

AFRO
BAROMETER
Let the people have a say

Brutality and corruption undermine trust in Uganda's police: Can damage be undone?

By Makanga Ronald Kakumba and Matthias Krönke

Afrobarometer Policy Paper No. 88 | August 2023

Introduction

The police are responsible for enforcing the law, preventing crime, maintaining public order and security, and protecting people's lives and property. Yet Uganda's police have often been criticized for brutality meted out against the very citizens meant to be under their protection. Since 2008, more than 100 civilians have reportedly been killed by Ugandan security officers, while many more have suffered injury, harassment, and abuse, often during protests and recently during aggressive enforcement of COVID-19 restrictions (Taylor, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2011, 2021, 2022; Guardian, 2021; 2022).

Uganda's national media also continues to report countless cases of repression by the police, particularly against journalists, political activists, and political opponents. Yet accused officers regularly go unpunished; critics contend that laws and provisions regarding the use of force by police officers in Uganda are lax and protect the police (Kiconco, 2018; *The Law on Police Use of Force*, 2022), and that internal accountability mechanisms such as the police disciplinary courts, regional police courts, and police council have fallen short of their intended objectives (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, 2006)

Corruption further tarnishes the image of the police. In surveys by Afrobarometer, Transparency International, and others, the Uganda Police Force is consistently ranked as more corrupt than other key institutions (Monitor, 2021; New Vision, 2015; Kakumba, 2021). Civil society groups may see the dismissal in 2021 of 153 officers accused of corruption and inappropriate conduct (Independent, 2021) as a step, but no more than a step.

Some officers' disregard for the law and excessive use of force have had real consequences on public perceptions of the police. As this policy report demonstrates, over the past two decades, the Uganda Police Force has lost a lot of its most important currency – public trust. Without this trust, it is more difficult for the police to get public support for crime-prevention measures, community safety initiatives, and criminal investigations (Nix, Wolfe, Rojek, & Kaminski, 2015).

A lack of public trust in the police also decreases citizens' compliance with the law (Jackson et al., 2012; Tyler, 2006). Some analysts even argue that distrust in law enforcement increases the likelihood of the public engaging in mob justice (Kakumba, 2020). Put differently, maintaining public trust in the police is essential not only for enhancing police legitimacy (Hawdon, Ryan, & Griffin, 2003), but also to facilitate the rule of law.

In this policy paper, we make use of multiple rounds of Afrobarometer survey data to answer three related questions about public trust in Uganda's police. First, how much do Ugandans trust their police force? Second, to what extent does public trust in the police vary over time and among different groups of citizens? Third, what explains the different levels of trust in the police?

We find that as of 2022, fewer than half of Ugandans trust the police, and the proportion who express no trust at all in the police has more than tripled since 2005. Uganda's police are less trusted than other key governmental institutions in the country, and rank among the least trusted and most corrupt police forces on the continent.

Our analysis also shows that citizens' perceptions of and experiences with the Uganda police force are very poor. A majority of Ugandans say that most or all members of the police are corrupt and that they frequently use excessive force in dealing with suspected criminals and managing protests. A substantial share of survey respondents report that the police "never" or "rarely" operate in a professional manner or respect citizens' rights. We demonstrate that opposition party supporters and residents in the country's Central Region (including Kampala) – an opposition stronghold and the centre of many political protests – are particularly likely to report these negative sentiments.

Based on these findings, we make several recommendations that could go some way toward improving citizens' perceptions of the police, including revision of the 1994 Police Act, establishment of an independent and external police oversight body, strengthening of parliamentary oversight, and additional training for police officers.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Nine rounds of surveys have been completed in up to 42 countries since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2023) cover 39 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

With financial support from the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda, the Afrobarometer team in Uganda, led by Hatchile Consult Ltd., interviewed 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. This was the 12th Afrobarometer survey in Uganda. Previous surveys included in this analysis were conducted in 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2017, and 2019.

Key findings

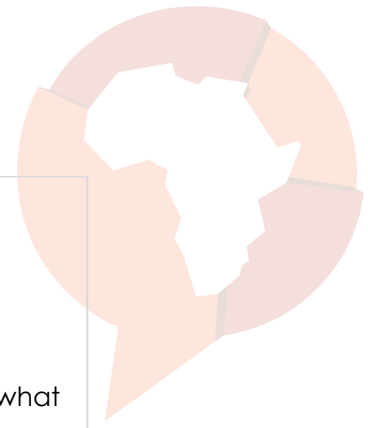
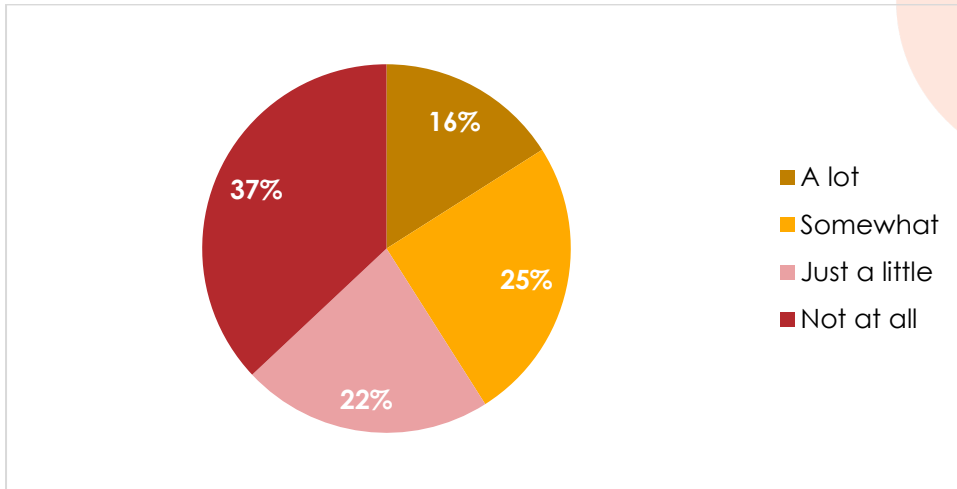
- **Trust in the police:** Fewer than half (41%) of Ugandans trust the police “somewhat” or “a lot.” The share of citizens who express no trust at all in the police has increased from 10% in 2005 to 37% in 2022.
- **Uganda police in comparative perspective:** Uganda police are the least trusted among key government institutions in the country and rank among the bottom eight across 34 African countries surveyed by Afrobarometer in Round 8.
- **Police corruption:** Three out of four Ugandans (77%) say that “most” or “all” members of the police are corrupt. Uganda police are perceived as the most corrupt among key public institutions and one of the most corrupt police forces in the 34 countries surveyed by Afrobarometer.
- **Police professionalism:** Only about one in five Ugandans (22%) think the police “often” or “always” operate in a professional manner and respect the rights of all citizens, while 42% say this “never” or “rarely” happens.
- **Police brutality:** A majority of citizens say the police “often” or “always” use excessive force in managing protests (57%) and in dealing with suspected criminals (54%). Among opposition party supporters, 74% think the police routinely use excessive force with protesters, but even among NRM supporters, half (49%) hold this view.
- **Determinants of trust in the police:** Statistical analyses show that citizens' low levels of trust in the police are driven by perceptions of police corruption, brutality, and lack of professionalism and respect for citizens' rights. Trust in the police is also significantly lower among citizens who support opposition parties and those living in the country's Central Region (including Kampala).

Trust in police

We begin by describing citizens' trust in the police both over time and in comparison to other African countries, as well as how trust varies at the subnational level. In the next section, we will discuss several factors that might affect citizens' trust in the police before testing which of these factors are most closely associated with trust. We will close by providing several recommendations about how trust in the country's police service might be improved.

It is much easier for a country's police to enforce the rule of law if citizens see the police as a legitimate actor that itself abides by the law. This prompts a simple question: How much do Ugandans trust the police? According to the most recent Afrobarometer survey, public trust in the Uganda Police Force is both low and declining. Fewer than half (41%) of citizens say they trust the police “somewhat” or “a lot,” while about six in 10 (59%) trust the institution “just a little” or “not at all” (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Trust in the police | Uganda | 2022

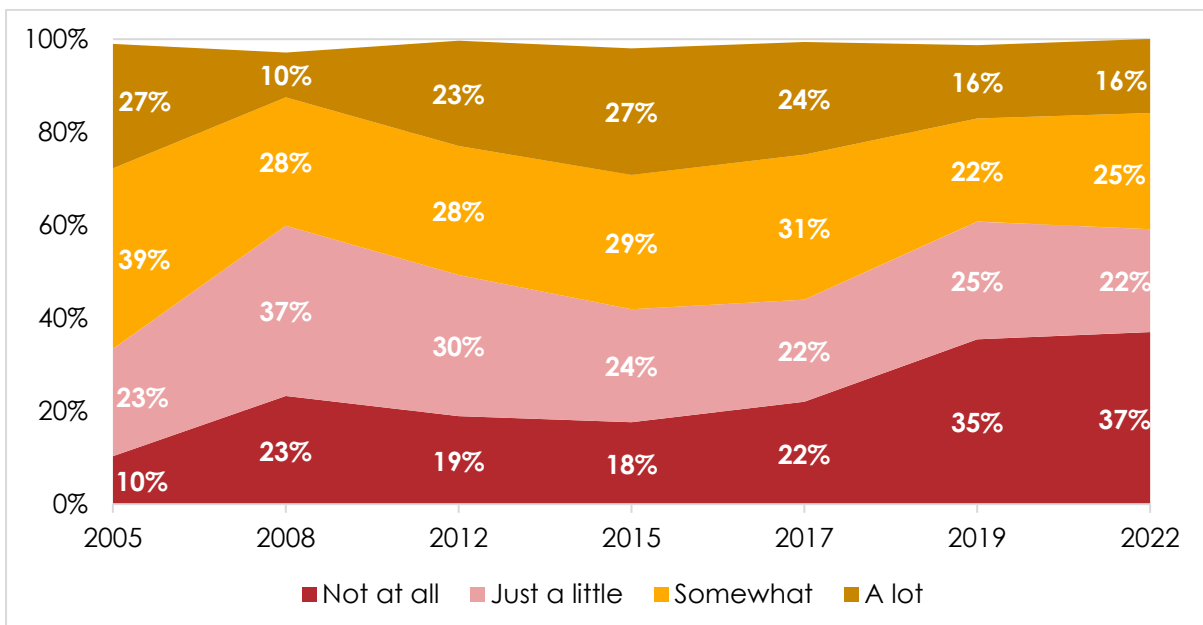


Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The police?

This low level of trust continues a trend that has emerged over the past two decades. As Figure 2 shows, the share of citizens who trust the police “somewhat” or “a lot” has decreased markedly between 2005 and 2022 (by 14 percentage points in the “trust somewhat” category and by 11 percentage points in the “trust a lot” category).

