Dispatch No. 1012 | 9 July 2025

Beninese trust police despite concerns about insecurity, excessive force, and corruption

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 1012 | Richard Kweitsu

Summary

The police serve as a primary interface between government and citizens, representing state authority at its most visible and immediate level. When citizens face crisis situations or require assistance, police officers often constitute their first point of contact with government services. Police forces are charged with enforcing laws and protecting both the property and civil rights of citizens. They are expected to maintain accessibility, responsiveness, and professionalism while serving all segments of society.

Benin's Republican Police, formed in 2018 through the merger of the national police and gendarmerie under the Ministry of Interior, has struggled to meet these expectations. Accusations have ranged from frequent roadside extortion to brutality against protesters and prisoners to extrajudicial killings, often with impunity (U.S. State Department, 2024; Amnesty International, 2019; Freedom House, 2025; Gain Integrity, 2020).

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

In Benin, substantial shares of the population – especially economically disadvantaged citizens and rural residents – report feeling unsafe in their neighbourhoods and homes.

Among those who had dealings with the police during the previous year, most say that assistance was easy to obtain, but demands for bribes were not uncommon. Most respondents say at least some police officials are corrupt.

Majorities say the police sometimes or often use excessive force with suspected criminal and protesters, and only slightly more than half think the police usually act with professionalism and respect all citizens' rights.

Despite these concerns, most Beninese say that they trust the police at least "somewhat" and that the government is doing a good job of reducing crime.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Nine survey rounds in up to 42 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 10 surveys are currently underway. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Benin, led by Innovante Recherche en Economie et Gouvernance (IREG), interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,200 adult Beninese in January 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3

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percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Benin in 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017, and 2020.

Key findings

- Six in 10 Beninese citizens (60%) say they felt unsafe while walking in their neighbourhood at least once during the previous year, including 41% who say this happened "several times," "many times," or "always."
  - Four in 10 (41%) say they feared crime in their home at least once.
  - Poor citizens and rural residents are more likely to experience these forms of insecurity than their better-off and urban counterparts.
  - Both forms of insecurity have increased over the past decade.
- About one in 12 citizens (8%) say they requested police assistance during the previous year. Twice as many (17%) say they encountered the police in other situations, such as at checkpoints.
  - Among those who sought help from the police, two-thirds (67%) found it easy to obtain assistance, but 19% say they had to pay a bribe.
  - Among those who encountered the police in other situations, three in 10 (29%) say they had to pay a bribe to avoid problems.
- About one-third (32%) of Beninese say that "most" or "all" police officials are corrupt, while another 56% say that "some" of them are corrupt.
- But fully two-thirds (67%) of citizens say they trust the police "somewhat" or "a lot."
- Majorities say the police "sometimes," "often," or "always" use excessive force in dealing with suspected criminals (71%) and with protesters (55%).
- A slim majority (54%) say the police "often" or "always" operate in a professional manner and respect all citizens' rights.
- More than three-fourths (77%) of citizens approve of the government's performance on reducing crime.

Sense of security

The most fundamental role of the police is to protect people and their property. Do citizens of Benin feel protected?

Survey responses indicate a significant security concern among Benin's population. Six in 10 Beninese (60%) say they felt unsafe while walking in their neighbourhood at least once during the previous year, including 41% who report feeling unsafe "several times," "many times," or "always" (Figure 1).

Four in 10 citizens (41%)[1] say they feared crime in their homes during the previous year, including 24% who say this happened at least "several times."

[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. 10% "many times/always" and 15% "several times" and 17% "just once or twice" sum to 41%).

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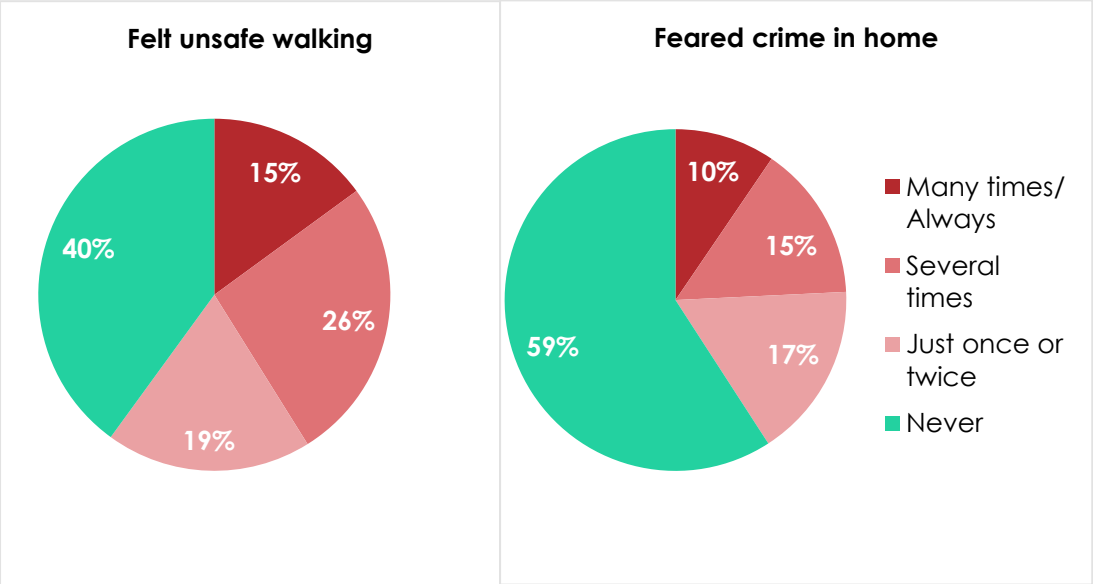
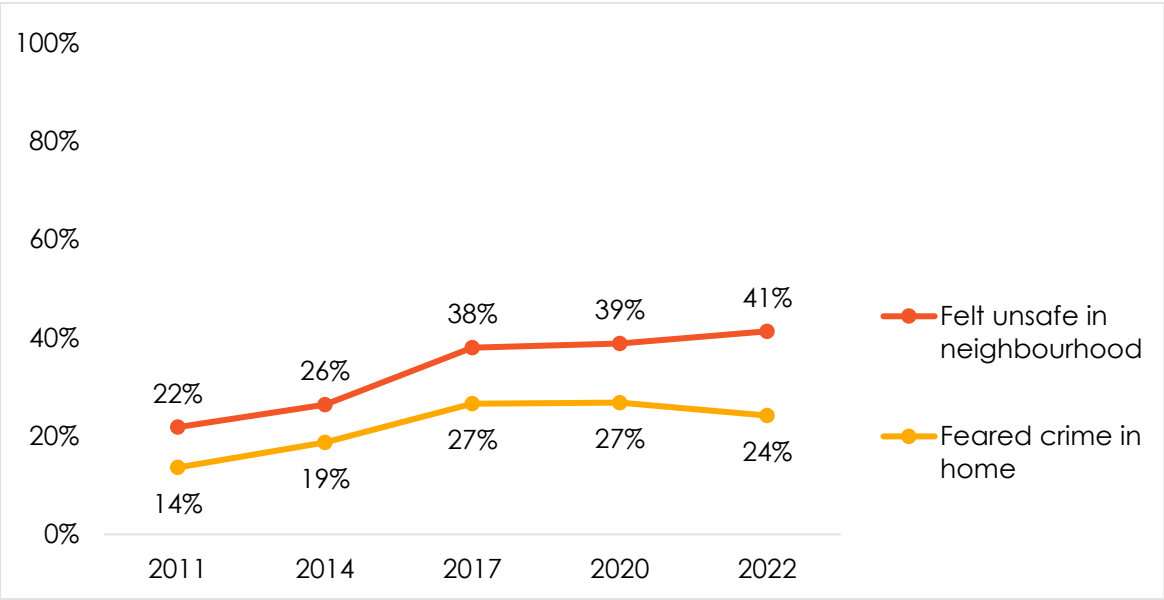
The proportions of Beninese experiencing these forms of insecurity at least "several times" have seen an upward trend over the past decade (Figure 2). Between 2011 and 2022, the share of respondents who repeatedly felt unsafe walking in their neighbourhood nearly doubled, from 22% to 41%, while the percentage who feared crime in their home rose from 14% to 24%.

