

Seychellois feel safe, but see police falling short of professional conduct

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 827 | Anne Okello

Summary

Despite outscoring most African countries across multiple performance indicators in Afrobarometer surveys (Krönke, Isbell, & Kakumba, 2024), including corruption and police brutality, the Seychelles Police Force faces public criticism for its professional conduct.

A Transparency Initiatives Seychelles (2019) survey investigating perceptions of corruption ranked the police force as the country's most corrupt institution. Reports indicate that bribery and collusion hinder the fight against drug abuse and trafficking, one of the country's top problems (Bird, Stanyard, Moonien, & Randrianarisoa, 2021). Civil society organisations have also complained about the police force using excessive force, harassing citizens, and abusing its power, allegations that have been corroborated in official reports (Association for Rights, Information and Democracy, 2020; Duval, 2021).

In its Strategic Plan 2023-2025, the police force details ways to improve its efficiency and rebuild public trust. The plan contains 15 recommendations to professionalise the police force, including by improving training, restructuring the Anti-Narcotics Bureau, and introducing specialised tourism police (Gappy, 2021).

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.

Most Seychellois say they feel safe in their neighbourhoods and homes, although poor citizens are more likely to experience insecurity than those who are better off. Public perceptions of widespread police corruption are lower in Seychelles than in any of the other 38 African countries that Afrobarometer surveyed in 2021/2023.

Despite these positive findings, fewer than half of Seychellois express trust in the police, and only about one-fourth say the police generally operate in a professional manner and respect all citizens' rights. Majorities say the police stop drivers without good reason and use excessive force with suspected criminals. And only a small share of people approve of the government's crime-fighting efforts.

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. Nine rounds of surveys have been completed in up to 42 countries since 1999. Round 10 surveys were launched in January 2024. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

In Afrobarometer's first survey in Seychelles, a team led by the Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,200 adult Seychellois in December 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

Key findings

- Around eight in 10 Seychellois say they “never” felt unsafe while walking in their neighbourhood (80%) or feared crime in their home (83%) during the previous year.
 - The poorest citizens are three to four times more likely to report experiencing insecurity than those who are economically well off.
- One in seven citizens (14%) say they requested police assistance during the previous year. Three times as many (43%) 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, a narrow majority (52%) say it was easy to get assistance, but 3% say they had to pay a bribe.
 - Among those who encountered the police in other situations, 2% report paying a bribe to avoid problems.
- About one in seven respondents (15%) say that “most” or “all” police are corrupt, the lowest such rating in all 39 countries that Afrobarometer surveyed in 2021/2023.
- Two-fifths (40%) of citizens say they trust the police “somewhat” or “a lot.” But three in 10 (30%) say they don’t trust the police “at all.”
- Majorities say the police at least “sometimes” stop drivers without good reason (54%) and use excessive force with suspected criminals (51%).
- Fewer than a quarter (23%) of respondents believe the police “often” or “always” operate professionally and respect all citizens’ rights.
- A majority (57%) of Seychellois are critical of the government’s performance on reducing crime.

Sense of security

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

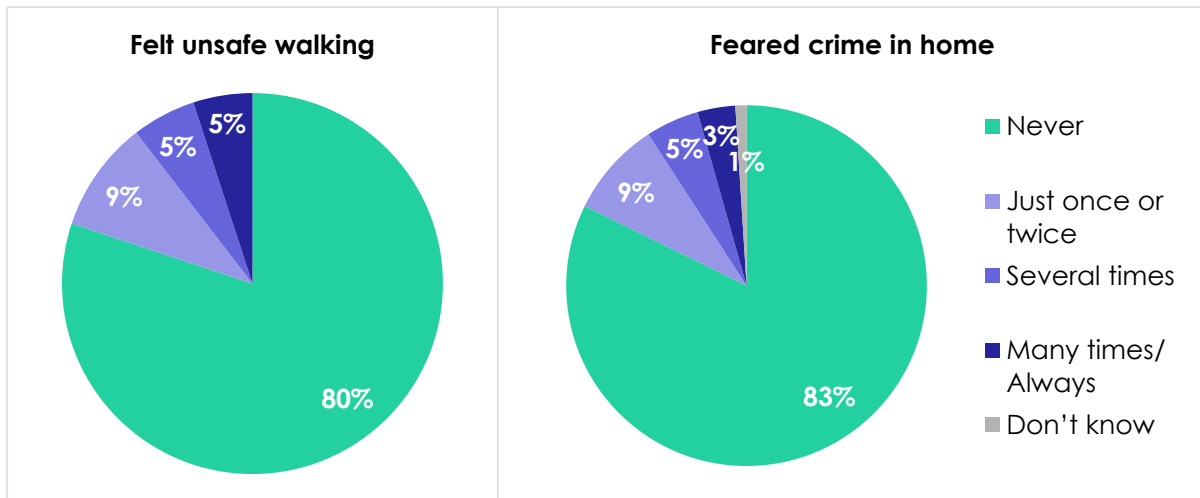
Eight in 10 citizens say they never felt unsafe while walking in their neighbourhood (80%) and never feared crime in their home (83%) during the previous year (Figure 1).¹ Fewer than one in five report feeling unsafe in their neighbourhood (19%) and fearing crime (17%) at least once.

However, the poorest respondents are far more likely to experience both forms of insecurity than their better-off counterparts. Respondents experiencing moderate or high levels of lived poverty² are more than four times as likely to report feeling unsafe at least “several times” (27% vs. 6% of those with no lived poverty) and three times as likely to fear crime in their home (17% vs. 6%) (Figure 2).

