

# Can cities cope?

Service-delivery challenges and opportunities  
in Uganda's new cities

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## Introduction



On 1 July 2020, less than a year before January 2021 presidential and parliamentary elections, Uganda's minister of local government, acting under the Local Governments Act and with the approval of Parliament, elevated 10 of the 15 earmarked municipal councils across the country to city status (Parliament of the Republic of Uganda, 1997, 2020). City status, equal in stature to district local government status, is the highest level that local government units can attain under the current law and is synonymous with near-autonomy, including significant political influence and more control over resource mobilisation and use.

Residents in the newly elevated city environs celebrated this administrative milestone amid surging expectations of immediate upgrades of public-services infrastructure and jobs. But the respective administrations awoke to the realities of over-stretched, outdated services infrastructure, and inadequate funding incapable of meeting the heightened level of demand.

Can these new cities fulfil their mandate – even in the face of COVID-19-related impacts on the economy and personal living conditions – and cope with soaring public expectations? Evidence from the 2022 Afrobarometer survey suggests that it will not be easy, as the public mood, engagement with elected local leaders, and public service-delivery ratings are on the decline while mistrust, perceptions of official corruption, and resentment toward paying taxes are on the rise.

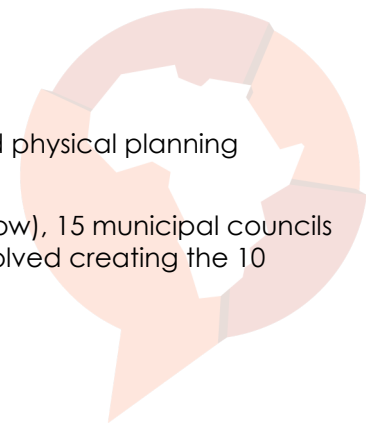
This policy paper makes a case for the creation of the 10 regional cities, especially because urban centres tend to spur socio-economic development (Lall, Lebrand, Park, Sturm, & Venables, 2021). But it also explores ways in which the new cities can prioritise their development planning. The country would benefit from having more functional urban, especially since residents in urban areas are more attuned to the ideals of democratic governance (Mattes, 2019), tend to engage more in civic action (Logan, Appiah-Nyamekye, & Han, 2021; Lekalake & Gyimah-Boadi, 2016), and are more likely than their rural counterparts to access public services infrastructure such as health, education, markets, roads, electricity, and financial services (Mitullah, Samson, Wambua, & Balongo, 2016).

Thus, the government's abrupt decision to prioritise expanding urban centres appears to have energised the masses, especially given Uganda's (and Africa's) changing and youthful demographic outlook. Global urbanisation trends indicate that Africa has the world's fastest-growing population (United Nations, 2019; OECD, 2020) and that by 2040, at least half of the continent's population will reside in cities (World Bank, 2013). In addition, Uganda's mushrooming urban centres are becoming hubs for social and economic opportunities (European Union, 2019). The challenge for new African cities lies in proper planning and funding to create liveable environments.

While urbanisation may facilitate meeting certain targets of the 2030 and 2063 development agendas (United Nations, 2015; African Union, 2015), constraints in development planning and resource mobilisation have hindered Uganda's rapidly growing urban centres from achieving their full potential in terms of structural transformation, expanded formal employment opportunities, socio-economic growth, and the creation of sustainable liveable environments. According to the National Planning Authority (2013, 2020), Uganda's current urban growth – including many unemployed people and refugees – is unsustainable due to chronic deficiencies in the quantity and quality of social services and inadequacies in physical planning and implementation.

Uganda's rapid population increase has dramatically increased pressures on public services infrastructure in the capital city, fuelling calls to create subregional cities to spur regional development and reduce uncontrolled rural-urban migration.

In response to these pressures, and in line with United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11's call for urban communities that are "inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable," the government adopted the Uganda Vision 2040, premised on, among other things, the need for controlled urbanisation (freeing up land for commercial agriculture), stable higher



incomes, and stronger institutions through legislation and integrated physical planning (National Planning Authority, 2013, 2020).

Under a two-phase city-upgrade implementation plan (Table 1 below), 15 municipal councils were to be elevated to city status by 1 July 2023. The first phase involved creating the 10 cities of:

- Arua, Gulu, and Lira in the Northern region
- Soroti, Mbale, and Jinja in the Eastern region
- Masaka in the Central region
- Mbarara, Fort Portal, and Hoima in the Western region

This brought the number of cities in the country to 11, including Kampala, the capital. The first phase created 10 new city administrations, 352 new town councils, and 364 new sub-county administrations, with local council elections held a year later during the 2021 general elections.

**Table 1: Timeline for creation of new cities | Uganda | 2020-2023**

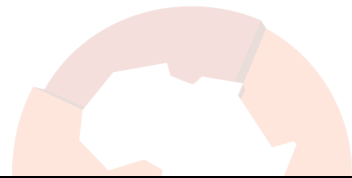
Phase	Commencement date	Cities to be created	Region
Phase 1	1 July 2020	Arua, Gulu, Lira	Northern region
		Soroti, Mbale, Jinja	Eastern region
		Masaka	Central region
		Mbarara, Fort Portal, Hoima	Western region
Phase 2	1 July 2022	Entebbe	Central region
Phase 3	1 July 2023	Moroto	Northern region
		Wakiso, Nakasongola	Central region
		Kabale	Western region

The second and third phases, planned to be completed by 1 July 2023, were to upgrade five more municipal councils:

- Entebbe, Nakasongola, and Wakiso in the Central region
- Moroto in the Karamoja region
- Kabale in the Western region

However, in April 2021 the line minister issued a moratorium on the creation of any new local government administration units, citing a widening funding gap for lower local governments (Opoka, 2021; Muhereza, 2023). Debate rages over this near-fiasco of the government creating so many administrative and elective positions that the country lacked the resources to sustain (Mbabazi & Atukunda, 2020).

Proponents maintain that this government action was justified by Uganda's population growth and the imperative to bring services closer to the people. Census and population estimates indicate that Uganda's population more than doubled between the 1991 census and the 2021 elections, from 16 million to almost 42 million. The number of district local governments almost quadrupled, from 38 units in the 1991 census to 146 by 2020 (Table 2). The government defended the new cities as necessary to keep pace with service-delivery demands at the subregion level, provide alternatives to urban migration and decongest Kampala, create regional economic hubs, and institutionalise the regional-tier system to assuage voices agitating for federalism (Rukundo, 2020).



**Table 2: Local administration levels | Uganda | 1996-2021**

Local administration level	Local government units by year of general elections					
	1996	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021
City	1	1	1	1	1	11
District	38	56	69	112	112	146
Constituency	214	214	215	238	290	353
Lower local government (subcounty, division, town council)		969	970	1,321	1,392	1,488
Parish					7,505	7,553
Village					57,759	58,197
National population (in thousands)				34.1	36.593	41.584

Source: Compiled from the respective annual statistical abstract reports produced by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics

However, dissenting voices argue that the government should not start a city without a proper plan (Muhumuza, 2020; Kyohairwe, 2020); some contend that the new cities were born of election fever, patronage, and clientelist tendencies aimed at winning the elections (Green, 2008). Critics say the elevation of the municipal councils came ahead of its time, considering resource-mobilisation constraints at the central government level and the inability of local governments to raise sufficient local revenue sustainably (Wambede et al., 2021).

As shown in Table 3, the districts where the new cities are the regional business centres are on average one-eighth Kampala's size in population, with one-fifteenth of its GDP, but are twice as large in terms of planning area size, making it a daunting task to roll out public service infrastructure.

**Table 3: Summary of the local population, economy, and size of planning land area**

City	Households (2014 census)	Population (2014 census) <sup>a</sup>	2007 GDP (million US\$) <sup>b</sup>	2007 GDP per capita (US\$)	Land area (square km)
<b>Kampala</b>	<b>414,406</b>	<b>1,504,086</b>	<b>4,695.50</b>	<b>2,655</b>	<b>189</b>
Arua City	56,582	308,643	214.8	261	413.7
Gulu City	37,720	183,873	173.3	599	255
Lira City	46,689	206,745	190.9	449	1,326
Soroti City	18,597	82,324	167.9	586	
Mbale City	46,520	190,080	351.8	712	
Jinja City	58,646	246,686	669.2	1,180	
Entebbe City	82,518	313,010			56.2
Masaka City	53,771	211,539	446.9	1,360	100
Mbarara City	52,659	195,828	540.1	1,013	
Fort Portal City	25,911	101,774	257.5	486	
Hoima City	24,894	99,695	229.6	449	228
<b>Average of new cities</b>	<b>45,864</b>	<b>194,563</b>	<b>324</b>	<b>710</b>	<b>396</b>
<b>Ratio of Kampala to new city average</b>	<b>9.04</b>	<b>7.73</b>	<b>14.48</b>	<b>3.74</b>	<b>0.48</b>

Sources: <sup>a</sup> 2014 census and 2020 population updates (Uganda Bureau of Statistics); <sup>b</sup> Rafa, Moyer, Wang, & Sutton, 2017)D

Note: Household counts, population, and land area size are for individual cities, while GDP estimates are for the district in which the respective city is located.

As the newly installed city administrations reorient their service-delivery plans to match heightened citizen expectations, it is hoped that this paper's city-by-city disaggregation of citizen views on key issues – including the interaction between measures of contentment with local government services and views on quality, integrity, and poverty – can help provide clues for identifying medium- and long-term solutions.



## Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Eight rounds of surveys have been completed in up to 39 countries since 1999, and Round 9 surveys are currently underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer national partner in Uganda, Hatchile Consult Ltd., interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 2,400 adult Ugandans between 7 and 25 January 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. An additional 992 interviews were equally distributed across the 10 newly created city administrations of Arua, Gulu, Lira, Soroti, Mbale, Jinja, Entebbe, Mbarara, Fort Portal, and Hoima to generate deeper insights on municipal service provision.

Previous surveys in Uganda have been conducted in 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2015, 2017, 2019, and 2021.

## Key findings

- **Direction country is headed:** Ugandans are divided on the country's overall direction, with half (51%) saying it is headed in "the wrong direction," a 14-percentage-point increase since 2019. Residents are particularly critical of the country's direction in the cities of Jinja (74%), Entebbe (69%), Masaka (62%), Gulu (62%), and Kampala (62%).
- **Declining economic and living conditions:** Two-thirds (66%) of citizens describe the country's economic condition as bad, a 20-percentage-point increase compared to 2019, and 58% offer negative assessments of their personal living conditions, up 17 points compared to pre-COVID-19 ratings recorded in 2019. While views on personal living conditions vary widely across the new cities, majorities in all cities describe the country's economic condition as bad.
- **Government economic performance:** Citizens' assessments of the government's performance on key economic tasks have declined sharply since 2015. Only small minorities give the government passing marks on keeping prices stable (12%), narrowing gaps between the rich and poor (14%), creating jobs (22%), improving the living standards of the poor (25%), and managing the economy (33%).
- **Citizens' development agenda:** Health, education, infrastructure/roads, and water supply have dominated Ugandans' list of the most important problems requiring government action since 2015. Residents in each city have their specific set of priorities, but health tops the list in most cities.
- **Lived poverty:** Seven in 10 Ugandans (70%) experienced moderate or high levels of lived poverty, a substantial increase from the 64% recorded in 2019, before COVID-19. Citizens residing in cities experience poverty at similar rates as those in their respective subregions, with the highest rates recorded in Jinja (81%), Arua (77%), Hoima (75%), and Entebbe (75%).





- **Perceptions of corruption:** Two-thirds (68%) of citizens say corruption increased over the past year. Perceptions of increasing corruption are highest in the cities of Jinja (81%), Lira (79%), Gulu (75%), and Hoima (72%).
- **Interaction with local leaders:** Half (51%) of Ugandans say they trust their local district council, though trust levels vary widely across the new cities. The share of citizens who contacted a local government councillor during the previous year has dropped by nearly two-thirds over the past two decades, from 71% in 2002 to 25% in 2022.
- **Difficulty and bribery in accessing public services:** About two-thirds (65%) of all Ugandans who had contact with any of four key public services during the previous year report having faced difficulties in obtaining at least one of the services, and fully half (50%) had to pay a bribe to access at least one of the services. The frequency of these experiences varies widely across the new cities.
- **Funding service delivery:** Six in 10 Ugandans (61%) say tax officials have the right to enforce tax compliance, but this proportion has dropped considerably since 2017 (84%). And a majority (54%) prefer lower taxes with fewer government services over higher taxes with more services.
- **Local government performance on key tasks:** Fewer than half of citizens are satisfied with the way district or city councils handle key tasks, including efficient management of local markets (45%), local roads (42%), government-owned health centres (41%), and land use (36%). And few express confidence in local government councils to improve local trade (33%), ensure citizen participation in local government budgeting and planning (26%), inform residents about how public money is spent (21%), and fight corruption (19%).

## New cities and post-COVID-19 economic conditions

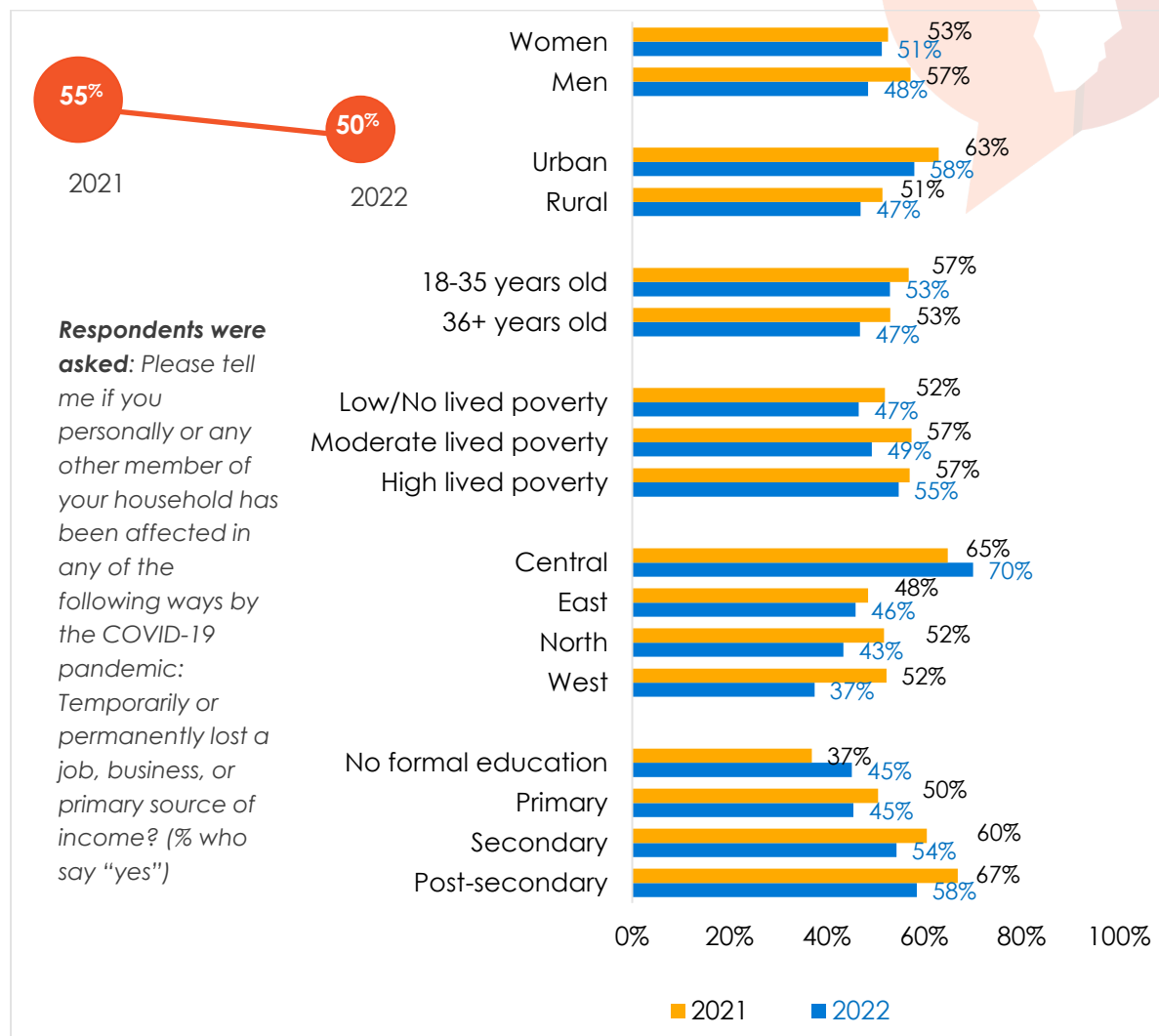
The success of Uganda's 10 new cities, and indeed all the country's 146 district local governments, depends in part on their ability to raise sufficient revenue through local tax collections or conditional and unconditional grants from the central government and/or donors (UN-Habitat, 2015; Waisswa, Akol, & Nalukwago, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have disrupted food, fuel, and commodity prices and slowed local economies (Twaweza, 2022; Museveni, 2022). From March 2020 to July 2021, pandemic-related disruption to the economy ravaged livelihoods, both in urban and rural areas, as most non-essential businesses – excluding cargo transport, energy supply, manufacturing, construction, health, sanitation, agro-trade, and security – were intermittently closed (Ladu, 2022). The country's schools were closed for nearly two full calendar years, with only candidate classes allowed to sit in special session classes to prepare for final examinations (Atuhairwe, 2022). Most of a season's crop went to waste amid declining agricultural sales as urban purchasing power dropped (Mutegeki, 2020; Ssali, 2021).

The January 2021 Afrobarometer survey showed that within less than a year of the pandemic, more than half (55%) of all adult Ugandans reported that someone in their household lost a job, business, or primary source of income due to COVID-19. This loss of livelihood was particularly high among populations that might show resilience against such shocks, including urban residents (63%), those with post-secondary education (67%), and residents in the Central region (65%) (Figure 1).

The numbers are slightly lower in the 2022 survey, though the patterns are similar.

**Figure 1: Loss of income due to the COVID-19 pandemic | by demographic group | Uganda | 2022**



Reports indicate that Uganda's foreign debt-to-GDP ratio has been growing, from 30% in 2015/2016 to 47% in 2020/2021 (Kiyonga, 2022), with much of that trajectory attributed to the country's investments in infrastructure, energy, and pandemic-related interventions. The local government funding situation is not expected to change dramatically soon, even when much-anticipated oil cash starts flowing into national coffers in 2025-2026 (Musisi, 2022a, b).

Prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Uganda realised GDP growth averaging 5.3% from 2013/2014 to 2018/2019, dropping to 3.3% in 2020/2021 as COVID-19 ravaged economies, lowering consumption rates due to reduced remittances, limited credit, and job losses and increasing poverty in Uganda from 27.5% to 32.7% after the first lockdown in 2020 (U.S. Department of State, 2022).

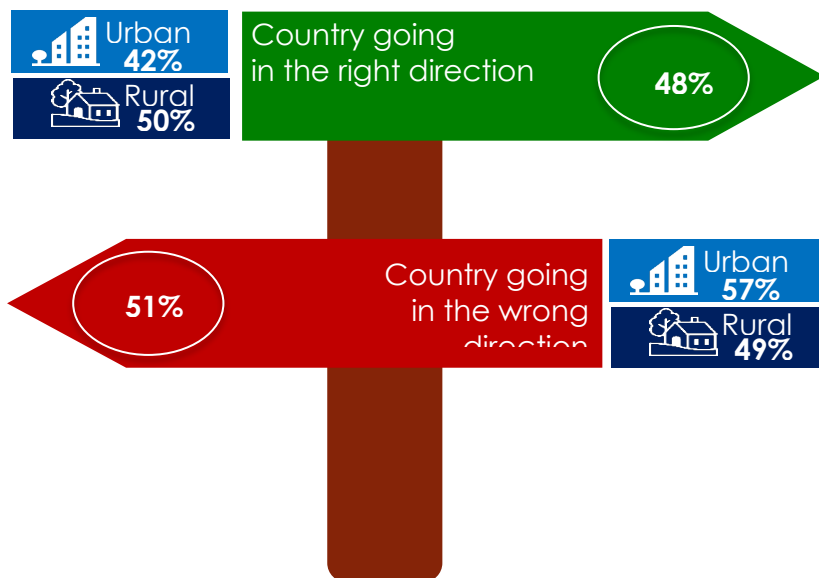
Increasing inflation, job losses, and business closures have been felt across Uganda's new cities (Ladu, 2022; Awuzu, 2021; Musisi, 2020; Kamoga, 2021; Mugerwa, 2021) – not a good prospect for the new cities, as local economies need to be revived.

## Country's direction

Against a background of economic challenges, Ugandans are split regarding the country's overall direction: Almost half (48%) see the country as headed in the right direction, while 51% say it is headed in the wrong direction (Figure 2).



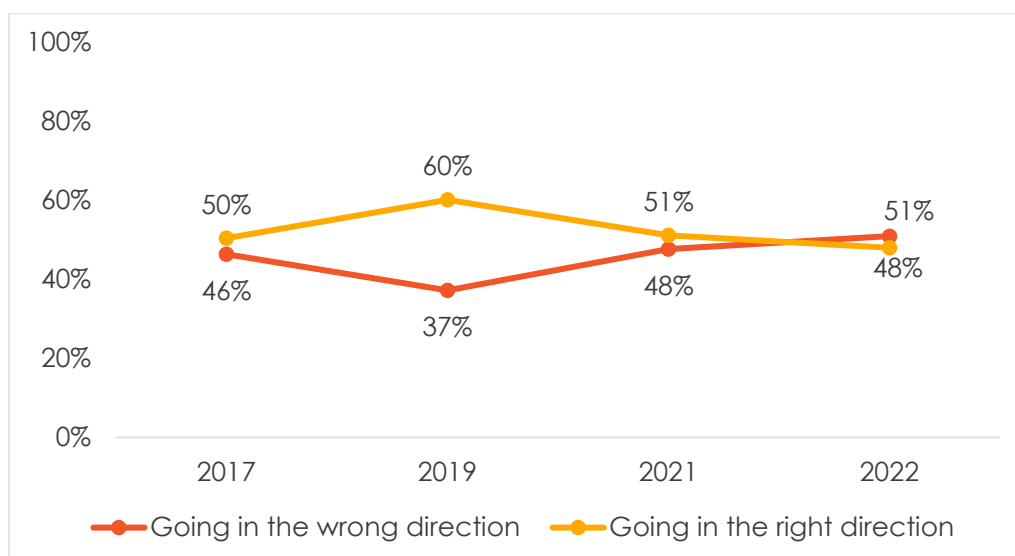
**Figure 2: Overall direction of the country | Uganda | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:** Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction?