Meanwhile, the percentage of citizens who trust police “just a little” increased markedly between 2005 and 2008 before declining to 22% in 2022, which is roughly where it was in 2005 (23%). But over the same period, the proportion of respondents who said they do not trust the police at all increased nearly fourfold, from just 10% in 2005 to 37% in 2022. While the overall decrease in trust is problematic, the drastic change in the number of people who completely distrust the police is particularly concerning, pointing to a major loss of legitimacy.

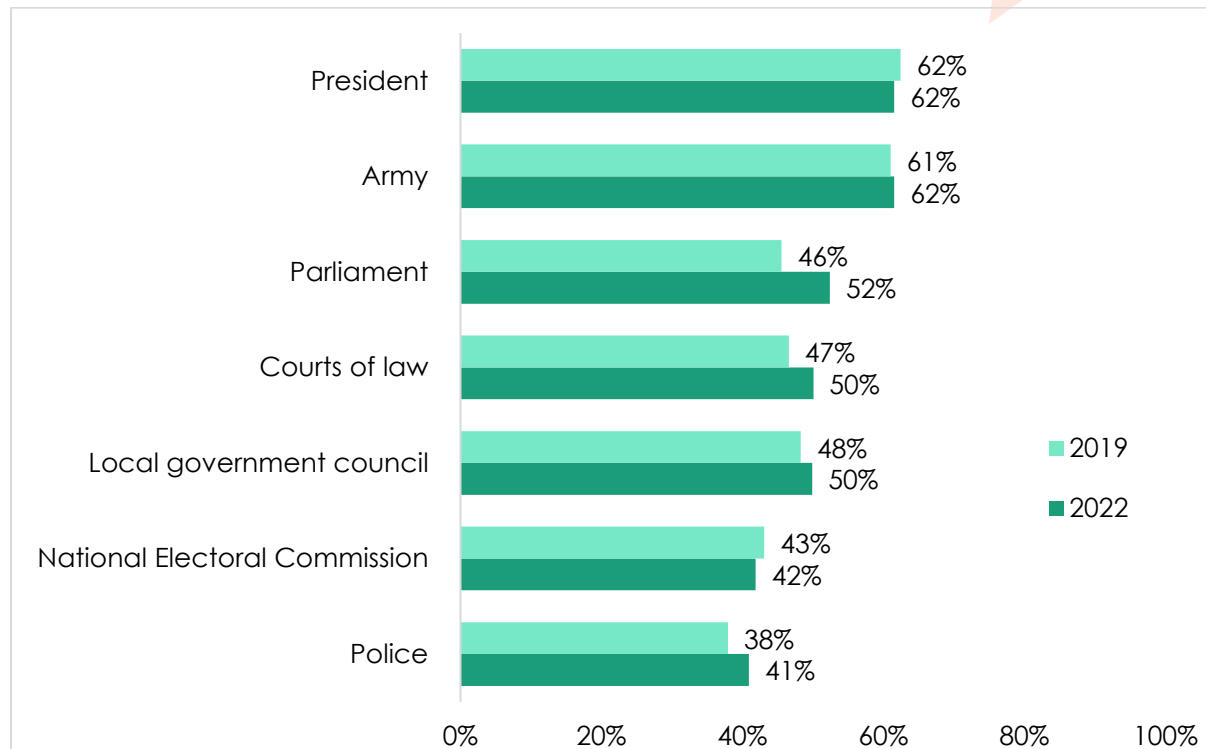
Figure 2: Trust in the police | Uganda | 2005-2022



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

Given these trends, it is not surprising that in both 2019 and 2022, the police were the least trusted among public institutions the surveys asked about, followed by the National Electoral Commission, another institution that has struggled to receive the support of Ugandans over the past two decades (Krönke, 2022). In contrast, citizens have more faith in the other arms of the executive branch, with six in 10 saying they trust the president and the army “somewhat” or “a lot” (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Trust in institutions | Uganda | 2019-2022



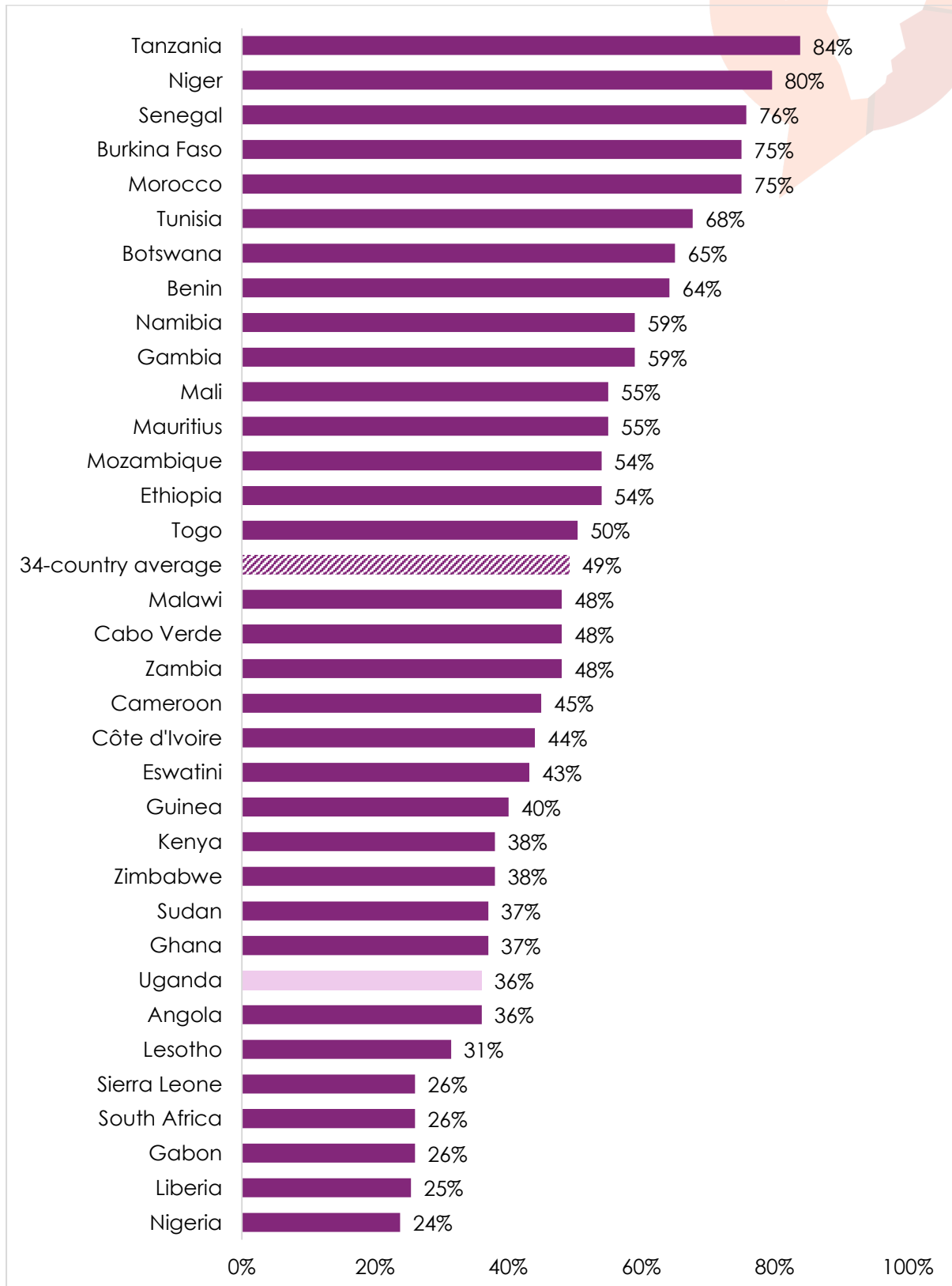
Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say “somewhat” or “a lot”)

A comparison of Uganda to the other 33 countries that Afrobarometer surveyed in Round 8 (2019/2021) reinforces the Ugandan Police Force's poor standing in the public eye. At 36%, trust in the Ugandan police falls well below the 34-country average of 49% and is less than half the levels seen in the most trusting countries: Tanzania (84%), Niger (80%), Senegal (76%), Burkina Faso (75%), and Morocco (75%) (Figure 4). In just six countries do citizens trust their police less than in Uganda: Nigeria (24%), Liberia (25%), Gabon (26%), South Africa (26%), Sierra Leone (26%), and Lesotho (31%).

Trust in the Ugandan police varies not only across time, but also among different groups in the country. For example, trust in the police is higher among older citizens (48%) than among the middle-aged and younger adults (39%), among women (46%) compared to men (36%), and among rural residents (45%) compared to urbanities (30%) (Figure 5).

However, these differences are smaller than the variation observed across Uganda's regions: Residents of the Central Region (including Kampala) (18%) are far less likely to trust the police than their counterparts in Western (42%), Northern (53%), and Eastern (55%) regions. There are also stark differences across the partisan divide and across education levels: Supporters of the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) are twice as likely as opposition supporters to say they trust the police (52% vs. 26%), and citizens with no formal schooling (49%) or only primary education (50%) trust the police far more than those with secondary (31%) or higher education (24%). We will return to these differences in subsequent sections.