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



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

Figure 2: Experienced insecurity and fear of crime at least 'several times' | Benin | 2011-2022



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")*

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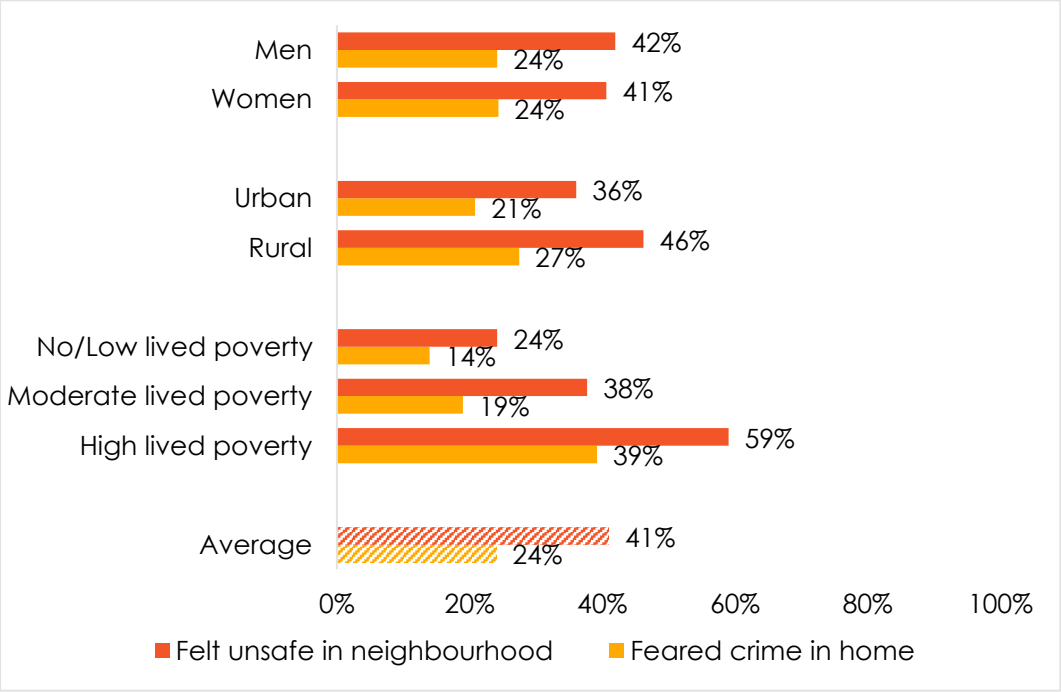
Repeated experiences of insecurity (at least "several times") are more common in rural areas than in cities (Figure 3). Rural residents are 10 percentage points more likely to feel unsafe in their neighbourhoods (46% vs. 36%) and 6 points more likely to fear of crime in the home (27% vs. 21%).

Insecurity also increases sharply with respondents' level of lived poverty[2]: The poorest citizens are more than twice as likely to feel unsafe in their neighbourhoods (59% vs. 24%) as their economically advantaged counterparts and nearly three times as likely to fear crime in their home (39% vs. 14%).

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



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

Police/security presence

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

In Benin, Afrobarometer field teams found police stations in or within easy walking distance of about one-third (35%) of the EAs they visited (Figure 4). They saw police officers or police

[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 Lekalake (2025).

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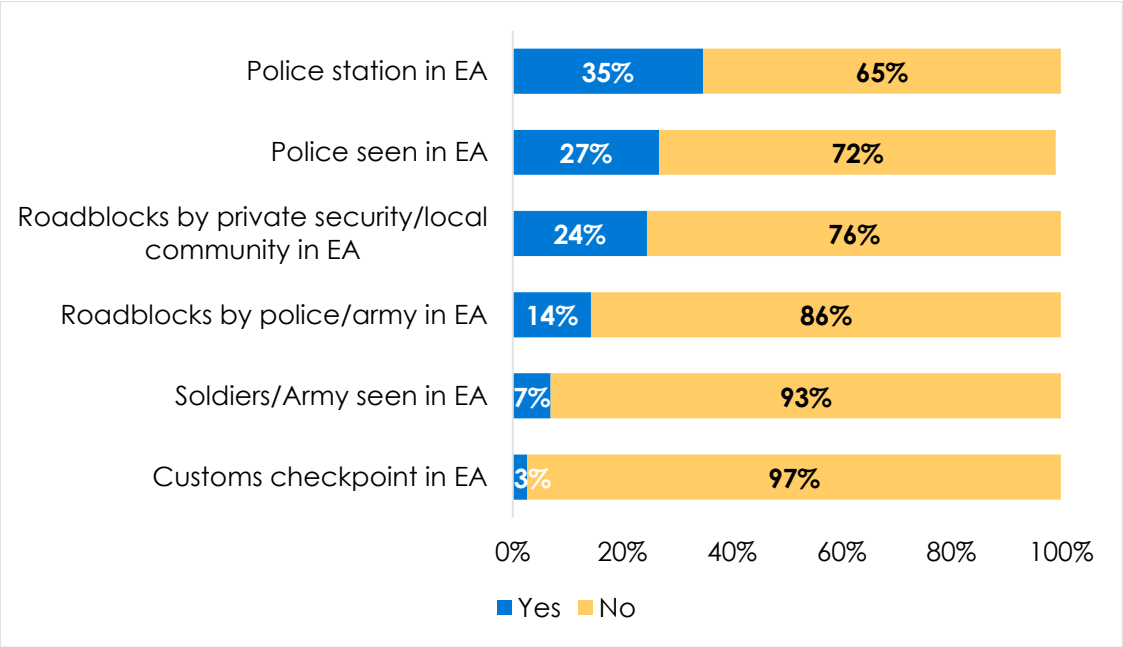
vehicles in 27% of the EAs. In addition, they saw a significant presence of private security or community-based security initiatives, with roadblocks operated by these non-state actors observed in 24% of EAs, substantially more common than roadblocks established by police or the army (14%). Other signs of security-related activity were less common, including presence of soldiers or other military (7%) and customs checkpoints (3%).