The proportion of Ugandans who perceive the country as headed in the right direction has dropped by 12 percentage points since 2019 (60%) (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Overall direction of the country | Uganda | 2017-2022**

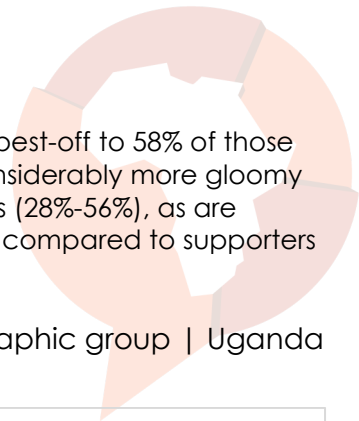


**Respondents were asked:** Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction?

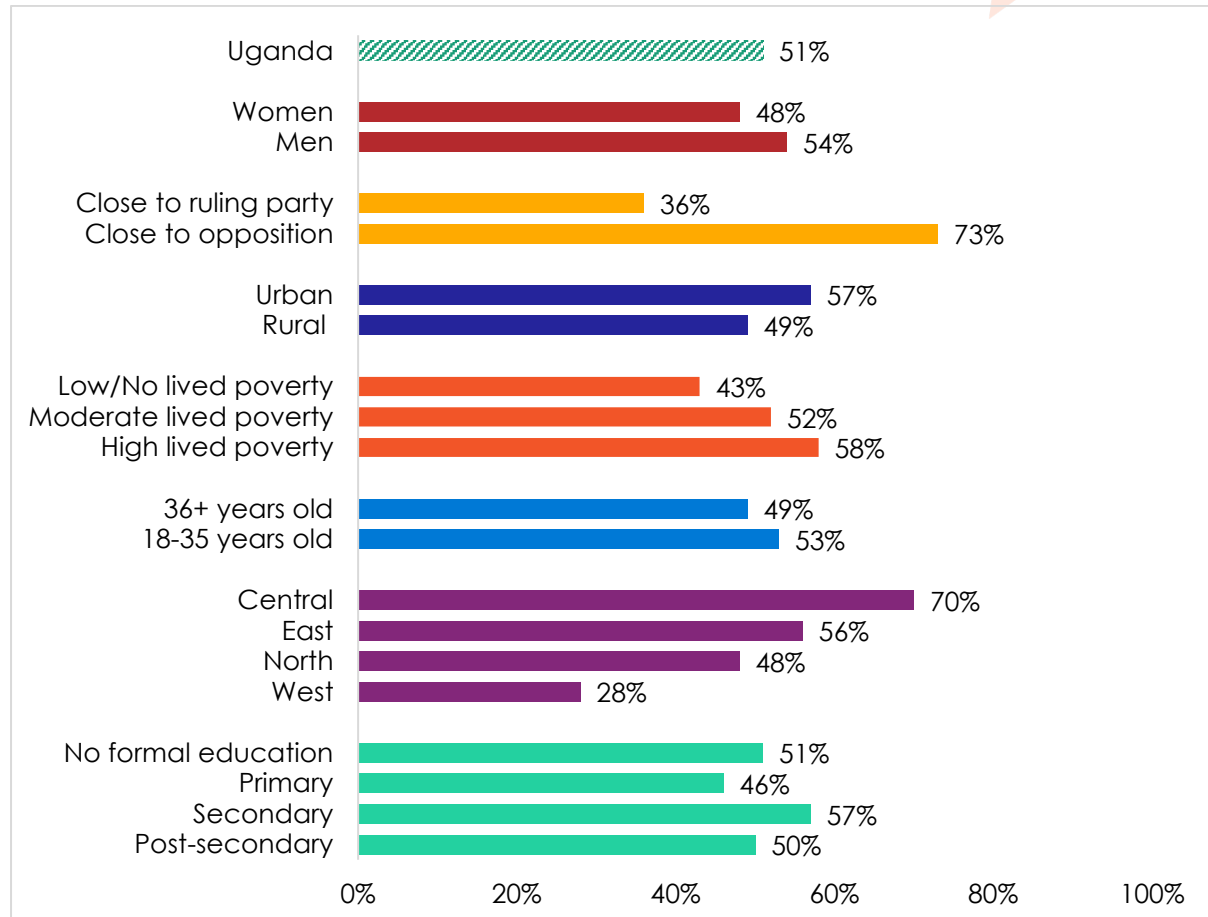
Disapproval of the country's direction is more common among urban than rural residents (57% vs. 49%) and among men compared to women (54% vs. 48%) (Figure 4). It increases with



respondents' experience of lived poverty,<sup>1</sup> ranging from 43% of the best-off to 58% of those with high lived poverty. Residents in the Central region (70%) are considerably more gloomy about the country's direction than their counterparts in other regions (28%-56%), as are citizens who "feel close to" the main opposition political party (73%) compared to supporters of the ruling party (36%).



**Figure 4: Country headed in the wrong direction** | by demographic group | Uganda | 2022



**Respondents were asked:** *Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction? (% who say "going in the wrong direction")*

The view that the country is headed in the wrong direction is likely to dampen goodwill toward the new cities (Krönke & Makanga, 2022), especially as accusations of mismanagement and lack of accountability dominate views on local government performance ratings (Advocates Coalition for Development & Environment, 2021, 2-3).

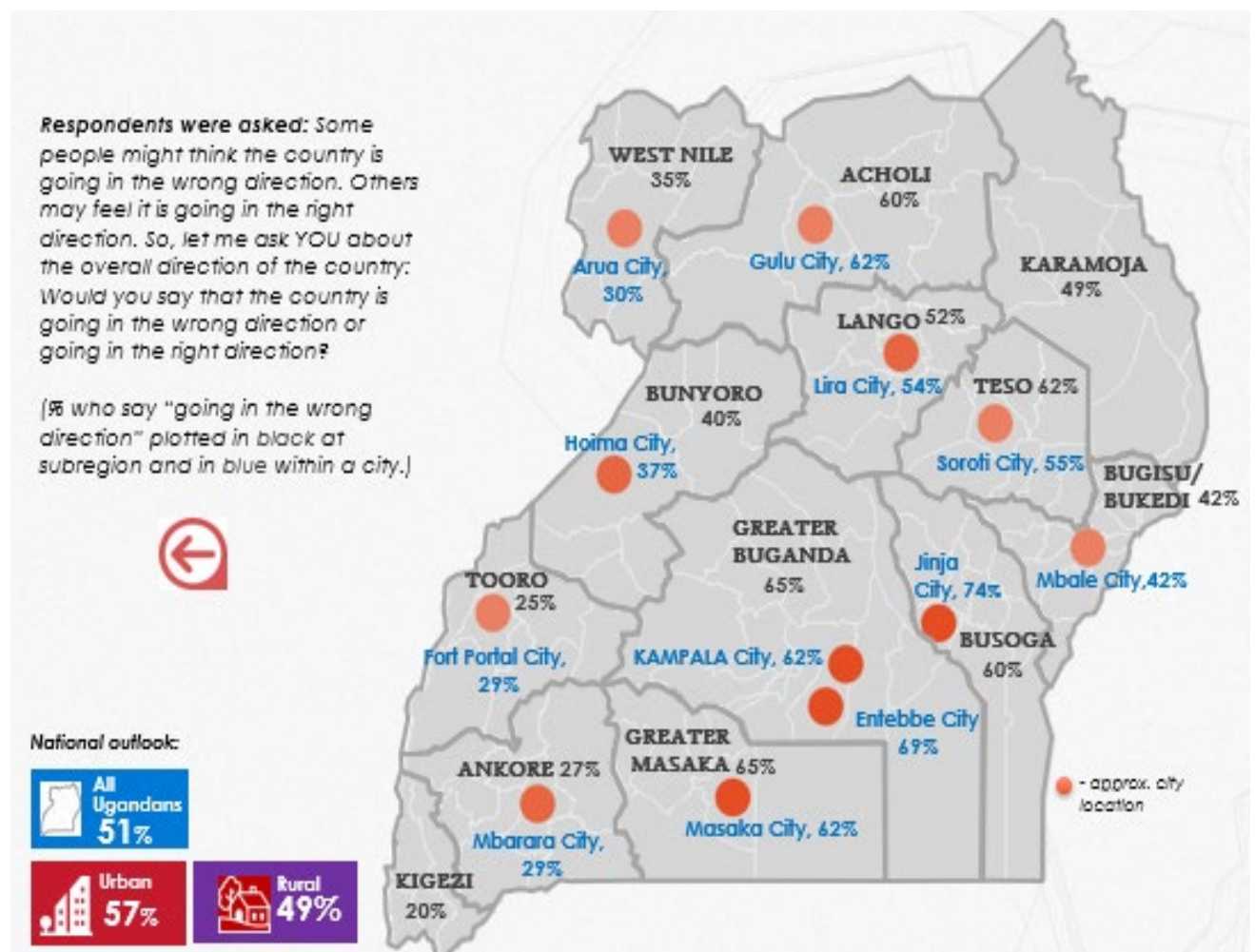
Views on the direction of the country also differ by city, with residents in Jinja (74%), Gulu (62%), Masaka (62%), and Kampala (62%) more likely to see the country as headed in the wrong direction than their counterparts in Fort Portal (29%), Mbarara (29%), Arua (30%), and Mbale (42%) (Figure 5). City residents differ little in their assessments from their counterparts within the same subregion except in Busoga and Ankore.

<sup>1</sup> Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes and Patel (2022).

Can the new city administrations attract citizen support where residents feel the country is headed in the wrong direction? The new cities were created with the hope that they would become regional development hubs, especially for job creation and improved social services, and would provide alternative migration destinations besides the city of Kampala. But if residents of the subregion hold views of the country's direction that are at least as negative as those held by city residents, might the cities lose their pull-factor potential and fail to attract investments and spur development in their subregion?

Moreover, subregions are yet to see any major funding policy changes toward the new cities, or any major roll-out of infrastructure developments except for reported prospective hikes in real estate rates in the new city environs (Monitor, 2022).

**Figure 5: Country headed in the wrong direction | by subregion and city | Uganda | 2022**



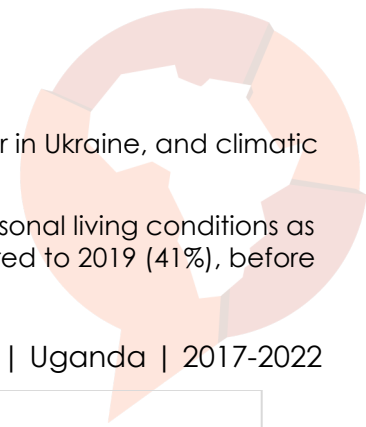
### Declining economic and living conditions

The new cities would certainly benefit from a vibrant local and national economy, especially if city residents are optimistic about their ability to meet their needs and generate disposable income for savings and investment. However, data show that the new cities were inaugurated amid growing economic uncertainty and hardship.

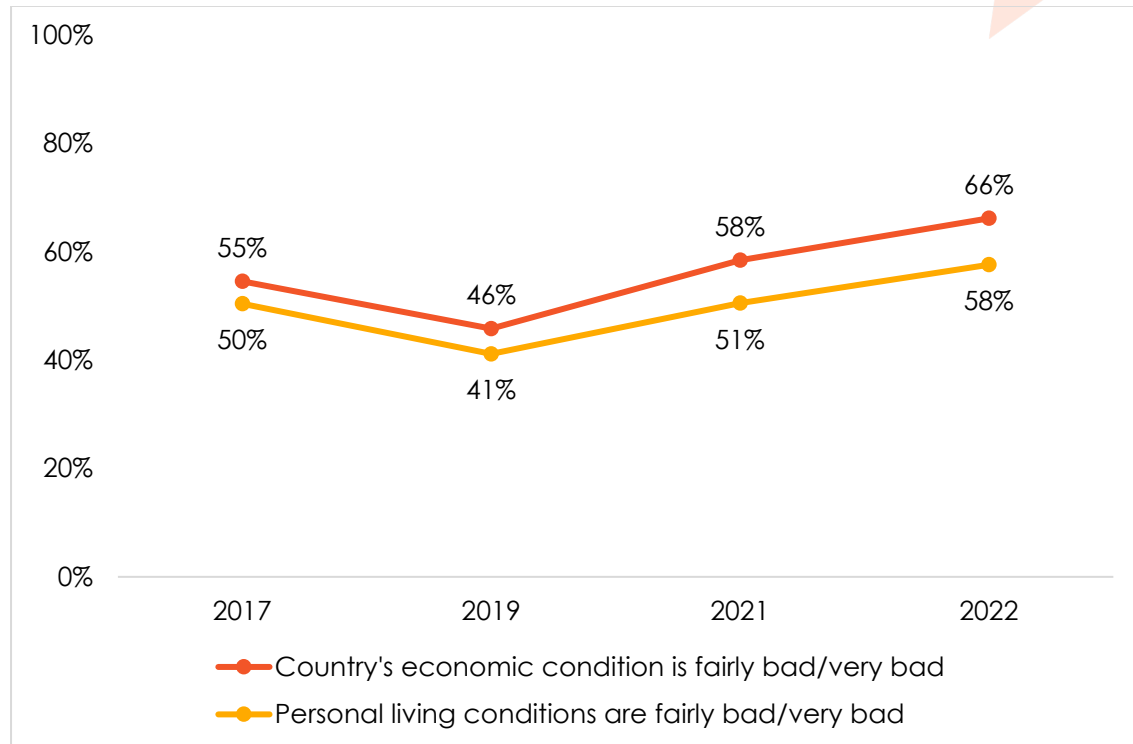
Ugandans' views of the country's economic situation and their personal living conditions have worsened since 2019, after improving during the period preceding the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 6). The proportion of survey respondents who consider the country's economic condition "fairly bad" or "very bad" has increased by 20 percentage points, from

46% to 66%, perhaps reflecting the effects of the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and climatic changes, among other factors.

At a personal level, a majority (58%) of Ugandans describe their personal living conditions as “fairly bad” or “very bad,” a 17-percentage-point increase compared to 2019 (41%), before COVID-19.



**Figure 6: Worsening economic and personal living conditions | Uganda | 2017-2022**



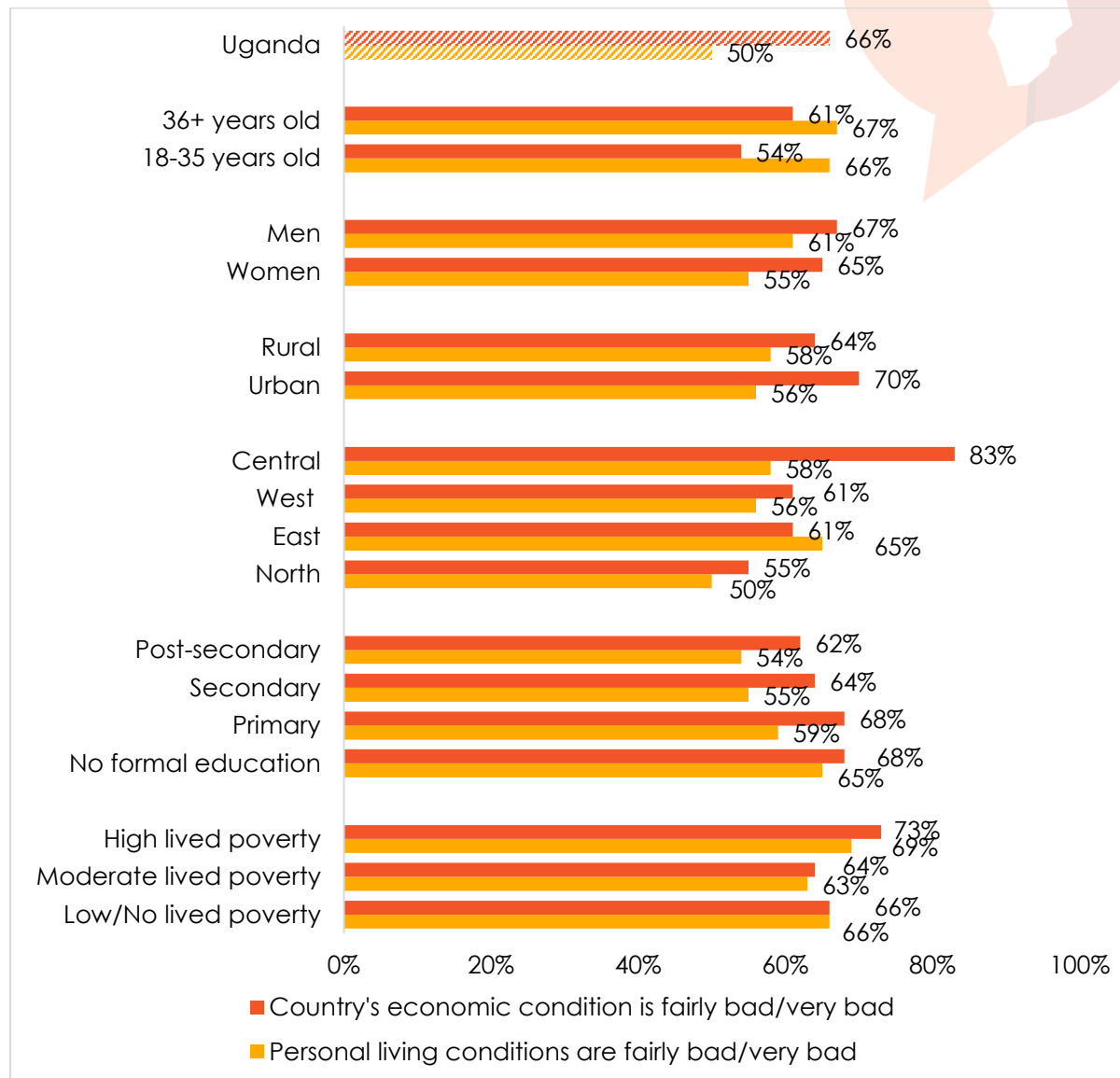
**Respondents were asked:** *In general, how would you describe: The present economic condition of this country? Your own present living condition? (% who say “fairly bad” or “very bad”)*

Not surprisingly, respondents whom the survey classified as experiencing high lived poverty are more likely to describe both their personal living conditions (69%) and the country's economic conditions (73%) as bad compared to those experiencing no/low lived poverty (66% on both indicators).

At the regional level, more residents in the Central (83%) describe the country's economic condition as bad compared to residents in the other regions. Residents in the East (65%) are more likely to describe their personal living conditions as bad than citizens in the North, West, and Central regions (Figure 7).

Thus, the worsening economic outlook has mostly affected those in the lowest income brackets and in urban areas, but differences diminish across gender, educational attainment, and age. These results point to the devastating COVID-19 disruptions, mostly among residents in urban areas, whose livelihoods depend on a paid job or on petty daily income.

**Figure 7: Country's economic situation and personal living conditions fairly/very bad**  
| by demographic group | Uganda | 2022



**Respondents were asked:** In general, how would you describe: The present economic condition of this country? Your own present living condition? (% who say "fairly bad" or "very bad")

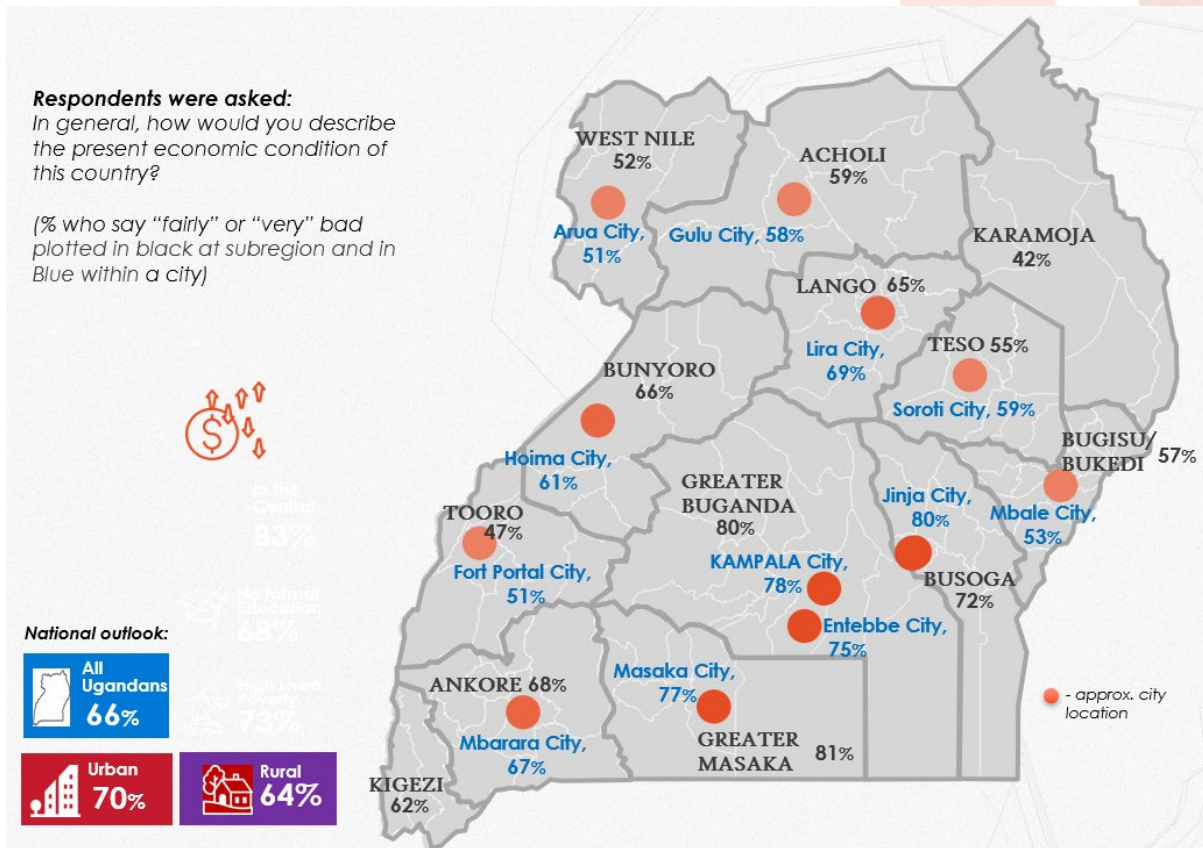
Negative assessments of the country's economic condition vary across the subregions – highest in Greater Masaka (81%) and Greater Buganda (80%) and lowest in Karamoja (42%) and Tooro (47%). More than half of residents in each new city describe the country's economic condition as bad, and city residents differ little in their assessments from those in their surrounding subregions (Figure 8).

Since trade in the new cities is sustained across subregional borders and with the capital city, the widespread negative economic outlook does not bode well for the prospects of the new cities.

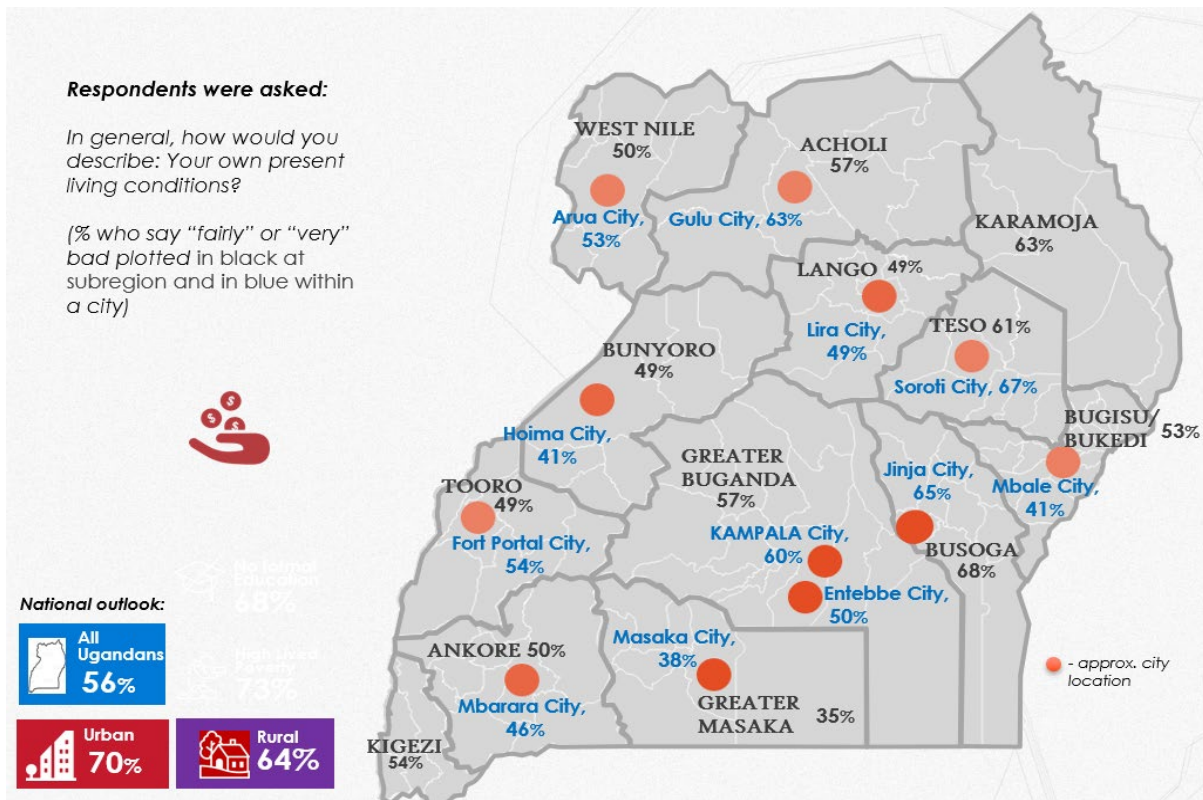
On a more encouraging note, citizens' ratings of their personal living conditions are somewhat less negative than their assessments of the country's economy. Perceptions that personal living conditions are fairly/very bad are highest in Busoga (68%) and lowest in Greater Masaka (35%) (Figure 9). Again, views in the new cities are not very different from those in the surrounding subregions, and city residents who are living on the edge might find it difficult to support the new city administrations if their living conditions are not improved.



