reported a higher correlation between the two variables: Pearson correlation coefficient=-.359.

Figure 14: Satisfaction with service delivery by local government councils | Uganda | 2022
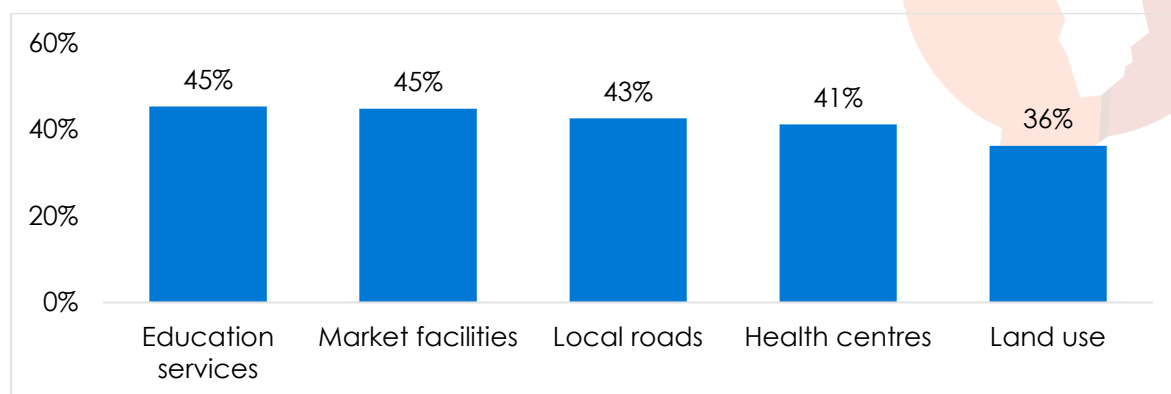
Respondents were asked: How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way that your district or city council is delivering the following services, or haven't you heard enough to say:
Ensuring health centres are well staffed and stocked with medical supplies?
Ensuring local market facilities are clean and well managed?
Construction and maintenance of local roads?
Planning and managing land use in the city or district?
Providing education services at all levels in the district or city?
(% who say "fairly satisfied" or "very satisfied")

A bivariate correlation analysis of the five items reveals moderate positive and statistically significant Pearson correlation coefficients (.436 to .568) (Table 4). This means that while respondents do differentiate between the different services, those who are dissatisfied with one service are also likely to be dissatisfied with other services in the municipality. For subsequent analysis, this allows us to create an aggregate *service delivery index* by averaging the responses of all five survey questions on a scale from 0 to 3 (*0=not at all satisfied, 1=not very satisfied, 2=somewhat satisfied, 3=very satisfied*).[9]

Table 4: Correlation of five service delivery items | Uganda | 2022

	Health centres	Market facilities	Local roads	Land use	Education services
Health centres	1				
Market facilities	.568**	1			
N	3342				
Local roads	.436**	.495**	1		
N	3354	3344			
Land use	.471**	.531**	.554**	1	
N	3110	3102	3105		
Education services	.494**	.521**	.478**	.565**	1
N	3302	3292	3305	3105	

*Note: Each question captures how satisfied citizens are with different aspects of district council service delivery. The correlations show how much overlap there is between citizens' evaluations of different services. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

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[9] The validity of this index is confirmed by a factor analysis (maximum likelihood method) that enables the discovery of this sort of regularity within a data set. In this case, it confirms that a single index is a valid summary measure of five component indicators because it (a) accounts for 62% of their variance and (b) captures the idea of municipal service delivery. The index is also statistically reliable (Cronbach's alpha=.844).

Given Uganda's growing levels of urbanisation and Parliament's approval of 15 cities as new administrative units in April 2020, we take advantage of the larger-than-usual sample of the Afrobarometer Round 9 survey to explore citizens' evaluations of local government councils in the new cities. At the time of the Round 9 survey, 11 of the 15 cities were operational. We created a sub-sample of all new cities for which we have at least 40 survey respondents, allowing us to capture the variation in satisfaction with service delivery at the city level (Figure 15).[10]

The best-performing city in this sub-sample is Arua (N=104) in the Northern Region of Uganda. Its average score on the service delivery index is 1.6 on the three-point scale, signaling a mediocre level of service delivery. At the other end of the spectrum, we find Gulu (N=104), also located in the Northern Region, where the median respondent is not very satisfied with basic service delivery (index score: 1.2).

Figure 15: Local government service delivery scores | by city council | 2022
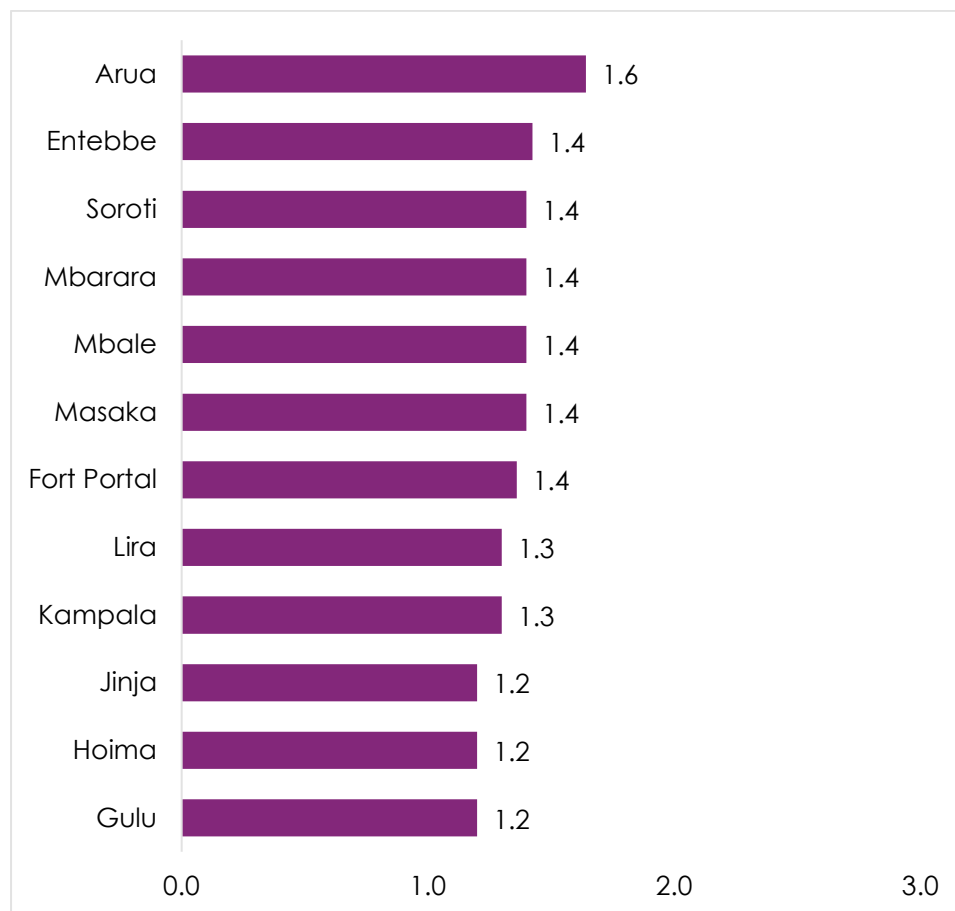
Note: In this aggregate service delivery index, the responses of all five survey questions are averaged and placed on a scale of 0 to 3 (0=not at all satisfied, 1=not very satisfied, 2=somewhat satisfied, 3=very satisfied). For the question phrasing, see Figure 14. Figure 15 shows the average scores for newly designated cities with at least 40 respondents in the survey sample, along with Kampala.