Figure 4: Presence of police/security | Benin | 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 Beninese citizens encounter the police in their daily lives?

Survey responses reveal a notably low level of interaction between citizens and police in Benin. Only 8% of respondents say they requested police assistance during the previous year. About twice as many (17%) encountered the police in other situations, such as at checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation (Figure 5).

One in 25 (4%) report police contact of both types, i.e. requesting police assistance and in other, less voluntary, encounters, while eight in 10 (79%) say they did not interact at all with the police during the past year.

Among citizens who asked for help from the police, two-thirds (67%) say it was "easy" (43%) or "very easy" (24%) to obtain the help they needed (Figure 6).

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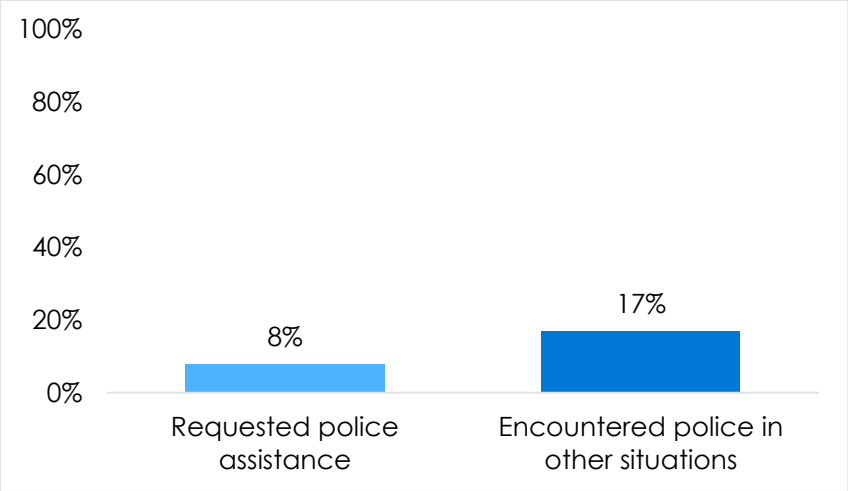
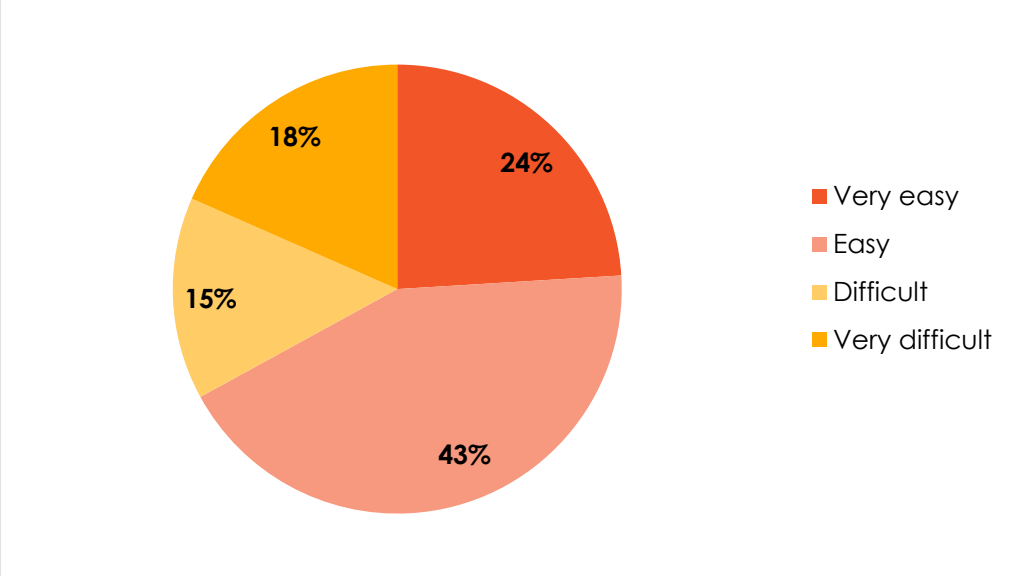
Figure 5: Contact with the police | Benin | 2022



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 | Benin | 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 citizens who asked for help from the police, one in five (19%) say they had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a police officer to get the help they needed (Figure 7).