Figure 4: Trust in the police | 34 countries | 2019/2021



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

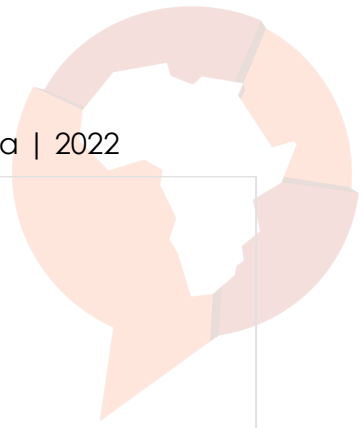
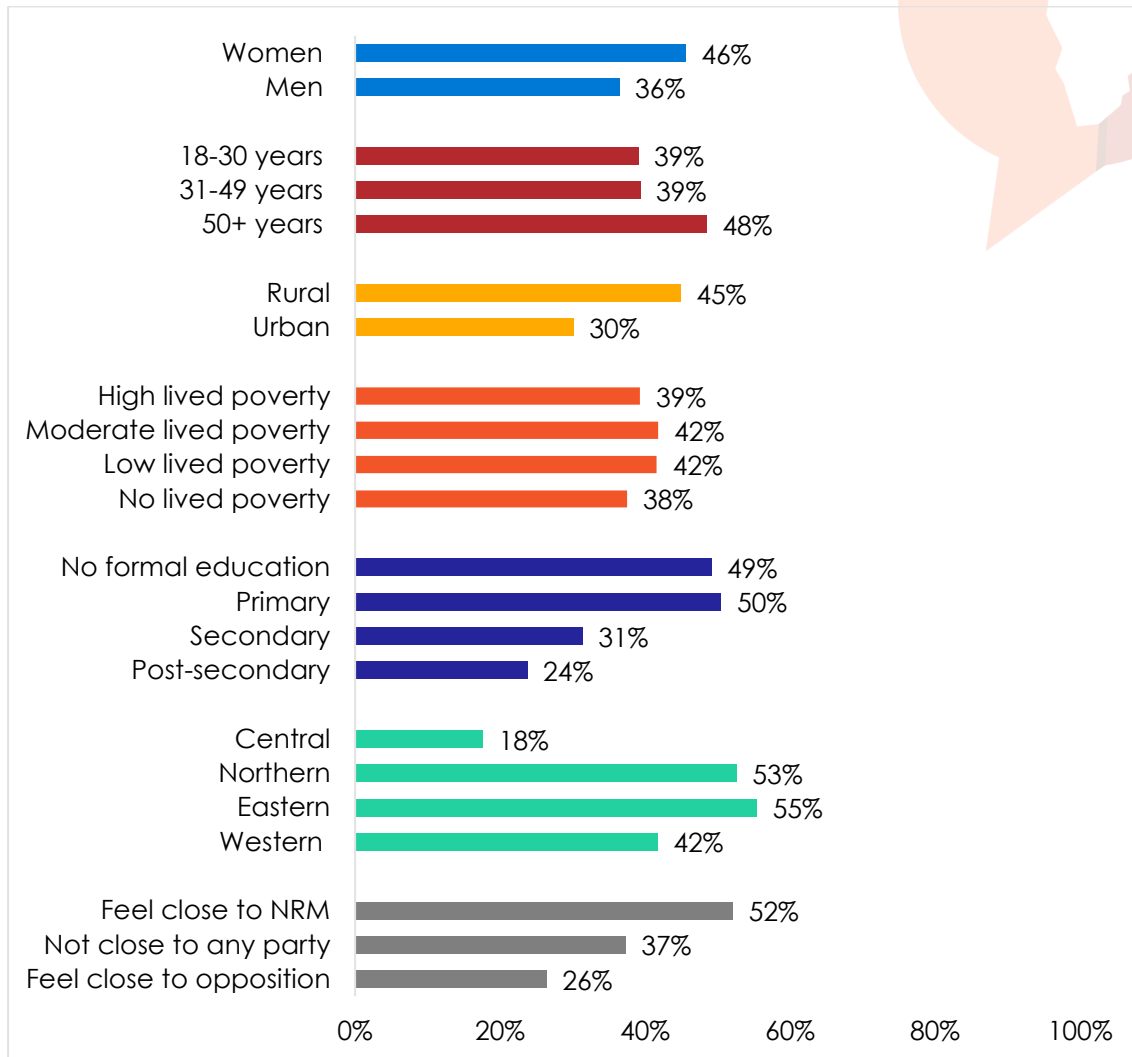


Figure 5: Trust in the police | by demographic group | Uganda | 2022



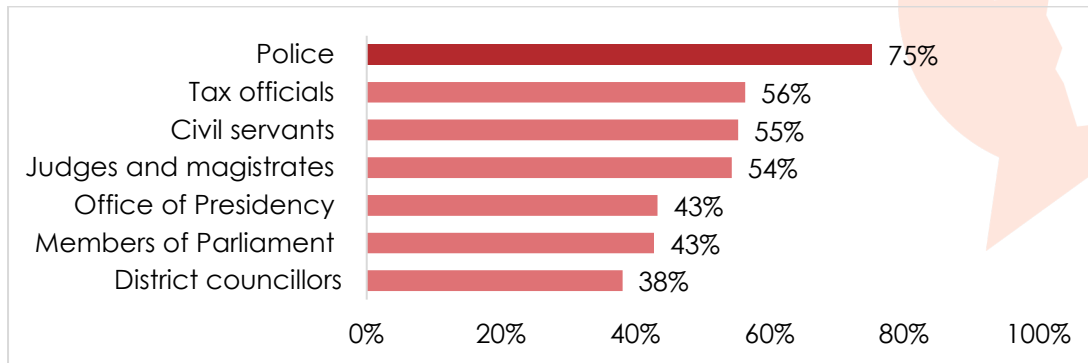
Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The police? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")
 Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families 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).

Police corruption

One possible explanation for distrust of the police is the perception of corruption among law enforcement officers. Police misuse of authority or abuse of power for personal gain (Syed & Bruce, 1998) can take a variety of forms, including accepting bribes from those involved in traffic offenses or other illegal activities (drug dealing, prostitution). According to the most recent Afrobarometer survey, three out of four Ugandans (75%) say that "most" or "all" police are corrupt, far more than see widespread corruption among tax officials (56%), civil servants (54%), judges and magistrates (54%), officials in the Presidency (43%), members of Parliament (43%), and district councillors (38%) (Figure 6).

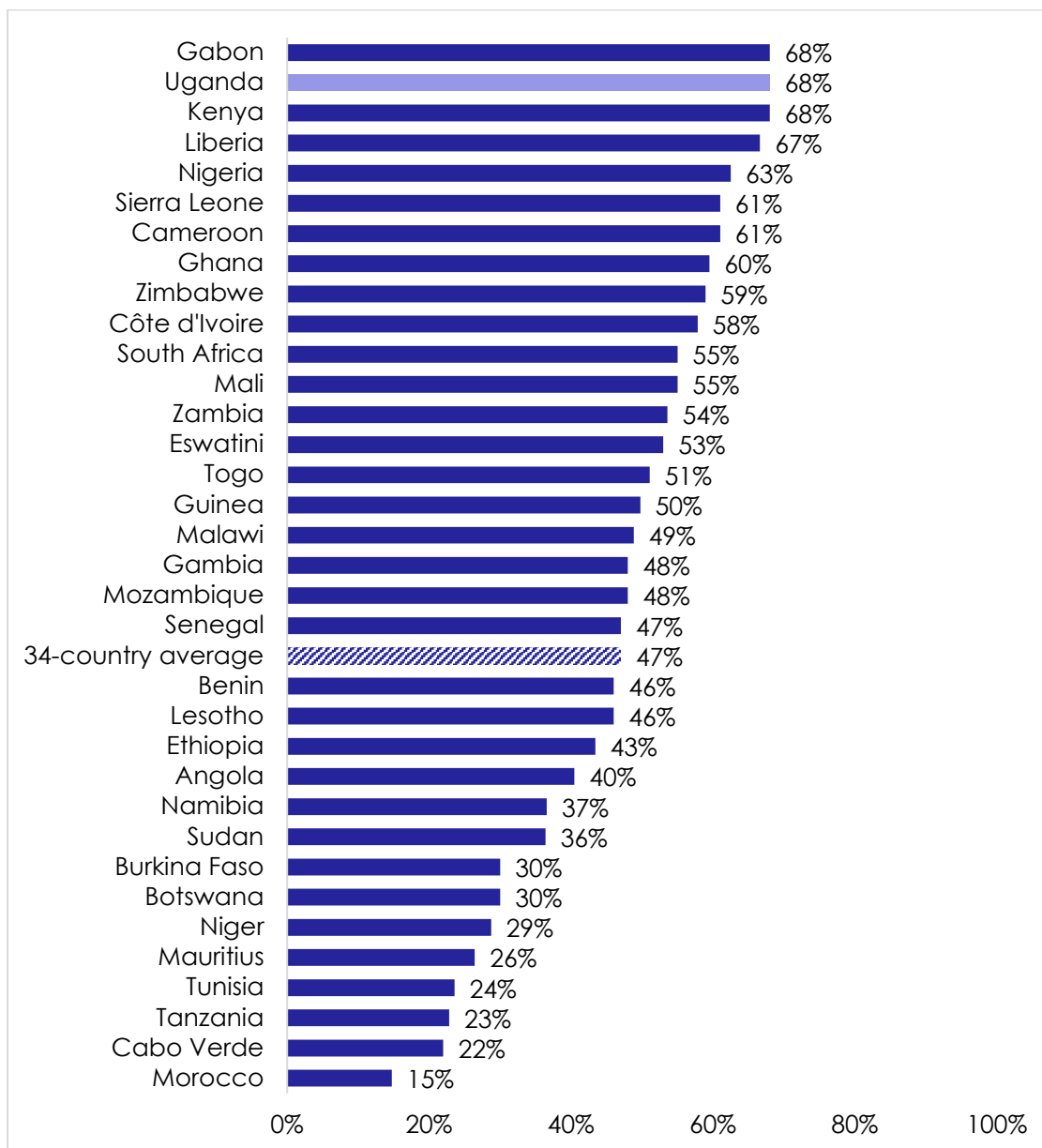
Ugandans top the list, along with Gabonese and Kenyans, in perceptions of police corruption across the 34 African countries surveyed in 2019/2021 (Figure 7). In contrast, fewer than a quarter of citizens perceive "most" or "all" police as corrupt in Morocco (15%), Cabo Verde (22%), Tanzania (23%), and Tunisia (24%).

Figure 6: Perceived corruption among public officials and 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? (% who say "most of them" or "all of them")

