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Combating gender-based violence tops Africa's agenda for women's rights

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## Summary

On her 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai touched the world with a United Nations speech calling for gender equality and the empowerment of girls and women. The following year, she made history as the youngest-ever recipient of the Nobel Prize (Malala Fund, 2013, 2014).

By then she had already suffered – and barely survived – a striking case of gender-based violence (GBV): At age 15, she was shot in the head by a Taliban gunman intent on silencing her advocacy for girls' right to an education (Britannica, 2023).

Yousafzai's case serves as a stark reminder that GBV, in the words of the United Nations' (1993) Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, is “a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women” and “one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men.”

The United Nations (1993) defines violence against women as “any act ... that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.” GBV encompasses physical violence such as beatings, but also extends to a variety of other abuse and mistreatment, including trafficking, forced and child marriage, sexual harassment, female genital cutting, work- and school-related intimidation, as well as marital rape and other forms of intimate partner violence.

GBV is extensive around the world: About one in three women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence (World Health Organization, 2021). Gruesome cases make headlines with frightening regularity; many more instances are never reported to anyone, forever hidden behind a wall of stigma and repressive social norms. Beyond their acute injuries, many victims suffer chronic pain, gynaecological problems, substance abuse, HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, and an increased risk of depression and suicide (World Bank, 2023a; Devries et al., 2011).

African states have taken important steps to address GBV. Fifty-two have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which is widely regarded as a global bill of women's rights and since 1992 formally acknowledges the importance of addressing violence against women as part of advancing these rights (United Nations, 1979). More recently, all United Nations member states are party to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), whose Goal No. 5 calls for the elimination of violence against women and girls. Through these, governments commit to identifying and addressing customs and practices that perpetuate violence against women, including through new laws and training of law enforcement officers.

African countries have also spearheaded regional efforts. For example, 44 states have ratified the Maputo Protocol, which commits states to addressing violence against women, including harmful traditional practices such as child marriage and female genital cutting (African Union, 2003). In 2010, African countries signed on to the Africa UNiTE campaign, part of then-UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon's global campaign to end violence against women and girls through joint efforts of all segments of African societies, from the private sector and schools and universities to civil society and government. At the national and local levels, countless government and civil society initiatives have targeted violence against women and girls (World Bank, 2023b; UNFPA & Equality Now, 2021). For example, seven countries (Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Guinea, Kenya, Senegal, Tanzania, and Uganda) have criminalised female genital cutting and allocated budgets for programmes aimed at ending the practice, and in 2022 the Republic of Congo and Côte d'Ivoire enacted legislation protecting women from various forms of domestic violence (Equality Now, 2022; World Bank, 2023b).



Notwithstanding these efforts, scholars believe that Africa has some of the world's highest rates of GBV (Zegeye et al., 2022), though research on the full extent of violence against women on the continent is relatively scarce.

This dispatch reports on a special survey module included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 (2021/2023) questionnaire to explore Africans' experiences and perceptions of gender-based violence.

Survey findings show that across Africa, GBV ranks as the most important women's-rights issue that citizens want their government and society to address. Almost four in 10 respondents say GBV is common in their community, though perceptions vary widely by country and demographic group. Most believe that the police take GBV cases seriously, but more than half think it's likely that a woman who reports such a crime will be criticised, harassed, or shamed by others in the community.

While most Africans say that men are never justified in using physical force to discipline their wives, only half think domestic violence should be treated as a criminal matter that requires the involvement of law enforcement, while the other half consider it a private matter to be resolved within the family.

## 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 9 surveys (2021/2023) cover 39 countries. (See Appendix Table A.1 for a list of countries and fieldwork dates.)

Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with samples of 1,200-2,400 adults that yield country-level results with margins of error of +/-2 to +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

This 39-country analysis is based on 54,436 interviews. The data are weighted to ensure nationally representative samples. When reporting multi-country averages, all countries are weighted equally (rather than in proportion to population size). For more details on country-level findings, see country dispatches at [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org).

## Key findings

- Africans see gender-based violence as the most important women's-rights-related issue that their government and society need to address, ahead of the scarcity of women in positions of power and inequalities in education and the workplace.
  - Perceptions of GBV as the top priority vary widely by country, ranging from just 5% in Mauritania to 69% in Cabo Verde.
- On average across 39 countries, almost four in 10 citizens (38%) say GBV is "somewhat common" or "very common" in their community.
  - In nine countries, at least half of respondents say violence against women is a common occurrence, led by Angola (62%) and Namibia (57%). Poor citizens are more likely to report that GBV happens frequently.
- More than two-thirds (69%) of Africans say it is "never" justified for a man to use physical force to discipline his wife.
  - But 31% consider a husband's use of force "sometimes" or "always" justified, including majorities in eight of the 39 surveyed countries. Poor and uneducated citizens are particularly likely to endorse this form of domestic violence.



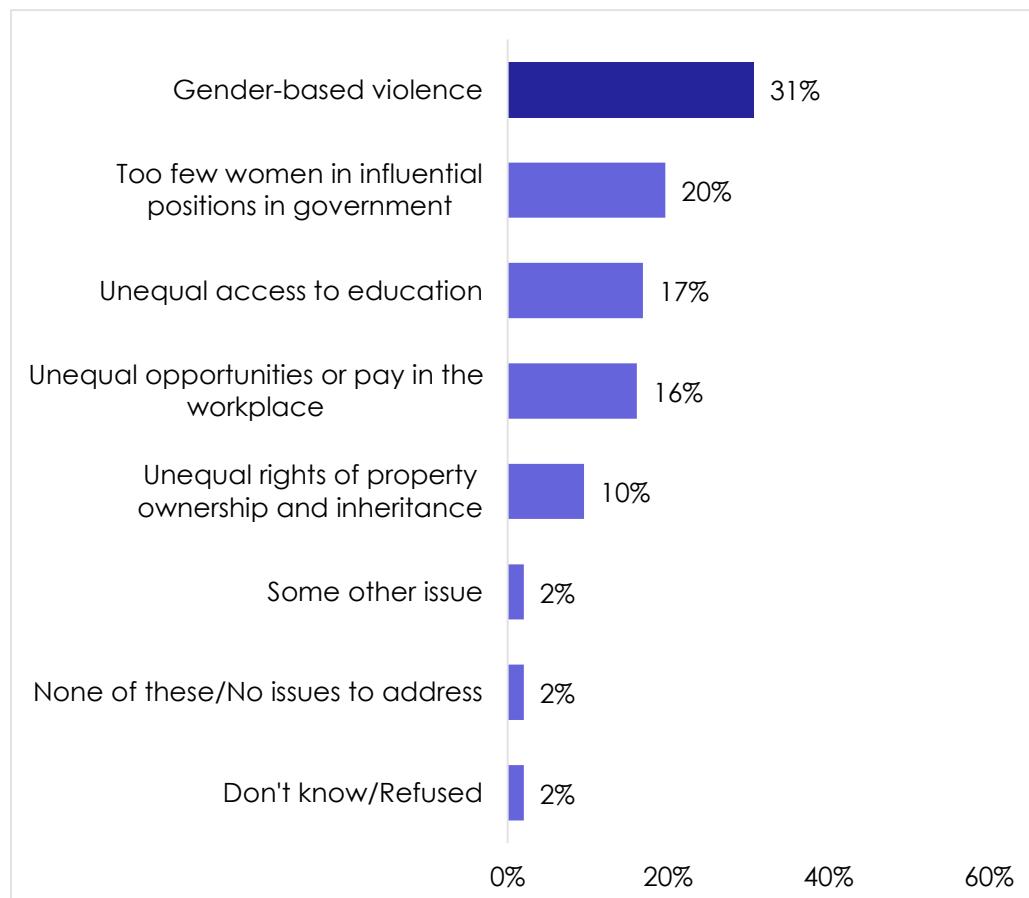
- More than half (52%) of respondents say it is “somewhat likely” or “very likely” that victims of GBV will be criticised, harassed, or shamed by others in the community if they report to the police.
  - However, most citizens (81%) consider it “somewhat likely” or “very likely” that the police will take cases of GBV seriously.
- Africans are divided on whether domestic violence should be treated as a criminal matter (50%) or a private matter (48%) to be resolved within the family.
- About six in 10 Africans (56%) say their government is doing a “fairly” or “very” good job of promoting equal rights and opportunities for women.
  - Approval reaches 83% in Tanzania, while only 16% of Sudanese consider their government’s efforts adequate.

## Most important women’s-rights issue

The prevalence of gender-based violence remains a critical concern in Africa. When asked what they consider the most important issue related to women’s rights that their government and society must address, citizens most frequently cite gender-based violence (31%) (Figure 1). Violence against women outranks the scarcity of women in influential positions (20%), unequal access to education (17%), and unequal opportunities or pay in the workplace (16%) as a top concern.

Women and men offer almost identical rankings of the most important women’s-rights issue.

