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Across Africa, public trust in key institutions and leaders is weakening

**Koffi Amessou Adaba and David Boio**

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## Summary

Trust in institutions is a fundamental requirement for the proper functioning of society, particularly in a democracy. Trust in public institutions manifests itself when citizens assess them as promise-keeping, accountable, efficient, competent, fair, and honest (Kaasa & Andriani, 2021). When individuals have trust in a public institution, they expect their interaction with authorities to have a positive outcome rather than being detrimental to them (Beesley & Hawkins, 2022).

Societies live harmoniously only when public institutions play their role in generating the trust necessary for collective life (Roché, 2016, p.12). As Newton and Norris (2000, p. 56) have noted, "institutional trust acts as the cornerstone of social cohesion, ensuring that citizens cooperate and adhere to societal norms." Trust in institutions underpins the stability and legitimacy of democratic governance, as emphasised by Easton (1975, p. 439), who argues that "without political trust, a system risks delegitimisation, and this can lead to social instability."

When citizens trust institutions, they are more likely to show solidarity with other community members, respect laws and regulations, support government policies and programmes, and develop optimism about the future, a crucial determinant of economic growth (Cloutier, Zovighian, & Bove, 2023). By limiting uncertainty and transaction costs, trust in institutions also encourages investment and other economic activity (Putnam, 1993; Kaasa & Andriani, 2021).

Conversely, a lack of trust in public institutions can lead to a range of social and political problems. A decline in institutional trust is linked with "a rise in societal fragmentation, where citizens become more prone to endorse populist and anti-establishment movements" (Hetherington, 2005, p. 101). In many countries, especially developing countries, low levels of public trust in government institutions are associated with acceptance of illegal behaviour such as tax fraud as well as increased polarisation and decreased support for the provision of public goods, all of which can pose obstacles for development (Beesley & Hawkins, 2022). Moreover, low trust limits the state's capacity to function efficiently, leading to a "vicious cycle of ineffective governance and growing distrust" (Rothstein & Stolle, 2008, p. 445). Such cycles are particularly harmful in fragile democracies, where institutional trust is already weak and the legitimacy of public institutions is often questioned (Norris, 2011).

In this context, to what extent do Africans trust their public institutions?

According to findings from Afrobarometer surveys in 39 African countries between late 2021 and mid-2023, Africans trust key institutions and leaders less than they did a decade ago. Only religious leaders, the army, and traditional leaders still enjoy majority trust, while political institutions are trusted least. Trust levels vary significantly by region and country, with East and West Africans recording higher trust levels than their counterparts in Southern, Central, and North Africa.

## 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 53,444 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

- On average across 39 countries, majorities of Africans express trust ("somewhat" or "a lot") in only three of the 11 institutions and types of leaders that the survey asked about: religious leaders (66%), the army (61%), and traditional leaders (56%).
  - Fewer than half say they trust their president (46%), the police (46%), courts of law (47%), Parliament (37%), and other state institutions.
- Since 2011, public trust in all 11 institutions has declined, including double-digit drops for Parliament (-19 percentage points), the ruling party (-16 points), the president (-12 points), and courts of law (-10 point).
- On average across the 11 institutions, East Africa and West Africa record the highest trust scores, followed by Southern, North, and Central Africa.
- Tanzania (78%), Niger (67%), and Burkina Faso (61%) record the highest average trust scores with regard to these 11 institutions, while Gabon (26%), Eswatini (27%), São Tomé and Príncipe (30%), and Niger (30%) register the lowest.
- Although the general trend in popular trust is downward, Tanzania, Togo, and Mali are among countries that have increased their levels of trust in some key institutions.

### Institutional trust: Continental averages

As shown in Figure 1, popular trust in key institutions and leaders across Africa varies considerably. On average across up to 39 countries<sup>1</sup> surveyed between late 2021 and mid-2023, majorities of Africans express trust ("somewhat" or "a lot") in only three of the 11 institutions and types of leaders that the survey asked about: religious leaders (66%), the army (61%), and traditional leaders (56%).

Fewer than half say they trust their president (46%), the police (46%), and courts of law (47%). And even fewer express trust in their national electoral commission (39%), their local government council (38%), Parliament (37%), the ruling party (37%), and opposition parties (30%).

