



Dispatch No. 668 | 11 July 2023

Zambians laud government crime-fighting efforts but cite police for lack of professionalism

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 668 | Edward Chibwili

Summary

In late June, the Law Association of Zambia issued a statement condemning brutality and abuse of citizens, particularly members of the political opposition, by Zambia's police (Lusaka Times, 2023a).

It was hardly the first high-level expression of concern about abuses by members of the Zambia Police Service. In December, the country's Human Rights Commission voiced alarm about continued complaints of police brutality, prolonged detention, and extra-judicial killings (Muchinshi, 2022). Recent criticism by civil society groups has highlighted the extended detention without formal charges of a former state house special adviser (Tembo, 2023; Lusaka Times, 2023b). The Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops condemned police brutality after the deaths of two protesters (Okoth, 2021). The 2022 Zambia Bribe Payers Index cites high levels of corruption among the police (Anti-Corruption Commission, 2023). And Zambian President Hakainde Hichilema has called on the police to rebuild public trust through professionalism and integrity (Zambia Daily Mail, 2021).

How do ordinary Zambians see their police?

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

In Zambia, citizens express significant levels of personal insecurity but give the government a positive rating on its performance in reducing crime.

However, the police are widely seen as corrupt, and among citizens who encountered the police during the previous year, almost half say they had to pay a bribe. Many say that officers routinely use excessive force with suspected criminals and protesters and stop drivers without good reason, and few think the police usually act in a professional manner and respect all citizens' rights.

Afrobarometer surveys

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 conducted in up to 39 countries since 1999. Round 9 surveys are being completed in 2023. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Zambia, led by the Institute of Economic and Social Research (INESOR), a research wing of the University of Zambia, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,200 Zambian adults between 3 August and 7 September 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of

error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Zambia in 1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2014, 2017, and 2020.

Key findings

- Almost half of Zambians say they felt unsafe while walking in their neighbourhoods (48%) and feared crime in their homes (47%) at least once during the previous year. These experiences of insecurity decreased compared to 2020 after rising over several survey rounds.
 - Poor citizens and urban residents are far more likely to be affected by such insecurity than better-off respondents and rural residents.
- About one in eight citizens (13%) say they requested police assistance during the previous year. Nearly twice as many (24%) encountered the police in other situations, such as at checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation.
 - Among citizens who asked for help from the police, 54% say it was difficult to get the assistance they needed, and 45% say they had to pay a bribe.
 - Among those who encountered the police in other situations, 46% say they had to pay a bribe to avoid problems.
- More than half (54%) of citizens say that "most" or "all" police are corrupt – by far the worst rating among 11 institutions and leaders the survey asked about.
- Fewer than half (47%) of citizens say they trust the police "somewhat" or "a lot."
- Almost half (45%) of respondents say the police "often" or "always" use excessive force when dealing with suspected criminals. About three in 10 say they routinely stop drivers without good reason (32%) and use excessive force in managing protests (30%). And 17% say police officers routinely engage in illegal activities.
- Only 27% of Zambians say the police "often" or "always" operate in a professional manner and respect all citizens' rights.
 - But 73% consider it likely that the police will take reports of gender-based violence seriously.
- Six in 10 citizens (60%) say the government is doing a "fairly good" or "very good" job of reducing crime, the highest level of approval since Afrobarometer surveys began in 1999.

Sense of security

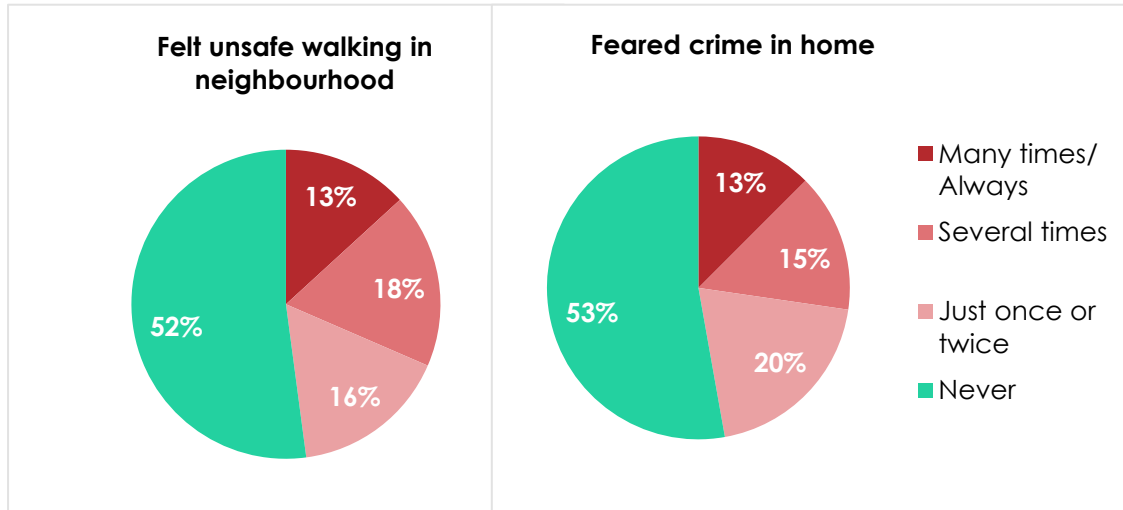
The primary role of the police is to protect people and their property. People's sense of security is highly dependent on how efficiently the police perform this noble role. Do Zambians feel protected?

Afrobarometer survey findings indicate a significant lack of a sense of personal security, though the situation has improved somewhat since 2020. Nearly half (48%) of Zambians say they felt unsafe while walking in their neighbourhood at least once during the previous year, including 32% who report feeling unsafe "several times," "many times," or "always" (Figure 1).¹

¹ Due to rounding, percentages for combined categories reported in the text may differ slightly from the sum of sub-categories shown in figures (e.g. 13% "many times/always" and 18% "several times" sum to 32%).