¹ Due to rounding, percentages may total 101% or 99%, and percentages for combined categories reported in the text may differ by 1 percentage point from the sum of sub-categories shown in figures.

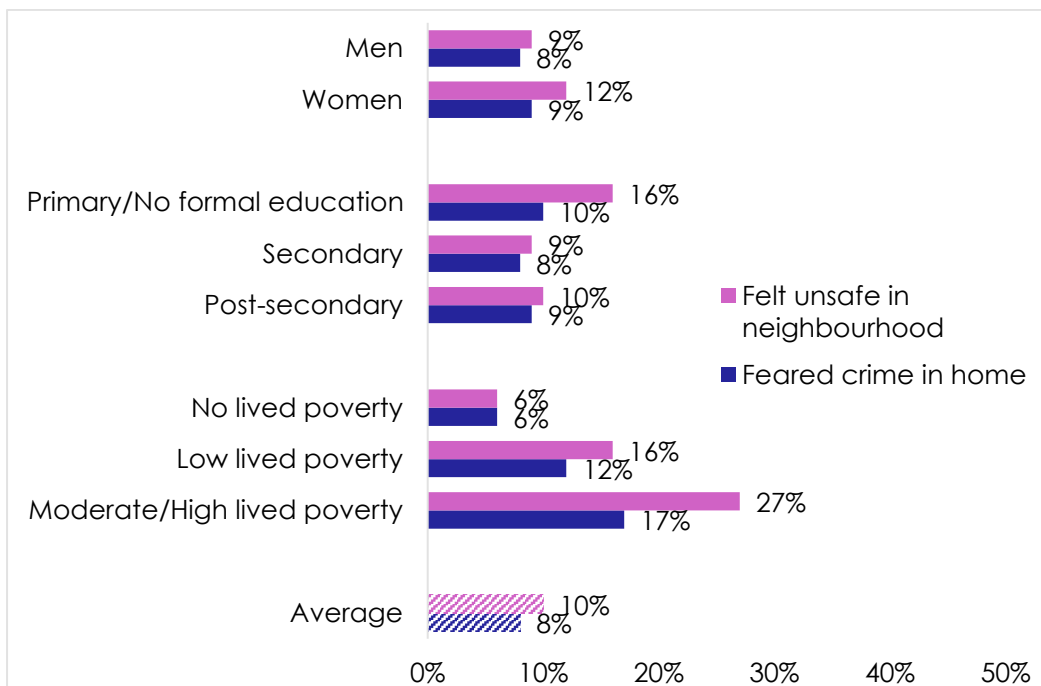
² Afrobarometer’s Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents’ levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty,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

Figure 1: Experienced insecurity? | Seychelles | 2022



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

Figure 2: Experienced insecurity at least 'several times' | by gender, education, and lived poverty | Seychelles | 2022



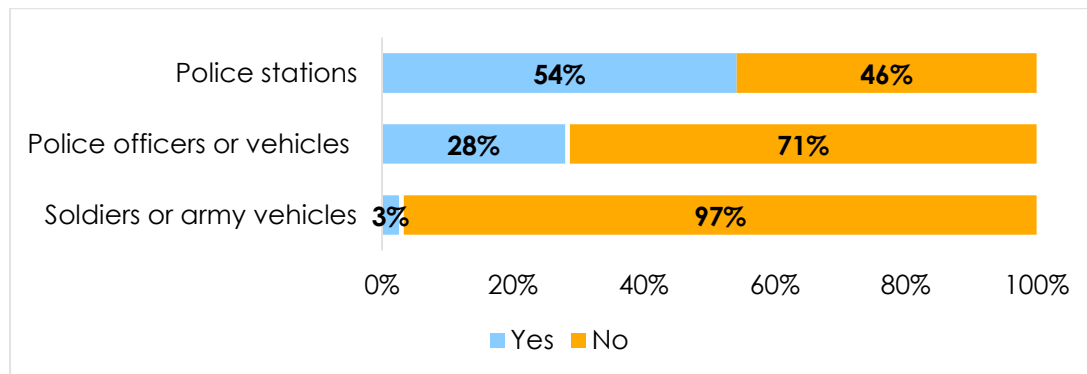
Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Felt unsafe walking in your neighbourhood? Feared crime in your own home? (% who say "several times," "many times," or "always")

Police/security presence

One factor that might affect people's sense of security is the presence of security forces. As part of their data collection process, Afrobarometer field teams make on-the-ground observations in each census enumeration area (EA) they visit about available services and facilities. 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 Seychelles, Afrobarometer field teams found police stations within easy walking distance of 54% of the EAs they visited (Figure 3). They saw police officers or police vehicles in 28% and soldiers or army vehicles in 3% of the EAs. They saw no roadblocks set up by the police or army, customs checkpoints, or roadblocks or booms set up by private security providers or by the local community.

Figure 3: Presence of police/security | Seychelles | 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?

