

African governments failing in provision of water and sanitation, majority of citizens say

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 349 | Brian Howard and Kangwook Han

Summary

More than half of Africans say their governments are failing them when it comes to one of their top priorities – the provision of clean water and sanitation services, a new Afrobarometer analysis shows. Half of survey respondents say they went without enough clean water for home use during the previous year – a particular concern considering the importance of proper hygiene for preventing the spread of coronavirus and other infectious diseases.



These findings from national surveys in 34 African countries, released in advance of World Water Day (March 22), show that there has been little progress in recent years toward the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 6, “Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.”

While experiences vary widely across countries, on average more than half of Africans have to leave their compounds to access water, and only one-fourth have access to sewage infrastructure. Rural residents continue to suffer major disadvantages in access to water and sanitation.

One in five Africans who tried to obtain utility services from government during the previous year report they had to pay a bribe. In 20 out of 34 countries, majorities say their government is doing a poor job of providing water and sanitation services.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on Africans’ experiences and evaluations of quality of life, governance, and democracy. Seven rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018. Round 8 surveys are planned in at least 35 countries in 2019/2020. Interested readers may follow our releases, including our Pan-Africa Profiles series of Round 7 cross-country analyses, at #VoicesAfrica and sign up for our distribution list at www.afrobarometer.org.

Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent’s choice with nationally representative samples that yield country-level results with margins of error of +/-2 to +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

This Pan-Africa Profile draws on data from 45,823 interviews completed in 34 countries between September 2016 and September 2018 (see Appendix Table A.1 for a list of countries and fieldwork dates). The countries covered are home to almost 80% of the continent’s population. The data are weighted to ensure nationally representative samples. When reporting multi-

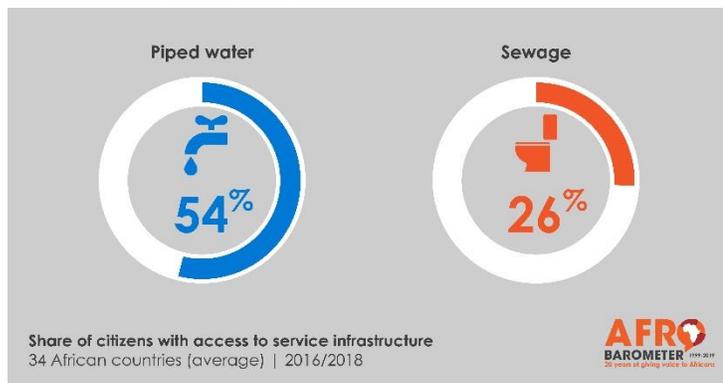
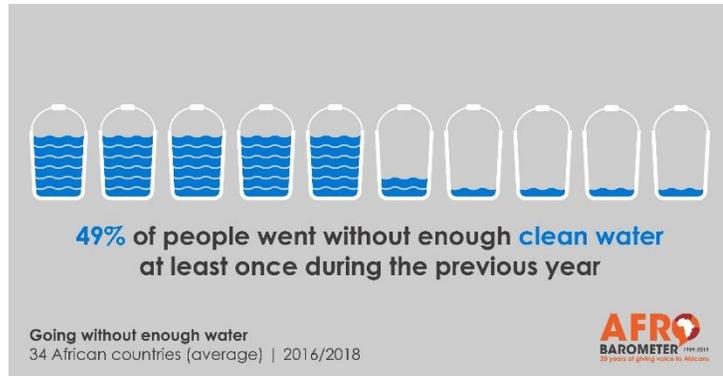
country findings such as regional or Africa-wide averages, each country is weighted equally (rather than in proportion to population size).

Key findings

- On average across 34 African countries, about half (49%) of citizens went without enough clean water for home use during the year preceding the survey, including 38% who suffered this form of lived poverty¹ “several times,” “many times,” or “always” (see Figure 1 in the “Charts” section below). Repeated shortages of clean water (at least “several times”) decreased slightly between surveys in 2011/2013 (39%) and 2014/2015 (35%) but increased again by 2016/2018, wiping out the earlier gains.

 - More than three-fourths of Gabonese (77%) and Guineans (76%) experienced a shortage of clean water, compared to fewer than one in four respondents in Mauritius (11%), Ghana (22%), and Morocco (23%) (Figure 2).
 - The situation has worsened significantly over the past six years in 12 of 31 countries surveyed throughout the period, with the most severe declines recorded in Nigeria, Tanzania, and Burkina Faso, where the proportion of citizens who “never” went without enough clean water shrank by 17, 12, and 10 percentage points, respectively. Improvements were registered in eight countries, led by Guinea (+17 points), Tunisia (12 points), and Malawi (11 points) (Figure 3).
- While SDG6 targets call for “universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all” by 2030, only a slim majority (54%) of Africans live in areas served by a piped-water system.² This ranges from just 8% of Liberians to more than nine out of 10 Tunisians (91%), São Toméans (91%), and Mauritians (100%) (Figure 4).

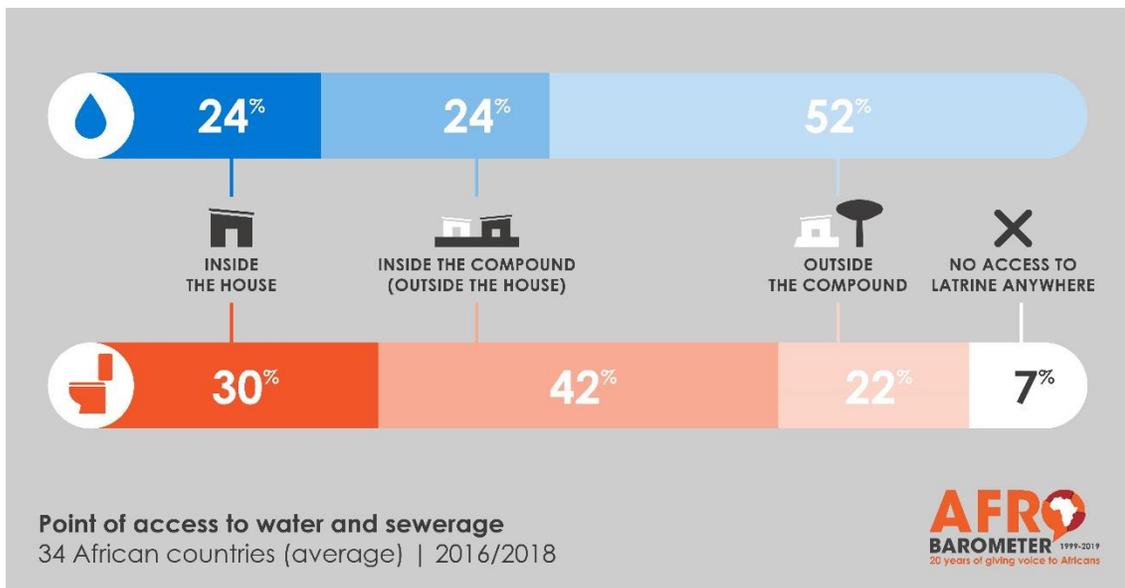
 - Only a quarter (26%) of Africans live in zones with sewage systems, an enormous challenge for achieving the SDG6 targets of providing



¹ 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, Dulani, & Gyimah-Boadi (2016).

² During survey fieldwork, enumerators capture data on the availability of basic services and infrastructure, including piped-water and sanitation systems, in each community they visit.

- access to “adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all” and ending open defecation. Liberia (5%) is joined by Tanzania (6%), the Gambia (7%), and Malawi (8%) at the low end, while only Tunisia (75%) and Morocco (69%) boast sewerage access for more than two-thirds of their populations (Figure 5).
- Rural residents and poor citizens are far less likely than their urban and better-off counterparts to benefit from water and sanitation infrastructure (Figure 6).
 - On average across 34 countries, neither water nor sanitation infrastructure appears to reaching larger proportions of the population than in Afrobarometer's 2011/2013 surveys (Figure 7).
 - More than half (52%) of Africans have to go outside their compound for clean water. This is true for more than eight out of 10 citizens in Uganda (87%), Niger (84%), Malawi (82%), and Tanzania (81%) (Figure 8). A water source inside the home or compound is enjoyed by just three out of 10 rural residents (31%) and citizens experiencing high lived poverty (28%) (Figure 9).
 - Almost three-fourths (72%) of respondents report having a toilet or latrine inside their home or compound, while 22% have to go outside the compound and 7% say they have no access to a toilet or latrine (Figure 10).
 - In seven countries, a majority of the population have no toilet or latrine in their home or compound: Ghana (58%), Niger (57%), Uganda (56%), Benin (56%), Malawi (55%), Liberia (55%), and Namibia (54%).
 - In five countries, more than one in five citizens say they have no access to a toilet or latrine at all: Benin (26%), Niger (26%), Burkina Faso (23%), Namibia (21%), and São Tomé and Príncipe (21%).
 - While the continental average shows no improvement since the 2011/2013 surveys, five countries registered significant gains in the proportion of citizens with toilets/latrines in their homes or compounds (Niger, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, eSwatini, and Ghana) (Figure 11).