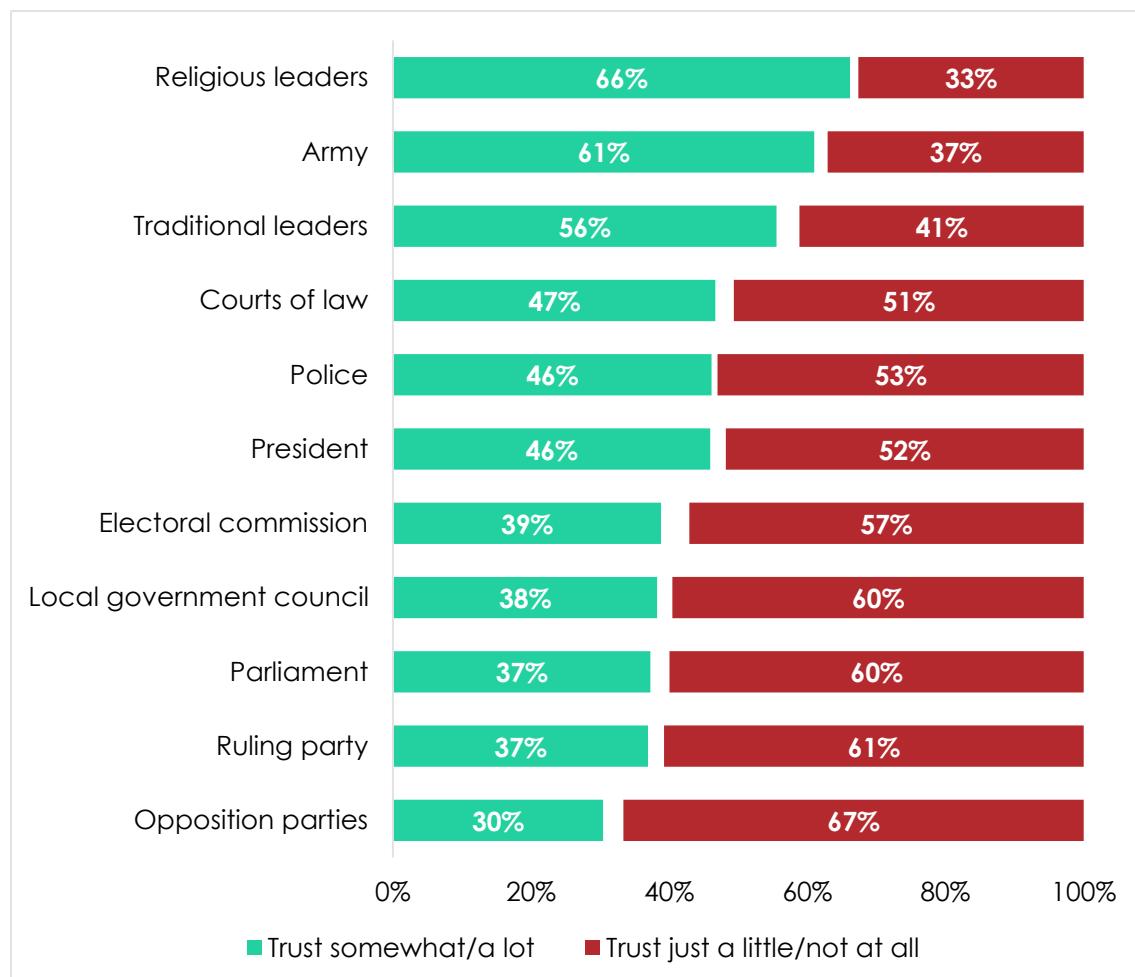
These low levels of trust could reflect perceptions of poor representation or ineffective governance, corruption, a lack of independence or impartiality, or unequal or ineffective law enforcement. Understanding what lies behind them is essential for building strong and reliable institutions.

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<sup>1</sup> Some questions were not asked in certain countries, as follows: traditional leaders in Cabo Verde, Mauritius, São Tomé and Príncipe, Seychelles, and Tunisia; electoral commission in Guinea; local government in Angola and Seychelles; Parliament in Tunisia, Sudan, Guinea, and Burkina Faso; ruling party in Tunisia, Sudan, Burkina Faso, and Eswatini; opposition parties in Tunisia, Eswatini, and Burkina Faso.



**Figure 1: Popular trust in institutions and leaders** | 39 countries<sup>1</sup> | 2021/2023



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

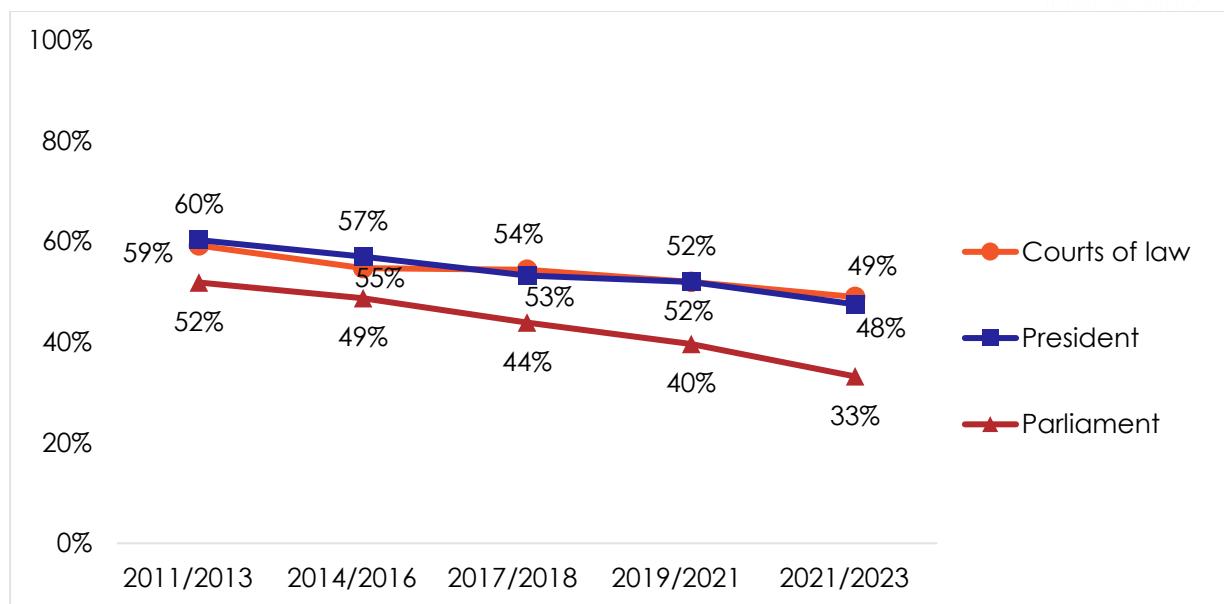
Strikingly, popular trust in all of these key institutions has declined over the past decade. On average across 30 countries that were surveyed regularly between 2011/2013 and 2021/2023, the share of Africans who say they trust Parliament "somewhat" or "a lot" dropped by 19 percentage points during that timeframe, from 52% to 33% (Figure 2).

