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Pan-Africa Profiles

Democratic dividend

The road to quality education in Africa

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Introduction

Education is a powerful tool to fight poverty, enable upward socioeconomic mobility, and empower people to live healthier lives. But while the global adult literacy rate continues to increase, from 81% in 2000 to 86% in 2018 (World Bank, 2019), the challenge of access to quality education remains particularly severe in Africa. Even before the COVID-19 crisis, globally one out of five children aged 6-17 years were not in school; more than half of these children live in sub-Saharan Africa. Additionally, many African pupils attend schools that are inadequately equipped, creating a difficult learning environment. For example, more than half of the schools in sub-Saharan Africa do not have access to basic drinking water, handwashing facilities, the Internet, or computers (United Nations, 2019).

COVID-19 may exacerbate these challenges as pupils lose school time, unequal access to online learning heightens inequalities, and health care and social-safety costs and economic losses put pressure on limited resources.

Africans are aware of education challenges. Across 34 African countries surveyed by Afrobarometer between late 2016 and late 2018, one in five respondents (21%) cited education as one of the most important problems their governments should address, placing it among citizens' top five priorities (Coulibaly, Silwé, & Logan, 2018). Not surprisingly, younger people placed substantially greater emphasis on education than their elders.

At a global level, the United Nations (UN) has highlighted the importance of quality education by including it in its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDG 4 calls for governments to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." To this end, the UN outlines specific targets to be achieved by 2030, including ensuring that "all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy." An important step toward this goal is that by 2030, all girls and boys should be able to "complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education" (United Nations, 2019).

Many African governments have made important commitments to universal education. Of the 34 countries surveyed by Afrobarometer in 2016/2018, 33 have made school attendance compulsory (for periods ranging from five to 11 years), and 33 provide free primary education. (See Appendix Table A.2 for details.) Many governments also commit substantial portions of their yearly budgets to improving education. For example, in Côte d'Ivoire, eSwatini, Ghana, Malawi, Senegal, Tunisia, and Zimbabwe, more than 25% of total government expenditures go to education (World Bank, 2020).

Afrobarometer surveys point to slow but steady progress as fewer Africans go without formal education and more attend school beyond the primary grades. But in some countries, two-thirds of adults still have no formal schooling, and significant gender gaps continue to disadvantage girls and women.

Overall, just a slim majority of Africans think their government is doing a good job on meeting educational needs. Factors that contribute to these evaluations include whether citizens find it easy to obtain school services and whether they think schools are transparent about their budgets and responsive to reports of teacher misconduct.

More fundamentally, our analysis finds that more democratic countries are seen as better able to provide public education. Citizens are more likely to be satisfied with government performance on education if immediate avenues of transparency and accountability at the school level are embedded in a broader political system that encourages these qualities.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on Africans' experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Seven rounds of surveys have been completed since 1999. Interested readers may follow our releases, including our Pan-Africa Profiles series of 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. Nationally representative samples of 1,200 to 2,400 yield country-level results with margins of error of +/-2 to +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. The data are weighted to ensure nationally representative samples. When reporting multi-country findings such as regional or Africa-wide averages, all countries are weighted equally (rather than in proportion to population size).

This policy paper relies primarily 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). It also makes comparisons to data collected in Round 5 (2011/2013) and Round 6 (2014/2015). Over-time comparisons focus on the 31 countries that were included in all three of these survey rounds.

Key findings

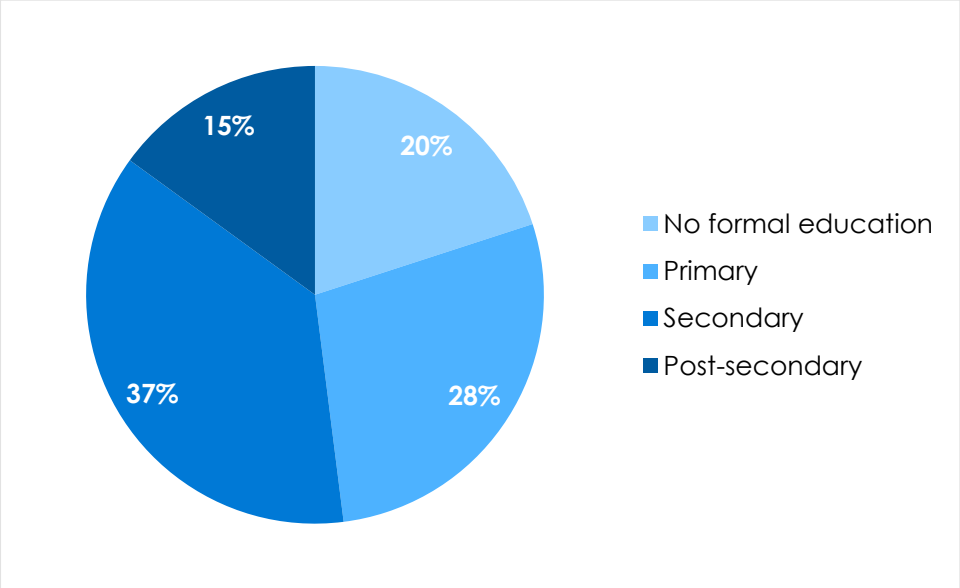
- On average across 34 countries, one in five African adults (20%) have no formal education, 28% attended primary school, 37% attended secondary school, and 15% attended institutions of higher learning.
- Over the past two decades, the proportion of the adult population with no formal education has shown a slow but consistent decrease, while the share of those with secondary or post-secondary education has risen. Gains over time are also reflected in much higher rates of secondary and post-secondary education among younger respondents than among their elders.
    - But countries vary widely in educational attainment. While almost all Gabonese and Mauritians have been to school, about two-thirds of citizens in Niger (68%), Burkina Faso (64%), and Mali (64%) have had no formal education.
- Nine out of 10 Africans (91%) said that boys and girls have equal opportunities to get an education. But gender gaps in educational attainment persist. Women are more likely than men to lack formal schooling (23% vs. 17%) and less likely to have secondary or post-secondary education (47% vs. 57%). And while 17 countries have eliminated the gender gap in formal education among the youngest cohort, large differences remain in Mali (a 27-percentage-point gap), Niger (23 points), Burkina Faso (17 points), and Benin (13 points).
- On average, a slim majority (54%) of Africans said their governments were doing a good job of meeting educational needs. But assessments varied widely by country, with approval levels ranging from eight out of 10 citizens in eSwatini and Ghana to fewer than two out of 10 in Morocco and Gabon.
    - Urban residents, poor respondents, and more-educated citizens were less satisfied with their government's performance on education.
- Citizens who believed they could access budget information about their schools and could have teachers held accountable were more likely to give government positive performance reviews than those who were less confident of school transparency and accountability. In short, education outcomes matter in performance evaluations, but so do the processes through which education services are delivered.
- Africans who saw their country as a well-functioning democracy were significantly more likely to approve of the government's performance on education. The more years a country has been an electoral democracy, the more likely it is that its citizens are satisfied with the delivery of public education services.

Educational attainment

To understand the challenges of achieving education and lifelong learning for all, it is important to take stock of the current situation. While official statistics on school enrollment and literacy are widely available (see, for example, the UNESCO (2019) and World Bank (2019) data banks), survey data add to these by looking at the entire population and shedding light on how education levels relate to attitudes and evaluations of government performance.

On average across the sample of 34 countries surveyed by Afrobarometer, 20% of respondents said they have no formal schooling, 28% have attended or completed primary school, 37% have attended or completed secondary school, and 15% have post-secondary education (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Educational attainment | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: *What is your highest level of education?*

Looking at educational attainment over time and by age group, we see evidence of some progress during the past two decades.