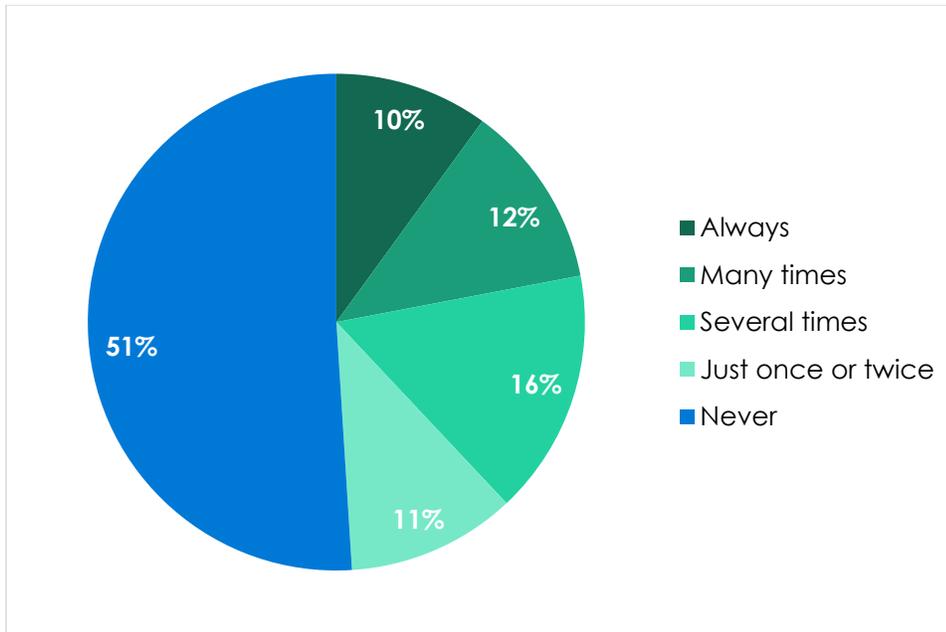


- Among respondents who tried to obtain water, sanitation, or electricity services from the government during the year preceding the survey, almost two-thirds (63%) say it was “difficult” or “very difficult” to get the services they needed. The proportions complaining of difficulty range from four in 10 in Tanzania and Mauritius (both 40%) to more than three-fourths in Madagascar (79%) and Gabon (78%) (Figure 12). Across 33 countries surveyed in both 2014/2015 and 2016/2018, the share of respondents reporting it was easy to obtain these services declined from 44% to 36%.
- On average, one in five respondents (20%) who tried to obtain utility services during the previous year say they had to pay a bribe or do a favour to get the needed services. Almost half (48%) of Liberians say they had to pay a bribe, followed by 39% of Cameroonians, while fewer than one in 20 report this experience in Mauritius (3%) and Botswana (4%) (Figure 13).
- On average across 34 countries, water/sanitation ties with infrastructure/transport/roads for third place among the most important national problems that Africans want their governments to address, trailing only unemployment and health (Figure 14). Six out of 10 Guineans (60%) cite water/sanitation among their three most important problems, followed by 47% of Tanzanians and 44% of Burkina Faso (Figure 15). Countries where the share of respondents who prioritize water/sanitation as an urgent national problem increased the most are Guinea, Tanzania, Kenya, and Côte d'Ivoire (Figure 16).
 - When we map citizens’ “most important problems” onto the Sustainable Development Goals, SDG6 (“clean water and sanitation”) is the highest-priority goal for Guineans, the second-highest priority in Tanzania and Benin, and the third-highest in eight other countries. Water/sanitation is an especially high priority in poor countries.³
 - Rural residents, less-educated citizens, and poor respondents are far more likely to prioritize water and sanitation than their urban, more-educated, and better-off counterparts (Figure 17).
- Given these manifold concerns, it’s no surprise that a majority (54%) of Africans say their government is doing “fairly badly” or “very badly” at providing water and sanitation services (Figure 18), although this reflects a modest improvement since 2011/2013 (from 56% to 53% across 31 countries surveyed in all of the past three rounds) (Figure 19). Gabonese (84%) and Guineans (82%) are most critical. Only nine countries register majority approval of government performance on water/sanitation, led by eSwatini (65%) and Botswana (63%) (Figure 20).
 - The greatest improvements in citizen assessments of government performance on water and sanitation occurred in Liberia, Lesotho, eSwatini, Senegal, Tunisia, and Tanzania (Figure 21), while Malawi, Guinea, South Africa, Sudan, and Sierra Leone registered the greatest declines (Figure 22).
- Rural residents’ disadvantage in water and sanitation services extends to all aspects of access and supply except for the likelihood of having to pay a bribe (Figure 23).

³ For more on citizens’ prioritization of the SDGs, see Coulibaly, Silwé, & Logan (2018), “[Taking stock: Citizen priorities and assessments three years into the SDGs](#)”

Charts

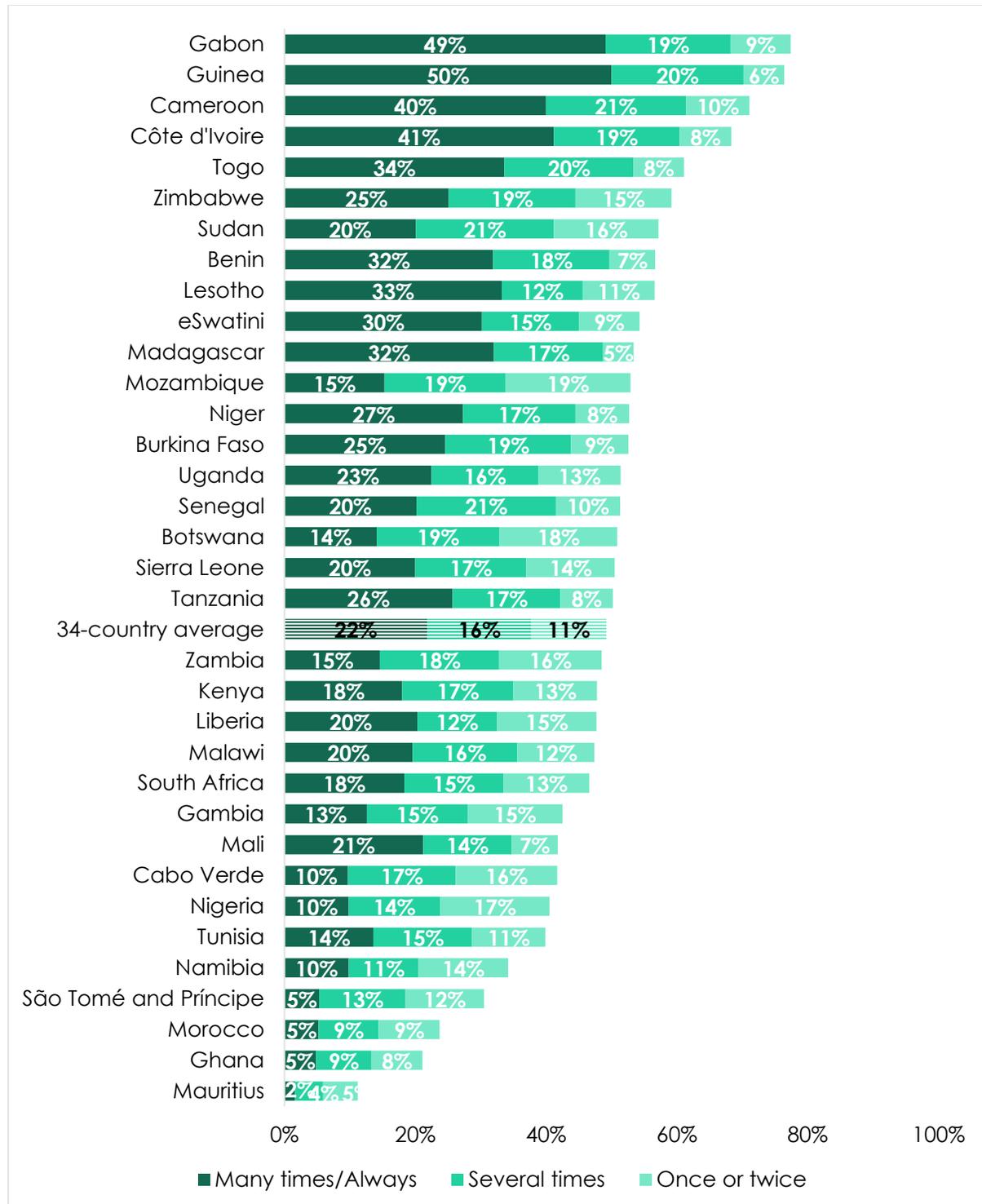
Figure 1: Going without enough clean water | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without enough clean water for home use?

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Figure 2: Going without enough clean water | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without enough clean water for home use?

Figure 3: Improving access to clean water (percentage points) | 31 countries | 2011-2018