**Figure 8: Country's economic condition fairly/very bad | by subregion and city | Uganda | 2022**



**Figure 9: Personal living conditions fairly/very bad | by subregion and city | Uganda | 2022**



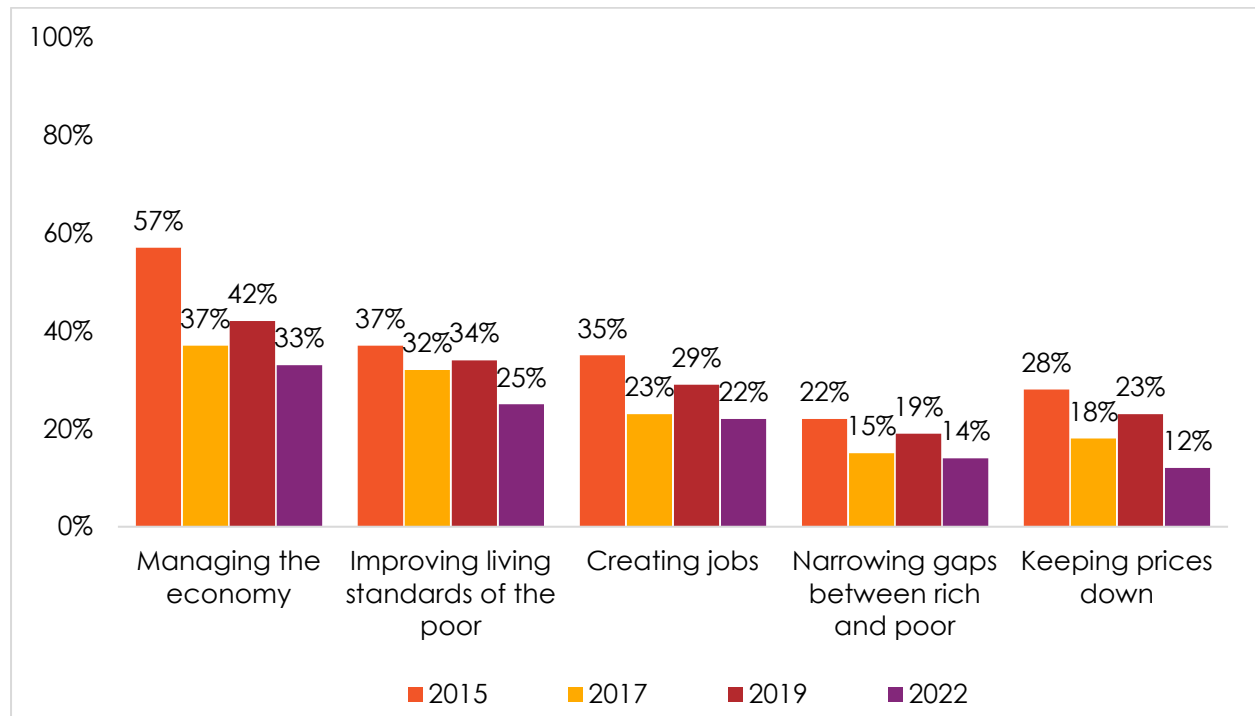


How well has the government managed to ensure acceptable living conditions for its citizens?

Popular assessments of the government's performance on selected economic indicators have been on the decline since 2015 (Figure 10). Only one-third (33%) of respondents say the government is doing a "fairly" or "very" good job of managing the economy, and even fewer approve of its performance improving living standards of the poor (25%), creating jobs (22%), narrowing gaps between rich and poor (14%), and keeping prices stable (12%).

Considering these increasingly poor ratings of government performance on economic issues, can new city administrations spur vibrant local economies?

**Figure 10: Government performance on selected economic tasks | Uganda | 2022**



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

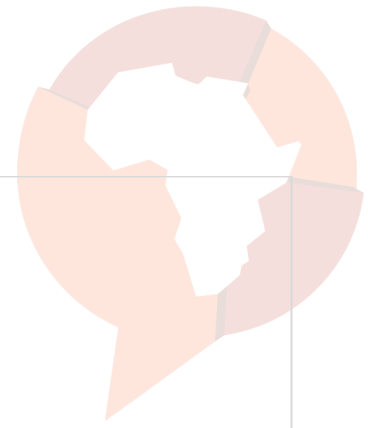
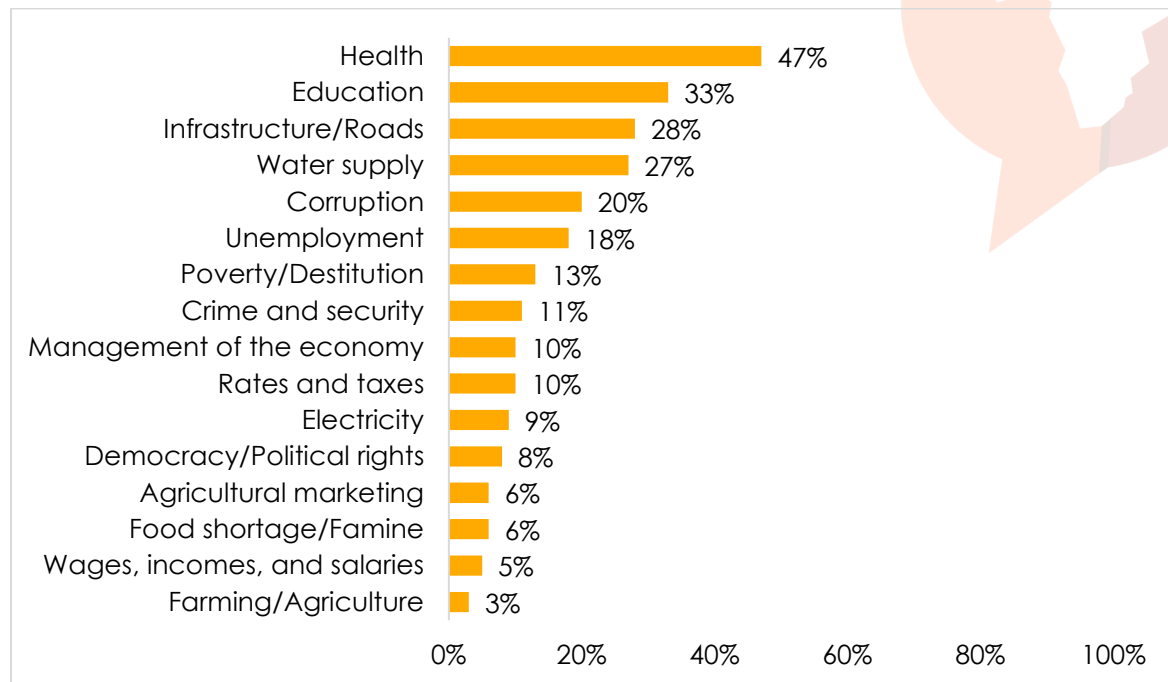
### The citizen development agenda from a city perspective

When Ugandans are asked what they consider the most important problems that the government should address, they most frequently mention health: Almost half (47%) of respondents cite this as one of their top three priorities. Education comes in at No. 2 (33%), followed by infrastructure/roads (28%) and water supply (27%) (Figure 11).

These priorities have been fairly stable over time, suggesting that the most pressing issues have not been entirely resolved, a picture that persists both in the new cities and in the subregions. Since 2015, survey respondents have consistently mentioned health, education, infrastructure, and water supply as the most important problems the country faces (Figure 12), often followed by unemployment, corruption, poverty, and management of the economy.

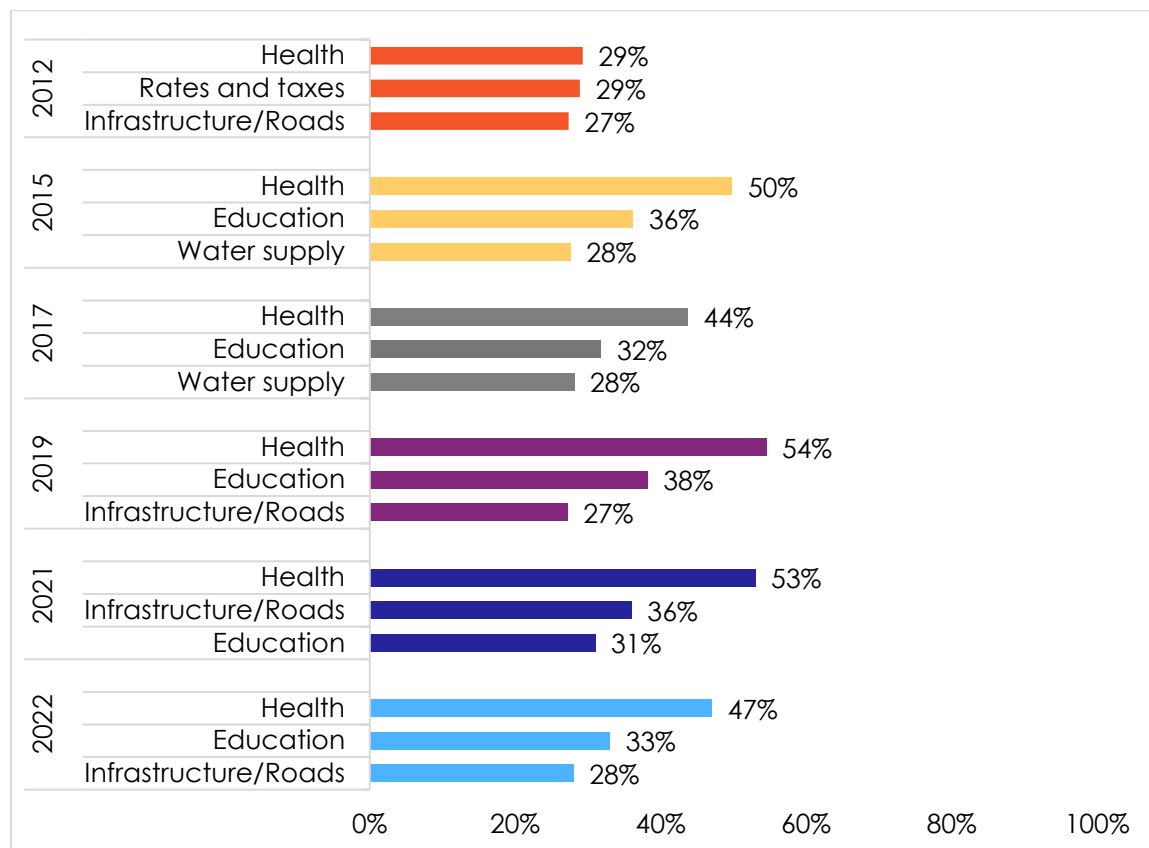
The poor state of health services infrastructure and unequal access to health services have made health such a critical problem (Yang & Geng, 2022; Tumwesigye, Okethwangu, Kaakyo, & Biribawa, 2021). Despite recent increases in the number of health facilities and providers against set national targets, many citizens still have to trek long distances to access health care and often face problems of staff absenteeism, stockouts, corruption, and poor service provision (Office of the Prime Minister, 2020).

**Figure 11: Most important problems** | Uganda | 2022



**Respondents were asked:** *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Respondents could give up to three responses. Figure shows % of respondents who mentioned each problem as one of their three priorities.)*

**Figure 12: Top-ranked problems** | Uganda | 2012-2022

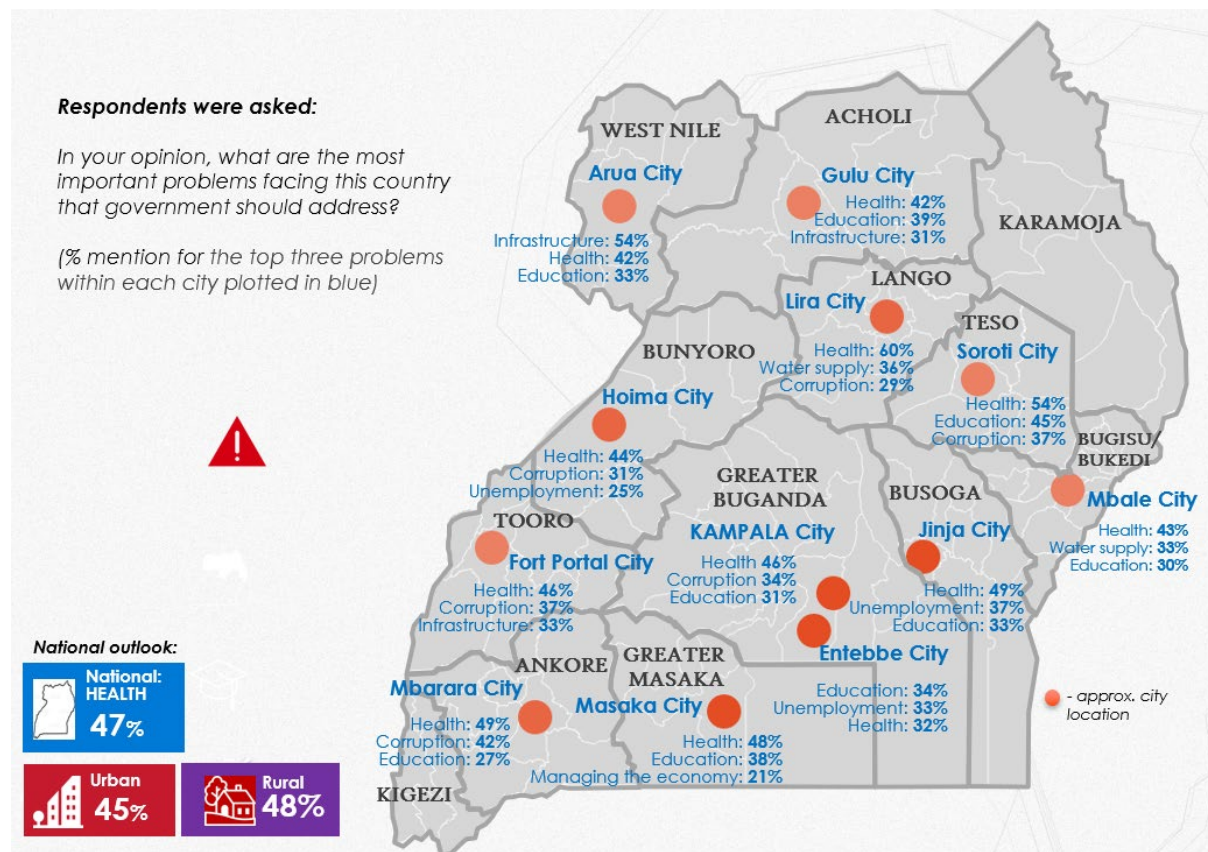


**Respondents were asked:** *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Up to three responses accepted per respondent. Figure shows the three most frequently cited problems in each survey round.)*

As shown in Figure 13, health places among the top problems cited by residents in all 11 cities. While each city records its own specific set of priorities, education is among the most frequently cited problem in nine cities, corruption in six, infrastructure in three, and water supply in two.

Considering the fact that certain problems are prioritised in most cities, and remain urgent problems over time, can the new city administrations inspire citizens to believe that hitherto unresolved problems will be successfully tackled? The data suggest that this will not be easy.

**Figure 13: Most important problems | by city | Uganda | 2022**

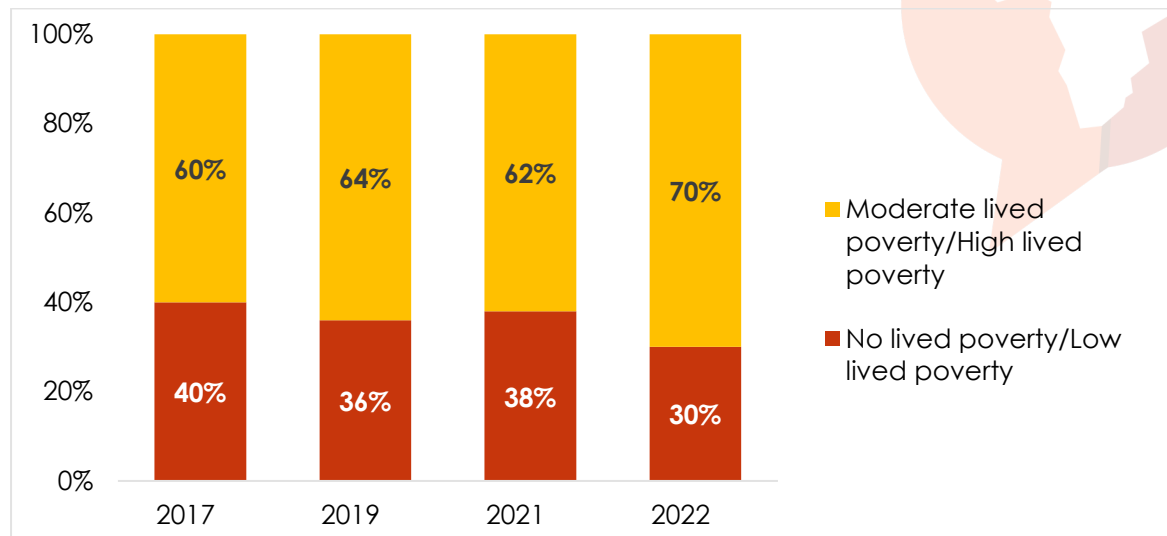


### Lived poverty across the cities

Government reports indicate that the proportion of the population living in poverty is declining, but the absolute number of people living in poverty is increasing, largely due to population growth and low employment rates, particularly among the youth (Office of the Prime Minister, 2020). Government estimates in 2019/2020, based on a new poverty line equal to \$1.77 per person per day, indicate that 30% of Ugandans (or 12.3 million people) are living in poverty, including 34% in rural areas and 20% in urban areas (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Recent government reports say that as many as 10.1 million people now live below the national poverty line of \$1.25 a day and that two-thirds of Ugandans remain at risk of falling into poverty (Nakaweesi, 2023). During the 2020-2021 COVID-19 crisis, experts expected as many as 780,000 Ugandans to fall into poverty (Independent, 2020).

By Afrobarometer's experiential measure of "lived poverty," which is based on how often households go without a basket of basic necessities (enough food and clean water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income), seven in 10 Ugandans (70%) experienced moderate or high levels of lived poverty during the year preceding the 2022 survey, which is a substantial increase from the 64% reported in 2019, before COVID-19 (Figure 14).

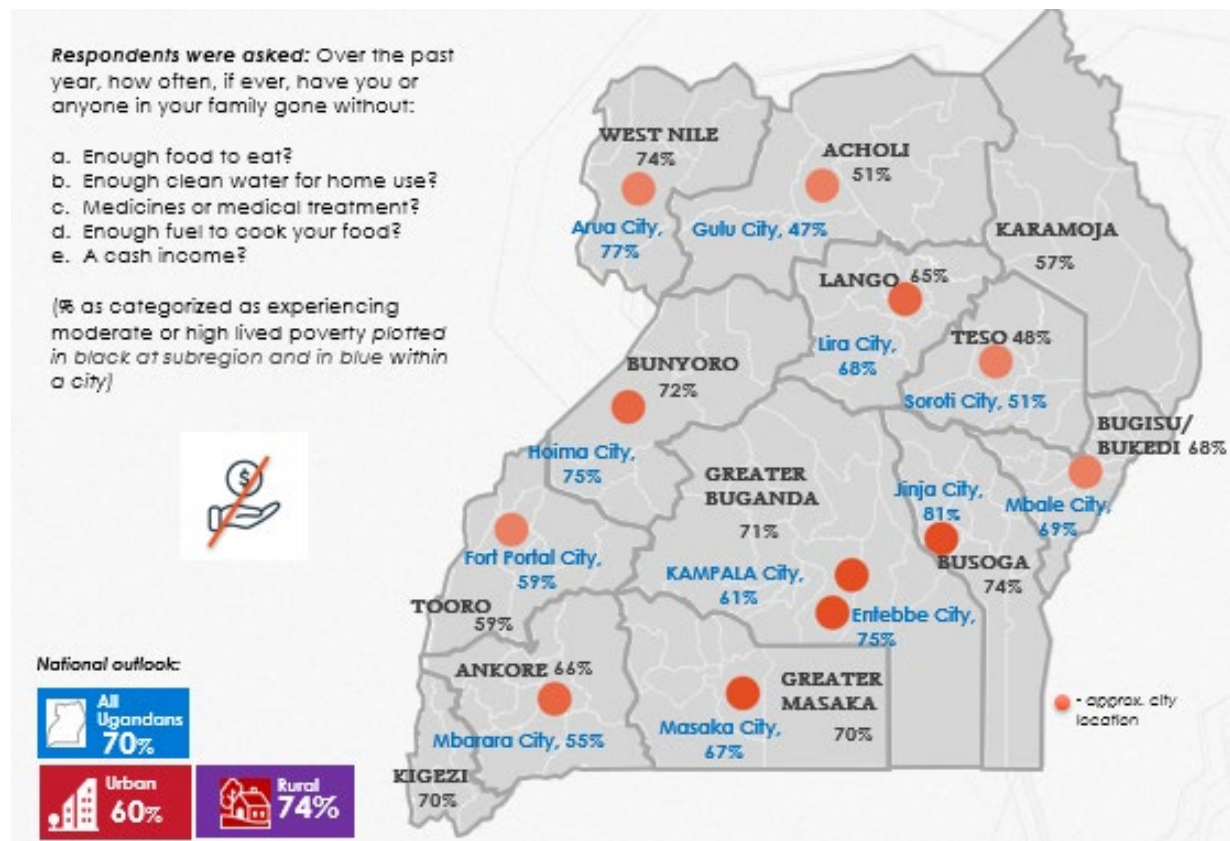
**Figure 14: Lived poverty | Uganda | 2017-2022**

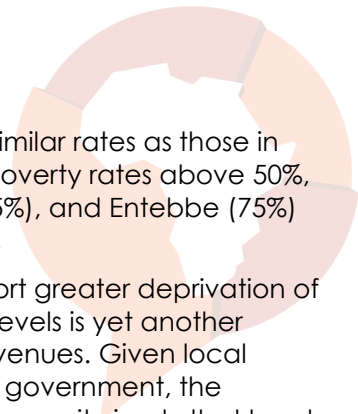


**Respondents were asked:** Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: Enough food to eat? Enough clean water for home use? Medicines or medical treatment? Enough fuel to cook your food? A cash income?

Lived poverty experiences vary across the subregions (Figure 15). In 12 of the 13 subregions, more than half of residents are classified as experiencing moderate or high lived poverty, with self-reported deprivation levels highest in West Nile (74%), Busoga (74%), and Bunyoro (72%) and lowest in Teso (48%), Acholi (51%), and Karamoja (57%). Regional economies, largely built on agriculture, tourism, and services, were grounded as transit towns and trade routes saw fewer travellers.

**Figure 15: Moderate/High lived poverty | by subregion and city | Uganda | 2022**





Citizens residing in the new cities generally experienced poverty at similar rates as those in the surrounding subregions. Most cities report moderate/high lived poverty rates above 50%, with the highest levels recorded in Jinja (81%), Arua (77%), Hoima (75%), and Entebbe (75%) and the lowest levels in Gulu (47%), Soroti (51%), and Mbarara (55%).

Can the new cities generate more local revenue where citizens report greater deprivation of basic needs? Widespread lived poverty at both subregion and city levels is yet another indicator that cities face a daunting task in sustainably mobilising revenues. Given local governments' traditional reliance on disbursements from the central government, the absence of a strong local tax base and citizens' dwindling taxable capacity imply that local administrations need to prioritise stimulus packages to spur local economies.

### Citizen experiences accessing public services

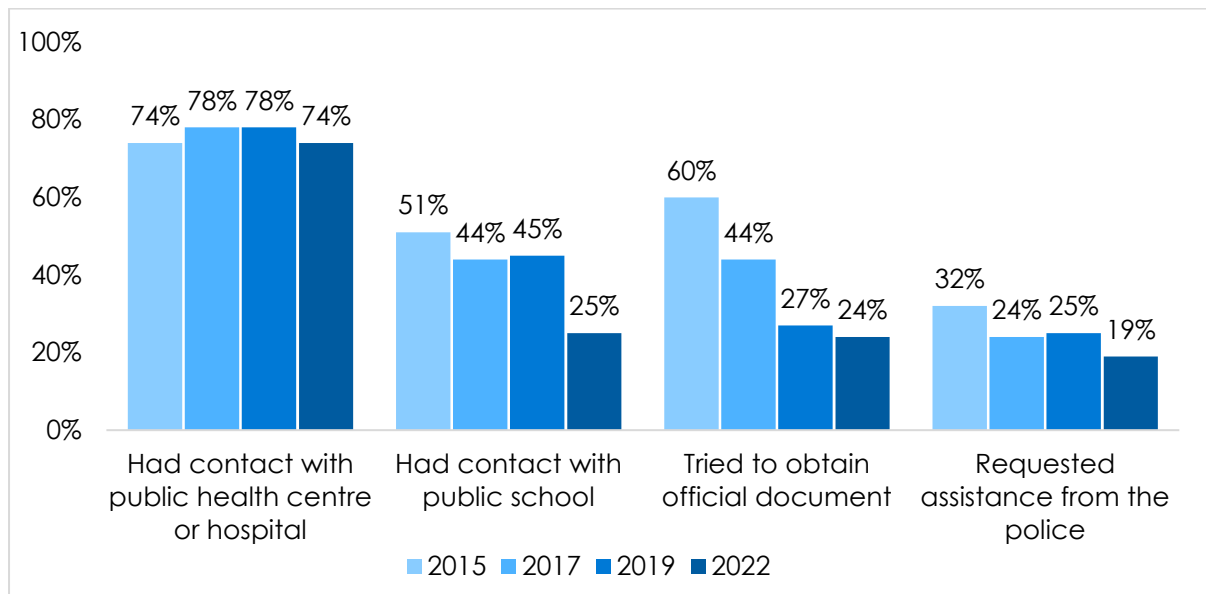
Afrobarometer survey findings show that the proportion of Ugandans who seek selected public services is on the decline and that many of those who make contact find it difficult to obtain the needed services or have to pay a bribe to do so. This state of affairs raises questions about how the new cities can thrive in an environment where citizen contact with public services is declining while difficulties and bribery continue unabated.