Figure 7: Perceived corruption among the police | 34 countries | 2019/2021



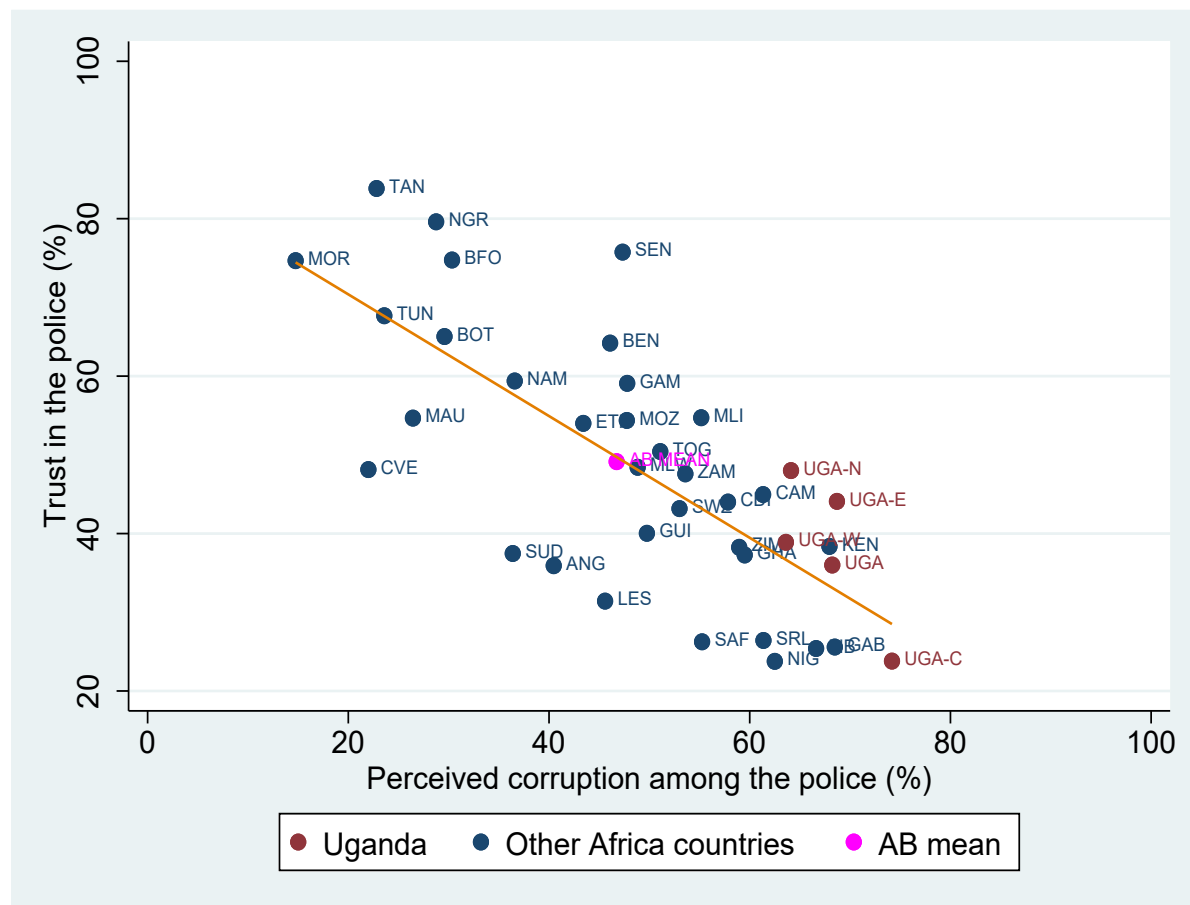
Respondents were asked: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The police? (% who say "most of them" or "all of them")

Police corruption and trust in the police

A previous analysis of Afrobarometer data from 2011/2013 demonstrated that citizens who perceive police officers to be corrupt are also less likely to trust the police (Wambua, 2015). We find that this is also true when comparing the data across the 34 countries surveyed in Round 8 (country-level Pearson's $r = -.669$, significant at the 0.001 level) (Figure 8). For example, Morocco and Tanzania, two of the countries with the lowest levels of perceived corruption among the police, also have some of the highest levels of trust in the police. Uganda, South Africa, and Nigeria are at the other end of the spectrum – high perceived corruption, low trust.

Since we observed huge differences in trust in the police across Uganda's regions, we also display their results here separately (red dots). Citizens in Uganda's Central Region (UGA-C in the figure) perceive the police to be more corrupt and have less trust in them than the average Nigerian citizen, while Ugandans from the Eastern and Northern regions have much higher levels of trust, similar to the average Zambian or Cameroonian respondent.

Figure 8: Association between perceived corruption and trust in the police
| 34 countries | 2019/2021



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: The police? (% who say "most of them" or "all of them")

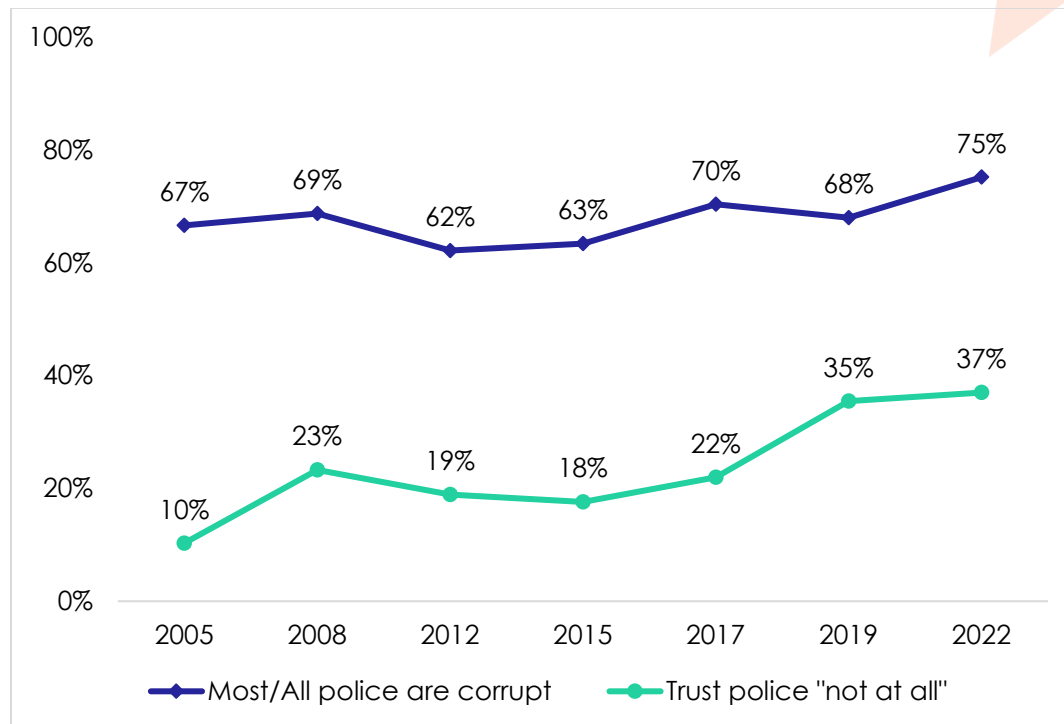
How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The police? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

Note: UGA denotes Uganda, UGA-N: Northern Uganda, UGA-C: Central Uganda, UGA-W: Western Uganda, and UGA-E: Eastern Uganda.

The longitudinal comparison of the relationship between perceived corruption of police officers and trust provides additional important insights (Figure 9). First, large majorities of

Ugandans have consistently seen the police as corrupt over the past two decades. At the same time, the share of respondents who completely distrust the police has almost quadrupled. One plausible explanation for this trend in the Ugandan case is that factors other than corruption play a significant role in explaining the erosion of trust in the police. We examine these factors in the next sections.

Figure 9: Perceived corruption and distrust of the police | Uganda | 2005-2022



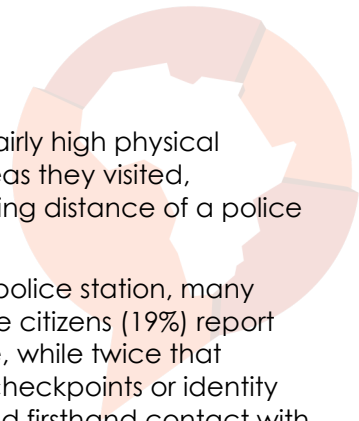
Respondents were asked:

How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The police (% who say "most of them" or "all of them")
How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The police? (% who say "not at all")

These negative evaluations of the Ugandan police force have prompted several attempts to improve citizens' perceptions of the police. Interventions such as the Police Accountability and Reform Project have shown some promise in changing police officers' attitudes regarding corruption and associated integrity violations (Wagner, Hout, & Namara, 2019). By bringing together the police and civil society to foster exchange and implement external control, the project aimed to improve accountability and democratic governance within the police. While the project affected officers' perception of misconduct as intended, it encouraged them only moderately to actually take action against bad practices. Other studies on the effects of community policing also highlight the difficulty of achieving meaningful and sustainable positive change (Blair, Weinstein, Christia, et al., 2021). The next sections explore citizens' evaluations of police conduct in more detail.

Police presence and encounters with the police

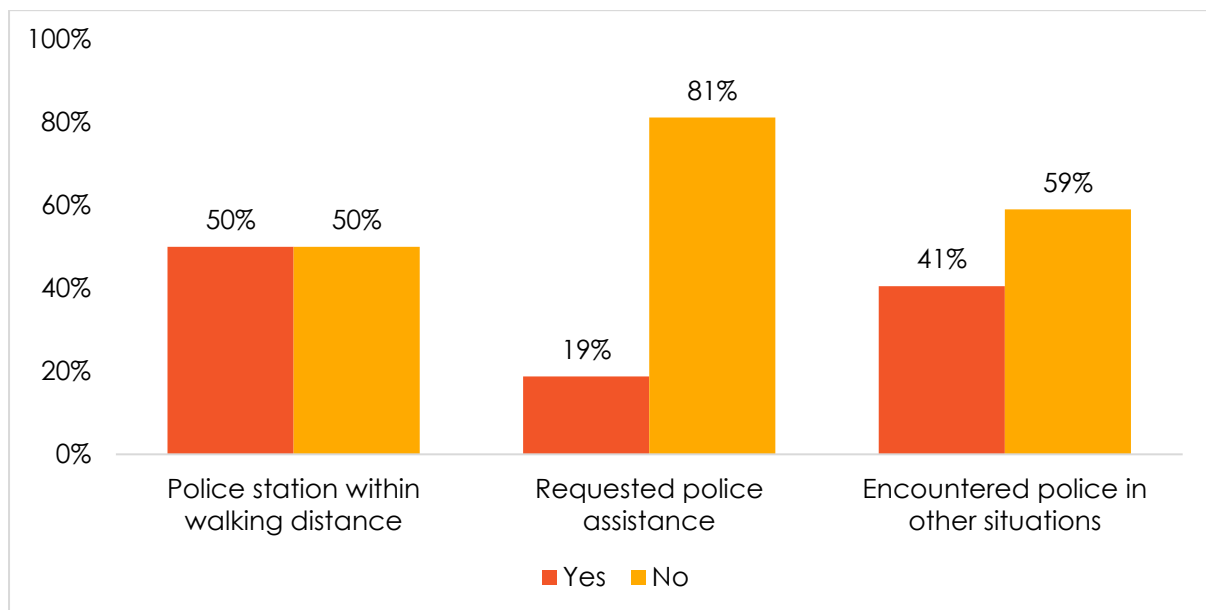
Police visibility, as well as personal contact with the police, are of central importance in the formation of public confidence and police legitimacy (FitzGerald, Hough, Joseph, & Qureshi, 2002; Skogan, 2006). While high visibility, positive contacts, and feeling informed about police actions are associated with higher levels of confidence in policing, the inverse has also been observed: Lack of visibility and negative experiences are associated with drops in public confidence (Bradford, Jackson, & Stank, 2009). An important question, therefore, is how often Ugandans either observe or have direct experiences with the police.



Compared to other African countries, the Ugandan police have a fairly high physical presence in communities across the country. In the enumeration areas they visited, Afrobarometer field teams found that 50% of citizens live within walking distance of a police station, compared to a 34-country average of 36%.

