

Fighting corruption in Uganda: Despite small gains, citizens pessimistic about their role

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 77 | John Martin Kewaza

Summary

Uganda's widespread corruption is highlighted in the country's poor ranking (139th out of 167 countries) in the Corruption Perceptions Index as well as in the recent Africa edition of the Global Corruption Barometer (Transparency International, 2015a, b). Pernicious effects stretch from substandard public services through elections and the judiciary to stunted economic development. In 2012, four in 10 respondents (41%) in an Afrobarometer survey reported that they had been offered money or a gift in return for their votes during the 2011 elections. In petitioning Parliament last year to appoint a commission of inquiry, retired Supreme Court Judge Justice George Kanyeihamba said, "There is evidence of inefficiency, incompetence, and corruption in the judiciary and unethical conduct by members of the bar" (Parliament of Uganda, 2015). The Black Monday Movement, a coalition of anti-corruption civil society organisations, estimates that between 2000 and 2014, the government lost more than Shs. 24 trillion to corruption – enough to finance the country's 2015/2016 budget (ActionAid Uganda, 2015)

The government's strategies to fight corruption include the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS), the Anti-Corruption Act, and the establishment of a specialized anti-corruption court within the judiciary. Internationally, Uganda has been a signatory of the United Nations Convention against Corruption (UNCAC) as well as the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combating Corruption since 2004.

Many civil society organisations have joined the anti-corruption fight, including the Anti-Corruption Coalition, Transparency International Uganda, the African Parliamentarians Network against Corruption, Civil Society Today, the Uganda Debt Network, and the NGO Forum (Martini, 2013).

These efforts may be reflected in modest improvements in the public's perceptions of corruption in the Office of the Presidency and of the government's performance in fighting corruption, according to Afrobarometer's 2015 survey in Uganda. Nonetheless, more than two-thirds of Ugandans say that corruption increased during the past year. Perhaps most importantly, less than half of Ugandans believe that ordinary citizens can make a difference in the fight against corruption.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. Six rounds of surveys have been conducted between 1999 and 2015. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of 1,200 or 2,400 respondents.

The Afrobarometer team in Uganda, led by Hatchile Consult, interviewed 2,400 adult Ugandans in May 2015. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Uganda in 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, and 2012.

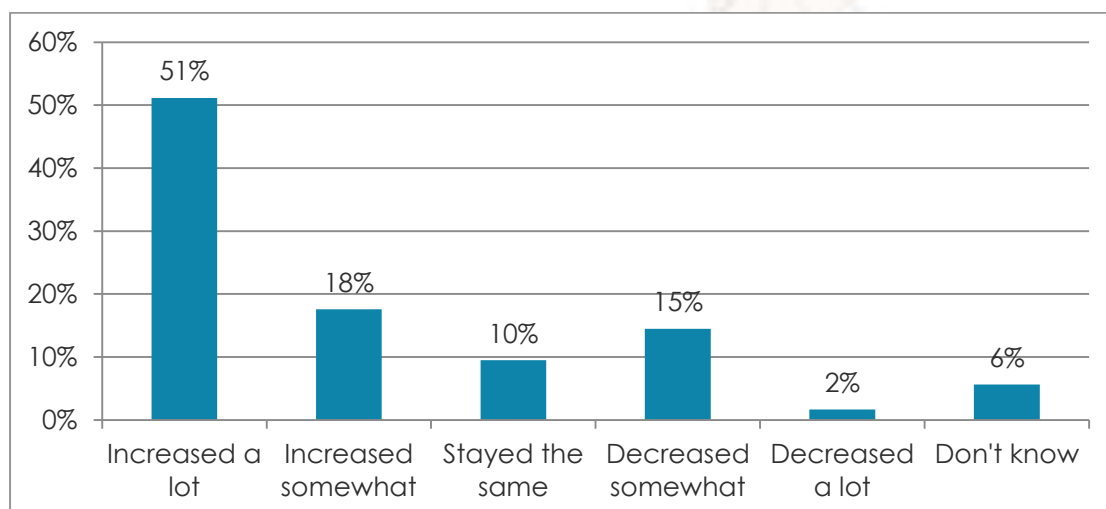
Key findings

- More than two-thirds (69%) of Ugandans say the level of corruption in the country increased during the 12 months preceding the survey, including 51% who say it increased "a lot." The proportion of citizens who perceive corruption as one of the most important problems facing the country is growing slowly but steadily.
- About one in three Ugandans (29%) say that "most" or "all" officials in the Office of the Presidency are corrupt, an improvement from 39% in 2008. Perceptions of corruption in the judiciary increased, but police continue to fare worst in public perceptions of corruption among state officials.
- Citizen assessments of the government's performance in fighting corruption improved slightly, but still only 26% describe those efforts as "fairly" or "very" good.
- Less than half of Ugandans (47%) agree that ordinary citizens can make a difference in the fight against corruption. Optimism is higher among men, younger citizens, more educated citizens, and frequent consumers of news.
- Among Ugandans who tried to obtain certain government services in the year preceding the survey, almost four in 10 (38%) say they paid a bribe to get the services they needed. Only 6% of those who paid bribes reported these incidents to the authorities.