Trust also registered double-digit losses for the ruling party (-16 points), the president (-12 points), and courts of law (-10 points).

As shown in Table 1, the army recorded the smallest decline, a marginal 2-point decrease, while all the other institutions lost 5-8 points in public trust.



**Figure 2: Change in popular trust in the president, Parliament, and courts**  
| 30 countries<sup>2</sup> | 2011-2023



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

**Table 1: Change in trust in key institutions and leaders** | 30 countries<sup>2</sup> | 2011-2023

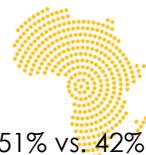
	2011/2013	2014/2015	2016/2018	2019/2021	2021/2023	Difference 2011-2023 (percentage points)
<b>Parliament</b>	52%	49%	44%	40%	33%	-19
<b>Ruling party</b>	49%	46%	43%	40%	33%	-15
<b>President</b>	60%	57%	53%	52%	48%	-12
<b>Courts of law</b>	59%	55%	54%	52%	49%	-10
<b>Electoral commission</b>	48%	49%	44%	46%	40%	-8
<b>Traditional leaders</b>	N/A	58%	51%	54%	50%	-8*
<b>Religious leaders</b>	N/A	73%	70%	69%	66%	-7*
<b>Opposition parties</b>	36%	36%	32%	33%	29%	-7
<b>Local govt council</b>	45%	47%	43%	42%	39%	-6
<b>Police</b>	52%	52%	52%	50%	47%	-5
<b>Army</b>	66%	66%	67%	66%	64%	-2

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

\* Table shows difference between 2014/2015 and 2021/2023, since the questions about religious and traditional leaders were not asked in 2011/2013.

Trust in all of these institutions is consistently higher in rural areas than in cities. For example, 8-9 percentage points separate rural and urban residents when it comes to trust in the

<sup>2</sup> The question about Parliament was not asked in Sudan, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Tunisia.



president (50% rural vs. 42% urban), Parliament (42% vs. 33%), and courts of law (51% vs. 42%) (Figure 3).

We also see consistent differences by respondents' education status: The most educated citizens are 7-14 percentage points less likely to express trust in the president, Parliament, and courts than those with no formal schooling.

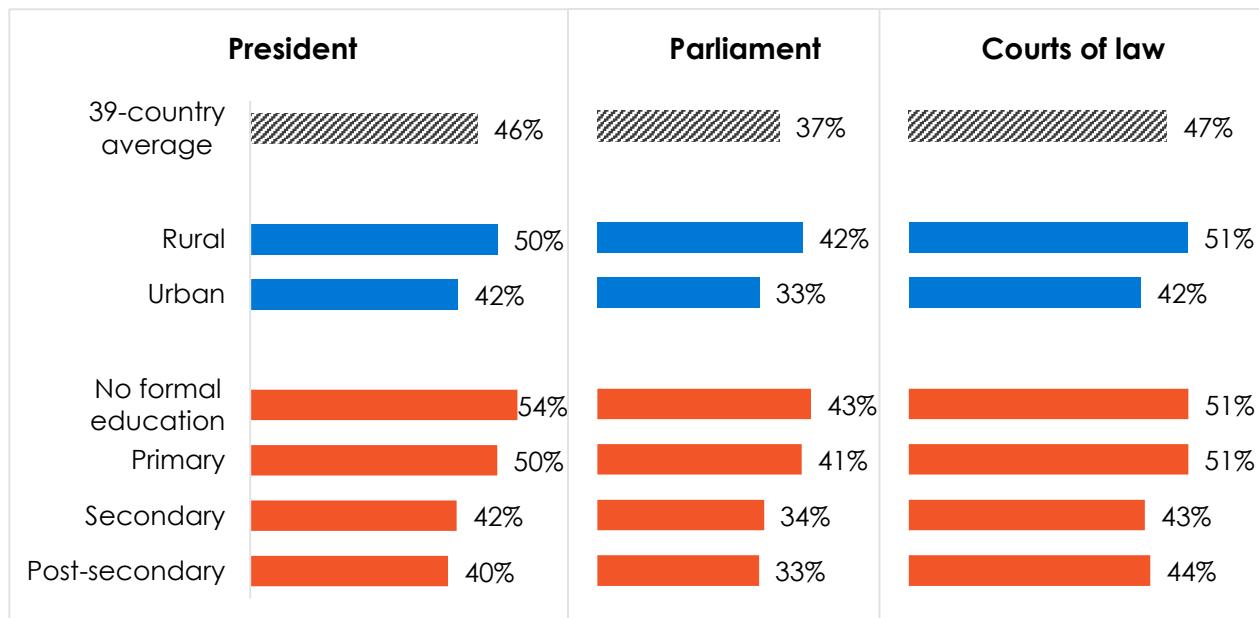
Like the urban-rural trust gap, the differences by education hold for all 11 institutions, as shown in Table 2.