Similarly, 47% of citizens say they feared crime in their home, including 27% who say this happened at least "several times."

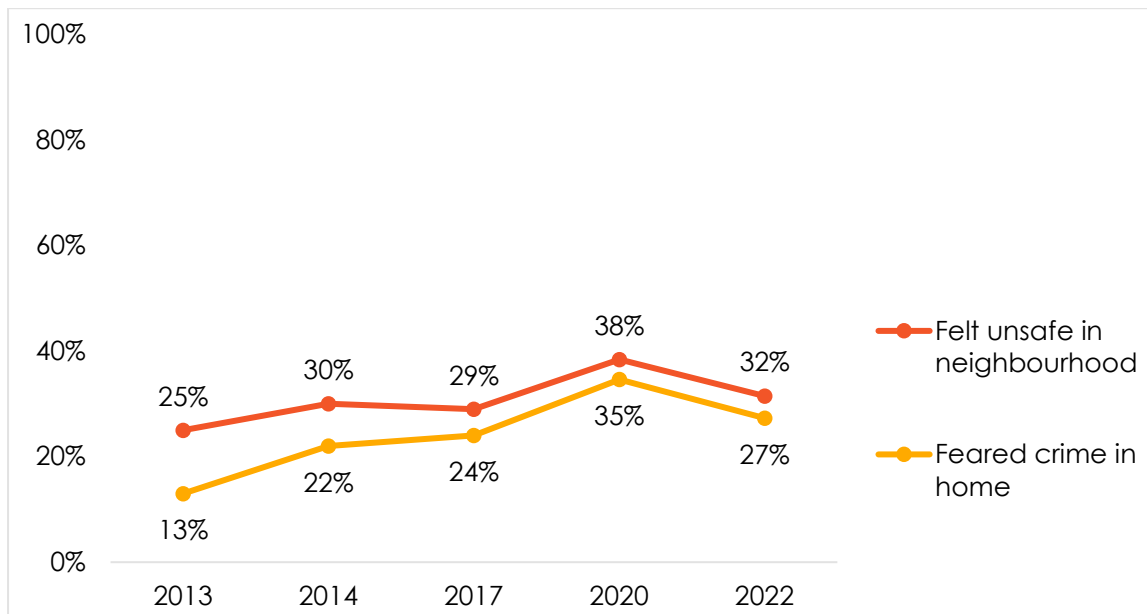
Figure 1: Insecurity and fear of crime | Zambia | 2022



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

The proportions of Zambians who report feeling unsafe or fearing crime at least "several times" increased significantly between 2013 and 2020 but have declined by 6 and 8 percentage points, respectively, since then (Figure 2).

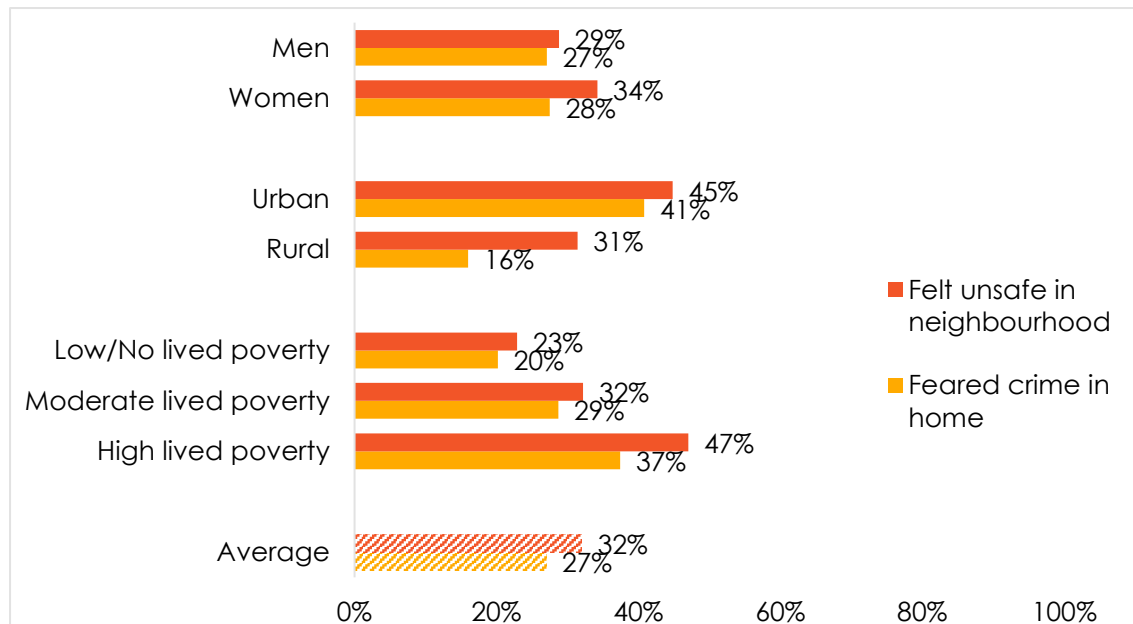
Figure 2: Experienced insecurity and fear of crime at least 'several times' | Zambia | 2013-2022



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

These experiences of insecurity are considerably more common in cities than in rural areas (by 14 percentage points for feeling unsafe in the neighbourhood and by 25 points for fearing crime in the home) (Figure 3). They increase sharply with respondents' level of lived poverty²: The poorest citizens are about twice as likely to feel unsafe and to fear crime as those experiencing no lived poverty.