**Figure 1: Most important women’s-right issue** | 39 countries | 2021/2023



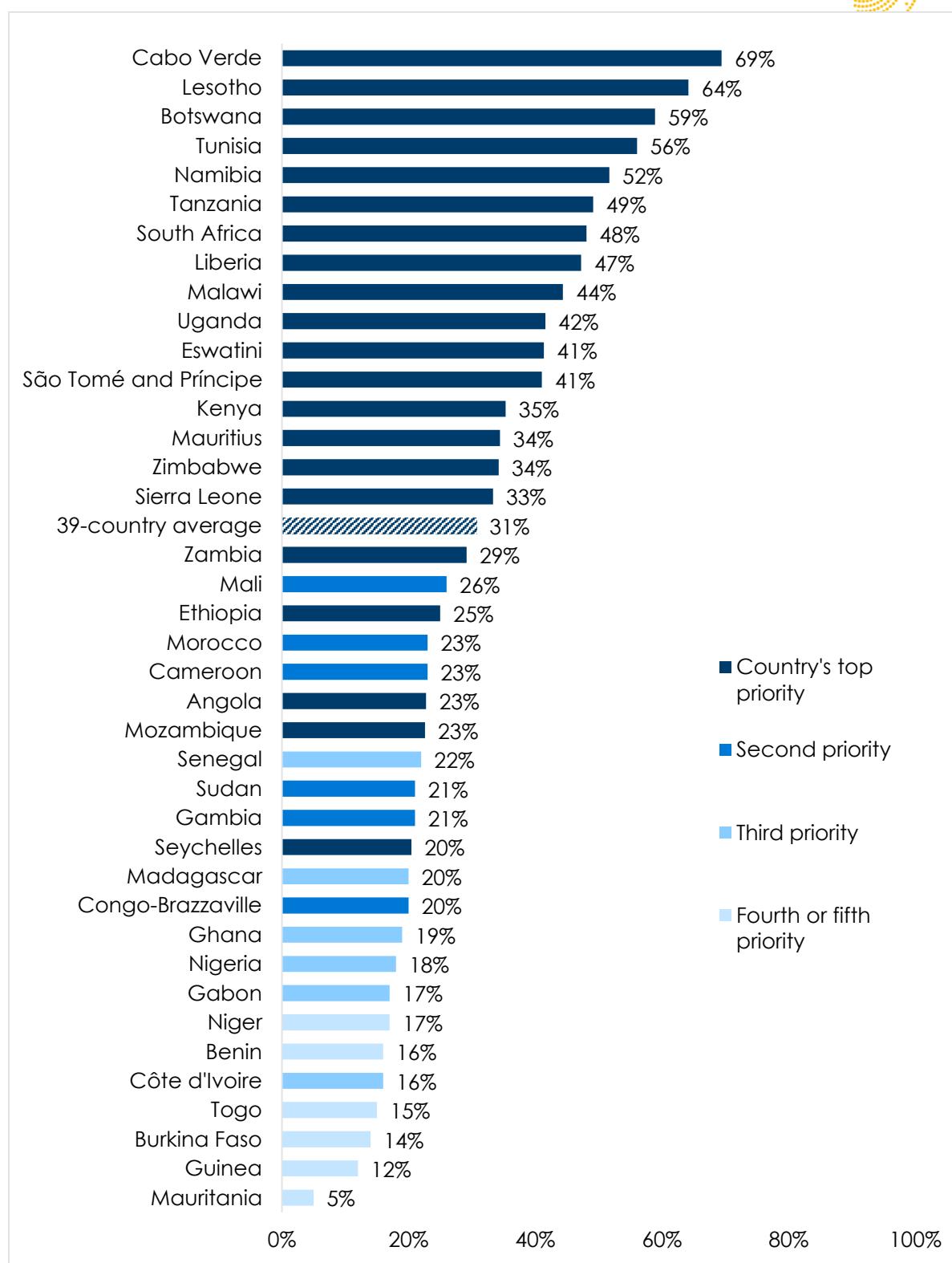
**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, which of the following issues related to women’s rights and equality do you think is the most important for our government and society to address?



Countries vary widely in how many citizens consider GBV the most critical women's-rights issue to address (Figure 2). GBV ranks as the top priority in 21 of the 39 surveyed countries, ranging up to 69% in Cabo Verde and 64% in Lesotho. It's the second-highest priority in six countries, third-highest in six others, and ranks fourth or fifth in six countries. In Mauritania, where unequal access to education is the most widely cited concern, only 5% prioritise GBV.



Figure 2: GBV as the most important women's-right issue | 39 countries | 2021/2023



**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, which of the following issues related to women's rights and equality do you think is the most important for our government and society to address? (% who say "gender-based violence")



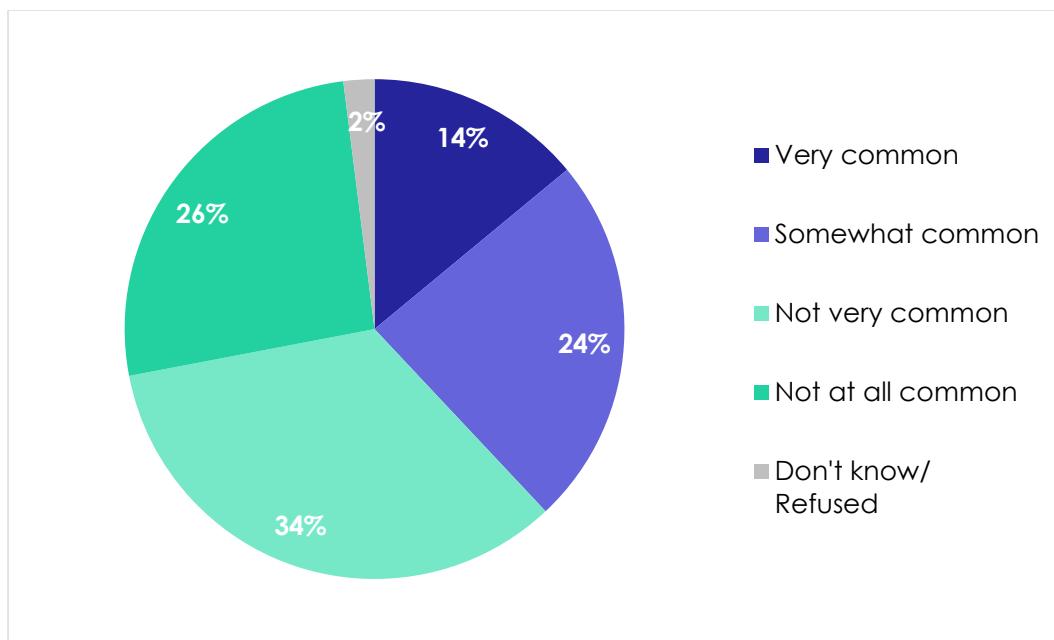
## How common is gender-based violence?

In line with the ranking of GBV as the most important women's-rights issue that African governments and society must address, almost four in 10 Africans (38%) say it is "somewhat common" (24%) or "very common" (14%) for men to use violence against women and girls in the home or the community, while 60% describe it as uncommon in the area where they live (Figure 3).

In fact, half or more of citizens in nine of the 39 surveyed countries say violence against women is a common occurrence, led by Angola (62%) and Namibia (57%). Even in countries where it is reported as least common, about one-fifth to one-fourth of respondents say GBV is a frequent occurrence, as in Tanzania (19%), Ghana (21%), Benin (22%), the Gambia (22%), and Burkina Faso (24%) (Figure 4).

Women (40%) are slightly more likely than men (36%) to say that GBV is a common occurrence, as are urban (40%) compared to rural (36%) residents (Figure 5). This perception is also somewhat more prevalent among young respondents (41% of those aged 18-35), the educated (37%-40% of those with primary education or more), and the poor (42% of those experiencing high lived poverty<sup>1</sup>) than among their various counterparts.

**Figure 3: Frequency of gender-based violence | 39 countries | 2021/2023**

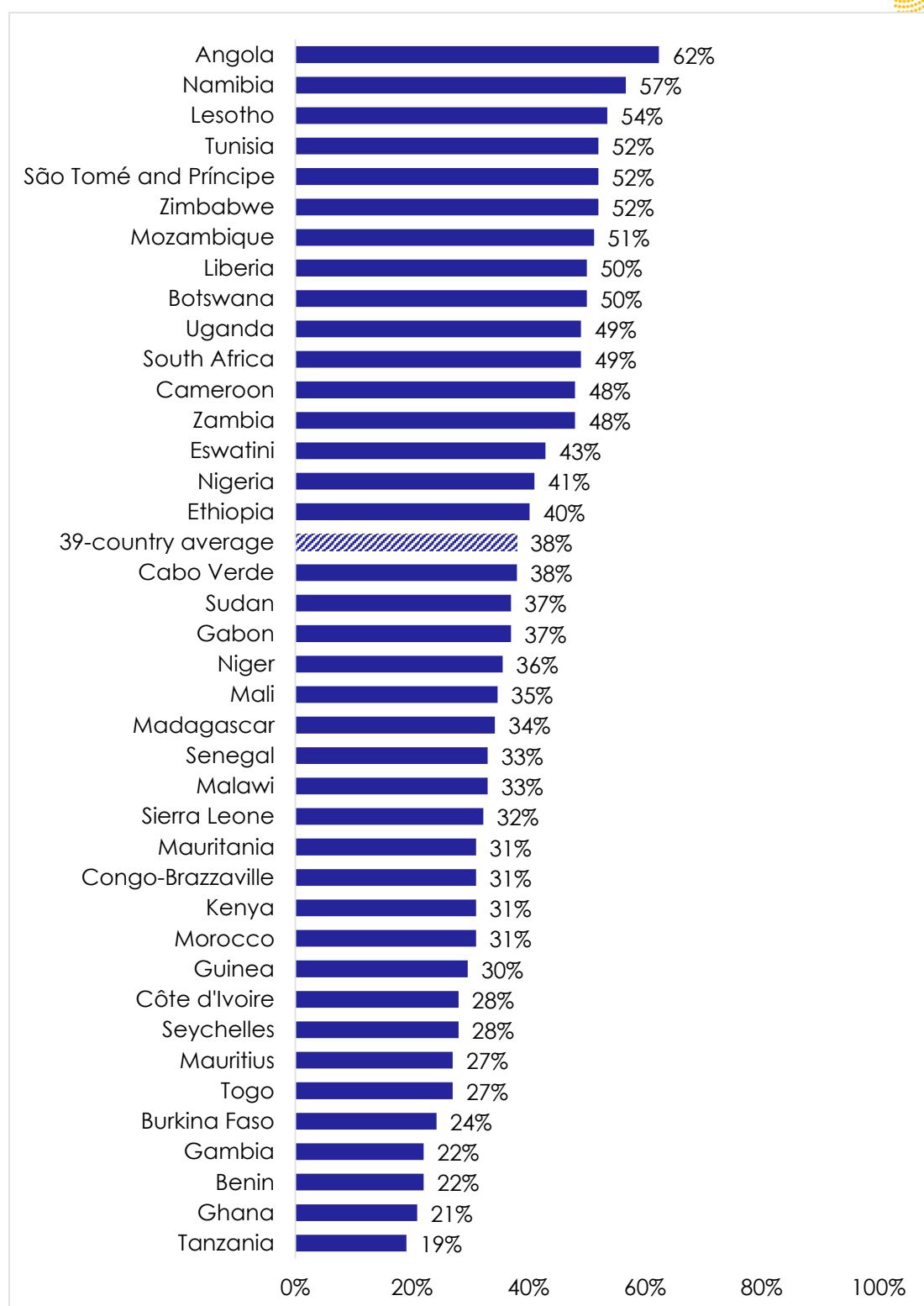


**Respondents were asked:** In this area, how common do you think it is for men to use violence against women and girls in the home or the community?