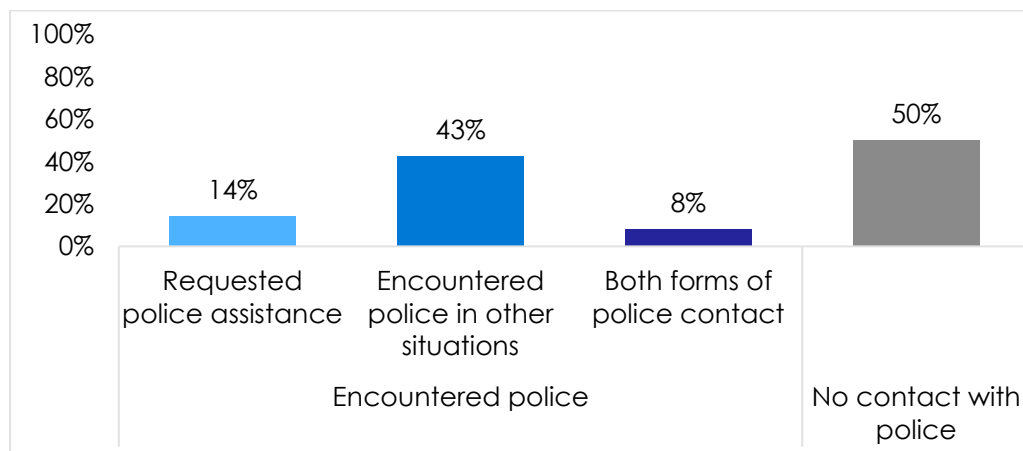
Encounters with the police

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

One in seven respondents (14%) say they requested police assistance during the previous year (Figure 4). Three times as many (43%) report encountering the police in other situations, for example at checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation.

About one in 12 (8%) report police contact of both types, while half (50%) say they did not interact with the police during the past year.

Figure 4: Contact with the police | Seychelles | 2022



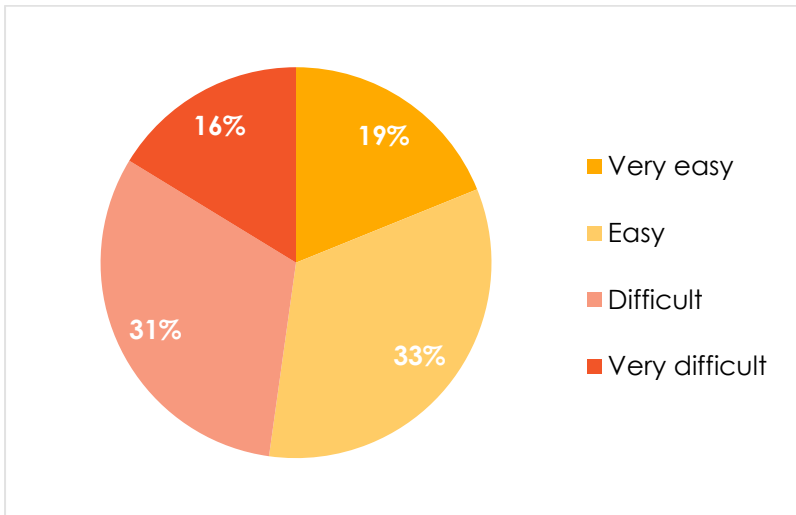
Respondents were asked:

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?

Experience of police support is mixed. Among citizens who asked the police for help, a slim majority (52%) say that getting assistance was easy, while the other 48% say it was difficult (Figure 5).

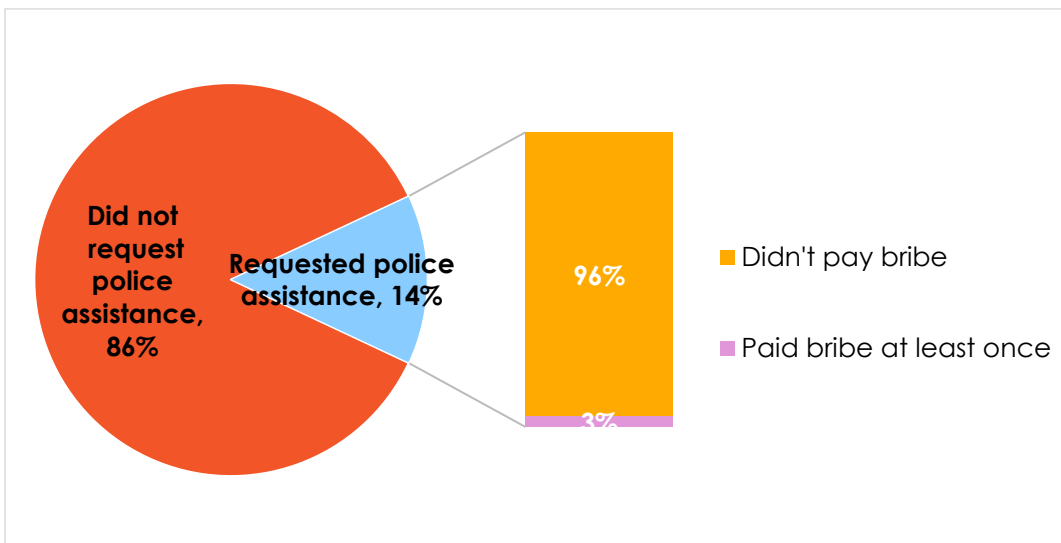
Figure 5: Ease of obtaining police assistance | Seychelles | 2022



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.)