On average across the 12 countries that Afrobarometer has surveyed in all seven survey rounds since 1999,[1] the proportion of respondents with no formal education has declined from 19% to 15% (Figure 2), while the proportion with secondary or post-secondary qualifications has risen from 47% to 53% (Figure 3). Examining larger groups of countries over shorter time spans (as Afrobarometer has expanded over time), we see similar gains for averages across 16 countries surveyed consistently since Round 2 (2002/2003),[2] 18 countries since Round 3 (2005/2006),[3] 20 countries since Round 4 (2008/2009),[4] and 31 countries since Round 5 (2011/2013).[5]

[1] Botswana, Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Namibia, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe

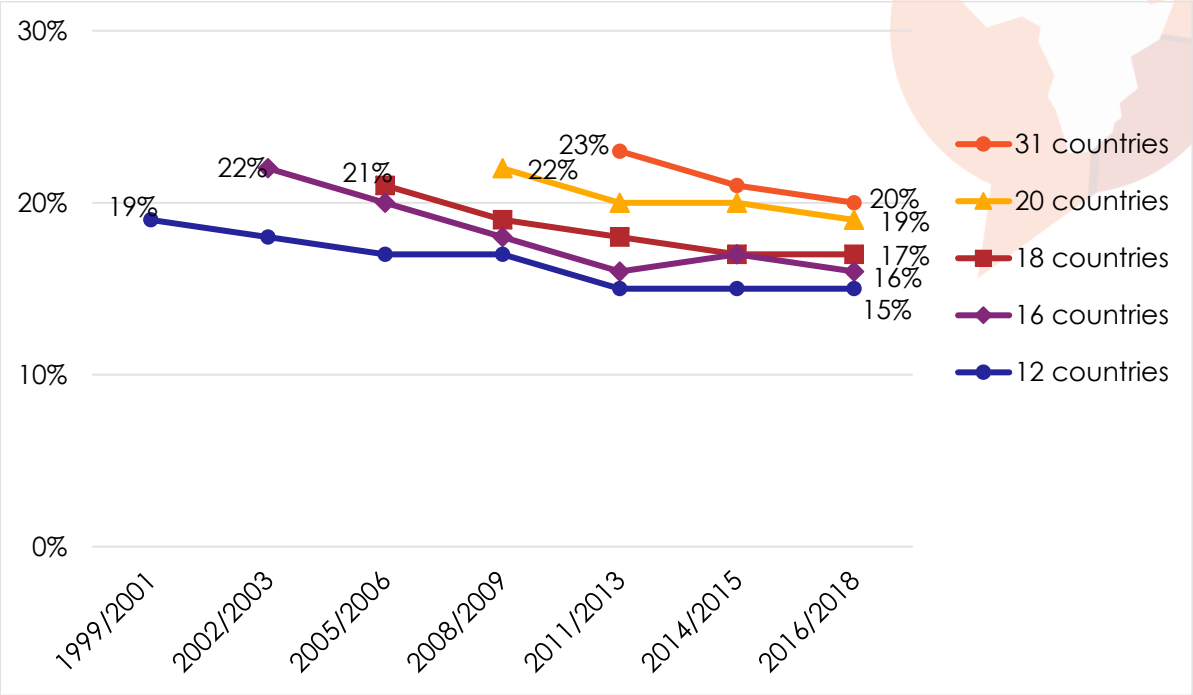
[2] The 12 countries listed above plus Cabo Verde, Kenya, Mozambique, and Senegal

[3] The 16 countries listed above plus Benin and Madagascar

[4] The 18 countries listed above plus Burkina Faso and Liberia

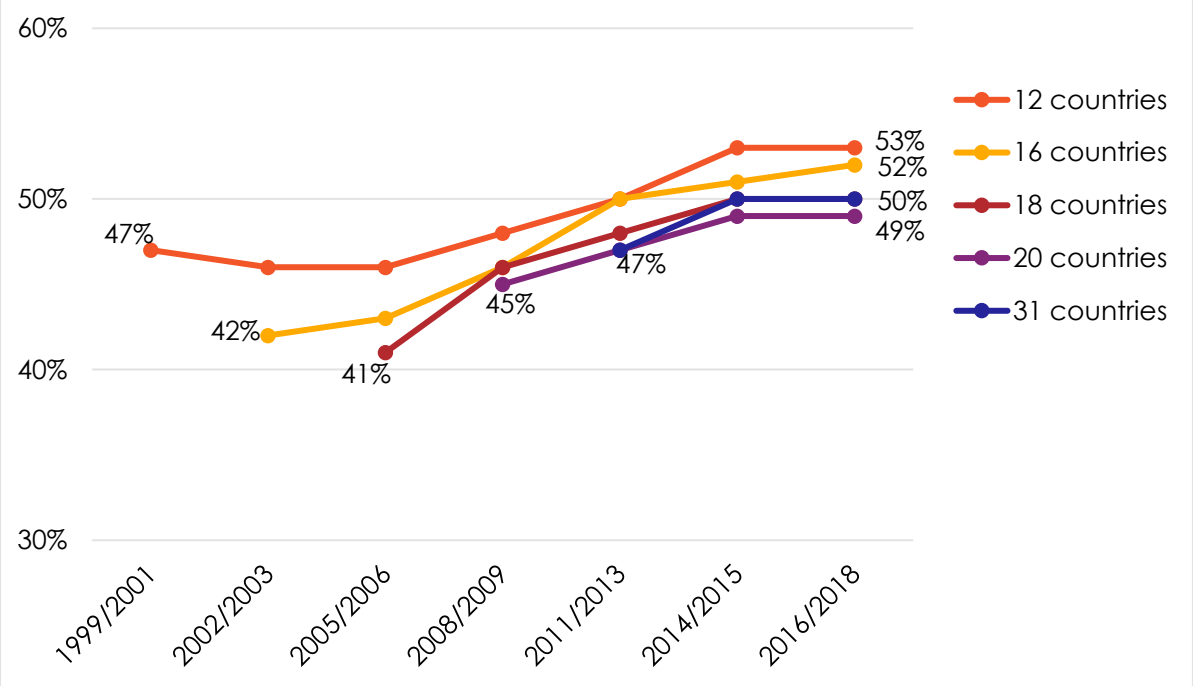
[5] The 20 countries listed above plus Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, eSwatini, Gabon, Guinea, Mauritius, Morocco, Niger, Tunisia, Sierra Leone, and Togo

Figure 2: No formal education | various country samples | 1999-2018



Respondents were asked: *What is your highest level of education?*

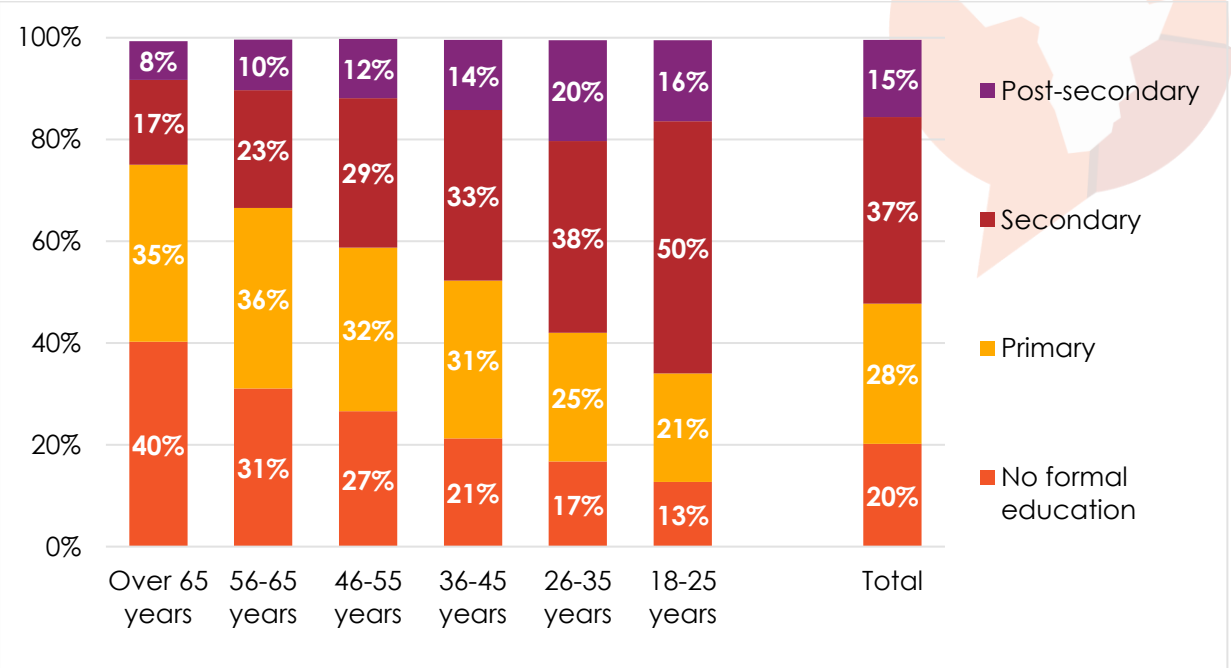
Figure 3: Secondary or post-secondary education | various country samples | 1999-2018



Respondents were asked: *What is your highest level of education?*

We see further evidence of progress in educational levels achieved by different age groups (Figure 4). While four in 10 respondents over age 65 (40%) in 2016/2018 reported having no formal education, that proportion shrinks to 13% among 18- to 25-year-olds. Conversely, the prevalence of post-secondary qualifications doubles and that of secondary qualifications triples when we compare the oldest and youngest age groups.