While women and men express similar levels of trust in institutions, younger respondents are consistently less trusting than their elders. This tendency is especially pronounced in the case of traditional leaders (53% of 18- to 35-year-olds vs. 62% of those over age 55), the president (43% vs. 52%), and the police (44% vs. 53%). The only exception concerns opposition parties, in which all age groups express similarly low levels of trust.

With regard to respondents' economic status,<sup>3</sup> poor citizens generally seem less trusting of state institutions than their well-off counterparts: Those experiencing high lived poverty are 5-12 percentage points less likely than those with no lived poverty to express trust in the courts, the president, the police, the electoral commission, Parliament, and the ruling party.

In contrast, the poor are more likely than the well-off to record trust in religious leaders (by 9 percentage points) and traditional leaders (by 13 points). The two groups express similar levels of trust in the army, local government, and opposition political parties.

**Figure 3: Trust in the president, Parliament, and courts | by demographic group**  
| 39 countries | 2021/2023



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

<sup>3</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 past year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes and Patel (2022).



**Table 2: Popular trust in key institutions and leaders | by demographic group | 39 countries | 2021/2023**

	Religious leaders	Army	Traditional leaders	Courts of law	President	Police	Electoral commission	Local government	Parliament	Ruling party	Opposition parties
<b>39-country average</b>	66%	61%	56%	47%	46%	46%	39%	38%	37%	37%	30%
<b>Women</b>	67%	59%	55%	47%	45%	46%	38%	38%	36%	36%	29%
<b>Men</b>	66%	63%	57%	47%	47%	46%	40%	39%	38%	38%	32%
<b>Rural</b>	73%	65%	64%	51%	50%	51%	43%	44%	42%	42%	32%
<b>Urban</b>	59%	57%	45%	42%	42%	41%	35%	32%	33%	32%	29%
<b>No formal education</b>	79%	70%	69%	51%	54%	57%	46%	47%	43%	43%	32%
<b>Primary</b>	71%	66%	60%	51%	50%	52%	42%	41%	41%	41%	30%
<b>Secondary</b>	61%	56%	50%	43%	42%	41%	35%	35%	34%	34%	30%
<b>Post-secondary</b>	57%	55%	43%	44%	40%	38%	35%	31%	33%	31%	29%
<b>18-35 years</b>	65%	59%	53%	45%	43%	44%	37%	37%	35%	36%	30%
<b>36-45 years</b>	66%	61%	56%	47%	45%	46%	39%	38%	37%	37%	31%
<b>46-55 years</b>	67%	64%	59%	48%	50%	49%	43%	41%	41%	39%	31%
<b>56+ years</b>	70%	66%	62%	50%	52%	53%	43%	42%	41%	41%	32%
<b>No lived poverty</b>	59%	59%	45%	52%	48%	50%	46%	39%	42%	41%	33%
<b>Low lived poverty</b>	65%	64%	54%	50%	48%	47%	42%	39%	39%	39%	30%
<b>Moderate lived poverty</b>	68%	62%	57%	46%	46%	46%	38%	38%	37%	37%	30%
<b>High lived poverty</b>	68%	58%	58%	42%	43%	44%	34%	37%	35%	33%	31%

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



## Institutional trust: Regional differences<sup>4</sup>

Institutional trust varies significantly across African regions. When we average responses to trust questions about the 11 key institutions and leaders, East Africa and West Africa record the highest average trust scores, at 53% and 49%, respectively. Southern Africa comes third at 43%, followed by North Africa (42%) and Central Africa (35%). These results are illustrated graphically in Table 3, with mostly green fields (higher levels of trust) for East and West Africa, a mix of green and yellow fields for Southern and North Africa, and mostly yellow fields (lower levels of trust) for Central Africa.

**Table 3: Popular trust in key institutions and leaders** | by region | 39 countries  
| 2021/2023

	East Africa	West Africa	Southern Africa	North Africa	Central Africa
<b>Religious leaders</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>52%</b>
<b>Army</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>44%</b>
<b>Traditional leaders</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>46%</b>
<b>Courts of law</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>31%</b>
<b>Police</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>37%</b>
<b>President</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>40%</b>
<b>Electoral commission</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Local government</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>Parliament</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>33%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>Ruling party</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>Opposition parties</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>24%</b>
<b>Regional average</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>49%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>35%</b>
<b>Key</b>	<b>&gt;60%</b>	<b>51%-60%</b>	<b>41%-50%</b>	<b>31%-40%</b>	<b>30% or less</b>

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

East and West Africa are quite similar in their trust patterns, with the highest trust in religious and traditional leaders and the army, mostly medium-range scores for key state institutions, and the lowest ratings for ruling and opposition political parties.

North Africa records the widest distribution in institutional trust, ranging from just 18% for opposition parties to 70% for the army.

<sup>4</sup> Regions: West (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo), East (Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, Tanzania, Uganda), Southern (Angola, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe), North (Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia), Central (Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, Gabon, São Tomé and Príncipe)



Southern Africans are more moderate in their views, showing the least variation in trust levels. Only 29 percentage points separate opposition political parties (32%) and religious leaders (61%).