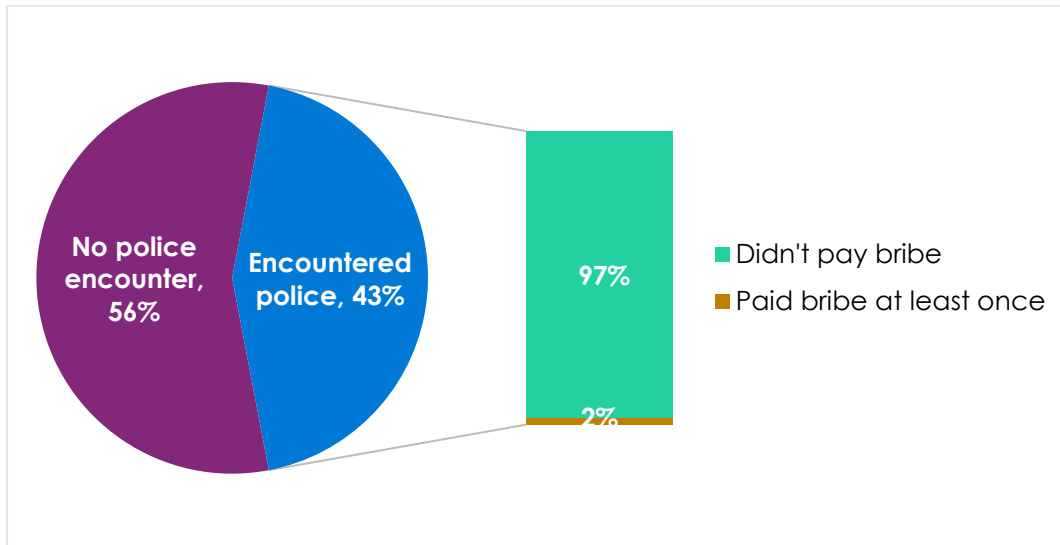
Among those who asked for help from the police, 3% say they had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for an officer at least once to get the assistance they needed (Figure 6). Among Seychellois who encountered the police in other situations, a similarly small share (2%) say they bribed an officer to avoid problems (Figure 7).

Figure 6: Paid a bribe to obtain police assistance | Seychelles | 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 7: Paid a bribe to avoid problems with the police | Seychelles | 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

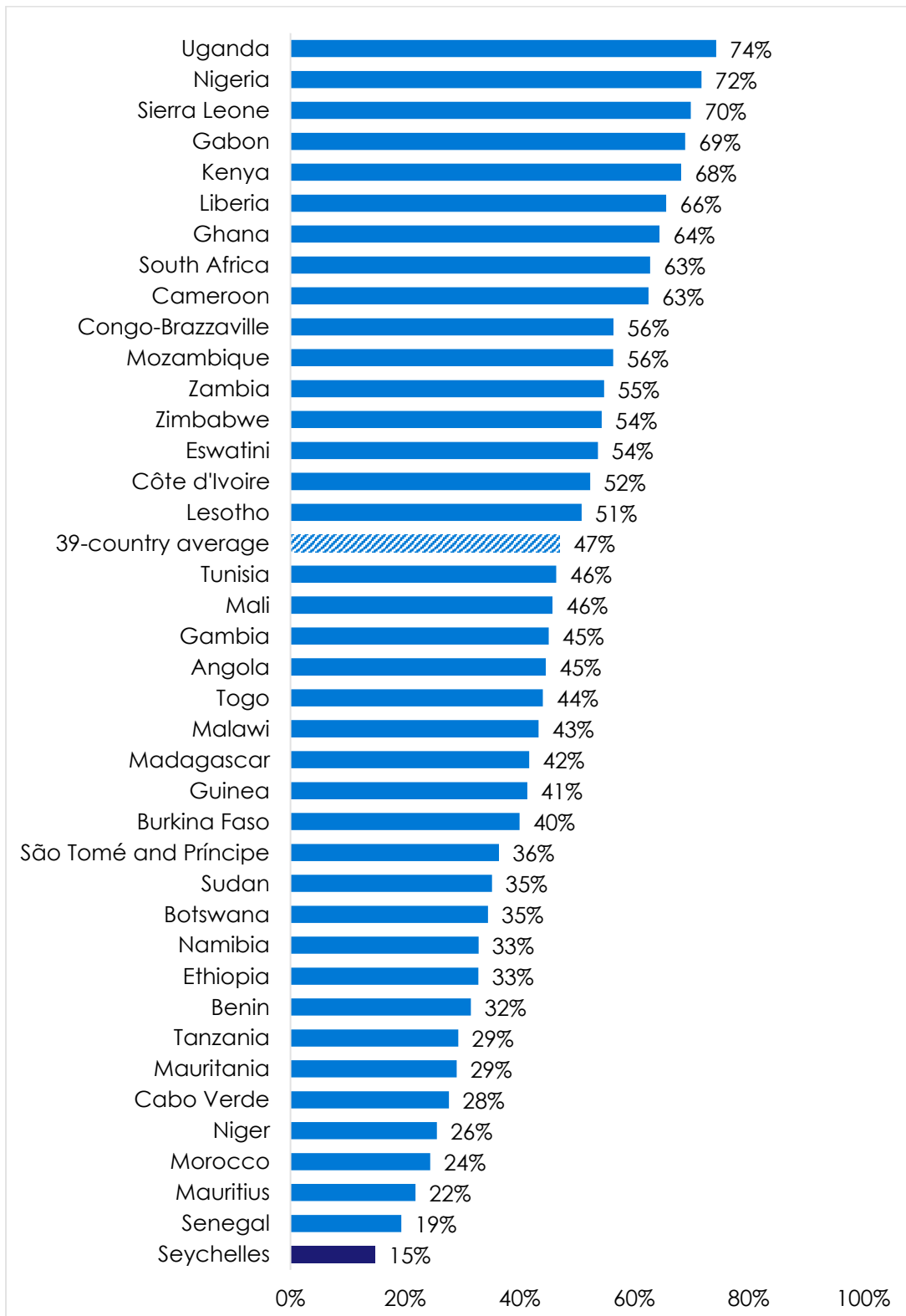
Considering the low frequency of reported bribe payments to the police, it is perhaps not surprising that the Seychellois police rank as the least corrupt among 39 African countries surveyed in 2021/2023 (Figure 8). About in seven citizens (15%) say that “most” or “all” police officials are corrupt, roughly one-third the continental average of 47%. In addition, 51% of Seychellois say “some” police officials are corrupt.