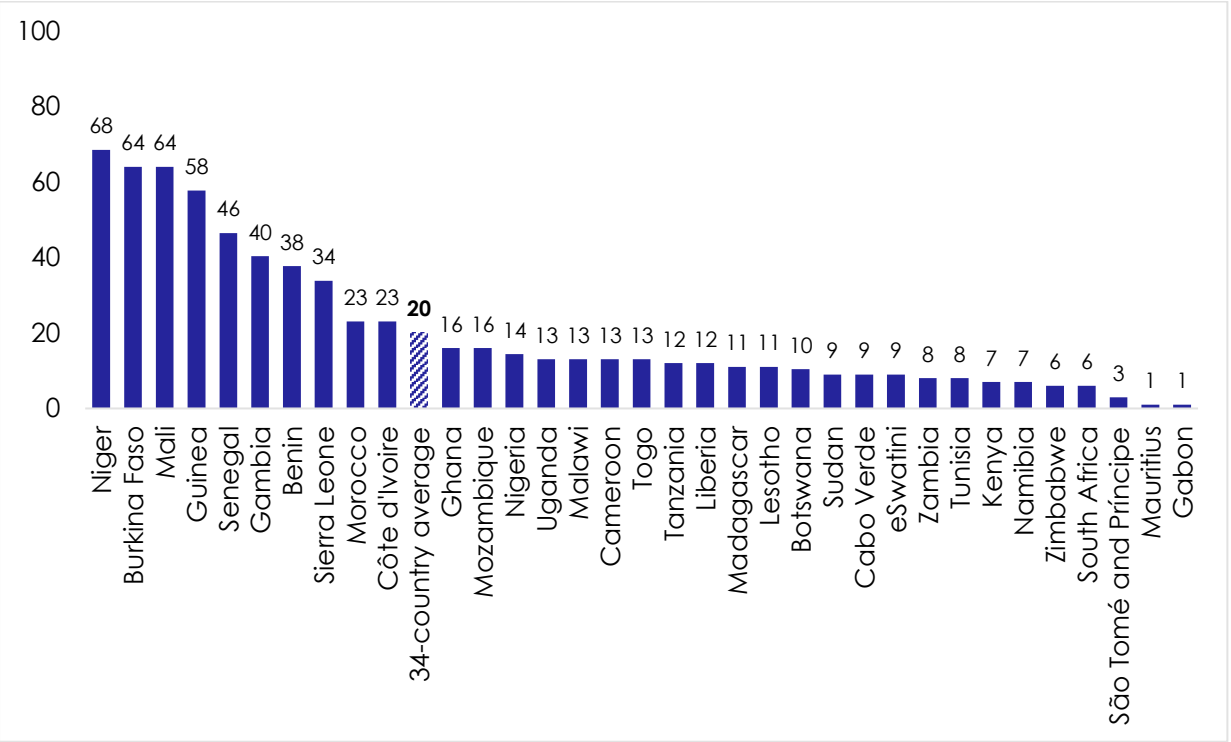
Figure 4: Educational attainment | by age group | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: *What is your highest level of education?*

These continental averages obscure vast differences in national educational attainment. While almost all Gabonese and Mauritians have been to school, about two-thirds of citizens in Niger (68%), Burkina Faso (64%), and Mali (64%) lack formal education altogether (Figure 5).

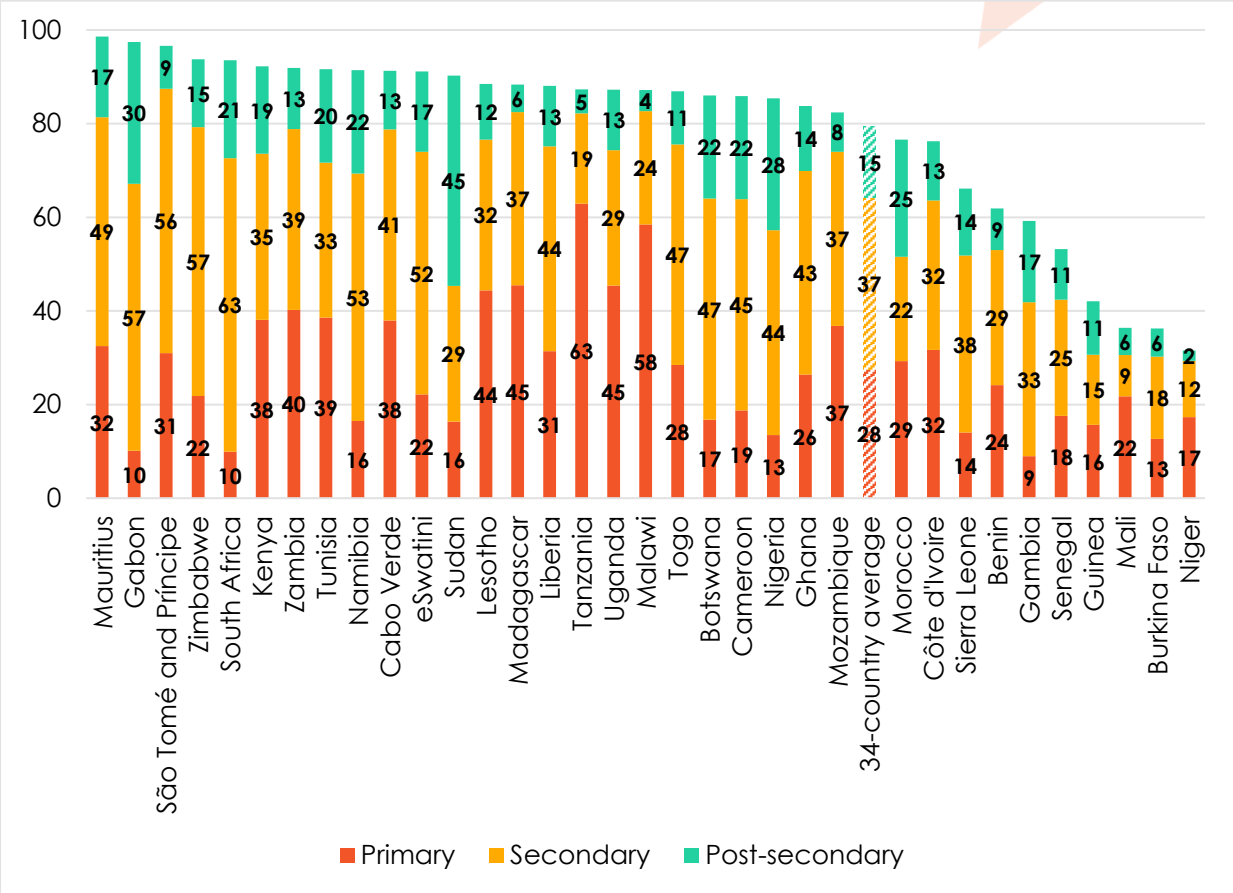
Figure 5: No formal education (%) | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: *What is your highest level of education? (% who have no formal schooling)*

Among Africans who have formal schooling, we see similar variation in the levels of educational attainment (Figure 6). For example, while about the same proportion of Liberians (88%) and Tanzanians (87%) received some form of formal education, more than twice as many Liberians have at least some secondary education (44% vs. 19% of Tanzanians). Post-secondary qualifications are particularly common in Sudan (45%), Gabon (30%), Nigeria (28%), and Morocco (25%).