Financial management and public participation

Apart from elections, citizen participation is "about the ways in which citizens exercise influence and control over the decisions that affect them" (Devas & Grant, 2003, p. 309). A hallmark of good local government is the accessibility of information about available resources and how they are used. All else being equal, it is easier for citizens and organised

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[10] This comparison also includes Uganda's capital, Kampala, even though it is not one of the newly designated cities.

civil society to hold councillors and local bureaucrats accountable if they have reliable information about how money is allocated and spent to meet various local needs. Using three related survey questions, we probe citizens' ability to play a role in these processes (Figure 16).

Across Uganda, only a quarter (26%) of respondents are confident that their council provides sufficient opportunities for ordinary citizens to participate in local government budgeting and planning processes. Even fewer say that their council makes it possible to track what happens with these resources once they are allocated (21%) or eliminates corruption and the misuse of public funds (19%).
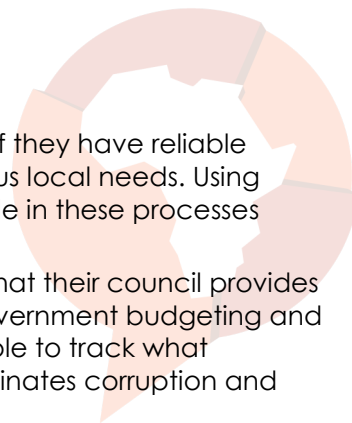
Figure 16: Confidence that council will deliver on responsibilities | Uganda | 2022
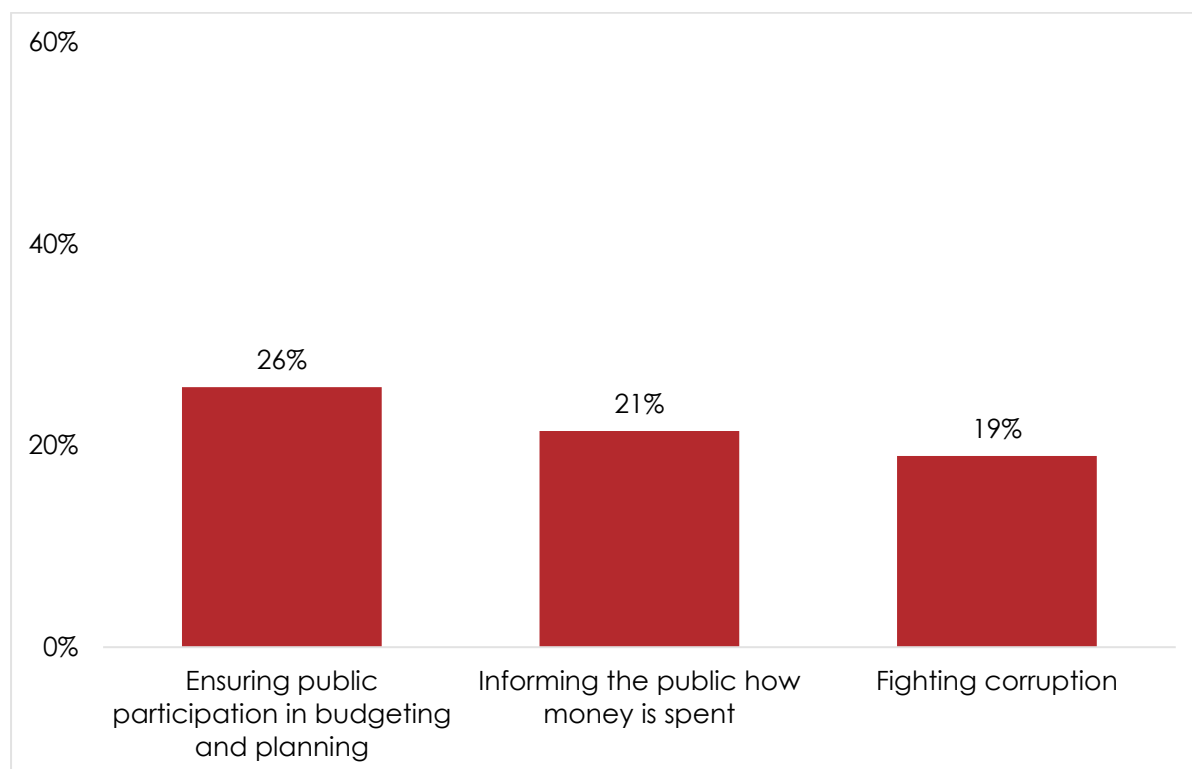
Respondents were asked: How much confidence do you have in your district or city council to deliver on the following responsibilities, or haven't you heard enough to say:
> Ensuring that citizens like you have the opportunity to participate in local government budgeting and planning processes?
> Ensuring that the public is informed about how the district or city council spends money allocated in the district or city council budget?
> Ensuring that corruption and misuse of public funds are eliminated within its jurisdiction?
(% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

Following the example of the *service delivery index* above, we create a *financial management index* that averages citizens' responses across the three questions on a scale from 0 to 3 (0=not at all confident, 1=just a little confident, 2=somewhat confident, 3=very confident). As can be seen in Table 5, the correlations between the three questions are even higher than in the previous index, suggesting that the creation of this index is appropriate.[11]

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[11] A factor analysis (maximum likelihood method) confirms that a single index is a valid summary measure of the three component indicators because it (a) accounts for 73% of their variance and (b) captures the idea of municipal financial management and public participation. The index is also statistically reliable (Cronbach's alpha=.812).
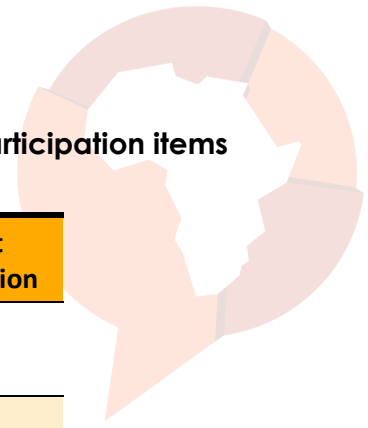
Table 5: Correlation of three financial management/public participation items | Uganda | 2022

	Budget participation	Inform public	Fight corruption
Budget participation **N**	1		
Inform public **N**	.623** 3301	1	
Fight corruption **N**	.528** 3277	.617** 3299	1

While local government should be attuned to the needs and wants of residents in general, it might also be expected to be better than high-level government at engaging the poor and other marginalised groups in the community. Yet scholars have long cast doubt on this assumption. Indeed, participatory processes are often tweaked in ways that reinforce connections between local leaders and elites, with only limited success at creating more inclusive avenues for the poor, and little improvement in terms of shifting actual spending priorities in favour of the marginalised (Devas & Grant, 2003; Paul, 2022).

