

Angolans highlight police corruption and use of excessive force

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 641 | Carlos Pacatolo, David Boio, and Victorino Roque

Summary

Between March and September 2020, human-rights groups documented 10 killings by Angola's police and military, including the deaths of five boys aged 14-16 (Amnesty International, 2020). While accusations of police brutality are hardly new in Angola, critics have compiled scores of recent cases of excessive force, arbitrary arrest, and extrajudicial killing by the police, often as part of repressing public protests related to COVID-19 restrictions, precarious living conditions, and political rights (Human Rights Watch, 2020; Amnesty International, 2022; Marques de Marais, 2018).

Interior Minister Eugênio César Laborinho added fuel to the fire when he appeared to justify police abuses by telling a national news conference that "the police are not on the streets to distribute sweets, nor to give chocolates" (DW, 2020).

This dispatch reports on a special survey module included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 (2021/2023) questionnaire to explore Africans' experiences and assessments of police professionalism.

Findings in Angola show that a majority of citizens experience insecurity and fear in their neighbourhoods and say the government needs to do a better job of reducing crime. Among Angolans who interacted with the police during the previous year, many report having to pay a bribe to get help or to avoid problems. Few express trust in the police, who are more widely seen as corrupt than other key state institutions.

A majority of Angolans believe that the police stop drivers without good reason and use excessive force in managing public demonstrations and dealing with criminal suspects, and many say the police engage in criminal activities.

Afrobarometer surveys

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 (2021/2023) are currently underway. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Angola, led by Ovulongwa – Estudos de Opinião Pública, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,200 adult Angolans between 9 February and 8 March 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/- 3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. A previous survey was conducted in Angola in 2019.

Key findings

- More than six in 10 Angolans (63%) say they felt unsafe walking in their neighbourhood at least once during the previous year, while 54% say they feared crime in their home at least once.
 - Insecurity and fear are more common experiences in cities than in rural areas.
- Among citizens who sought police assistance during the previous year, 41% say they had to pay bribes (“gasosa” or “sentimentos”). And 37% of those who encountered the police in other settings say they paid a bribe to avoid problems.
- Almost half (45%) of Angolans say “most” or “all” police officials are corrupt, the worst rating among 12 institutions and groups of leaders the survey asked about. Perceptions of widespread police corruption increased by 6 percentage points compared to 2019.
- Two-thirds (66%) of Angolans say the police “often” or “always” stop drivers without good reason, and majorities say the police use excessive force during protests (57%) and with suspected criminals (55%). Almost four in 10 (38%) say the police frequently engage in criminal activities.
- Fewer than two in 10 Angolans (18%) say the police “often” or “always” act in a professional manner and respect the rights of all citizens, while a remarkable 60% say they “rarely” or “never” do.
- A majority (59%) of citizens consider it likely that the police will take reports of gender-based violence seriously.
- More than two-thirds (68%) of Angolans describe the government’s performance in reducing crime as “fairly bad” or “very bad.”

Sense of insecurity

The most basic role of the police is to protect people and their property. Do Angolans feel protected?

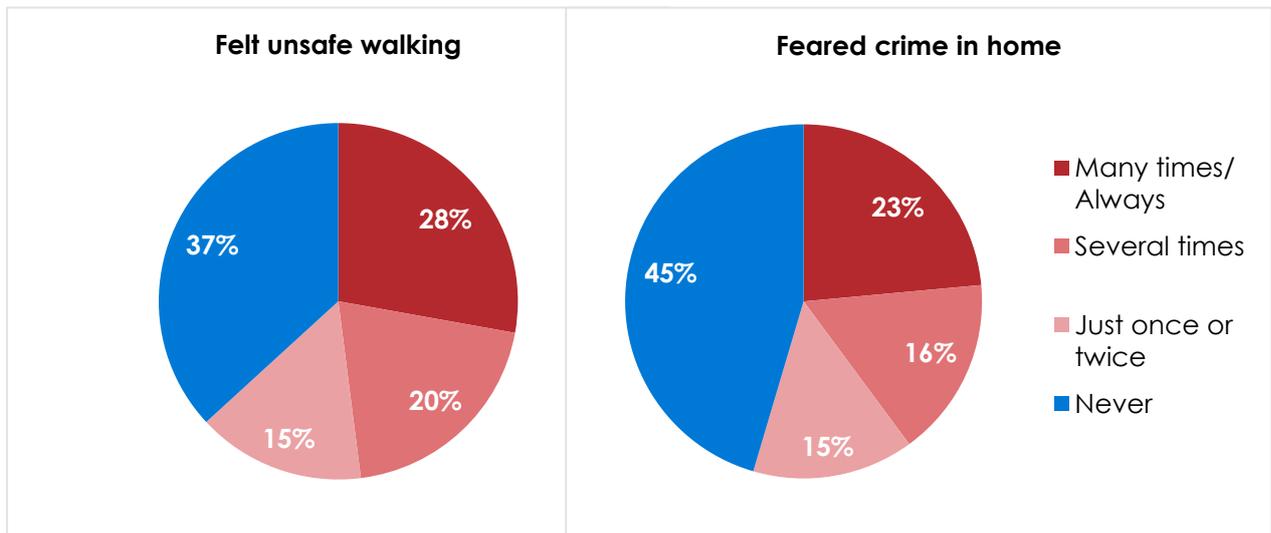
Almost two-thirds (63%) of citizens say they felt unsafe walking in their neighbourhood at least once during the previous year, including 48% who say this happened “several times,” “many times,” or always” (Figure 1).

More than half (54%) say they feared crime in their home at least once, including 40% who say this occurred at least “several times.”¹

The proportion of Angolans who report feeling unsafe in their neighbourhood at least “several times” rose by 5 percentage points between 2019 and 2022, while the share who report multiple experiences of fearing crime rose by a marginal 3 points (the survey’s margin of error) (Figure 2).

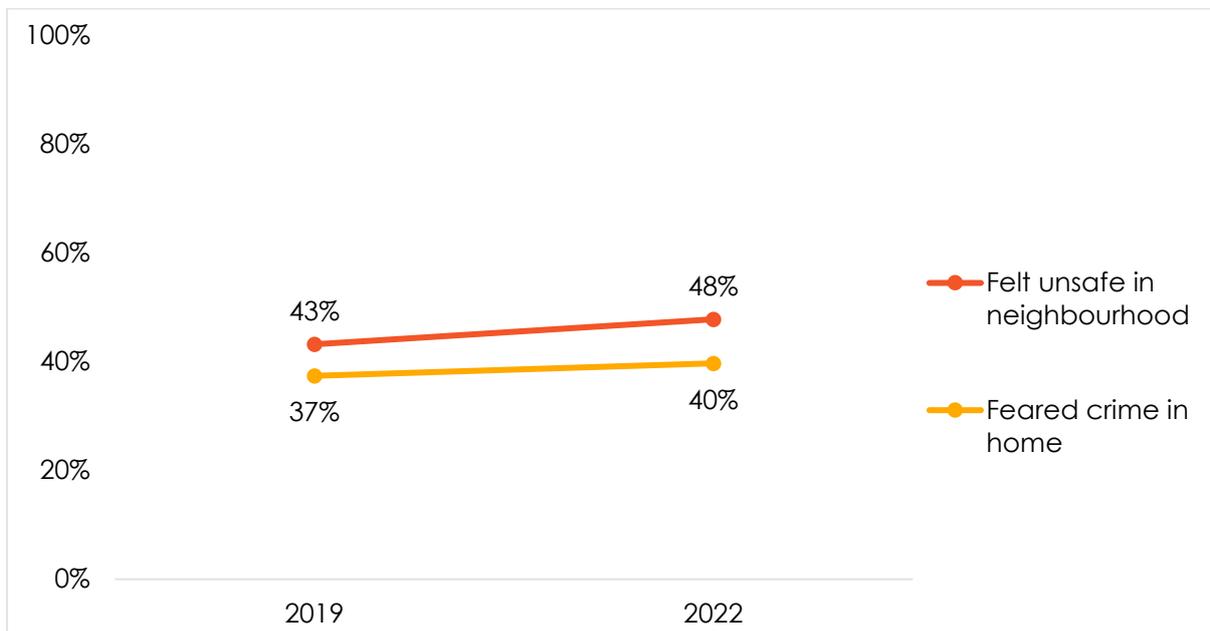
¹ Due to rounding, percentages for combined categories reported in the text may differ slightly from the sum of sub-categories shown in figures.