Even so, within the country, the police score no better than civil servants, judges and magistrates, members of Parliament, and officials in the Presidency when it comes to perceptions of widespread corruption (Figure 9).

Findings also suggest possible links between interaction with the police and perceptions of corruption. Citizens who encountered police during the previous year are more likely to see the institution as corrupt than those who had no such contact (18% vs. 13%) (Figure 10).

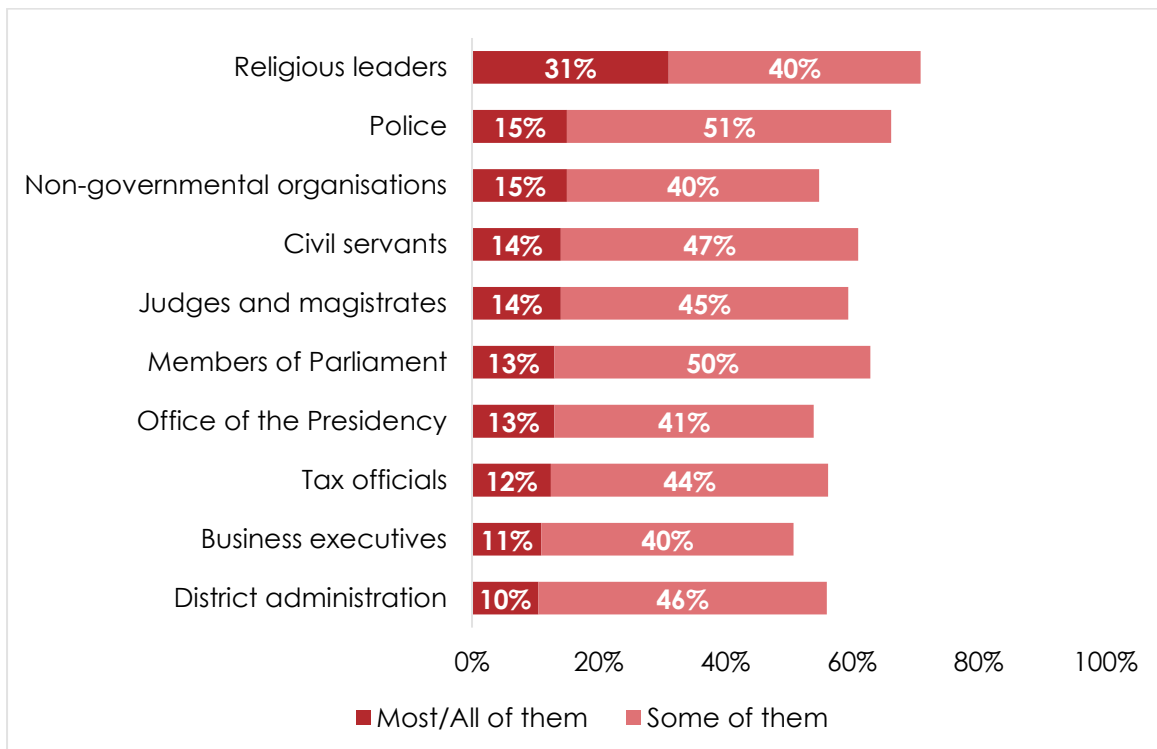
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Figure 8: Perception of widespread police corruption | 39 countries | 2021/2023



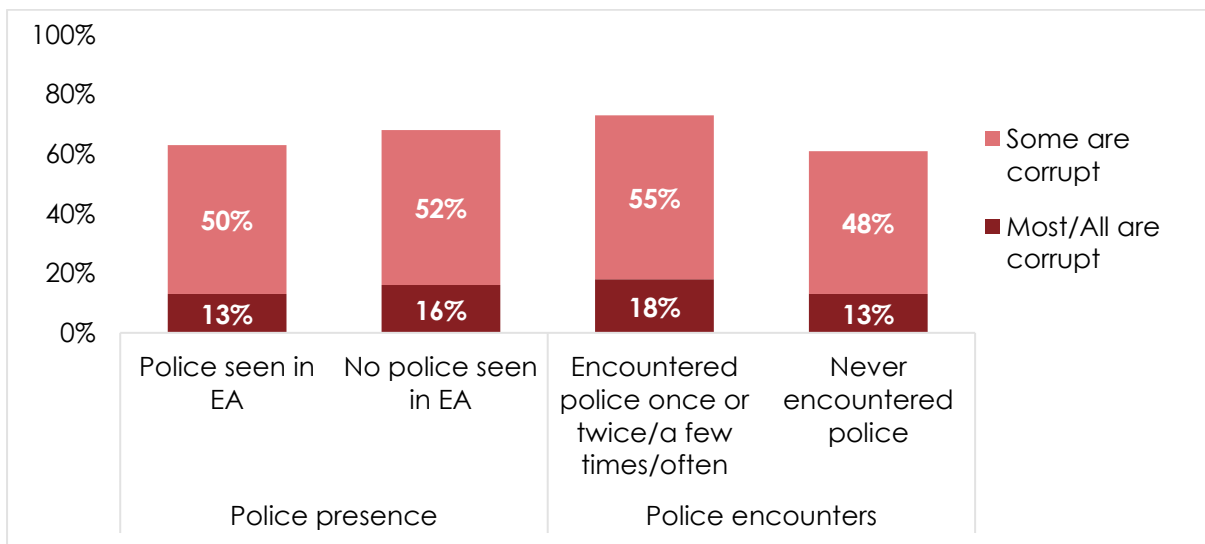
Respondents were asked: How many of the following do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Police? (% who say "most of them" or "all of them")