<sup>1</sup> Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes and Patel (2022).



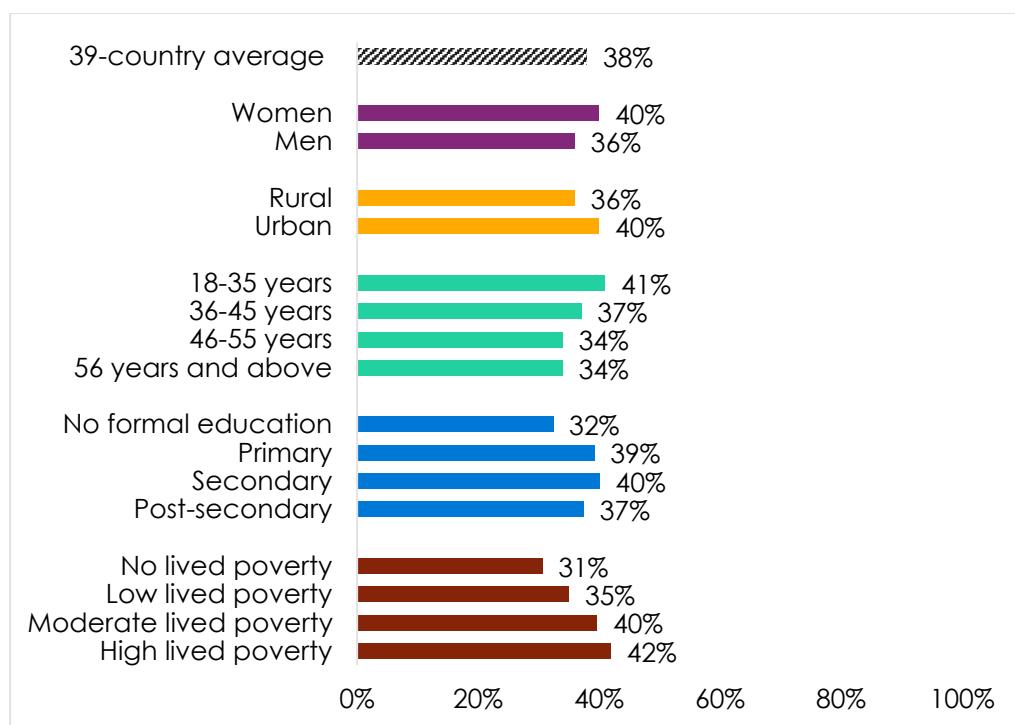
**Figure 4: GBV perceived as somewhat/very common** | 39 countries | 2021/2023



**Respondents were asked:** In this area, how common do you think it is for men to use violence against women and girls in the home or the community? (% who say "somewhat common" or "very common")



**Figure 5: GBV perceived as somewhat/very common | by demographic group** | 39 countries | 2021/2023



**Respondents were asked:** In this area, how common do you think it is for men to use violence against women and girls in the home or the community? (% who say "somewhat common" or "very common")

### Using physical force against a spouse

One of the most common types of GBV is intimate partner violence (IPV). Worldwide, more than one-fourth (27%) of women aged 15-49 report having experienced some form of physical and/or sexual violence at the hands of a partner (World Health Organization, 2021; UNICEF, 2017). While IPV is present in all societies, other studies have found that it is most common in sub-Saharan Africa (33% of women aged 15-49, including 20% in the past 12 months) and South Asia (35%, including 19% in the past year) (World Bank, 2022, 2023c). Some researchers argue that acceptance of wife-beating in some African countries contributes to a higher prevalence of IPV as well as less reporting of IPV incidents (Zegeye et al., 2022; Cools & Kotsadam, 2017; Devries et al., 2013; Pavlou & Knowles, 2009).

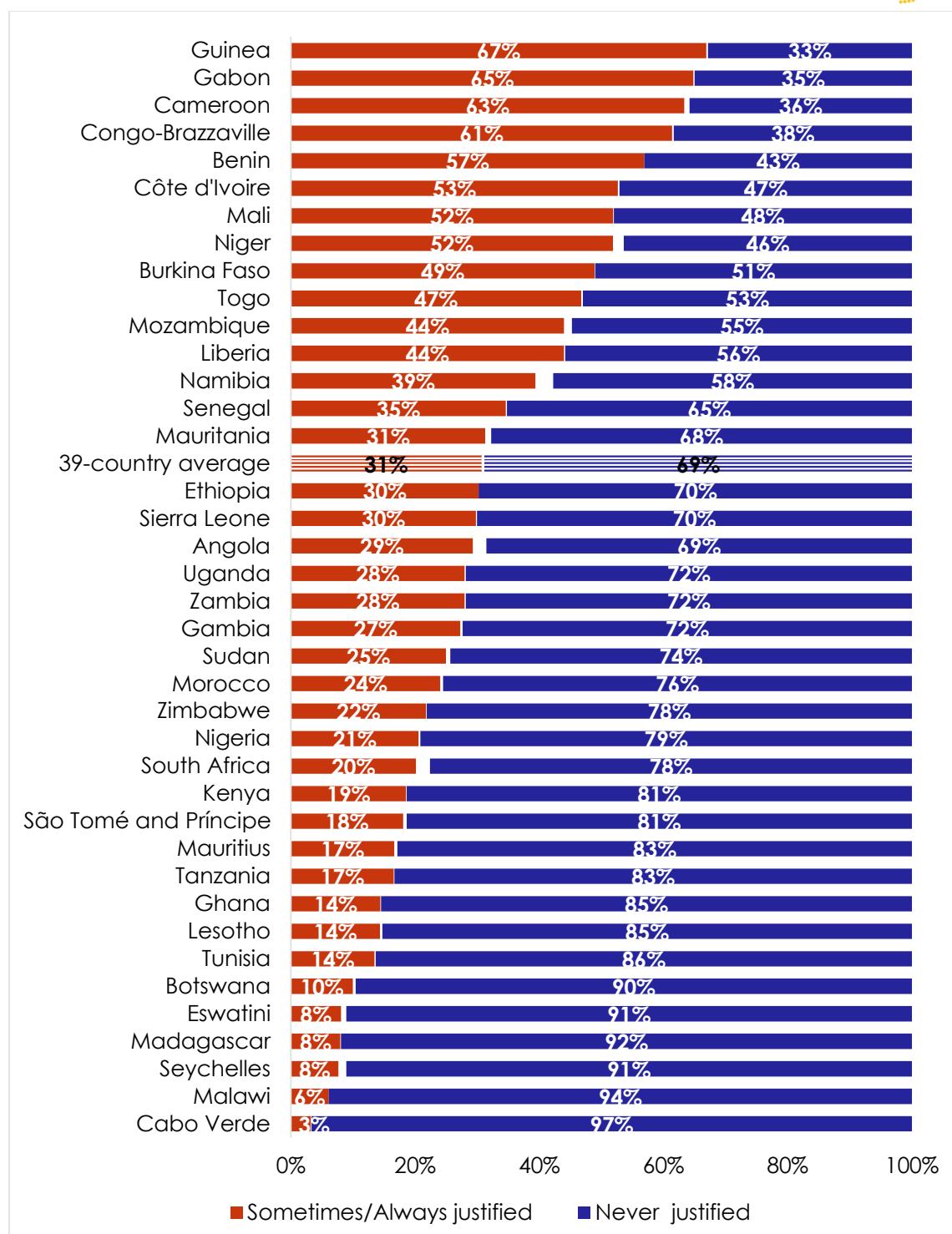
On average across the 39 countries that Afrobarometer surveyed in 2021/2023, more than two-thirds (69%) of Africans say it is "never justified" for a man to use physical force to discipline his wife. However, nearly one in three (31%) say it is "sometimes" or "always" justified (Figure 6).<sup>2</sup>

Majorities in eight of the 39 surveyed countries endorse the use of physical force, including about two-thirds of Guineans (67%) and Gabonese (65%). The 10 countries recording the highest levels of support for the use of physical force are all in West or Central Africa. Fewer than one in four citizens agree in 17 countries, and tolerance drops below one in 10 in Cabo Verde (3%), Malawi (6%), Seychelles (8%), Madagascar (8%), and Eswatini (8%).

<sup>2</sup> In its Round 7 (2016/2018) surveys in 34 countries, Afrobarometer found that 71% of respondents said it was "never" justified "for a man to beat his wife," while 28% said it was "sometimes" or "always" justified (Lardies, Dryding, & Logan, 2019). However, direct comparisons between Round 7 and Round 9 results are not advisable because of the change in question wording, from "for a man to beat his wife" to "for a man to use physical discipline on his wife if she has done something he doesn't like or thinks is wrong."



**Figure 6: Is it justified for men to physically discipline their wives? | 39 countries | 2021/2023**



**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following actions, please tell me whether you think it can always be justified, sometimes be justified, or never be justified: For a man to use physical discipline on his wife if she has done something he doesn't like or thinks is wrong?