In addition to passively observing police activity by living close to a police station, many Ugandans also have firsthand experience with the police. One in five citizens (19%) report contacting the police during the previous year to request assistance, while twice that number (41%) encountered police in other circumstances, such as checkpoints or identity checks or during investigations (Figure 10). In total, 48% of citizens had firsthand contact with the police in at least one of these two ways, highlighting the fact that citizens will often have personal experiences to draw on when evaluating the police.

Figure 10: Police presence and encounters with the police | Uganda | 2022



Afrobarometer field teams were asked to record: Are the following facilities present in the primary sampling unit/enumeration area or in easy walking distance: Police station?

Respondents were asked:

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

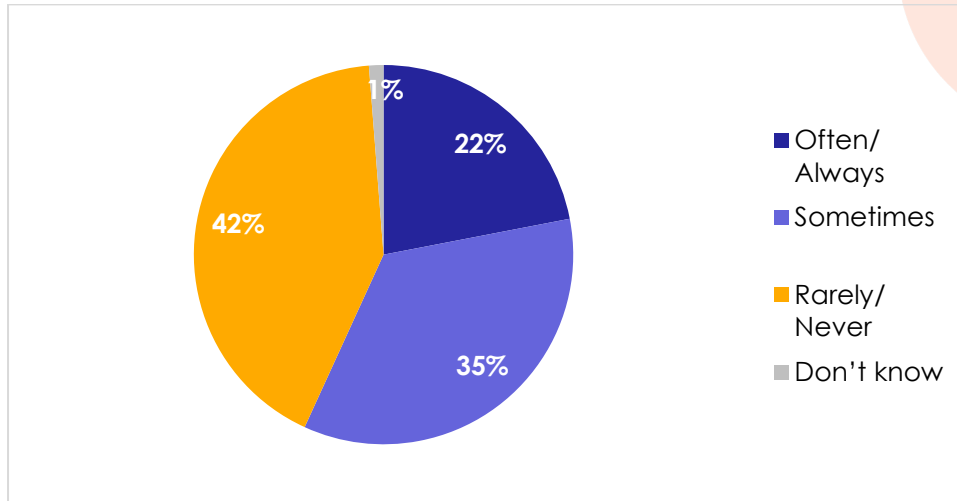
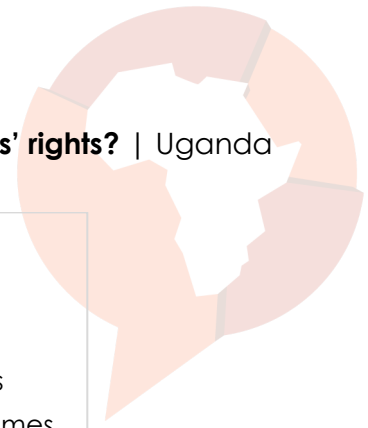
In the past 12 months, how often have you encountered the police in other situations, like at checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation? (% "yes" includes those who say "often," "a few times," or "once or twice")

Police professionalism and conduct

Police professionalism

Among the self-proclaimed core values of the Ugandan police is that its law enforcement officers execute their duties with professionalism and respect for the rights of all citizens (Uganda Police Force, 2020). Yet only about one in five Ugandans (22%) say police "often" or "always" operate in this manner. The largest proportion (42%) say this "rarely" or "never" happens, while about one-third (35%) believe that the police "sometimes" conduct themselves in a professional manner (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Do the police act professionally and respect citizens' rights? | Uganda | 2022



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

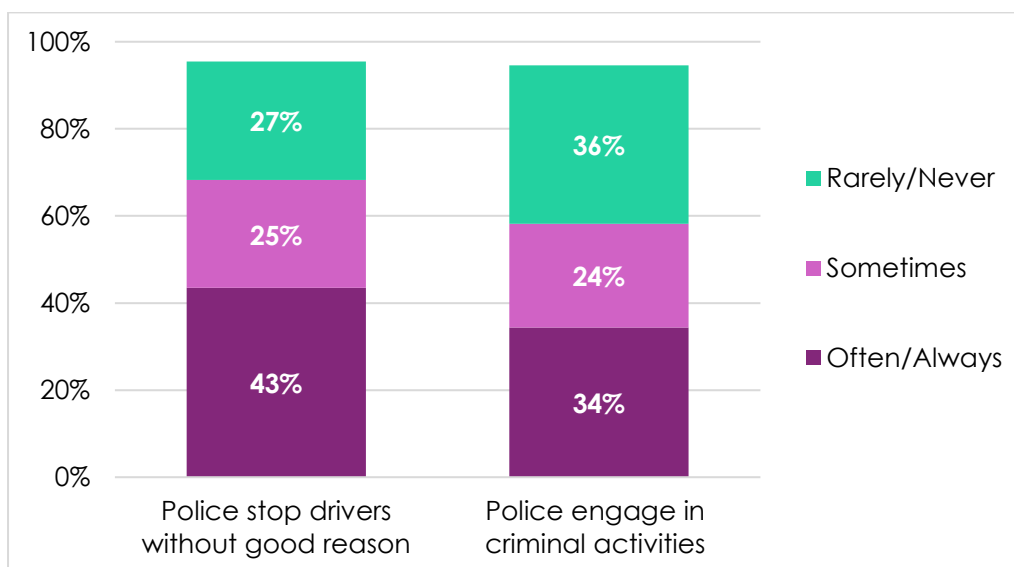
Police conduct

Zooming in on specific aspects of police conduct, we find that only a minority of citizens say the police usually follow the law and implement it in an appropriate way. Only about a quarter (27%) of Ugandans say the police “rarely” or “never” stop drivers without good reason, while 43% say this occurs “often” or “always” and another quarter (25%) say it happens “sometimes” (Figure 12).

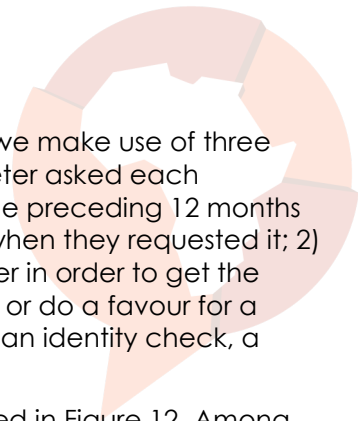
What's more, one-third (34%) of Ugandans say the police routinely engage in criminal activities – the very thing they are meant to prevent – and a further 24% say this occurs “sometimes.”

In sum, a majority of Ugandans say the police at least “sometimes” engage in improper practices, and many say they do so routinely.

Figure 12: Citizens' views on police conduct | Uganda | 2022



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often do the police in Uganda: Stop drivers without good reason? Engage in criminal activities?*



To confirm that these responses are rooted in citizens' experiences, we make use of three other survey questions related to police professionalism. Afrobarometer asked each respondent who reported a personal encounter with the police in the preceding 12 months whether 1) they had difficulty obtaining assistance from the police when they requested it; 2) they had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a police officer in order to get the assistance they needed; and 3) they had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a police officer in order to avoid a problem at a checkpoint or during an identity check, a traffic stop, or an investigation.

The responses in Table 1 are revealing and support the results reported in Figure 12. Among those who contacted the police for assistance, 56% say it was "difficult" or "very difficult" to obtain the help they needed, and a remarkable 73% say they had to pay a bribe to get that help. Among those who had contact with the police in other situations (roadblocks, etc.), 65% report having to pay a bribe to avoid problems. Taken together, these findings provide disheartening evidence of how far the Uganda Police Force has strayed from one of its core values.

Table 1: Citizens' experience with police (of those who had contact with police) | Uganda | 2022

| Question | Very easy | Easy | Difficult | Very difficult |
|--|-----------|---------------|-------------|----------------|
| Ease or difficulty of obtaining assistance from police | 15% | 30% | 24% | 32% |
| Question | Never | Once or twice | A few times | Often |
| Had to pay a bribe/give a gift/do a favour to get assistance | 27% | 24% | 16% | 33% |
| Had to pay a bribe/give a gift/do a favour to avoid problem | 35% | 21% | 21% | 23% |

Respondents who had contact with the police in the previous 12 months were asked:

How easy or difficult was it to obtain the assistance you needed?

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?

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 avoid a problem during one of these encounters?

(Percentages are based only on respondents who had contact with the police in the previous 12 months.)

Police brutality

A particularly egregious form of misconduct attributed to the Ugandan police on numerous occasions is the use of excessive force (Taylor, 2021). This can take many forms, including shootings, beatings, unlawful takedowns, and unwarranted use of tasers. Many victims of police brutality have died or sustained serious long-term injuries (Amnesty International, 2020; Anadolu Agency, 2021).

Prominent examples include the use of excessive force during the enforcement of curfews related to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as violence surrounding the arrest of opposition leader Robert Kyagulanyi Ssentamu, known as Bobi Wine (Hayden, 2020, Taylor, 2021). Following his arrest in the country's eastern district of Luuka on charges of violating COVID-19 restrictions while campaigning for the presidency, nationwide protests erupted in which police and soldiers killed at least 54 people – many of whom weren't even protesting (Taylor, 2021).

Unsurprisingly, these and other acts of police brutality seem to have left a lasting impression on Ugandans. According to the 2022 Afrobarometer survey, more than half of respondents say police "often" or "always" use excessive force in managing protests or demonstrations (57%) and when dealing with suspected criminals (54%), and another 23%-26% say they

“sometimes” do so. In contrast, only one in five Ugandans (18%-19%) say the police “rarely” or “never” use excessive force in these situations (Figure 13).