Figure 9: Perceived corruption in institutions and among leaders | Seychelles | 2022



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

Figure 10: Perceived police corruption | by police presence and frequency of interaction with police | Seychelles | 2022



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

Respondents were asked:

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

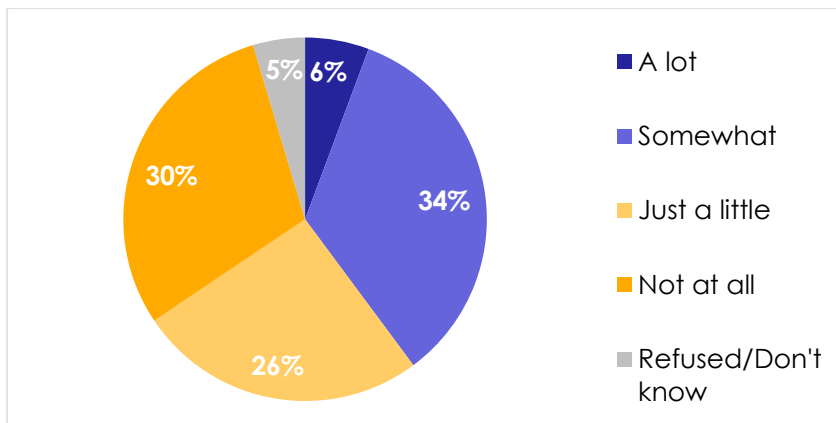
How many of the following do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Police?

Trust in the police

Despite relatively low levels of perceived corruption, only two in five Seychellois (40%) say they trust the police “somewhat” or “a lot,” while a majority (56%) express “just a little” trust (26%) or none whatsoever (30%) (Figure 11).

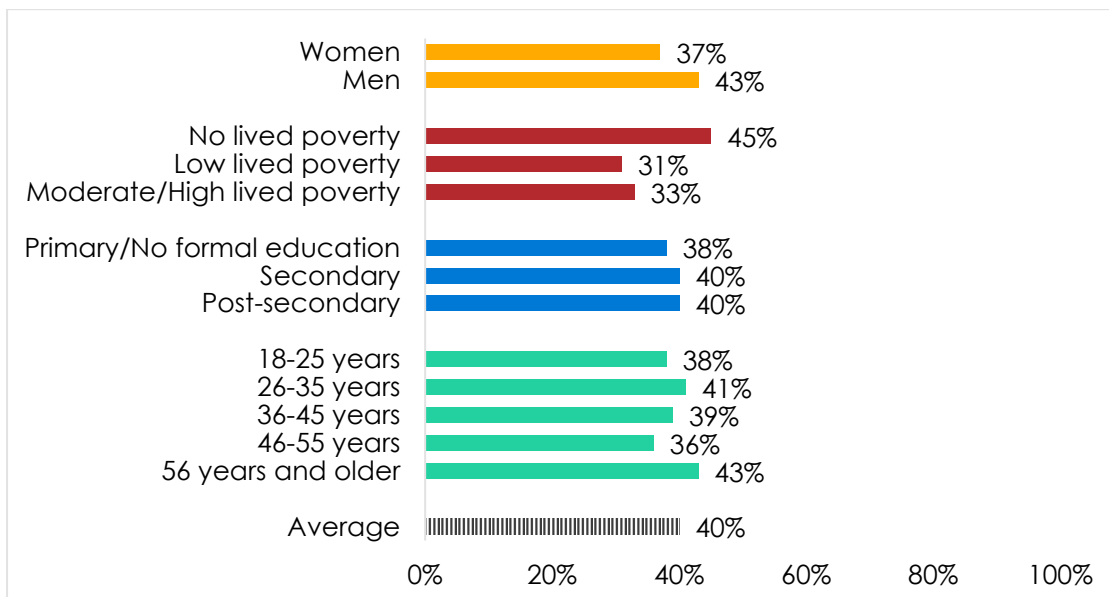
Men (43%) express higher levels of trust in the police than women (37%) (Figure 12). Trust is also relatively strong among well-off citizens (45%, compared to 31%-33% among those experiencing various levels of lived poverty).