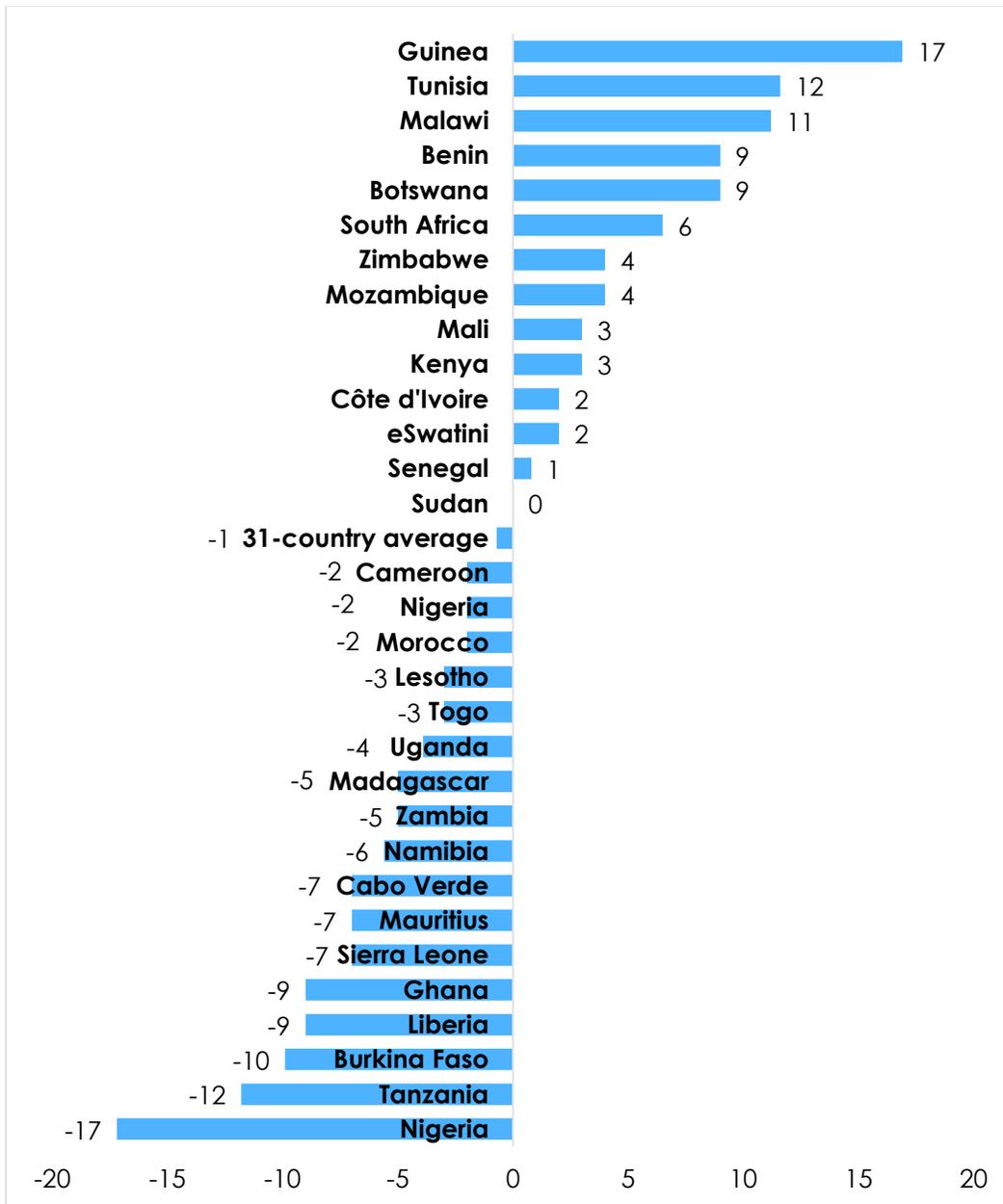
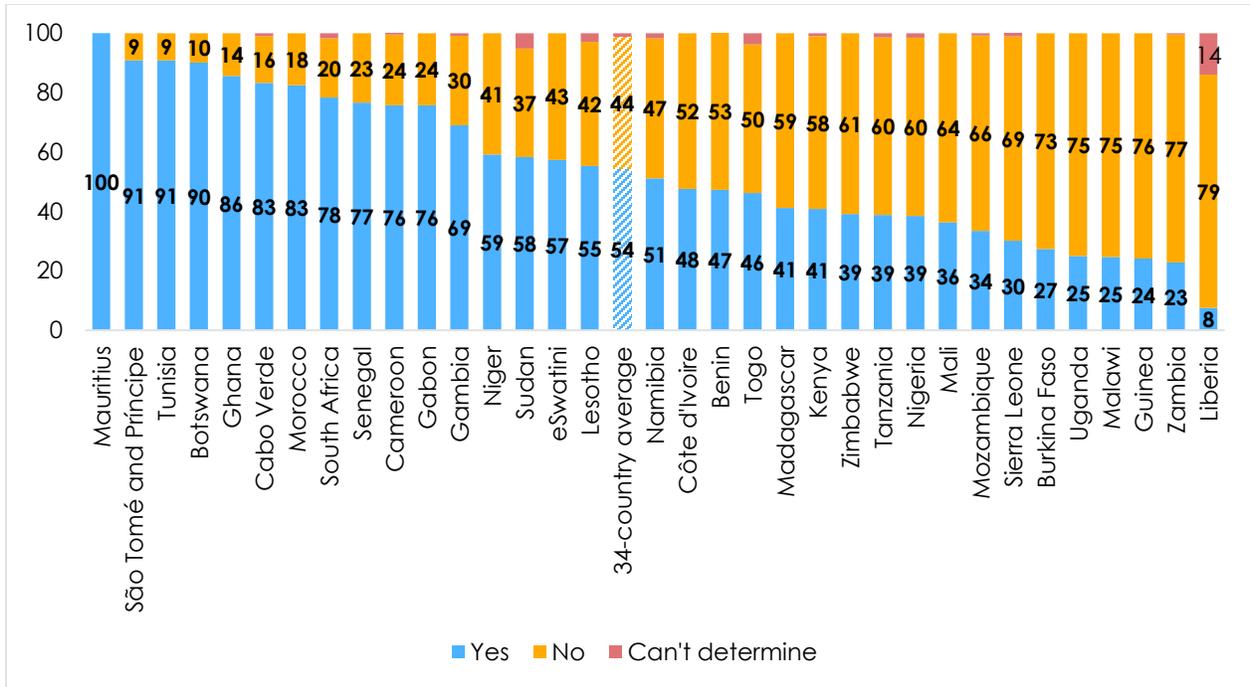


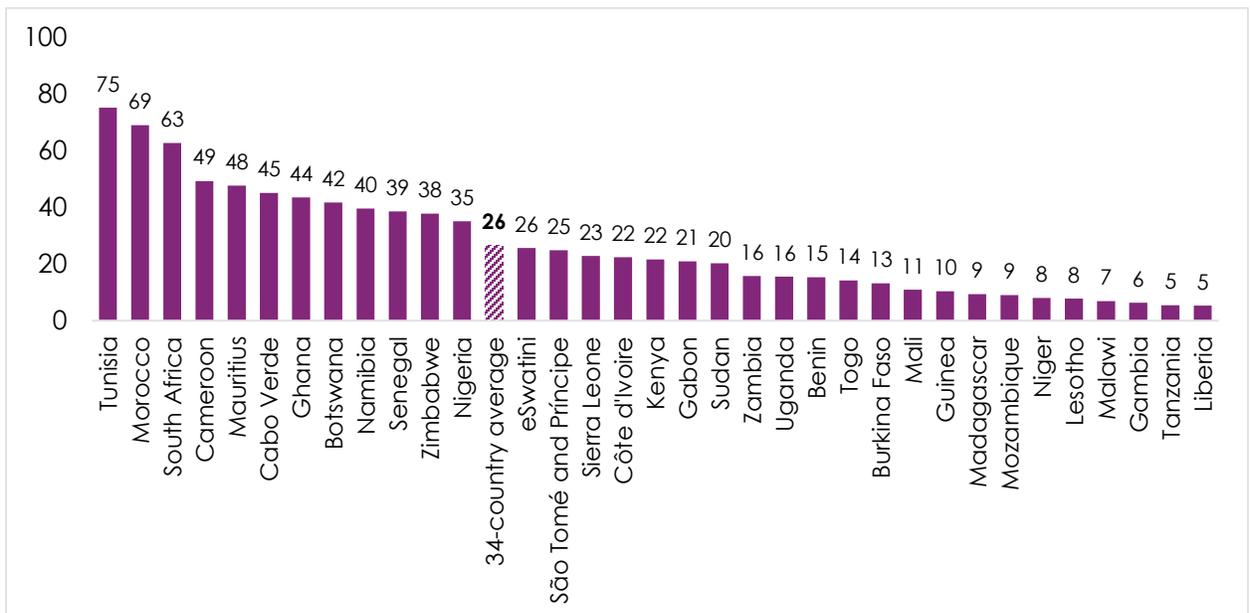
Figure shows the change (in percentage points) between survey rounds in 2011/2013 and 2016/2018 in the proportion of respondents who say they “never” went without enough clean water. Positive numbers indicate improvement.

Figure 4: Piped-water system in the enumeration area | 34 countries | 2016/2018



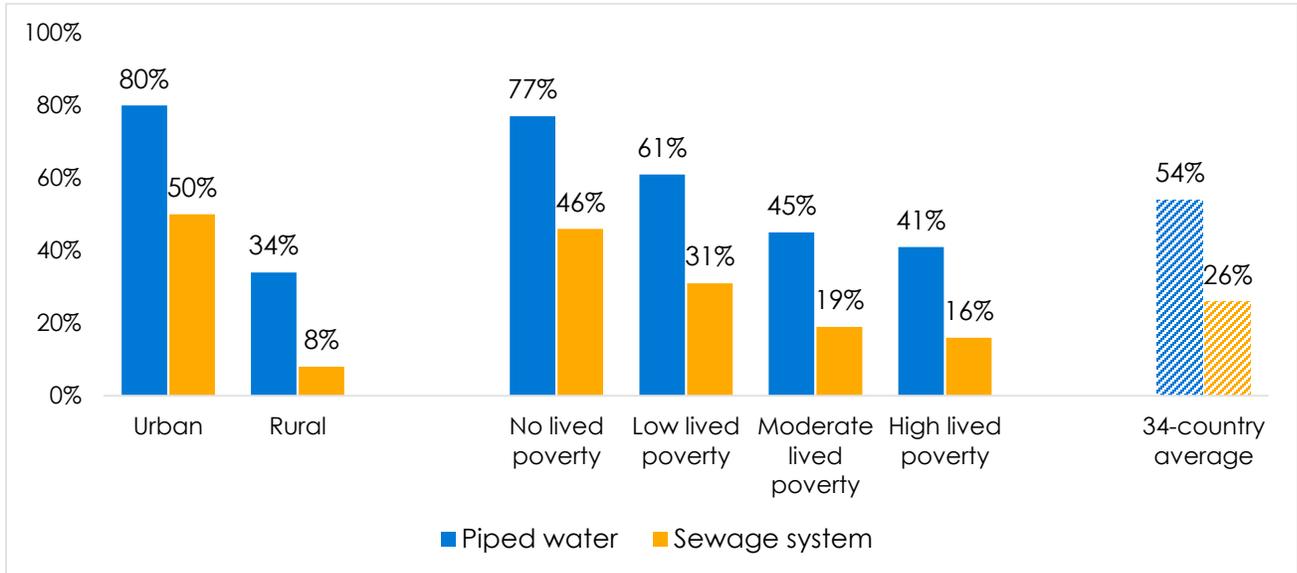
Afrobarometer interviewers were asked to observe: Are the following services present in the primary sampling unit/enumeration area: Piped-water system that most houses can access?