Figure 6: Levels of education (%) | 34 countries | 2016/2018

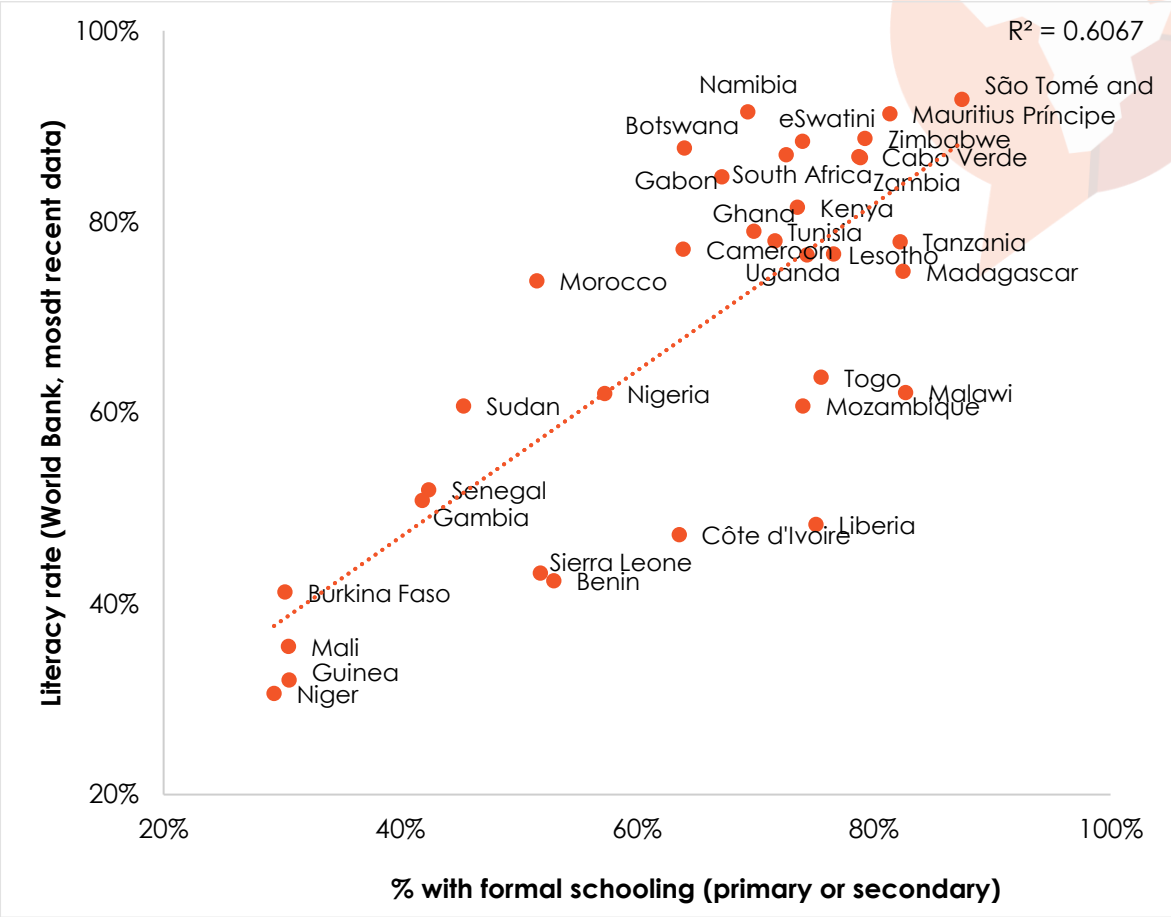


Respondents were asked: *What is your highest level of education? % of respondents who attended primary school (at least some primary schooling/completed primary), secondary (at least some secondary schooling/completed secondary), post-secondary (any post-secondary qualification). (Note: Respondents with no formal education are not shown.)*

These numbers say nothing about the quality of education that pupils receive. Previous research has documented a variety of barriers to education quality in some African countries, including overcrowded classrooms, a shortage of textbooks, absent teachers, and poor teaching (Bratton, 2009). Nevertheless, school attendance is strongly correlated with literacy (Figure 7), and thus with human and national development.[6]

[6] Pearson's correlation coefficient r=.775 (2-tailed); p<.01

Figure 7: Formal schooling and literacy | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: *What is your highest level of education? (% who have some primary, completed primary, some secondary, or completed secondary school)*
Note: *Literacy rates are drawn from the World Bank Databank (2019), reflecting the most recent year for which data are available.*

Gender gaps in educational attainment

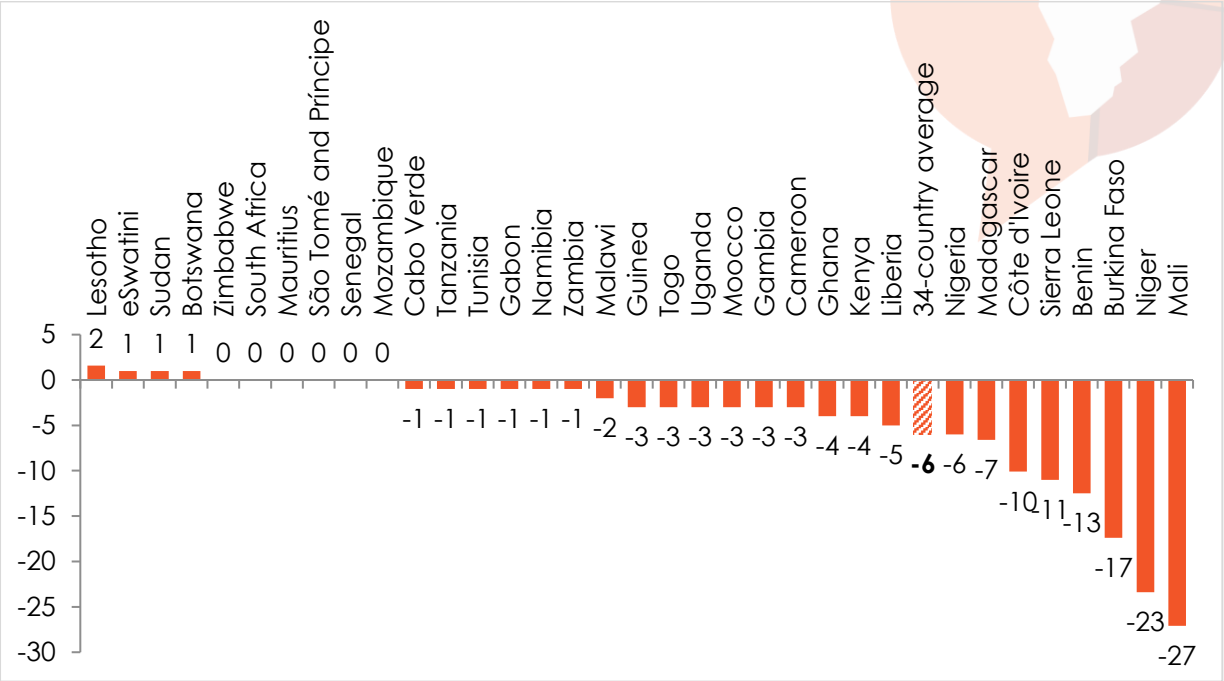
While the proportion of Africans completing formal schooling is growing, gender gaps in educational attainment persist. For example, 23% of the women interviewed in Round 7 have no formal education, compared to 17% of men. (For more on gender gaps in education, see Alpin Lardies, Dryding, & Logan, 2019).

Nevertheless, 17 countries have reduced the gender gap for basic formal education among the youngest cohort to insignificant levels (less than +/-2 percentage points) (Figure 8). This achievement stands in sharp contrast to the still very large gaps in countries such as Mali (27-point deficit for women), Niger (23 points), Burkina Faso (17 points), and Benin (13 points). Moreover, at the post-primary education level, 10 percentage points more men (57%) than women (47%) have secondary or tertiary education (Alpin Lardies et al, 2019).

Despite remaining gender gaps in educational attainment, both women and men overwhelmingly (91% each) said boys and girls today have equal opportunities to get an education in their country. Only in Mozambique and Malawi were fewer than 80% of citizens of the view that boys and girls have the same educational opportunities (Figure 9).

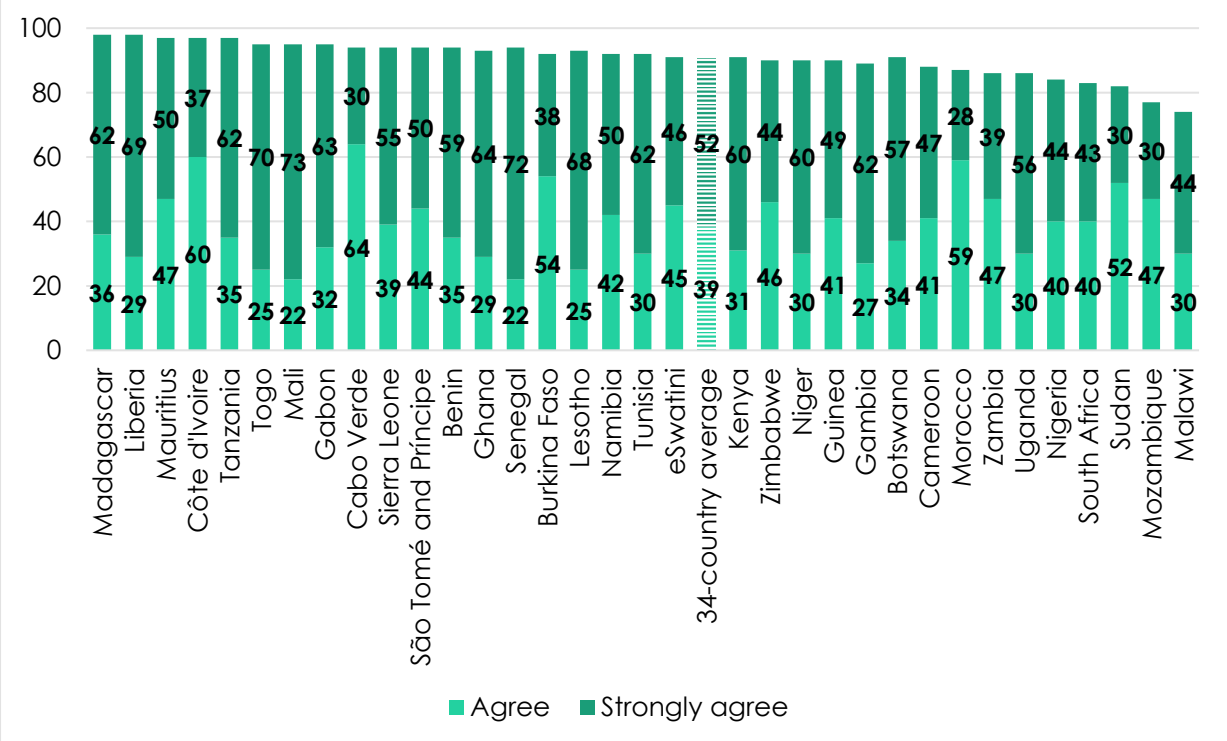
Taken together, these findings highlight progress while also suggesting that sustained efforts of proactive governments and committed civil servants will be required to meet SDG4. The next section provides an overview of how satisfied citizens were with their governments' performance in the education sector before we turn to four sets of possible explanations for differences in government performance evaluations.