Trust levels are fairly low across the board in Central Africa. Religious leaders are the only institution trusted by a majority (52%) of the region's inhabitants, and no more than 40% of citizens express trust in most key institutions.

Comparing across regions, we see that political parties rank at or near the bottom in all regions, while religious leaders enjoy the highest levels of trust everywhere except in North Africa. The military is one of the three most-trusted institutions in all five African regions, and traditional leaders make the top three everywhere except North Africa.

### **Institutional trust: Country differences and trends**

While continental and regional averages describe relatively low and declining trust levels, both absolute levels of trust and trends in trust vary considerably depending on the country. These differences underscore the diversity of political contexts in Africa and the importance of in-depth studies to understand the specificities of each nation.

As shown in Table 4, among the 39 surveyed countries, average trust levels across the 11 institutions are highest in Tanzania (78%), where religious leaders (94%), the army (94%), and the courts (88%) enjoy almost universal popular trust and majorities express trust in every institution except opposition political parties (45%).

The Sahel states Niger (67%), Burkina Faso (61%), and Mali (59%) follow with strong average trust levels, though confidence in several institutions falls below 50%.

At the other end of the spectrum, average trust levels are lowest in Gabon (26%), Eswatini (27%), São Tomé and Príncipe (30%), and Nigeria (30%). Across all four countries combined, the only institution or group that enjoys majority trust is religious leaders in Nigeria (60%).

Table 4 also illustrates the range across countries of trust in a given institution. For example, trust in religious leaders ranges from 34% in Tunisia to at least nine out of 10 Tanzanians (94%), Senegalese (92%), Nigeriens (90%), and Ethiopians (90%).

The range is widest – 71 percentage points – for the armed forces, from 23% in Eswatini to 94% in Tanzania and 90% in Tunisia.

Trust in traditional leaders, expressed by majorities in 24 countries, ranges as high as 80% in Niger and 78% in Mali but drops as low as 25% in Ghana.

For presidents, a 68-point gap ranges from 18% in Tunisia to 86% in Mali, with majorities in just 17 countries expressing trust in their political leader.

Variation for other institutions/groups ranges from 38 percentage points for opposition political parties to 69 points for ruling parties. Whether due to deep disillusionment with the political alternatives on offer or political environments in which the opposition is unable to operate effectively, only one country – Cabo Verde (52%) – records majority trust in opposition parties.

Among other notably low trust levels, we see 15% for Nigeria's police, 16% for Gabon's electoral commission, 18% for Tunisia's local government, 18% for Lesotho's Parliament, and 26% for São Tomé and Príncipe's courts.



Table 4: Trust in key institutions and leaders | 39 countries | 2021/2023

	Religious leaders	Army	Traditional leaders	Courts of law	Police	President	Electoral commission	Local government	Parliament	Ruling party	Opposition parties	Country average
Tanzania	94%	94%	56%	88%	79%	82%	79%	74%	78%	84%	45%	78%
Niger	90%	85%	80%	65%	77%	66%	54%	63%	58%	56%	42%	67%
Burkina Faso	76%	77%	72%	51%	71%	48%	46%	46%				61%
Mali	75%	89%	78%	42%	58%	86%	38%	57%	53%	43%	29%	59%
Cabo Verde	64%	74%		60%	60%	65%	61%	46%	48%	46%	52%	57%
Zambia	70%	80%	64%	65%	47%	70%	56%	47%	44%	62%	25%	57%
Ethiopia	90%	72%	75%	60%	57%	49%	46%	51%	44%	47%	28%	56%
Uganda	85%	62%	68%	50%	41%	62%	42%	50%	52%	52%	34%	54%
Senegal	92%	86%	75%	47%	77%	43%	39%	43%	27%	31%	34%	54%
Benin	67%	63%	65%	52%	67%	57%	41%	57%	43%	41%	34%	53%
Mauritania	81%	65%	55%	52%	58%	54%	42%	43%	47%	39%	31%	51%
Namibia	65%	62%	55%	59%	64%	55%	44%	38%	46%	40%	36%	51%
Zimbabwe	71%	55%	58%	54%	42%	51%	47%	51%	44%	44%	48%	51%
Togo	62%	61%	59%	47%	61%	57%	44%	47%	47%	46%	30%	51%
Mozambique	61%	55%	51%	56%	52%	52%	47%	37%	42%	53%	40%	50%
Gambia	81%	67%	65%	44%	52%	38%	40%	36%	36%	34%	35%	48%
Kenya	72%	66%	55%	56%	34%	52%	45%	35%	42%	32%	31%	47%
Tunisia	34%	90%		42%	46%	74%	28%	18%				47%
Madagascar	79%	55%	75%	27%	51%	52%	31%	58%	39%	31%	17%	47%
Sierra Leone	83%	68%	54%	36%	19%	53%	53%	32%	34%	47%	33%	47%
Guinea	80%	48%	67%	34%	38%	46%		45%		28%	30%	46%
Malawi	71%	74%	58%	62%	46%	27%	41%	28%	33%	22%	36%	45%
Côte d'Ivoire	67%	49%	61%	43%	45%	50%	32%	40%	39%	38%	34%	45%
Cameroon	64%	60%	55%	36%	44%	55%	34%	35%	36%	33%	30%	44%
Seychelles	68%	41%		47%	40%	40%	37%		38%	37%	34%	42%
Mauritius	48%	38%		48%	46%	42%	38%	40%	37%	41%	37%	42%
Morocco	54%	72%	31%	61%	67%	18%	51%	22%	25%	22%	22%	41%
Botswana	55%	61%	55%	51%	46%	24%	31%	32%	30%	24%	35%	40%
Congo-Brazzaville	59%	51%	45%	32%	41%	45%	23%	26%	29%	24%	29%	37%
Lesotho	67%	58%	53%	44%	34%	20%	37%	39%	18%	15%	15%	36%
Sudan	57%	53%	33%	48%	41%	25%	26%	20%			14%	35%
Liberia	63%	62%	43%	30%	26%	37%	34%	20%	23%	29%	21%	35%
Ghana	43%	67%	25%	36%	28%	32%	33%	25%	27%	27%	29%	34%
Angola	53%	39%	45%	36%	32%	29%	21%		25%	27%	27%	33%
South Africa	49%	52%	35%	50%	32%	27%	28%	25%	23%	22%	22%	33%
Nigeria	60%	43%	50%	28%	15%	27%	23%	21%	19%	26%	21%	30%
São Tomé/Príncipe	41%	34%		26%	22%	34%	27%	27%	30%	36%	22%	30%
Eswatini	44%	23%	34%	29%	23%	23%	22%	23%	26%			27%
Gabon	45%	30%	38%	30%	25%	26%	16%	21%	21%	16%	14%	26%
39-country average	66%	61%	56%	47%	46%	46%	39%	38%	37%	37%	30%	46%