Figure 5: Sewage system in the enumeration area | 34 countries | 2016/2018



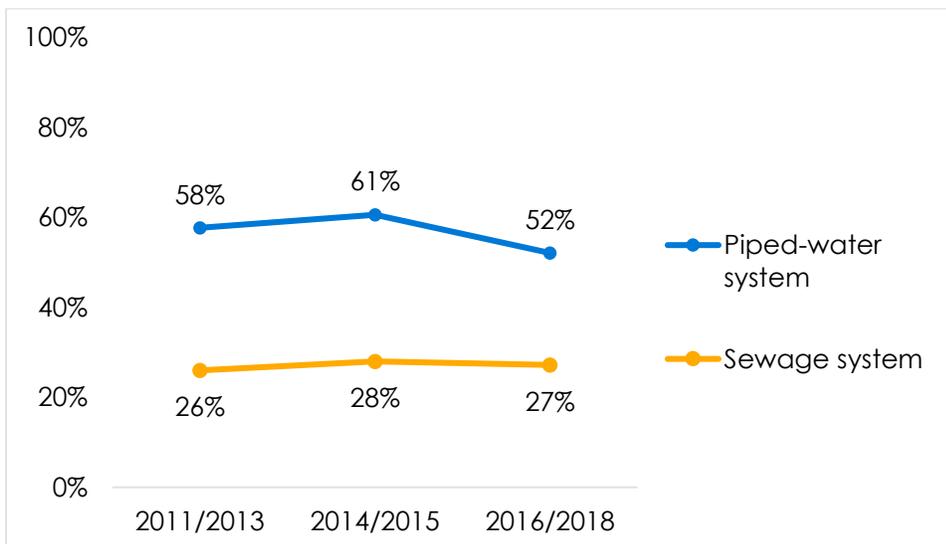
Afrobarometer interviewers were asked to observe: Are the following services present in the primary sampling unit/enumeration area: Sewage system that most houses can access? (% of enumeration areas where services are available)

Figure 6: Piped-water and sewage system in the enumeration area | by urban-rural residency and lived poverty | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Afrobarometer interviewers were asked to observe: Are the following services present in the primary sampling unit/enumeration area: Piped-water system that most houses can access? Sewage system that most houses can access? (% of enumeration areas where services are available)

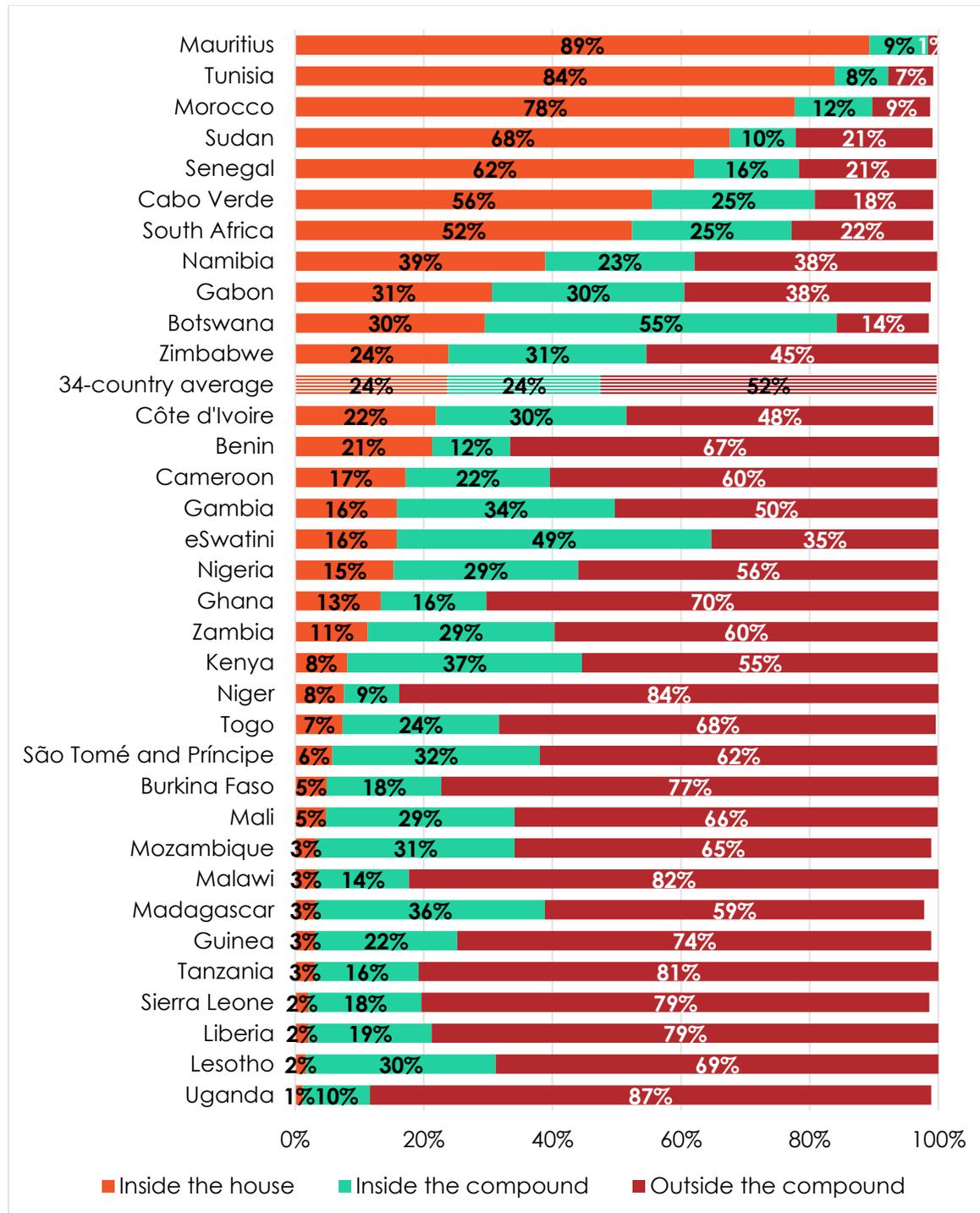
Figure 7: Piped-water and sewage system in the enumeration area | 31 countries | 2011-2018



Afrobarometer interviewers were asked to observe: Are the following services present in the primary sampling unit/enumeration area: Piped-water system that most houses can access? Sewage system that most houses can access? (% of enumeration areas where services are available)

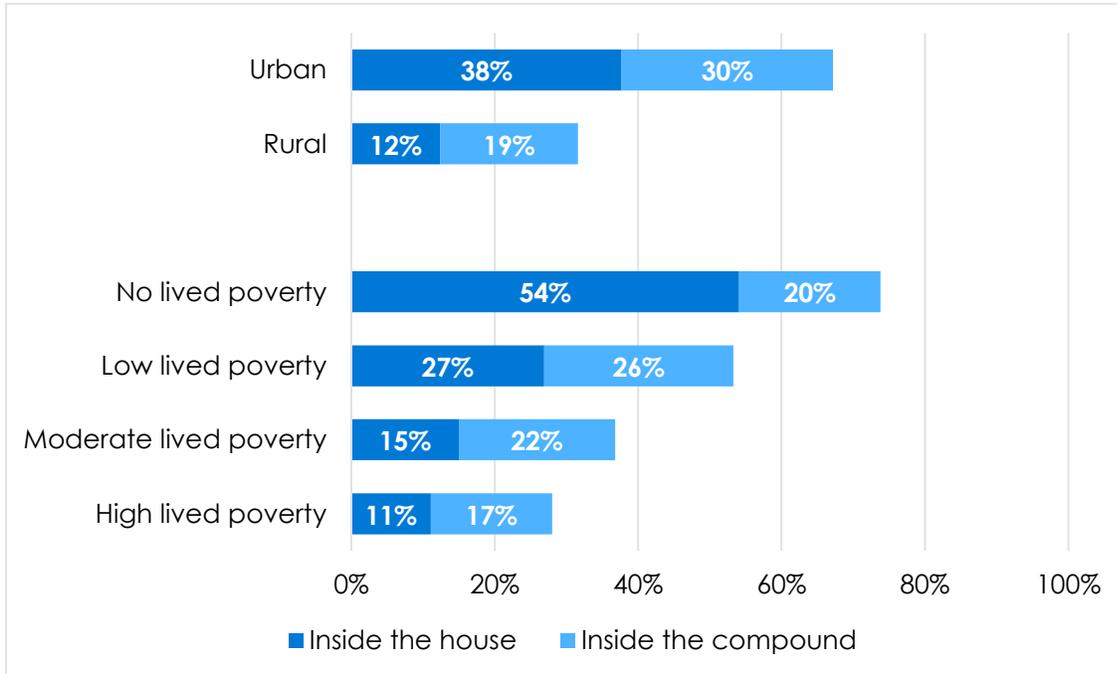
(Note: Since these data are reported at the enumeration area (EA) level, with samples of just 150-300 EAs, the margin of error is substantially larger than for questions posed to all respondents. This may help explain fluctuations in recorded service levels.)