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



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

Presence of police/security

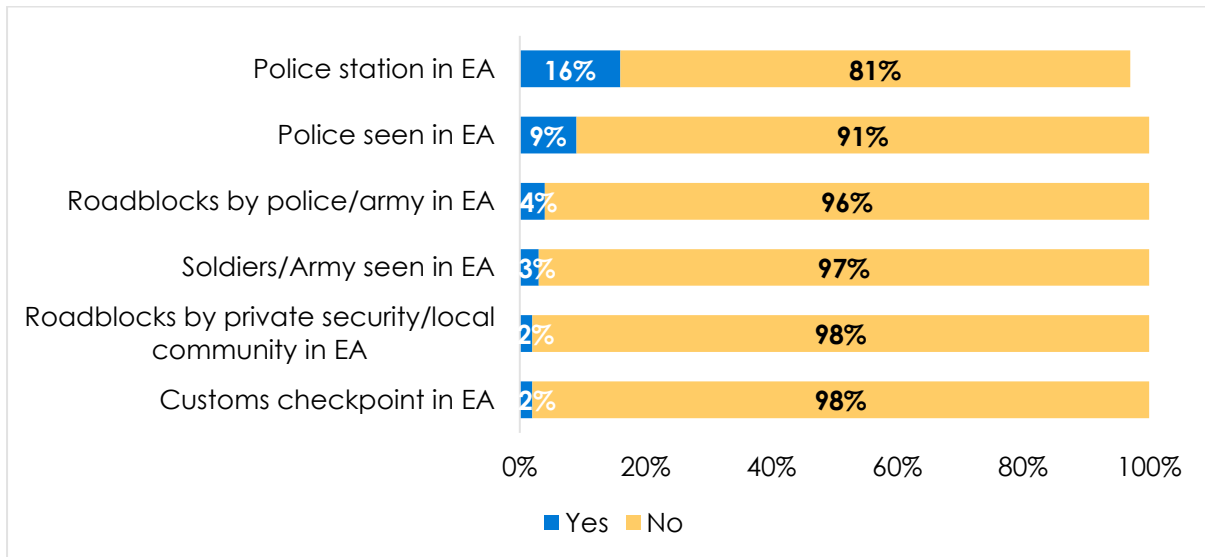
People's sense of security may be affected by security installations and the presence of security forces. As part of their data-collection process, Afrobarometer field teams make on-the-ground observations in each census enumeration area (EA) they visit about services and facilities available in the area. Since the EAs visited are selected to represent the country's population as a whole, these data provide reliable indicators of infrastructure and service availability.

In Zambia, Afrobarometer field teams found police stations in or within easy walking distance of 16% of the EAs they visited (Figure 4). They saw other signs of security-related activity in fewer than one in 10 EAs, including police officers or police vehicles (9%), roadblocks by the police or army (4%), soldiers or other military (3%), roadblocks by private security or the local community (2%), and customs checkpoints (2%).

The share of citizens who report having felt unsafe at least once is somewhat higher in areas with a nearby police station than in areas without a police station (54% vs. 46%).

² Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes and Patel (2022).

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



Survey enumerators were asked:

Are the following facilities present in the primary sampling unit (PSU)/enumeration area (EA) or in easy walking distance: Police station?
 In the PSU/EA, did you (or any of your colleagues) see: Any police officers or police vehicles? Any soldiers or army vehicles? Any roadblocks set up by police or army? Any customs checkpoints?
 Any roadblocks or booms set up by private security providers or by the local community?

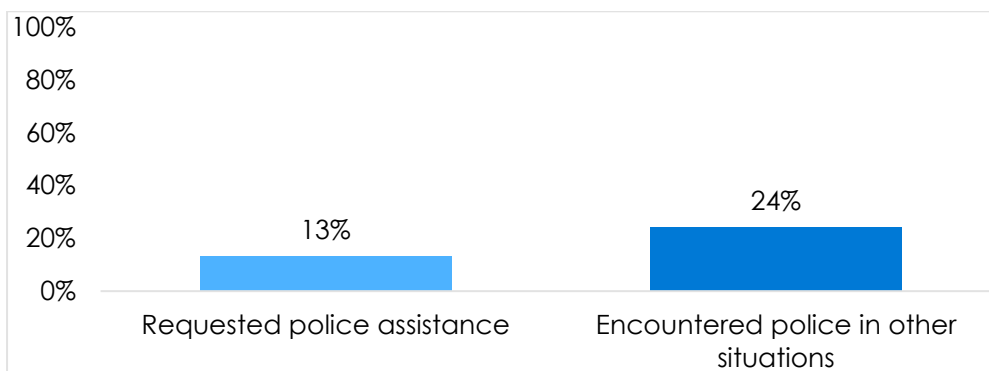
Encounters with the police

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

About one in eight respondents (13%) say they requested assistance from the police during the year preceding the survey. Almost twice as many (24%) encountered the police in other situations, such as at checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation (Figure 5).

Among citizens who asked for help from the police, slightly more than half (54%) say it was "difficult" or "very difficult" to get the assistance they needed (Figure 6). Only 16% indicate that it was "very easy" to get assistance from police.

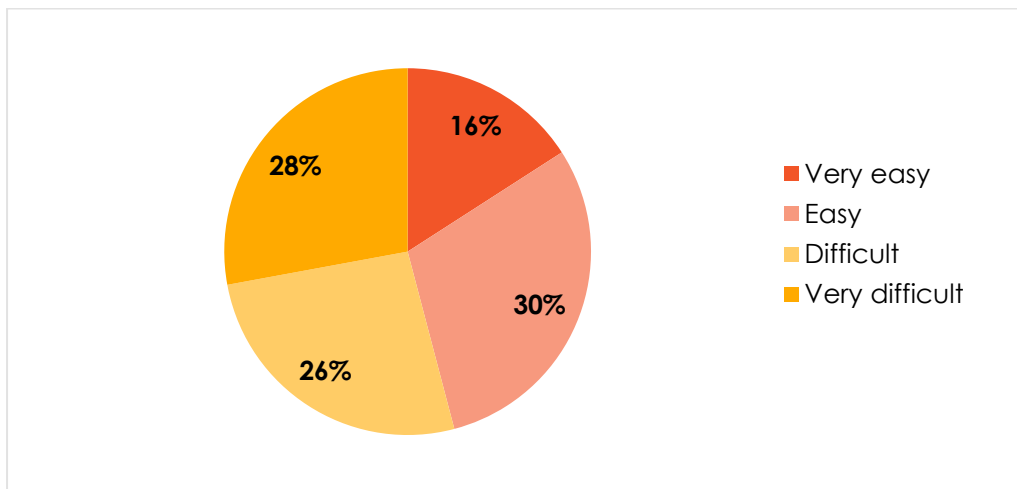
Figure 5: Contact with the police | Zambia | 2022