Key (%) >75 51-75 41-50 31-40 <31 Not asked in country

(% who say "trust somewhat" or "trust a lot")



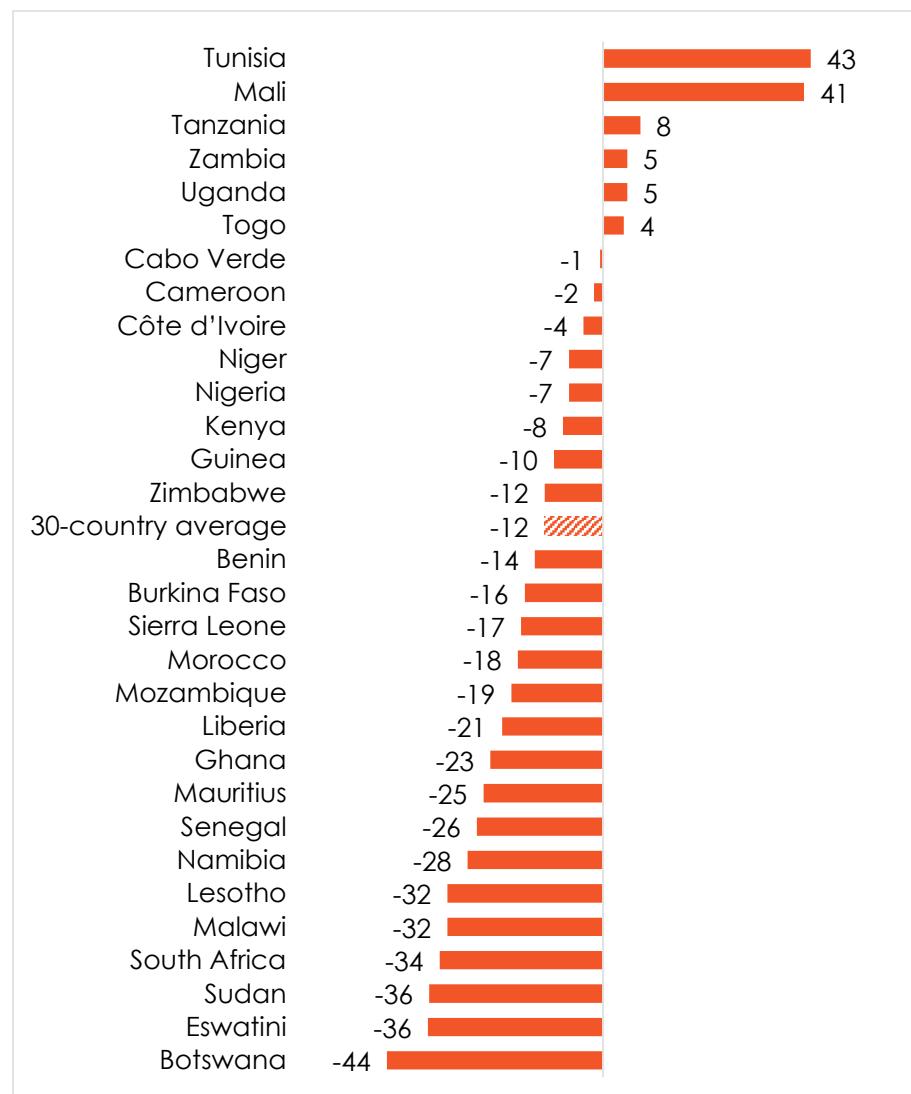
## Country trends in institutional trust

While average trust levels have been declining, a closer look at three central state institutions – the president or prime minister, Parliament, and the courts – shows that countries vary significantly in their trends in popular trust in institutions. Many countries – especially in Southern Africa – record above-average decreases, but Tanzania, Togo, Mali, Morocco, Tunisia, and Zambia are among countries that have maintained or increased trust in some key institutions.