Perceived level of corruption

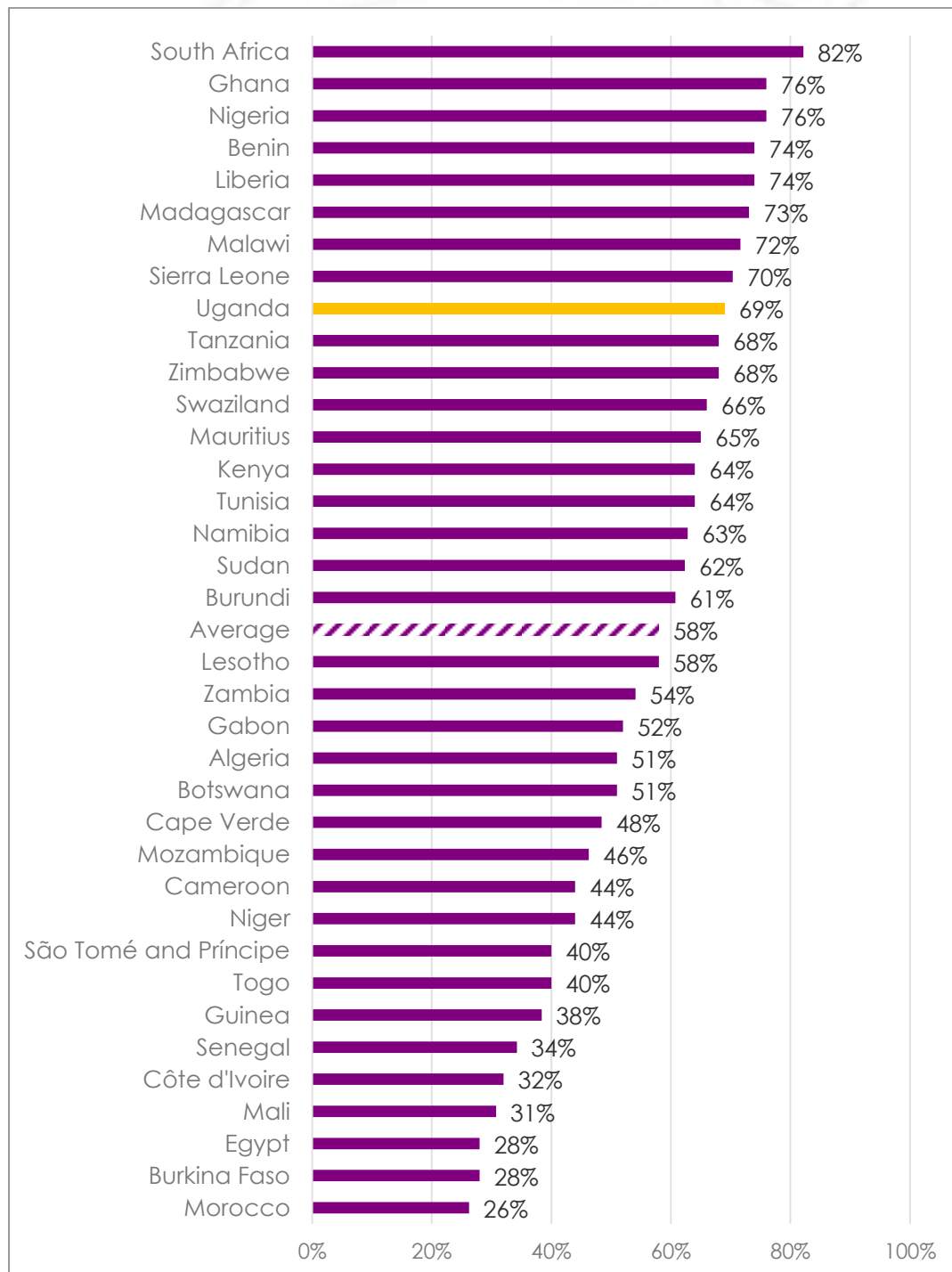
Almost seven in 10 Ugandans (69%) say the level of corruption in the country increased in the previous 12 months; more than half (51%) say it increased "a lot" (Figure 1). Among 36 surveyed countries, this places Uganda in ninth place in terms of a perceived increase in corruption (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Perception of increased corruption | Uganda | 2015



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, over the past year, has the level of corruption in this country increased, decreased, or stayed the same?*

Figure 2: Perception of increased corruption | 36 countries | 2015



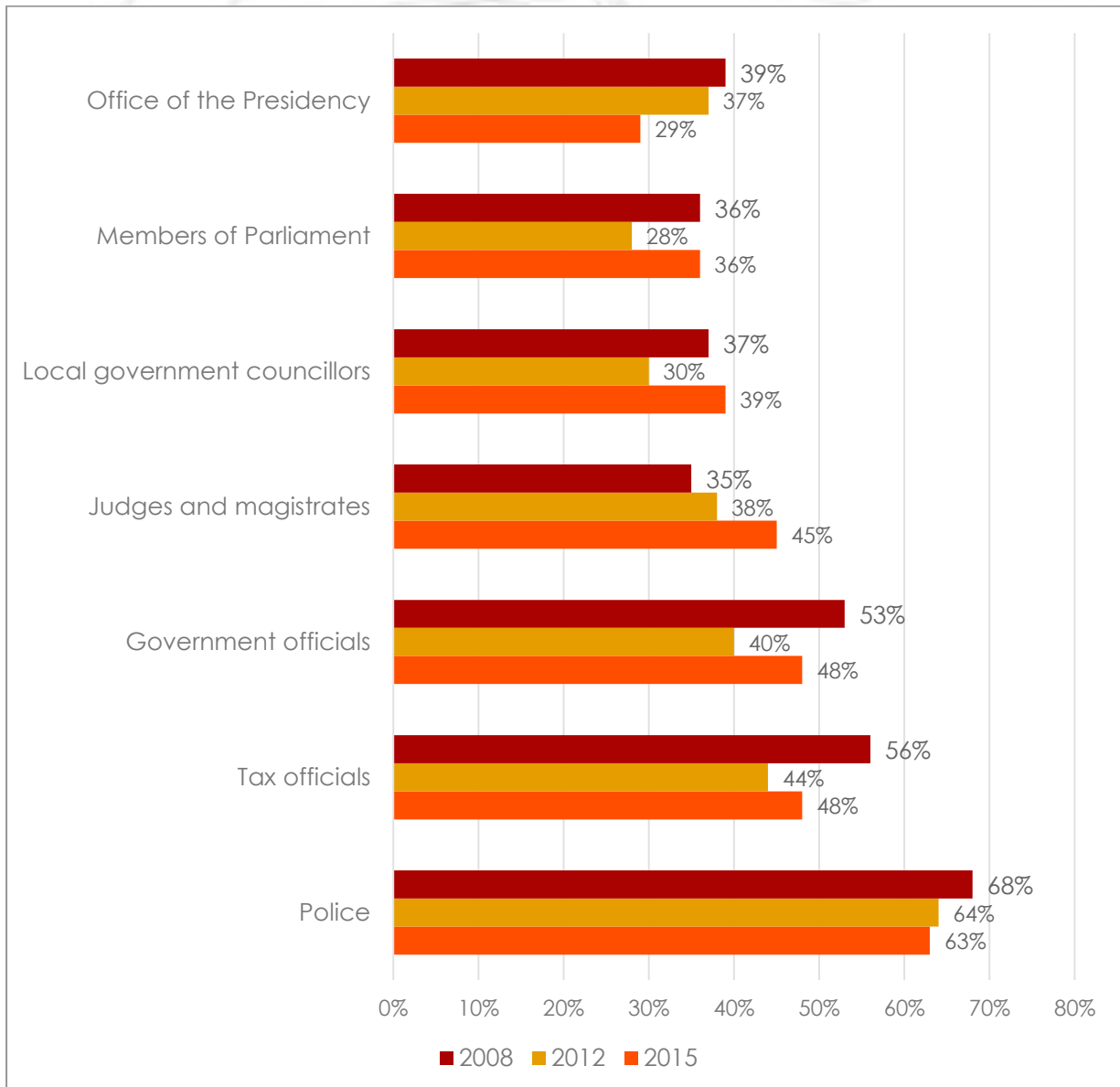
Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, over the past year, has the level of corruption in this country increased, decreased, or stayed the same? (% who say "increased somewhat" or "increased a lot")*