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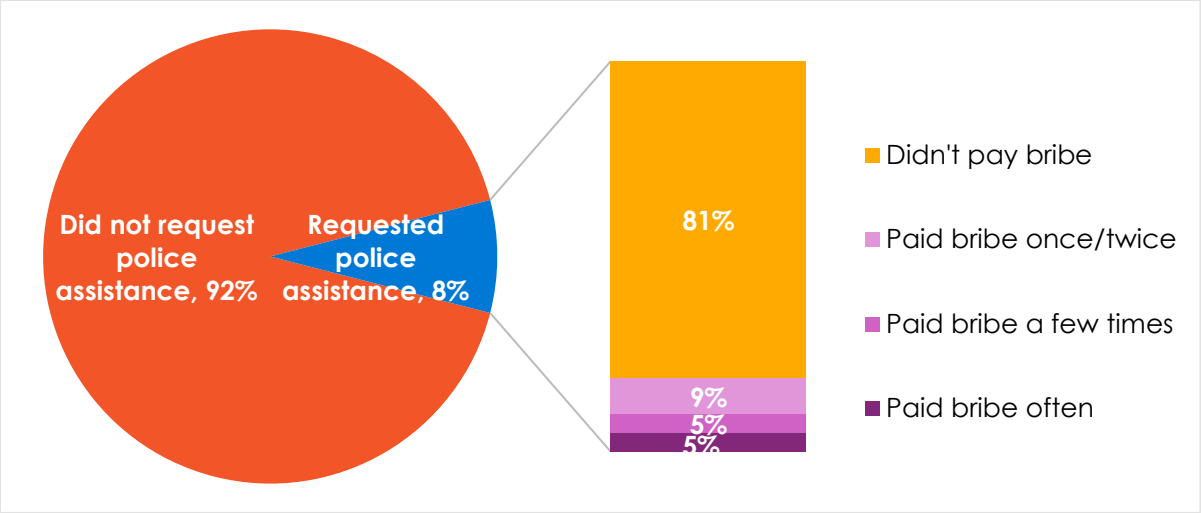
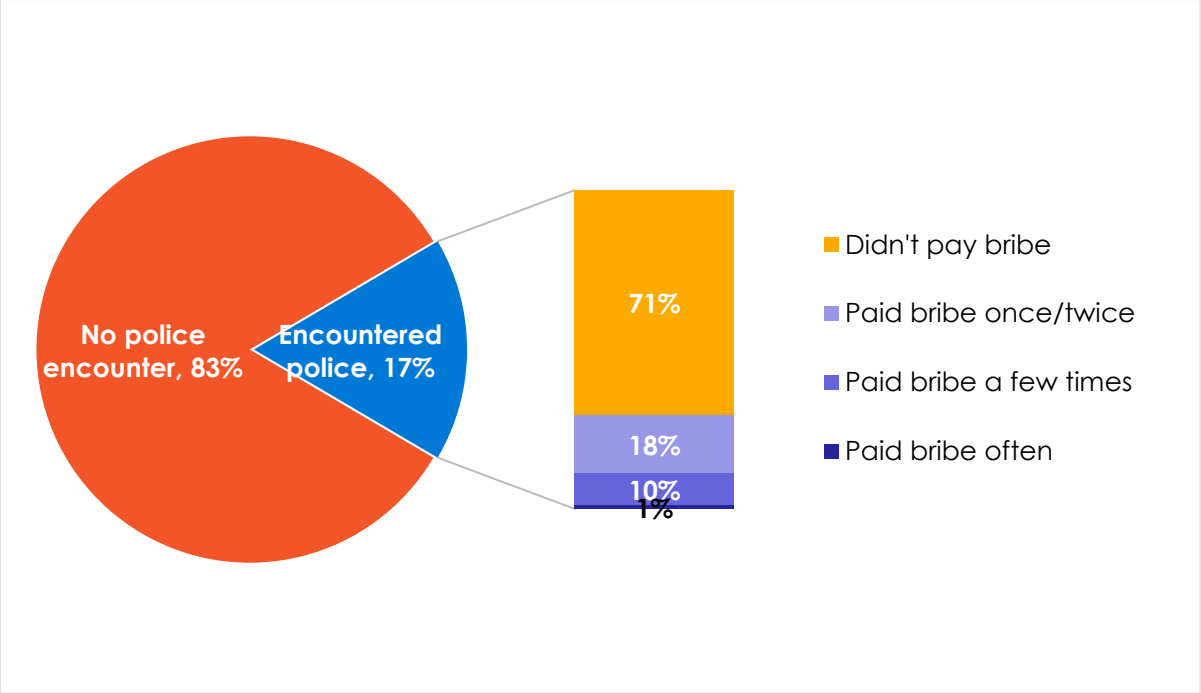
Figure 7: Paid a bribe to obtain police assistance | Benin | 2022



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? (Respondents who did not request police assistance are excluded.)*

Among Beninese who encountered the police in other situations, about three in 10 (29%) say they had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour to avoid problems (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Paid a bribe to avoid problems with the police | Benin | 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? (Respondents who did not encounter the police are excluded.)*

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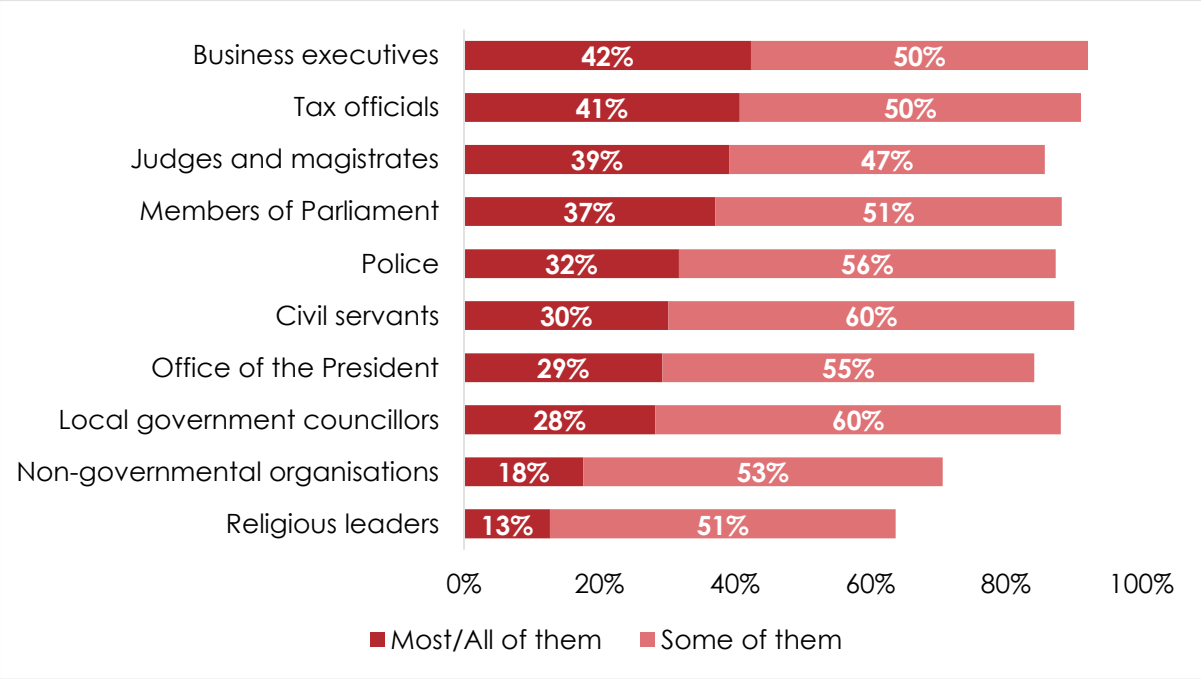
To summarise the experience among all Benin adults during the past year, about one in 20 (6%) paid a bribe at least once to get police assistance, to avoid a problem with the police, or both.

Police corruption

About one-third (32%) of Beninese say that "most" or "all" police officials are corrupt, in addition to a majority (56%) who think that "some" of them are corrupt. Only 12% of citizens say the police force is free of corruption.

This places the police in the middle tier of perceived institutional corruption – somewhat better than business executives, tax officials, judges and magistrates, and members of Parliament, but worse than civil servants, officials in the Presidency, and local government councillors, among others (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Perceived corruption among institutions and leaders | Benin | 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 of widespread corruption in the police force are particularly common among citizens experiencing high lived poverty (37%) and those with post-secondary education (44%) (Figure 10). Older respondents are less likely to see most/all police officials as corrupt (25%-27%).

Findings also suggest a possible link between perceptions of police corruption and interaction with the police: Citizens who often encountered the police during the previous year are significantly more likely to say that "most" or "all" police are corrupt than those who had no police encounters (44% vs. 31%), though the latter are twice as likely to see "some" police as corrupt (56% vs. 28%) (Figure 11).