Figure 8: Main source of water for household use | 34 countries | 2016/2018



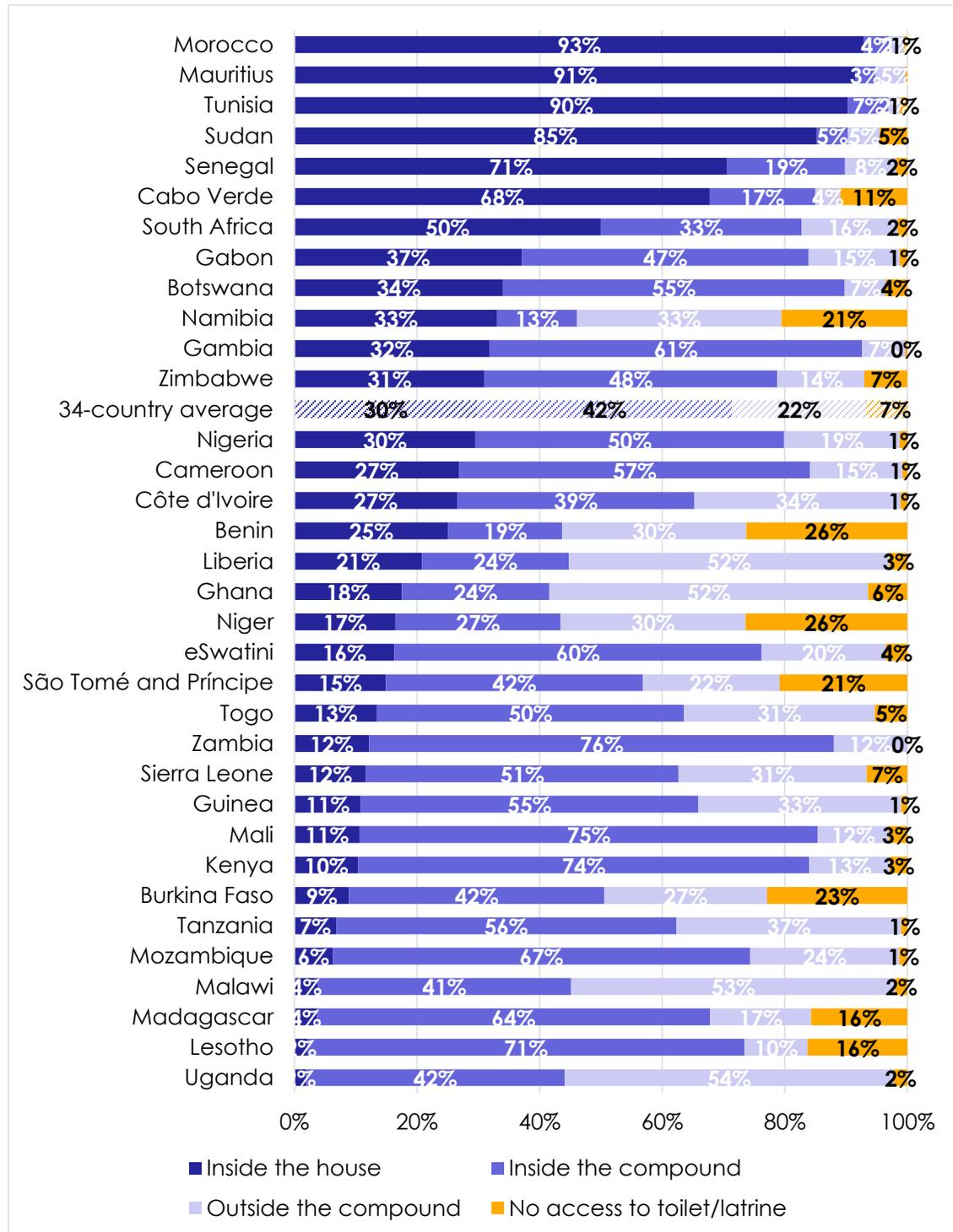
Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether each of the following are available inside your house, inside your compound, or outside your compound: Your main source of water for household use?

Figure 9: Main source of water for household use | by urban-rural residency and lived poverty | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether each of the following are available inside your house, inside your compound, or outside your compound: Your main source of water for household use?

Figure 10: Location of toilet or latrine | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether each of the following are available inside your house, inside your compound, or outside your compound: A toilet or latrine?

Figure 11: Toilet inside house or compound: Countries with largest gains | 31 countries
 | 2011-2018

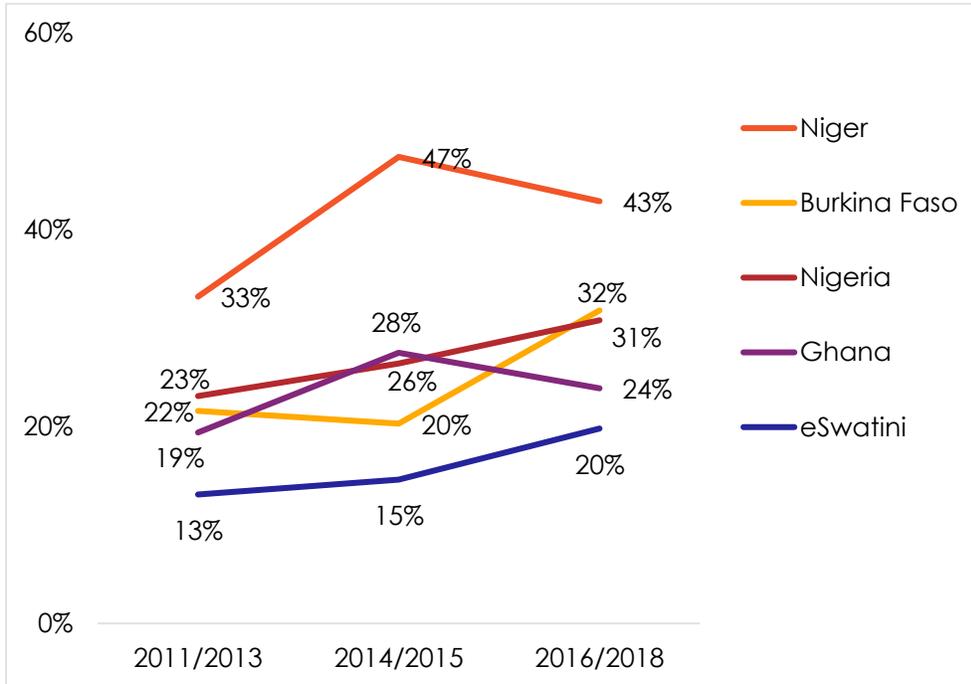
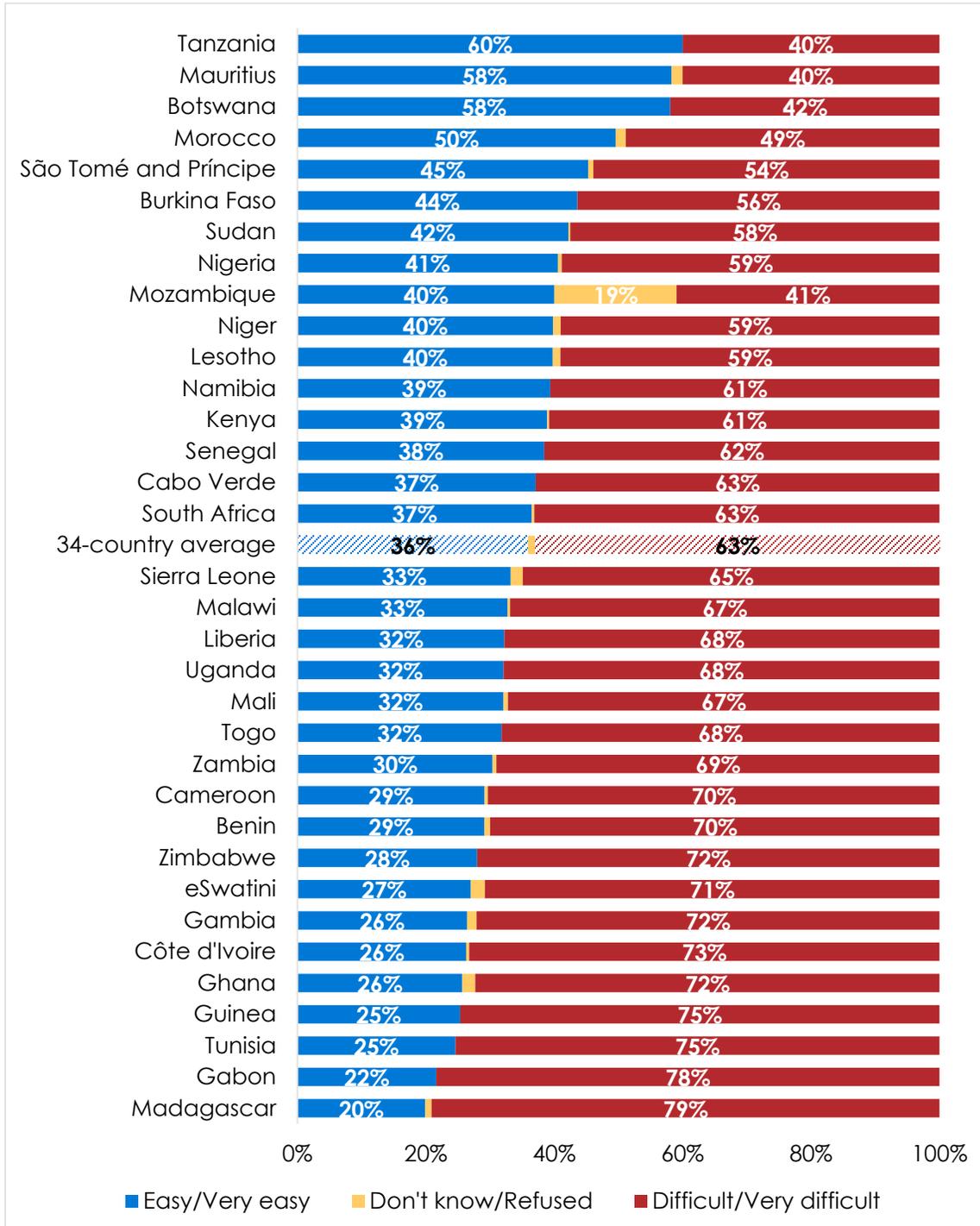


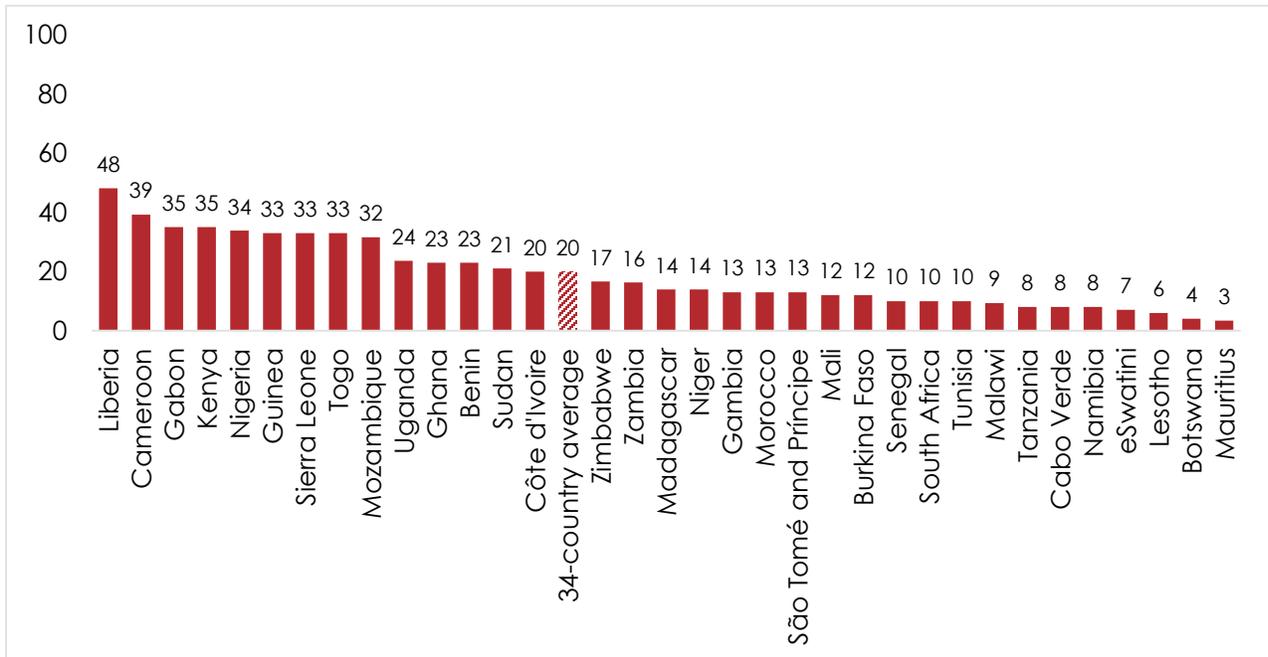
Figure shows countries registering the largest increases in the proportion of respondents with toilets or latrines inside the house or inside the compound.