#### Level of contact for public services

In 2022, three-fourths (74%) of citizens say they had contact with a government-owned health centre or hospital, 25% had contact with a public school, 24% tried to obtain a government document (such as a national ID, trading license, permit, or passport), and 19% sought assistance from the police (Figure 16).

Health care has consistently been the most sought-after of these services, and contact rates have remained high since 2015. But contact with public schools has dropped by half (from 51% in 2015 to 25%), and contact with a government agency to obtain an official document has dropped even more steeply (from 60% to 24%), while the share of citizens seeking police assistance declined from 32% to 19%.

**Figure 16: Contact for public services | Uganda | 2015-2022**

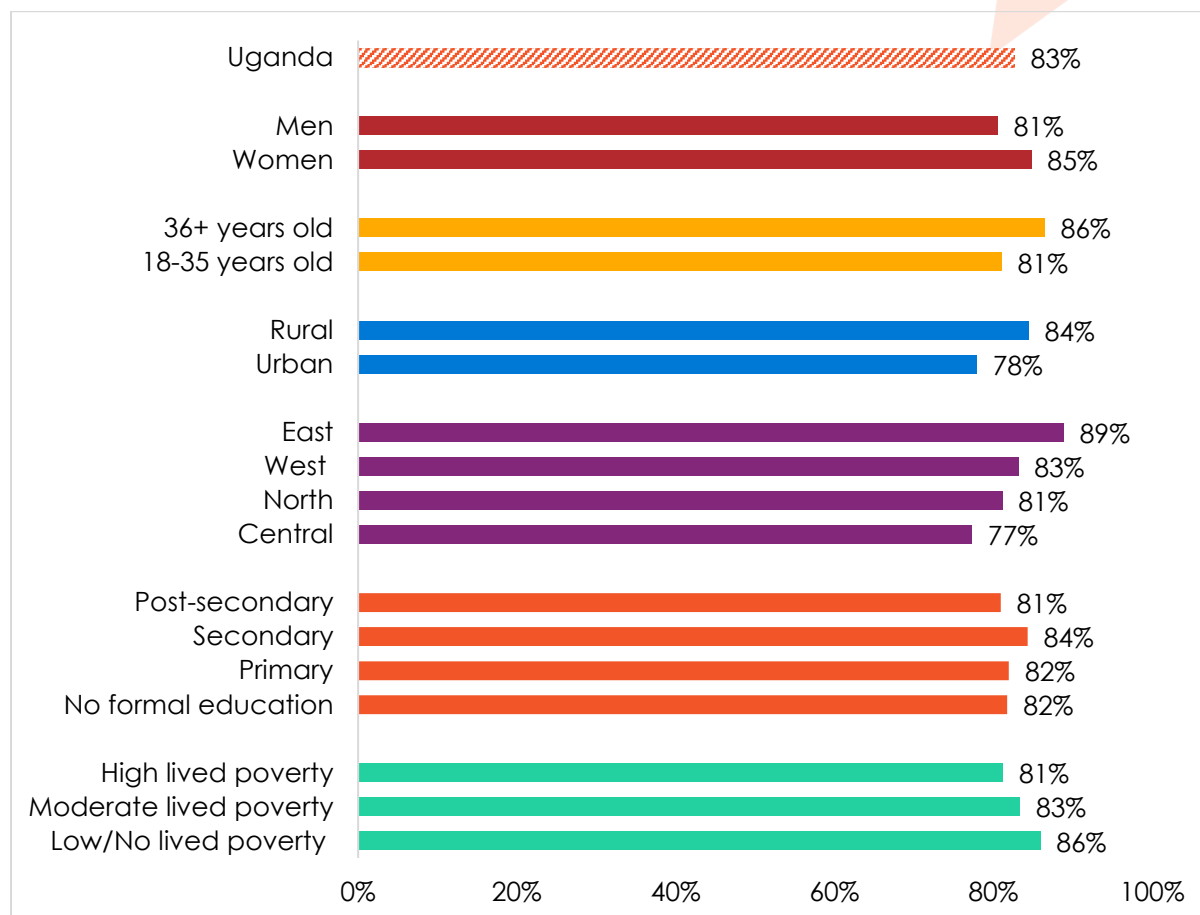


**Respondents were asked:** *In the past 12 months, have you: Had contact with a public school? Had contact with a public health centre or hospital? Tried to get an identity document like a birth certificate, driver's license, passport or voter's card, or permit from the government? Requested assistance from the police? (% who say "yes")*



More than eight in 10 Ugandans (83%) made contact for at least one of these four key services during the past year, most often seeking health care. Contact with at least one service is highest among women (85%), rural residents (84%), citizens with low or no lived poverty (86%), and those living in the Eastern region (89%) (Figure 17).

**Figure 17: Contact with at least one of four key public services** | by demographic group | Uganda | 2022



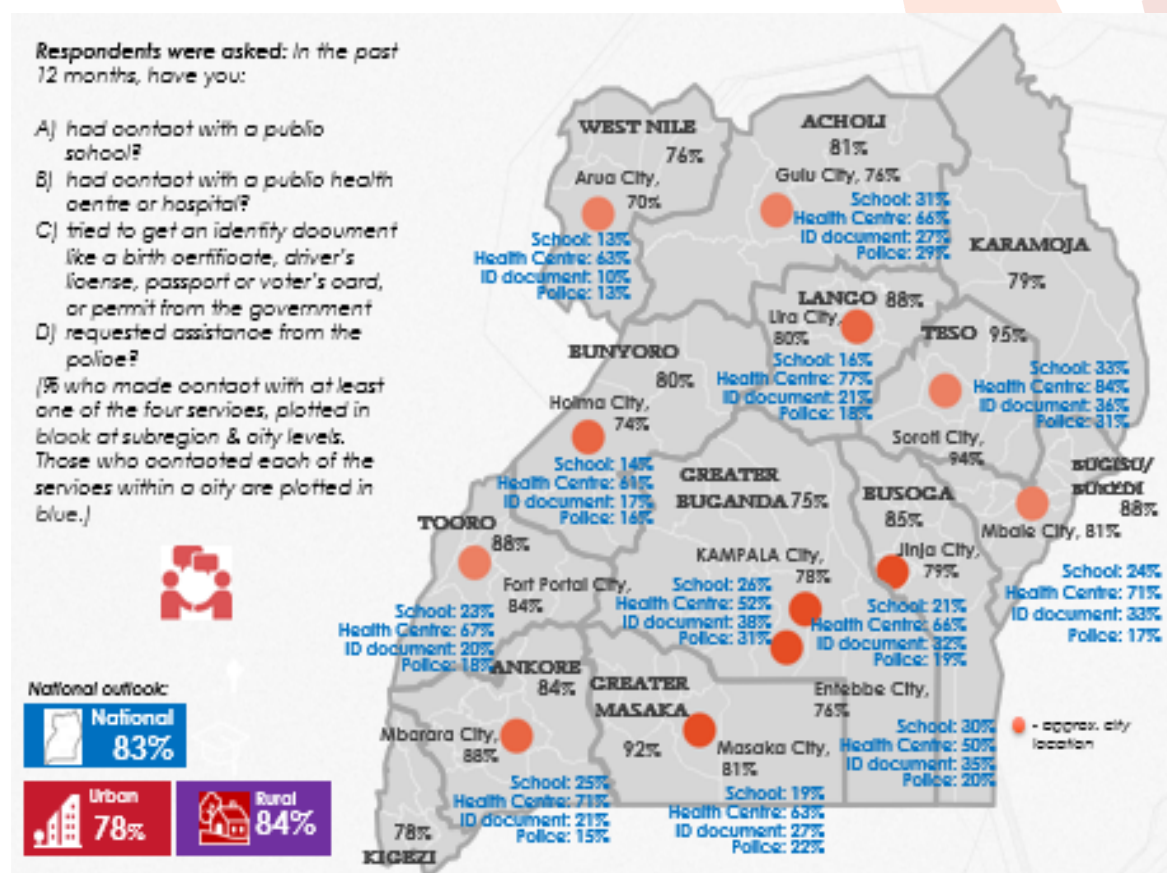
**Respondents were asked:** In the past 12 months, have you: Had contact with a public school? Had contact with a public health centre or hospital? Tried to get an identity document like a birth certificate, driver's license, passport or voter's card, or permit from the government? Requested assistance from the police? (% who contacted at least one of the four services)

Contact for at least one of the four public services is high across all the new cities – highest in Soroti (94%), Mbarara (88%), and Fort Portal (84%) and lowest in Hoima (74%) and Arua (70%) (Figure 18).

In all the new cities, at least half of respondents made contact for health services, being highest in Soroti (84%), Lira (77%), Mbale and Mbarara (71% each) and lowest in Kampala (52%), Hoima (61%), Masaka (63%), and Arua (63%). Contact for public education services varies across cities, from highs in Soroti (33%), Gulu (31%), Kampala (26%), and Mbarara (25%) to lows in Arua (13%), Hoima (14%), Lira (16%), and Masaka (19%).

In most cases, subregions record somewhat more contact for services than their new cities.

**Figure 18: Contact with at least one of four public services | by subregion and city | Uganda | 2022**



### Difficulty in accessing public services

Many Ugandans faced difficulties in accessing the four services highlighted here. For health services, which tend to be accessed by many, challenges may stem from distances to facilities, low levels of infrastructure development, low quality of services, staff absenteeism, stockouts, high costs, and overcrowding – challenges that provide a conducive environment for corruption.

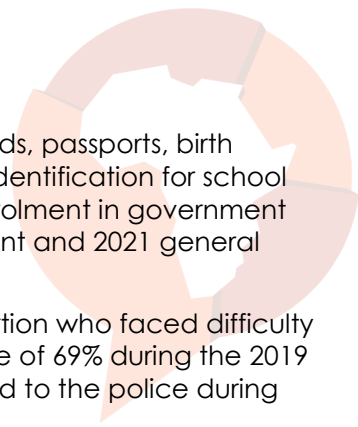
Among the three-quarters (74%) of respondents who accessed health services during the past year, 60% say it was “difficult” or “very difficult” to obtain the needed services (Figure 19). Similarly, more than half (55%) of respondents who sought police assistance report having faced difficulty in obtaining the help they needed, while a little more than one-third (36%) of all respondents who sought public school services faced difficulties. Similarly, 43% report facing difficulty obtaining government documents such as a birth certificate, driver's license, passport, voter's card, or permit.

Data show that since 2015, difficulty in accessing these four selected services has increased (Figure 20). Among respondents who had contact with a government-owned health centre, the proportion who faced difficulty increased from 52% in 2015 to 60% in 2022. Among those who had contact with a public school, 36% report difficulty in accessing services, up from 29% in 2015. Some of these difficulties in accessing public school services may be due to challenges similar to those faced in health service provision, such as long distances to schools, low levels of infrastructure development, low quality of services, staff absenteeism, associated costs, overcrowding, and corruption.

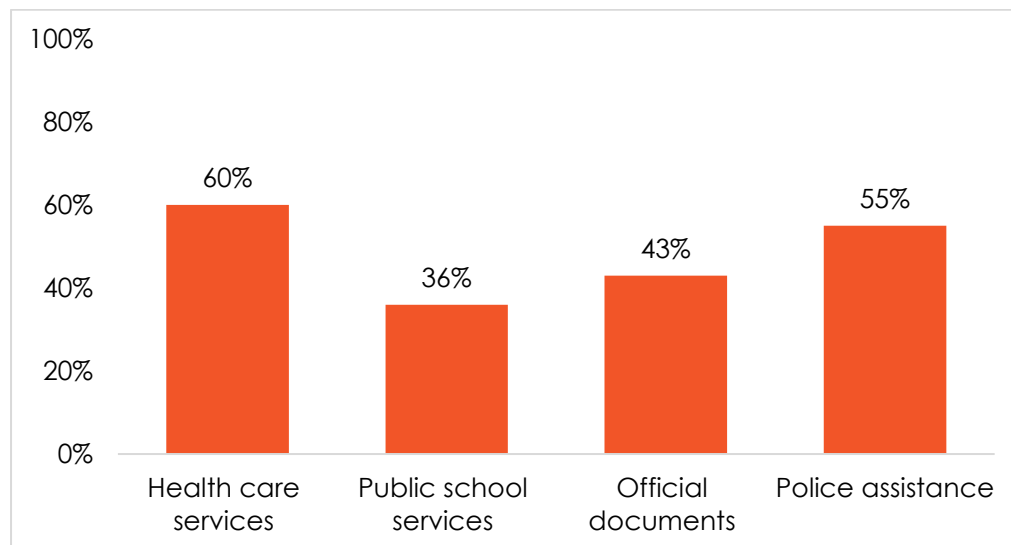
Similarly, difficulty in accessing official documents increased from 35% in 2015 to 43% in 2022 among those who tried to obtain them. The 2019 survey recorded a spike in difficulty,

perhaps as a result of people's efforts to obtain national Identity cards, passports, birth certificates, and driver licenses, which became necessary forms of identification for school enrolment, accessing financial services, overseas travel for work, enrolment in government poverty-alleviation initiatives, and voting in the 2018 local government and 2021 general elections.

Among citizens who contacted the police for assistance, the proportion who faced difficulty increased from 51% in 2015 to 55% in 2022, with a reported high score of 69% during the 2019 survey, perhaps reflecting cases of election-related disputes reported to the police during the 2018 local government elections.

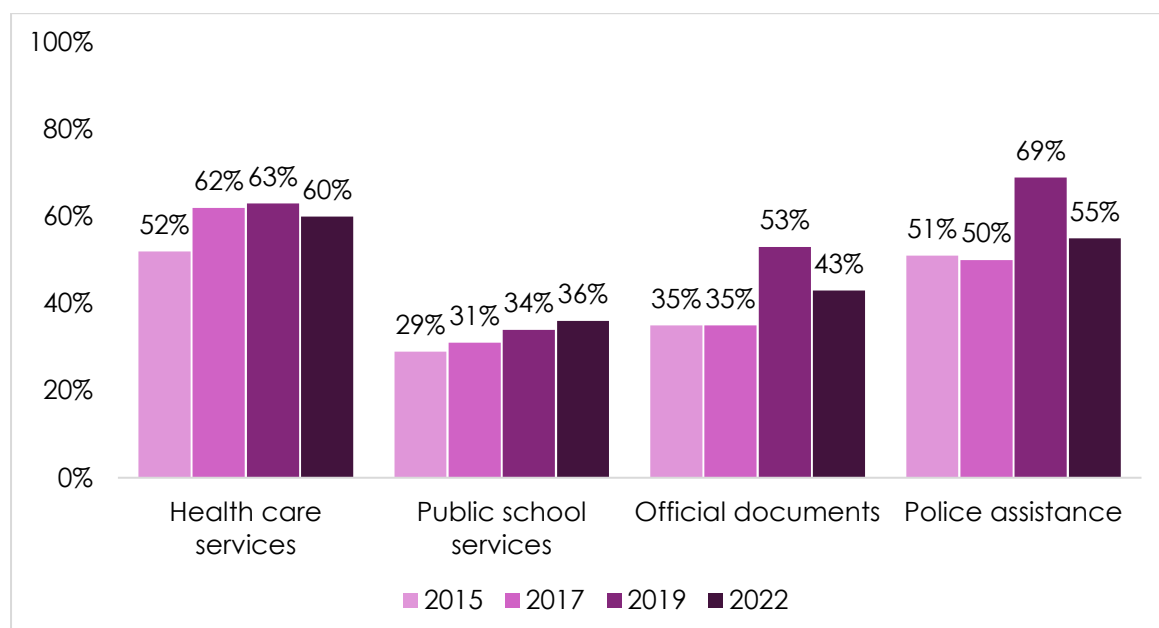


**Figure 19: Difficulty in accessing key public services | Uganda | 2022**



**Respondents who sought key public services during the previous year were asked:** How easy or difficult was it [to obtain the services you needed]? (Figure shows percentage of all respondents who say they sought each of these services and found it "difficult" or "very difficult" to obtain)

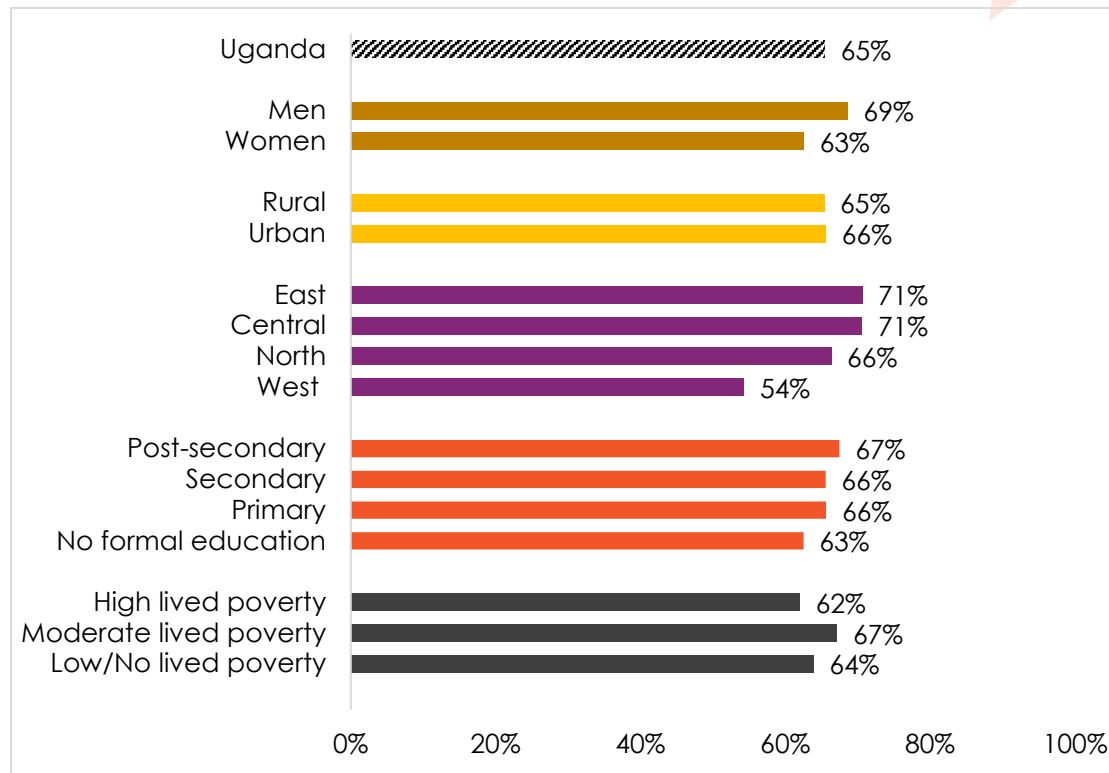
**Figure 20: Difficulty in accessing public services | Uganda | 2015-2022**



**Respondents who sought key public services during the previous year were asked:** How easy or difficult was it [to obtain the services you needed]? (Figure shows percentage of all respondents who say they sought each of these services and found it "difficult" or "very difficult" to obtain)

About two-thirds (65%) of all Ugandans who had contact with any of the four key public services during the previous year report having faced difficulties in obtaining at least one of the services. Men are somewhat more likely to report problems than women (69% vs. 63%), as are residents from the East and Central regions (71% each) compared to the West (54%) and North (66%) (Figure 21).

**Figure 21: Difficulty in obtaining at least one public service | by demographic group | Uganda | 2022**

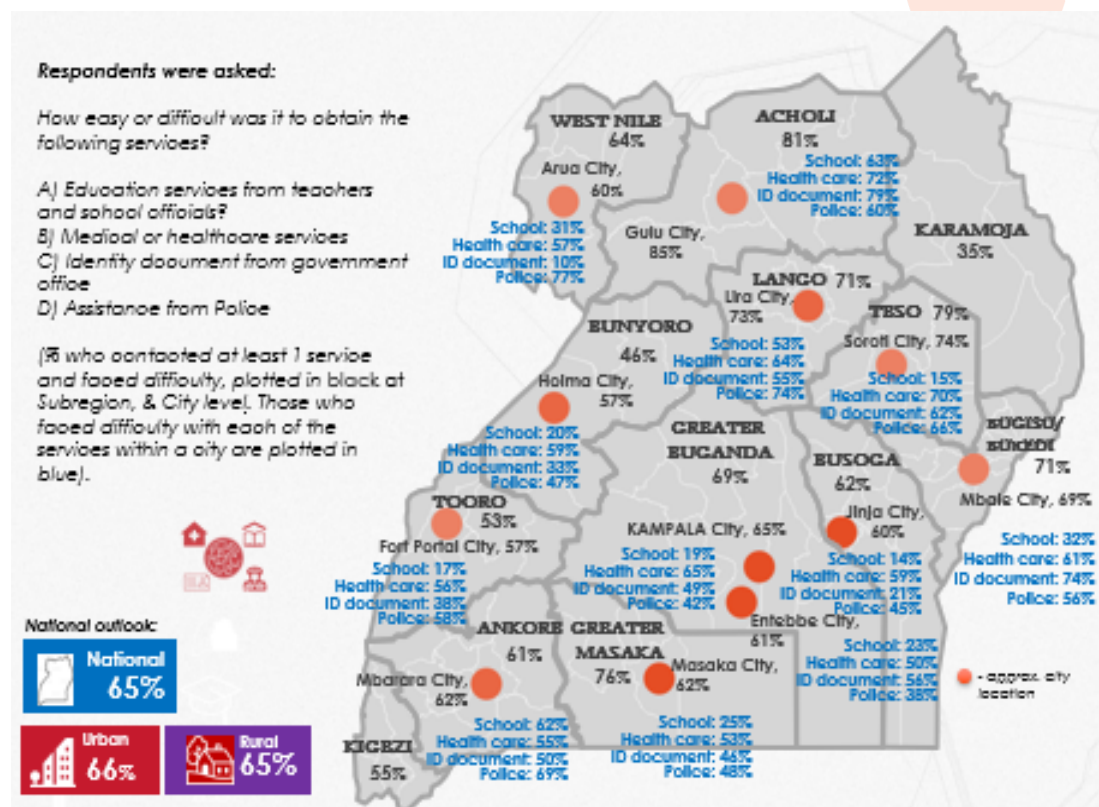


**Respondents who accessed at least one of four key public services were asked:** How easy or difficult was it [to obtain the services you needed]? (Figure shows the percentage of all respondents who sought at least one of the four key services and say it was “difficult” or “very difficult” to obtain.)

Difficulty in accessing public services varies across subregions and cities, with high levels reported in the subregions of Acholi (81%), Lango (79%), Greater Masaka (76%), and Bugisu (71%), vs. significantly lower levels in Karamoja (35%), Bunyoro (46%), Tooro (53%), and Kigezi (55%). Cities differ somewhat less in the reported difficulty of obtaining public services, ranging from highs in Gulu (85%), Teso (74%), Lira (73%), Mbale (69%), and Kampala (65%) to lows in Hoima (57%), Fort Portal (57%), Jinja (60%), and Arua (60%) (Figure 22).

The finding that a majority of citizens in each new city report difficulty in obtaining key public services highlights the need for urgent intervention if cities are to win public trust and confidence in service delivery. The new cities will need to adopt service-delivery strategies that project effectiveness and efficiency, particularly in reducing delays that fuel agitation and bribery.

**Figure 22: Difficulty obtaining at least one public service | by subregion and city | Uganda | 2022**



### Paying bribes to access public services

Can the new cities thrive where citizens feel service delivery is difficult and corrupted?

Four in 10 Ugandans (39%) who accessed health care services report having to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a health worker at least once in order to obtain the needed services (Figure 23). Similarly, three in 10 (29%) of those who sought public school services say they had pay a bribe.

The proportion who paid a bribe to get an official document (40%) is nearly the same as the share who say they faced difficulty.

Bribery is particularly common in accessing police assistance: Almost three-fourths (73%) of those who sought help say they had to pay a bribe – far more than say that obtaining assistance was difficult (55%).

As shown in Figure 24, the experience of bribery among those seeking key public services has increased since 2015. The proportion of those who sought medical care at a government-owned health facility and had to pay a bribe increased by 14 percentage points, from 25% in 2015 to 39% in 2022. Over the same time period, bribe-paying increased by 10 percentage points for public school services, by 25 points – more than doubling – for official documents, and by 32 points for police assistance.