Respondents were asked:

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

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



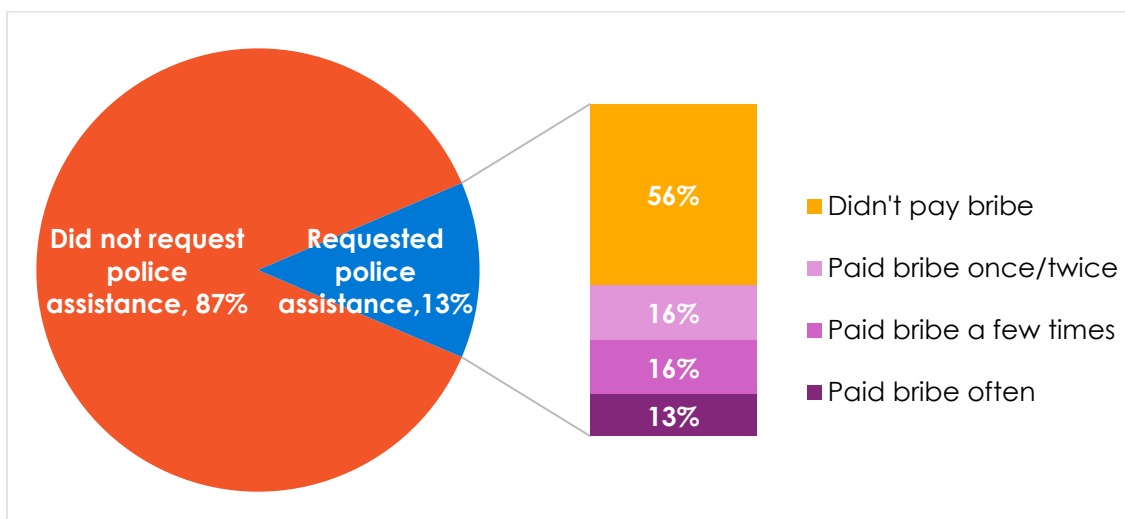
Respondents who requested police assistance during the previous year were asked: How easy or difficult was it to obtain the assistance you needed? (Respondents who did not request police assistance are excluded.)

Among those who asked for help from the police, almost half (45%) say they had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a police officer to get the assistance they needed (Figure 7).

Among Zambians who encountered the police in situations such as checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation, about the same proportion (46%) say they had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour to avoid problems, including 13% who say this happened "often" during the previous year (Figure 8).

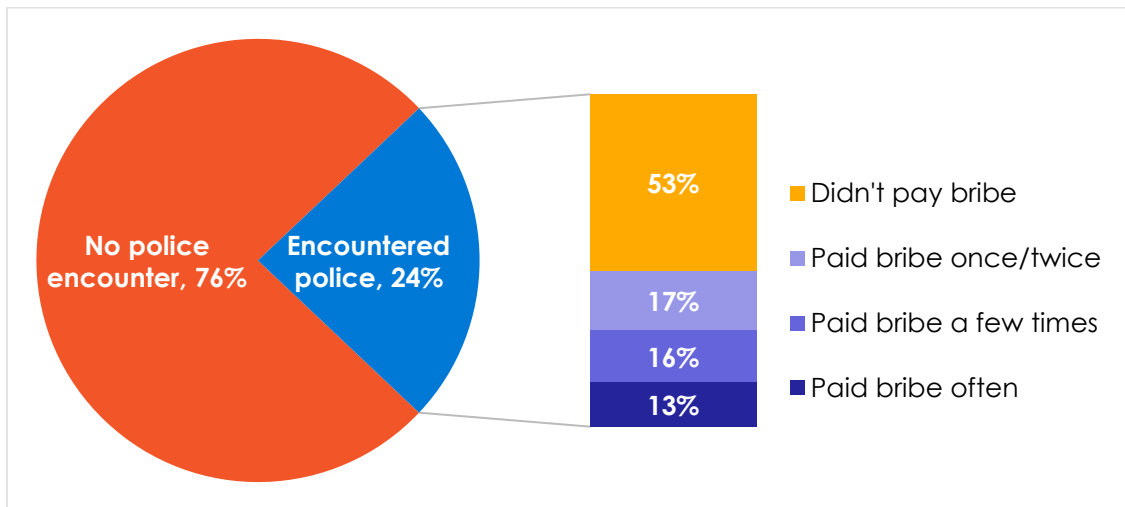
To summarise the experience with the police among all Zambian adults during the past year, 15% paid a bribe at least once to get police assistance, to avoid a problem with the police, or both.