Figure 1: Insecurity and fear of crime | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Felt unsafe walking in your neighbourhood? Feared crime in your own home?

Figure 2: Experienced insecurity and fear of crime at least 'several times' | Angola | 2019-2022

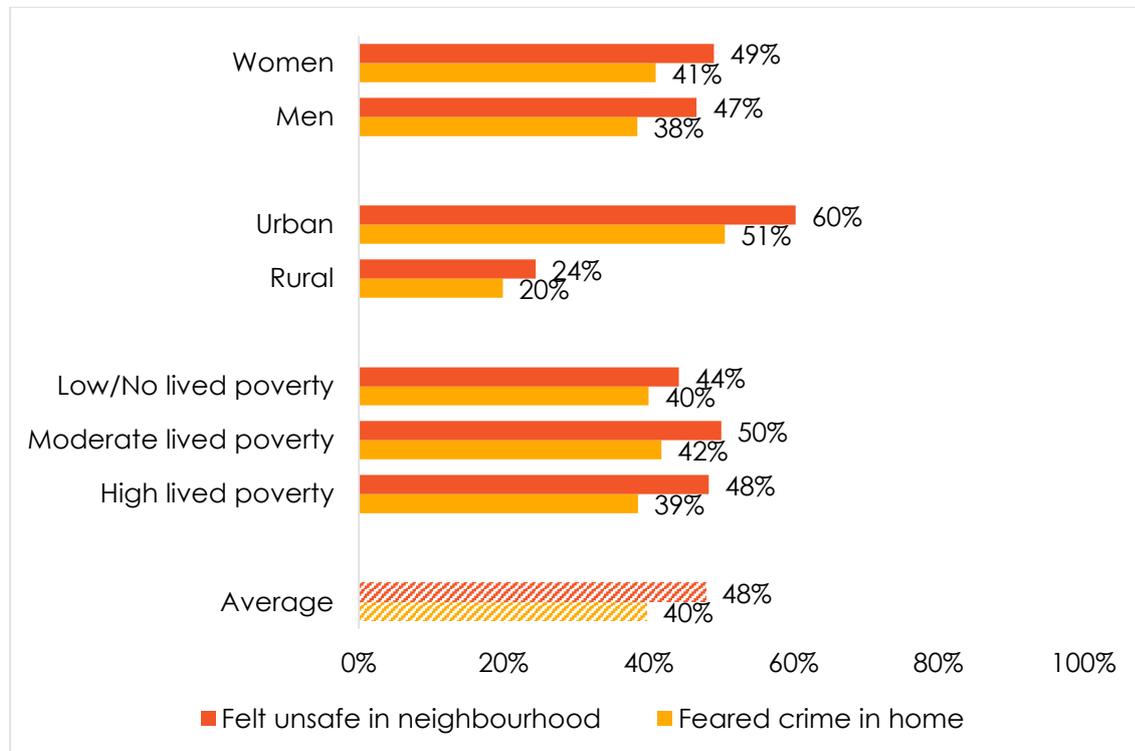


Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Felt unsafe walking in your neighbourhood? Feared crime in your own home? (% who say "several times," "many times," or "always")

While men and women report similar levels of insecurity and fear, these experiences are far more common in cities than in rural areas (Figure 3). Six in 10 urban residents say they felt unsafe in their neighbourhood at least "several times" during the previous year, compared to 24% of rural residents. And while 51% of respondents in cities say they feared crime at least "several times," only 20% of rural dwellers say the same.

Economically better-off citizens are slightly less likely to report feeling unsafe, but differences by level of lived poverty are small.²

Figure 3: Experienced insecurity and fear of crime at least ‘several times’
 | by gender, location, and lived poverty | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Felt unsafe walking in your neighbourhood? Feared crime in your own home? (% who say “several times,” “many times,” or “always”)

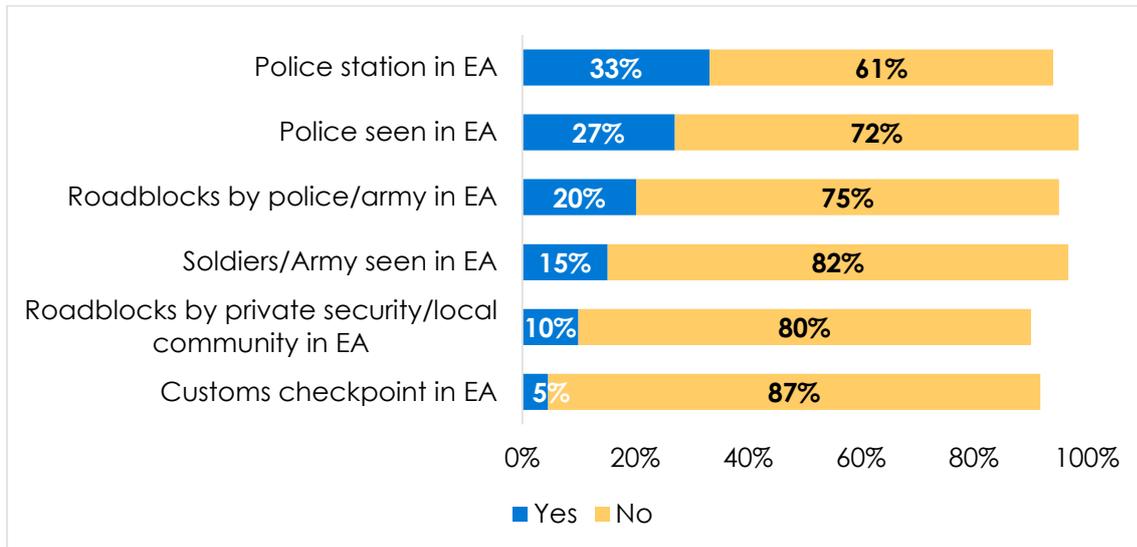
Police/security presence

One factor that might affect people’s sense of security is the presence of security forces. As part of their data collection process, Afrobarometer field teams make on-the-ground observations in each census enumeration area (EA) they visit about services and facilities that are available in the area. Since the EAs visited are selected to represent the population of the country as a whole, these data provide reliable indicators of infrastructure and service availability.

In Angola, Afrobarometer field teams found police stations in or near one-third (33%) of the EAs they visited (Figure 4). They saw police officers or police vehicles in 27% and police or military roadblocks in 20% of EAs. Other signs of security-related activity were less common, including soldiers or military vehicles (15%), roadblocks by private security or the local community (10%), and customs checkpoints (5%).

² 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 and Patel (2022).

Figure 4: Presence of police/security | Angola | 2022



Survey enumerators were asked:

Are the following facilities present in the primary sampling unit (PSU)/enumeration area (EA) or in easy walking distance: Police station?

In the PSU/EA, did you (or any of your colleagues) see: Any police officers or police vehicles? Any soldiers or army vehicles? Any roadblocks set up by police or army? Any customs checkpoint? Any roadblocks or booms set up by private security providers or by the local community?