Women are only slightly less likely than men to approve of the use of physical force (28% vs. 33%), as are urban compared to rural residents (28% vs. 33%) (Figure 7). Men's greater support for the practice holds true in most countries, with double-digit gaps in 10 countries, ranging up to 16 percentage points in Morocco and 15 points in Sudan. But in Ethiopia,

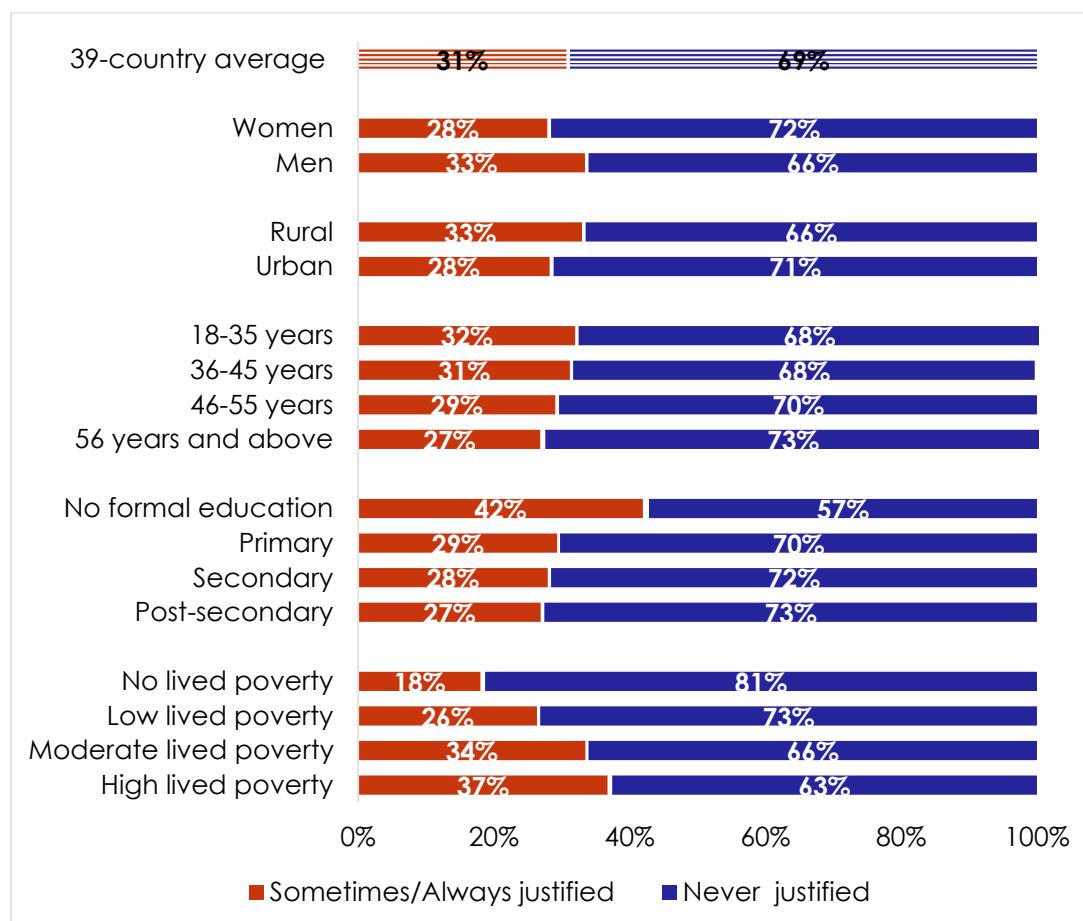


Namibia, and Niger, more women than men (by 3-5 percentage points) endorse the use of physical force against women.

And tolerance for this form of violence does not appear to be dying out: The youngest respondents are actually more likely to endorse it than the oldest (32% vs. 27%).

The view that men are never justified in physically disciplining their wives grows in strength as respondents' education level increases, ranging from 57% of those with no formal schooling to 70%-73% of those with primary, secondary, or post-secondary qualifications. Opposition to this form of violence also increases sharply with citizens' economic status, from 63% of those experiencing high lived poverty to 81% of well-off respondents.

**Figure 7: Is it justified for men to physically discipline their wives? | by demographic group | 39 countries | 2021/2023**



**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following actions, please tell me whether you think it can always be justified, sometimes be justified, or never be justified: For a man to use physical discipline on his wife if she has done something he doesn't like or thinks is wrong?

### Is domestic violence a criminal or private issue?

While most Africans reject men's use of physical force against their wives, do they see domestic violence as a criminal matter or a private matter?

Citizens are almost evenly divided: Half (50%) believe it is a criminal matter that requires the involvement of the police, while about the same proportion (48%) consider it a private matter that should be resolved within the family (Figure 8).

But this balanced 39-country average obscures wide variation across countries (Figure 9). Overwhelming majorities in Botswana (85%), Seychelles (82%), São Tomé and Príncipe (81%),

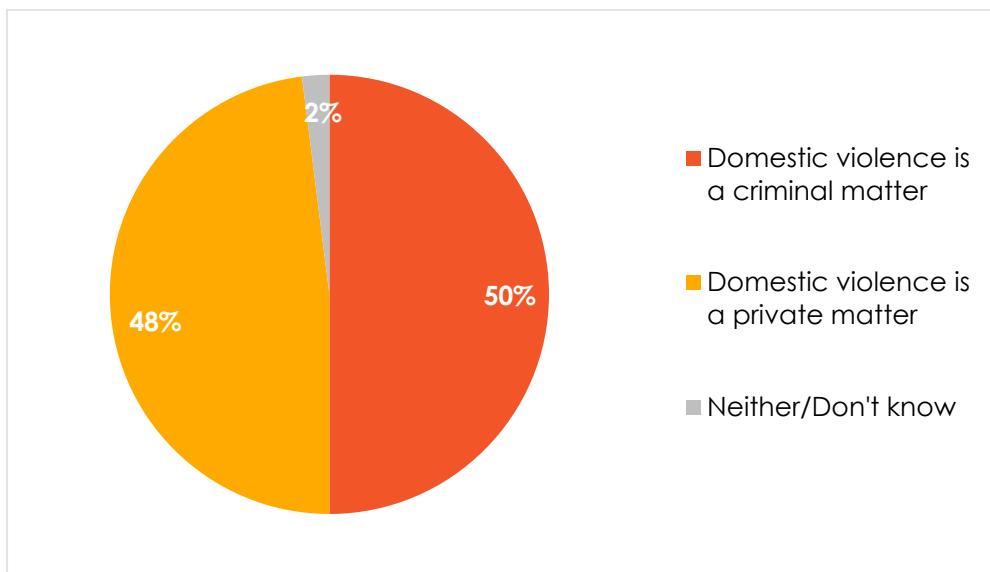


and Cabo Verde (80%) say domestic violence should be treated as a criminal matter, while fewer than one in four see it that way in Niger (11%), Sudan (20%), Mali (23%), and Guinea (23%). In 19 of the 39 countries, majorities see domestic violence as a private matter.

Perceptions of domestic violence as a criminal matter are considerably more common among women (54%) and urbanites (58%) than among men (46%) and rural residents (42%) (Figure 10). This view gains strength as citizens' education and economic levels rise. While only one-third (33%) of those with no formal schooling see domestic violence as a criminal matter, almost twice as many (63%) of those with post-secondary education do. Similarly, a 21-percentage-point gap separates well-off citizens (64%) from the poorest (43%).

Older adults are more likely to want domestic violence handled within the family than young respondents (51% vs. 46%).

**Figure 8: Is domestic violence a criminal or private matter? | 39 countries**  
| 2021/2023



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

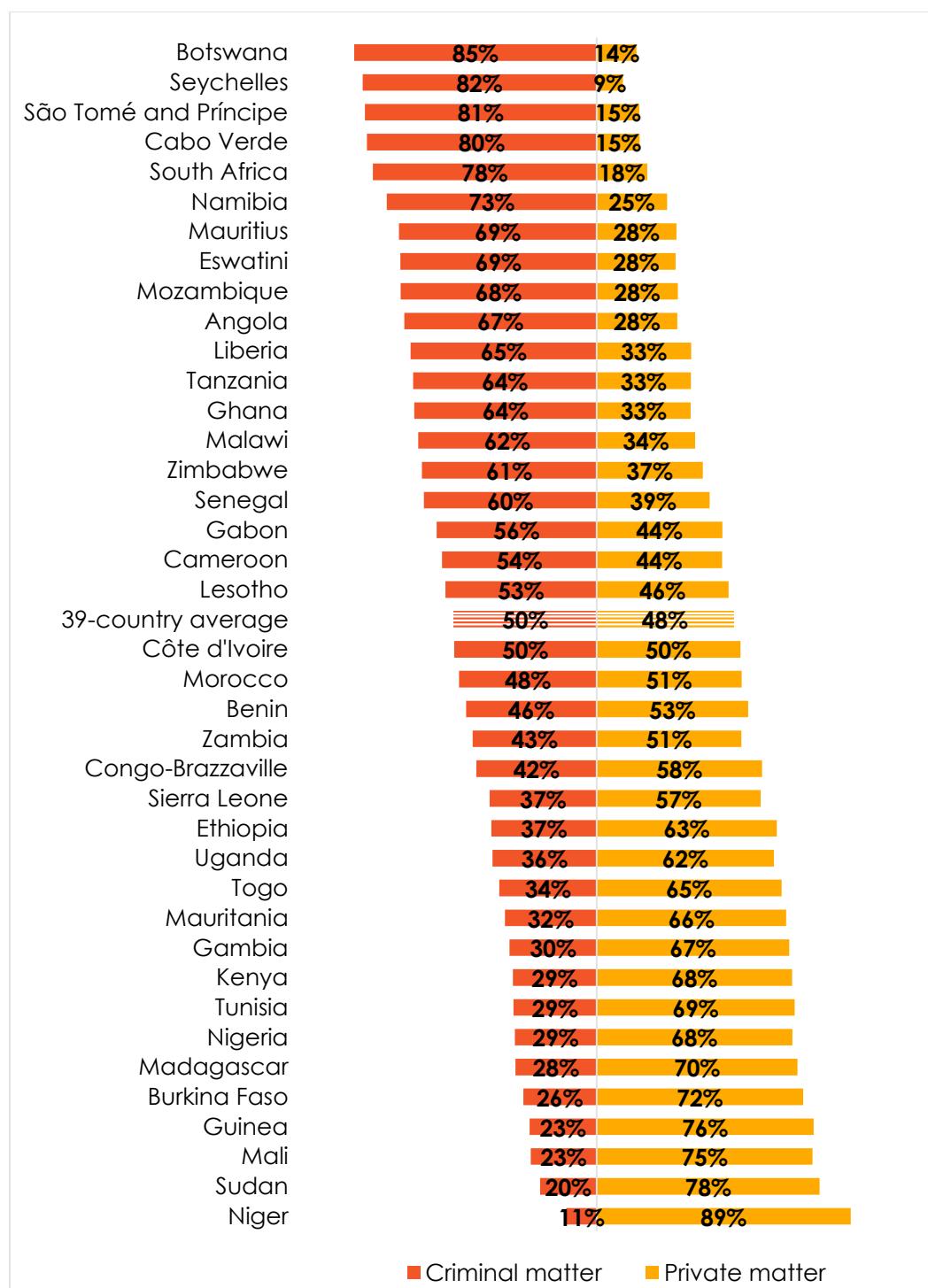
Statement 1: Domestic violence is a private matter that needs to be handled and resolved within the family.