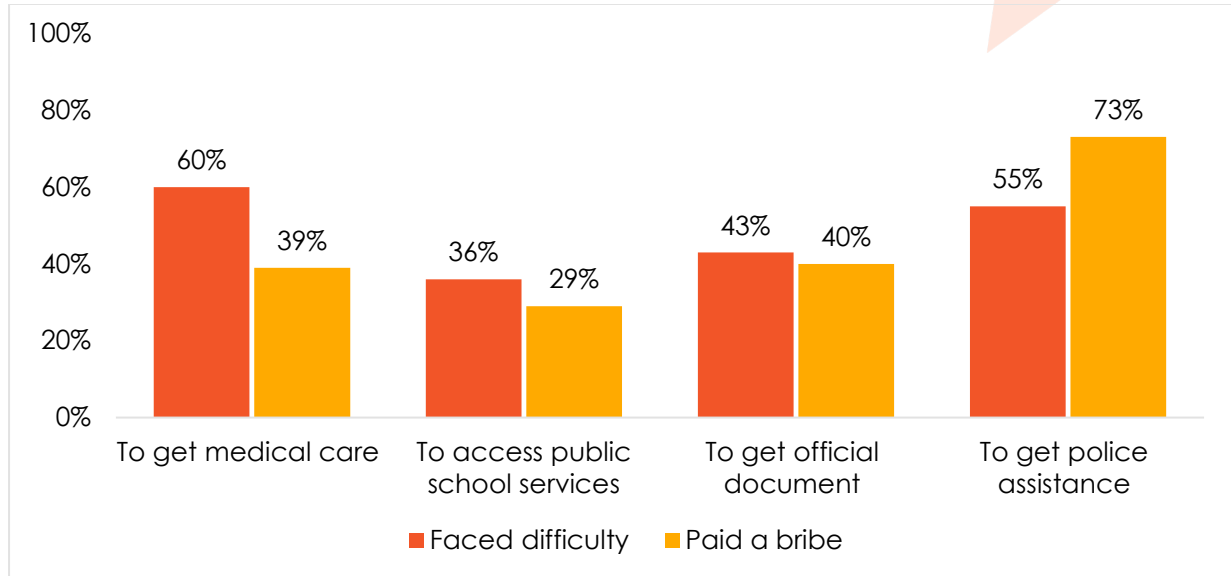
These findings indicate that anti-corruption efforts undertaken by the government and other stakeholders are yet to achieve their desired impact.

Overall, fully half (50%) of all adult Ugandans who had contact with any of the four services report having the experience of paying a bribe, offering a gift, or doing a favour in order to obtain the service. This experience was particularly common among men (53%), urban residents (55%), citizens without formal education (59%), and residents in the Central (62%) and East (58%) regions (Figure 25).



Residents in six of the 11 cities – Arua, Gulu, Mbale, Fort Portal, Hoima, and Mbarara – are more likely to report the experience of seeking these key public services and having to pay a bribe than their counterparts in the surrounding subregion (Figure 26). Situations where cities experience more corruption could reduce those cities' pull-factor potential and make it more difficult to attract local and foreign investment and build public trust.

**Figure 23: Difficulty and bribery in accessing key public services | Uganda | 2022**

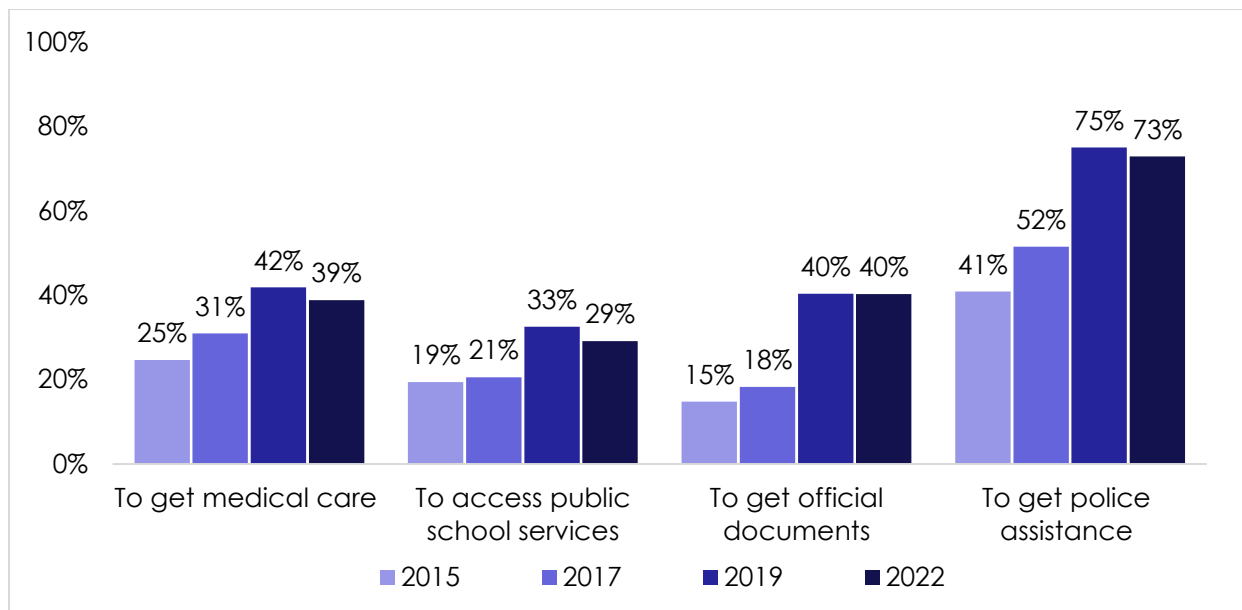


**Respondents who sought key public services during the previous year were asked:**

*How easy or difficult was it [to obtain the services you needed]? (Figure shows percentage of all respondents who say they sought each of these services and found it "difficult" or "very difficult" to obtain)*

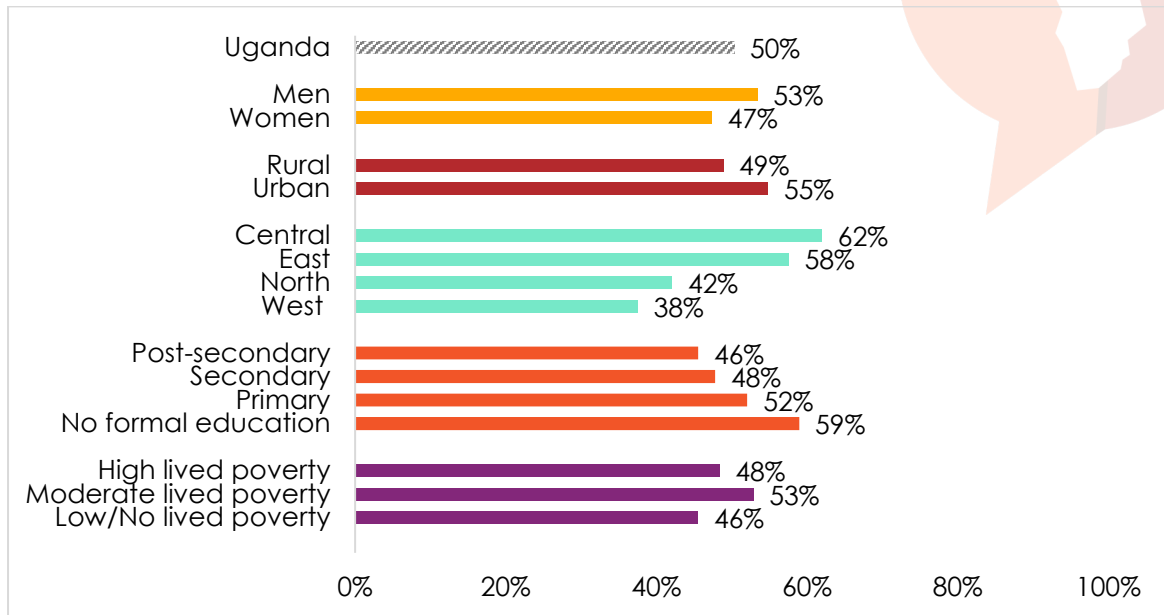
*How often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for [an official in order to get the services you needed]? (Figure shows percentage of all respondents who say they sought each of these services and had to pay a bribe "once or twice," "a few times," or "often")*

**Figure 24: Paid a bribe to obtain public services | Uganda | 2015-2022**



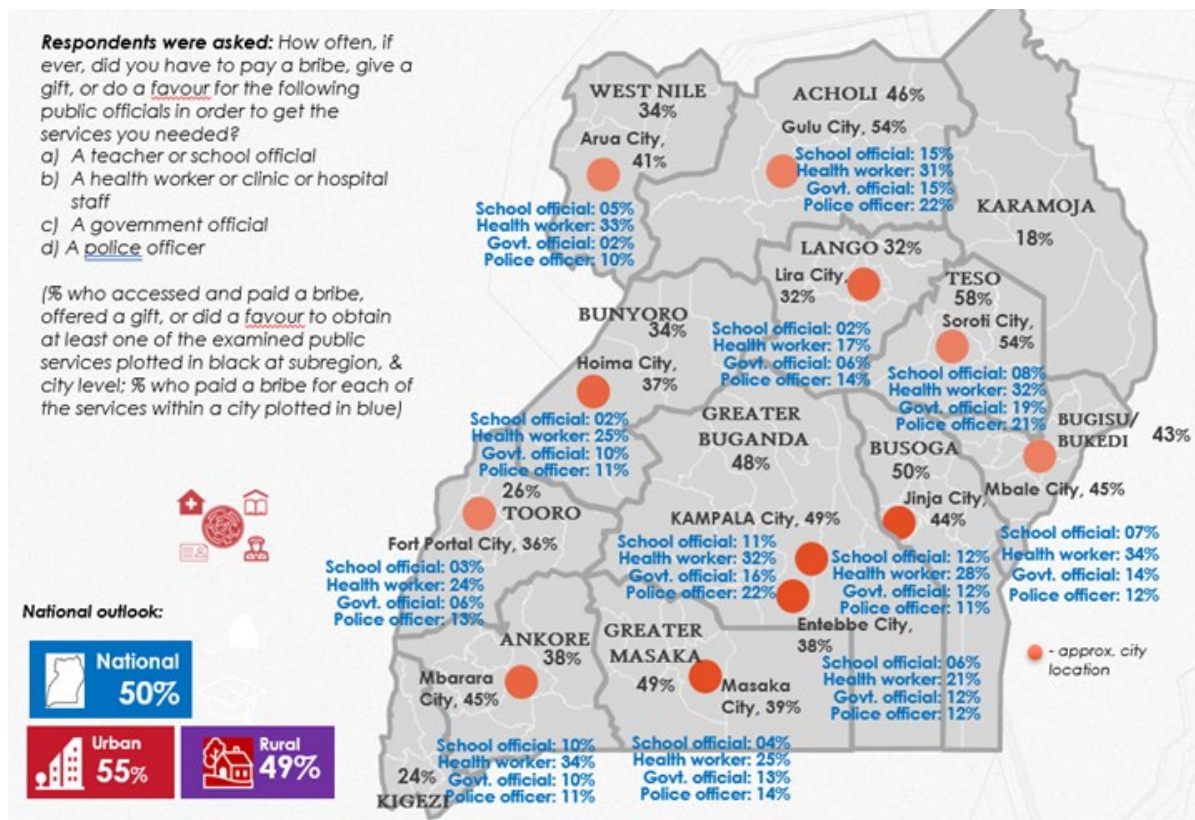
**Respondents who sought key public services during the previous year were asked:** *How often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for [an official in order to get the services you needed]? (Figure shows percentage of all respondents who say they sought each of these services and had to pay a bribe "once or twice," "a few times," or "often")*

**Figure 25: Paid a bribe to obtain at least one public service | by demographic group | Uganda | 2022**



**Respondents who accessed at least one of four key public services were asked:** How often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour [in order to obtain the services you needed]? (Figure shows the percentage of all respondents who sought at least one of the four key services and say they had to pay a bribe "once or twice," "a few times," or "often")

**Figure 26: Paid a bribe to obtain at least one public service | by subregion and city | Uganda | 2022**

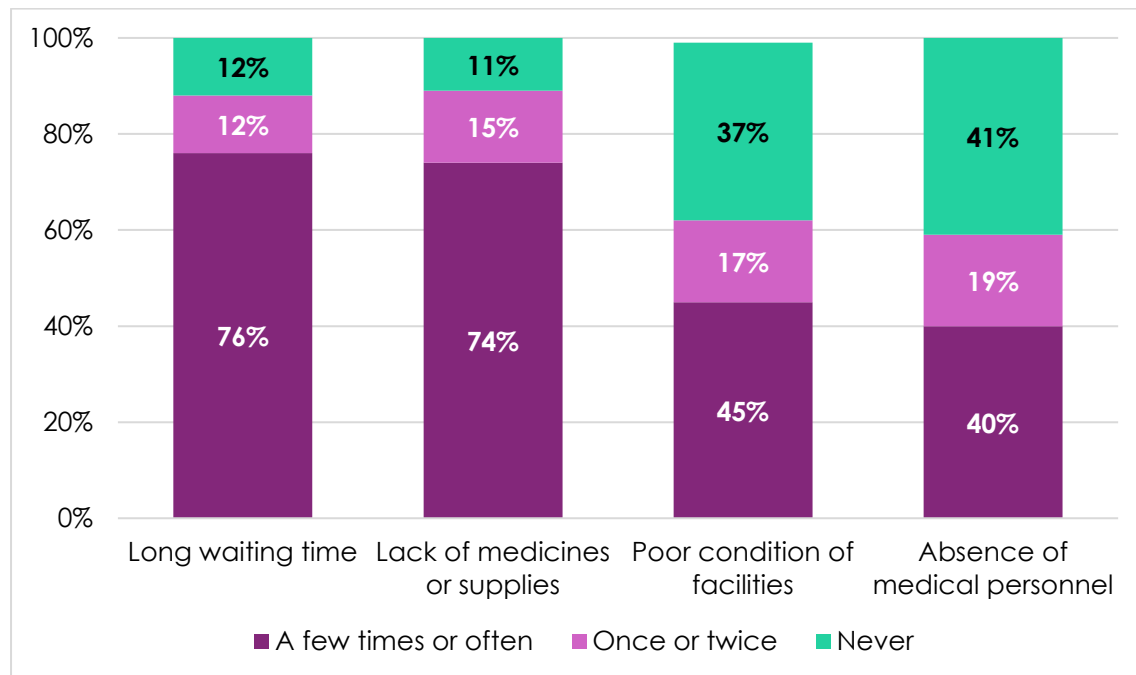


### Problems encountered in accessing public health care and courts

Nearly nine out of 10 Ugandans who had contact with a government-owned health centre or hospital during the previous 12 months say they experienced a lack of medicines or supplies (89%) or long wait times (88%). Majorities also report facilities in poor condition (63%) and absent medical personnel (59%) (Figure 27).

While a majority (57%) say the staff treated them with respect (“somewhat” or “a lot”), 23% say they felt completely disrespected.

**Figure 27: Extent of problems faced in accessing public health care | Uganda | 2022**



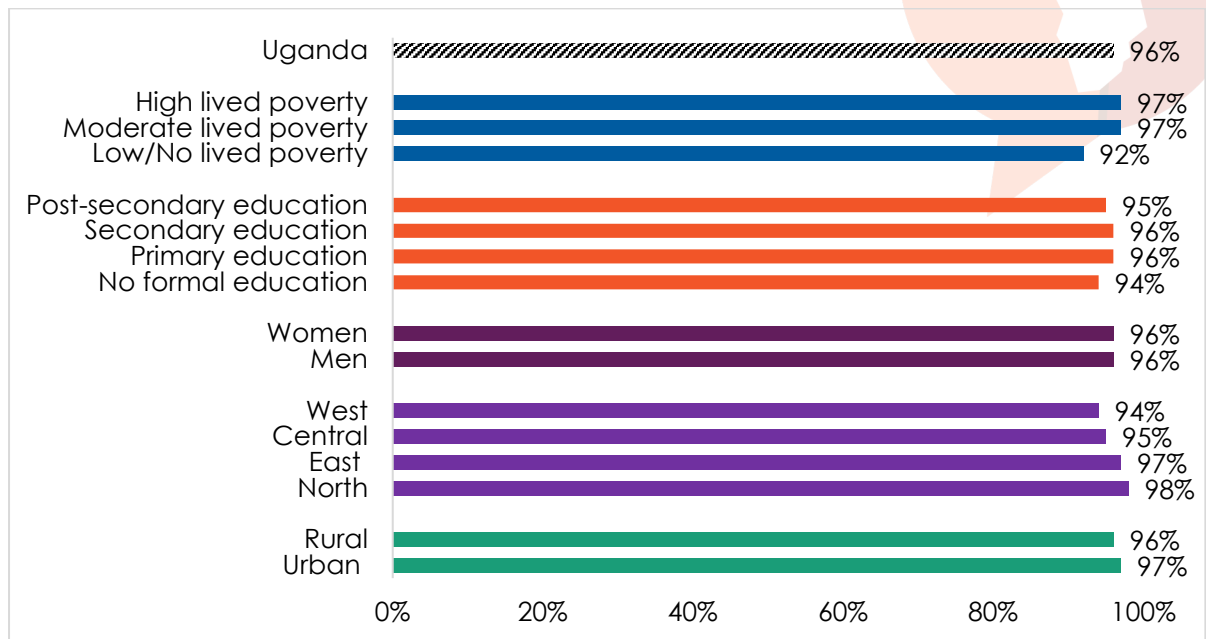
**Respondents who had contact with a public health centre or hospital during the previous year were asked:** And have you encountered any of these problems with a public health centre or hospital during the past 12 months? (Respondents who had no contact with public health facilities are excluded.)

Nearly all respondents (96%) report facing at least one of these problems in accessing health services, including large majorities across key demographic groups (Figure 28), indicating that challenges in accessing health services are common across all demographic groups.

Across the cities, the proportion of Ugandans who report facing at least one of the four highlighted problems in accessing health services remains high. Residents in the cities Mbarara, Jinja, and Hoima report facing these challenges more than their counterparts in the subregions of Ankore, Busoga, and Bunyoro (Figure 29). In fact, seven cities face these challenges at levels equal to or higher than those experienced in their respective subregions. This state of affairs presents a challenge to the new city administrations, especially as the cities were created to be regional hubs for development and better services.

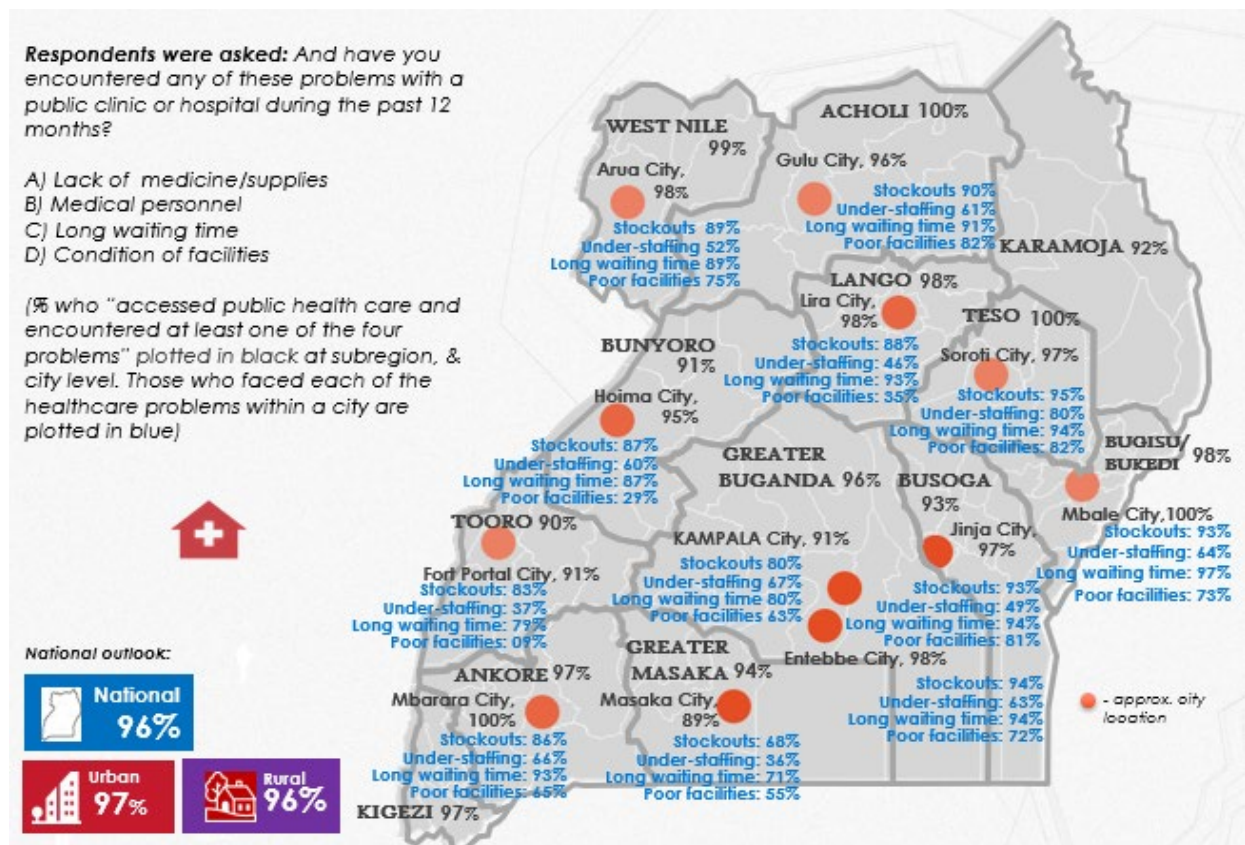
All the cities report facing long waiting times and stockouts as the top-ranking challenges, which calls for the attention of the new city administrations.

**Figure 28: Faced at least one problem in accessing public health care | by demographic group | Uganda | 2022**



**Respondents who had contact with a public health centre or hospital during the previous year were asked:** And have you encountered any of these problems with a public health centre or hospital during the past 12 months: Lack of medicines or supplies? Absence of doctors or other medical personnel? Long waiting time? Poor condition of facilities? (Respondents who had no contact with public health facilities are excluded.)

**Figure 29: Problems faced in obtaining public health care | by subregion and city | Uganda | 2022**





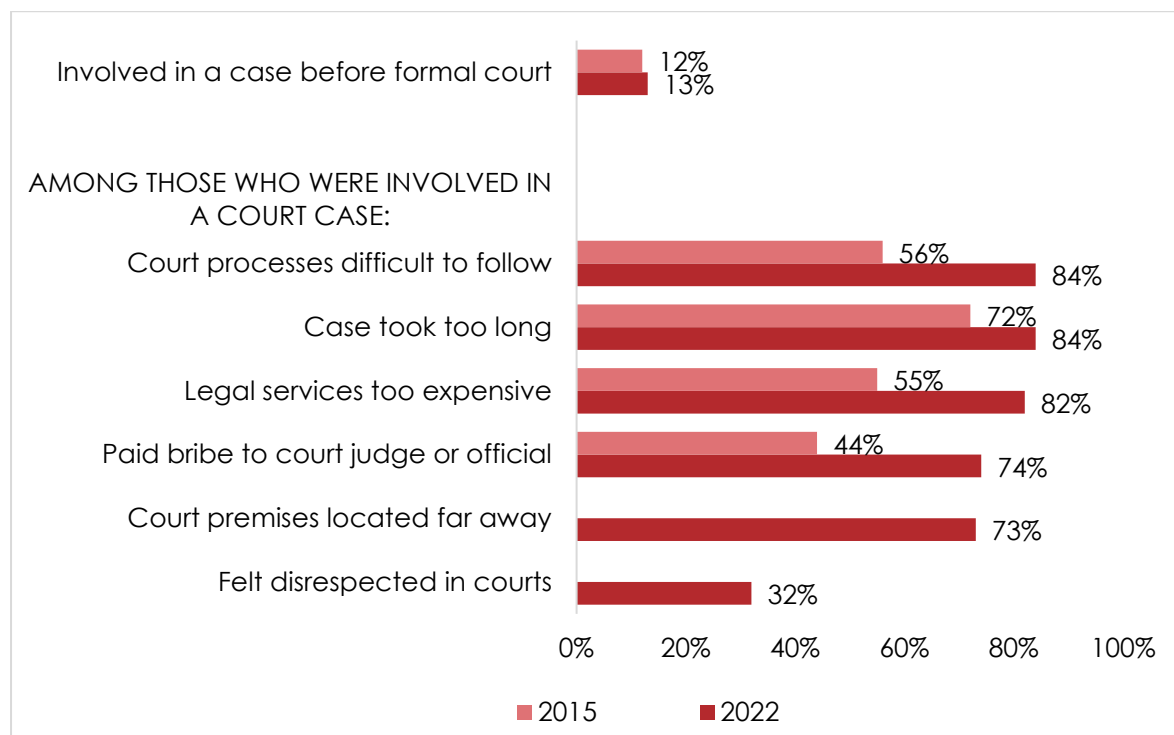
## Experience with formal courts

About one in eight Ugandans (13%) say they or a member of their family were directly involved in an administrative, civil, or criminal case that came before a government court or tribunal during the past five years – about the same proportion as in Afrobarometer’s 2015 survey (Figure 30).

Among those who had experience with the courts, the proportion who encountered specific problems increased between 2015 and 2022. For example, the share who had to pay a bribe to a judge or court official shot up from 44% to 74%. More than eight in 10 (82%) found legal services too expensive, up from 55%, while the experience of court processes as difficult to follow increased from 56% to 84%. Perhaps indicative of the challenges the judiciary has long experienced with case backlog, the proportion who indicate that the case took too long increased from 72% in 2015 to 84% in 2022.