Perceived institutional corruption

In public perceptions of corruption among state officials, the Office of the Presidency fares best and the police worst (Figure 3). About three in 10 Ugandans (29%) say "most" or "all" officials in the Presidency are corrupt, an improvement from 39% in 2008 and 37% in 2012. More than twice as many citizens say "most" or "all" police officials are corrupt (63%, a slight improvement from 68% in 2008).

Public perceptions of corruption in the judiciary continue to worsen (45% say most or all judges and magistrates are corrupt). Members of Parliament, local government councillors, other government officials, and tax officials largely lost improvements in public perceptions recorded between 2008 and 2012.

Figure 3: Perceived institutional corruption | Uganda | 2008-2015

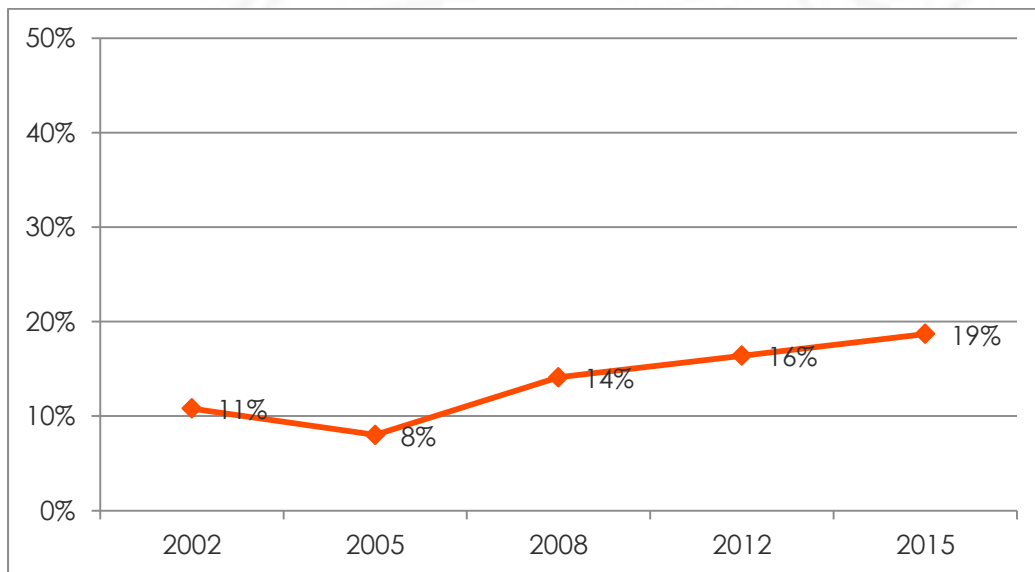


Respondents were asked: How many of the following do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say "most" or "all" are corrupt)

Government performance in fighting corruption

The proportion of Ugandans who perceive corruption as one of the most important problems facing their country has been increasing slowly but steadily over the past decade: One in five respondents (19%) now cite corruption among their top three priorities that the government should address, compared to 8% in 2005 (Figure 4). This places corruption at No. 6 among citizens' priority problems.