Figure 8: Gender gap among 18- to 25-year-olds in lack of formal education | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: *What is your highest level of education? (percentage-point difference between men and women in those reporting no formal education, among respondents aged 18-25 years; negative numbers indicate that fewer men than women lack formal education)*

Figure 9: Do girls and boys have equal chance at education? (%) | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked*: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree, or haven't you heard enough to say: In our country today, girls and boys have equal opportunities to get education? (Note: In Kenya, the question was asked separately for primary and secondary school. This figure reports the average of responses to the two questions.)*

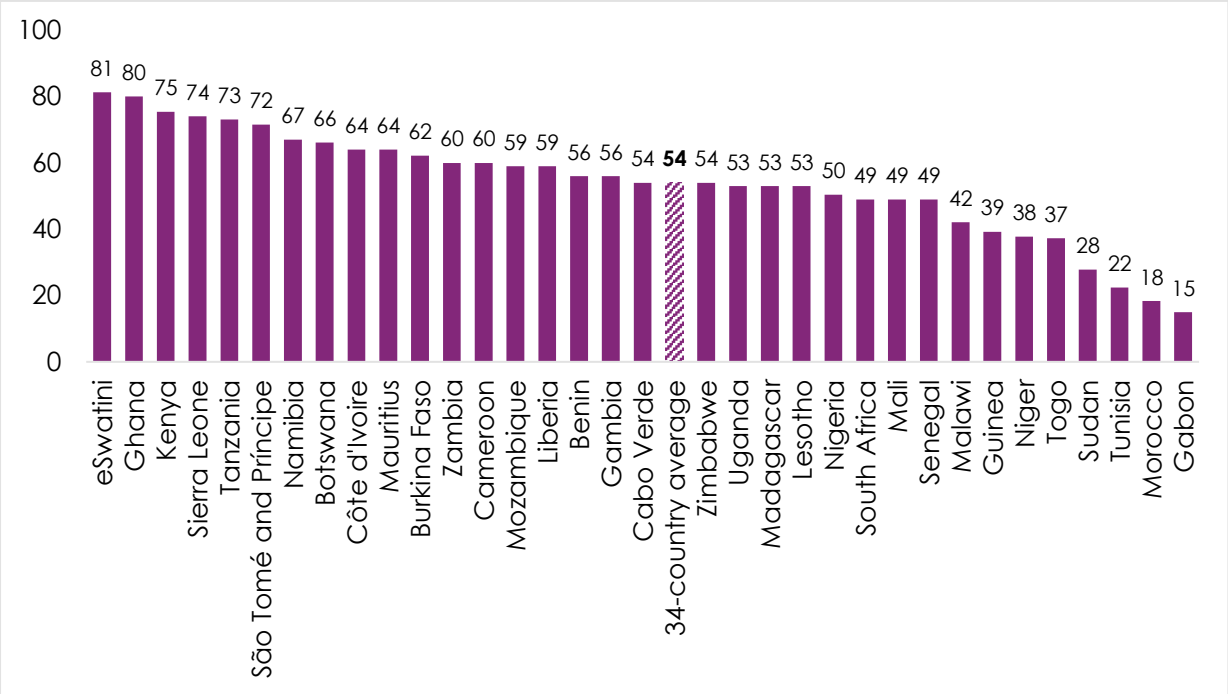
Citizens' views of government performance on education

Given substantial differences in educational attainment, how satisfied are Africans with their governments' performance in providing this essential service? On average across 34 countries, a slim majority (54%) of respondents said their governments were performing "fairly well" or "very well" in addressing educational needs, though more than four out of 10 (43%) described their performance as fairly/very bad.

Countries vary drastically in their assessments (Figure 10). More than eight out of 10 citizens in eSwatini (81%) and Ghana (80%) approved of how the government handles education, but fewer than two in 10 agreed in Morocco (18%) and Gabon (15%). Of the 12 countries where half of respondents or less gave the government good marks, 10 are in West or North Africa.

In some cases, government performance ratings seem to match up with citizens' educational attainment: In Niger, Guinea, and Senegal, where large shares of the population lack formal education (see Figure 5), fewer than half of citizens approved of the government's efforts on education. But in Gabon, where only one in 100 citizens lack formal education, the government got the worst grade of all surveyed countries (15% approval), while in Burkina Faso, where 64% have never been to school, 62% approved of the government's performance on education.

Figure 10: Satisfaction with government performance on education (%) | 34 countries | 2016/2018



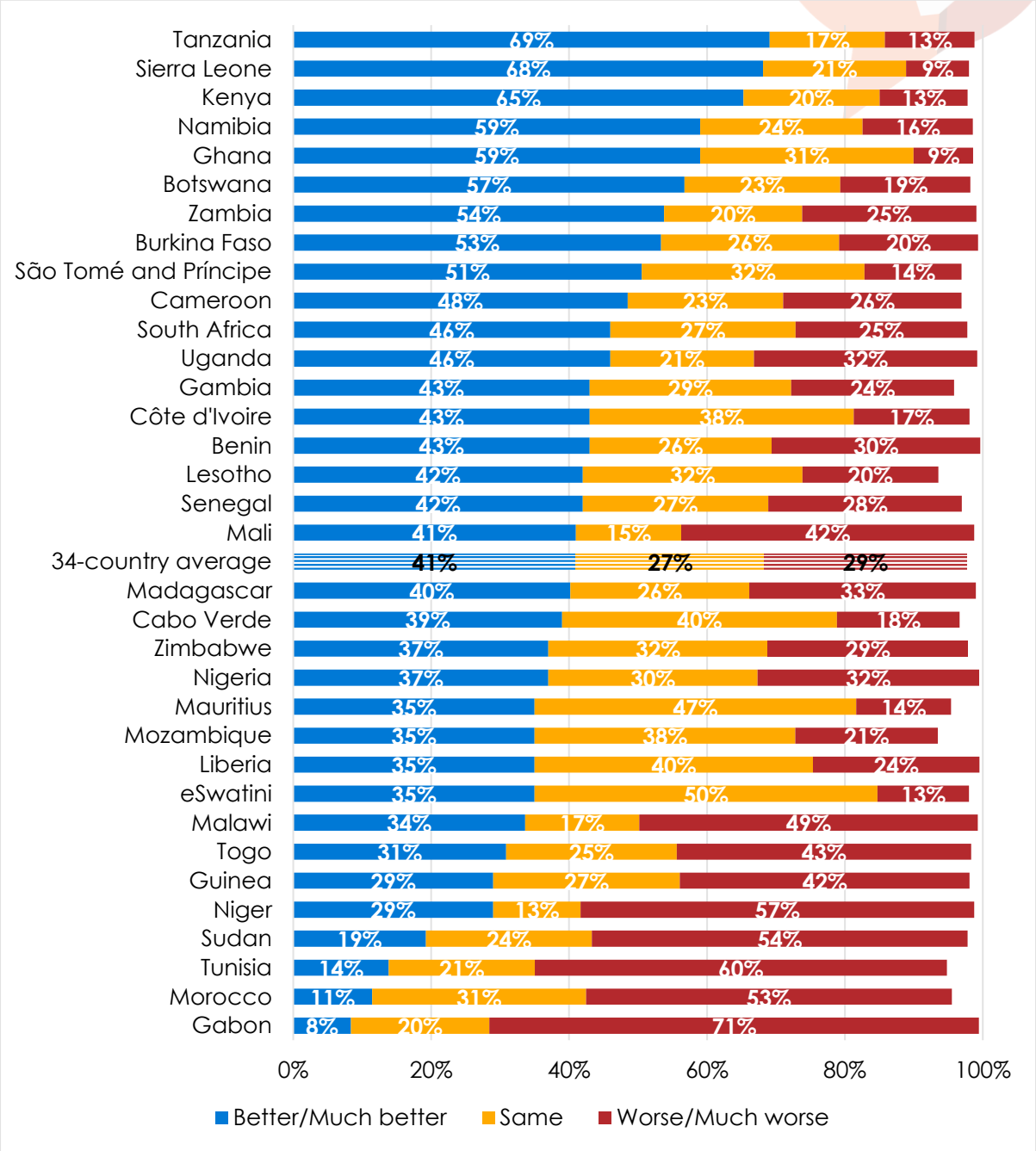
Respondents were asked: *How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Addressing educational needs? (% who said "fairly well" or "very well")*

While more than half of Africans saw their government as doing well in addressing educational needs, only four out of 10 (41%) saw improvement, compared to "a few years ago," in the government's effectiveness on the issue. More than half thought that little had changed (27%) or that things had actually gotten worse (29%).