Figure 12: Difficulty of obtaining water, sanitation, or electricity services | 34 countries
 | 2016/2018



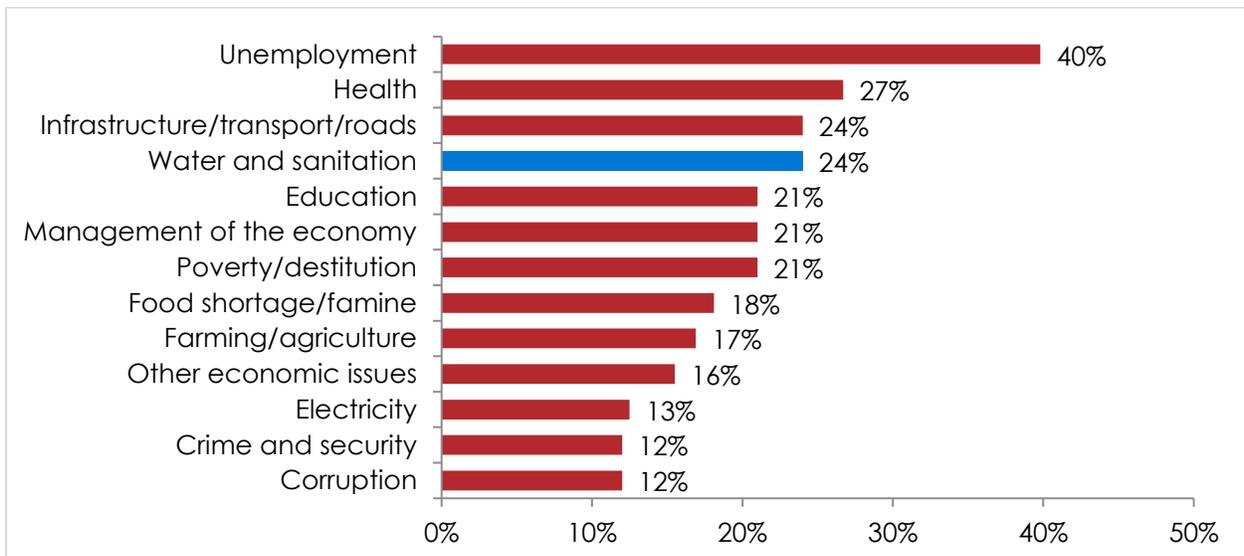
Respondents were asked: In the past 12 months, have you tried to get water, sanitation, or electric services from government? (If yes:) How easy or difficult was it to obtain the services you needed?

Figure 13: Paid a bribe to obtain water, sanitation, or electricity services in past year
 | 34 countries | 2016/2018



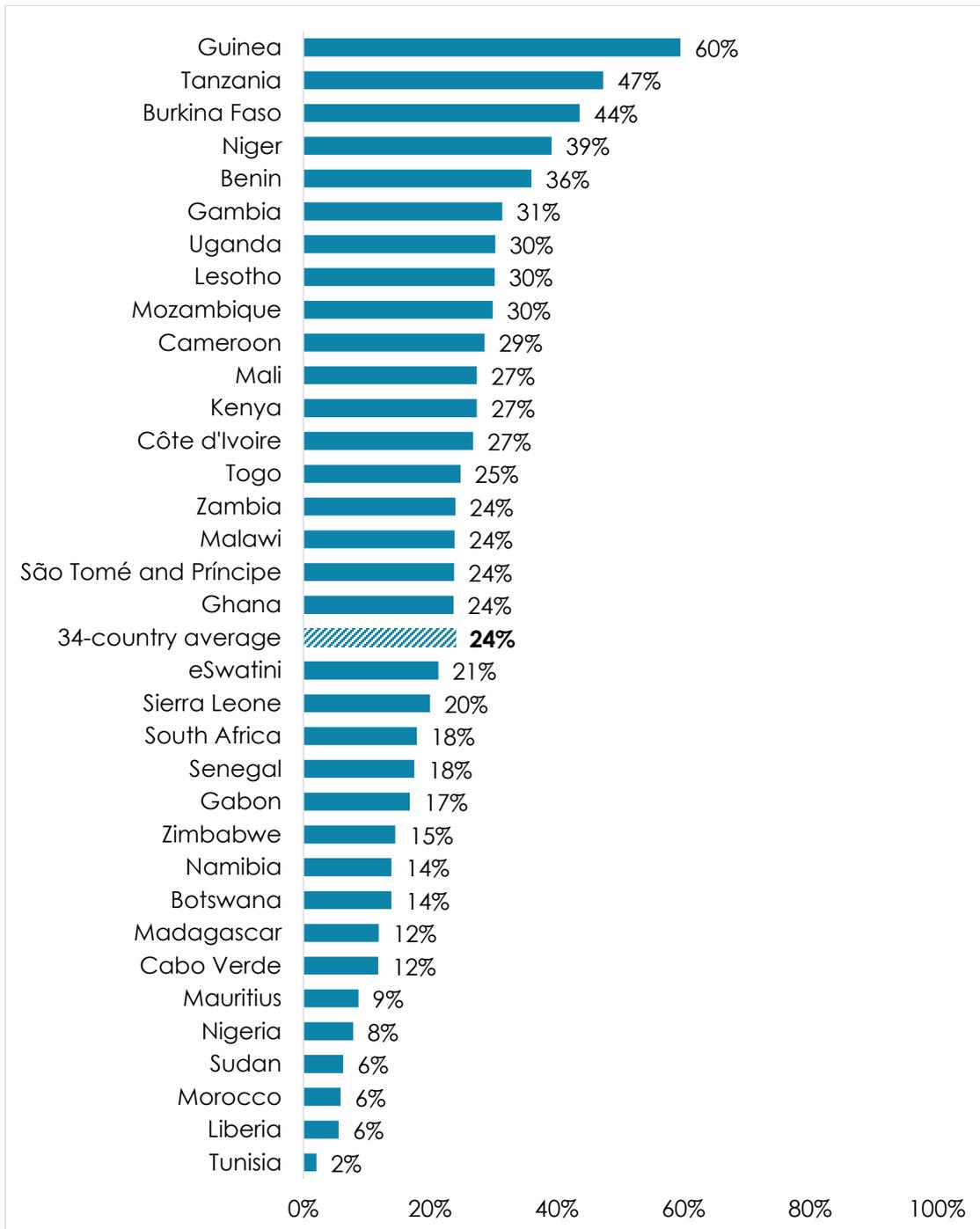
Respondents were asked: *In the past 12 months, have you tried to get water, sanitation, or electric services from government? (If yes:) And how often, if ever, have you had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour to government officials in order to get the services you needed? (Among respondents who tried obtain services, % who say they paid a bribe "once or twice," "a few times," or "often")*

Figure 14: Most important problems | 34 countries | 2016/2018



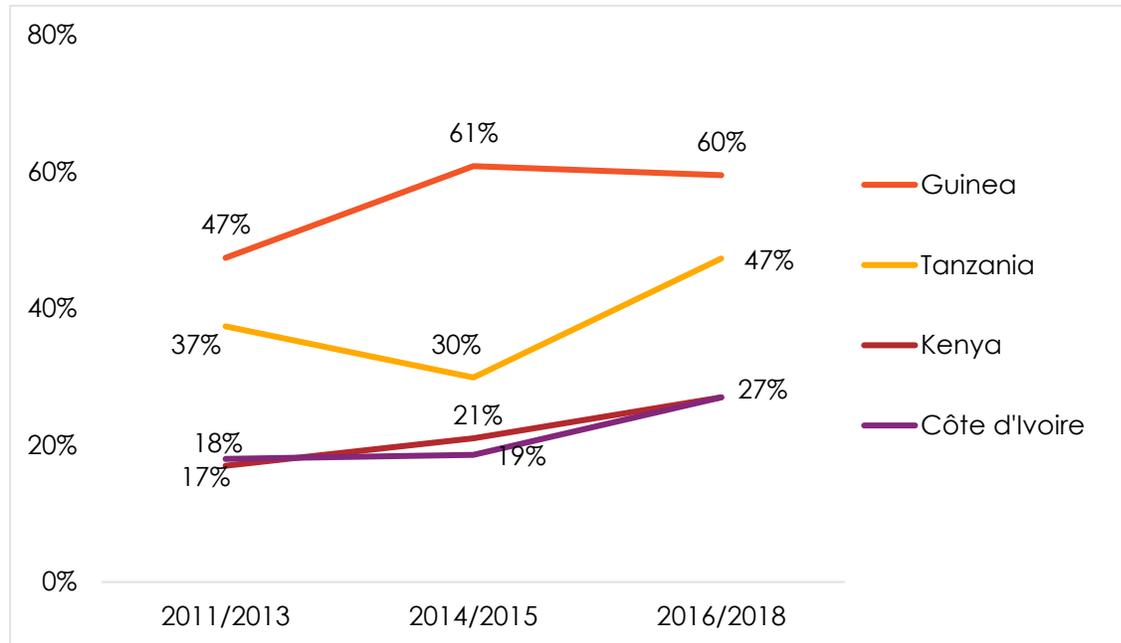
Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Note: Respondents could give up to three responses. Figure shows % of respondents who cite each problem as among their top three.)*