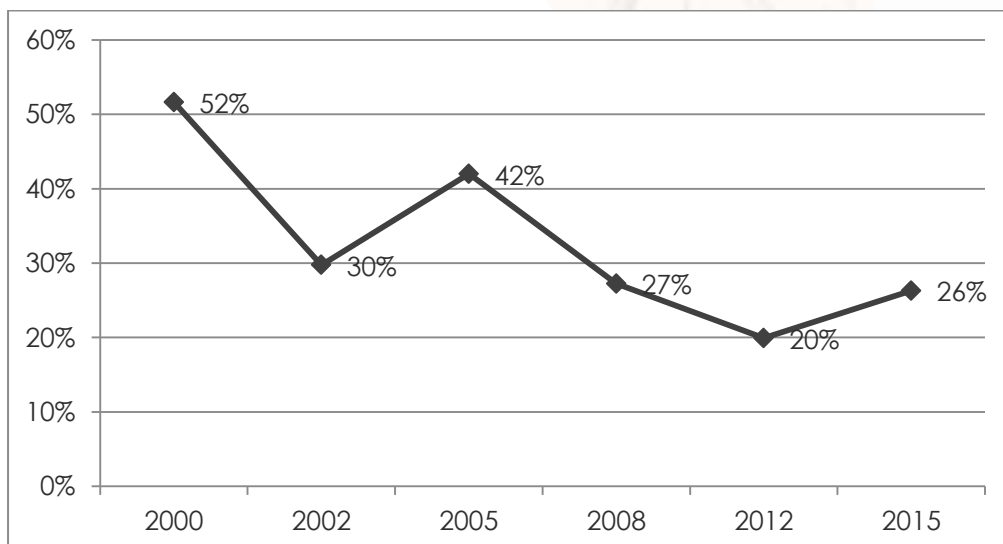
Figure 4: Corruption as the most important problem facing Uganda | 2002-2015



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Respondents could give up to three responses; figure shows % of respondents who cited corruption among their top three problems.)*

Only one in four Ugandans (26%) say the government is doing “fairly well” or “very well” in fighting corruption. This is a slight improvement after a decade of increasingly negative ratings, but is still only half the level of approval recorded in 2000 (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Perceptions of government performance in fighting corruption | Uganda | 2000-2015



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

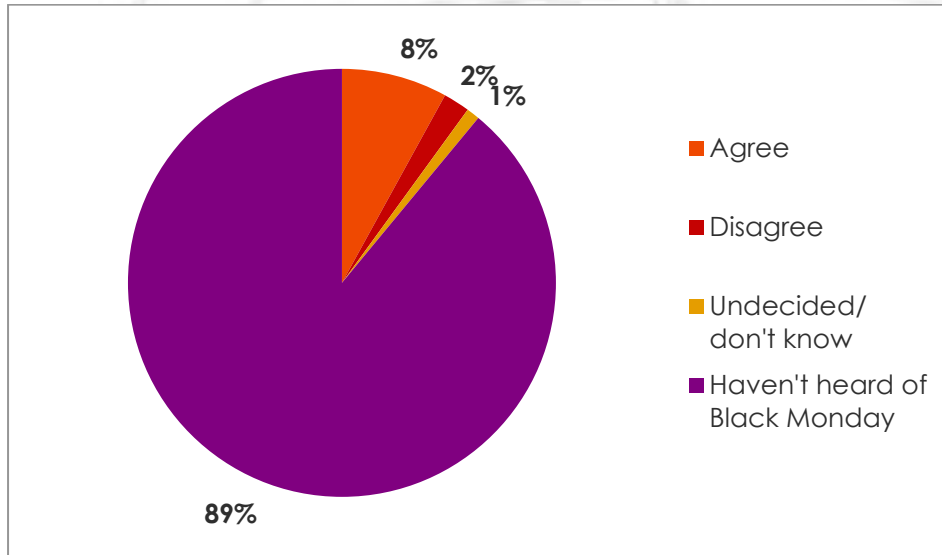
Combating corruption: Civil society efforts

A number of civil society organisations have focused on reducing corruption. In response to corruption scandals, these organisations formed a coalition named the Black Monday Movement to campaign against theft of public resources and impunity. The coalition

organises events every first Monday of the month to raise awareness of corruption and mobilize citizens to take action.

Among survey respondents, only one in 10 (11%) have heard about the Black Monday campaign. Of those who know of the campaign, 73% agree with it (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Awareness of and support for Black Monday campaign | Uganda | 2015

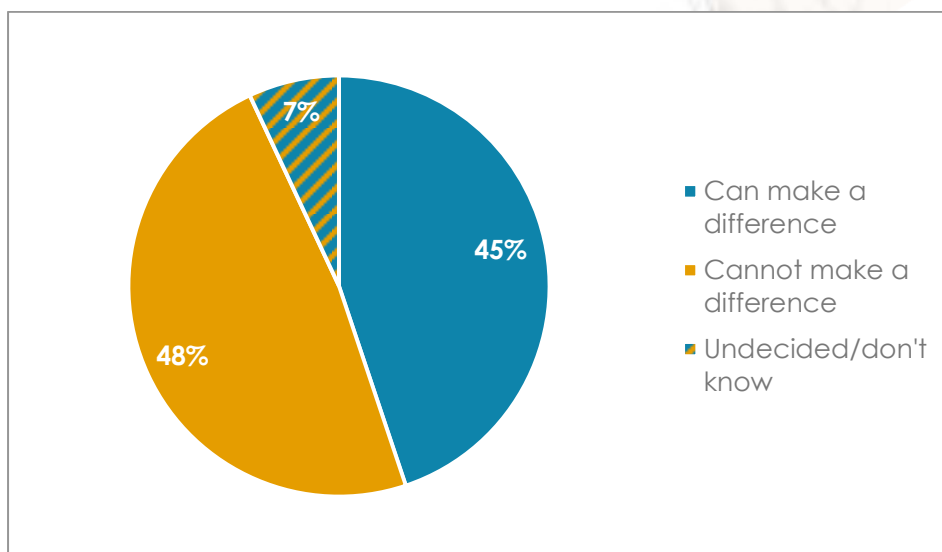


Respondents were asked: Have you heard about the “Black Monday” campaign organized by civil society organizations in this country to demand for greater accountability from public officials? (If yes:) Do you agree or disagree with the “Black Monday” campaign?

Combating corruption: Role of ordinary citizens

Less than half (45%) of Ugandans agree that ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption (Figure 7). A slightly greater number (48%) disagree, while 4% say they don't know.