Often citizens' assessments of government performance and progress on education go hand in hand. Ghana, Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Tanzania rank in the top five both in citizen approval of government performance (Figure 10 above) and in perceived improvement in effectiveness on education (Figure 11 below). At the other extreme, Gabon, Morocco,

Tunisia, Sudan, Togo, Niger, Guinea, Malawi register the lowest levels of citizen satisfaction on both indicators.

Figure 11: Better or worse: Government effectiveness on education | 34 countries | 2016/2018



***Respondents were asked**: Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same: The government's effectiveness in addressing educational needs?*

Explaining government performance ratings on education

For governments that want to satisfy public expectations when it comes to education, it might be useful to know what citizens base their evaluations of government performance on. What factors influence how well or badly people think they are being served?

While in-depth causal explanations are beyond the scope of this paper, we examine four potential explanatory factors:

1. Demographic characteristics of respondents
2. Infrastructure: Availability of facilities
3. Accessibility of public school services
4. Transparency and accountability in delivery of education services

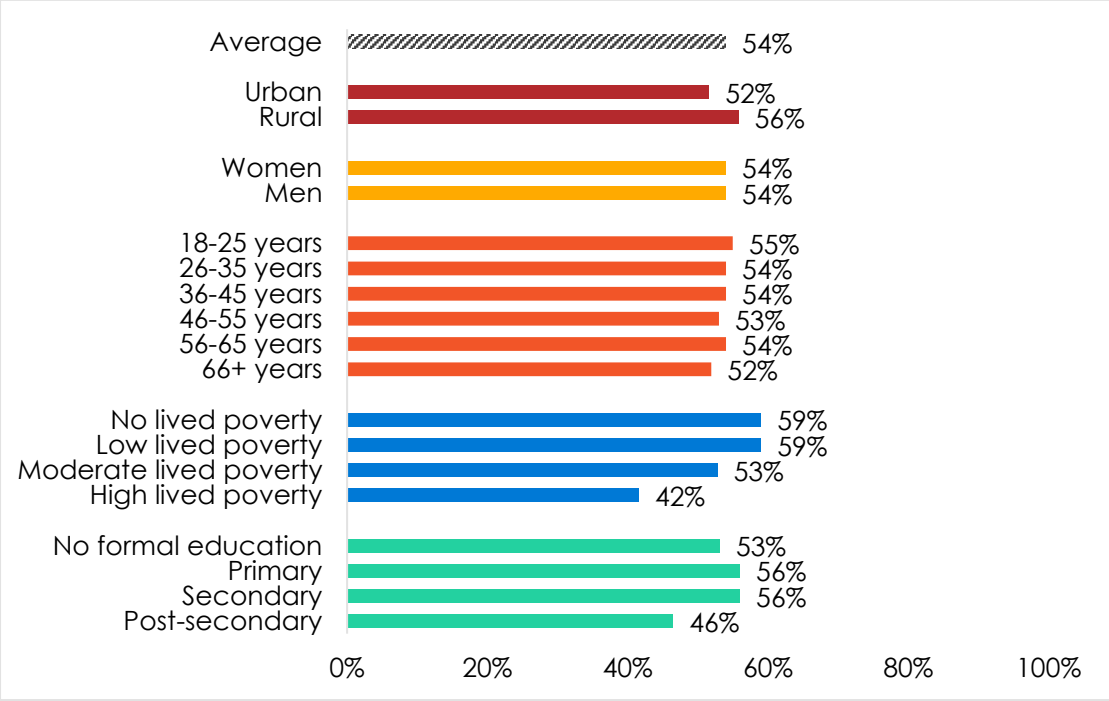
Demographic characteristics of respondents

People's age, where they live, how educated or wealthy they are – all of these factors might affect both their expectations and the types and quality of educational services they actually receive, which in turn might influence their assessments of the government's performance in delivering these services.

Our data show few differences in ratings of government performance on education between men and women or different age groups. By contrast, rural residents were slightly more positive in their assessments than urbanites. Moreover, economically better-off respondents were more satisfied than the poor (Figure 12). Respondents who experienced no lived poverty[7] or low lived poverty during the previous year were more likely to say the government was doing a good job (59%) than those who frequently went without basic necessities of life (42%). One possible explanation might be that the former live in areas with better-equipped and better-staffed schools.

However, we also see that Africans with post-secondary education were less satisfied with how government handles education than their less-educated peers. It is possible that the former draw on their broader experience across the different tiers of the education system, which in turn makes them more critical of government performance.

Figure 12: Satisfaction with government performance on education | by socio-demographic group | 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: Addressing educational needs? (% who said "fairly well" or "very well")*

[7] For more on lived poverty, see Mattes, Dulani, & Gyimah-Boadi (2016).

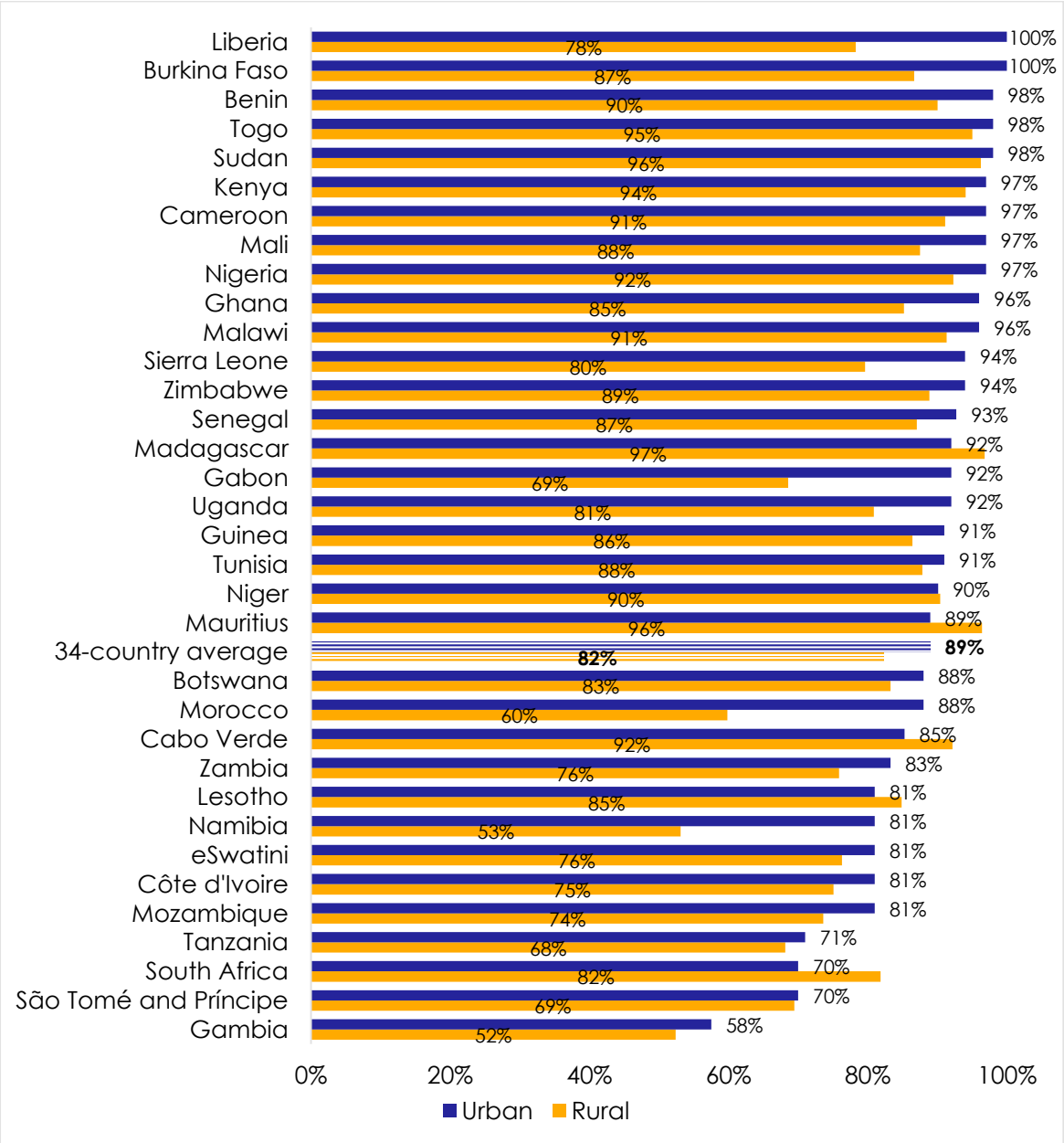
Infrastructure: Availability of facilities

Afrobarometer enumerators recorded the presence or absence of a school (public or private) in all the enumeration areas they visited or within easy walking distance. This allows us to examine whether the mere availability of an education facility leads to better government performance ratings.