A comparison of financial management index scores by gender, education level, and wealth shows a near-unanimous verdict: Citizens have "just a little" confidence that their local government council will perform these three functions (Figure 17). That is, while these results do not confirm an anti-poor bias in how local government councils deliver on their responsibilities of financial management and public participation, they reveal underperformance across the board. We see slightly more variation across geographic location (especially between Central and Northern/Eastern regions) and political partisanship. Yet here, too, citizens have at best "just a little" confidence and at worst close to no confidence at all.

When exploring the local government council-level variation using the same sub-sample of cities as in the previous analysis, we see that once again Gulu city council is performing worst (0.5), along with Fort Portal city in the Western Region (Figure 18). On average, the respondents from these cities say they have no confidence at all that their local government council will execute a participatory budgeting and planning process, inform the public about how the district spends money, or fight corruption. In contrast, Arua city scores more than twice as high on the four-point scale (1.2). Given the consistency of high (Arua) and low (Gulu) performers across the two indices, it is perhaps not surprising that the two indices are also correlated with each other at the city level (r=0.8), suggesting an intuitive relationship between financial management and public participation on the one hand and service provision on the other (also see Figure A.2 in the appendix).

Figure 17: Financial management index score | by demographic group | Uganda | 2022

	Uganda	0.83
Location	Rural	0.88
	Urban	0.70
Region	Northern	1.01
	Eastern	1.00
	Western	0.92
	Kampala	0.48
	Central	0.44
Age	18-29 years	0.81
	30-49 years	0.82
	50+ years	0.90
Gender	Men	0.83
	Women	0.83
Education	No formal education	0.98
	Primary	0.82
	Secondary	0.82
	Post-secondary	0.76
Lived poverty	No	0.74
	Low	0.93
	Moderate	0.79
	High	0.79
Demand for democracy	Low	1.24
	Moderate	0.93
	High	0.91
	Full	0.76
Partisanship	Support ruling party	0.96
	Support opposition parties	0.63
	Non-partisan	0.82

Note: In this aggregate financial management index, the responses of all three survey questions are averaged and placed on a scale of 0 to 3 (0=not at all, 1=just a little, 2=somewhat, 3=a lot). For the question phrasing, see Figure 16. Figure 17 shows the average scores by sub-group. Only includes districts with at least 40 survey respondents.

Figure 18: Local government financial management index scores | by city council
| Uganda | 2022
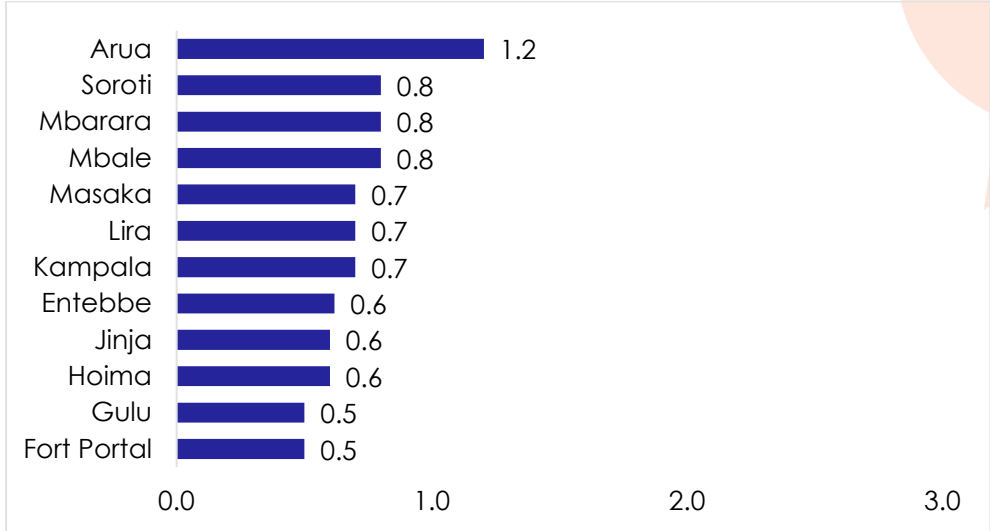
Figure shows average financial management index scores for newly designated cities with at least 40 respondents in the survey sample, along with Kampala.

Overall performance approval

Every five years, Ugandans get a chance to judge the performance of their local councillors at the ballot box. At shorter intervals, Afrobarometer asks survey respondents to evaluate their elected representatives between elections. A comparison across seven survey rounds shows that Ugandans have become less satisfied with their overall performance (Figure 19). In 2005, a strong majority of 71% "approved" or "strongly approved" of their local councillors' job performance, 21 percentage points above the 18-country average of 50%. While Ugandans have consistently been above average in their assessments of their local councillors, by 2022 only 55% held a favourable view. Moreover, the assessments reflected in the service delivery and financial management index scores in 2022 suggest that higher overall performance ratings may be unlikely in the near future.

Comparing councillors' performance to that of other Ugandan elected representatives shows that councillors have fared only slightly better than MPs during this period, and for the most part worse than President Yoweri Museveni (Krönke & Kakumba, 2022).

Figure 19: Approval of local councillor performance | 18 countries | 2005-2022
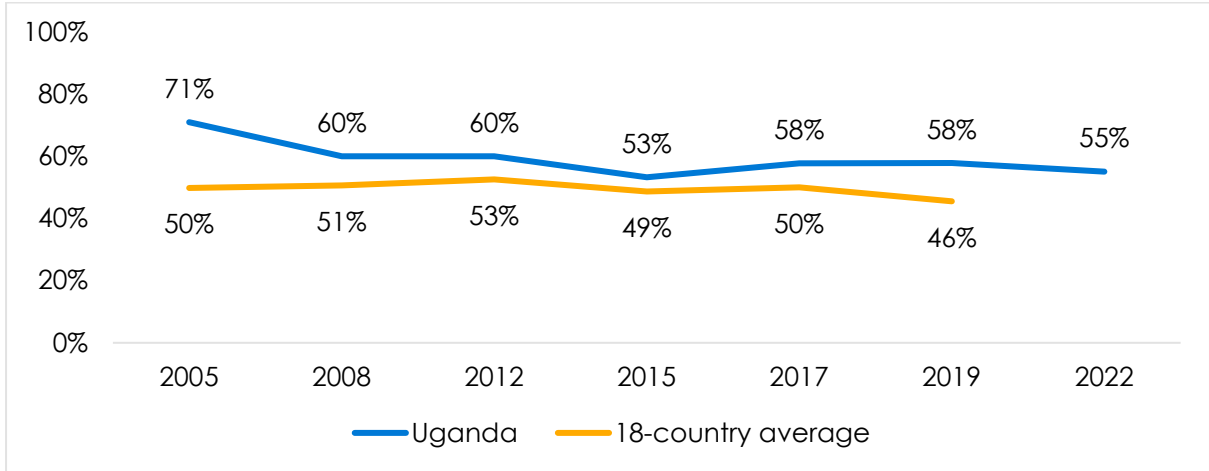
Respondents were asked: *Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past 12 months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Your local government councillor? (% who "approve" or "strongly approve")*
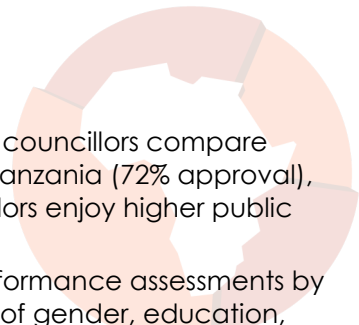
Despite the downward trend in their performance ratings, Ugandan councillors compare favourably to their peers in most other countries (Figure 20). Only in Tanzania (72% approval), Benin (71%), Burkina Faso (67%), and Mozambique (61%) did councillors enjoy higher public approbation in Round 8.