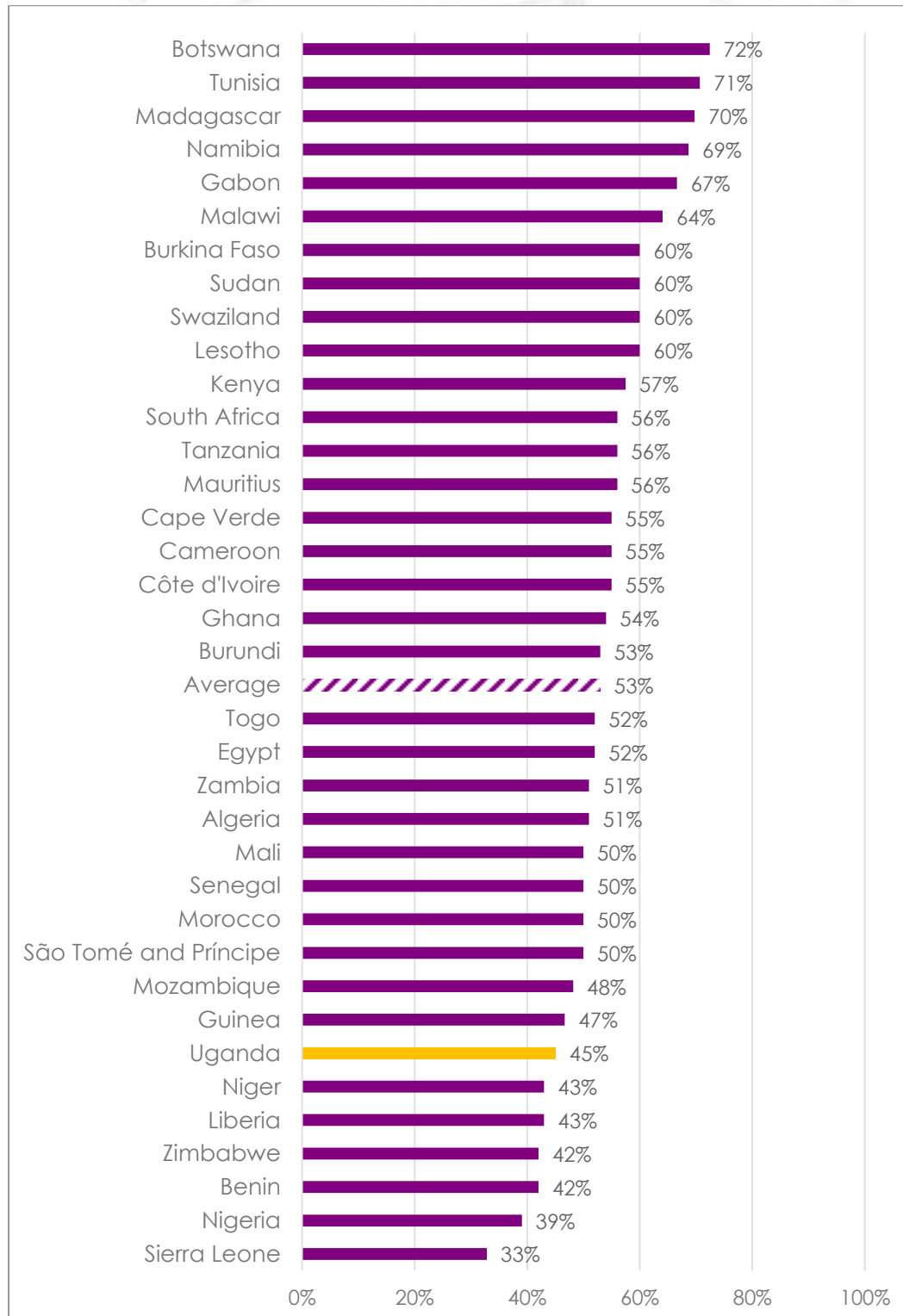
Figure 7: Views on whether ordinary citizens can make a difference in the fight against corruption | Uganda | 2015



Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: Ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption?

This response places Uganda among the least optimistic countries in Africa in terms of the ability of citizens to fight corruption (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Percentage of respondents who agree that ordinary citizens can make a difference in the fight against corruption | 36 countries | 2015