Figure 15: Water and sanitation as a top-priority problem | 34 countries | 2016/2018



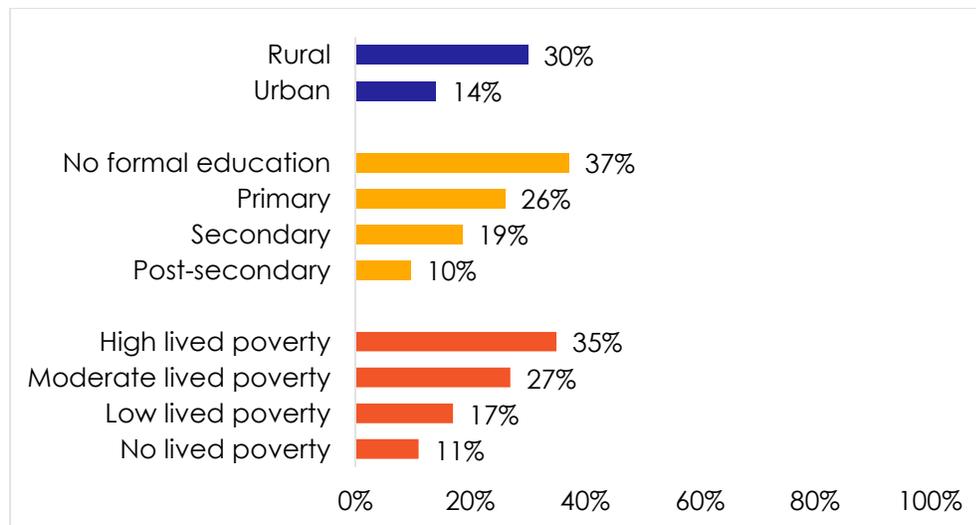
Respondents were asked: In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? **(Note:** Respondents could give up to three responses. Figure shows % of respondents who cite “water and sanitation” as one of their top three priorities.)

Figure 16: Greatest increase in prioritization of water/sanitation as a national problem
 | 31 countries | 2011-2018



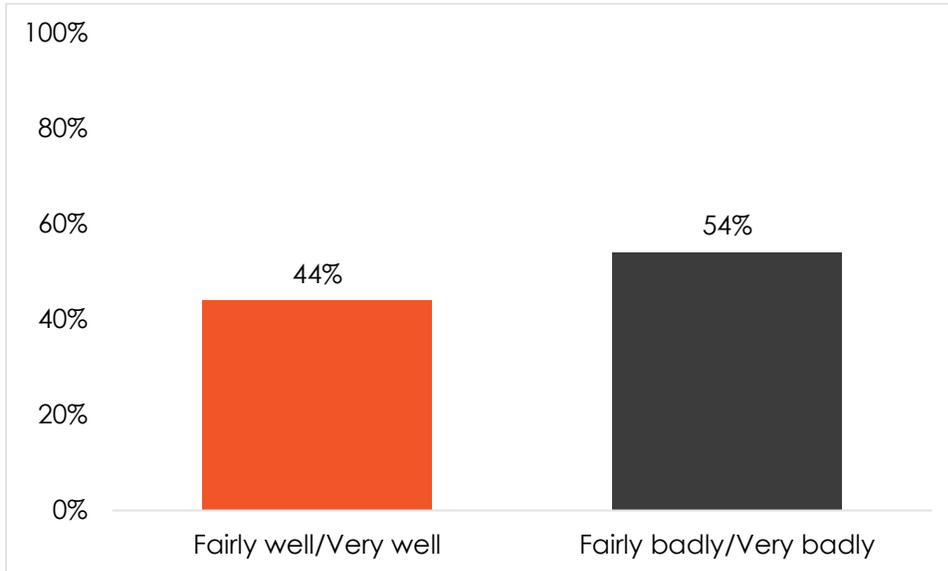
Respondents were asked: In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? **(Note:** Respondents could give up to three responses. Figure shows % of respondents who cite "water and sanitation" as one of their top three priorities.)

Figure 17: Water/sanitation as a most important problem | by urban-rural residency, education, and lived poverty | 34 countries | 2016/2018



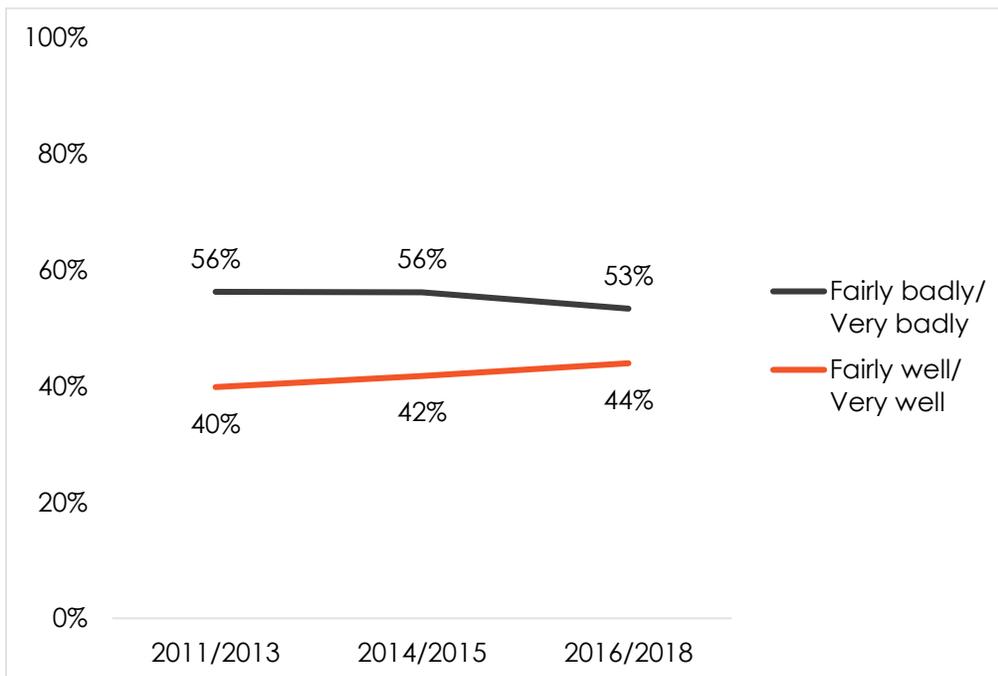
Respondents were asked: In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? **(Note:** Respondents could give up to three responses. Figure shows % of respondents who cite "water and sanitation" as one of their top three priorities.)

Figure 18: Government performance in providing water and sanitation services
 | 34 countries | 2016/2018



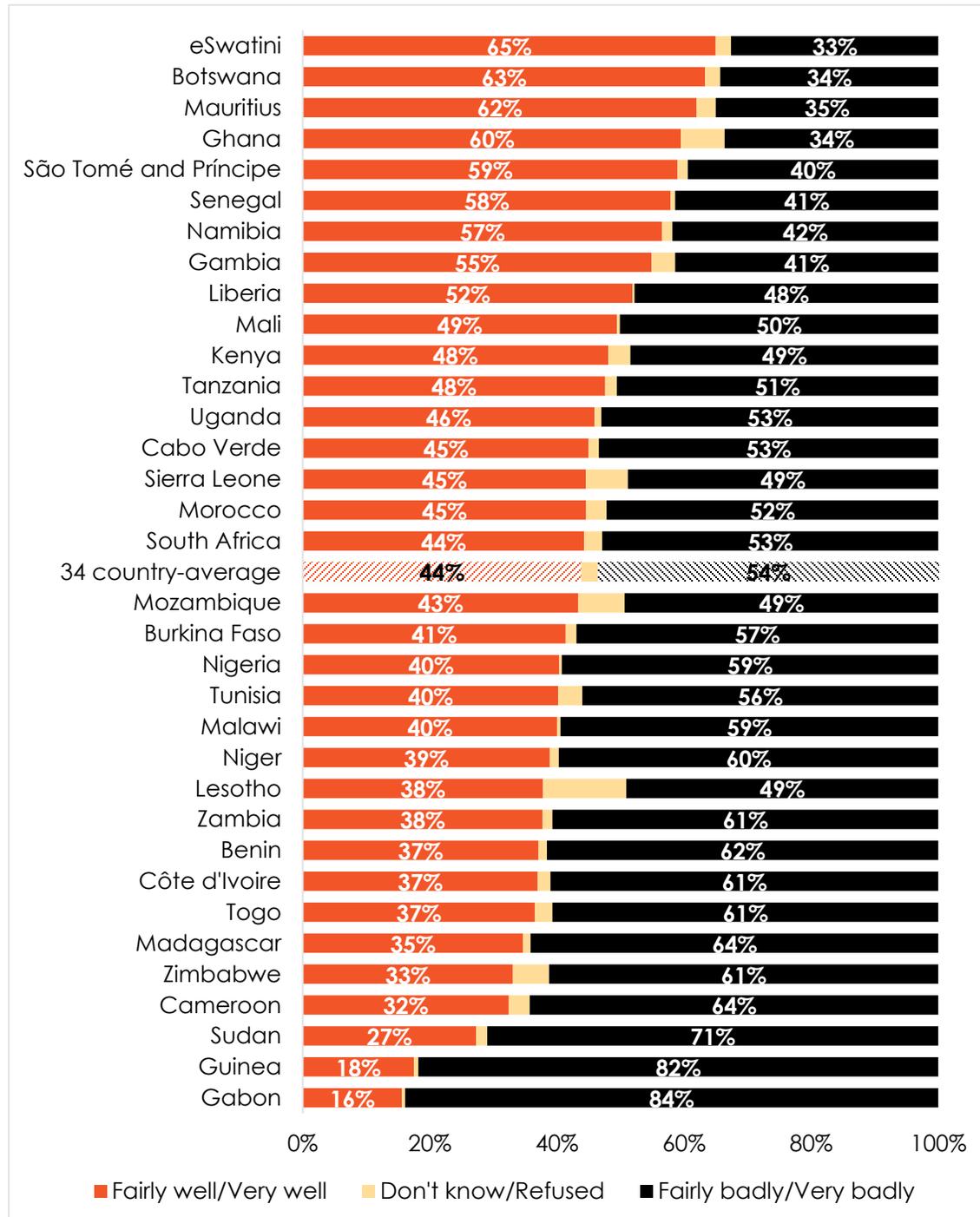
Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Providing water and sanitation services?