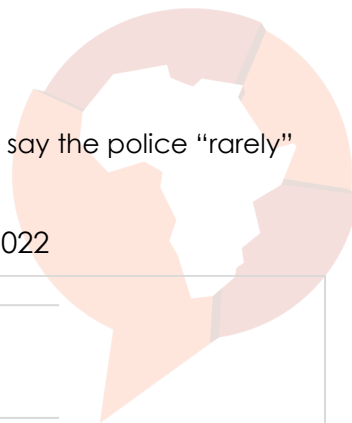
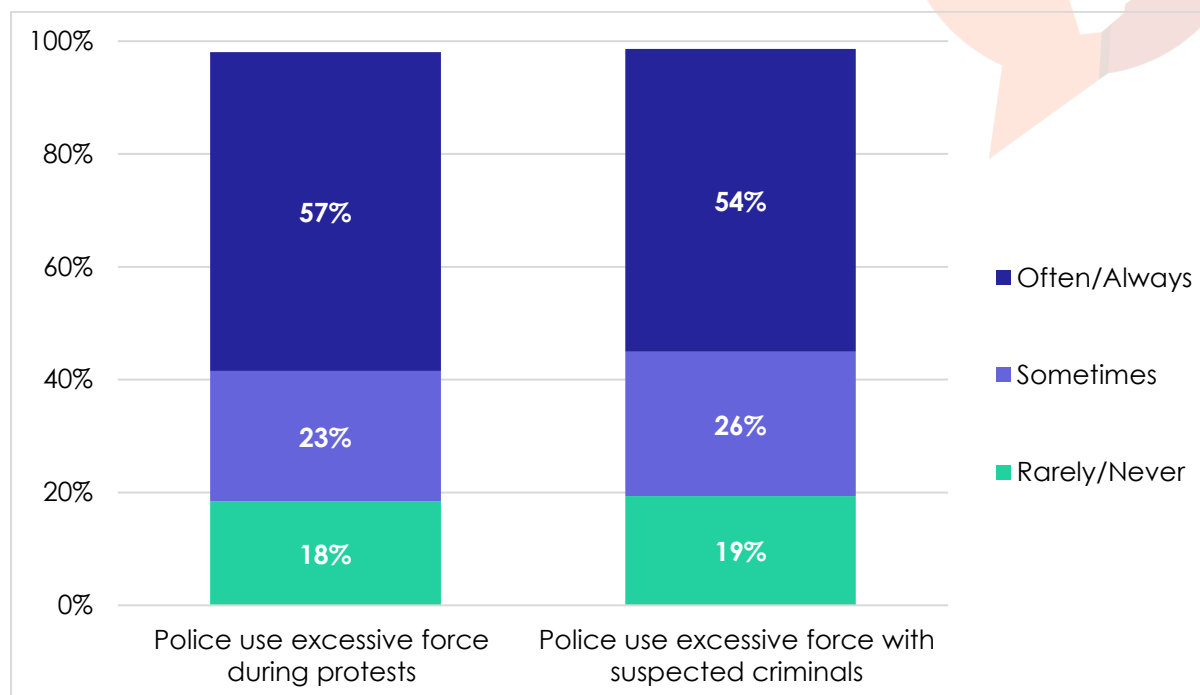


Figure 13: How often police use excessive force | Uganda | 2022



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often do the police in Uganda: Use excessive force in managing protests or demonstrations? Use excessive force when dealing with criminals?*

When splitting responses by demographic and attitudinal factors, we find the largest difference across the partisan divide (Figure 14). Over the past decade, opposition supporters, activists, and leaders have been the target of police repression, especially when they have attempted to organise or participate in political rallies (Human Rights Watch, 2015; East African, 2015). Indeed, three-fourths (74%) of opposition supporters say that police “often” or “always” use excessive force during protests. But even among NRM supporters, half (49%) report the frequent use of excessive force – a striking indictment of police behaviour.

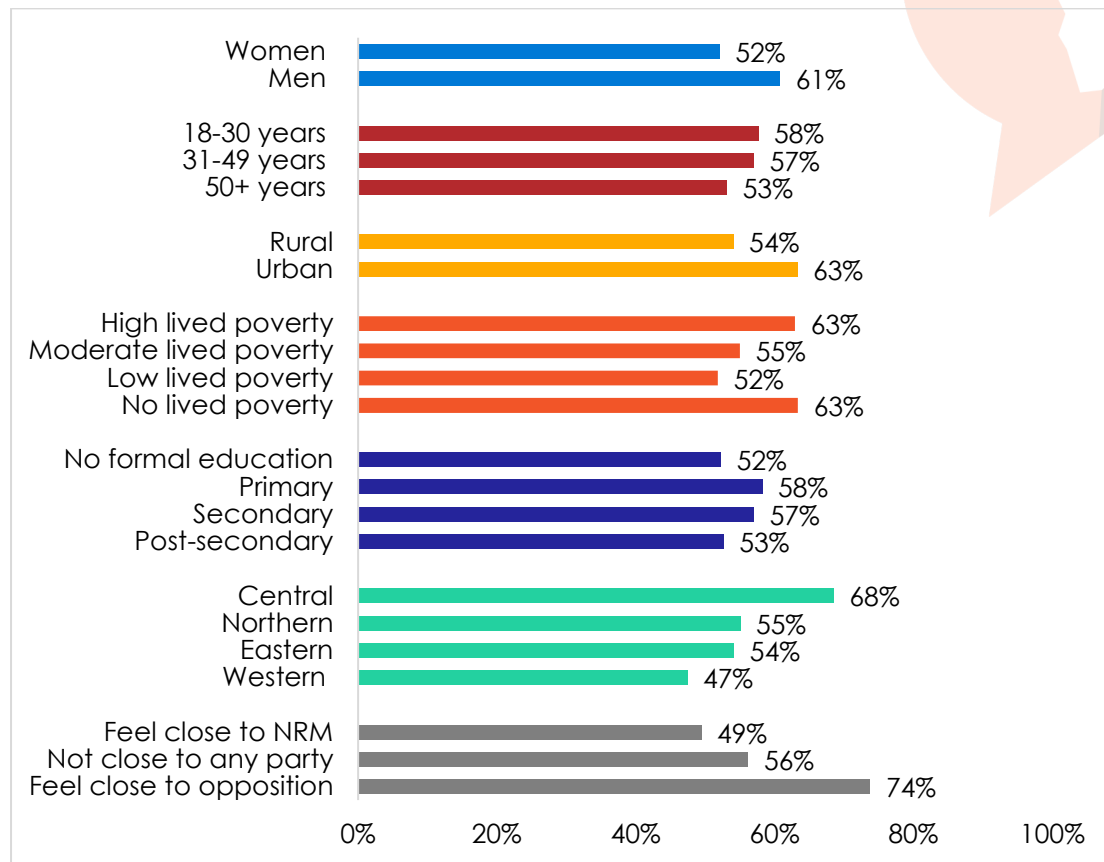
In line with the partisan difference, residents in the Central Region are far more likely (68%) than their counterparts in other regions (47%-55%)¹ to say the police routinely use excessive force in managing protests. Over the past decade, the Central Region, particularly Kampala, has often been the stage for protests, during which hundreds of people have reportedly been killed or injured by security forces (Taylor, 2021). This may explain, at least in part, the distinct sentiments of Central Region residents.

Perceptions of frequent police brutality during protests are also more prevalent among men (61%) than women (42%), and among urbanities (63%) compared to rural residents (54%). They increase with respondents’ education level, ranging from 50% of those with no formal schooling to 64% among those with post-secondary education.

Taken together, these differences lead us to our third substantive question in this policy paper: What best explains citizens’ views of the police?

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

Figure 14: Police often/always use excessive force during protests | by demographic group | Uganda | 2022



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often do the police in Uganda use excessive force in managing protests or demonstrations? (% who say "often" or "always")*

What drives trust in the police?

So far, the survey data have revealed that fewer than half of Ugandans trust the police, while the proportion of citizens who do not trust them at all has almost quadrupled over the past two decades. A majority of Ugandans say the police frequently use excessive force against ordinary citizens, and only 22% think the police usually operate in a professional manner and respect citizens' rights.

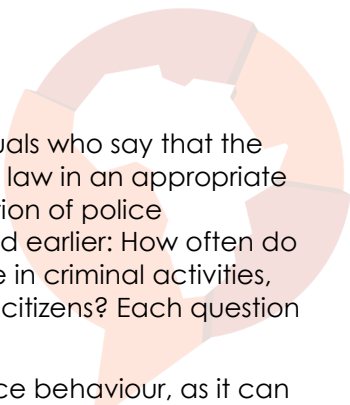
We now turn to the question of how strong the links are between the findings on trust and those concerning other aspects of police behaviour. In other words, *what drives citizens' trust in the police?*

To answer this question, we employ a multiple regression model using the Afrobarometer Round 9 (2022) survey data that will allow us to understand which factors are related to citizens' trust in the police and to explore the strength of these relationships.

Measurement and hypotheses

We use the question introduced at the outset of our analysis – *How much do you trust the police?* – as our main dependent variable. Responses range from 0 (Trust not at all) to 3 (Trust a lot). The expected relationships between our main independent, or explanatory, variables, and the dependent variable are as follows:

H1: Perceived corruption in police: As we have already shown a negative correlation between perceived corruption and trust in the police at the country level (Figure 8), we expect the same to be true at the individual level. Citizens who perceive that most or all members of the police are corrupt are less likely to trust the police.



H2: Police professionalism and conduct: We hypothesise that individuals who say that the police frequently act in an unprofessional manner or fail to apply the law in an appropriate way are less likely to trust the police. We assess respondents' perception of police professionalism and conduct based on three questions we introduced earlier: How often do the police in Uganda: 1) stop drivers without good reason, 2) engage in criminal activities, and 3) operate in a professional manner and respect the rights of all citizens? Each question taps into a related but distinct aspect of this relationship.²

H3: Police brutality: We treat police brutality as a distinct form of police behaviour, as it can also send a strong political message about how much the regime tolerates dissenting voices (e.g. at demonstrations or protest marches). Here we expect that individuals who say that police use excessive force against its citizens are less likely to express trust in the police. We constructed a composite measure/index to assess respondents' perception of police brutality based on two Afrobarometer questions asking how often the police in Uganda use excessive force 1) in managing protests or demonstrations and 2) when dealing with suspected criminals.³

H4: Proximity to police services: While one might expect proximity to a police station to increase citizen trust in the police, the descriptive data already presented suggest that this is unlikely to be the case in Uganda. Rather than expecting citizens to benefit from easy access to law enforcement officers and visible policing in their area, we hypothesise that being close to a police station will decrease trust in the police because, all else being equal, citizens might be more likely to observe police misconduct than someone who lives farther from a police station.

H5: Encounters with the police: Given the mostly negative experiences that citizens have when engaging with the police, we anticipate that people who recently had contact with police services in their communities are less likely to trust the police than those who did not have contact with them. The detailed questions in the survey allow us to test two separate scenarios of citizen contact with the police: 1) contact of choice (seeking assistance) and 2) other contact.

H6: Central Region: In addition to journalistic accounts of high levels of police brutality in the Central Region, and in Kampala in particular, our analysis so far has shown that Ugandans living in this region not only report worse experiences with the police, but also see them as less trustworthy. To test the extent to which citizen trust in the police varies across regions, we include several dummy variables into the statistical model in which we compare the Central Region against each of the other three (Eastern, Northern, and Western) regions.

H7: Partisanship: Similar to the geographic variation, we have seen substantial differences in the extent to which citizens trust the police depending on their partisan orientation. Based on the descriptive evidence presented above, we hypothesise that opposition supporters are less likely to trust the police.

H8: Control variables: To account for the possible influence of other personal characteristics, the analysis includes the following control variables in the estimation equation: age, gender, level of formal education, level of lived poverty, and residential location (urban vs rural).

A fuller description of the variables and the data-recoding scheme is shown in Table A.3 in the Appendix.⁴

² The three questions are not highly correlated with each other ($r=.100$, $r=.101$).