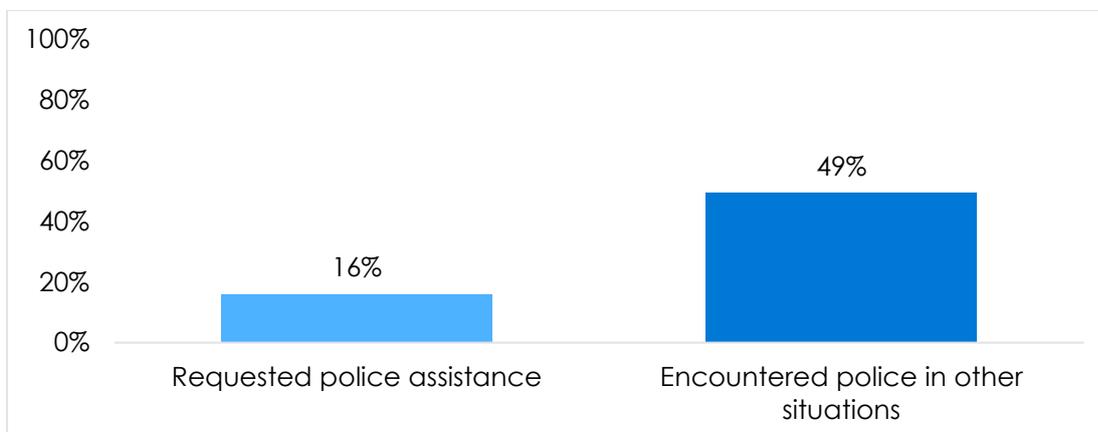
Encounters with the police

How often do Angolans encounter the police in their daily lives?

According to survey respondents, only 16% requested assistance from the police during the previous 12 months, perhaps reflecting the scarcity of police posts and citizens' low confidence in the police (Figure 5).

More than three times as many (49%) say they encountered the police in other situations, such as at checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation.

Figure 5: Contact with the police | Angola | 2022



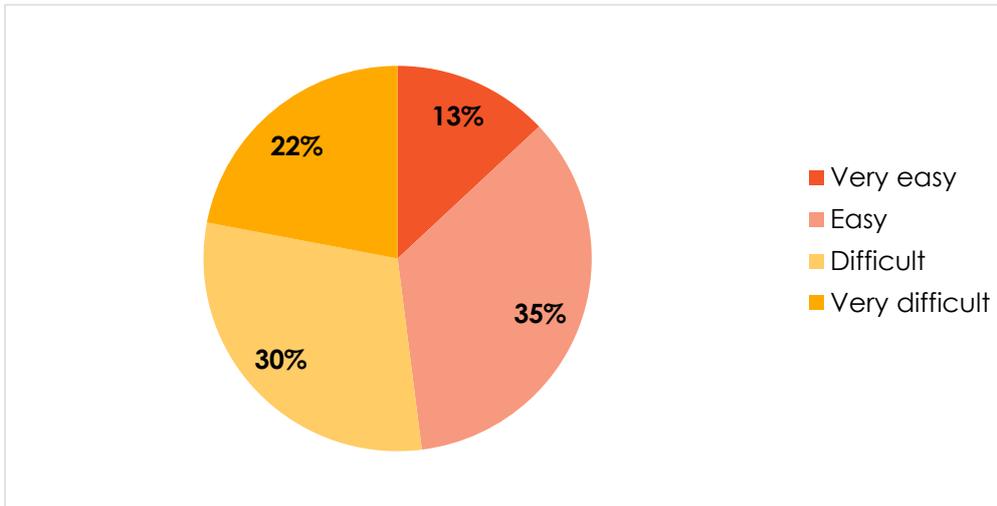
Respondents were asked:

In the past 12 months, have you requested assistance from the police?

In the past 12 months, how often have you encountered the police in other situations, like at checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation?

Among citizens who asked for help from the police, a majority (52%) say it was “difficult” (30%) or “very difficult” (22%) to obtain the assistance they needed (Figure 6).

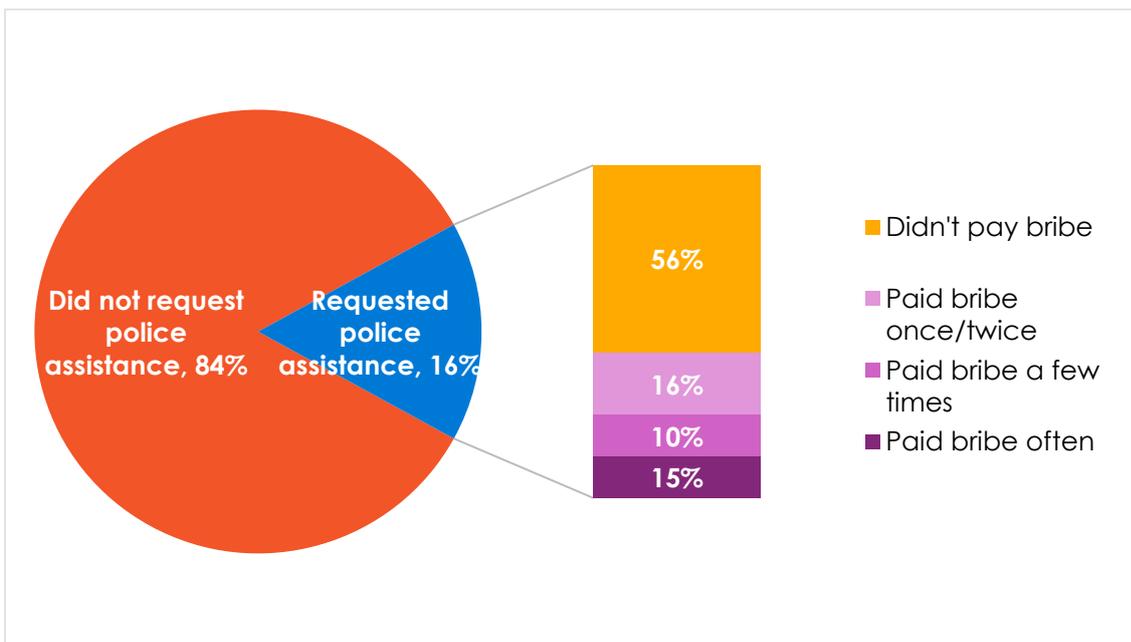
Figure 6: Ease of obtaining police assistance | Angola | 2022



Respondents who requested police assistance during the previous year were asked: How easy or difficult was it to obtain the assistance you needed? (Respondents who did not request police assistance are excluded.)

Among those who asked the police for help, 41% say they had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour – collectively known as offering “gasosa” or “sentimentos” – to the police, including 10% who did so “a few times” and 15% who did so “often” (Figure 7).

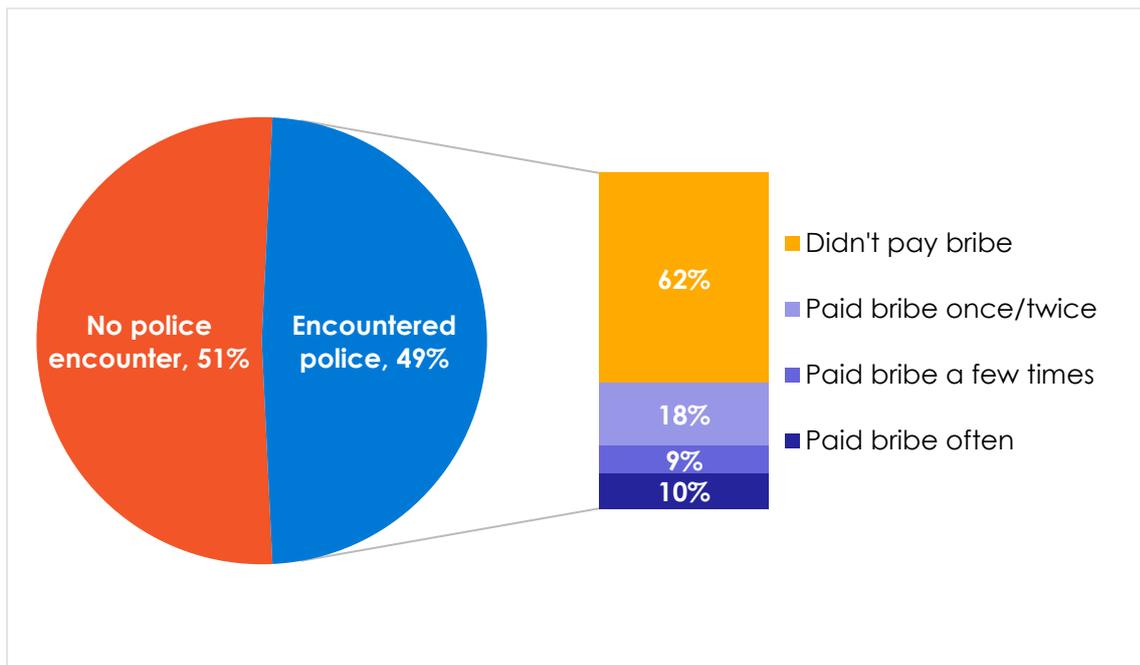
Figure 7: Paid a bribe to obtain police assistance | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: In the past 12 months, have you requested assistance from the police? (If “yes”:] How often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a police officer in order to get the assistance you needed?