As on the financial management index, a breakdown of overall performance assessments by demographic variables shows there is very little variation along lines of gender, education, and wealth (Figure 21). We see large differences, however, between residents of Kampala and the Central Region, where only 38% and 45%, respectively, approve of their councillors' performance, and the country's Northern Region, 70% approve. Similarly, we see a clear divide along partisan lines: 47% of opposition party supporters approve, vs. 61% of ruling party adherents.

Figure 20: Approval of local councillor performance | 31 countries* | 2019/2021
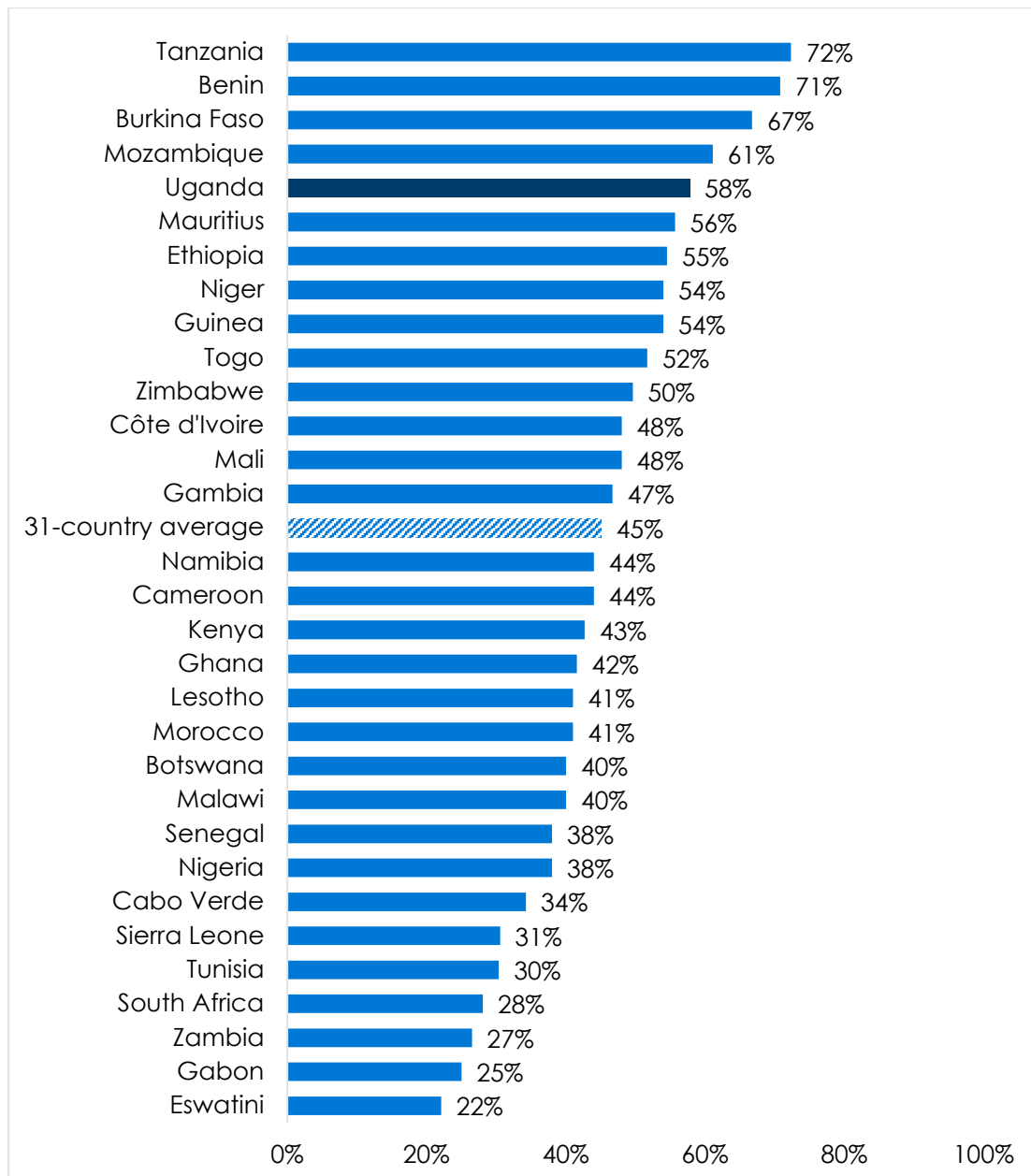
Respondents were asked: Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past 12 months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Your local government councillor? (% who "approve" or "strongly approve")
**Question was not asked in Angola, Liberia, and Sudan.*