Trust in the president/prime minister declined significantly (by at least 3 percentage points) in 22 of 30 countries surveyed in both 2011/2013 and 2021/2023, led by Botswana (-44 points), Eswatini (-36 points), Sudan (-36 points), and South Africa (-34 points) (Figure 4).

At the same time, trust in the political leader rose in six countries, including huge increases in Tunisia (+43 points) and Mali (+41 points).

**Figure 4 : Change in popular trust in the president/prime minister | 30 countries | 2011-2023**

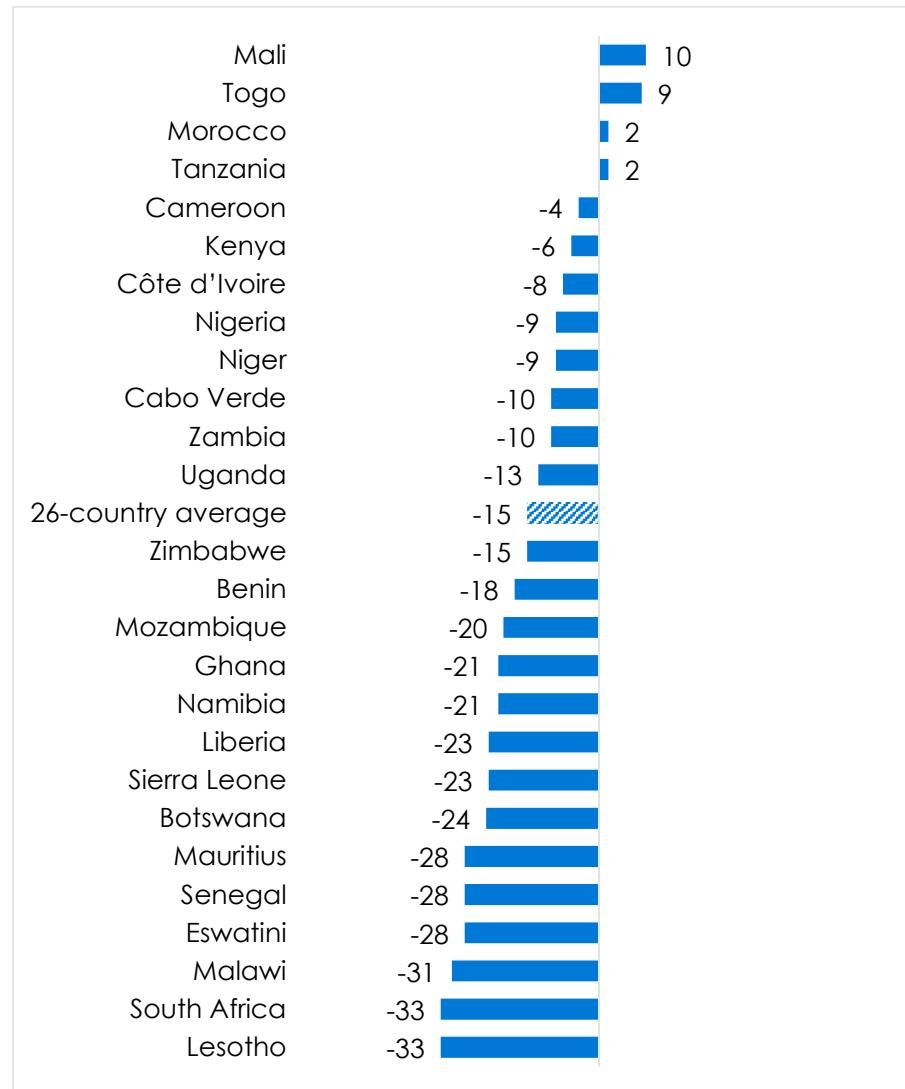


**Respondents were asked:** How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The president/prime minister? (Figure shows the difference, in percentage points, between surveys in 2011/2013 and 2021/2023 in the proportion of respondents who said they trust their president/prime minister "somewhat" or "a lot.")



Similarly, trust in Parliament declined in 22 of the 26 countries where this question was asked in both survey rounds, led by huge drops in four Southern African countries – Lesotho (-33 points), South Africa (-33 points), Malawi (-31 points), and Eswatini (-28 points) (Figure 5). But two countries report increases, though much more modest: Mali (+10 points) and Togo (+9 points).