Statement 2: Domestic violence is a criminal matter whose full resolution requires the involvement of law enforcement agencies.

(% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)



**Figure 9: Is domestic violence a criminal or private matter? | by country**  
 | 39 countries | 2021/2023



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

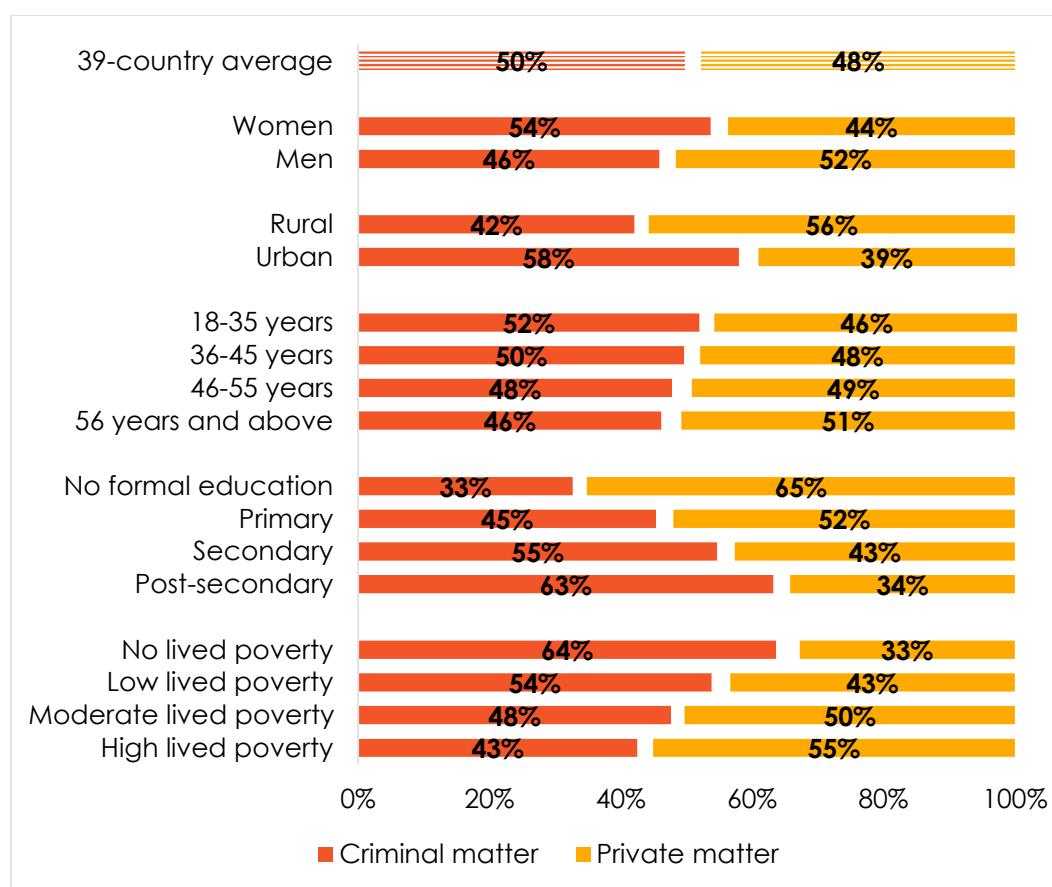
Statement 1: Domestic violence is a private matter that needs to be handled and resolved within the family.

Statement 2: Domestic violence is a criminal matter whose full resolution requires the involvement of law enforcement agencies.

(% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)



**Figure 10: Is domestic violence a criminal or private matter? | by demographic group | 39 countries | 2021/2023**



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: Domestic violence is a private matter that needs to be handled and resolved within the family.

Statement 2: Domestic violence is a criminal matter whose full resolution requires the involvement of law enforcement agencies.

(% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)

## Response to GBV

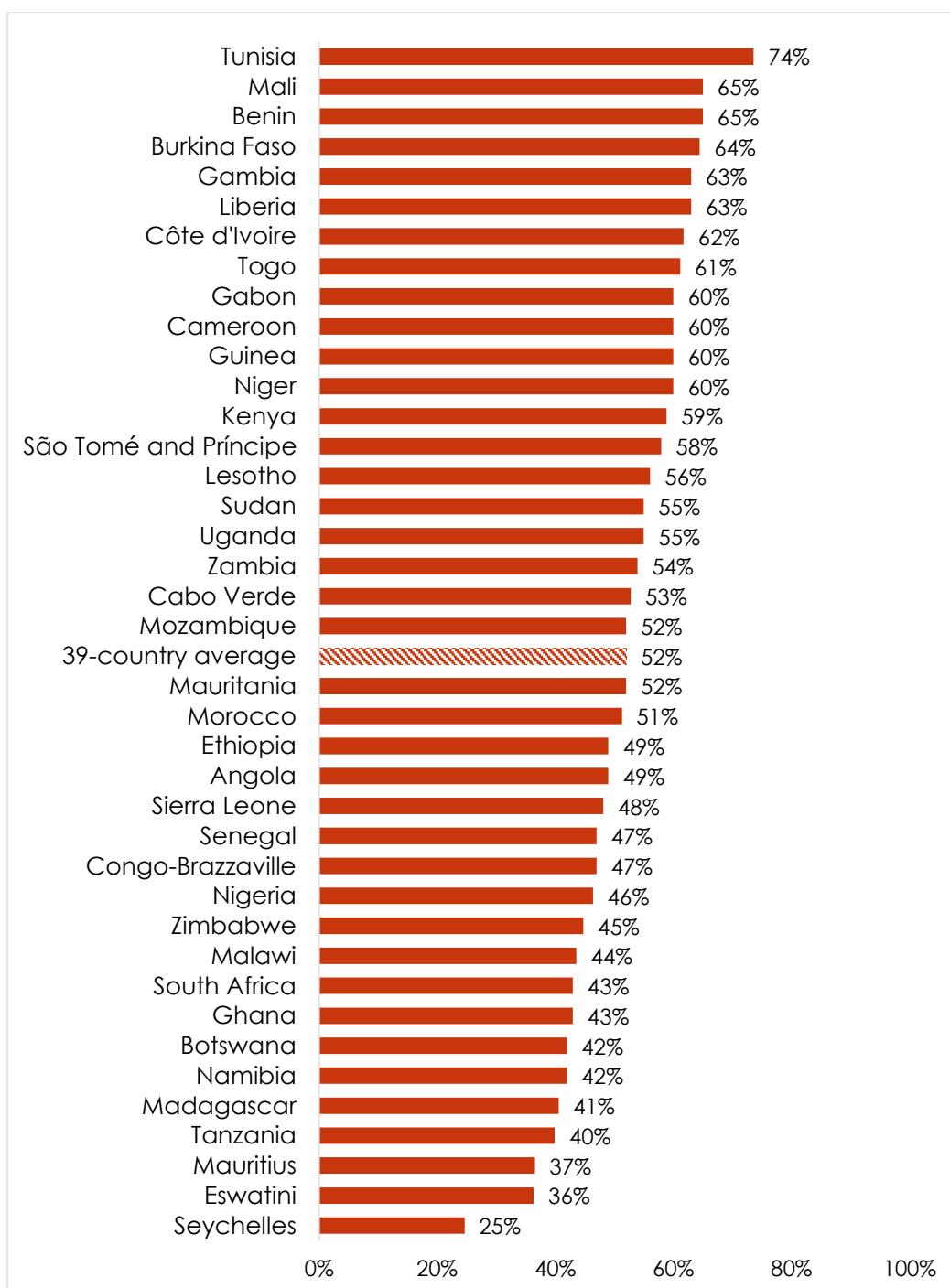
Research has consistently shown that violence against women is grossly under-reported, for reasons that include fear of not being believed, doubts about whether the crime will be taken seriously, and fear of the attacker (Palermo, Bleck, & Peterman, 2014). Studies have shown that in most countries, fewer than four in 10 women who have experienced violence seek help of any kind; even fewer – less than 10% – seek help from the police (UN Women, 2023; United Nations Statistics Division, 2015). Social stigma, a lack of female officers and officers with GBV training, and the persistence of patriarchal attitudes within the security forces, among other factors, can make it especially difficult for women to report cases of GBV.

### Community response

In the Afrobarometer surveys, more than half (52%) of respondents say it is "somewhat likely" (28%) or "very likely" (24%) that a woman who reports GBV to the authorities will be criticised, harassed, or shamed by others in the community. Majorities in 22 countries share this view, ranging up to three in four citizens (74%) in Tunisia (Figure 11). Seychelles (25%) is the only surveyed country where fewer than one-third of citizens consider it likely that women who report violent crimes will be re-victimised by the community response.