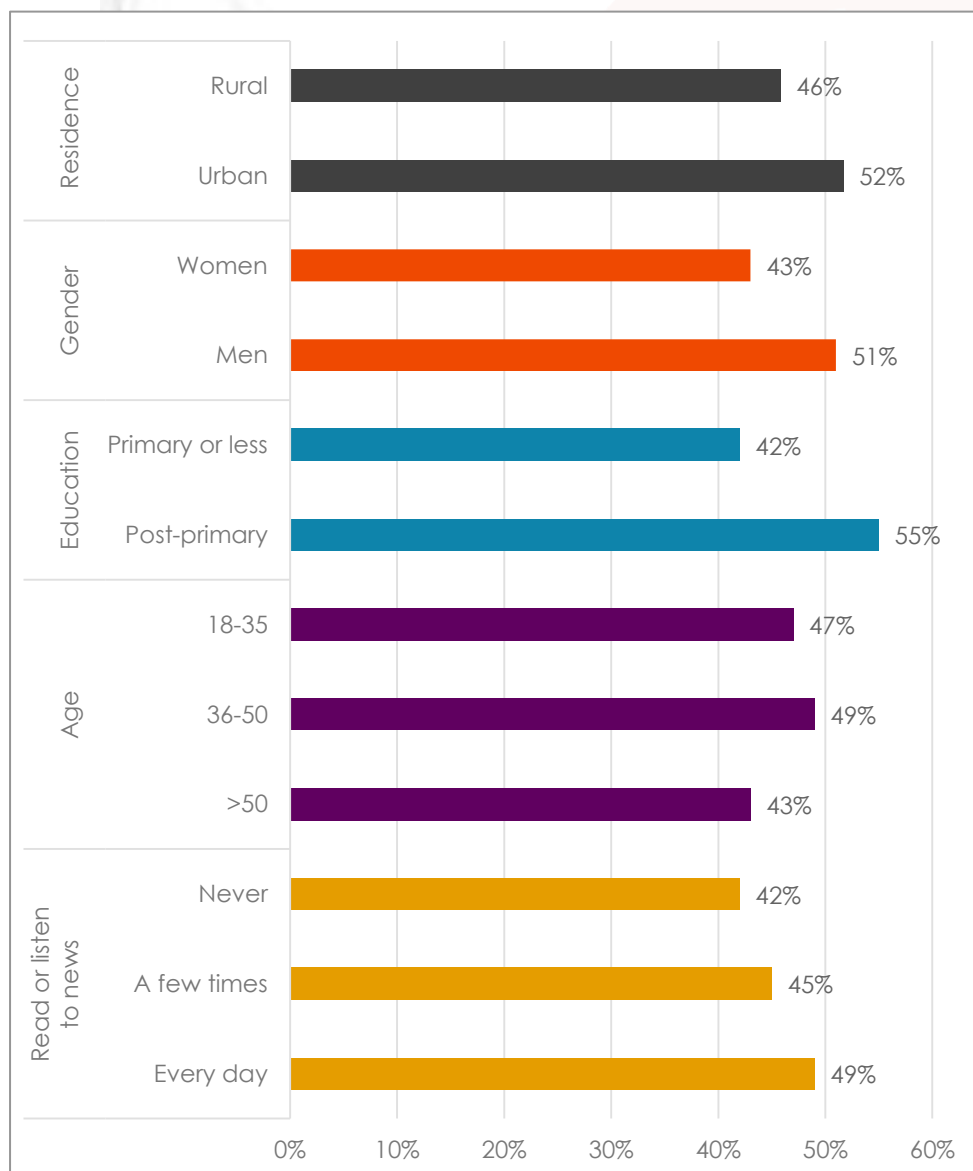


Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: Ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption?

Optimism about the ability of ordinary citizens to play a role in fighting corruption varies by respondents' residence, gender, education level, age, and news habits. The view that ordinary citizens can make a difference is somewhat more common among men (49%) than among women (43%) and somewhat more common among urban (52%) than rural residents (46%). Respondents with secondary and post-secondary education are more optimistic than those with less education, 55% vs. 42%. Younger citizens are more optimistic about fighting corruption than those aged 50 and above, as are more frequent news consumers compared to respondents who never read or listen to the news (Figure 9).

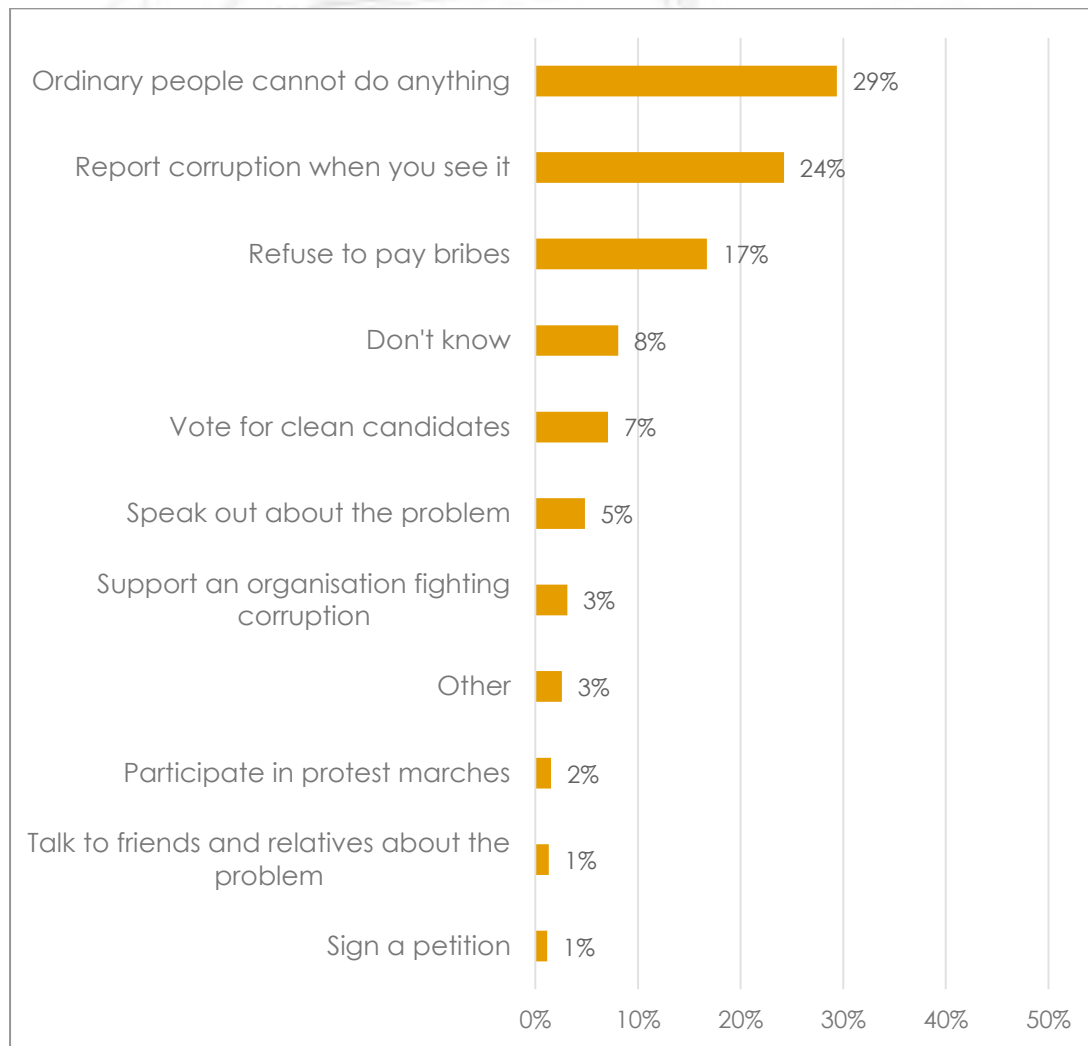
Respondents who say the government is performing poorly on fighting corruption are somewhat less likely to believe that ordinary citizens can make a difference in the anti-corruption fight ($r=0.061$, $p<.001$).