Among those who encountered the police in situations such as checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation, 37% say they had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or to a favour to avoid problems with the police, including 9% who did so “a few times” and 10% who had to pay “often” (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Paid a bribe to avoid problems with the police | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: *In the past 12 months how often have you encountered the police in other situations, like at checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation? [If yes:] And how often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a police officer in order to get the assistance you needed?*

To summarise the experience among all Angolan adults during the past year, about one in five (21%) paid a bribe at least once to get police assistance, to avoid a problem with the police, or both.

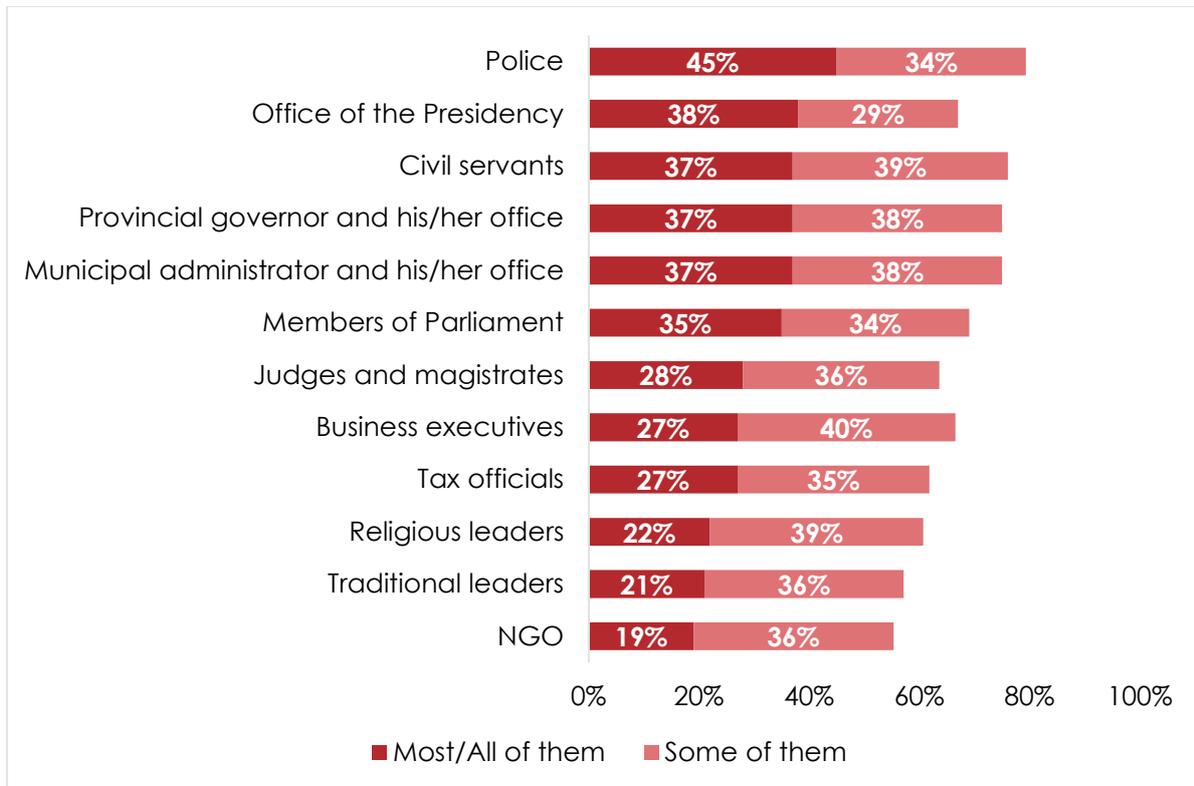
Police corruption

Almost half (45%) of Angolans say “most” or “all” police officials are corrupt, the worst rating among 12 institutions and groups of leaders the survey asked about (Figure 9). Another 34% say “some” police are involved in graft, leaving just 9% who think none of them are corrupt (along with 12% who “don’t know” or refused to answer the question).

The perception of widespread corruption among the national police officers rose by 6 percentage points between 2019 and 2022, from 39% to 45% (Figure 10). An even larger increase in perceived widespread corruption concerns the Presidency, from 22% in 2019 to 38% in 2022.

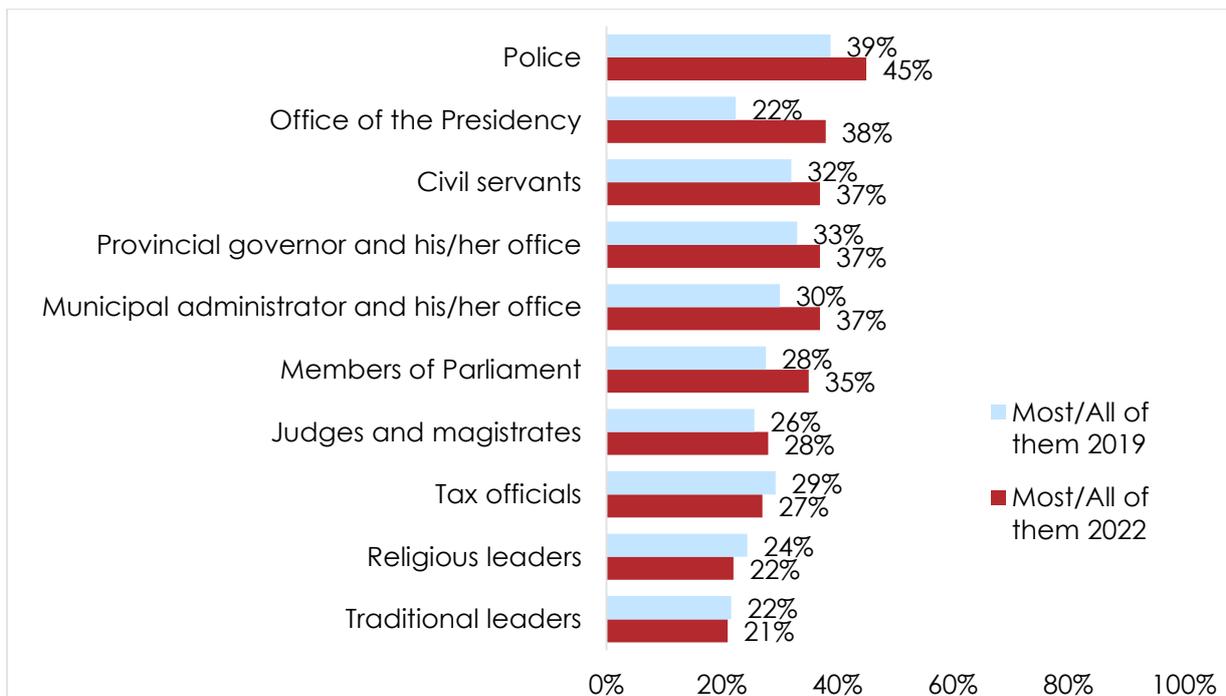
Urban residents are considerably more likely than rural residents to see most/all police as corrupt (51% vs. (34%) (Figure 11). So are citizens with secondary (50%) or post-secondary (53%) compared to those with less schooling (36%).