³ These two questions are more closely related than the other professionalism questions (see Appendix Table A.1).

⁴ For indices, which were calculated as simple mathematical averages, factor analysis (maximum likelihood method) was used to determine the reliability of pooling the responses to these questions (see Table A.2 in the Appendix).

Results and discussion

The results of the ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analyses are presented in two models. Model 1 includes only what we consider institutional and performance factors (H1-H5). In Model 2, we add contextual factors to the first model (H6-H8). For ease of interpretation, each model includes the unstandardised B as well as the standardised beta coefficients. The first allows us to compare the effect size of the relationship between an independent and dependent variable across models, while the second allows for a comparison of the relative weight of the different independent variables within each model.

The results in Model 1 (Table 2) corroborate the negative relationship between perceived levels of corruption among police officers and trust in the police. As hypothesised, Ugandans who perceive widespread corruption among the police are less likely to trust them (H1). Of the three measures of police professionalism and conduct, only the variable gauging whether citizens believe the police respect citizens' rights is statistically significant. That is, Ugandans who view the police as unprofessional and unable or unwilling to safeguard citizens' rights are also less likely to trust the police (H2A).

Model 1 also provides supporting evidence for hypotheses 3 and 4. Ugandans who say that the police use excessive force when dealing with either protestors or suspected criminals are significantly less likely to trust the police (H3). Similarly, as expected, citizens who live close to a police station are actually less likely to trust the police (H4).

Lastly, we find that citizens who recently had contact with the police, either because they sought help or because they were approached or stopped by the police, are less likely to trust the police, but the difference is not statistically significant, so these results do not confirm Hypothesis 5. While one interpretation of this finding could be that contact does not further erode trust in the police, it is important to keep two things in mind. First, trust in the Ugandan police is already among the weakest on the continent. Second, in principle, contact with the police should be a means for police to increase their public legitimacy. So the null result for this hypothesis remains disheartening as it does not suggest a clear path through which the police can increase citizen trust.

A comparison of the standardised beta coefficients for this model shows that perceived corruption (H1) has the largest effect ($\beta = -.325$). In comparison, citizen perceptions of police professionalism (H2A) and brutality (H3) have roughly similar effect sizes ($\beta = -.174$ and $-.141$, respectively).

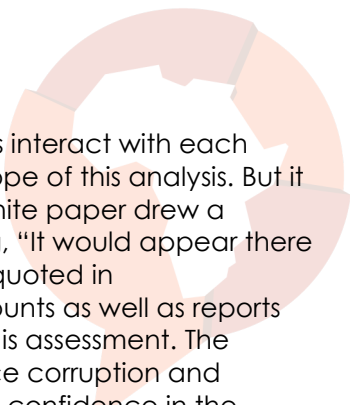
In Model 2, after adding the contextual factors, we see that all the performance and institutional factors are still statistically significant and negatively associated with trust in the police. However, the inclusion of the new contextual variables generates several additional insights. First, confirming Hypothesis 6, all else being equal, citizens living in Uganda's Eastern, Northern, and Western regions are much more likely to trust the police than those living in the epicentre of political protests (Central Region). Second, respondents who don't feel close to the ruling party are less likely to trust the police, confirming Hypothesis 7. We also find that more educated citizens and men are less likely to trust the police, while we observe no statistically significant difference between urbanites and rural residents, and between wealthier and poorer citizens, once we account for the other factors.

When comparing the standardised beta coefficients in Model 2, we see once again that the perceived levels of corruption have the strongest effect in the model ($\beta = -.301$). The coefficient for the differences between Central Region and Uganda's other regions is the second-highest in the model, underscoring the importance of the geographic variation that we have emphasised throughout this analysis. The next-strongest effect sizes are based on police professionalism and respect for citizens' rights ($\beta = -.145$) and respondents' level of education ($b = -.096$). The effect size of perceived brutality has decreased by about half (from $b = -.186$ to $b = .092$) but remains important (and statistically significant) in explaining the variance of trust in the police.

Table 2: Factors contributing to trust in the police | Uganda | 2022

| | | Model 1 | | Model 2 | |
|--|--|------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|
| Variable/Concept | | Unstd.coef (std. error) | Std. coeff. beta | Unstd. coef (std. error) | Std. coeff. beta |
| (Constant) | | 3.397*** | | 3.036*** | |
| Institutional and performance factors | | | | | |
| H1 | Perceived corruption among police | -0.415*** (0.037) | -0.325 | -0.384*** (0.036) | -0.301 |
| H2 | Police professionalism and conduct | | | | |
| A | Police are unprofessional and disrespect citizens' rights† | -0.168*** (0.027) | -0.174 | -0.140*** (0.026) | -0.145 |
| B | Police stop drivers without good reason | -0.005 (0.027) | -0.006 | -0.020 (0.026) | -0.023 |
| C | Police engage in criminal activities | -0.015 (0.026) | -0.018 | 0.011 (0.025) | 0.014 |
| H3 | Police brutality‡ | -0.186*** (0.035) | -0.141 | -0.092** (0.034) | -0.088 |
| H4 | Proximity to police services | -0.096** (0.060) | -0.083 | -0.121* (0.060) | -0.055 |
| H5 | Encounters with the police | | | | |
| A | Request police assistance | -0.096 (0.078) | -0.035 | -0.007 (0.075) | -0.002 |
| B | Encounter police in other situations | -0.065 (0.062) | -0.029 | -0.075 (0.061) | -0.034 |
| Contextual factors | | | | | |
| H6 | Region (Ref=Central) | | | | |
| | Northern | | | 0.588*** (0.090) | 0.219 |
| | Eastern | | | 0.601*** (0.084) | 0.245 |
| | Western | | | 0.409*** (0.089) | 0.157 |
| H7 | Party affiliation (Ref=NRM) | | | | |
| | Opposition-party supporter | | | -0.171* (0.084) | -0.062 |
| | Non-partisan | | | -0.141* (0.068) | -0.061 |
| H8 | Respondent's individual characteristics | | | | |
| A | Age group (Ref=50+ years) | | | | |
| | 18-30 years | | | 0.018 (0.082) | 0.008 |
| | 31-49 years | | | 0.010 (0.086) | 0.004 |
| B | Education level | | | -0.124*** (0.036) | -0.096 |
| C | Location (Ref=Rural) | | | 0.000 (0.070) | -0.000 |
| D | Gender (Ref=Female) | | | -0.136* (0.060) | -0.062 |
| E | Lived Poverty Index | | | -0.068 (0.037) | -0.050 |
| | Constant | 3.397*** | 0.147 | 2.671*** (0.221) | 0.221 |
| | Adj. R ² | 0.214 | | 0.284 | |
| | N (Number of observations) | 1,059 | | 1,057 | |

Note: †=For ease of interpretation, we recode the response categories so that higher values indicate lower levels of professionalism. The negative coefficient signals that a perceived lack of professionalism and respect is negatively associated with trust. ‡= Higher values on the index (with scores ranging from 1 to 5) reflect higher perceived occurrence of police brutality.



A more detailed statistical analysis of how the independent variables interact with each other and how this affects the dependent variable is beyond the scope of this analysis. But it is worth highlighting that almost two decades ago, a government white paper drew a connection between two of the main independent variables, stating, "It would appear there is a correlation between corruption and absence of human rights" (quoted in Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, 2006, p. 9). Journalistic accounts as well as reports by Human Rights Watch and other organisations continue to echo this assessment. The findings presented here confirm the strongly negative effects of police corruption and disregard for human rights, reflected in the ongoing erosion of public confidence in the institution.

Our findings are also consistent with other research that shows how police corruption undermines public trust in the police (Kumssa, 2015; Wambua, 2015). An important question, then, is whether the damage can be reversed. Here, recent findings provide little hope. A coordinated study across six countries (including Uganda) found no evidence that community policing increased trust in the police (Blair, Weinstein, Christia et al., 2021; Blair, Curtice, Dow, & Grossman, 2021). This, too, is supported by our findings about the presence of police stations (H4) and encounters with the police (H5).

These issues are compounded by acts of selective repression by the police. Rather than acting as neutral enforcers of the rule of law, they seem to apply the law unequally or to skirt it when dealing with demonstrations or protesters, especially those from opposition political parties (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, 2006). What's more, Curtice (2021) has shown not only that acts of politically motivated excessive force decrease support for the police, but also that the effect is stronger among those who do not support the regime. This aligns with our finding that Ugandans in the Central Region (an opposition stronghold) as well as opposition supporters and non-partisans are significantly less likely to trust the police.

Conclusions and recommendations

Uganda's police have been accused on many occasions of a lack of professionalism, poor conduct, corrupt practices, and human-rights violations, including during brutal crackdowns at opposition-party campaign rallies and against various other forms of public dissent. In this policy paper, we have taken a closer look at what this means for citizen trust in the police. Specifically, we have investigated how much Ugandans trust their police force, to what extent public trust in the police varies over time and among different groups, and what drives low levels of public trust in the police.

Our analysis of more than two decades' worth of survey data reveals that trust in the police has decreased substantially over time, dropping to below half of the population. The Uganda police garner less public trust than other key governmental institutions and rate among the least-trusted police forces on the continent.

Our search for explanations reveals that citizen trust in the police is shaped by institutional and performance factors (perceived corruption and lack of professionalism and respect for citizens' rights) as well as contextual factors. Regarding the latter, we find that residents in Uganda's Central Region express significantly less trust in the police, highlighting the different political dynamics across Uganda's regions. Moreover, other studies have shown that it will be difficult to reverse the trend of declining trust, making it a challenge to engage citizens in cooperating with the police to co-produce the rule of law in their communities.

Any attempt to increase citizens' trust in the police will require multiple interventions at various levels to address the factors we've identified. For example, to rein in selective repression and excessive force by police officers, it would be possible to intervene on at least three levels. First, with respect to the legal framework, while international law restricts the use of firearms to situations in which it is necessary to confront an imminent threat of death or serious injury, Uganda continues to have extremely permissive rules (The Law on Police Use of Force, 2022). A substantial revision of the 1994 Police Act could go a long way toward limiting the circumstances under which police officers can legally use firearms. This has the potential

to change police-citizen interactions, especially during high-risk interactions such as protests or demonstrations.

Second, it is important to improve implementation of the legal framework by strengthening institutional accountability. One option, as Ndifuna (2020) has argued, would be to establish an effective and independent police oversight body with the capacity required to investigate police misconduct and corruption. Such a reform could also be linked to stronger parliamentary oversight over the police. However, the success of these types of changes to institutional accountability also depends on parliamentarians' ability and willingness to develop an identity that is independent of the executive branch (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2018) and to work effectively with the judiciary.