**Figure 5: Change in popular trust in Parliament | 26 countries | 2011-2023**

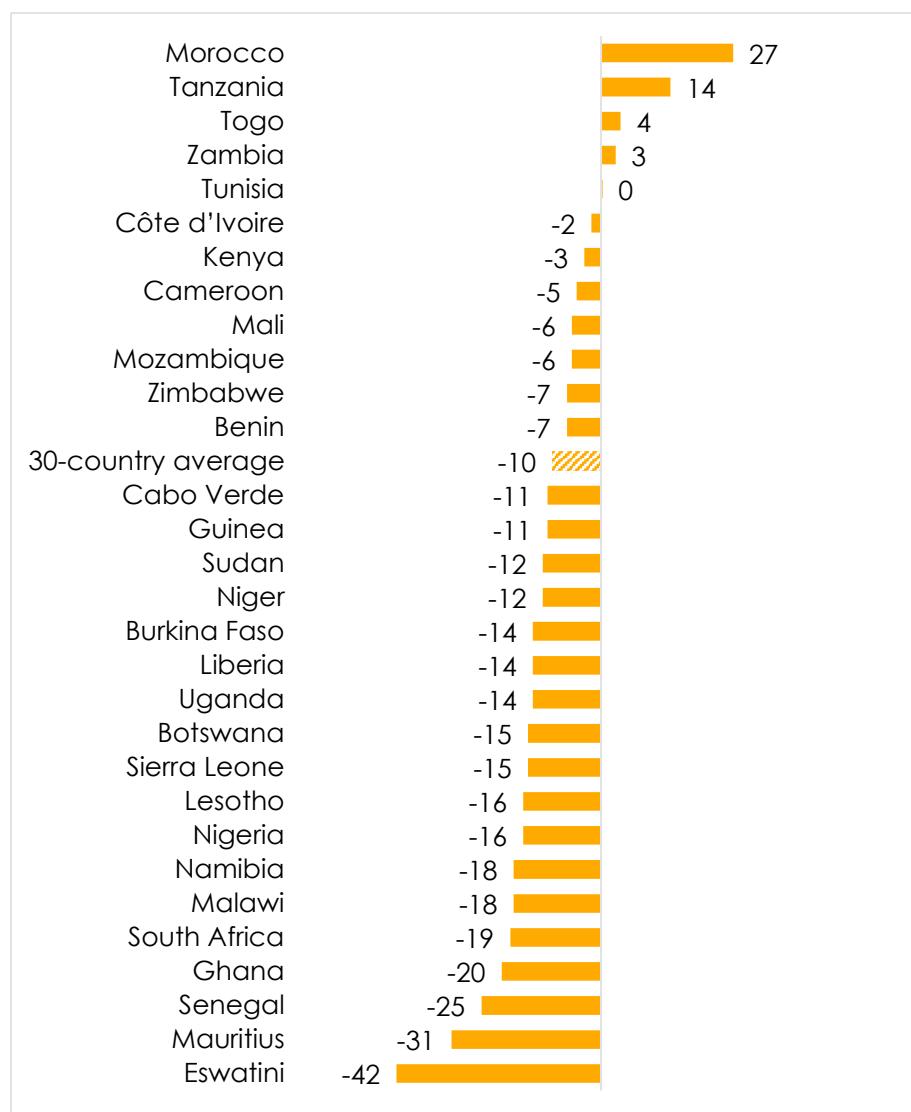


**Respondents were asked:** How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Parliament? (Figure shows the difference, in percentage points, between surveys in 2011/2013 and 2021/2023 in the proportion of respondents who said they trust Parliament "somewhat" or "a lot.")

The judiciary also saw increases in a few countries, most notably a 27-point jump in Morocco (Figure 6). But decreases in 24 countries made for a 10-point drop on average, including a 42-point plunge in Eswatini.



**Figure 6: Change in popular trust in the courts of law | 30 countries | 2011-2023**



**Respondents were asked:** How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Courts of law? (Figure shows the difference, in percentage points, between surveys in 2011/2013 and 2021/2023 in the proportion of respondents who said they trust courts of law "somewhat" or "a lot.")

## Conclusion

Trust levels in African institutions are low and falling. This may be a worrying trend for governments, activists, investors, citizens, and the international community, as deteriorating trust can erode the legitimacy of public institutions and exact a high price, especially for developing countries (Cloutier et al., 2023).

In most countries, religious and traditional leaders are seen as more trustworthy than state institutions. The only public-sector institution trusted by a majority across the continent is the military, though most Africans also oppose the idea of being governed by the military (Afrobarometer, 2024). Explicitly political institutions bring up the rear in public trust, starting with political parties, Parliament, and local government councils.

Contrary to the general trend of declining popular trust, Tanzania, Togo, and Mali are among countries that have maintained or even raised levels of trust in key institutions. While a detailed analysis of reasons for this evolution is beyond the scope of this dispatch, the literature suggests factors that might improve institutional trust. As a World Bank study shows,



both outcomes and processes matter (Zovighian et al., 2024). Outcome-based trust means that citizens trust their government based on performance, i.e. the capacity of state institutions to deliver results. Process-based trust depends on citizens' perceptions of the fairness and transparency (or corruption) of policy decisions and service-delivery processes.

Given the immense importance of public trust for political stability and development, citizens' assessments of trustworthiness demand the attention of institutional leaders across the continent.



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## Appendix

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

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



## Authors

Koffi Amessou Adaba is a political sociologist at the Center for Research and Opinion Polls (CROP), Afrobarometer's national partner in Togo. Email: [kadaba0909@gmail.com](mailto:kadaba0909@gmail.com).

David Boio is a sociologist; co-principal investigator at Ovilongwa – Estudos de Opinião Pública, the Afrobarometer national partner in Angola; and a researcher at Centro Sol Nascente do Huambo. Email: [davidboio@gmail.com](mailto:davidboio@gmail.com).

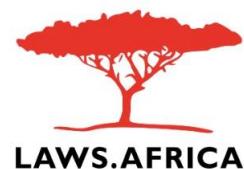
## About Data for Governance Alliance

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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