Figure 9: View that ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption | by residence, sex, education, age, and news habits | Uganda | 2015



Yet when asked about the most effective way to combat corruption, most respondents are able to mention one (Figure 10). One-quarter (24%) of respondents say reporting corruption when you see or experience it is the best way to combat it, while 17% say refusing to pay bribes is the most effective way. Still, the most frequent response (29%) is that there is nothing that ordinary people can do to combat corruption. In addition, 8% say they “don't know.”

Figure 10: Most effective way to combat corruption | Uganda | 2015



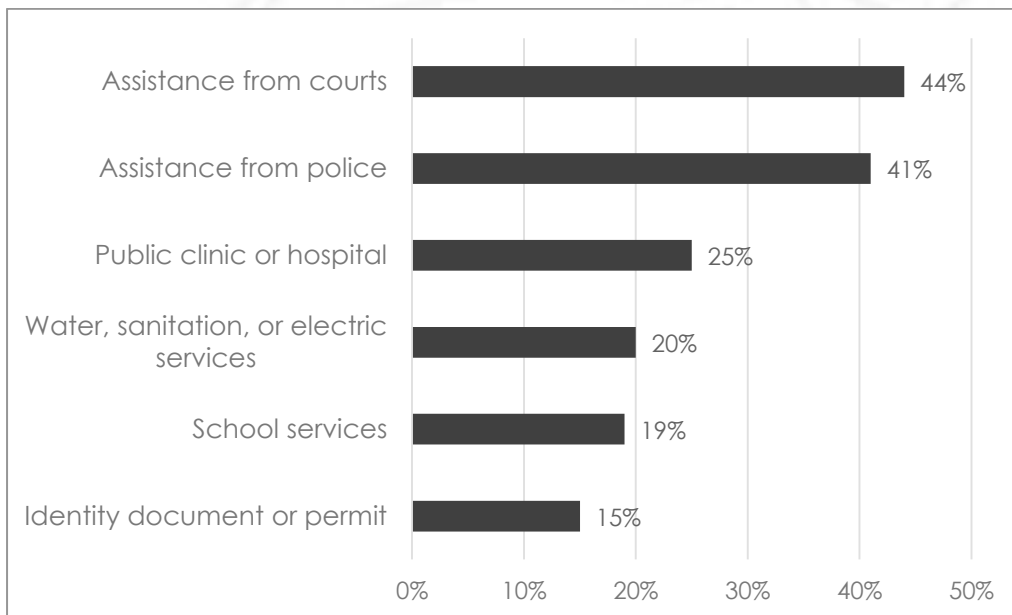
Respondents were asked: What is the most effective thing that an ordinary person like you can do to help combat corruption in this country?

Payment of bribes and reporting of corruption

To assess how common small-scale corruption is in Uganda, Afrobarometer asked survey respondents whether they had tried to obtain certain government services during the previous 12 months and, if so, whether they had to “pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour” in order to get the needed services.

Among respondents who tried to obtain services, almost four in 10 (38%) say they had to pay a bribe “once or twice,” “a few times,” or “often.” Bribe payment was most common in obtaining assistance from the courts (44%), followed by getting assistance from or avoiding problems with the police (41%) (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Payment of bribes to obtain government services | Uganda | 2015



Respondents were asked:

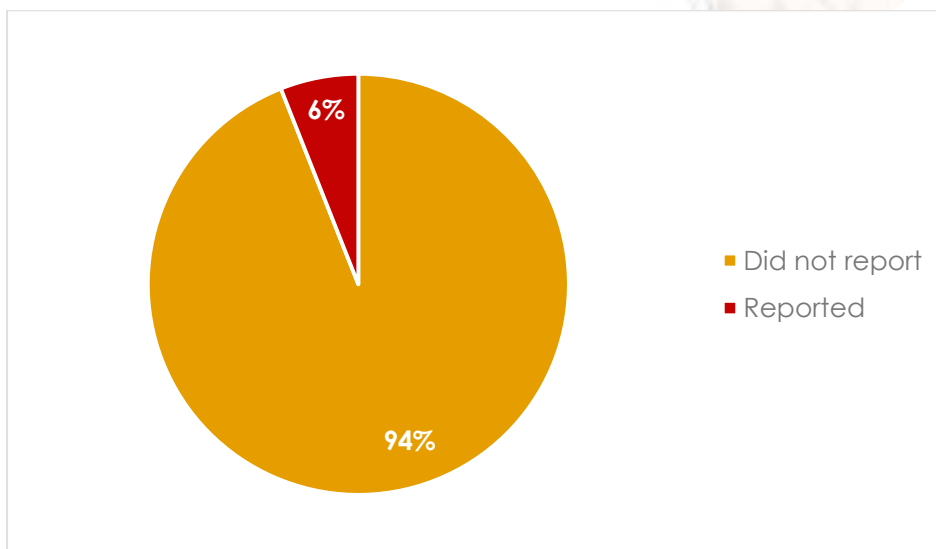
1. In the past 12 months, have you:

- Had contact with a public school?
- Had contact with a public clinic or hospital?
- Tried to get an identity document like a birth certificate, driver's license, passport or voter's card, or a permit, from government?
- Tried to get water, sanitation, or electric services from government?
- Requested assistance from the police?
- Had contact with the courts?