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



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

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

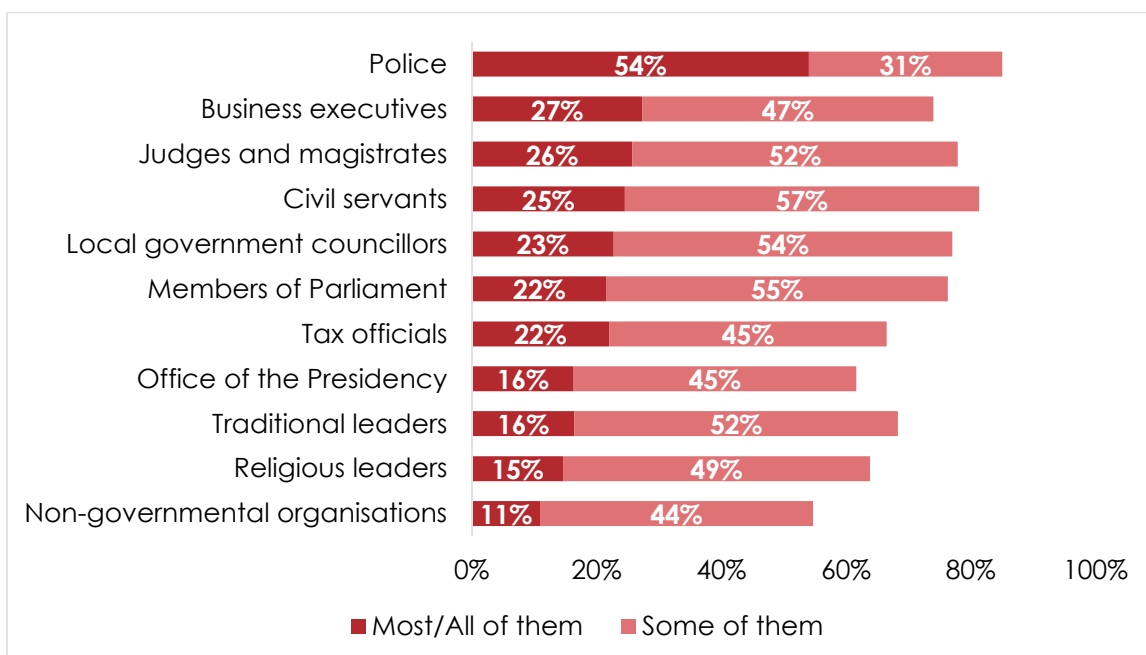


Respondents were asked: In the past 12 months how often have you encountered the police in other situations, like at checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation? [If yes:] And how often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a police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

Police corruption

Considering the frequency of reported bribe payments to the police, it is perhaps not surprising that an overwhelming majority (85%) of Zambians believe that at least "some" police officials are corrupt. In fact, more than half (54%) of citizens say that "most" or "all" police are corrupt – by far the worst rating among 11 institutions and leaders the survey asked about (Figure 9).

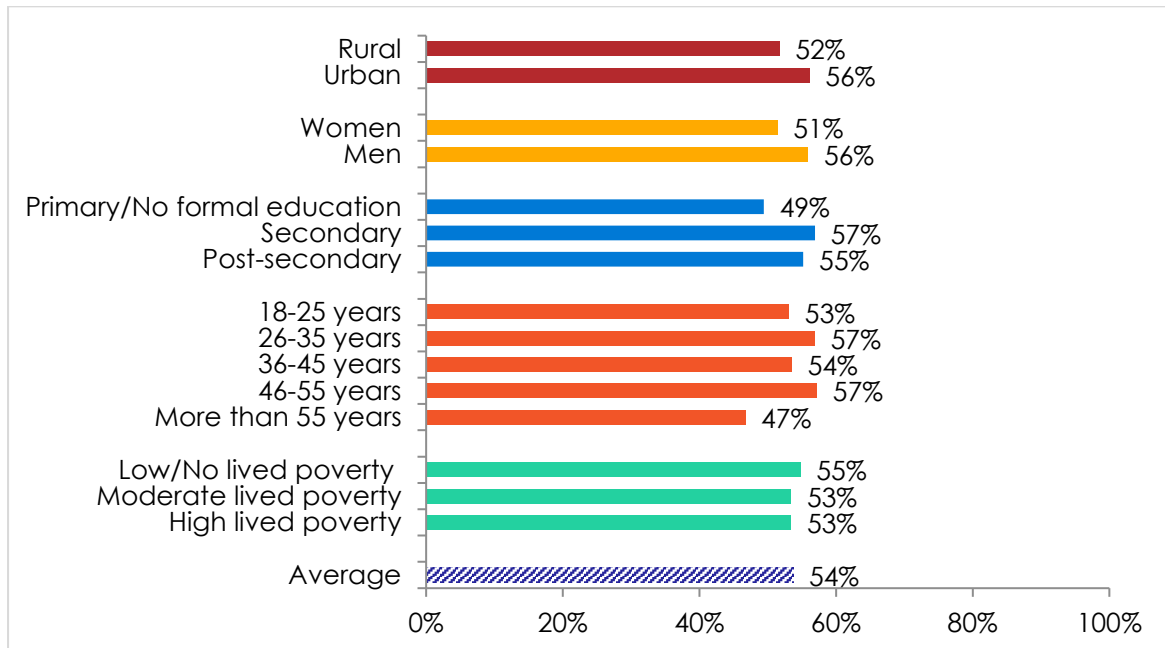
Figure 9: Perceived corruption among institutions and leaders | Zambia | 2022



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

Perceptions that most/all police are corrupt are slightly more common among men (56%) and urban residents (56%) than among women (51%) and rural residents (52%) (Figure 10). Respondents with primary schooling or less (49%) are somewhat less likely to see widespread corruption than those with secondary (57%) or post-secondary (55%) education.

Figure 10: Perception that most/all police are corrupt | by demographic group | Zambia | 2022

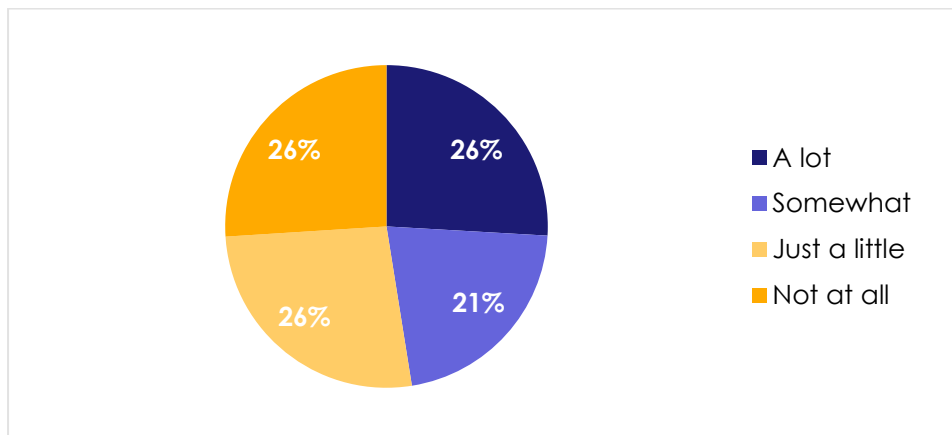


Respondents were asked: How many of the following do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Police? (% who say "most of them" or "all of them")