Figure 9: Perceived corruption among institutions and leaders | Angola | 2022



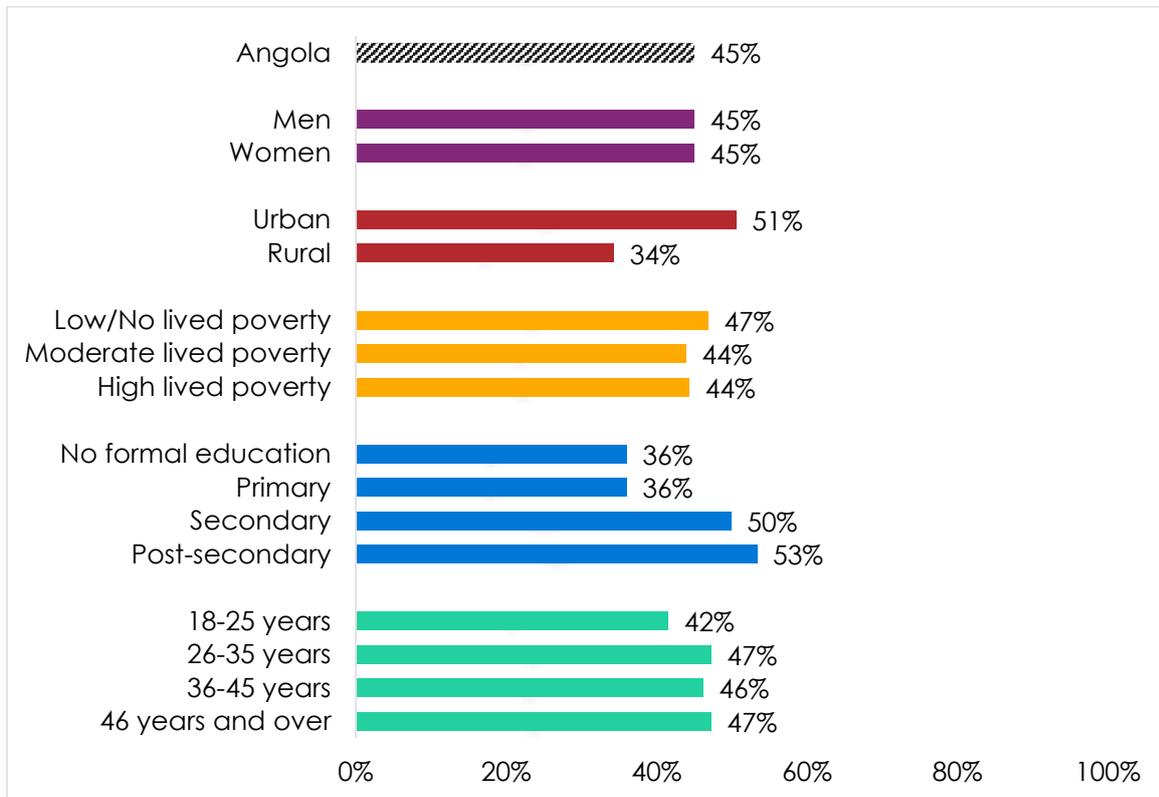
Respondents were asked: How many of the following do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

Figure 10: Perceived corruption among institutions and leaders | Angola | 2019-2022



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

Figure 11: Perception that most/all police are corrupt | by demographic group
 | Angola | 2022



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

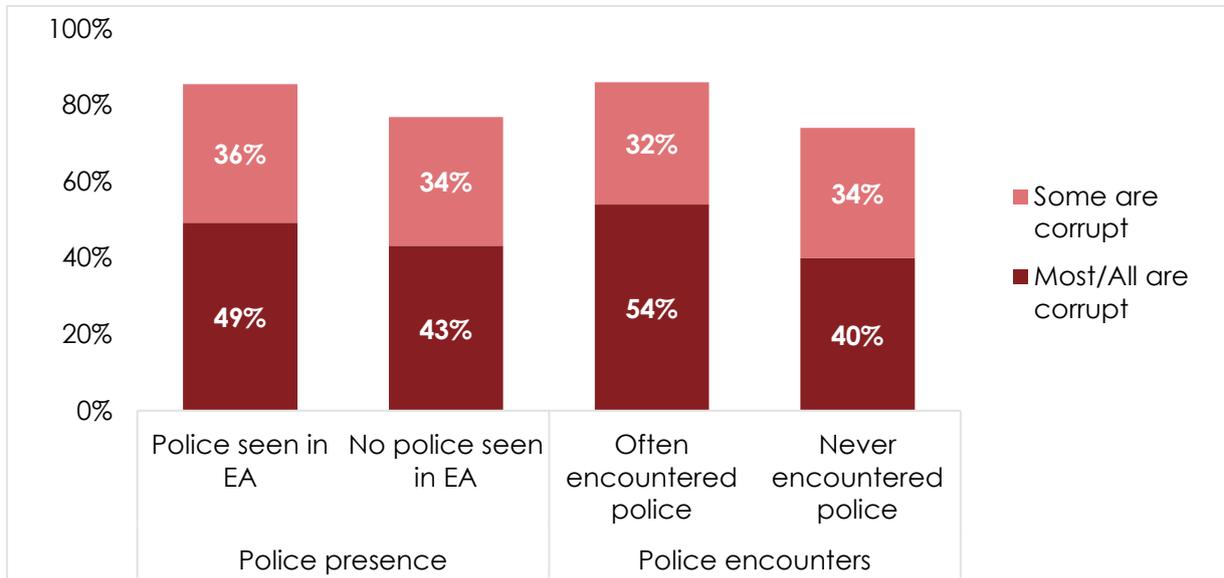
Findings also suggest possible links between perceptions of police corruption and interaction with the police (Figure 12).

Citizens who live in EAs where field teams saw police officers are slightly more likely to say that most/all police are corrupt than are their counterparts in EAs where no police presence was observed (49% vs. 43%).

And citizens who "often" encountered police in involuntary situations such as checkpoints or traffic stops are significantly more likely to see most/all police as corrupt than are those who had no such encounters with police (54% vs. 40%).

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 12: Perceived police corruption | by police presence and frequency of interaction with police | Angola | 2022



Survey enumerators were asked: In the PSU/EA, did you (or any of your colleagues) see any police officers or police vehicles?

Respondents were asked:

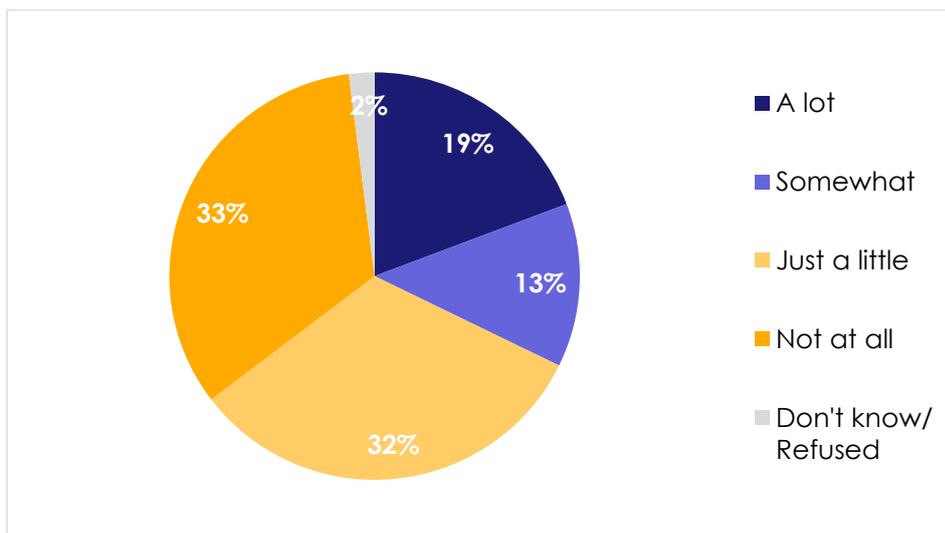
In the past 12 months, how often have you encountered the police in other situations, like at checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation?

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

Trust in the police

Only about one in three Angolans (32%) say they trust the police "somewhat" (13%) or "a lot" (19%). A similar proportion (33%) express no trust "at all" in the police, while 32% express "just a little" trust in them (Figure 13).