Police visibility in the area, as recorded by Afrobarometer teams, makes no difference in respondents' assessments of police corruption.

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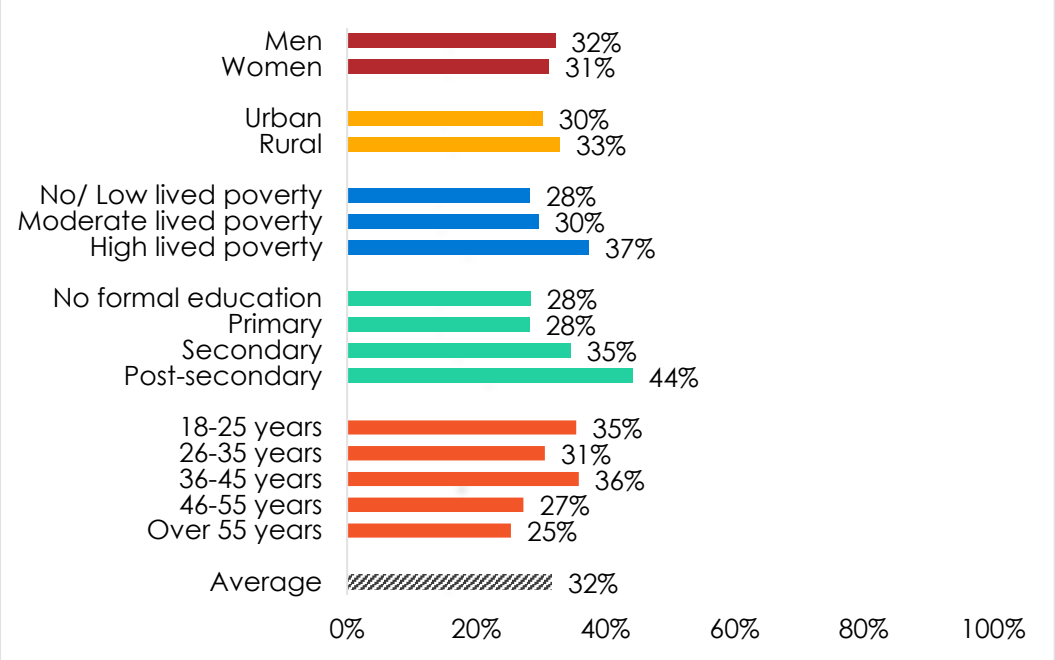
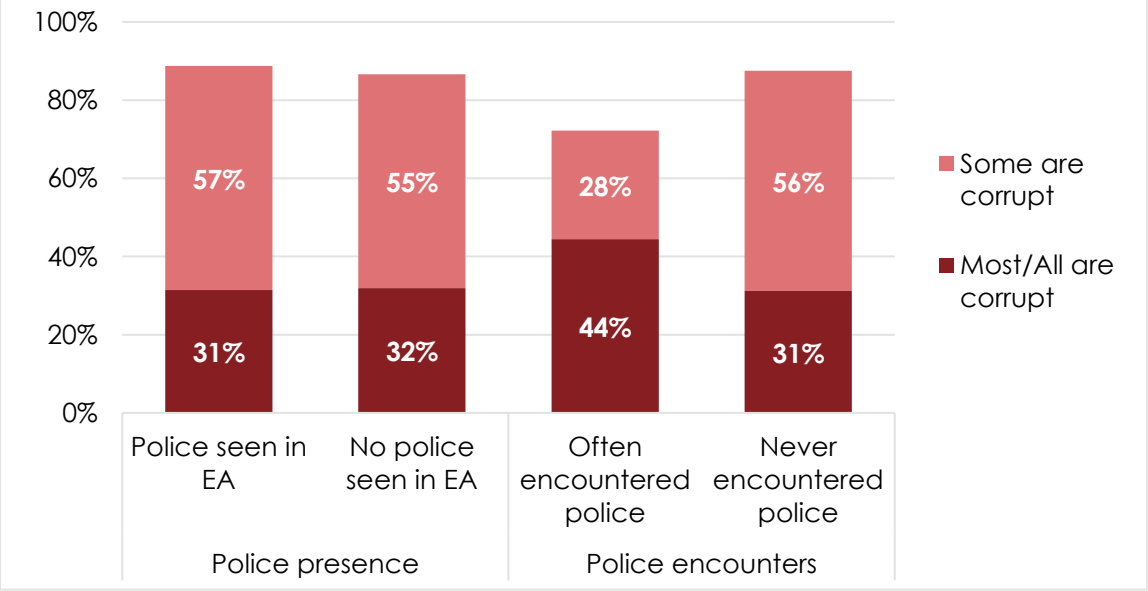
Figure 10: Perception that most/all police are corrupt | by demographic group | Benin | 2022



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")*

Figure 11: Perceived police corruption | by police presence and frequency of interaction with police | Benin | 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?

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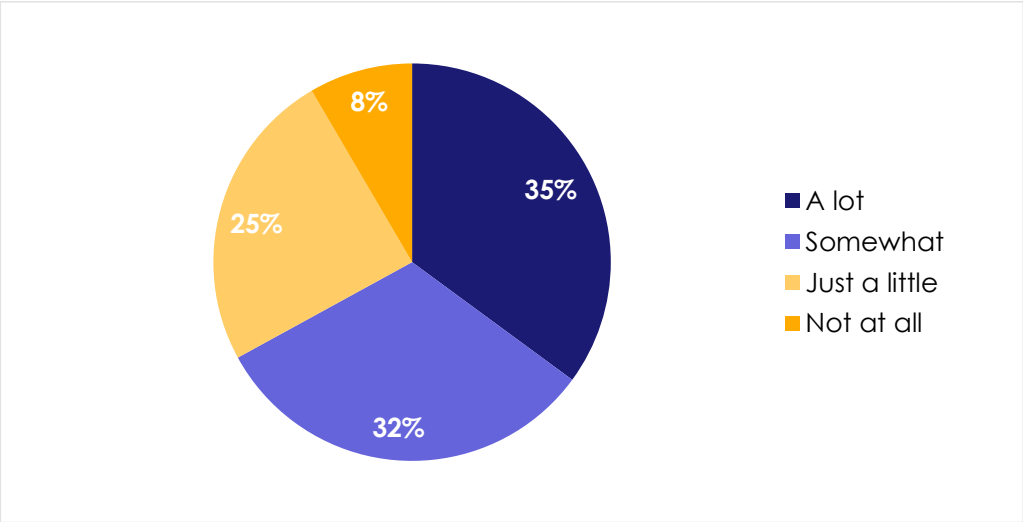
Trust in the police

Despite concerns about corruption, Beninese citizens express relatively high levels of trust in their police. Fully two-thirds (67%) of respondents say they trust the police "somewhat" (32%) or "a lot" (35%) (Figure 12).