Figure 11: Trust in the police | Seychelles | 2022



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

Figure 12: Trust in police | by demographic group | Seychelles | 2022



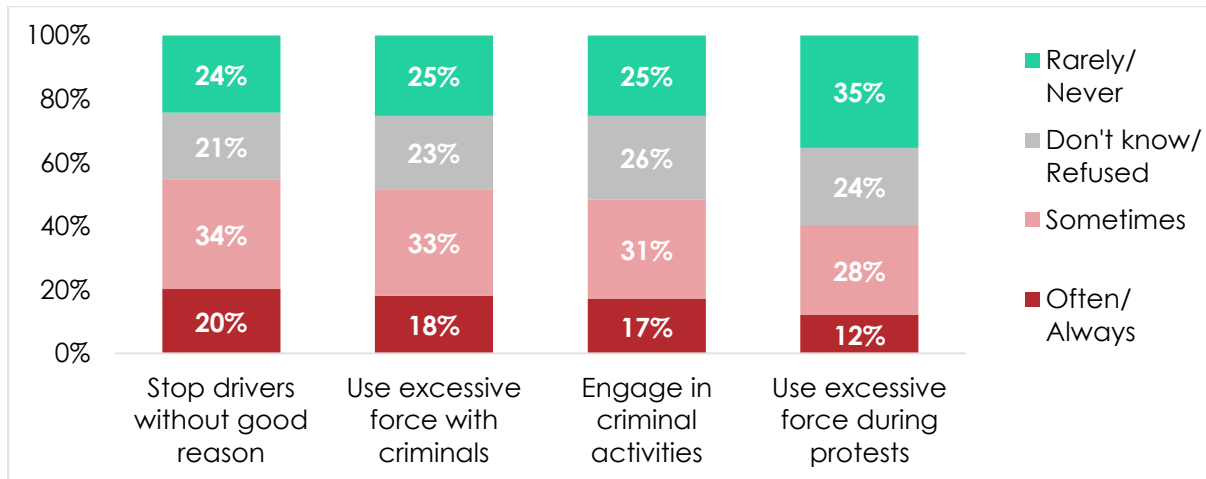
Respondents were asked: How much do you trust the police, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say “somewhat” or “a lot”)

Police conduct

In addition to expressing a lack of trust in the police, many Seychellois say at least some police officers engage in improper and even illegal activities.

More than half (54%) of citizens say the police at least sometimes stop drivers without good reason, including one-fifth (20%) who say this happens "often" or "always" (Figure 13). Significant proportions think the police at least sometimes use excessive force when dealing with suspected criminals (51%) or during protests (40%). Nearly half (48%) suspect at least some police of engaging in criminal activities themselves.

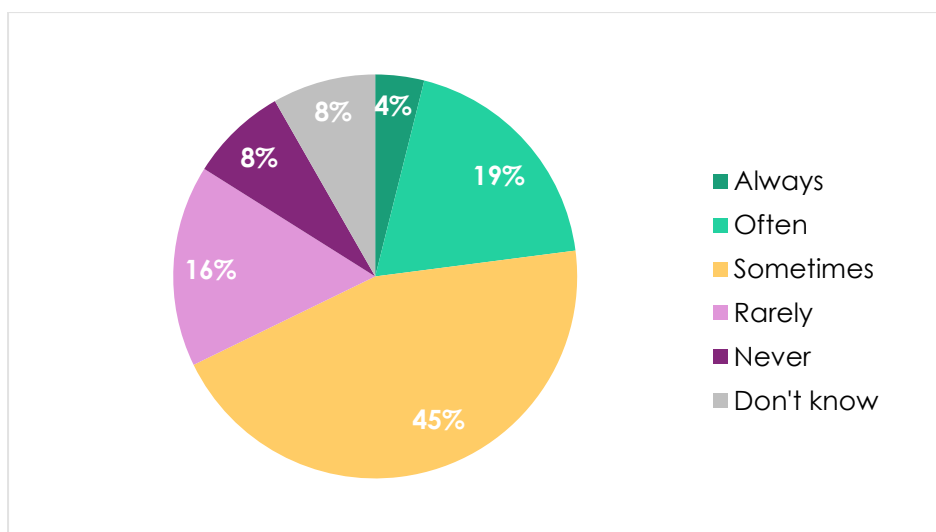
Figure 13: Improper police practices | Seychelles | 2022



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

Overall, only about one in four citizens (23%) say the police "often" or "always" operate in a professional manner and respect all citizens' rights (Figure 14). A similar proportion (24%) consider such behaviour rare or unheard of. Between these two extremes, a large plurality (45%) say police conduct is "sometimes" professional and respectful.

Figure 14: Do the police act professionally and respect citizens' rights? | Seychelles | 2022

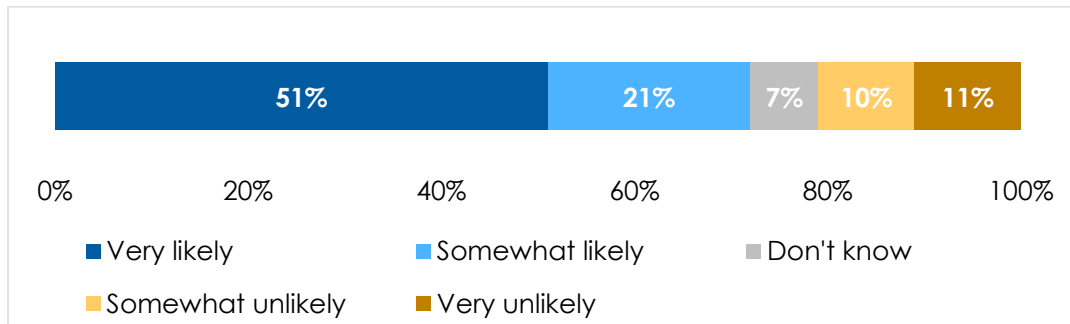


Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how often do the police in Seychelles operate in a professional manner and respect the rights of all citizens?

Most Seychellois show faith in the police's handling of gender-based violence (GBV) cases. More than seven in 10 respondents (72%) consider it "very likely" or "somewhat likely" that police officers will take women's reports of GBV seriously, whereas 21% think the opposite (Figure 15).