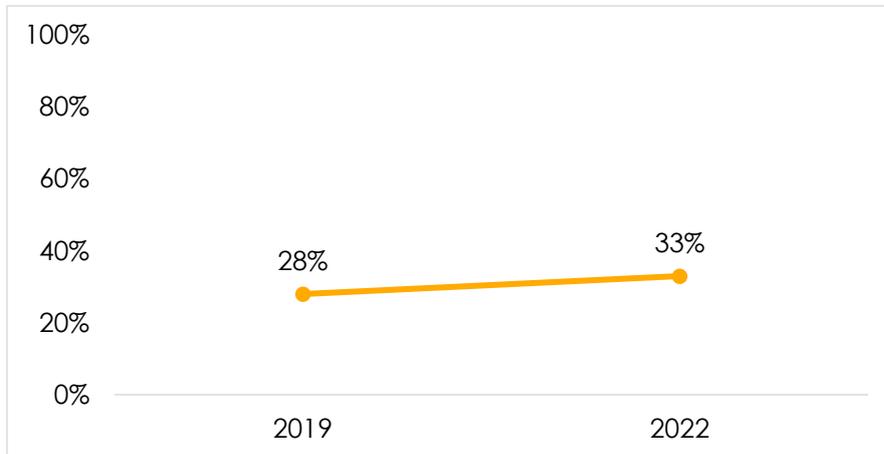
Figure 13: Trust in the police | Angola | 2022



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

The share of citizens who say they don't trust the police "at all" has increased by 5 percentage points compared to 2019 (28%) (Figure 14).

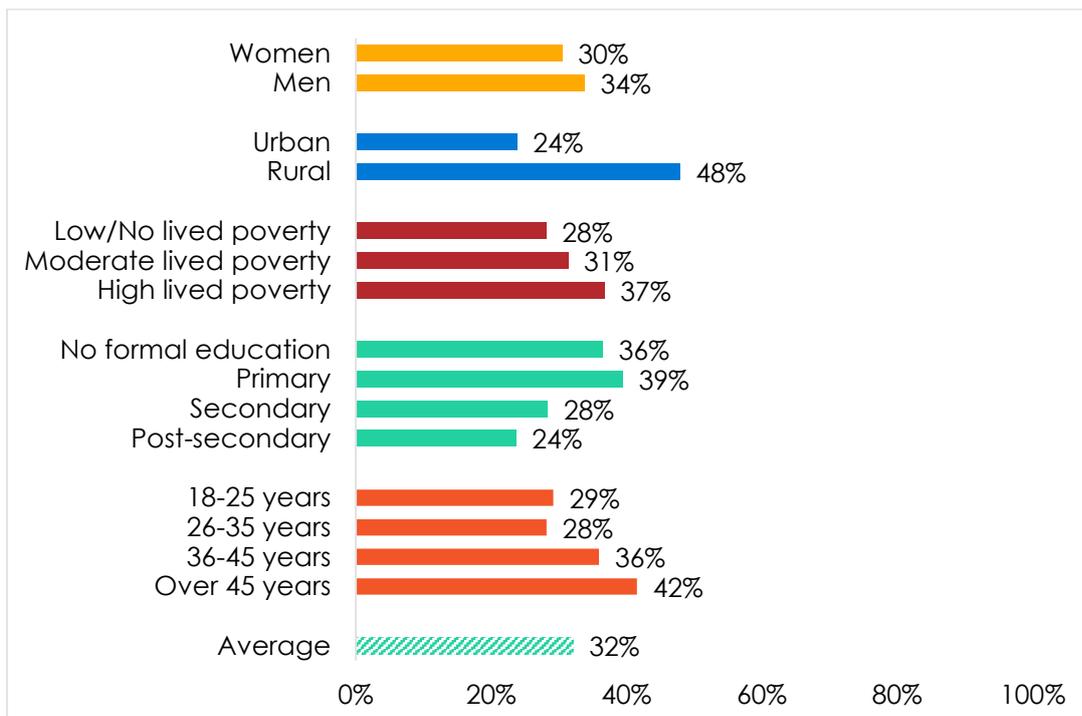
Figure 14: Don't trust the police 'at all' | Angola | 2019-2022



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust the police, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say "not at all")

Rural residents are twice as likely as urbanites to say they trust the police "somewhat" or "a lot" (48% vs. 214%) (Figure 15). Trust is also higher among citizens with primary schooling or less (36%-39%) than among those with secondary (28%) or post-secondary (24%) education. Older respondents (50%) are more likely to express trust in the police than younger respondents (28%-36%).

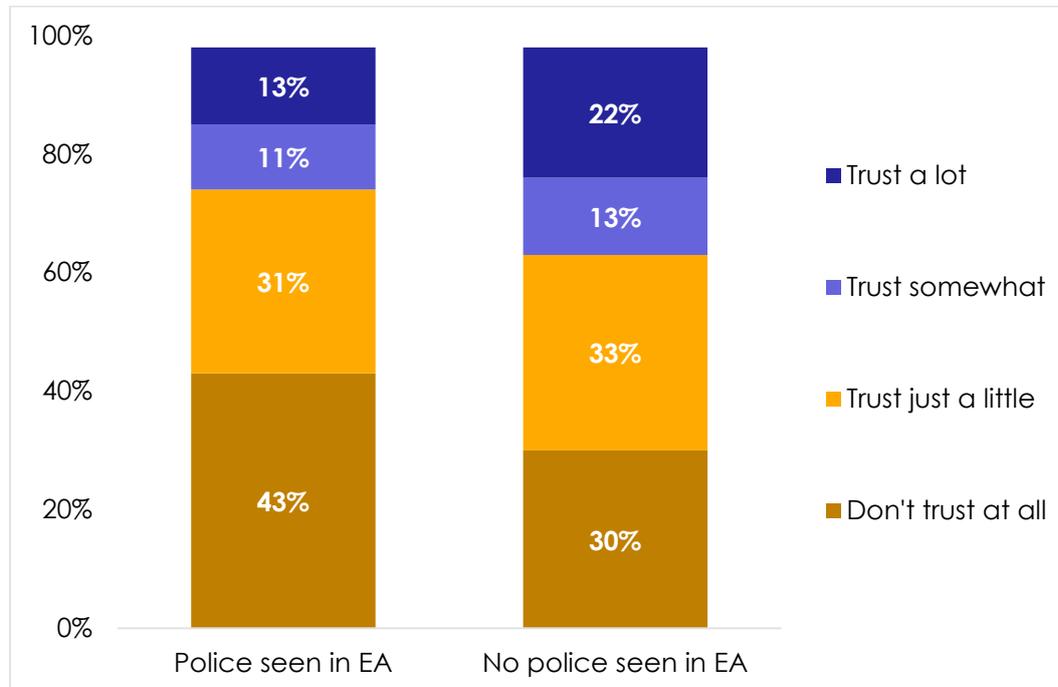
Figure 15: Trust in the police | by demographic group | Angola | 2022



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

Having a visible police presence does not appear to increase trust in the police. Complete lack of trust in the police is more widespread among citizens who reside in areas where Afrobarometer field teams observed police officers or vehicles (43%) than among those in areas where no police presence was observed (30%) (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Police presence and trust | Angola | 2022



Survey enumerators were asked: In the PSU/EA, did you (or any of your colleagues) see any police officers or police vehicles?