Trust in the police

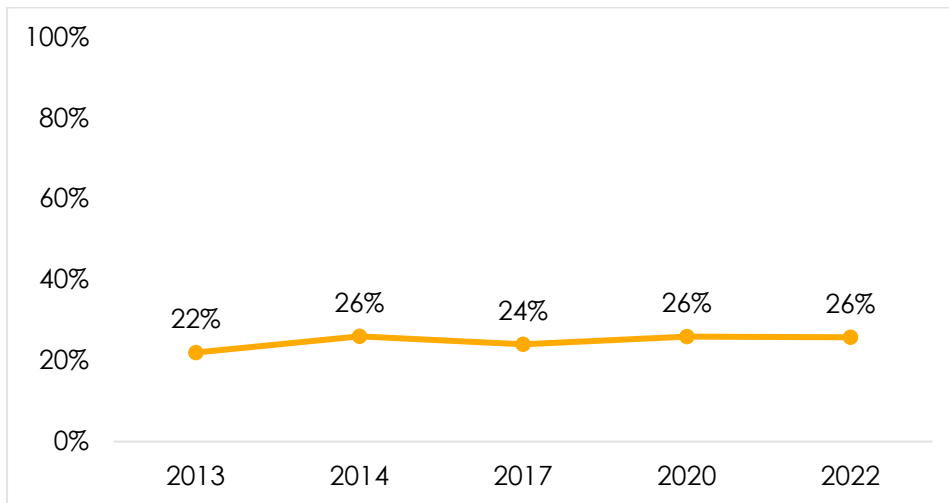
Alongside high levels of perceived corruption, Zambia's police suffer from fairly low levels of public trust. Fewer than half (47%) of citizens say they trust the police "somewhat" (21%) or "a lot" (26%) (Figure 11). Distrust in the police has held fairly steady over time, with about one-quarter of citizens (26% in 2022) saying they don't trust the police "at all" (Figure 12).

Figure 11: Trust in the police | Zambia | 2022



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

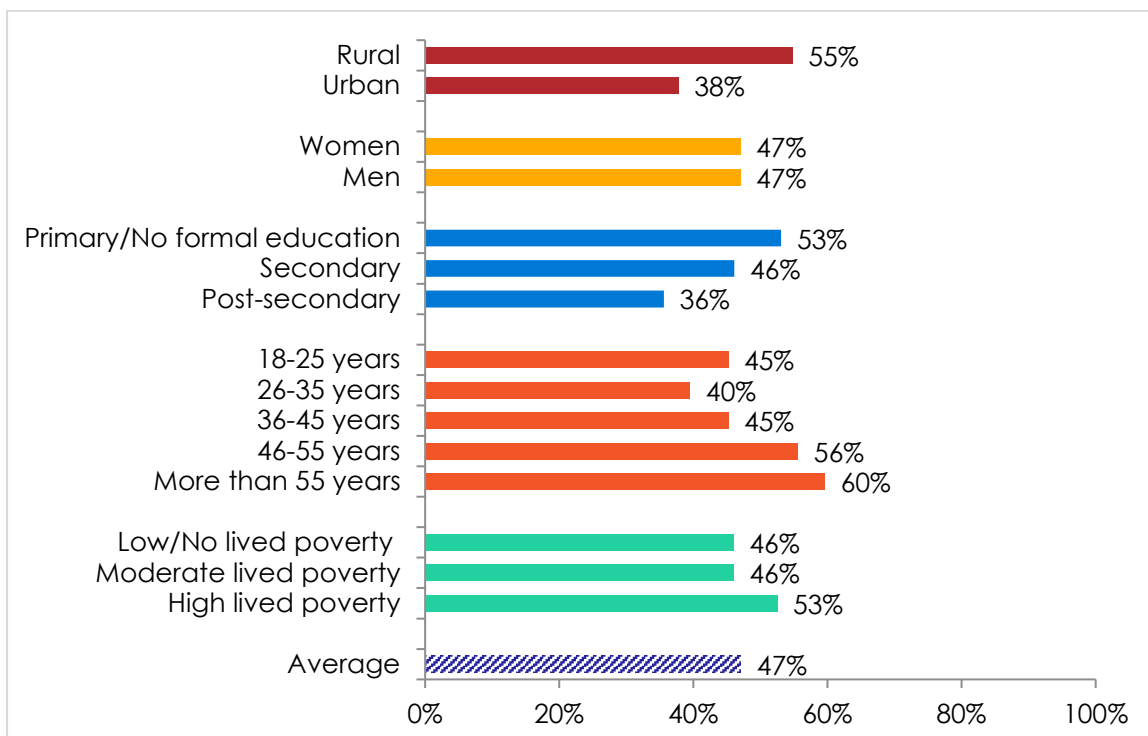
Figure 12: Don't trust the police 'at all' | Zambia | 2013-2022



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

Trust in the police is significantly stronger in rural areas than in cities (55% vs. 38%) (Figure 13). Trust declines as respondents' education levels increase, ranging from 53% among those with primary or no formal schooling to just 36% among those with post-secondary qualifications, and is higher among the poor (53%) than among better-off respondents (46%). Older citizens (60% of those over age 55) trust the police more than younger cohorts.

Figure 13: Trust the police somewhat/a lot | by demographic group | Zambia | 2022



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

Police conduct

In addition to expressing fairly weak trust in the police, many Zambians say at least some police officers engage in improper and even illegal activities (Figure 14). Almost half (45%) say the police "often" or "always" use excessive force when dealing with suspected criminals, in addition to 26% who say they "sometimes" do this. About three in 10 respondents say the police "often" or "always" stop drivers without good reason (32%) and use excessive force in managing protests or demonstrations (30%). Moreover, 17% say the police routinely engage in illegal activities; only 41% think this "rarely" or "never" happens.