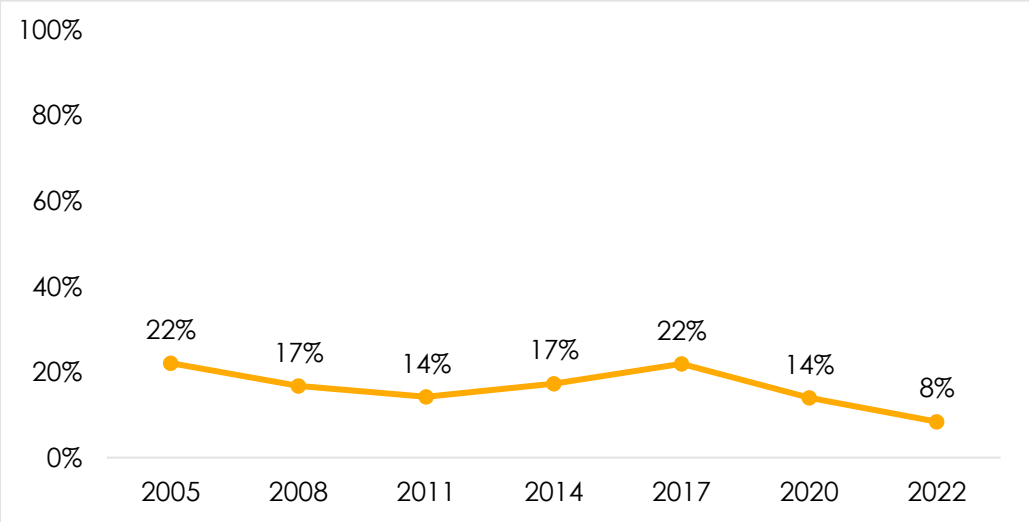
The share of citizens who say they don't trust the police "at all" has dropped by about two-thirds since 2017, from 22% to 8% (Figure 13).

Figure 12: Trust in the police | Benin | 2022



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

Figure 13: Don't trust the police 'at all' | Benin | 2011-2022



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 about equally strong among women and men and among rural and urban residents (Figure 14).

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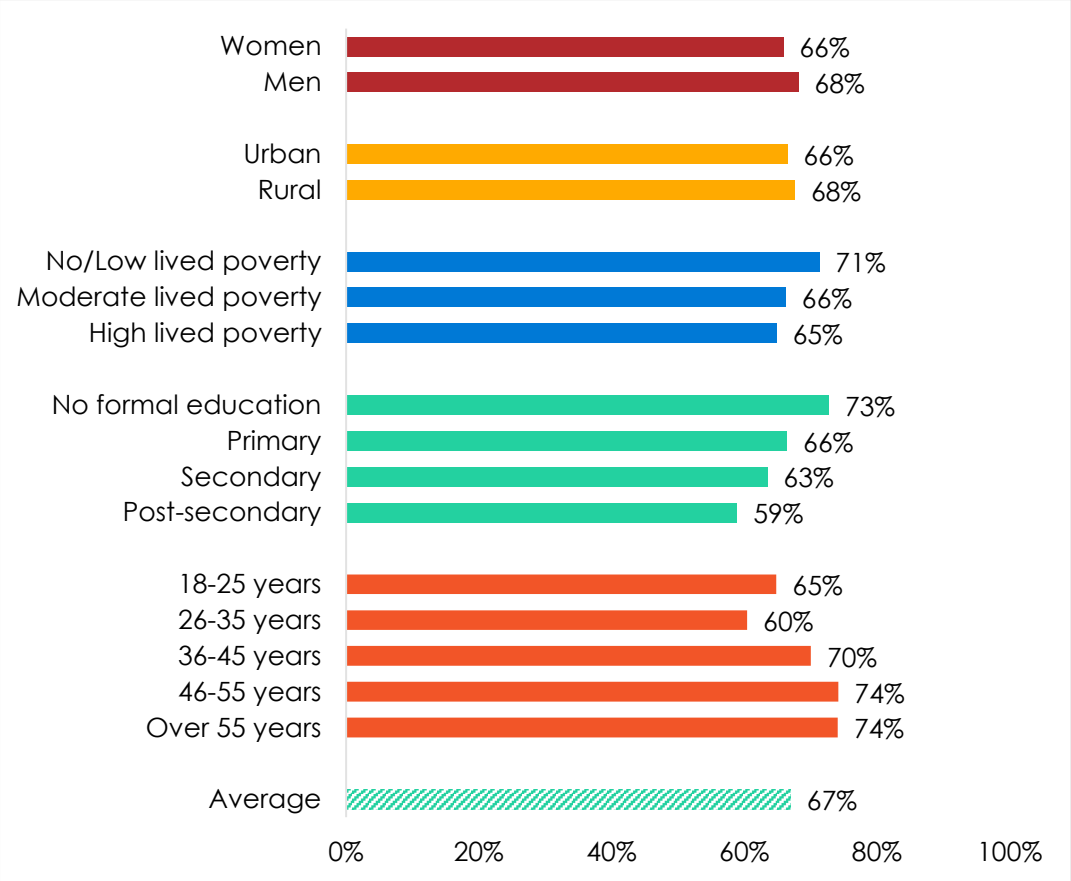
Economically advantaged citizens express greater trust in the police than their worse-off counterparts (71% vs. 65%-66%). Trust declines as education levels increase, from 73% among those with no formal schooling to 59% among those with post-secondary qualification. But trust increases with respondents' age, from 60%-65% among youth to 74% among those over age 45.

Figure 14: Trust in the police | by demographic group | Benin | 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

Although most Beninese express trust in the police, many fault the police for engaging in improper activities (Figure 15).

Almost half (45%) of respondents say the police "often" or "always" use excessive force when dealing with suspected criminals, in addition to 27% who say they "sometimes" do so.

A majority (55%) say the police at least "sometimes" use excessive force in managing protests or demonstrations, while 46% say they stop drivers without good reason. More than a quarter (27%) of citizens say the police at least "sometimes" engage in illegal activities.

Overall, a slim majority (54%) of Beninese say the police "often" or "always" operate in a professional manner and respect all citizens' rights; 19% assert that such behaviour is rare or unheard of (Figure 16).