On average across 34 countries, 85% of people live within easy walking distance of a school. The least well-served countries are the Gambia (56%), Namibia (69%), and Tanzania (69%).

Rural areas (82%) lag slightly behind cities (89%), although in Madagascar, Mauritius, Cabo Verde, Lesotho, and South Africa, schools are actually somewhat more common in rural areas. In Gabon, Liberia, and Namibia, substantial gaps exist (22-28 percentage points) favouring urban over rural areas in the availability of schools (Figure 13).

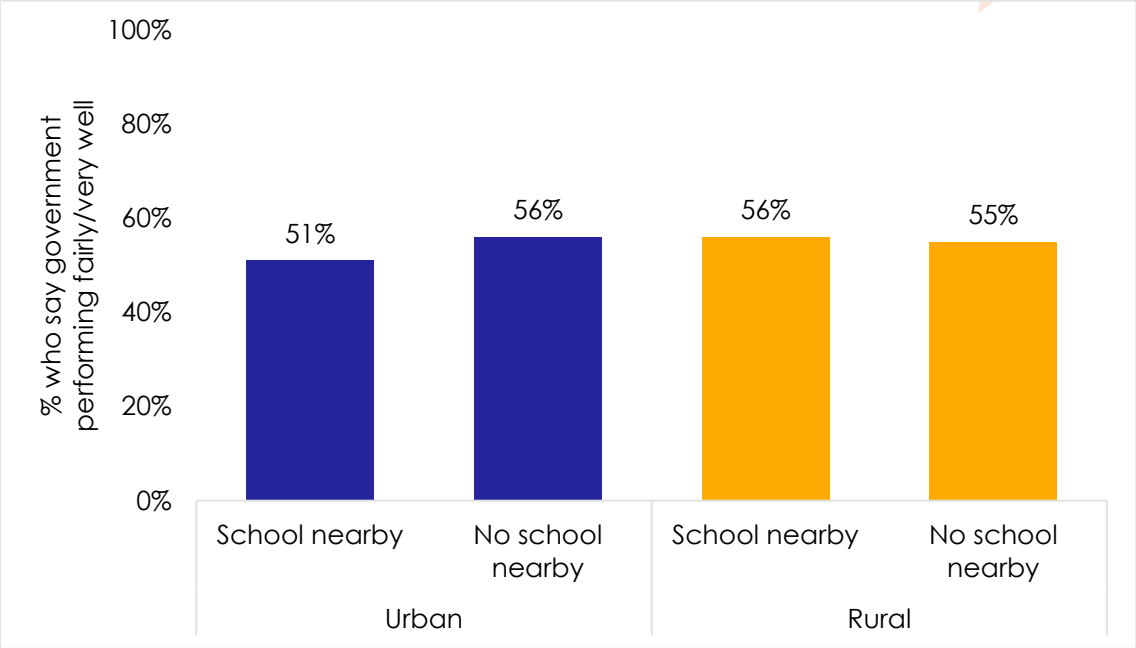
Figure 13: School within walking distance | by urban-rural residency | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Survey enumerators were asked: *Are the following facilities present in the primary sampling unit/enumeration area or in easy walking distance: A school (private or public or both)? (% "yes")*

In rural areas, having a school within easy walking distance appears to make no difference in terms of government performance ratings (56% approval where there is and 55% where there is not an easily available school) (Figure 14). Contrary to what we might expect, in urban areas, performance ratings were moderately higher in places without a school (56% vs. 51%). In any case, it appears that simple availability of school facilities is a poor predictor of citizens' evaluations of government performance in education.

Figure 14: School within walking distance and government performance assessment | by urban-rural residency | 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: Addressing educational needs? (% who said "fairly well" or "very well")*

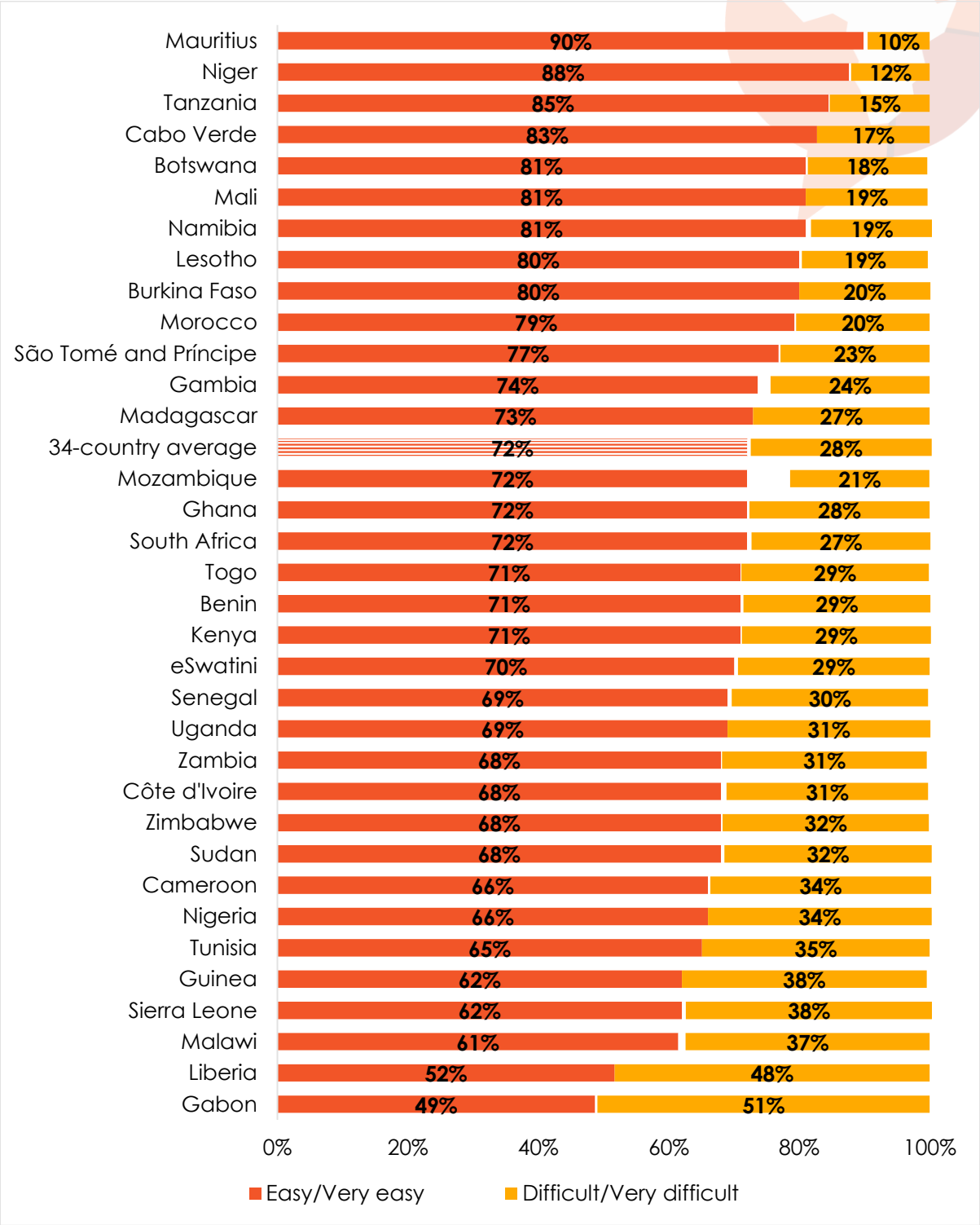
Accessibility of public-school services

Besides personal characteristics and the availability of infrastructure, people's experiences with schools seem likely to shape whether their expectations are being met. While there is disagreement about whether or not education should be free (Bray & Kwo, 2013), it is widely accepted that citizens should not have to jump through too many bureaucratic hoops or pay bribes to obtain educational services. To examine the accessibility of public school services, we look at how easy or difficult people find it to obtain services and whether bribes or personal favours are required to do so.