Figure 21: Approval of local councillor performance | by socio-demographic group | Uganda | 2022
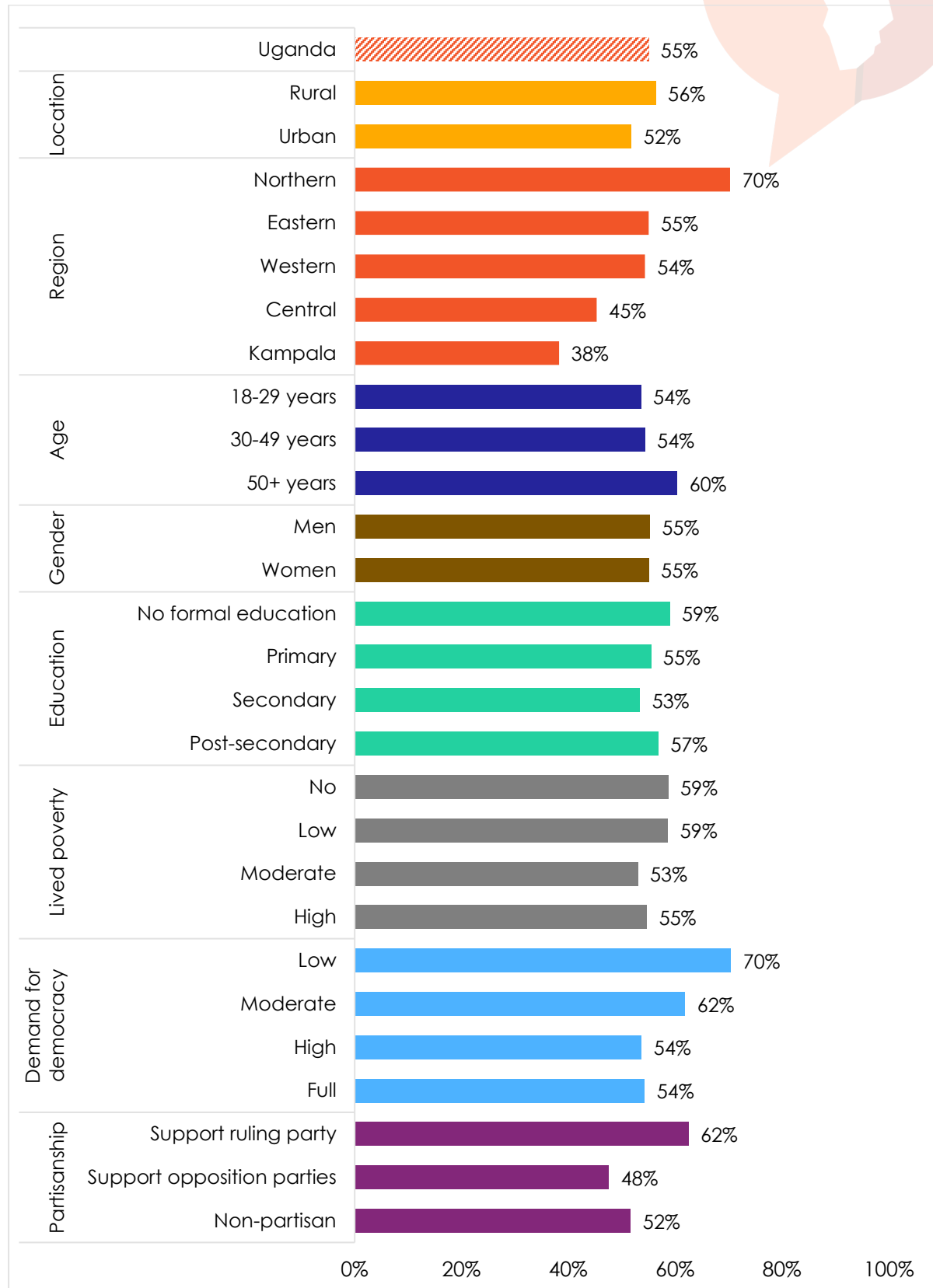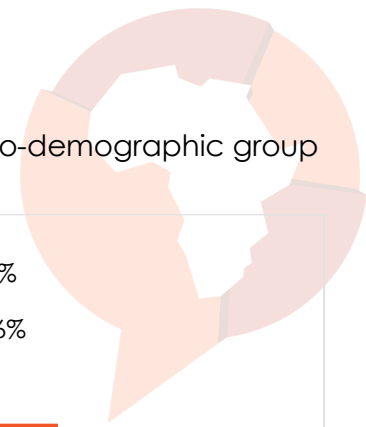
	Uganda	55%
Location	Rural	56%
	Urban	52%
Region	Northern	70%
	Eastern	55%
	Western	54%
	Central	45%
	Kampala	38%
Age	18-29 years	54%
	30-49 years	54%
	50+ years	60%
Gender	Men	55%
	Women	55%
Education	No formal education	59%
	Primary	55%
	Secondary	53%
	Post-secondary	57%
Lived poverty	No	59%
	Low	59%
	Moderate	53%
	High	55%
Demand for democracy	Low	70%
	Moderate	62%
	High	54%
	Full	54%
Partisanship	Support ruling party	62%
	Support opposition parties	48%
	Non-partisan	52%

Respondents were asked: *Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past 12 months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Your local government councillor? (% who "approve" or "strongly approve")*

What drives performance approval?

Having examined how citizens see their councillors' constituency work and integrity, we now turn to the question of whether these factors influence citizens' evaluations of their elected representatives. In other words, what drives people's performance evaluations of their elected representatives? We test how useful each of the factors – councillor-citizen engagement and perceptions of councillor corruption – as well as several other demographic, attitudinal, and behavioural factors are in predicting assessments of different aspects of performance.

In the previous section, we looked at local government performance in three ways: 1) service delivery, 2) financial management and public participation, and 3) overall performance. While the three measures are correlated at the individual level, the correlation coefficients are relatively small (Table A.1 in the appendix). Therefore, our analysis will treat each variable as a separate outcome to be explained (dependent variable).

Earlier we showed that more recently established local government councils tend to have smaller populations. Following the rationale for the creation of additional district councils, smaller local government units should, all else being equal, provide better services to their citizens. A cursory look at the relationship between population size and citizens' performance evaluations of councillors in the new city councils, however, shows that there is no relationship between population size and two of the three performance indices (Figure 22). To test this finding of the city council sub-sample in a more systematic manner, we include population size as a key variable in one of our regression models.

We use OLS regression models to estimate the relationship between our key independent variables at the district council level (population size) and individual level (*contact councillor*, *councillor listens*, *corrupt councillors*) with our three main dependent variables. We also include several control variables introduced above (a respondent's location, age, gender, education, level of lived poverty, and demand for democracy). Lastly, we include two variables that probe the extent to which respondents talk about politics with others on a regular basis (*discuss politics*) and listen to news on the radio (*radio news*).[12]

The regression analysis allows us to 1) understand which factors are related to our dependent variables and 2) explore the strength of these relationships. We use the most recent available survey data from 2022. For ease of interpretation, each model also includes the standardised beta coefficients, which allow for a comparison of the relative weight of the independent variables within each model.

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[12] The exact questions are as follows:
"When you get together with your friends or family, would you say you discuss political matters: 0=Never? 1=Occasionally? 2=Frequently?"
"How often do you get news from the following sources: Radio? 0=Never, 1=Less than once a month, 2=A few times a month, 3=A few times a week, 4=Every day."

Figure 22: District size and local government performance | Uganda | 2022

Service delivery

R² = 0.0002

Service delivery index

Hoima
Entebbe
Masaka
Arua
Lira
Mbarara
Mbale
Gulu
Soroti
Fort Portal
Jinja

Population (in thousand)

Financial management

R² = 0.2528

Financial management index

Mbarara
Arua
Jinja
Fort Portal
Gulu
Hoima
Masaka
Soroti
Mbale
Entebbe
Lira

Population (in thousand)

Councillor performance

R² = 0.0024

Overall performance

Arua
Entebbe
Soroti
Mbarara
Gulu
Hoima
Lira
Masaka
Mbale
Fort Portal
Jinja

Population (in thousand)

Note: Population data is from 2020/2021. The scatter plots show only districts with at least 40 survey respondents and exclude Wakiso and Kampala because they are outliers.

Results

The results of the OLS regression are reported in a separate table for each dependent variable. Each table shows three models. Models 1, 4, and 7 (base) include only the standard variables used throughout the analysis so far (e.g. in Figure 21: Approval of local councillors' performance, by socio-demographic group).[13] Models 2, 5, and 8 (individual level) and all individual-level variables, while models 3, 6, and 9 (full) include the population size for each respondent's district council. For these last three models, we exclude respondents from Kampala and Wakiso because these districts have far bigger populations than the other councils and thus are clear outliers. Therefore, the results in these models are more exploratory than the others.