**Figure 11: Likely that a woman will be criticised, harassed, or shamed for reporting GBV | 39 countries | 2021/2023**

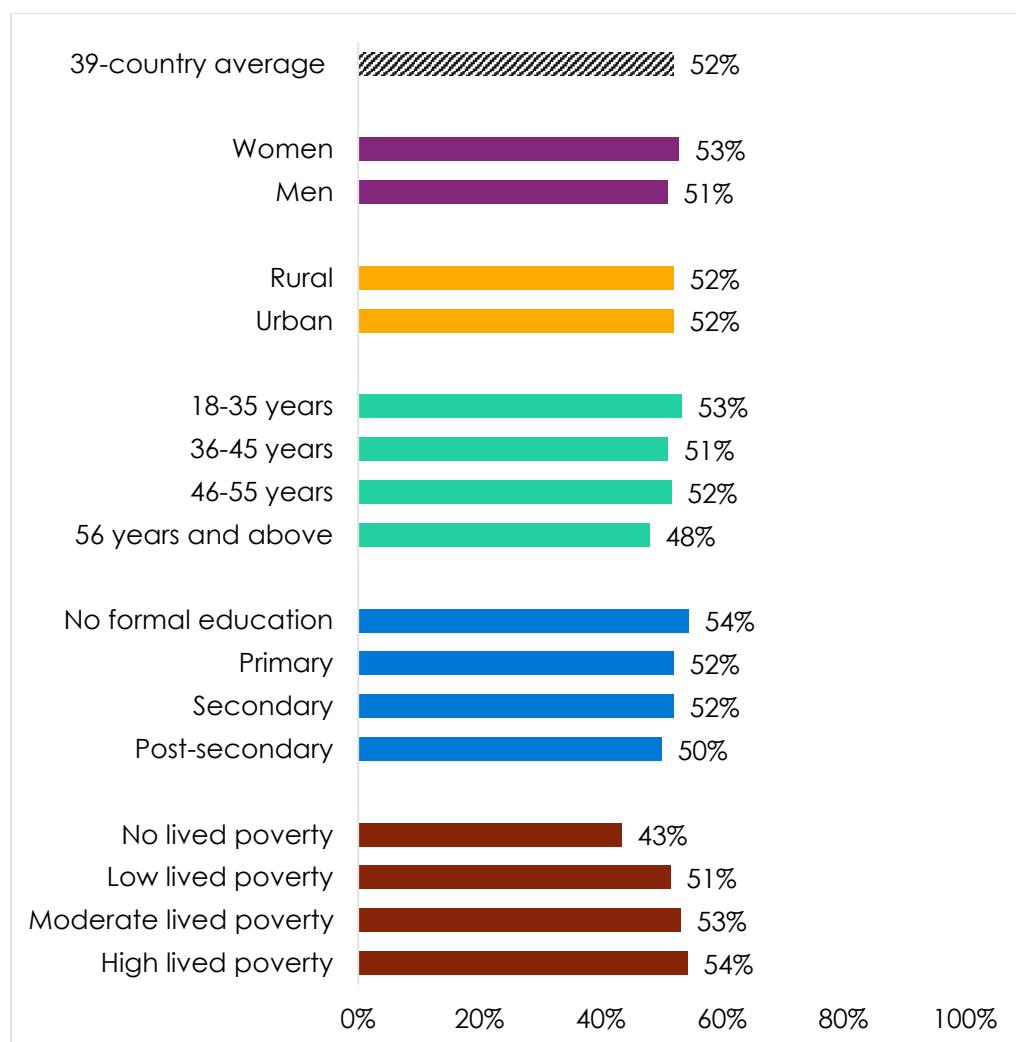


**Respondents were asked:** If a woman in your community goes to the police to report being a victim of gender-based violence, for example, to report a rape or report being physically abused by her husband, how likely or unlikely is it that the following things might occur: She will be criticised, harassed, or shamed by others in the community? (% who say "somewhat likely" or "very likely")

Differences by demographic group are modest – meaning majorities in most groups consider such a backlash likely. Economic status is an exception: Better-off respondents (43%) are less likely to think women who report incidents of GBV will suffer criticism, harassment, or shaming than their poorer counterparts (51%-54%) (Figure 12). Older citizens are also less likely than the youth to expect such negative consequences (48% vs. 53%).



**Figure 12: Likely that a woman will be criticised, harassed, or shamed for reporting GBV | by demographic group | 39 countries | 2021/2023**



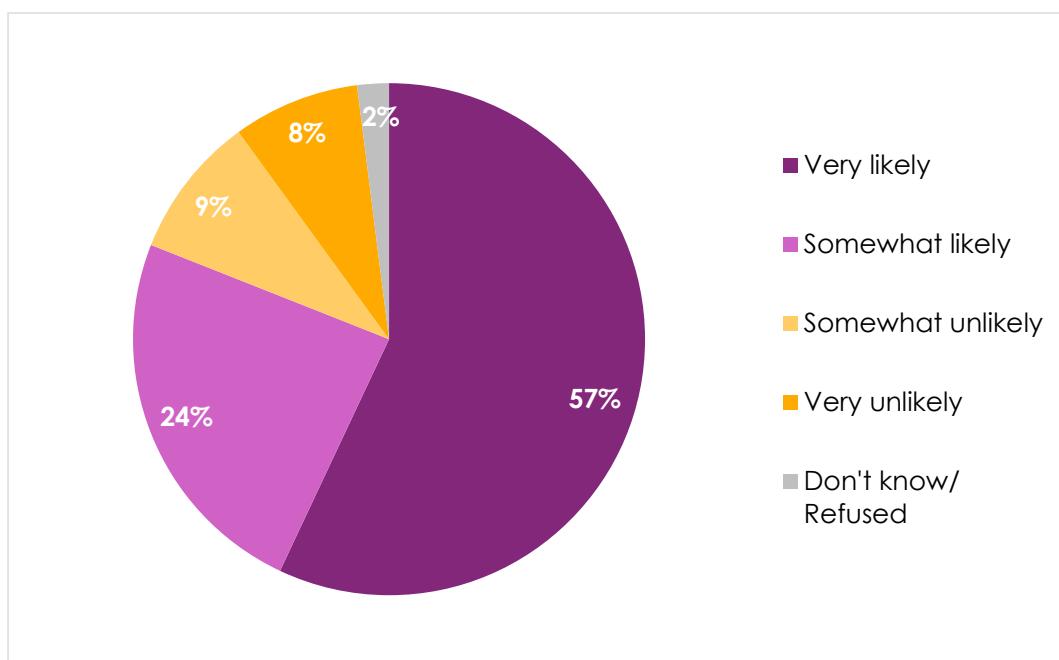
**Respondents were asked:** If a woman in your community goes to the police to report being a victim of gender-based violence, for example, to report a rape or report being physically abused by her husband, how likely or unlikely is it that the following things might occur: She will be criticised, harassed, or shamed by others in the community? (% who say "somewhat likely" or "very likely")

#### Police response

Despite fairly negative expectations regarding the community's response, most Africans believe that the police will respond appropriately to reported cases of GBV: Eight in 10 (81%) see it as likely that the police will take such reports seriously, including 57% who say it is "very likely" (Figure 13).



**Figure 13: Do the police take GBV cases seriously? | 39 countries | 2021/2023**



**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 the following things might occur: Her case will be taken seriously by the police?

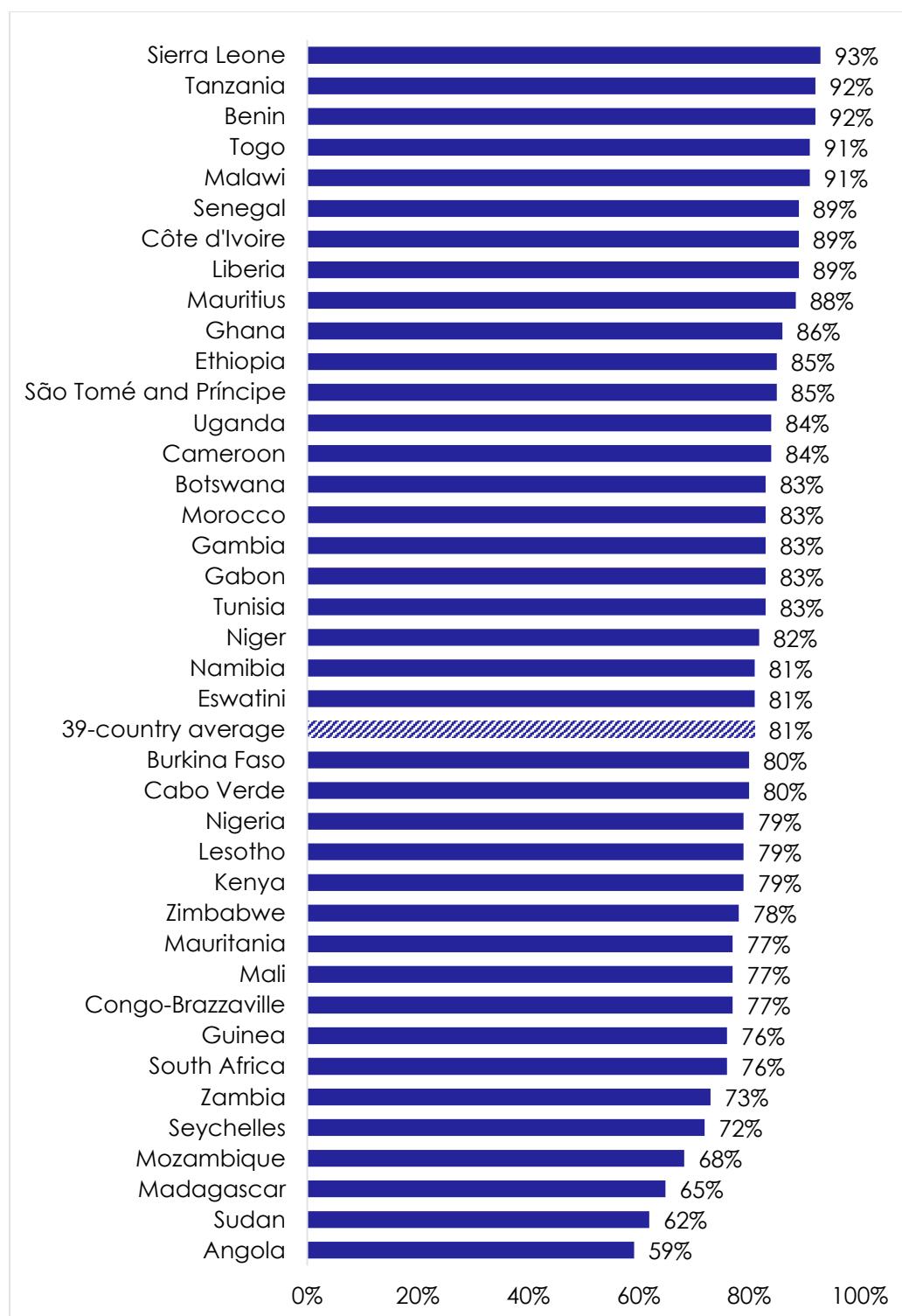
Majorities in all surveyed countries share this view (Figure 14). Several countries that have made notable recent efforts to combat GBV record particularly strong confidence in the police response, perhaps reflecting perceptions of political commitment on this issue. Sierra Leone, where President Julius Maada Bio's declaration of rape as a national emergency and the 2019 strengthening of the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act helped bring needed attention to the problem (M'Cormack-Hale & Twum, 2022), leads the field with an overwhelming 93% of citizens who consider it likely that the police will take GBV cases seriously. Tanzania (92%) saw a decline in reported GBV cases from 42,414 in 2020 to 29,373 in 2021 following collaborative initiatives with UN agencies and civil society organisations, including the establishment of one-stop centres for GBV survivors and gender desks within police stations (Legal and Human Rights Centre, 2022; Msafiri, 2023). In Benin (92%), medical certificates for prosecuting GBV cases were made free in 2022, after a new law in 2021 expanded the definition of GBV and instituted or strengthened penalties for sexual harassment, rape, child and forced marriage, female genital cutting, and sexual incidents between teachers and students (World Bank, 2023d). And in Malawi (91%), President Lazarus Chakwera committed to seeking harsher penalties against GBV perpetrators as one of his priorities upon taking office (Masina, 2020; Chunga & Nedi, 2022).