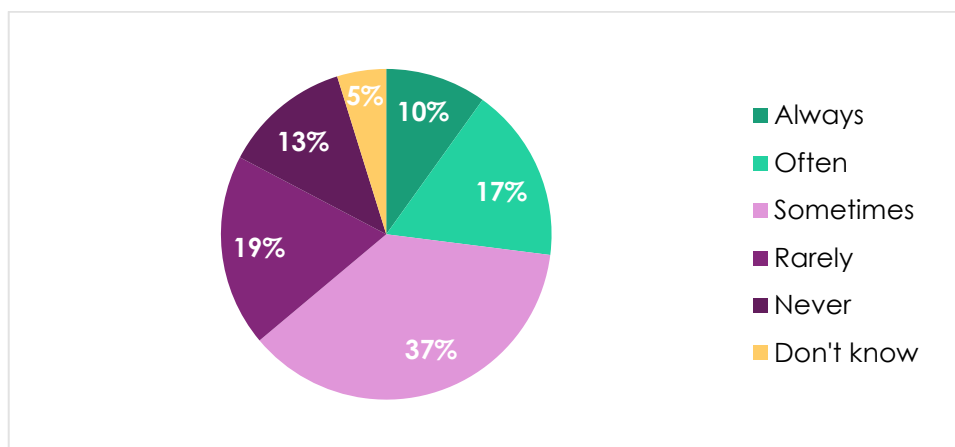
Figure 14: Improper police practices | Zambia | 2022



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

Overall, only 27% of Zambians say the police "often" or "always" operate in a professional manner and respect all citizens' rights; the largest proportion (37%) say this happens "sometimes," while 32% assert that such behaviour is rare or unheard of (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Do the police act professionally and respect citizens' rights? | Zambia | 2022

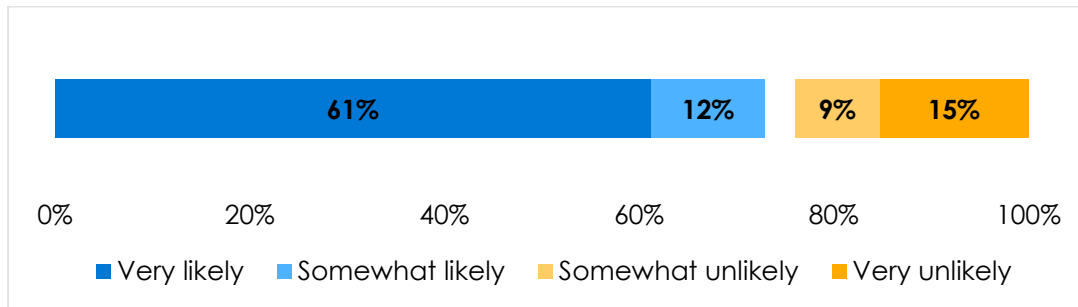


Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how often do the police in Zambia operate in a professional manner and respect the rights of all citizens?

One area in which Zambians rate their police positively is in treating cases of gender-based violence (GBV) as serious offences. Almost three-fourths (73%) consider it likely that the police will take a woman's report of GBV seriously, including 61% who see this as "very likely" (Figure 16).

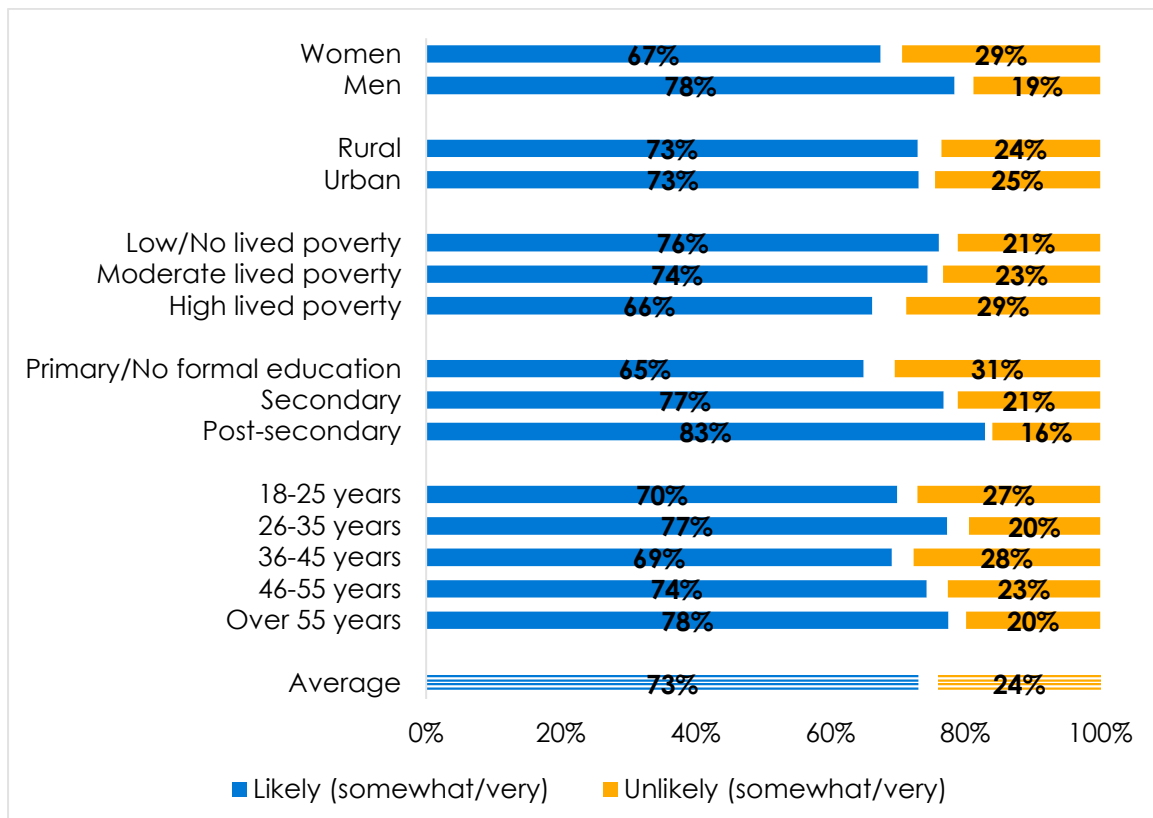
While this assessment is shared across key demographic groups, confidence is somewhat less strong among women (67%), the poor (66%), and those with primary or no formal education (65%) (Figure 17).