Service delivery index: As shown in Table 6 Model 1, only two variables are statistically significant predictors of citizens' satisfaction with basic service delivery. Committed democrats, poorer respondents, and those with higher levels of formal education are less likely to approve of their district council's service delivery performance. The remaining predictors – age, gender, and urban/rural location – do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

More interestingly, the results in Model 2 suggest that in addition to gender, lived poverty, education, and commitment to democracy, recent contact with a local councillor contributes to positive performance evaluations. Moreover, so do respondents' perceptions that councillors try their best to listen and are not corrupt – the two factors with the highest beta coefficients in Model 2 (.179 and .174, respectively). This is good news, as the core drivers of citizen satisfaction are related to what councillors do rather than to citizens' life circumstances. Put differently, councillors have the power to change the perceptions of their work.

The inclusion of the district council's population size (Model 3) does not improve the fit of the model, and citizens' perceptions of local government service delivery do not vary systematically depending on the district council's population size. While this does not decisively show that decentralisation fails to improve service delivery in Uganda, it does, at the very least, provide some evidence that decentralisation needs to entail more than just decreasing the population size in a given municipality to improve satisfaction with service delivery.

Financial management index: The results for the financial management index, shown in Table 7 (models 4-6), reveal both similarities to and differences from those for the service delivery index. On the one hand, Ugandans who are committed democrats and those who experience lived poverty are less satisfied with their district council's effort to implement a transparent budgeting process and encourage public participation. This is in line with our findings in models 1-3. Similarly, citizens who recently contacted a local councillor score higher on the financial management index, all else being equal. Moreover, the perception that councillors are responsive has a statistically significant and positive impact on the dependent variable. In fact, it has the highest beta coefficient in models 5 and 6, which means that compared to all other variables in these models, councillor responsiveness best predicts citizen satisfaction with councillor performance on the financial management and public participation indicators.

On the other hand, the results in this set of models differ from those for service delivery in two ways. First, while education predicted citizens' satisfaction with service delivery, this variable no longer reaches statistical significance for the financial management index.

Second, we find some tentative evidence for the hypothesised positive effects of decentralisation. In Model 6, district council population is a statistically significant predictor at the p≤0.01level. That is, citizens living in districts with larger populations score lower on the

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[13] However, we exclude partisanship as a predictor variable, as expectations for the relationship with performance evaluations would vary depending on the partisanship of both citizens and councillors. While such an analysis would generate important insights, it goes beyond the scope of this analysis.

financial management index. This suggests some positive consequences of creating smaller local government councils in recent years.
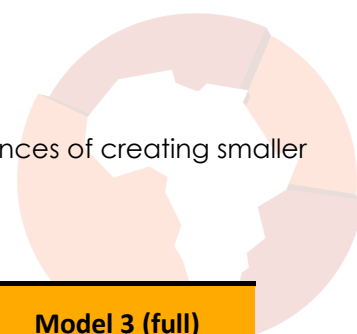
Table 6: Service delivery index | Uganda | 2022

	Model 1 (base)		Model 2 (individual level)		Model 3 (full)	
	Unstd. coeff. (std. error)	Std. coeff. beta	Unstd. coeff. (std. error)	Std. coeff. beta	Unstd. coeff. (std. error)	Std. coeff. beta
(Constant)	2.804*** (.111)		2.816*** (.118)		2.955*** (.138)	
Location (ref=urban)	.018 (.031)	.010	-.017 (.031)	-.010	-.071 (.037)	-.038
Age	.028 (.019)	.028	.016 (.018)	.016	-.006 (.020)	-.006
Gender (ref=male)	.046 (.027)	.031	.061* (.027)	.040	.043 (.030)	.028
Education	-.054** (.018)	-.058	-.058** (.018)	-.062	-.064** (.020)	-.066
Lived Poverty Index	-.116*** (.017)	-.126	-.086*** (.017)	-.094	-.075*** (.018)	-.081
Demand for democracy	-.096*** (.017)	-.103	-.078*** (.016)	-.083	-.069*** (.018)	-.074
Contact councillor			.073*** (.016)	.083	.076*** (.017)	.086
Councillor listens†			.154*** (.016)	.179	.151*** (.017)	.178
Corrupt councillors‡			-.151*** (.015)	-.174	-.133*** (.017)	-.150
Discuss politics			-.007 (.020)	-.006	-.022 (.022)	-.019
Radio news			-.005 (.010)	-.009	.001 (.011)	.002
District council population					.000	-.011
Adj R²	.029		.106		.090	
Observations	3060		2939		2519	

*Note: Cells report unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors (in brackets). *** $p \leq 0.001$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; * $p \leq 0.05$. Significant correlations are highlighted in bold. †=A higher score reflects better performance (more effective). ‡= A higher score reflects poorer performance.*
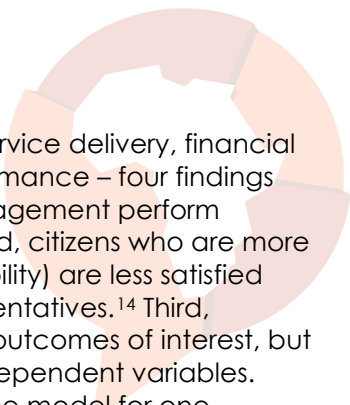
Table 7: Financial management index | Uganda | 2022

	Model 4 (base)		Model 5 (individual level)		Model 6 (full)	
	Unstd. coeff. (Std. error)	Std. coeff. beta	Unstd. coeff. (Std. error)	Std. coeff. beta	Unstd. coeff. (Std. error)	Std. coeff. beta
(Constant)	2.016*** (.112)		1.876*** (.123)		2.188*** (.144)	
Location (ref=urban)	.175*** (.031)	.099	.135*** (.032)	.076	.067 (.038)	.034
Age	.034 (.019)	.032	.025 (.019)	.024	.014 (.021)	.013
Gender (ref=male)	.003 (.028)	.002	.032 (.028)	.020	.025 (.031)	.016
Education	-.026 (.018)	-.027	-.031 (.018)	-.033	-.016 (.020)	-.016
Lived Poverty Index	-.071*** (.017)	-.074	-.061*** (.017)	-.063	-.088*** (.019)	-.089
Demand for democracy	-.109*** (.017)	-.111	-.099*** (.017)	-.101	-.101*** (.019)	-.101
Contact councillor			.070*** (.017)	.074	.056** (.018)	.059
Councillor listens†			.155*** (.016)	.172	.146*** (.017)	.163
Corrupt councillors‡			-.031* (.016)	-.035	.002 (.018)	.003
Discuss politics			.008 (.021)	.006	-.005 (.023)	-.004
Radio news			-.001 (.011)	-.002	.004 (.012)	.006
District council population					.000*** (.000)	-.068
Adj R²	.027		.068		.060	
Observations	3236		3111		2655	

Note: Cells report unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors (in brackets). *** p ≤ 0.001; ** p ≤ 0.01; * p ≤ 0.05. Significant correlations are highlighted in bold. †=A higher score reflects better performance (more effective). ‡= A higher score reflects poorer performance.