Only three countries record majorities of fewer than two-thirds who say the police are likely to treat GBV cases seriously: Angola (59%), Sudan (62%), and Madagascar (65%).

Confidence that the police will take GBV cases seriously is high – above three-fourths – across key demographic groups, though slightly higher among men (82%), the most educated (82%), and well-off respondents (83%) than among women (79%), those without formal schooling (79%), and the poorest citizens (78%) (Figure 15).



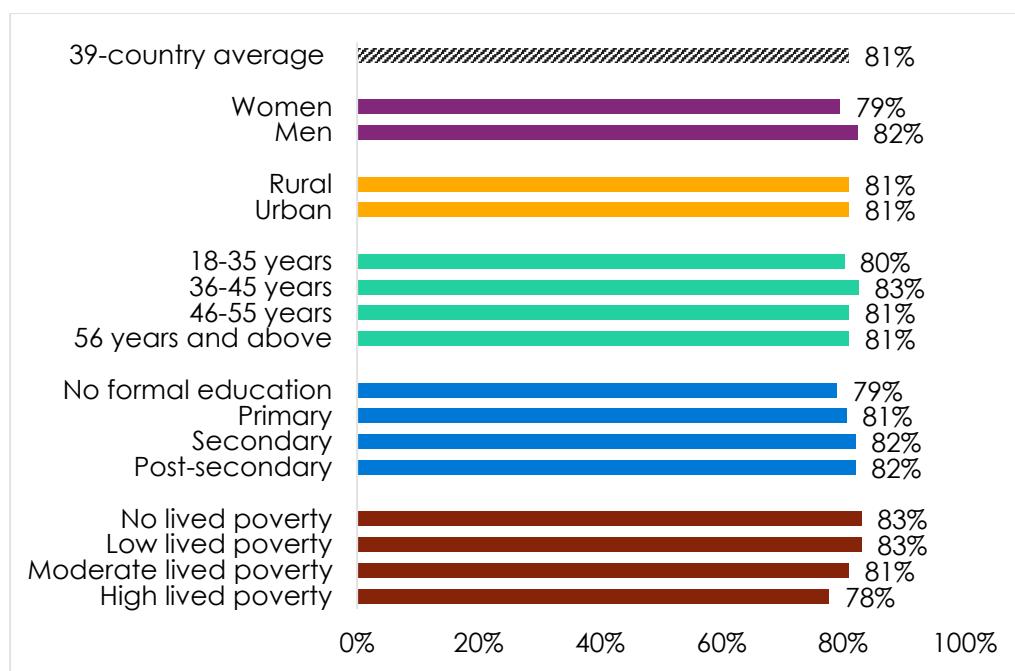
**Figure 14: Police somewhat/very likely to take GBV cases seriously | 39 countries | 2021/2023**



**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 the following things might occur: Her case will be taken seriously by the police? (% who say "somewhat likely" or "very likely")



**Figure 15: Police somewhat/very likely to take GBV cases seriously**  
| by demographic group | 39 countries | 2021/2023



**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 the following things might occur: Her case will be taken seriously by the police? (% who say "somewhat likely" or "very likely")

### Summarising GBV attitudes

Table 1 suggests the complexity of GBV-related views across Africa, using colours to illustrate low (dark and light green), medium (yellow), and high (light and dark red) levels of agreement with the perceptions that GBV is somewhat/very common, that the use of physical force is sometimes/always justified, that domestic violence is a private matter, that women who report GBV are somewhat/very likely to face criticism or harassment, and that the police are somewhat/very unlikely to take GBV cases seriously.

Ordering countries by the average proportions who say that GBV is common, we see immediately that while Column 1 (GBV is common) and Column 2 (use of force is justified) record a broad mix of perceptions across countries, relatively high levels of agreement dominate Column 3 (domestic violence is a private matter) and especially Column 4 (women who report GBV are likely to experience community backlash). Column 5 is almost entirely green: Relatively few citizens anywhere express a lack of confidence in the police response to GBV.

Country-level patterns are harder to establish. For instance, Burkina Faso and Togo register relatively little agreement (green) that GBV is common but some of the highest levels of agreement (red) that domestic violence is a private matter and that women will face backlash for reporting GBV. Meanwhile, São Tomé and Príncipe and South Africa record high scores with respect to the frequency of GBV but low levels of agreement that the use of force is justified and that domestic violence is a private matter.

Seychelles is the only country recording all green scores, followed by Mauritius with four. No country has all reds; Cameroon comes closest with four.



Table 1: Summary: Views on GBV by country | 39 countries | 2021/2023

	GBV is common	Use of physical force is justified	Domestic violence is a private matter	Women who report GBV are likely to be criticised	Police are unlikely to take GBV cases seriously
Angola	62%	29%	28%	49%	32%
Namibia	57%	39%	25%	42%	17%
Lesotho	54%	14%	46%	56%	17%
Tunisia	52%	14%	69%	74%	15%
São Tomé and Príncipe	52%	18%	15%	58%	13%
Zimbabwe	52%	22%	37%	45%	16%
Mozambique	51%	44%	28%	52%	30%
Liberia	50%	44%	33%	63%	11%
Botswana	50%	10%	14%	42%	13%
Uganda	49%	28%	62%	55%	14%
South Africa	49%	20%	18%	43%	20%
Cameroon	48%	63%	44%	60%	16%
Zambia	48%	28%	51%	54%	24%
Eswatini	43%	8%	28%	36%	18%
Nigeria	41%	21%	68%	46%	18%
Ethiopia	40%	30%	63%	49%	14%
Cabo Verde	38%	3%	15%	53%	17%
Sudan	37%	25%	78%	55%	36%
Gabon	37%	65%	44%	60%	17%
Niger	36%	52%	89%	60%	15%
Mali	35%	52%	75%	65%	21%
Madagascar	34%	8%	70%	41%	33%
Senegal	33%	35%	39%	47%	9%
Malawi	33%	6%	34%	44%	9%
Sierra Leone	32%	30%	57%	48%	7%
Mauritania	31%	31%	66%	52%	22%
Kenya	31%	19%	68%	59%	21%
Congo-Brazzaville	31%	61%	58%	47%	23%
Morocco	31%	24%	51%	51%	17%
Guinea	30%	67%	76%	60%	23%
Côte d'Ivoire	28%	53%	50%	62%	10%
Seychelles	28%	8%	9%	25%	21%
Mauritius	27%	17%	28%	37%	8%
Togo	27%	47%	65%	61%	9%
Burkina Faso	24%	49%	72%	64%	19%
Gambia	22%	27%	67%	63%	15%
Benin	22%	57%	53%	65%	8%
Ghana	21%	14%	33%	43%	13%
Tanzania	19%	17%	33%	40%	7%
39-country average	38%	31%	48%	52%	17%
More than 50%	41%-50%	31%-40%	21%-30%	20% or less	



## How well are governments promoting equal rights and opportunities for women?

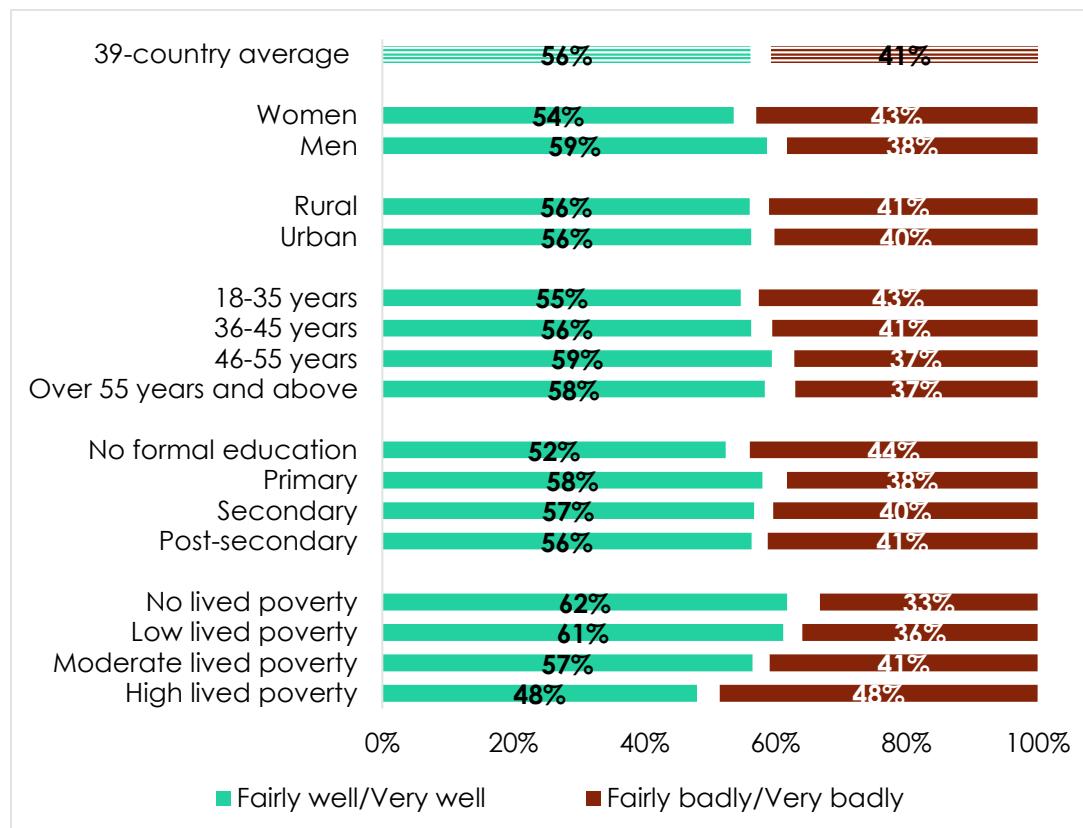
Given GBV's roots in gender inequality, and the priority that Africans give to addressing violence against women and girls, citizens' perceptions regarding GBV may also be reflected in their assessments of their government's efforts to promote gender equality.