Figure 19: Trend in government performance in providing water and sanitation services
 | 31 countries | 2011-2018



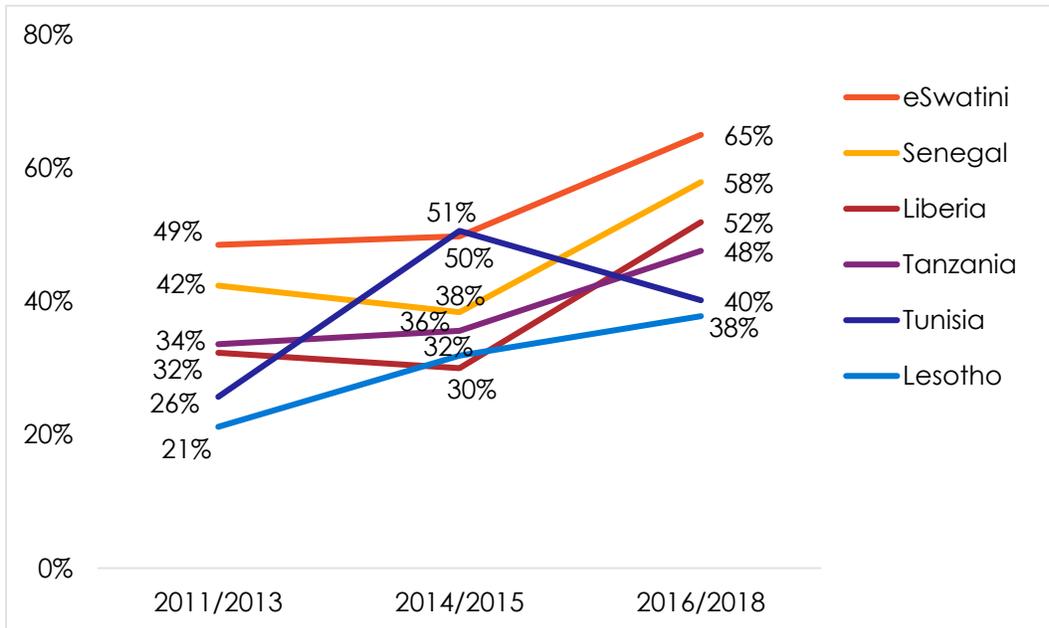
Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Providing water and sanitation services?

Figure 20: Government performance in providing water and sanitation services
 | 34 countries | 2016/2018



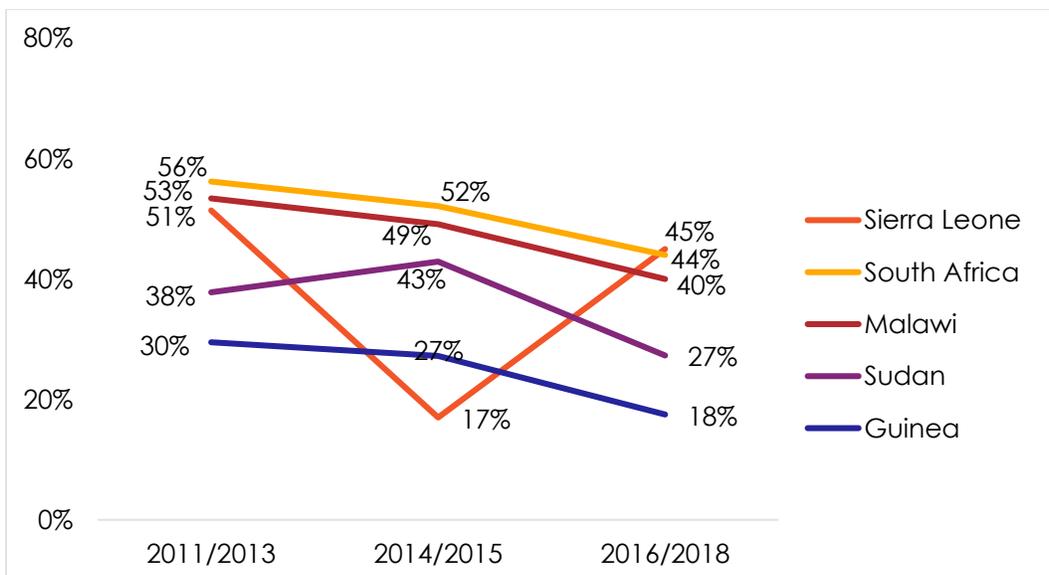
Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Providing water and sanitation services?

Figure 21: Greatest improvement in perceived government performance in providing water and sanitation services | 31 countries | 2011-2018



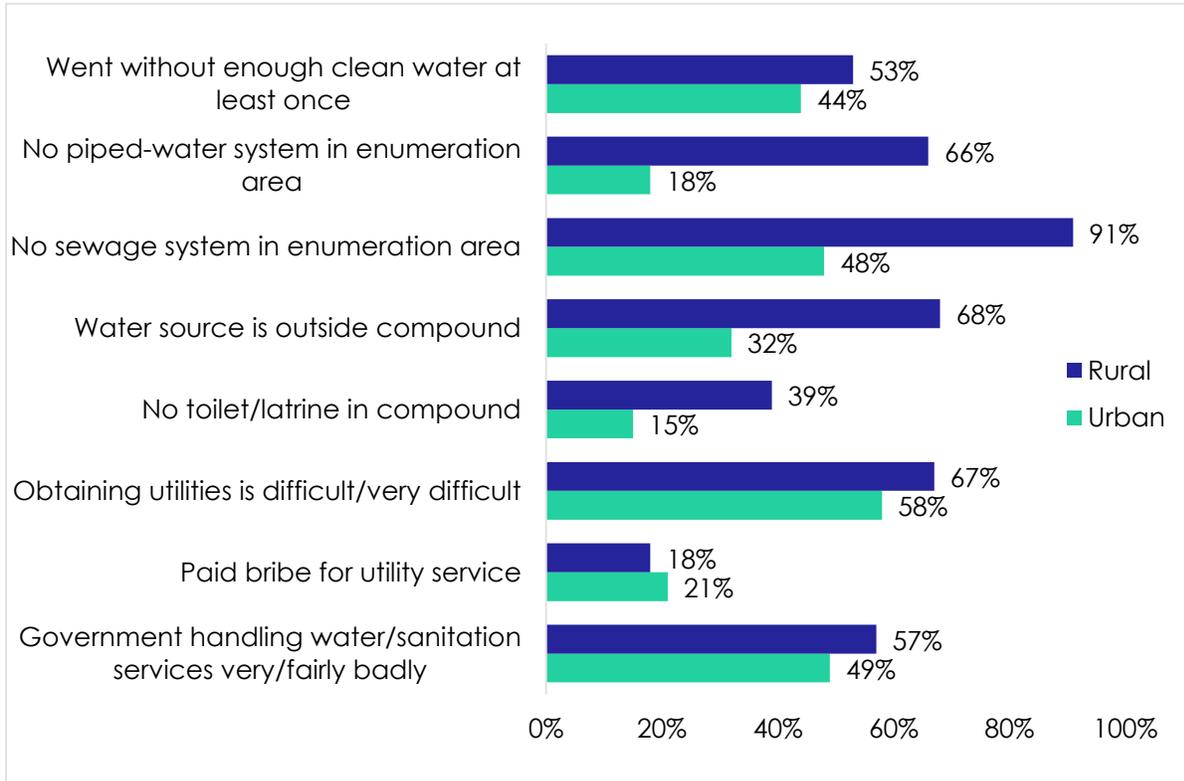
Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Providing water and sanitation services? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")

Figure 22: Greatest decline in perceived government performance in providing water and sanitation services | 31 countries | 2011-2018



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: Providing water and sanitation services? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")

Figure 23: Urban-rural differences on water/sanitation indicators | 34 countries
 | 2016/2018



References

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- Mattes, R., Dulani, B., & Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2016). Africa's growth dividend? Lived poverty drops across much of the continent. Afrobarometer Policy Paper No. 29.
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- ✓ Policy Paper 51: Taking stock: Citizen priorities and assessments three years into the SDGs

Appendix

Table A.1: Afrobarometer Round 7 fieldwork dates and previous survey rounds

Country	Months when Round 7 fieldwork was conducted	Previous survey rounds
Benin	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
Botswana	June-July 2017	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Burkina Faso	Oct 2017	2008, 2012, 2015
Cameroon	May 2018	2013, 2015
Cape Verde	Nov-Dec 2017	2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
Côte d'Ivoire	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	2013, 2014
eSwatini (Swaziland)	March 2018	2013, 2015
Gabon	Nov 2017	2015
Gambia	July-August 2018	N/A
Ghana	Sept 2017	1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Guinea	May 2017	2013, 2015
Kenya	Sept-Oct 2016	2003, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
Lesotho	Nov-Dec 2017	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Liberia	June-July 2018	2008, 2012, 2015
Madagascar	Jan-Feb 2018	2005, 2008, 2013, 2015
Malawi	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Mali	Feb 2017	2001, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014
Mauritius	Oct-Nov 2017	2012, 2014
Morocco	May 2018	2013, 2015
Mozambique	July-August 2018	2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015
Namibia	Nov 2017	1999, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2014
Niger	April-May 2018	2013, 2015
Nigeria	April-May 2017	2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2015
São Tomé and Príncipe	July 2018	2015
Senegal	Dec 2017	2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2014
Sierra Leone	July 2018	2012, 2015
South Africa	August-Sept 2018	2000, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2011, 2015
Sudan	July-August 2018	2013, 2015
Tanzania	April-June 2017	2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Togo	Nov 2017	2012, 2014
Tunisia	April-May 2018	2013, 2015
Uganda	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015
Zambia	April 2017	1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2014
Zimbabwe	Jan-Feb 2017	1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2014

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