The fact that the proportion of respondents who experienced these problems with a formal court is high and has increased quite substantially since 2015 points to a need to improve access to justice in Uganda by bringing court and legal services closer to the people.

**Figure 30: Problems faced by those who accessed formal courts | Uganda**  
| 2015-2022



### Respondents were asked:

*In the last five years, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family been directly involved in an administrative, civil, or criminal case that has come before a government court or tribunal as a claimant, as a respondent or defendant, or as a witness?*

*[If at least once:] And have you encountered any of the following problems during your interactions with the courts in the past five years: The case took too long? Legal services were too expensive? Court processes were difficult to follow? Court premises were located far away? You were asked to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a judge or court official? You were not treated with respect? (Figure shows percentage, among those who were involved in a court case, who say they encountered each problem "once or twice," "a few times," or "often")*

While it would be interesting to look at subregional and city-level breakdowns of these issues, the subsamples of those with court experience are too small for a meaningful analysis.



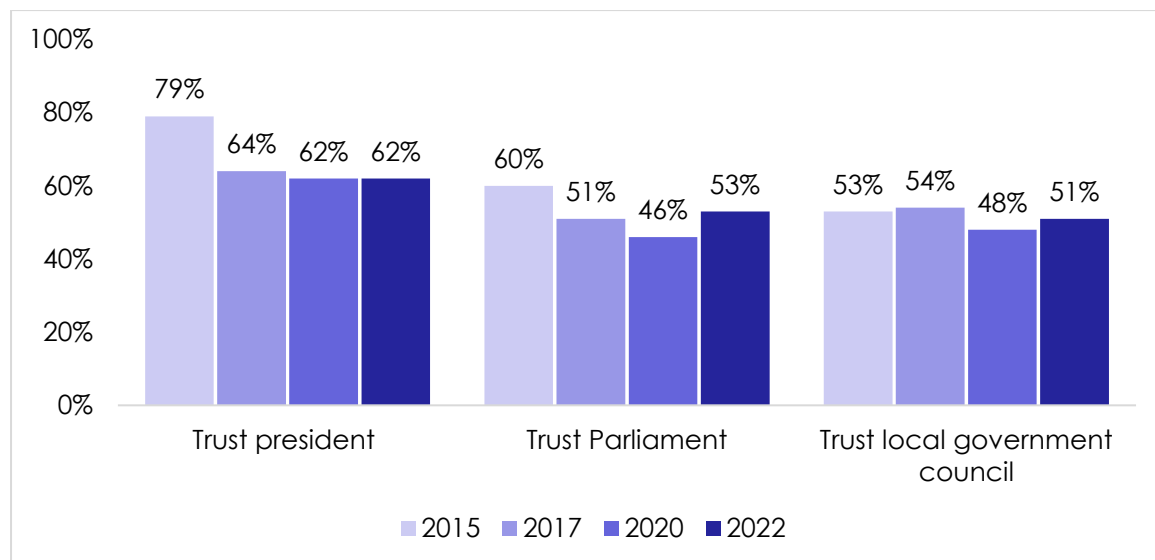
## Contact, trust, and perceptions of corruption among elected leaders

Afrobarometer survey findings show that citizens' contact with and trust in local elected leaders is on the decline while perceptions of corruption are increasing. Moreover, majorities said in the 2019 Afrobarometer survey that members of Parliament (53%) and district councillors (37%) don't listen to their constituents and that political party leaders serve their own political ambitions rather than the people (79%). These findings suggest that new city administrations will face hurdles in trying to mobilise local residents to support city development efforts.

### Trust in elected leaders

Despite a 17-percentage-point drop compared to 2015, the president remains the most trusted elected leader, with 62% of survey respondents in 2022 indicating that they trust him "somewhat" or "a lot" (Figure 31). Slim majorities say they trust Parliament (53%, down from 60% in 2015) and their local district council (51%, similar to the 53% recorded in 2015). About one-third (35%) of citizens express trust in all three of these leaders.

**Figure 31: Trust in elected leaders | Uganda | 2015-2022**



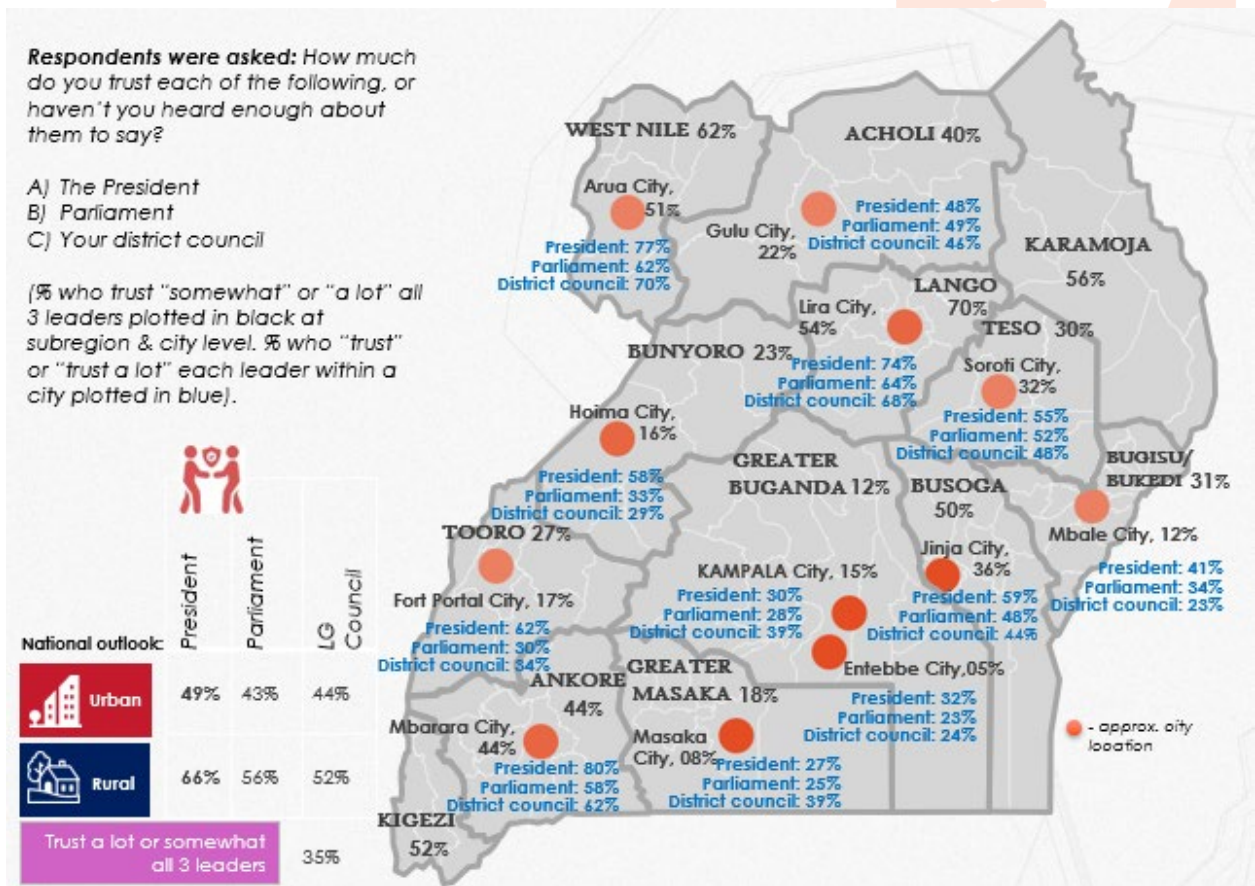
**Respondents were asked:** How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

At the subregion level, the proportion of respondents who say they trust all three leaders is highest in Lango (70%), West Nile (62%), and Karamoja (56%) and lowest in Greater Buganda (12%), Greater Masaka (18%), Bunyoro (23%), and Tooro (27%) (Figure 32).

At the city level, there are differences in the levels of trust in elected district councils. Trust in the district council is highest in the cities of Arua (70%), Lira (68%), and Mbarara (62%) and lowest in Mbale (23%), Hoima (29%), and Fort Portal (34%). With fewer than half of residents in nine of the 11 cities expressing trust in their elected district councils, strengthening public trust will be a critical task for leaders in the new cities.

The reported low levels of trust in local government councils could be due to a number of factors, including perceived corruption, mismanagement, and limited funding to address citizen needs. One of the predicaments facing local government administrations is that, based on the Local Government Finance Management Act (Parliament, 2015), district councils are not fully in control of the district development agenda. Thus, when citizens report the pressing issues they need addressed, the council may be unable to address them because conditional grants from the central government or well-wishers are often tied to specific activities.

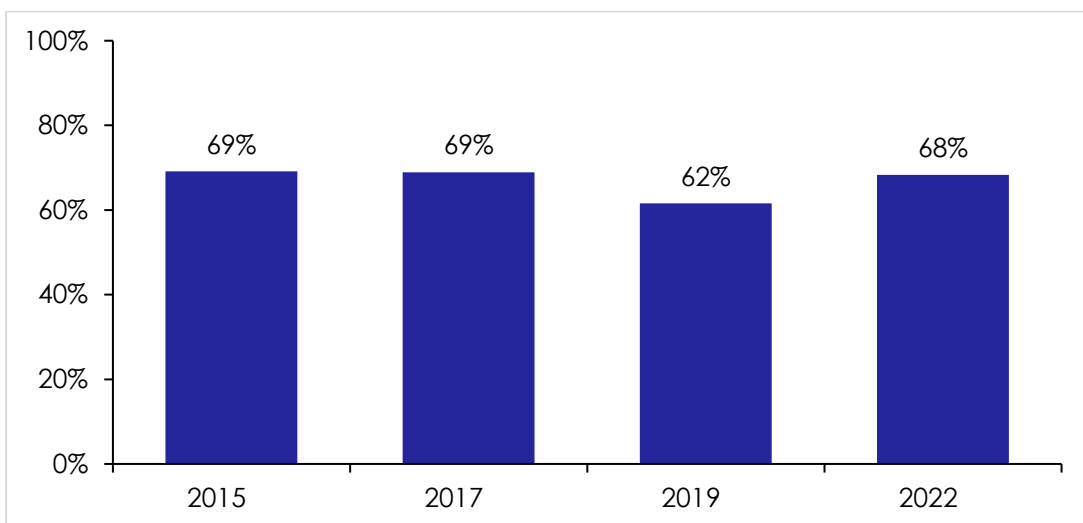
**Figure 32: Trust in elected leaders | by subregion and city | Uganda | 2022**



*Perceptions of corruption among elected leaders*

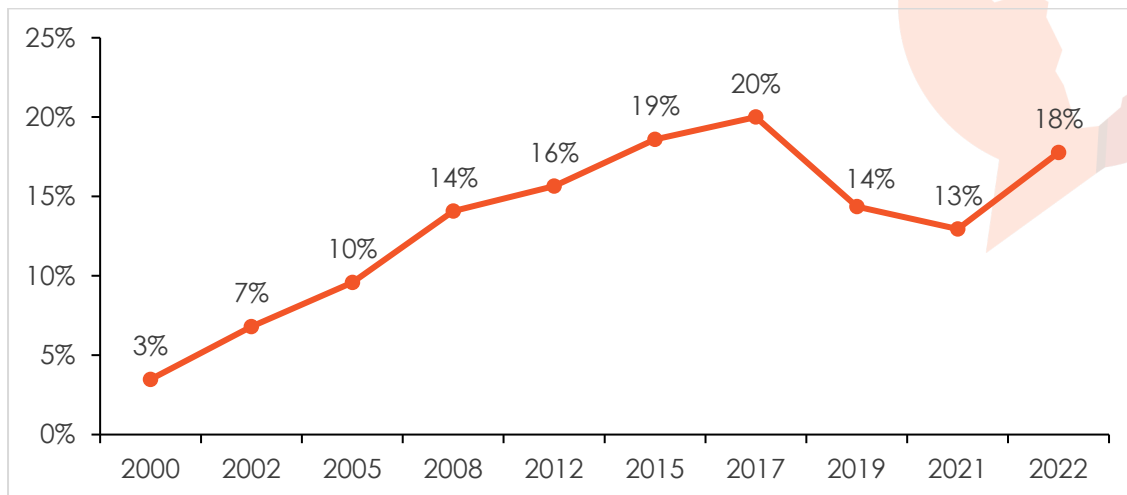
Despite government and stakeholder efforts to curb corruption (Office of the President, 2019), most Ugandans (68%) perceive corruption to have increased during the past year (Figure 33), and a growing number of them consider it one of the country's most important problems (Figure 34).

**Figure 33: Increased level of corruption | Uganda | 2015-2022**



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

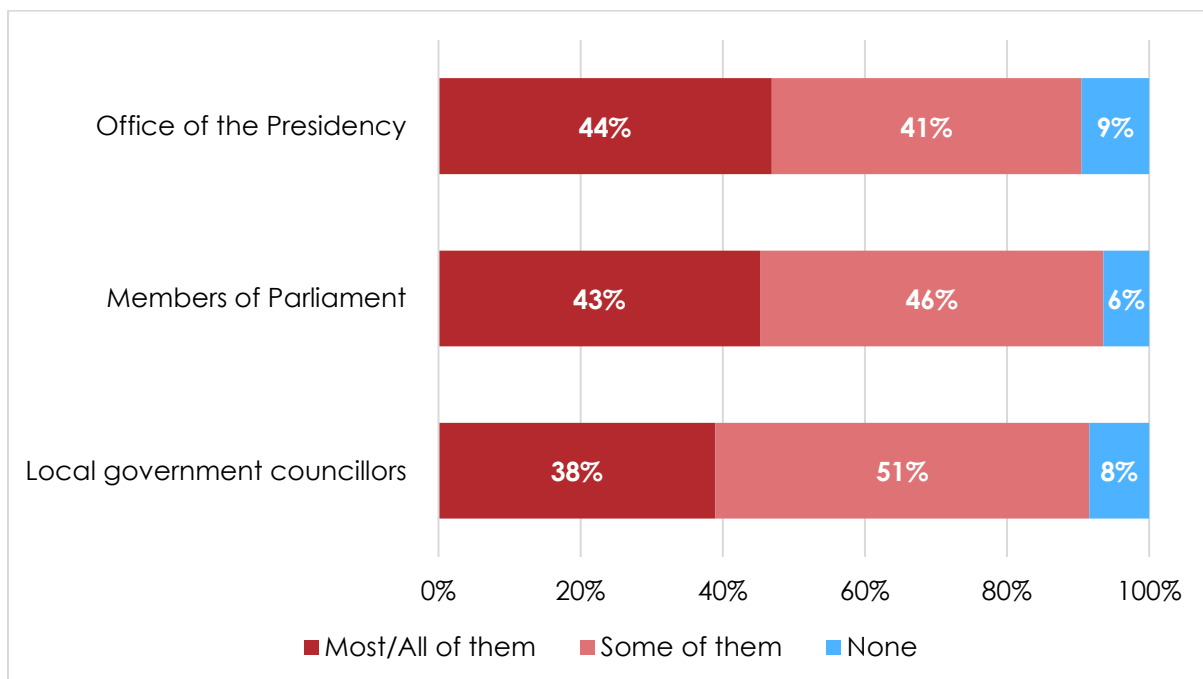
**Figure 34: Corruption as most important problem | Uganda | 2000-2022**



**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that the government should address? (% who mention "corruption" as one of up to three most important problems)

More than four in 10 citizens say "most" or "all" officials in the Presidency (44%) and members of Parliament (MPs) (43%) are corrupt, and 38% say the same thing about local government councillors (Figure 35). Large proportions think "some" of these officials are corrupt; fewer than one in 10 respondents think that none of them are.

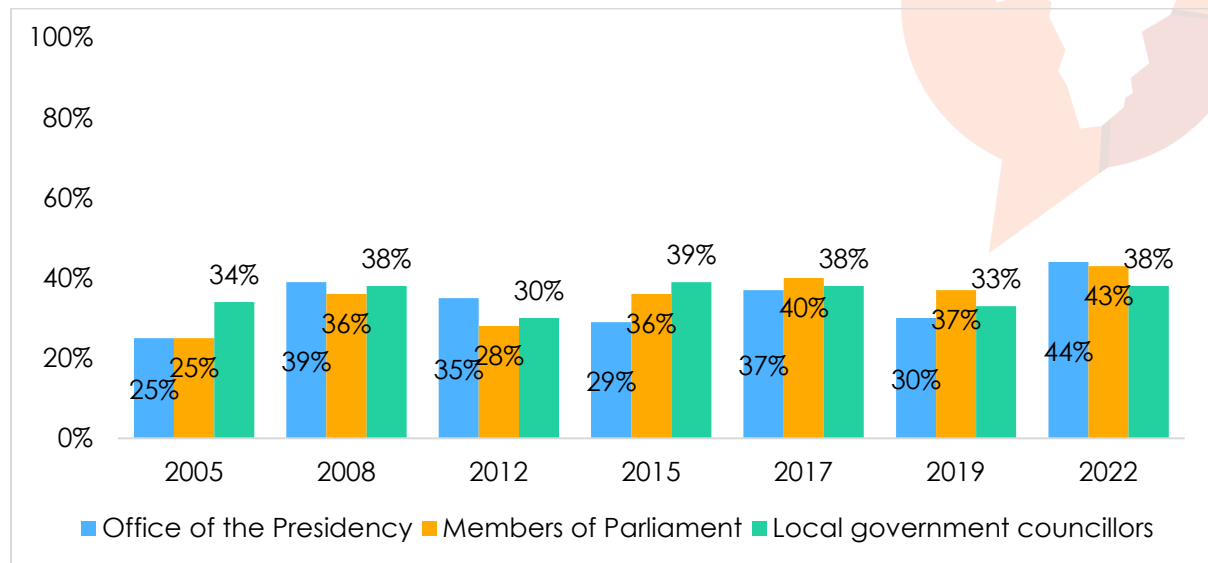
**Figure 35: Perceived corruption among selected leaders | Uganda | 2022**



**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 say?

Perceptions of widespread corruption among officials in the Presidency and members of Parliament have almost doubled compared to 2005, rising from 25% to 44% and 43%, respectively (Figure 36). Perceptions that most/all local government councillors are involved in corruption have increased slightly (from 34% to 38%) over the same period.

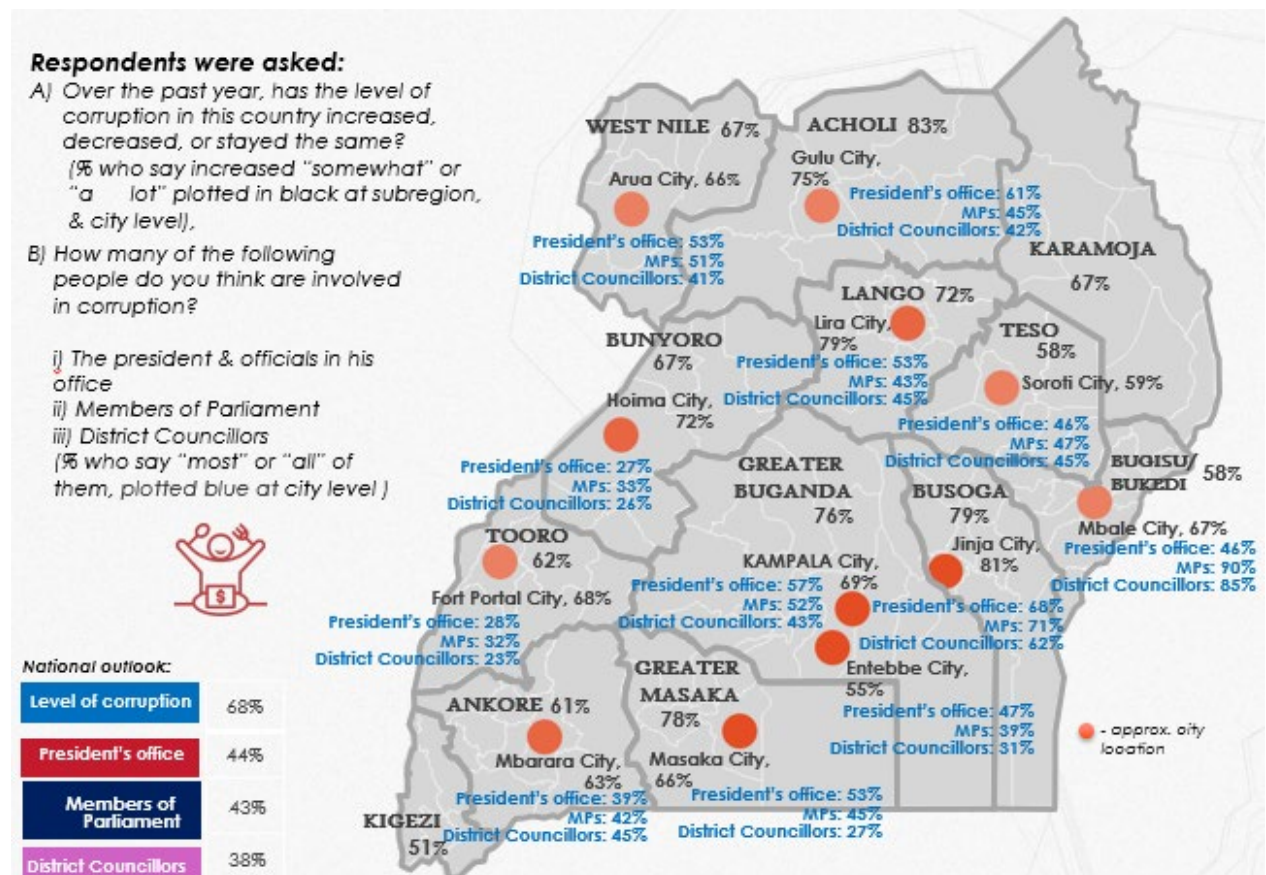
**Figure 36: Perceived corruption among selected leaders | Uganda | 2005-2022**

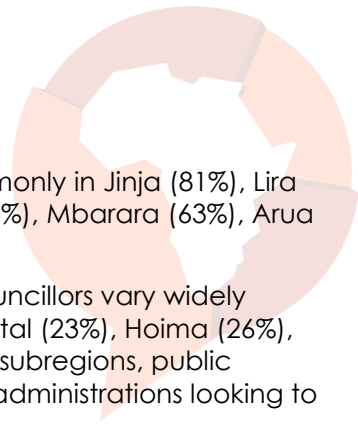


**Respondents were asked:** How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say "most of them" or "all of them")

Can cities thrive in an environment perceived to be increasingly corrupt? At the subregion level, perceptions of corruption among elected leaders vary considerably (Figure 37). Majorities in all subregions say corruption increased over the past year, a perception that is most widespread in Acholi (83%), Busoga (79%), Greater Masaka (78%), and Lango (72%) and is least common in Kigezi (51%), Teso (58%), Bugisu (58%), and Ankore (61%).

**Figure 37: Perceived level of corruption | by subregion and city | Uganda | 2022**





Similarly, majorities in each city say corruption increased, most commonly in Jinja (81%), Lira (79%), Gulu (75%), and Hoima (72%) and least frequently in Soroti (59%), Mbarara (63%), Arua (66%), and Masaka (66%).

Perceptions of widespread corruption among local government councillors vary widely across cities, ranging from fewer than three in 10 residents in Fort Portal (23%), Hoima (26%), and Masaka (27%) to 62% in Jinja and 85% in Mbale. In all cities and subregions, public perceptions of increasing corruption pose a challenge for new city administrations looking to garner public support.