On average across 39 countries, a majority (56%) of Africans say their government is doing "fairly well" or "very well" on promoting equal rights and opportunities for women, while 41% disagree. Somewhat fewer women than men approve of the government's performance on gender equality (54% vs. 59%). But the sharpest differences concern economic status: Citizens experiencing high levels of lived poverty (48%) are significantly less likely to approve than those with low or no lived poverty (61%-62%) (Figure 16).

Assessments are identical in cities and rural areas, although previous Afrobarometer analysis has shown that compared to their urban counterparts, rural women are less likely to have an education, a bank account, access to the Internet from a mobile phone, a job, or a say in how household money is used (Patel, 2020).

Assessments vary widely by country: While more than eight in 10 citizens approve of their government's performance in Tanzania (83%), Uganda (81%), Togo (81%), and Madagascar (81%), fewer than one in four Sudanese (16%) and Basotho (24%) agree (Figure 17).

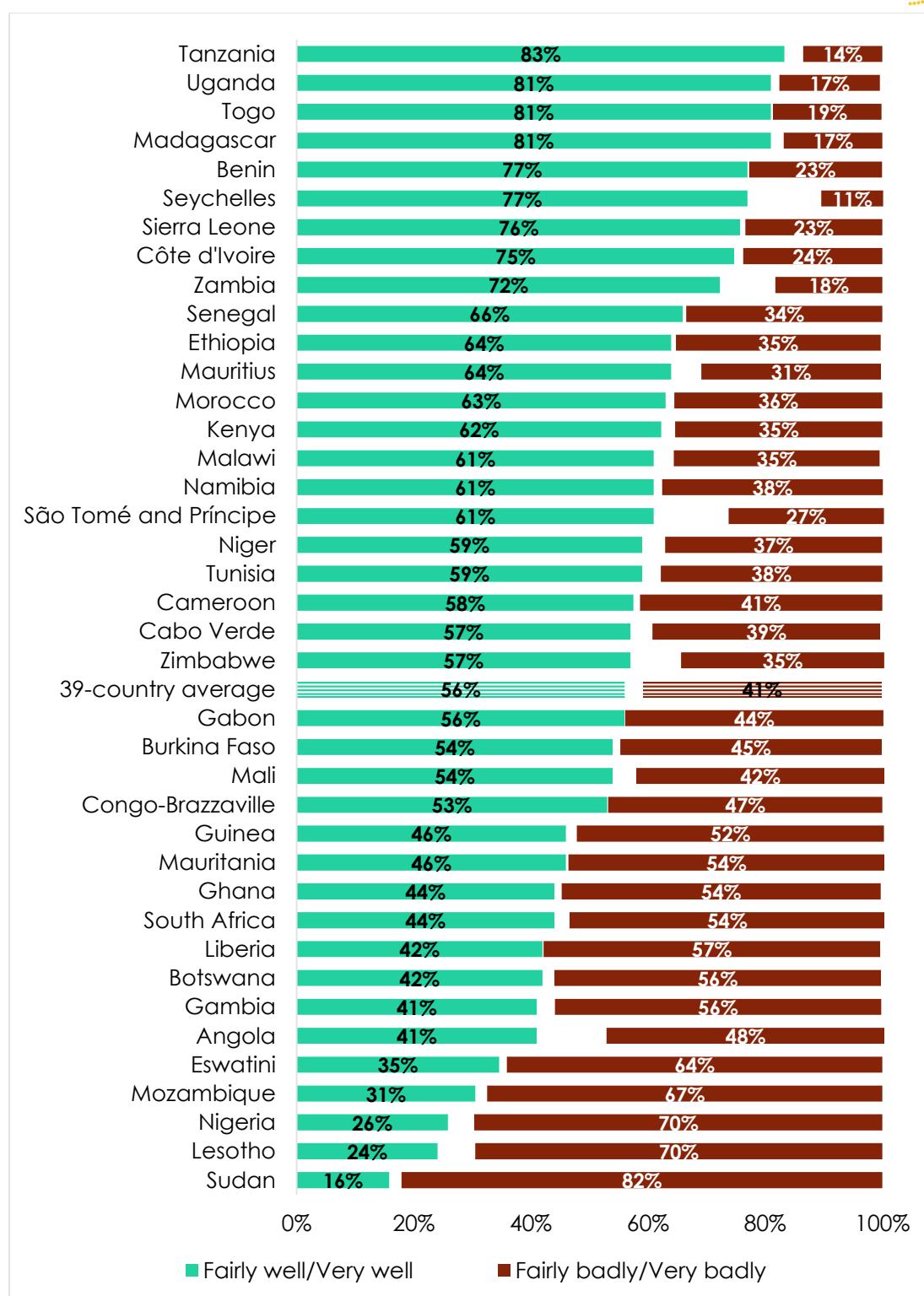
**Figure 16: Government performance on promoting equal rights and opportunities for women** | by demographic group | 39 countries | 2021/2023



**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: Promoting equal rights and opportunities for women?



**Figure 17: Government performance on promoting equal rights and opportunities for women | 39 countries | 2021/2023**



**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: Promoting equal rights and opportunities for women?



## Conclusion

Africans' perceptions of gender-based violence (GBV) vary widely by country and demographic group, suggesting that a woman's fundamental right to safety depends at least in part on her location and circumstances.

Overall, GBV ranks as the top women's-rights issue that Africans want their government and society to address. Almost four in 10 citizens say GBV is a common occurrence in their community, including half or more citizens in nine countries, and even where GBV may be uncommon, it is a preventable tragedy and human-rights violation.

The findings reveal a mixed picture regarding the reporting of GBV. While most Africans trust that the police will take reported cases seriously, more than half believe that women who do report such crimes may face criticism, harassment, or shame from their community. Majorities in 22 of the 39 surveyed countries share this view, which deters reporting and perpetuates GBV.

Similarly, findings are mixed regarding domestic violence. A large majority of Africans reject men's use of physical force against their wives as "never justified," though majorities in eight countries – all in Central or West Africa – endorse it. And only half of Africans consider domestic violence a criminal matter that should involve law enforcement, while the other half see it as a private matter to be resolved within the family.

These findings highlight the complex nature of gender-based violence in Africa, and the multifaceted challenge of addressing it. While a significant portion of the population acknowledges the problem, deeply ingrained attitudes enable its continuation. Creating a safe environment for girls and women will require education and awareness campaigns along with strong legal frameworks and well-trained law enforcement. Outreach efforts could involve the media, civil society, and religious communities as well governments, and could prioritise economically disadvantaged communities, which are particularly likely to report that GBV is common, to see the use of physical force against women as justified, and to consider domestic violence a private matter. By taking the lead in tackling GBV, African nations can make a significant contribution to the global effort to promote women's rights and gender equality.



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## Appendix



**Table A.1: Afrobarometer Round 9 fieldwork dates and previous survey rounds**

Country	Round 9 fieldwork	Previous survey rounds
Angola	Feb.-March 2022	2019
Benin	Jan. 2022	2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017, 2020
Botswana	June-July 2022	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019
Burkina Faso	Sept.-Oct. 2022	2008, 2012, 2015, 2017, 2019
Cabo Verde	July-Aug. 2022	2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017, 2019
Cameroon	March 2022	2013, 2015, 2018, 2021
Congo-Brazzaville	June-July 2023	NA
Côte d'Ivoire	Nov.-Dec. 2021	2013, 2014, 2017, 2019
Eswatini	Oct.-Nov. 2022	2013, 2015, 2018, 2021
Ethiopia	May-June 2023	2013, 2020
Gabon	Nov.-Dec. 2021	2015, 2017, 2020
Gambia	Aug.-Sept. 2022	2018, 2021
Ghana	April 2022	1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019
Guinea	Aug. 2022	2013, 2015, 2017, 2019
Kenya	Nov.-Dec. 2021	2003, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2016, 2019
Lesotho	Feb.-March 2022	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2020
Liberia	Aug.-Sept. 2022	2008, 2012, 2015, 2018, 2020
Madagascar	April-May 2022	2005, 2008, 2013, 2015, 2018
Malawi	Feb. 2022	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019
Mali	July 2022	2001, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2020
Mauritania	Nov. 2022	NA
Mauritius	March 2022	2012, 2014, 2017, 2020
Morocco	Aug.-Sept. 2022	2013, 2015, 2018, 2021
Mozambique	Oct.-Nov. 2022	2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2018, 2021
Namibia	Oct.-Nov. 2021	1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2019
Niger	June 2022	2013, 2015, 2018, 2020
Nigeria	March 2022	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2015, 2017, 2020
São Tomé and Príncipe	Dec. 2022	2015, 2018
Senegal	May-June 2022	2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2021
Seychelles	Dec. 2022	NA
Sierra Leone	June-July 2022	2012, 2015, 2018, 2020
South Africa	Nov.-Dec. 2022	2000, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2015, 2018, 2021
Sudan	Nov.-Dec. 2022	2013, 2015, 2018, 2021
Tanzania	Sept.-Oct. 2022	2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2021
Togo	March 2022	2012, 2014, 2017, 2021
Tunisia	Feb.-March 2022	2013, 2015, 2018, 2020
Uganda	Jan. 2022	2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2017, 2019
Zambia	Aug.-Sept. 2022	1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2020
Zimbabwe	March-April 2022	1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2021



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## About Data for Governance Alliance

The Data for Governance Alliance is a four-year project that promotes data-based advocacy and engagement between pan African civil society organisations (CSOs) and African Union organs. The project is led by Afrobarometer with partners, including CDD Ghana, the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Nairobi, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation and Laws.Africa. The project is funded by the European Union.



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