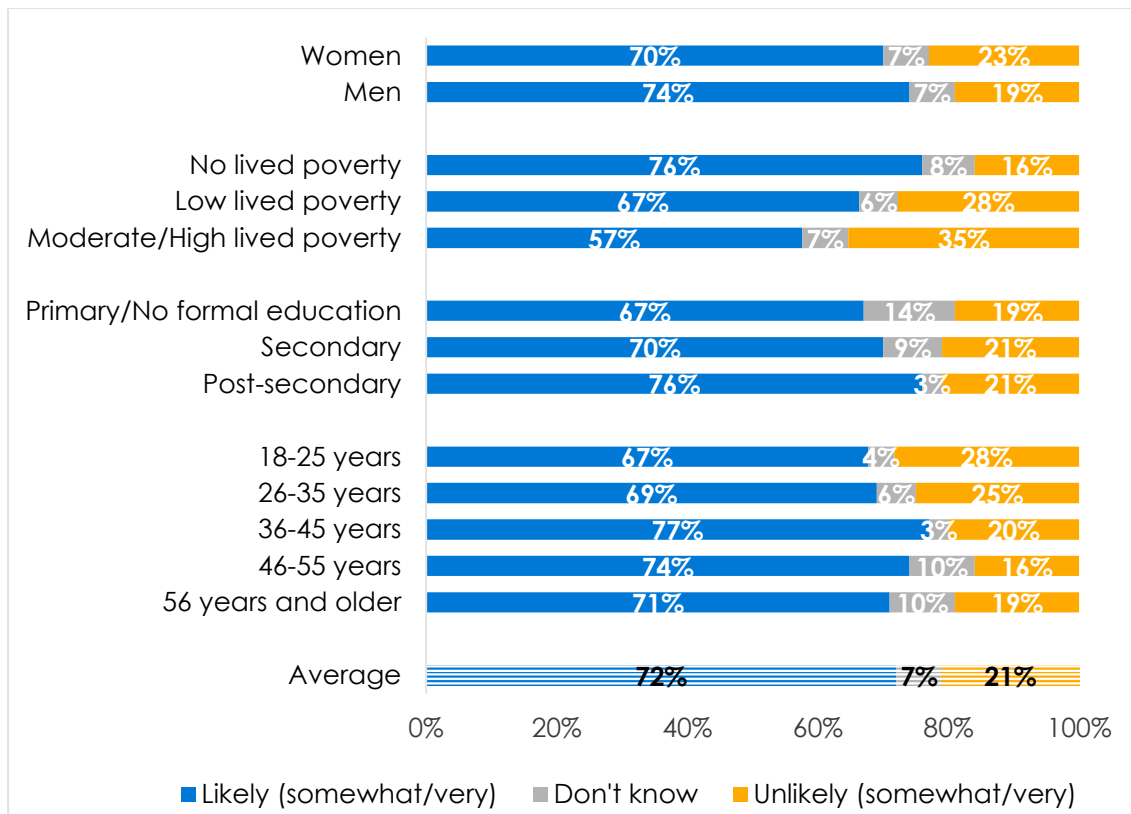
While this assessment is largely shared across key demographic groups, confidence is weaker among the poorest citizens (57%), the least educated (67%), and the youngest respondents (67%) (Figure 16).

Figure 15: Do the police take GBV seriously? | Seychelles | 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 16: Do the police take GBV seriously? | by demographic group | Seychelles | 2022

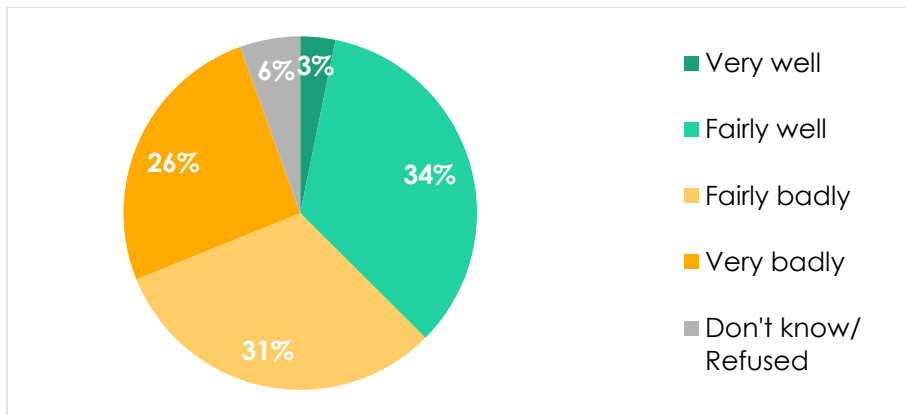


Respondents were asked: If a woman in your community goes to the police to report being a victim of gender-based violence, for example, to report a rape or report being physically abused by her husband, how likely or unlikely is it that her case will be taken seriously by the police?

Government performance on reducing crime

Overall, a majority (57%) of Seychellois are critical of the government's performance on reducing crime (Figure 17). Fewer than four in 10 (37%) salute the government for doing a "fairly good" or "very good" job.

Figure 17: Government performance on reducing crime | Seychelles | 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?

Conclusion

Despite feeling relatively safe at home and in their neighbourhoods, Seychellois express concerns about the conduct and trustworthiness of police officers.

Afrobarometer's findings reveal that around half of citizens say the police at least sometimes stop drivers without good reason, use excessive force, and engage in criminal activities.

The authorities should take heart from the fact that public perceptions of corruption in the police are relatively low. However, it should concern them that a majority of Seychellois see their police as less than professional and are dissatisfied with the government's performance on fighting crime.

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Anne Okello is Afrobarometer assistant project manager for Eastern Africa, based at the Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi. Email: aokello@afrobarometer.org.

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