Overall councillor performance: Models 7, 8, and 9, shown in Table 8, confirm several of the results from the earlier analyses. Once again, contact with councillors and the perception that these elected representatives try their best to listen to citizens' concerns are positively correlated with citizens' perceptions of overall councillor performance. Similarly, and unsurprisingly, when citizens see their councillors as not corrupt, they also award them higher

overall performance scores. In contrast, committed democrats are less satisfied with the performance of their local elected representatives. At the same time, demographic variables are not consistently statistically significant predictors of councillor performance. Lastly, while district council population and overall performance are correlated in the expected direction – i.e. small population linked to better performance scores – the relationship does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

Table 8: Overall councillor performance | Uganda | 2022

	Model 7 (base)		Model 8 individual level)		Model 9 (full)	
	Unstd. coeff. (Std. error)	Std. coeff. beta	Unstd. coeff. (Std. error)	Std. coeff. beta	Unstd. coeff. (Std. error)	Std. coeff. beta
(Constant)	2.649*** (.130)		2.659*** (.131)		2.626***	
Location (ref=urban)	.090* (.036)	.044	.029 (.034)	0.014	.015 (.041)	0.007
Age	.036 (.022)	.030	.008 (.020)	0.006	.001 (.022)	0.001
Gender (ref=male)	-.016 (.032)	-.009	.025 (.030)	0.014	.019 (.033)	0.011
Education	-.031 (.021)	-.028	-.045* (.020)	-0.040	-.046* (.022)	-0.040
Lived Poverty Index	-.064** (.020)	-.058	-.029 (.019)	-0.026	.000 (.020)	0.000
Demand for democracy	-.060** (.019)	-.054	-.039* (.018)	-0.035	-.040* (.020)	-0.036
Contact councillor			.135*** (.018)	0.126	.148*** (.020)	0.140
Councillor listens†			.261*** (.017)	0.254	.243*** (.019)	0.241
Corrupt councillors‡			-.261*** (.017)	-0.253	-.231*** (.019)	-0.219
Discuss politics			.053* (.022)	0.040	.060* (.025)	0.045
Radio news			-.001 (.011)	-0.001	.008 (.012)	0.012
District council population					-.000 (.000)	-0.013
Adj R²	.008		.181		2677	
Observations	3272		3141		.154	

Note: Cells report unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors (in brackets). *** p ≤ 0.001; ** p ≤ 0.01; * p ≤ 0.05. Significant correlations are highlighted in bold. †=A higher score reflects better performance (more effective). ‡= A higher score reflects poorer performance.

When we compare results across the three dependent variables – service delivery, financial management and public participation, and overall councillor performance – four findings stand out. First, variables that directly relate to citizen-councillor engagement perform consistently and as predicted across all dependent variables. Second, citizens who are more committed to democratic processes (and by implication accountability) are less satisfied with the performance of local government councils and their representatives.[14] Third, demographic predictors are not only less powerful in predicting the outcomes of interest, but they are also not consistently statistically significant across all three dependent variables. Lastly, the inclusion of district council population size only improves the model for one dependent variable, the financial management index. Although models 3, 6, and 9 test the effect of decentralisation in a very coarse manner, these results cast doubt on the argument that decentralisation has a universally positive effect on local governance, at least as it is currently implemented in Uganda.

Conclusion

The structure of Uganda's local government has undergone significant changes since the enactment of the Local Governments Act in 1997. A primary objective of decentralisation efforts was to improve the delivery of basic government services to local communities, allowing them to "own" government programs. But our analysis has shown that decentralisation and the creation of 90 new districts since 1997 has not improved the relationship between Ugandans and their local councillors.

Indeed, we show that citizens have become increasingly dissatisfied with their political representatives. Over time, fewer and fewer Ugandans have said that councillors try to listen to constituents' concerns. Fewer have expressed satisfaction with their councillors' overall performance. And fewer than half of citizens rate their local government positively on the provision of basic services, financial management, and transparency. None of these trends bodes well for the citizen-councillor relationship.

Using regression analyses, we find that citizens who see councillors as corrupt and unwilling to listen to their concerns are least satisfied with the performance of their elected representatives. In contrast, Ugandans who interact with councillors provide more positive evaluations. Another important finding is that people's personal background plays only a minor role in how they judge the performance of their councillor. Citizens' democratic attitudes and experiences with councillors are far more important drivers of their performance evaluations than their personal circumstances. These findings not only go some way toward explaining the over-time changes mentioned above, but also imply that it is up to councillors to improve how they engage with citizens in order to reverse the current trends.

Finally, we use the larger-than-usual sample of the 2022 Afrobarometer survey to explore the relationship between a district's population size and citizens' performance evaluations of local government councils. The mixed results of our exploratory analysis indicate that the proliferation of districts has not had the intended positive effect. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to disentangle the effects that reassigning administrative responsibilities and adding local government councils in some parts of the country (but not others) might have on the satisfactory provision of basic government services, our findings may provide useful insights into how policy makers and civil society could reverse some of the negative trends we document.

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[14] These results are stronger and more consistent than in a similar analysis of MP performance (Krönke & Kakumba, 2022).
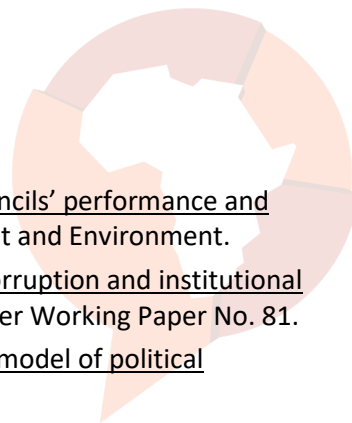
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Figure A.1: Local councillors listen | 32 countries* | 2019/2021
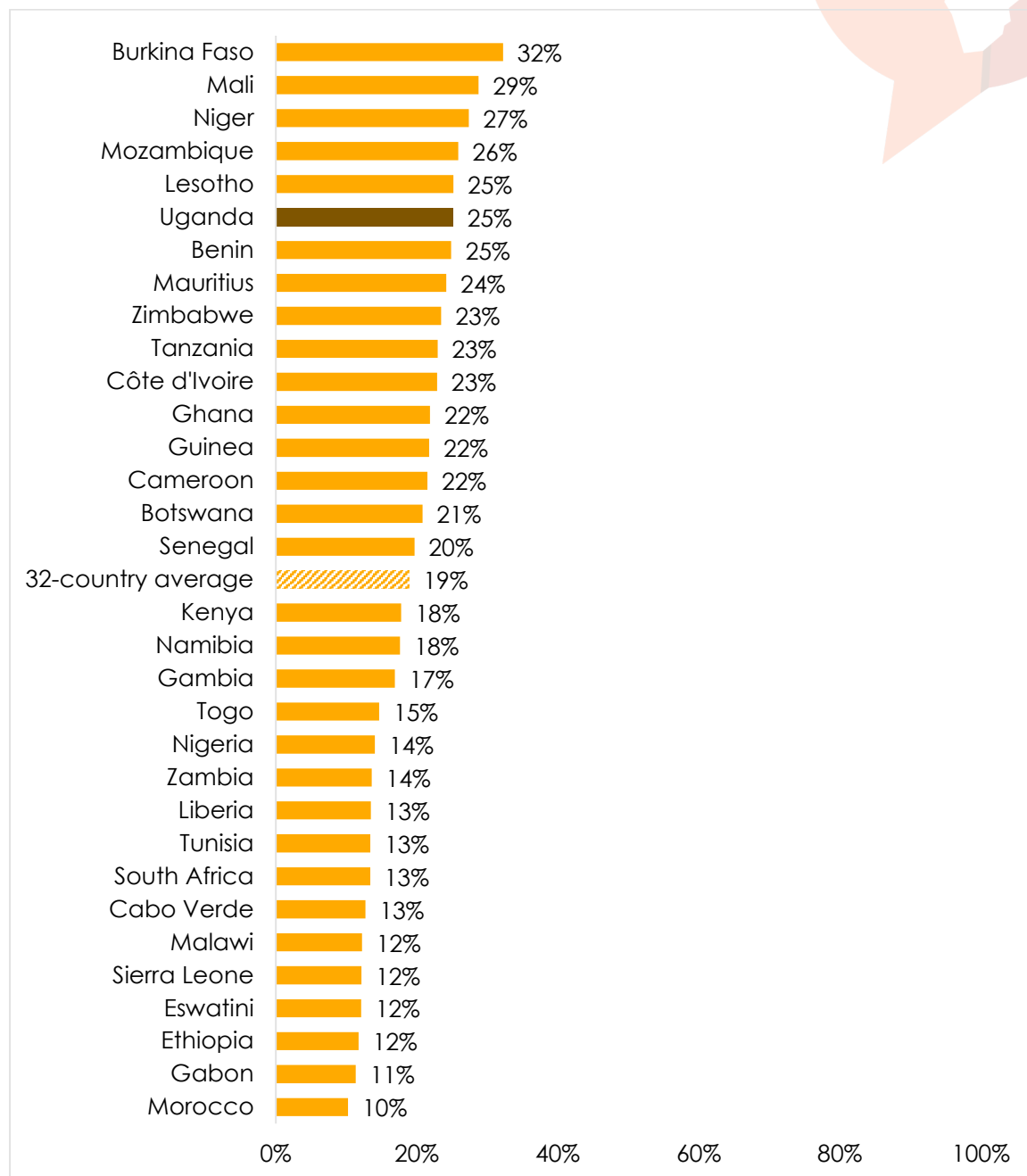
Respondents were asked: How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what people like you have to say: Local councillors? (% who say "often" or "always")
*Question was not asked in Angola or Sudan.