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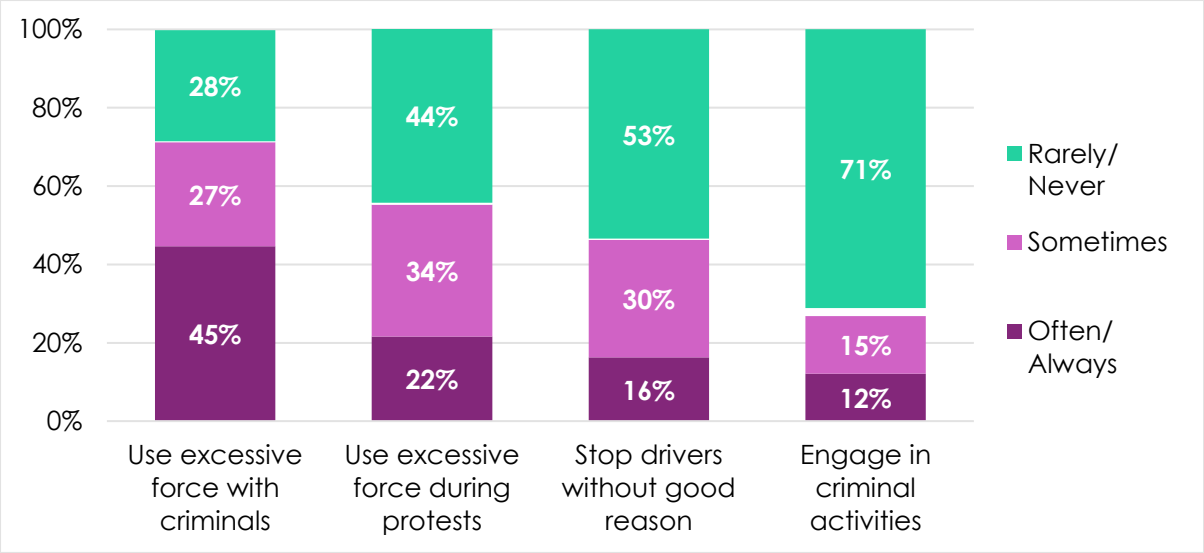
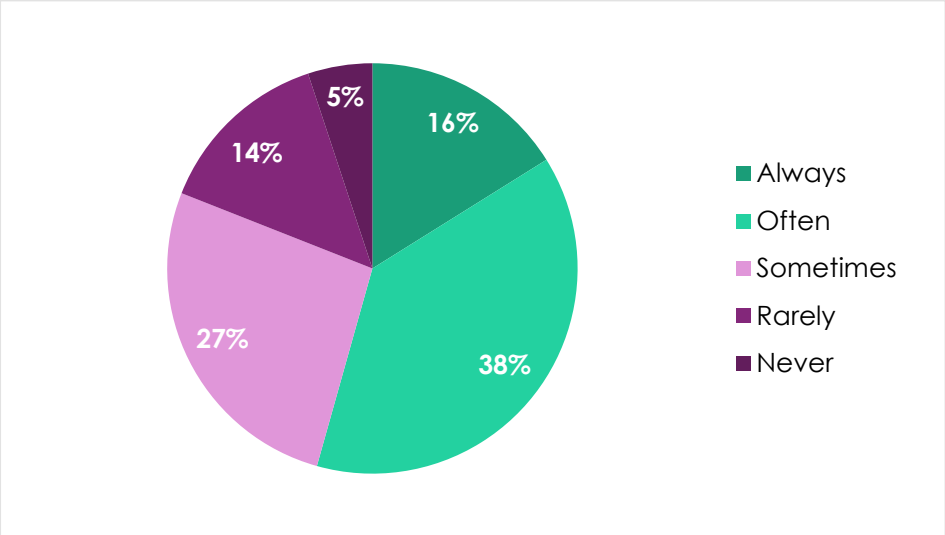
Figure 15: Improper police practices | Benin | 2022



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

Figure 16: Do the police act professionally and respect citizens' rights? | Benin | 2022



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

One area in which Beninese give their police better marks is in treating cases of gender-based violence (GBV) as serious offences. About nine in 10 respondents (92%) consider it likely that the police will take a woman's report of GBV seriously, including 70% who see this as "very likely" (Figure 17).

While this assessment is shared across key demographic groups, confidence is slightly less strong among citizens experiencing high lived poverty (87%) (Figure 18).

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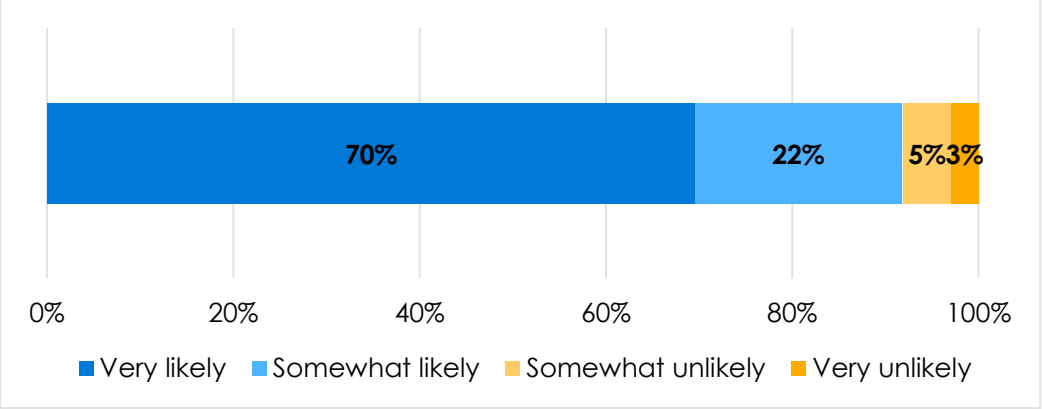
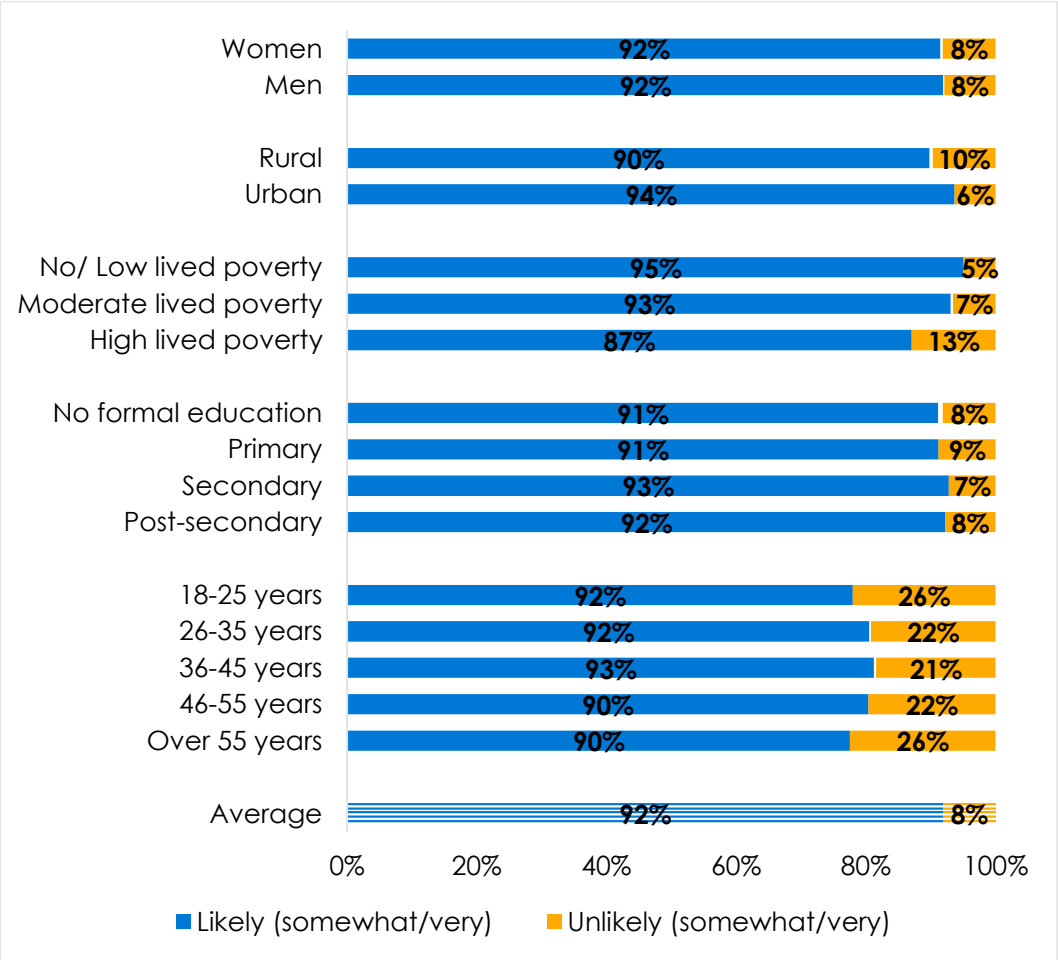
Figure 17: Do the police take gender-based violence seriously? | Benin | 2022