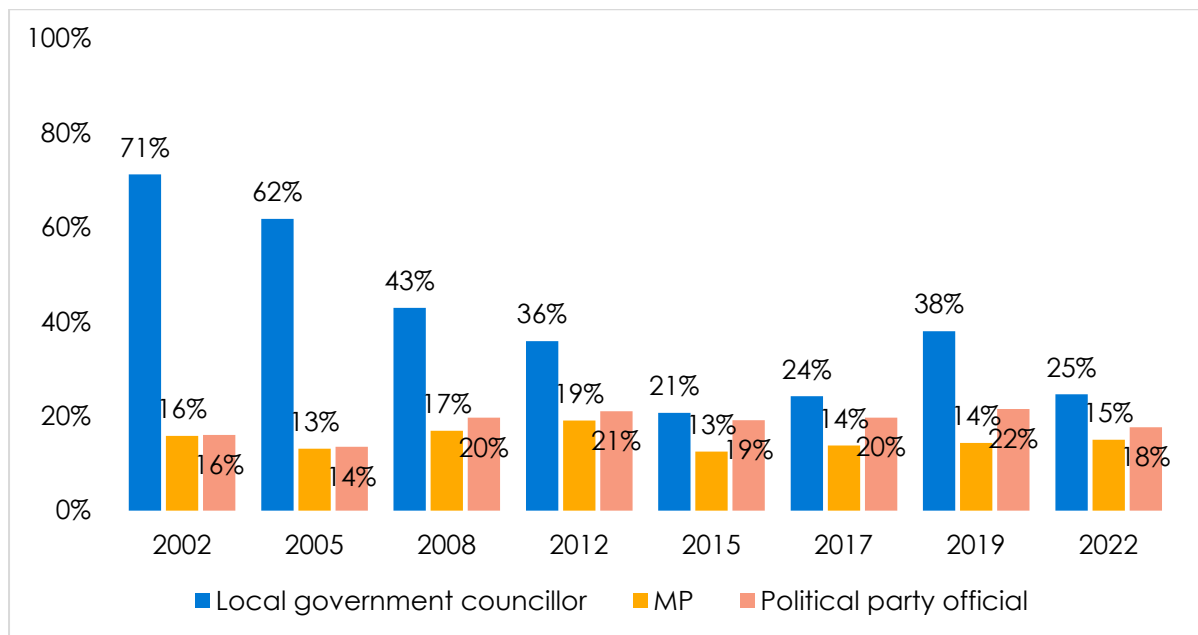
### Contact with leaders

Representative democracy requires interaction between constituents and elected officials. Given their close proximity to local communities, local government administrations thrive and feed off vibrant contact and engagement with residents. Indeed, many aspiring leaders have used local government platforms to propel their political careers to national elective positions, especially in Parliament, by becoming active in local politics and administration.

Can the new cities thrive where contact with the electorate is low or stagnating?

Survey findings show that over the past two decades, citizen contact with local government councillors has dropped by nearly two-thirds, from 71% in 2002 to 25% in 2022 (Figure 38). One factor that may have contributed to this drastic drop in contact between citizens and local government councillors may be a 2006 policy change to abolish the graduated tax, which had been levied per adult male and collected at the sub-county level, and the subsequent requirement that all local revenues be centrally deposited with the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (MoFPED). Although local government councils remain at the centre of the planning, delivery, and monitoring of public services, the lengthy formal social-service delivery cycle through the MoFPED leaves local government councillors hard pressed to respond quickly to unbudgeted requests that they might previously been able to address.

**Figure 38: Contacted leaders | Uganda | 2002-2022**



**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? (% who say "only once," "a few times," or "often")

Note: The question asked about "contact with a political party official" in the 2019 and 2022 surveys, but in earlier survey rounds, it asked about contact with "a government official."

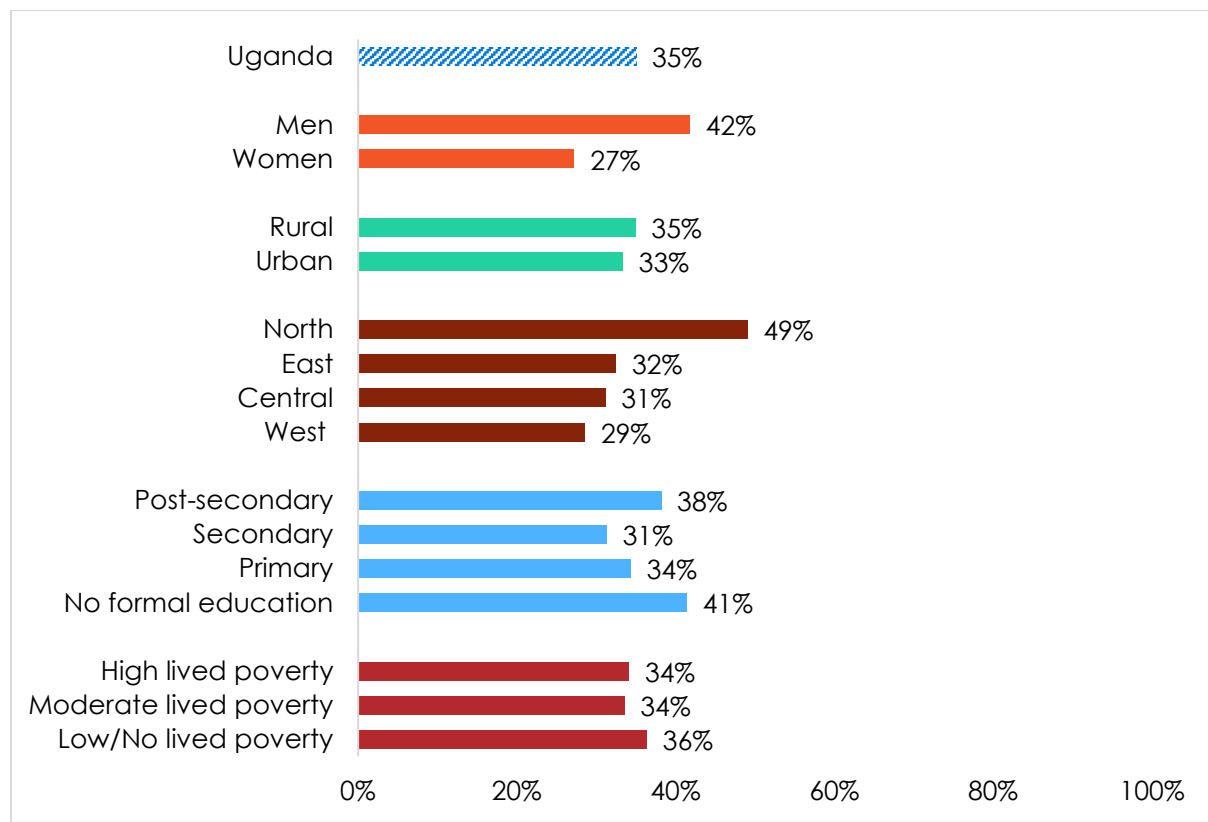




In contrast, the proportion of respondents who say they contacted an MP (15% in 2022) and a political party official (18% in 2022) during the previous year has remained fairly stable, though low. Despite being ex-officio members of the local government council, MPs normally conduct their business in the capital and are thinly present in the constituency. MPs also tend to be swamped in national-level politics and policy issues, interacting infrequently with constituents.

About one-third of respondents report contact with at least one of these three types of leaders during the previous year. Men are more likely than women to have contact with a leader (42% vs. 27%), as are residents of the North region (49%) compared to their counterparts in other regions (29%-32%) (Figure 39).

**Figure 39: Contacted a leader at least once during the previous year | by demographic group | Uganda | 2022**

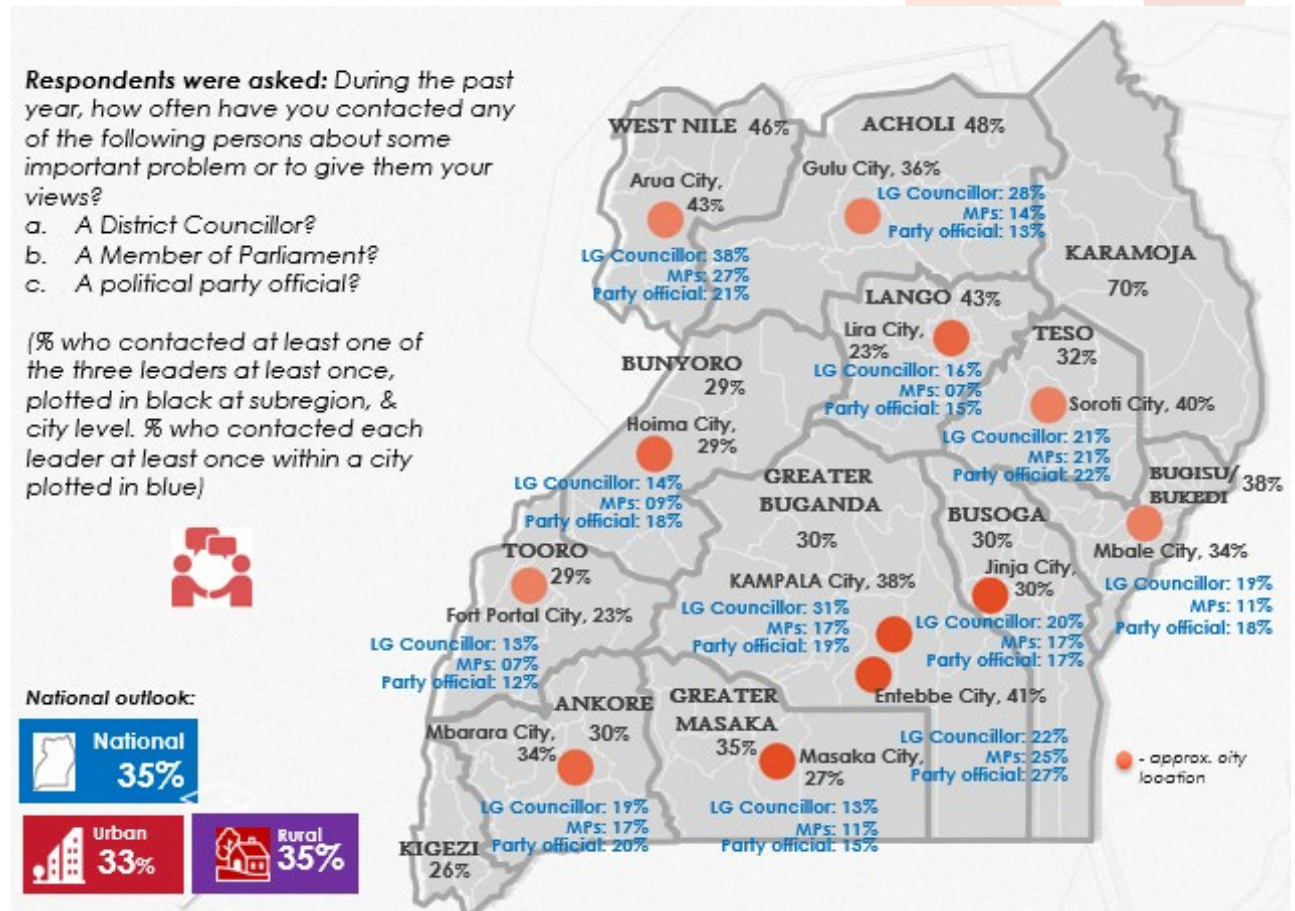


**Respondents were asked:** During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views: A district councillor? A member of Parliament? A political party official? (% who contacted at least one of these three types of leaders at least once during the previous year)

Afrobarometer data show that residents in only three of the 11 cities report more contact with the leaders included in this analysis than residents in their respective subregions: Kampala (38%, vs. 30% in the subregion), Mbarara City (34%, vs. 30% in the subregion), and Soroti City (40%, vs. 32% in the subregion) (Figure 40). Contact in the city is lower in six of the 11 cities, perhaps requiring improved leadership response to encourage more contact.

Local government councillors and political party officials are contacted more frequently than MPs, particularly in the new cities. Contact with MPs is particularly infrequent in Bunyoro, Tooro, and Lango subregions.

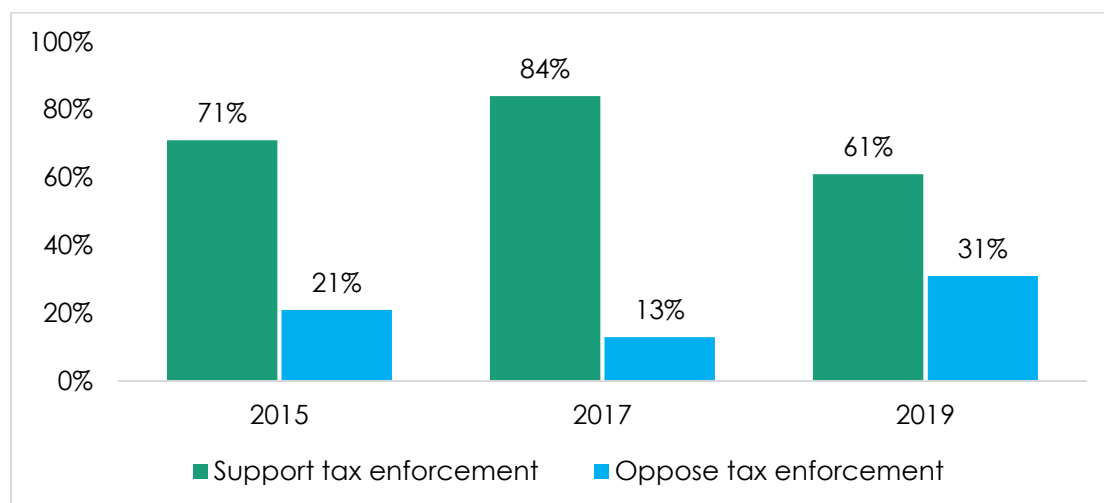
**Figure 40: Contacted a leader at least once during the previous year | by subregion and city | Uganda | 2022**



### Citizen willingness to fund development

Afrobarometer data from 2019 show that six in 10 Ugandans (61%) believe that tax officials always have the right to make people pay taxes, but this proportion has dropped significantly compared to 2015 (71%) and 2017 (84%) (Figure 41).

**Figure 41: Support for tax enforcement | Uganda | 2015-2019**

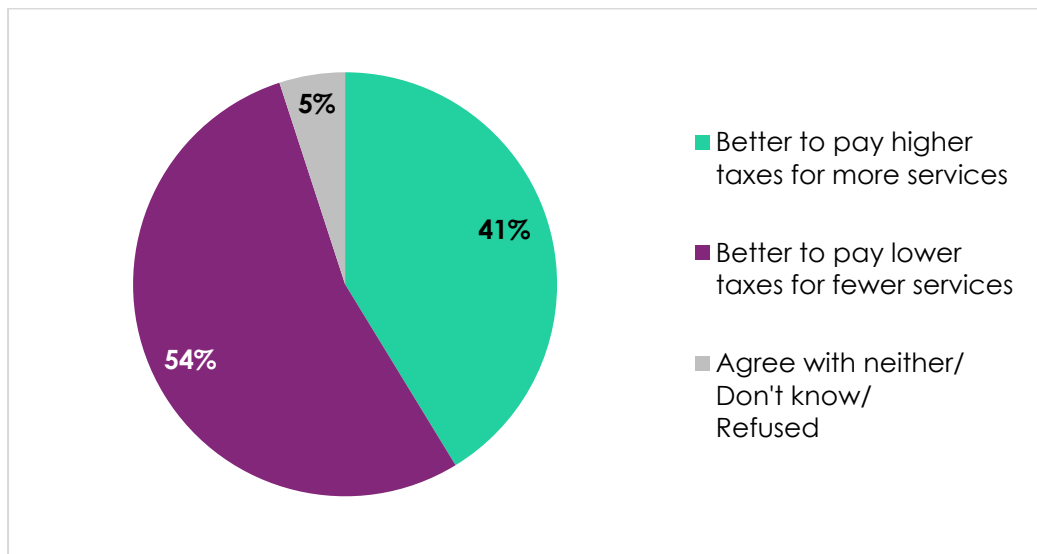


**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: The tax authorities always have the right to make people pay taxes?

Moreover, in 2019, before COVID-19 struck, a majority (54%) of Ugandans preferred to pay less in taxes even if that would mean getting fewer government services, while only 41% would instead opt for higher taxes in exchange for service-delivery improvements (Figure 42). And only 46% said the government generally uses tax revenues for the well-being of its citizens (Figure 43).

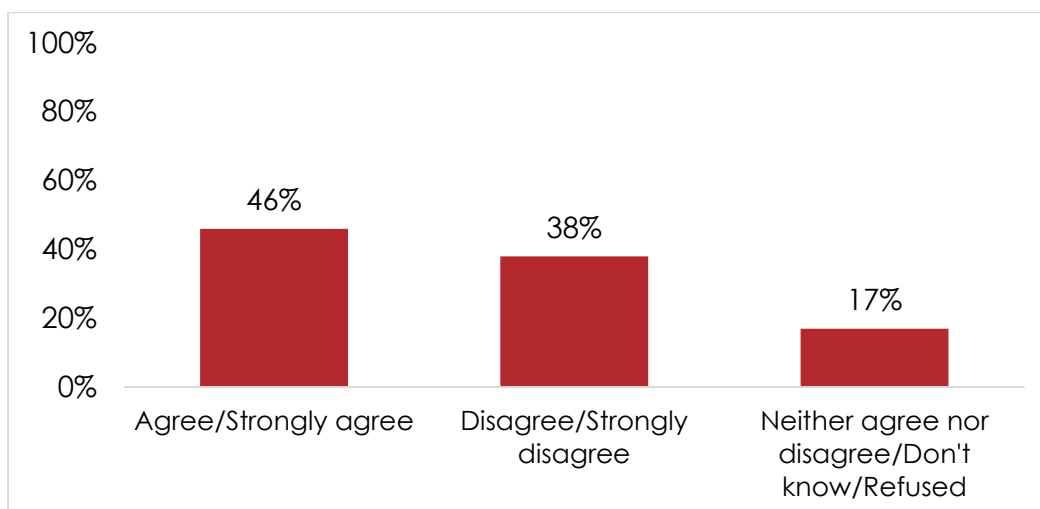
Can the cities thrive where citizens want improved services but are unwilling to pay more taxes or user fees? These findings point to challenges in Uganda's attempts to encourage greater tax compliance and widen the country's tax base. Local governments and city administrations will need avenues through which to improve service and income tax collection as well as other non-tax revenue collections.

**Figure 42: Higher taxes for more services? | Uganda | 2019**



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: It is better to pay higher taxes if it means that there will be more services provided by the government.  
 Statement 2: It is better to pay lower taxes, even if it means there will be fewer services provided by the government.  
 (% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)

**Figure 43: Does the government use taxes for the well-being of citizens? | Uganda | 2019**



**Respondents were asked:** Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: The government usually uses the tax revenues it collects for the well-being of citizens?

## Rating local government service delivery

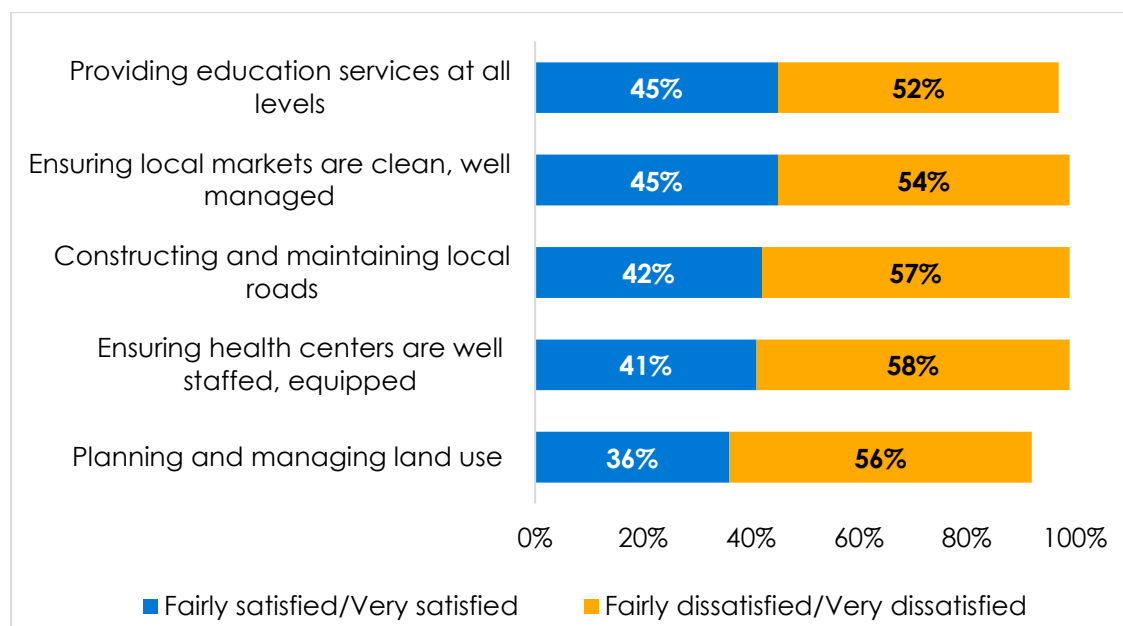
Can the new cities thrive if service delivery is inadequate?

Survey findings show that fewer than half of Ugandans are “fairly satisfied” or “very satisfied” with the way their district or city administration has provided education services (45%), ensured that local markets are clean and well managed (45%), built and maintained local roads (42%), ensured that health centres are well-equipped and staffed (41%), and planned and managed land use (36%) (Figure 44).

Averaging these ratings (see Appendix, Part 6 for details), we see that only 41% of citizens are satisfied with their district or city administration’s delivery of these key services, highlighting the challenges that local governments face in getting citizens on board to support development programmes.

Across selected demographics (not shown), satisfaction with local government service delivery is highest among residents in the North region (60%), citizens with no formal education (48%), and those who experience low or no lived poverty (48%). It is understandable that satisfaction is higher in northern Uganda, especially as these communities are transiting from a long period of civil war and the government, through the Office of the Prime Minister, has over the years rolled out reconstruction programmes through local government, such as the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund and the Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan. However, the level of satisfaction among respondents who experience low or no lived poverty is surprising, since these better-off citizens might be expected to be more critical. However, since they have a bit of disposable income, they might be better able to pay their way around inefficiencies in local government service provision than their counterparts who experience high lived poverty.

**Figure 44: District or city council performance on selected services | 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:

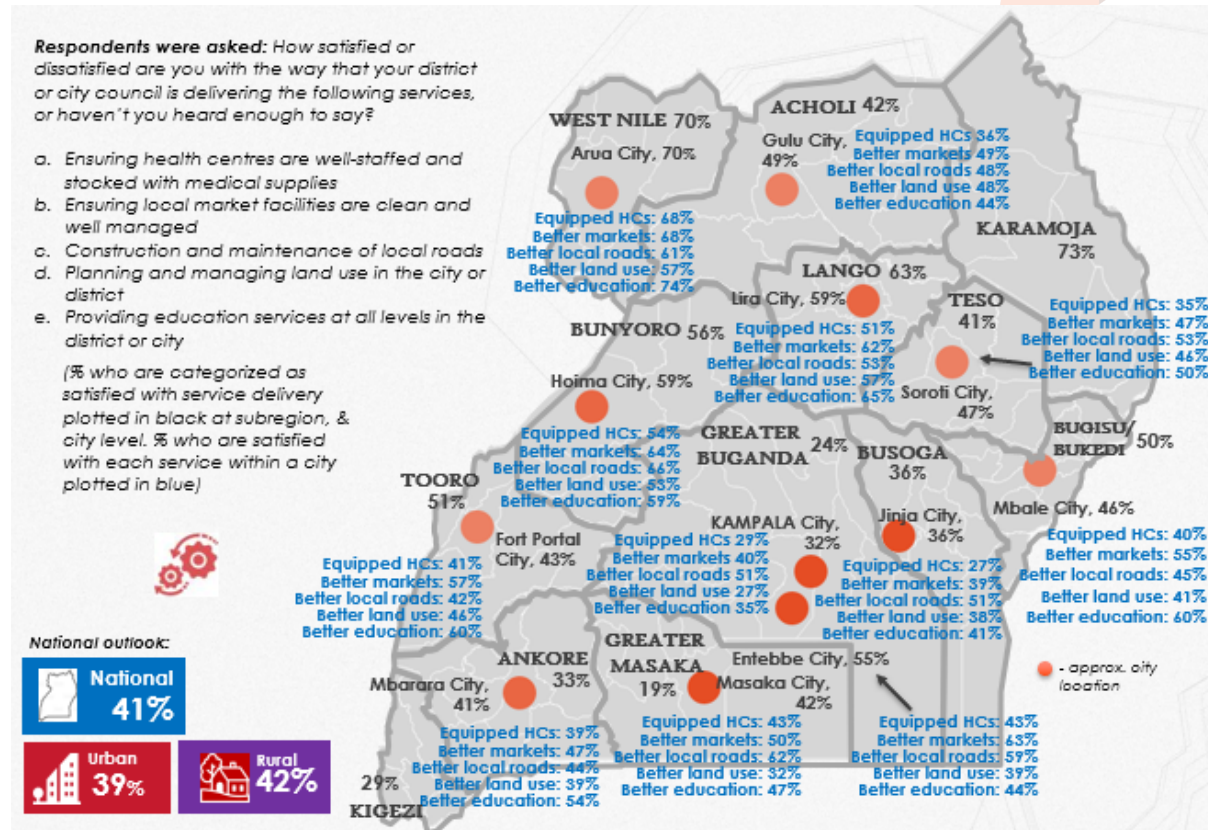
- Ensuring health centres are well staffed and stocked with medical supplies?
- Ensuring local market facilities are clean and well managed?
- Construction and maintenance of local roads?
- Planning and managing land use in the city or district?
- Providing education services at all levels in the district or city?

The subregions vary in their levels of satisfaction with local service delivery (Figure 45). Satisfaction is highest in Karamoja (73%), followed by West Nile (70%) and Lango (63%) and



lowest in Greater Masaka (19%), Greater Buganda (24%), and Kigezi (29%). Residents in the cities of Arua (70%), Lira (59%), and Hoima (59%) express higher levels of satisfaction than residents in their surrounding subregions.