2. (If yes:) And how often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour [in order to obtain the needed services]? (% who say "once or twice," "a few times," or "many times")

Among those who say they paid a bribe at least once, only 6% say they reported the incident to a government official or someone in authority (Figure 12).

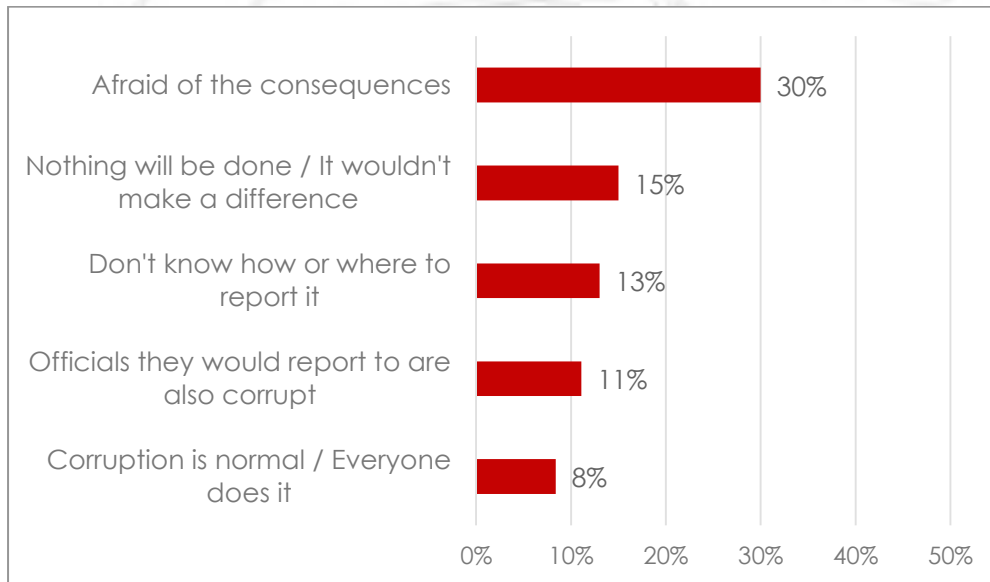
Figure 12: Payment and reporting of bribes | Uganda | 2015



Respondents were asked: If you ever paid a bribe for any of the services discussed above, did you report any of the incidents you mentioned to a government official or someone in authority?

When respondents are asked what they think is the main reason why many people do not report corruption when it occurs, the most common responses are that people are afraid of the consequences (cited by 30%) and that nothing would be done if they did report it (15%) (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Reasons why people do not report corruption | Uganda | 2015



Respondents were asked: *Some people say that many incidents of corruption are never reported. Based on your experience, what do you think is the main reason why many people do not report corruption when it occurs? (Figure shows most frequent responses.)*

Conclusion

Despite modest improvements in public perceptions of government anti-corruption efforts, the outlook for Uganda's fight against corruption is bleak if citizens do not believe that they can make a difference. Fighting corruption is not only the job of mandated agencies but is a collective responsibility that calls for combined efforts to succeed. The fight against corruption must start with each ordinary citizen (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012, 2015), in an environment that is favourable to their action.

Anti-corruption programs designed by the government and civil society organisations should aim at strengthening faith in citizens by making them realize how important and powerful they are in this fight. Survey results show that education and frequent news consumption are associated with stronger perception that citizens can make a difference in the fight against corruption. In addition, younger people tend to be more optimistic about their role, which could be a significant factor given that Uganda has one of the world's youngest populations (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2014). The government and civil society should critically consider these factors in designing anti-corruption programs, in addition to ensuring that reporting mechanisms are operationalized, impartial, efficient, and accessible to all citizens.

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

- ActionAid Uganda. (2015). Black Monday News Letter, Issue 29.
- Afrobarometer. (2012). Round 5 Uganda survey summary of results. Compiled by Wilsken Agencies Limited and the Centre for Democratic Governance (CDG). Available at http://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Summary%20of%20results/uga_r5_sor.pdf.
- Martini, M. (2013). Uganda: Overview of corruption and anti-corruption. Transparency International. Available at http://www.transparency.org/files/content/corruptionqas/379_Uganda_Overview_of_corruption_and_anticorruption.pdf.
- Parliament of Uganda. (2015). Law society petitions parliament over bribery in the judiciary. Available at <http://www.parliament.go.ug/new/index.php/about-parliament/parliamentary-news/154-law-society-petitions-parliament-over-bribery-in-the-judiciary>.
- Transparency International. (2015a). Corruption perceptions index. Available at <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2015>.
- Transparency International. (2015b). People and corruption: Africa survey 2015 – global corruption barometer. In partnership with Afrobarometer. Available at http://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/people_and_corruption_africa_survey_2015.
- Uganda Bureau of Statistics. (2014). Uganda national household survey 2012/2013. Available at http://www.ubos.org/onlinefiles/uploads/ubos/UNHS_12_13/2012_13%20UNHS%20Final%20Report.pdf.
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2012). Your no to corruption counts. Available at https://www.unodc.org/documents/yournocounts/print/call2action_A4_EN.pdf.
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. (2015). "Citizens can be soldiers in the fight against corruption," says UNODC regional representative at anti-corruption opening. Available at <https://www.unodc.org/middleeastandnorthafrica/en/web-stories/international-anti-corruption-day.html>.

John Martin Kewaza is a researcher for Hatchile Consult in Uganda.
Email: jm.kewaza@gmail.com.

Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

Core support for Afrobarometer Rounds 5 and 6 has been provided by the UK's Department for International Development (DfID), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank.

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

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 77 | 28 March 2016