Third, it is necessary to change the attitudes and behaviour of police officers. While interventions such as the above-mentioned Police Accountability and Reform Project have shown some promise (Wagner, Hout, & Namara, 2019), citizens' complaints about police brutality and lack of professionalism clearly show that more needs to be done. We suggest continuous training and professionalisation efforts as an important piece of the puzzle to improve police-citizen interactions. This is supported by our findings on the relationship between perceptions of police corruption and citizens' trust in the police.

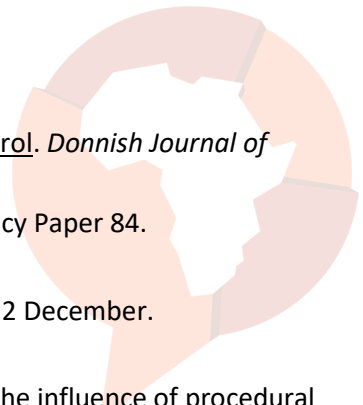
These suggestions will not miraculously solve the deep crisis of legitimacy of the Ugandan police. However, they are examples of levers that could be moved to build public trust and strengthen relations between the police and all Ugandans, irrespective of region and political colour.

Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question,
for any country and survey round. It's easy and free at
www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.



References

- Africa Center for Strategic Studies. (2018). Parliamentary oversight of the security sector: Uganda's experience. 28 November.
- Amnesty International. (2020). Uganda: Stop killings and human rights violations ahead of election day. 14 December.
- Anadolu Agency. (2021). Uganda sees killings, human rights abuses during covid-19 lockdown. 9 August.
- Blair, G., Weinstein, J., Christia, F., et al. (2021). Community policing does not build citizen trust in police or reduce crime in the global south. *Science*, 374(6571), 1-14.
- Blair, R. A., Curtice, T., Dow, D., & Grossman, G. (2021). Public trust, policing, and the covid-19 pandemic: Evidence from an electoral authoritarian regime. CEGA Working Paper No. WPS-164. Center for Effective Global Action. University of California, Berkeley.
- Bradford, B., Jackson, J., & Stank, E. (2009). Contact and confidence: Revisiting the impact of public encounters with the police. *Policing and Society*, 19(1), 20-46.
- Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative. (2006). The police, the people, the politics: Police accountability in Uganda.
- Curtice, T. (2021). How repression affects public perceptions of police: Evidence from a natural experiment in Uganda. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 65(10), 1680-1708.
- East African. (2015). Uganda police brutality warning ahead of polls rights group. 15 October.
- FitzGerald, M., Hough, M., Joseph, I., & Qureshi, T. (2002). Policing for London: Report of an independent study funded by the Nuffield Foundation, the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation (1st ed.). London: Willan.
- Guardian. (2021). 'It was a torture chamber': Ugandans abducted in vicious crackdown. 21 April.
- Guardian. (2022). General accused of rights abuses made Ugandan head of police. 2 February.
- Hawdon, J. E., Ryan, J., & Griffin, S. P. (2003). Policing tactics and perceptions of police legitimacy. *Police Quarterly*, 6(4), 469-491.
- Hayden, S. (2020). 'I realised my body was burning': Police brutality in Uganda lockdown. Guardian. 28 May.
- Human Rights Watch. (2011). Torture, extortion and killings by police unit in Uganda. 23 March.
- Human Rights Watch. (2015). Uganda: End police obstruction of gatherings. 18 October.
- Human Rights Watch. (2021). World report 2021: Uganda events of 2020.
- Human Rights Watch. (2022). World report 2022: Uganda events of 2021.
- Independent. (2021). Police confirms dismissal of 150 officers over corruption. 26 April.
- Jackson, J., Bradford, B., Hough, M., Myhill, A., Quinton, P., & Tyler, T. R. (2012). Why do people comply with the law? Legitimacy and the influence of legal institutions. *British Journal of Criminology*, 52, 1051-1071.
- Kakumba, M. R. (2020). Willing to kill: Factors contributing to mob justice in Uganda. Afrobarometer Policy Paper No. 70.
- Kakumba, M. R. (2021). A never-ending problem: Ugandans say corruption has increased, rate government fight against corruption poorly. Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 435.
- Kiconco, J. (2018). Police brutality and use of excessive force during arrest: Revisiting Uganda's police act.
- Krönke, M. (2022). Broad support for multiparty elections, little faith in electoral institutions: Uganda in comparative perspective. Afrobarometer Policy Paper No. 79.



- Kumssa, A. (2015). Police corruption: A perspective on its nature and control. *Dannish Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 1(1), 1-8.
- Mattes, R., & Patel, J. (2022). Lived poverty resurgent. Afrobarometer Policy Paper 84.
- Monitor. (2021). Police most corrupt says IGG, UBOS report. 26 February.
- Ndifuna, M. (2020). Uganda needs police oversight commission. Monitor. 2 December.
- New Vision. (2015). Police top corrupt institution. 16 December.
- Nix, J., Wolfe, S. E., Rojek, J., & Kaminski, R. J. (2015). Trust in the police: The influence of procedural justice and perceived collective efficacy. *Crime & Delinquency*, 61(4), 610-640.
- Skogan, W. (2006). Asymmetry in the impact of encounters with police. *Policing and Society*, 16(2), 99-126.
- Syed, T., & Bruce, D. (1998) Inside and outside the boundaries of police corruption. *African Security Review*, 7(2), 3-21.
- Taylor, L. (2021). The myth of 'stray bullets' in Uganda. Foreign Policy. 18 November.
- The Law on Police Use of Force. (2022). The law on police use of force: Uganda.
- Tyler, T. R. (2006). *Why people obey the law*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Uganda Police Force. (2020). Mandate, core values, mission and vision of Uganda Police Force.
- Wagner, N., Hout, W., & Namara, R. (2019). Improving police integrity in Uganda: Impact assessment of the police accountability and reform project. *Review of Development Economics*, 24(1), 62-83.
- Wambua, P. M. (2015). Police corruption in Africa undermines trust, but support for law enforcement remains strong. Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 56.

Appendix



Table A.1: Correlation of five items assessing police professionalism, conduct, and brutality

| | Police professional and respect rights | Police stop drivers without good reason | Police use excessive force during protests | Police use excessive force with criminals | Police engage in criminal activities |
|--|--|---|--|---|--------------------------------------|
| Police professional and respect rights | 1 | | | | |
| Police stop drivers without good reason | .100** (N=1138) | 1 | | | |
| Police use excessive force during protests | .065* (N=1170) | .468** (N=1132) | 1 | | |
| Police use excessive force with criminals | .051 (N=1176) | .403** (N=1136) | .607** (N=1173) | 1 | |
| Police engage in criminal activities | .101** (N=1128) | .373** (N=1098) | .398** (N=1125) | .425** (N=1130) | 1 |

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

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table A.2: Factor analysis results for composite variables

| | Concept/Variable | Relevant questions | Eigen values total | % of variance explained | Reliability (Cronbach's alpha) |
|-----------|------------------|--------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|
| H3 | Police brutality | Q44C & Q44D | 1.607 | 80.374 | 0.756 |
| H8 | Lived poverty | Q6A-Q6E | 2.225 | 44.507 | 0.686 |

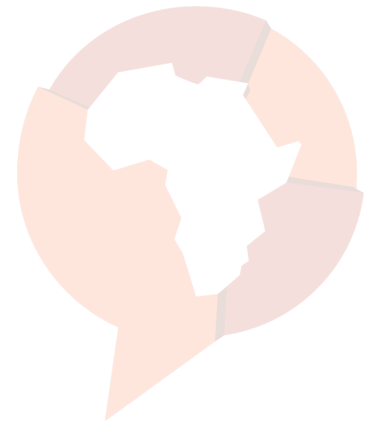
Table A.3: Measurement and hypotheses

| | Variable/Concept | Variable coding description | Relationship with outcome variable |
|----|--|--|------------------------------------|
| H1 | Perceived corruption in police | 0=None, 1=Some of them, 2=Most of them, 3=All of them | Negative |
| H2 | Police professionalism and conduct | | |
| | A. Police professional and respect rights | 1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always | Negative |
| | B. Police stop drivers without good reason | 1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always | Negative |
| | C. Police engage in criminal activities | 1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always | Negative |
| H3 | Police brutality | Index of how frequently police use excessive force when dealing with protests/demonstrations and crime. Scores of the average index range from 0 to 5. | Negative |
| H4 | Proximity to police services | 0=No police station in enumeration area (EA), 1=Police station in EA | Negative |
| H5 | Encounters with police | | |
| | A: Request police assistance | 0=No, 1=Yes | Negative |
| | B: Encounter police in other situations | 0=Never, 1=Once or twice, 2=A few times, 3=Often | Negative |
| H6 | Region (Ref=Central) | | |
| | Northern region | Dummy: 0=Other regions, 1=Northern region | Positive |
| | Eastern region | Dummy: 0=Other regions, 1=Eastern region | Positive |
| | Western region | Dummy: 0=Other regions, 1=Western region | Positive |
| H7 | Party affiliation (Ref=NRM supporter) | | |
| | Opposition-party supporter | Dummy: 0=Feel close to ruling party or non-partisan, 1=Opposition party supporter | Negative |
| | Non-partisan | Dummy: 0=Feel close to other parties, 1=Non-partisan | Negative |
| H8 | Respondent characteristics | | |
| | A: Age group (Ref=50+yrs) | | |
| | 18-30 yrs | Dummy: 0=Other age categories 1=18-30 years | Positive |
| | 31-49 yrs | Dummy: 0=Other age categories 1=31-49 years | Positive |
| | B. Education level | 0=No formal education, 1=Primary, 2=Secondary, 3=Post-secondary | Negative |
| | C. Location (Ref=Rural) | Dummy: 0=Rural, 1=Urban | Negative |
| | D. Gender (Ref=Female) | Dummy: 0=Female, 1=Male | Negative |

Note: All “don’t know,” “refused,” and “can’t determine” responses were excluded in the analysis. Responses on the concept/variable “Police professional and respect rights” were rescaled for consistency with other measures of police professionalism and conduct (“Police stop drivers without good reason” and “Police engage in criminal activities”). Therefore, lower values on the scale of each of these concepts/variables indicate a lower likelihood of the perceived event happening.

AFRO BAROMETER

LET THE PEOPLE HAVE A SAY



Makanga Ronald Kakumba is a senior data manager for the MRC/UVRI and LSHTM Uganda Research Unit in Entebbe, Uganda.

Matthias Krönke is a researcher in the Afrobarometer Analysis Unit.

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

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

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

For more information, please visit www.afrobarometer.org.

Follow our releases on **#VoicesAfrica**.



Cover: Adapted from a photograph by Abubaker Lubowa.

Contact:

makanga.ronnie@gmail.com

mkroenke@afrobarometer.org