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 18: Do the police take gender-based violence seriously? | by demographic group | Benin | 2022



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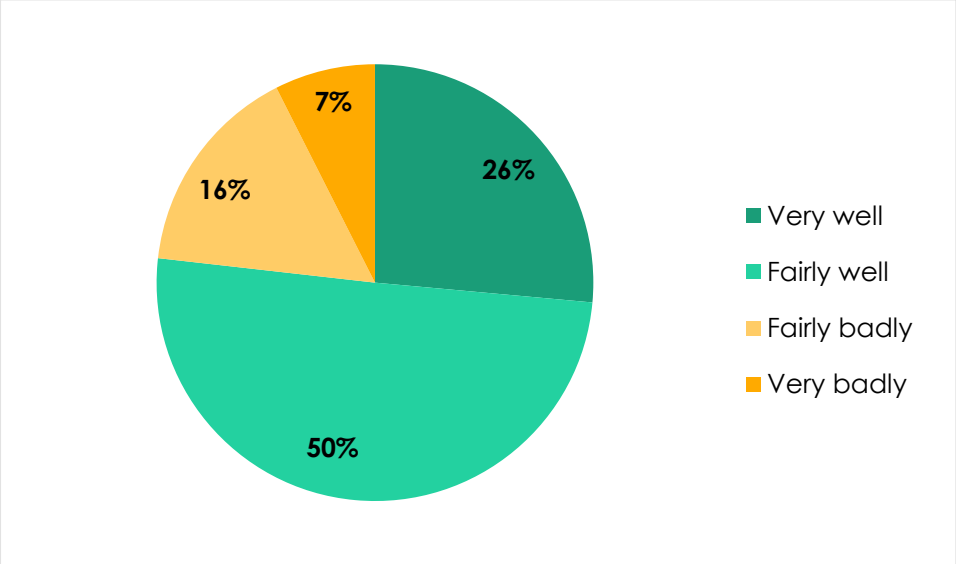
Government performance on reducing crime

Despite concerns about their personal security and police conduct, Beninese citizens give their government positive marks for its crime-reduction efforts: More than three-quarters (77%) of respondents say it is handling the fight against crime "fairly well" or "very well" (Figure 19).

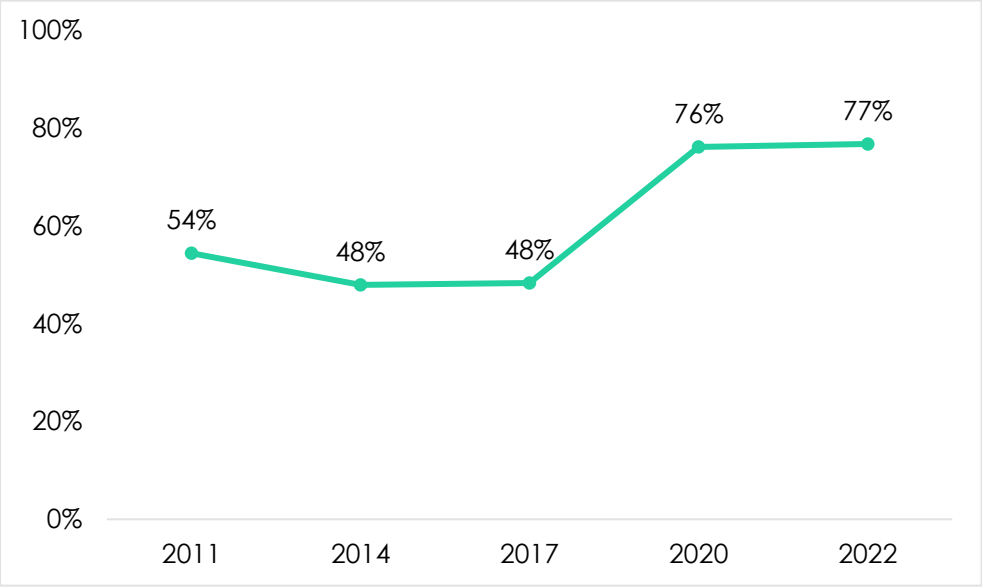
These ratings maintain a 28-percentage-point jump in positive assessments between 2017 and 2020 (Figure 20).

Figure 19: Government performance on reducing crime | Benin | 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 20: Government performing well on crime reduction | Benin | 2011-2022



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")*

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Conclusion

This analysis of Beninese citizens' experiences and evaluations of their police force reveals a complex relationship with law enforcement. While two-thirds of citizens express confidence in their police and three-quarters approve of the government's crime-reduction efforts, the data also expose troubling patterns of misconduct that demand urgent attention.

Citizens report positive experiences when seeking police assistance, with most finding help easy to obtain. Yet in significant numbers, citizens find themselves compelled to pay bribes to get police assistance or to avoid problems.

Moreover, majorities report police use of excessive force against both suspected criminals and protesters, and significant minorities say officers engage in illegal activities and corruption and fail to act with professionalism and respect for all citizens' rights.

Moving forward, leaders face the challenge of building on existing foundations of public trust to address the systemic issues that perpetuate corruption, excessive force, and impunity.

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.

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