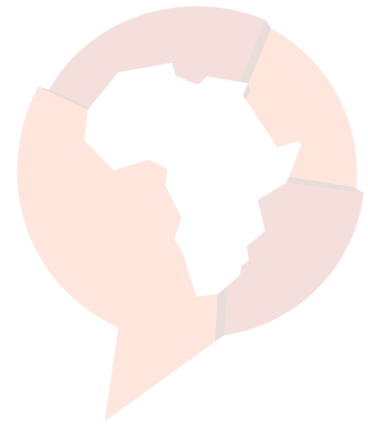**Figure A.2: Service delivery and financial management indices** | by city council
| Uganda | 2022
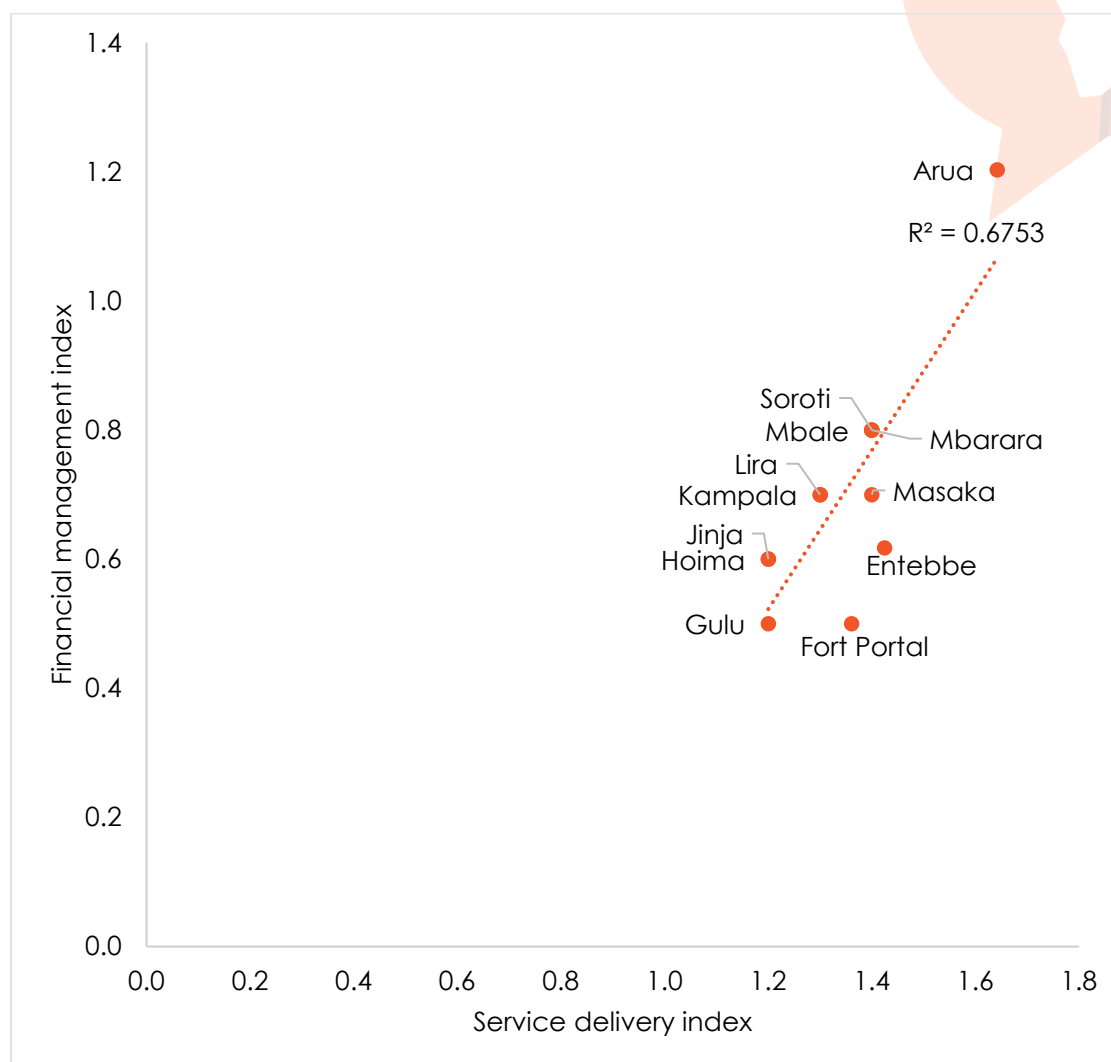
Table A.1: Correlation of performance measures | Uganda | 2022

	Service delivery	Financial management	Councillor performance
Service delivery **N**	1		
Financial management **N**	.273** 2997	1	
Councillor performance **N**	.326** 3000	.221** 3182	1

Matthias Krönke is a PhD candidate at the University of Cape Town and a researcher in the Afrobarometer Analysis Unit.

Makanga Ronald Kakumba is a research associate for Hatchile Consult Ltd. in Uganda.

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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