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

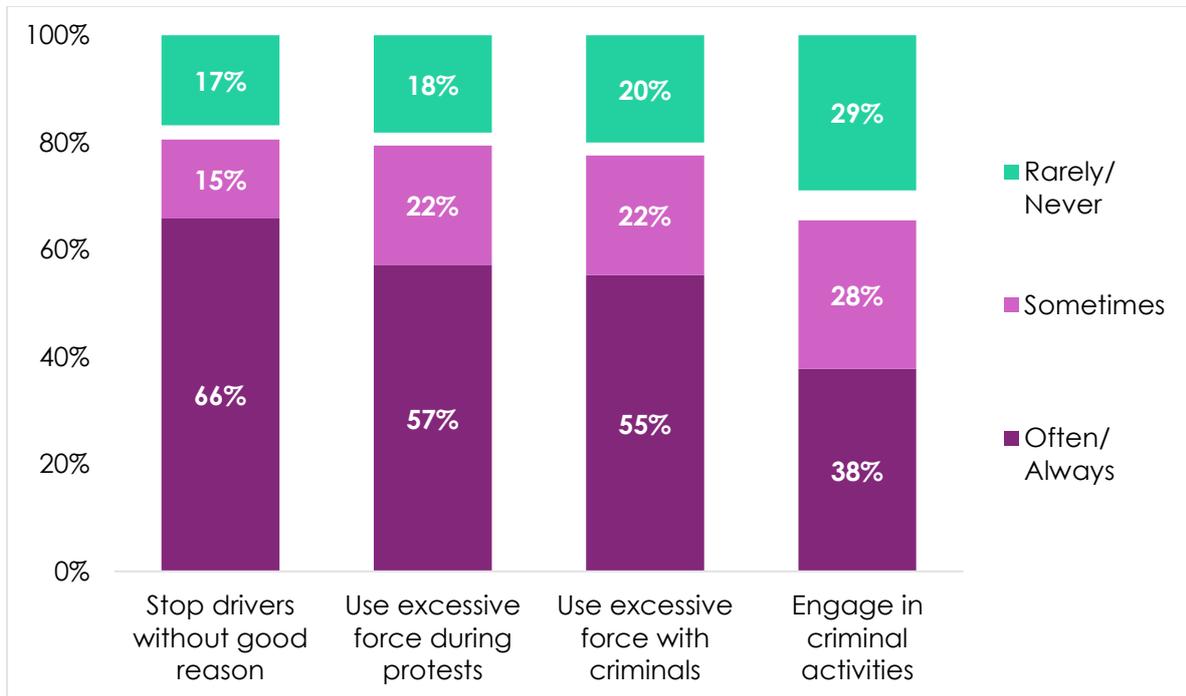
Police conduct

In addition to expressing mistrust and perceptions of corruption among the police, many Angolans say at least some police officers engage in improper and even illegal activities (Figure 17). Two-thirds (66%) of respondents say the police “often” or “always” stop drivers without good reason. Majorities also believe that the police routinely use excessive force in managing protests or demonstrations (57%) and in dealing with criminal suspects (55%). Only about one in five citizens think these abuses are rare.

Almost four in 10 citizens (38%) say the police routinely engage in illegal activities, while only 29% think this “rarely” or “never” happens.

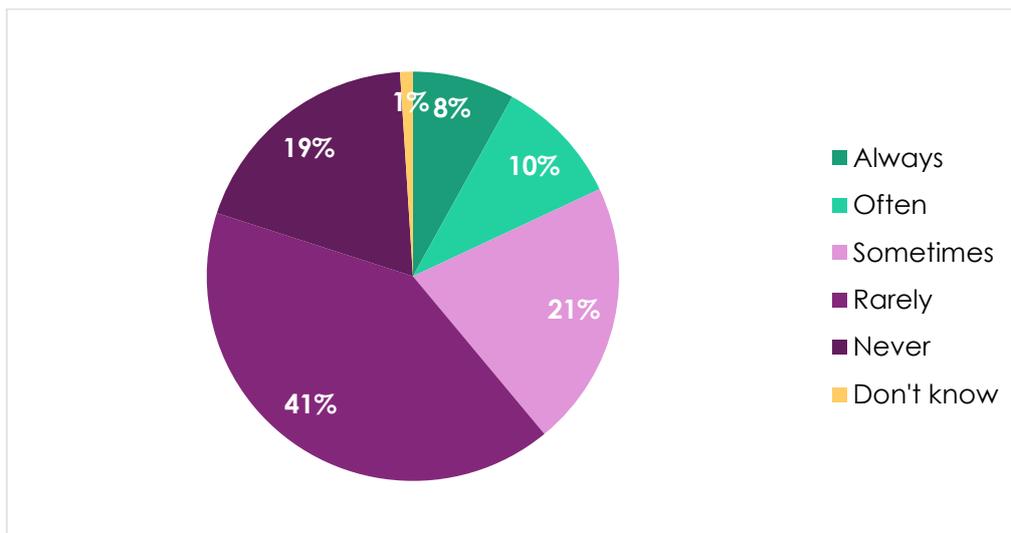
Overall, only about one in five citizens (18%) say the police “often” or “always” operate in a professional manner and respect all citizens’ rights; fully 60% assert that such behaviour is rare or unheard of (Figure 18).

Figure 17: Improper police practices | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how often do the police in Angola:
 Stop drivers without good reason?
 Use excessive force in managing protests or demonstrations?
 Use excessive force when dealing with criminals?
 Engage in criminal activities?

Figure 18: Do the police act professionally and respect citizens' rights? | Angola | 2022



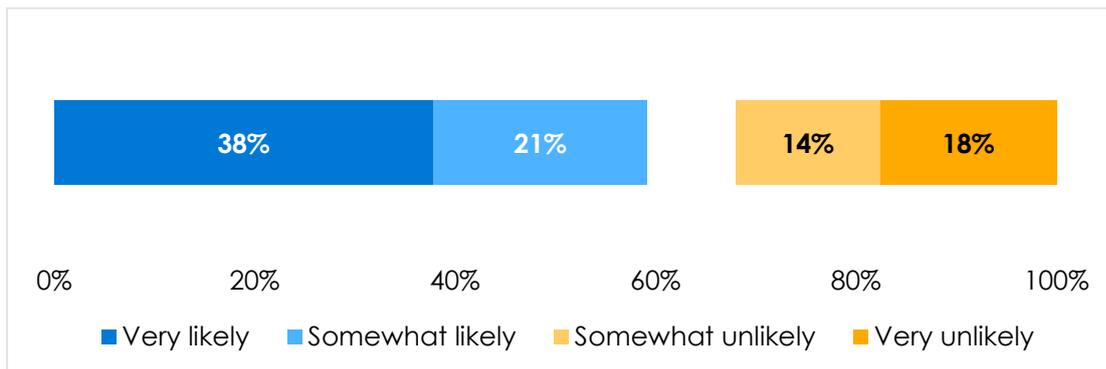
Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how often do the police in Angola operate in a professional manner and respect the rights of all citizens?

One area in which Angolans give their police better marks is in treating cases of gender-based violence (GBV) as serious offences. A majority (59%) say it is "very likely" (38%) or

“somewhat likely” (21%) that the police will take a woman's complaints about gender-based violence seriously, though about one-third consider this “somewhat unlikely” (14%) or “very unlikely” (18%) (Figure 19).

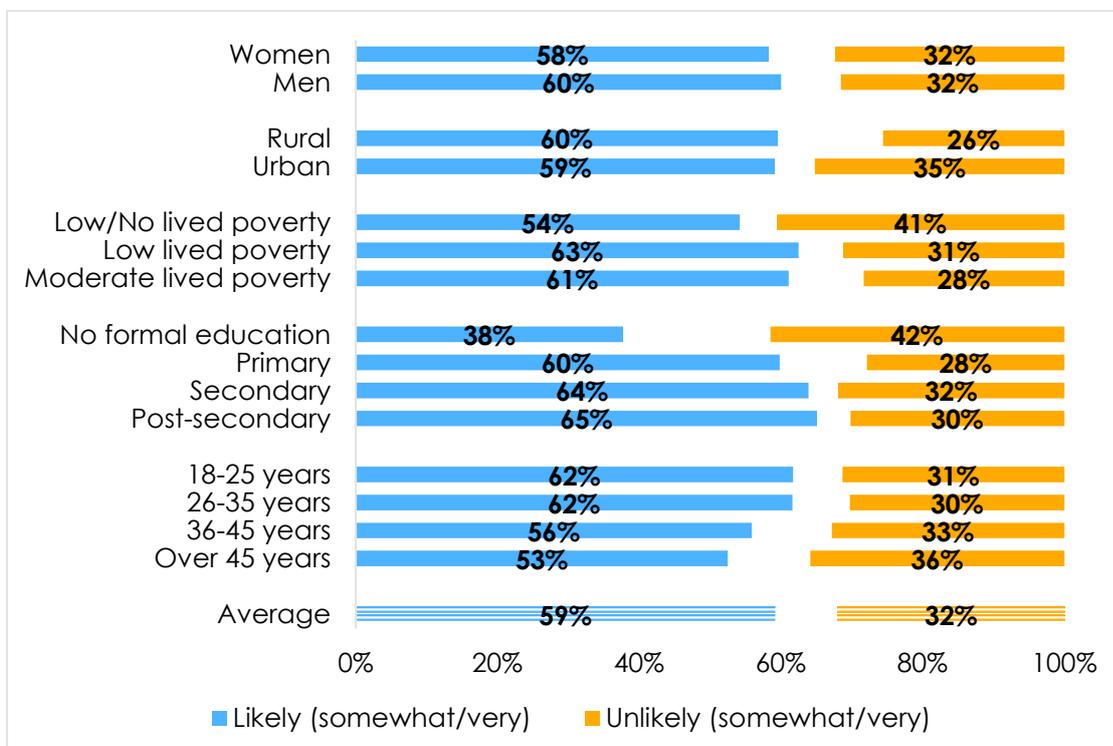
The expectation of a serious police response to GBV is somewhat more common among citizens with secondary or post-secondary education (64%-65%), those experiencing moderate or high lived poverty (61%-63%) and younger respondents (62% of those aged 18-35) than among their respective counterparts (Figure 20).