**Figure 45: Satisfaction with local government service delivery | by subregion and city | Uganda | 2022**



Graphic shows the percentages of respondents who rank above average in satisfaction with each of the five services (see Appendix, Part 6 for details).

### Confidence in the district or city council's performance

Only one-fourth (26%) of Ugandans say they are at least "somewhat confident" that their local administration will ensure that citizens have the opportunity to participate in local government budgeting and planning processes, and even fewer (21%) think it can ensure that the public is informed about how the district or city council spends money allocated in its budget (Figure 46). These findings point to a disconnect between the local administration and citizens, who are not taking full advantage of provisions to participate in the planning and monitoring of local government projects.

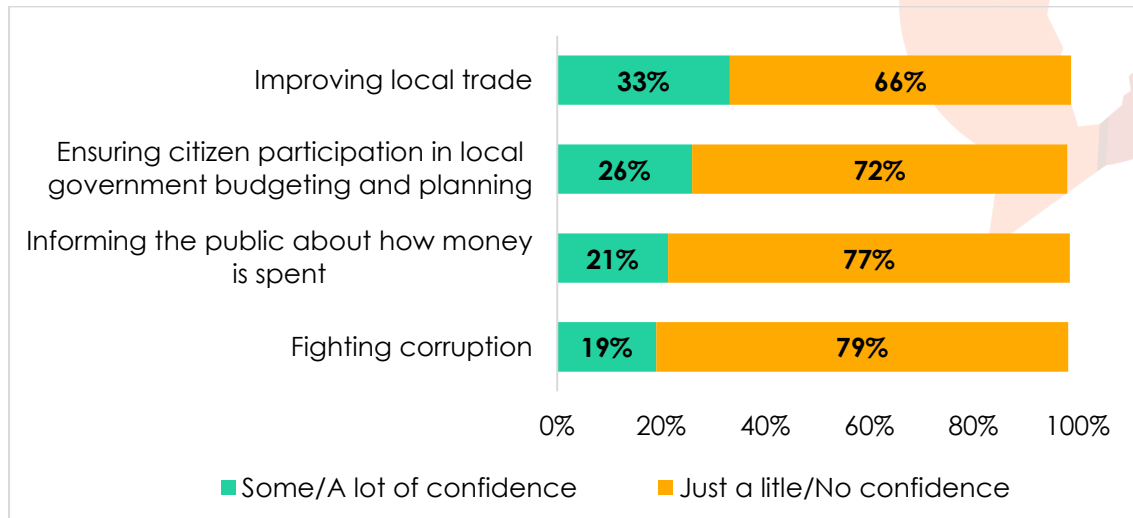
Similarly, only one-third (33%) of respondents are confident that their local administration will improve local trade and maintain quality standards in trading facilities, and only 19% think it will ensure that corruption and misuse of public funds are eliminated within its jurisdiction.

Averaging these responses, fewer than three in 10 citizens (28%) express confidence in their district or city administration to deliver these key goods.

Residents in the subregions of Karamoja (59%), Busoga (53%), and Ankore (49%) express higher levels of confidence in their local administration to achieve these goals than their counterparts in Greater Buganda (6%), Greater Masaka (5%), and Bunyoro (15%) (Figure 47). Citizens in the cities of Mbarara (43%), Jinja (43%), Arua (40%), and Gulu (39%) show more confidence than residents in their surrounding subregion.



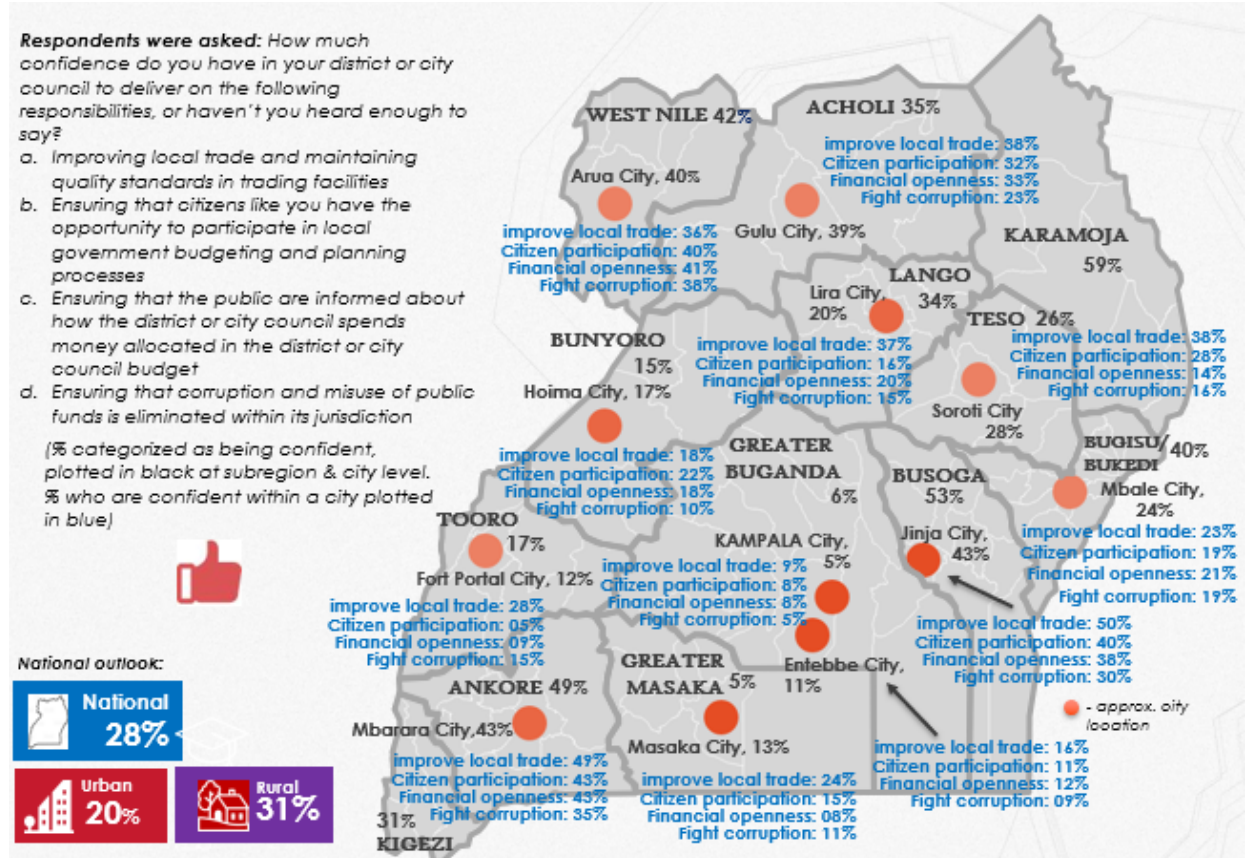
**Figure 46: Confidence in district or city council's performance | Uganda | 2022**



**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:

- Improving local trade and maintaining quality standards in trading facilities?
- 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?

**Figure 47: Confidence in city or district administration | by subregion and city | Uganda | 2022**



Graphic shows the percentages of respondents who rank above average in confidence in their district or city council to deliver on each of the four responsibilities (see Appendix, Part 7 for details).

## Discussion of findings

The foregoing sections show evidence of dissatisfaction with district or city council service delivery as well as reluctance to pay more taxes or user fees to fund service-delivery improvements – a service-delivery paradox. The analysis has also shown that poverty is on the increase, reflected in worsening assessments of the country's economic situation and personal living conditions, amid criticism of poor-quality services and growing mistrust and perceptions of official corruption.

It is thus important to understand how these demand-side valuations related to quality, integrity, and living standards combine to impact the supply-side factors of satisfaction and confidence in district or city council delivery of services, construed as *contentment* for this analysis. The purpose is to use evidence from these interactions to highlight likely pathways for cities to improve their prospects for coping with citizen expectations.

The analysis sets out to explore the relationship between contentment with district or city council service delivery, on the one hand, and views on economic and personal living conditions, experience with social services, and contact with and trust in elected leaders, on the other.

We estimate these interactions in three regression models predicting satisfaction, confidence, and overall contentment, where contentment is measured through a simple additive index of satisfaction with the provision of social services and confidence in district or city authorities to deliver on selected obligations (see Appendix for details on variables used to construct indices). The three models are estimated at the national level, and the contentment model is estimated at the level of each of the 11 cities.

As shown in Table 4, citizen satisfaction with the provision of district or city council-provided services increases with trust in elected leaders, positive views of the overall direction the country is headed, and residing in the North of the country (compared to residing in the West). Satisfaction also increases with positive evaluations of the country's economic condition and personal living conditions, but is seen to decrease with increases in educational attainment, high lived poverty, and paying a bribe to access public services, although these results are not statistically significant.

Confidence in the ability of district and city councils to deliver on their obligations increases with trust in elected leaders and residing in the East or the North of the country (compared to residing in the West), but decreases with residing in the Central region and with higher levels of lived poverty. Confidence also increases among those who hold favourable views of the country's economic condition, but is seen to decrease with increasing educational attainment, positive views of the overall direction the country is taking, and positive views of personal living conditions, although these findings are not statistically significant.

When measures of satisfaction and confidence are taken together to estimate contentment, the analysis shows that overall trust in local government leaders plays a big part in ensuring contentment, as does residing in the North and East of the country (compared to residing in the West). However, contentment is seen to decrease with difficulty in accessing public services, residing in the Central region, and experiencing high lived poverty.

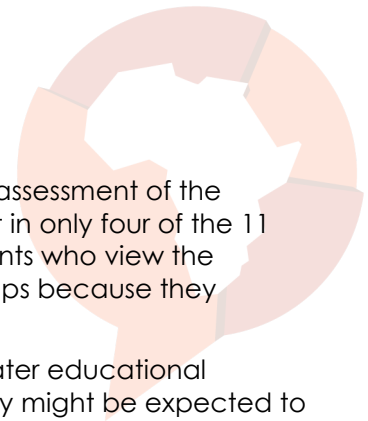
Contentment is also seen to increase with positive evaluations of the country's economic condition and positive views of the overall direction of the country, but decreases with positive evaluations of personal living conditions, residing in rural areas, increases in educational attainment, and bribe paying, although these results are not statistically significant in explaining contentment.

**Table 4: Predictors of contentment with district or city service delivery**

| OLS regression | Uganda | 2022

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Satisfaction with service delivery		Confidence in delivery on obligations		Contentment (confidence & satisfaction) index	
	Coef.	P>t	Coef.	P>t	Coef.	P>t
(Constant)	1.984	.000	.910	.000	2.909	.000
Paid a bribe to obtain public services (index)	-.002	.976	.010	.852	-.015	.868
Overall trust in selected leaders	.254	.000	.216	.000	.463	.000
<b>Level of corruption</b> (reference category: Stayed the same/Decreased somewhat/a lot)						
Increased somewhat/a lot	.015	.900	-.040	.669	-.044	.787
Difficulty in obtaining services (index)	-.239	.002	-.086	.136	-.307	.002
<b>Region</b> (reference category: West)						
East	.261	.095	.377	.001	.671	.001
Central	-.353	.040	-.499	.000	-.838	.000
North	.862	.000	.426	.001	1.326	.000
<b>Level of education</b> (reference category: No formal education)						
Primary	-.132	.514	-.124	.415	-.282	.289
Secondary	-.003	.990	-.016	.918	-.023	.933
Post-secondary	-.116	.667	-.009	.964	-.125	.725
<b>Urban/Rural</b> (reference category: Urban)						
Rural	-.287	.034	.074	.469	-.221	.215
<b>Health as the most important problem</b> (reference category: Did not mention health)						
Yes, mentioned health	-.214	.055	-.090	.284	-.293	.045
<b>Lived poverty</b> (reference category: Low/No lived poverty)						
No/Low lived poverty	<i>Ref</i>					
Moderate lived poverty	-.397	.004	-.252	.017	-.662	.000
High lived poverty	-.266	.092	-.282	.018	-.541	.009
<b>Gender</b> (reference category: Men)						
Women	-.050	.655	.047	.579	.006	.966
<b>Direction of the country</b> (reference category: Wrong direction)						
Going in the right direction	.297	.022	-.091	.352	.202	.235
Country's economic condition (good coded highest)	.106	.058	.042	.317	.126	.082
Personal living conditions (good coded highest)	.006	.911	-.022	.585	-.001	.993
F-value	11.081		9.899		17.35	
P-value	0.000		0.000		0.000	
R-squared	0.179		0.163		0.254	

At the city level, findings in Table 5 show that when the population living in all 11 cities is aggregated, contentment varies the same way as in the national analysis, albeit with differences across cities. Overall, contentment appears to increase with trust across all cities except Mbarara and Gulu, probably due to the presence of other influential factors such as local politics. Trust is significant in determining contentment in six of the 11 cities: Soroti, Entebbe, Fort Portal, Hoima, Jinja, and Lira.



In contrast to the national-level analysis, findings show that positive assessment of the country's economic condition is positively related with contentment in only four of the 11 cities (Soroti, Entebbe, Gulu, and Masaka<sup>2</sup>). This suggests that residents who view the country's economic condition as good still feel discontented, perhaps because they distinguish between national and local-level economies.

In line with observations from the national-level analysis above, greater educational attainment, lived poverty, and perceptions of corruption and bribery might be expected to lower contentment at the city level. Surprisingly, in four of the 11 cities (Mbarara, Lira, Jinja, and Mbale), greater educational attainment tends to lead to greater contentment. It is plausible that in these four cities, the local administrations have, through other intervening factors such as local politics or ethnic identity, an opportunity to appeal to the elite.

Similarly, residents in the cities of Hoima, Gulu, Lira, Entebbe, and Mbale who experience more poverty appear to be more contented than those who experience low or no lived poverty. Since economically better-off citizens tend to be more educated, more exposed to news media, and often more critical of local government performance than the poor, the observation that the poor in these four cities are less contented is unexpected. It is plausible that the more empowered folks in these four cities feel they stand a real chance to benefit from the new city's development plans, while the less empowered feel left out, and hence discontented. The new city administrations in Hoima, Gulu, Lira, Entebbe, and Mbale, therefore, need to adopt strategies that appeal to the poor, especially to encourage their active participation, through poverty alleviation, education, and empowerment.

Lastly, another unexpected result, residents in six of the 11 approved cities (Kampala, Fort Portal, Jinja, Lira, Masaka, and Entebbe) are discontented on the grounds of a perceived increase in corruption during the previous year, but are at the same time contented after paying a bribe to access public services. Conversely, residents in five of the 11 approved cities (Arua, Mbarara, Gulu, Hoima and Mbale), show discontent after paying a bribe to access public services.

Data show that in 10 of the 11 cities, residents who perceive corruption to have increased over the previous year are less contented with local government services, although this result is statistically significant only in Fort Portal. Again, this is surprising, since additional payment for public services would be expected to provoke discontent. Perhaps the new city administrations need to prioritise anti-corruption strategies to close avenues through which corruption thrives in local government service delivery.

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<sup>2</sup> Only in Masaka is this relationship statistically significant.

**Table 5: Predictors of contentment with district or city service delivery** | by city | OLS regression | Uganda | 2022

Variables	Arua	Mbarara	Soroti	Kampala	Entebbe	Fort Portal	Gulu	Hoima	Jinja	Lira	Masaka	Mbale	ALL cities
(Constant)	4.94*	2.89	1.5	4.44*	6.02*	5.99*	5.3*	3.6*	2.17	0.64	1.5	4.81	<b>3.02*</b>
Paid a bribe to obtain public services (index)	-0.59	-0.51	0.56	0.05	0.08	0.38	-0.21	-0.25	0.23	0.24	0.27	-0.14	<b>-0.05</b>
Trust in selected leaders	0.56	-0.07	0.66*	0.02	0.78*	0.59*	-0.34	0.57*	1.45*	1.1*	0.51	0.00	<b>0.65*</b>
<b>Level of corruption</b>	-0.17	-0.12	0.08	-0.47	-0.2	-0.68*	-0.38	-0.45	0.00	-0.06	-0.14	-0.41	<b>-0.08*</b>
Difficulty in obtaining services (index)	-0.04	-0.32	-0.54	-0.24	-0.05	-0.44	0.02	0.35	-0.44	-0.25	-0.4	-0.12	<b>-0.28*</b>
<b>Level of education</b> (reference category: No formal education)													
Primary	-0.16	1.94	-0.24	-0.41	-3.01	-1.71	-0.16	0.01	0.35	3.85*	-1.63	1.02	<b>-0.42*</b>
Secondary	-0.74	1.2	0.15	0.07	-3.64	-1.05	-0.31	0.53	0.48	3.4*	-0.96	2.43	<b>-0.30</b>
Post-secondary	0.19	1.61	-0.28	-0.17	-3.23	-2.08	0.59	-1.74	0.32	1.1	-1.42	1.43	<b>-0.39</b>
<b>Health most important problem</b>	1.1	0.08	-0.82	-0.84	-0.76	0.5	0.09	-0.63	-0.46	-0.25	-1.11	-0.37	<b>-0.29*</b>
<b>Lived poverty</b> (reference category: Low/No lived poverty)													
Moderate lived poverty	2.07	0.24	0.61	0.85	-0.34	0.01	-1.32	-2.1*	0.58	-1.63*	0.28	-1.18	<b>-0.31*</b>
High lived poverty	1.75	-1.42	-0.44	0.24	-0.11	-0.91	-1.5	-1.64	0.09	-1.59	1.5	-1.47	<b>-0.29*</b>
<b>Gender</b> (reference category: Men)													
Women	-0.98	0.51	0.2	-0.17	0.19	0.37	-0.05	0.77	-0.86	1.04	0.45	0.36	<b>-0.09</b>
<b>Political party ID</b> (reference category: None/Refused/Don't know)													
NRM	-0.87	0.4	-0.38	-0.58	-0.32	-0.95	1.6	0.16	-0.49	-0.3	-1.6	1.32	<b>0.02</b>
Opposition	0.01	-1.6	-0.05	-0.66	0.27	-0.62	-0.66	0.78	-0.74	-0.44	1.21	1.3	<b>-0.08</b>
<b>Direction of the country</b> (reference category: Wrong direction)													
Going in the right direction	0.31	0.63	0.13	0.71	0.81	-0.29	0.05	1.68*	0.26	0.25	-0.47	0.52	<b>0.10</b>
Country's economic condition	-0.39	-0.21	0.35	-0.15	0.44	-0.14	0.24	-0.04	-0.2	-0.47	0.99*	-0.37	<b>0.17*</b>
Personal living conditions	-0.03	0.28	-0.08	0.12	-0.16	0.46	0.23	0.23	0.04	0.04	0.33	-0.16	<b>0.02</b>



## Conclusion

Their new city status has confronted local administrations with a number of challenges, especially the need to respond meaningfully to citizens' optimism and high expectations. Now that the new cities are beginning to take shape, with administrations established and development strategies adopted, it is imperative that their governance remain steadfast and grounded in strong policy and discipline.

The new cities currently generate meagre funds compared to Kampala, yet serve far larger planning areas. The resulting funding gap, combined with an over-dependence on government grants and donations, is a critical area to address. Delays in securing adequate funding to roll out the development agenda constitute a major risk; cities that stagnate or backtrack could plunge along an urban development trajectory characterised by an absence of planning standards, informal economies, and resentment among residents.

In tandem with the central government, the new city administrations need to adopt strong policies and development plans that attract investment in key sectors such as human capital, natural resources development, and production. This analysis has shown the extent to which citizens see the country's economic condition and their personal living conditions as worsening. This calls for strategies to boost local economies, especially targeting household incomes through linkages to government development programmes such as the ongoing Parish Development Model (PDM) initiative.

Our analysis has also shown that Ugandans have over time consistently cited the same set of problems that the government should prioritise. Most citizens are dissatisfied with social service delivery, often encountering difficulties and having to pay bribes to access key public services. The new city administrations must set and enforce service-delivery standards that address issues of access, quality, and corruption. Moreover, the review of interactions between measures of contentment and views on quality, integrity, and poverty has shown that the new city administrations need to adopt strategies that improve institutional trust, reduce poverty and corruption, and empower citizens to actively participate in the city's development efforts.

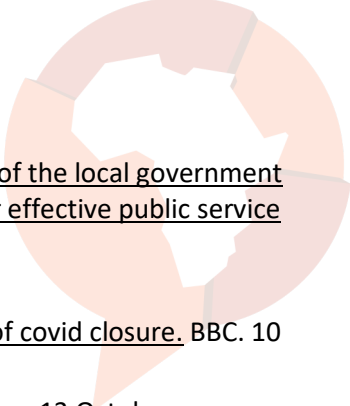
Investment in strategies to win citizen trust is essential in cementing local synergies, partnerships, and participation in development programmes. Winning citizen trust, especially through demonstrable efforts to curb corruption, could go a long way in cultivating citizen willingness to pay local tax obligations and building community ownership of city developments.

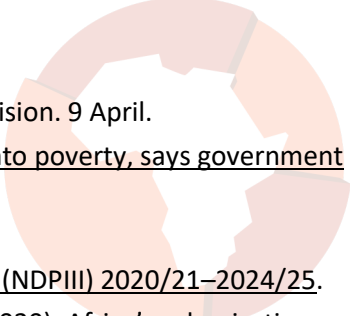
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## Appendix

### Variables used to construct indices

#### 1) Questions used to estimate contact with selected public services

Now I would like to talk to you about experiences that you may have had in accessing certain essential government services.

- a. In the past 12 months, have you had contact with a public school?
- b. In the past 12 months, have you had contact with a public health centre or hospital?
- c. In the past 12 months, have you tried to get an identity document like a birth certificate, driver's license, passport or voter's card, or permit from government?
- d. In the past 12 months, have you requested assistance from the police?

The additive index aggregates respondents who contacted at least one of the four public services assessed, with scores ranging from 0 to 4.

#### 2) Questions used to estimate facing difficulty in accessing selected public services

- a. How easy or difficult was it to obtain the services you needed from teachers or school officials?
- b. How easy or difficult was it to obtain the medical care you needed?
- c. How easy or difficult was it to obtain the document you needed?
- d. How easy or difficult was it to obtain the assistance you needed from the police?

The additive index aggregates respondents who found it "difficult" or "very difficult" to access the four selected services, with scores of 0 to 4.

#### 3) Questions used to estimate bribery in accessing selected public services

- a. How often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a teacher or school official in order to get the services you needed from the schools?
- b. How often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a health worker or health centre or hospital staff in order to get the medical care or services you needed?
- c. How often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a government official in order to get the document you needed?
- d. 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?
- e. Have you encountered any of the following problems during your interactions with the courts in the past five years: You were asked to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a judge or court official?

The additive index aggregates incidents of bribery for respondents who paid a bribe "once or twice," "a few times," or "often," with scores of 0 to 5.

#### 4) Questions used to report on problems encountered in accessing health services from government-owned health centres

And have you encountered any of these problems with a public health centre or hospital during the past 12 months:

- a. Lack of medicines or other supplies?
- b. Absence of doctors or other medical personnel?
- c. Long waiting time?
- d. Poor condition of facilities?

The additive index aggregates respondents who experienced these problems "once or twice," "a few times," or "often," with scores of 0 to 4.

## 5) Questions used to report on problems encountered in accessing courts

In the last five years, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family been directly involved in an administrative, civil, or criminal case that has come before a government court or tribunal as a claimant, as a respondent or defendant, or as a witness?

And have you encountered any of the following problems during your interactions with the courts in the past five years?

- a. Court case took too long?
- b. Legal services were too expensive?
- c. Court processes were difficult to follow?
- d. Court premises were located far away?
- e. Paid bribe to court judge or official?
- f. You were not treated with respect?

The additive index aggregates respondents who encountered any of the listed problems when accessing a court.

## 6) Questions used to estimate satisfaction with local government service delivery

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:

- a. Ensuring health centres are well staffed and stocked with medical supplies?
- b. Ensuring local market facilities are clean and well managed?
- c. Construction and maintenance of local roads?
- d. Planning and managing land use in the city or district?
- e. Providing education services at all levels in the district or city?

The additive index aggregates respondents who are "very satisfied" or "fairly satisfied," with scores of 0 to 5.

## 7) Questions used to estimate confidence in local government councils to deliver services

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:

- a. Improving local trade and maintaining quality standards in trading facilities?
- b. Ensuring that citizens like you have the opportunity to participate in local government budgeting and planning processes?
- c. Ensuring that the public is informed about how the district or city council spends money allocated in the district or city council budget?
- d. Ensuring that corruption and misuse of public funds are eliminated within its jurisdiction?

The additive index aggregates respondents who are "somewhat" or "a lot" confident, with a scale of 0 to 4.





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**Cover:** Infographic shows an artistic impression of the Kampala Flyover Project (more than 50% completed at the time of publication) at the junctions of Jinja Road, Yusuf Lule Road, and Access Road. Credit: Uganda National Roads Authority, published in Daily Monitor, 15 March 2023.

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