Figure 16: Do the police take gender-based violence seriously? | Zambia | 2022



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

Figure 17: Do the police take gender-based violence seriously? | by demographic group | Zambia | 2022



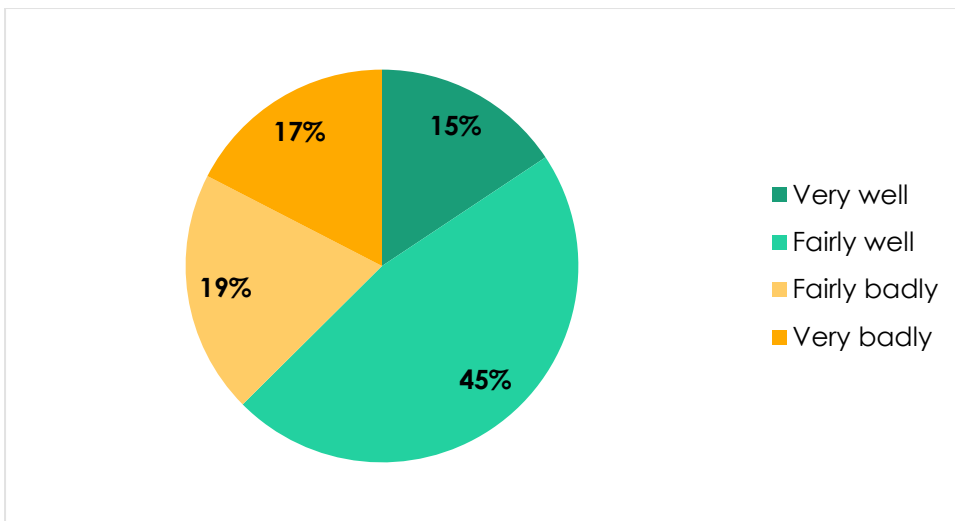
Respondents were asked: *If a woman in your community goes to the police to report being a victim of gender-based violence, for example, to report a rape or report being physically abused by her husband, how likely or unlikely is it that her case will be taken seriously by the police?*

Government performance in reducing crime

Despite the shortcomings highlighted by Zambians' assessments of police corruption, trustworthiness, and conduct, a solid majority (60%) of citizens say the government is doing a "fairly good" or "very good" job of reducing crime, while 36% are critical of the government's performance on this issue (Figure 18).

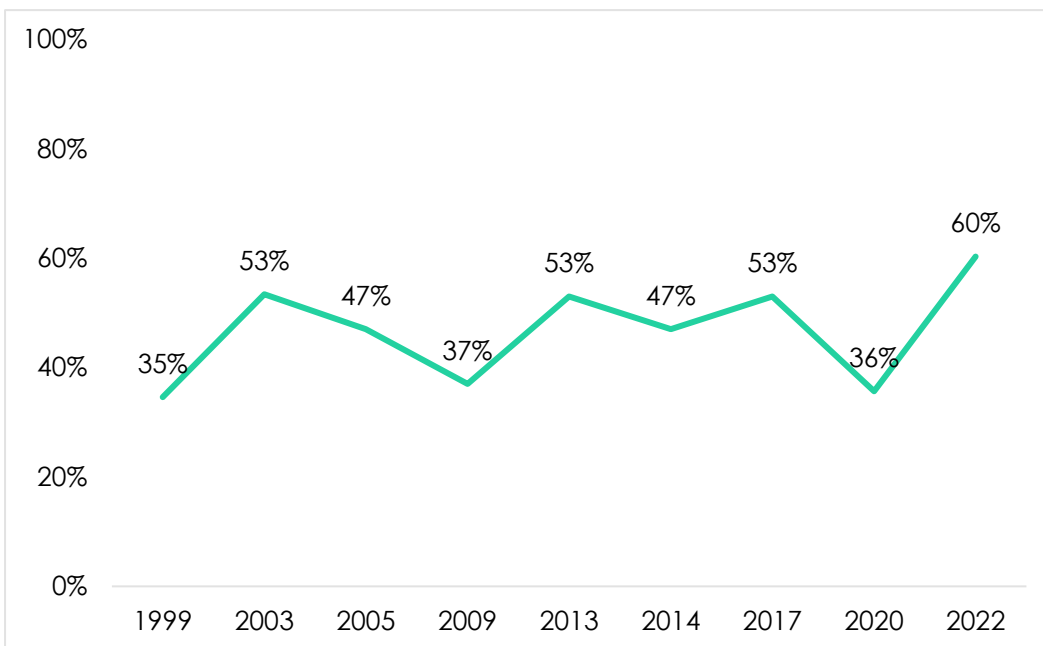
Approval increased by 24 percentage points compared to 2020, reaching its highest level since Afrobarometer surveys started in 1999 (Figure 19).

Figure 18: Government performance in reducing crime | Zambia | 2022



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

Figure 19: Government performing well on crime reduction | Zambia | 1999-2022



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

Conclusion

Survey findings show that Zambians report fewer experiences of insecurity compared to 2020 and give the government its best marks in two decades on fighting crime. However, the Zambia Police Service continues to operate in an environment of weak public trust. A majority of citizens believe that officers use excessive force, fail to respect human rights, and engage in corruption – profound challenges for a government seeking to build a professional force.

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

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