Figure 19: Do the police take gender-based violence seriously? | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: *If a woman in your community goes to the police to report being a victim of gender-based violence, for example, to report a rape or report being physically abused by her husband, how likely or unlikely is it that her case will be taken seriously by the police?*

Figure 20: Do the police take gender-based violence seriously? | by demographic group | Angola | 2022

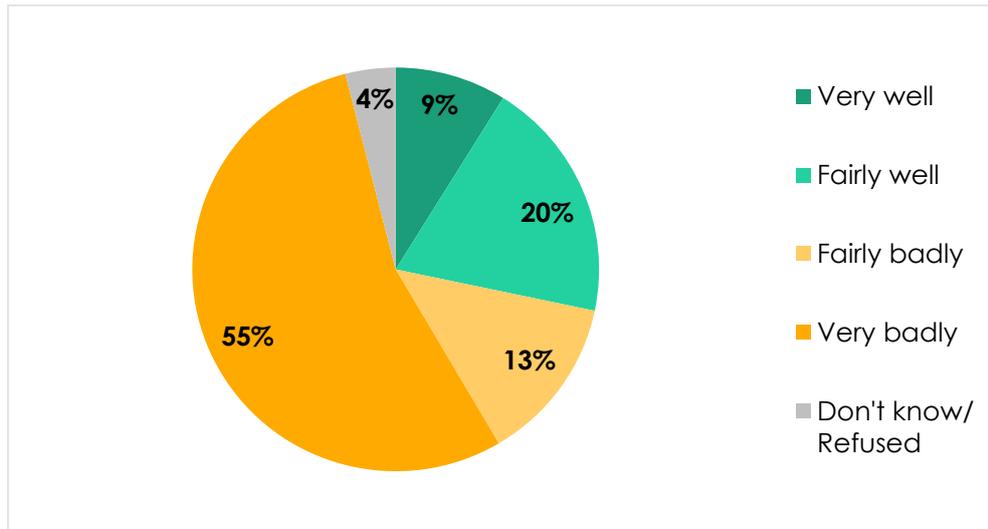


Respondents were asked: *If a woman in your community goes to the police to report being a victim of gender-based violence, for example, to report a rape or report being physically abused by her husband, how likely or unlikely is it that her case will be taken seriously by the police?*

Government performance on reducing crime

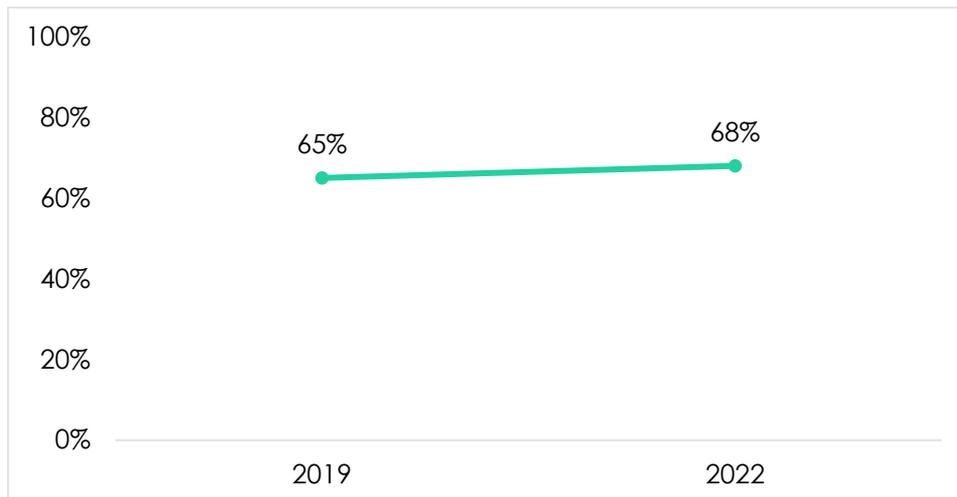
Overall, Angolans are quite critical of their government's performance on reducing crime. More than two-thirds (68%) say it is doing a poor job, including 55% who describe its performance as "very bad" (Figure 21). Disapproval of the government's crime-reduction efforts has increased marginally since 2019 (65%) (Figure 22).

Figure 21: Government performance on reducing crime | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling reducing crime, or haven't you heard enough to say?

Figure 22: Government performing badly on crime reduction | Angola | 2022



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling reducing crime, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "fairly badly" or "very badly")

Conclusion

Survey findings show that Angolans see the national police as one of the country's most corrupt public institutions and think that many of its officers are prone to using excessive force and other abuses. Few trust the police, and even fewer think they operate in a professional manner and respect citizens' rights.

These public perceptions highlight major challenges the government faces in building a professional, trusted security force prepared to carry out with zeal and selflessness the tasks entrusted to them.

References

- Amnesty International. (2020). 'The police are not on the ground to distribute sweets.'
- Amnesty International. (2022). Angola: Unlawful killings, arbitrary arrests and hunger set election tone. 16 August.
- DW. (2020). Angola: 'Polícia não está para distribuir chocolates.' 3 April.
- Human Rights Watch. (2020). Angola: Police fire on peaceful protesters. 12 November.
- Mattes, R., & Patel, J. (2022). Lived poverty resurgent. Afrobarometer Policy Paper 84.
- Marques de Marais, R. (2018). Angola's killing fields: A report on extrajudicial executions in Luanda, 2016-2017.

Carlos Pacatolo is a political scientist, principal investigator at Ovilongwa – Estudos de Opinião Pública, the Afrobarometer national partner in Angola, and a researcher at CESP Jean Piaget Benguela. Email: pacatolo@yahoo.com.br.

David Boio is a sociologist, co-principal investigator at Ovilongwa – Estudos de Opinião Pública, the Afrobarometer national partner in Angola, and a researcher at Centro Sol Nascente do Huambo. Email: davidboio@gmail.com.

Victorino Roque is a sociologist and executive director of the civil society organisation Okuveleka. Email: victorinoroque09@hotmail.com.

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.

Financial support for Afrobarometer is provided by Sweden via the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) via the U.S. Institute of Peace, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Open Society Foundations - Africa, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the European Union, the National Endowment for Democracy, the Mastercard Foundation, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, the University of California San Diego, the Global Centre for Pluralism, the World Bank Group, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda, and GIZ.

Donations help Afrobarometer give voice to African citizens. Please consider making a contribution (at www.afrobarometer.org) or contact Felix Biga (felixbiga@afrobarometer.org) or Runyararo Munetsi (runyararo@afrobarometer.org) to discuss institutional funding.

Follow our releases on #VoicesAfrica.



Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 641 | 17 May 2023