On average across 34 countries, slightly more than one-third (36%) of survey respondents said they had contact with a public school during the previous 12 months. By country, contact rates varied from just 14% in Tunisia to 53% in São Tomé and Príncipe and 55% in Kenya (see Appendix Figure A.1 for details).

Among respondents who had contact with a public school, more than seven out of 10 (72%) said it was "easy" or "very easy" to obtain the educational services they needed, while 28% found it difficult. About nine out of 10 respondents said it was easy in Mauritius (90%) and Niger (88%). Gabon is the only country where more than half found it difficult (51%) (Figure 15).

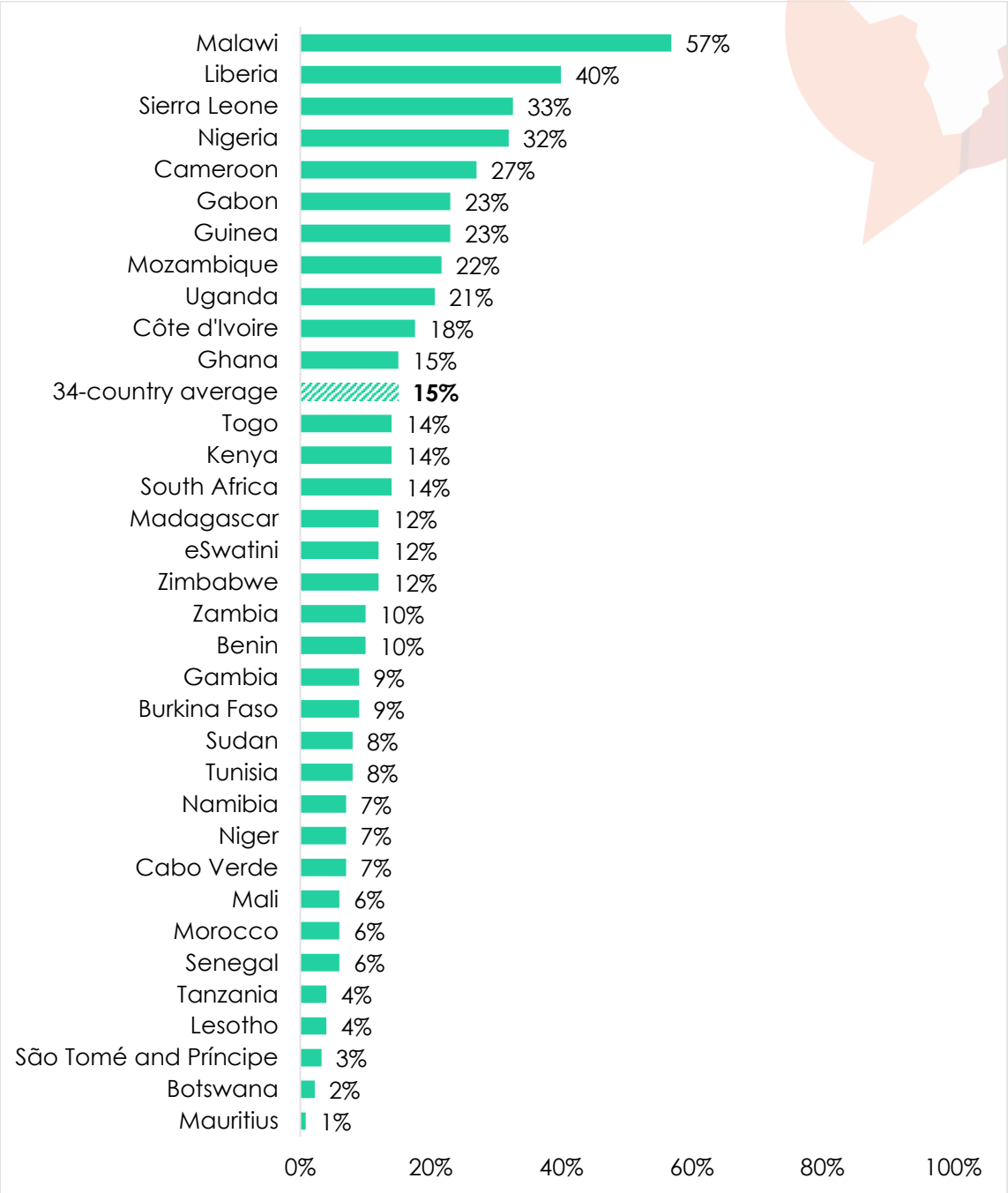
Figure 15: Ease of obtaining public school services | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents who had contact with a public school during the previous 12 months were asked: *How easy or difficult was it to obtain the services you needed from teachers or school officials?*

About one in seven respondents (15%) who had contact with a public school said they had to "pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour" for a teacher or school official in order to get the services they needed. In Malawi, a remarkable 57% reported having to pay a bribe, followed by 40% in Liberia, 33% in Sierra Leone, and 32% in Nigeria (Figure 16).

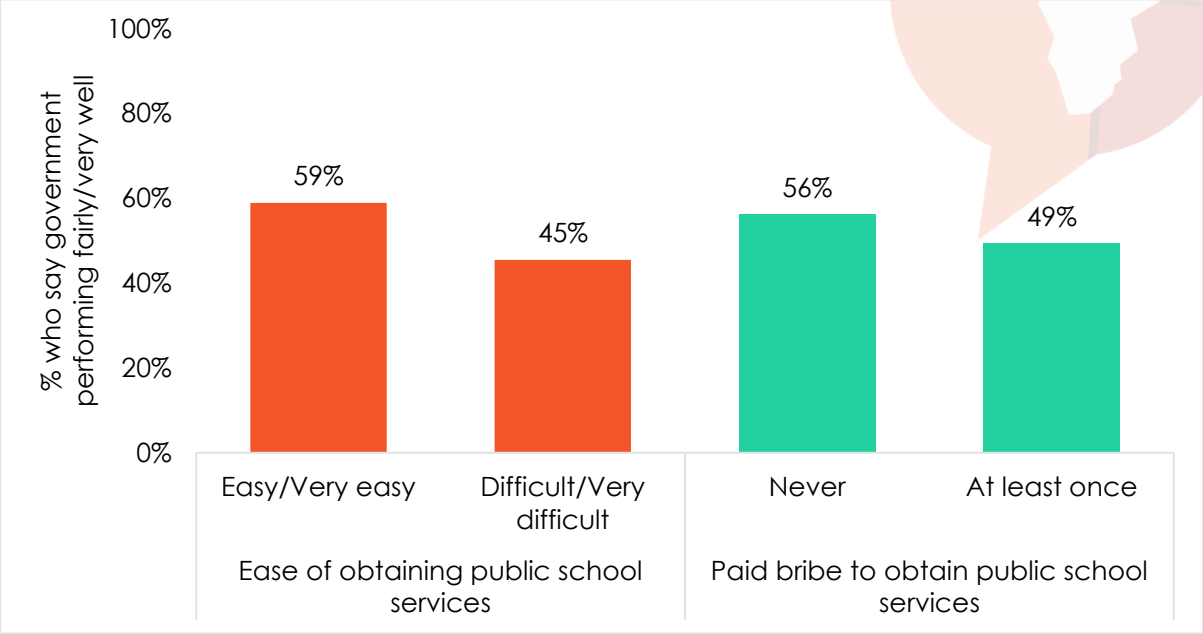
Figure 16: Paid bribe to obtain public school services | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents who had contact with a public school during the previous 12 months were asked: *How often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a teacher or school official in order to get the services you needed from the schools? (% who said "once or twice," "a few times," or "often")*

Returning to the question of whether these experiences with schools might affect popular ratings of government performance, we find that among those who said it was easy to access school services, 59% were satisfied with how government was addressing educational needs, compared to just 45% of those who found it difficult to obtain services (Figure 17). A similar, albeit smaller, gap can be observed between those who never had to pay a bribe (56%) and those who had to pay at least once (49%).

Figure 17: Satisfaction with government performance on education | by perceived ease of obtaining services and bribe-paying | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents who had contact with a public school during the previous 12 months were asked:

How easy or difficult was it to obtain the services you needed from teachers or school officials?
How often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a teacher or school official in order to get the services you needed from the schools?
How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Addressing educational needs? (% who said "fairly well" or "very well")

In sum, the results in this section suggest that easily obtaining services and not having to pay a bribe (two factors that are modestly correlated[8]), may be associated with assessments of the government's performance on education. This supports previous analysis by Bratton (2009) showing that citizens who are in a more accessible educational system are also more likely to be satisfied with government performance.

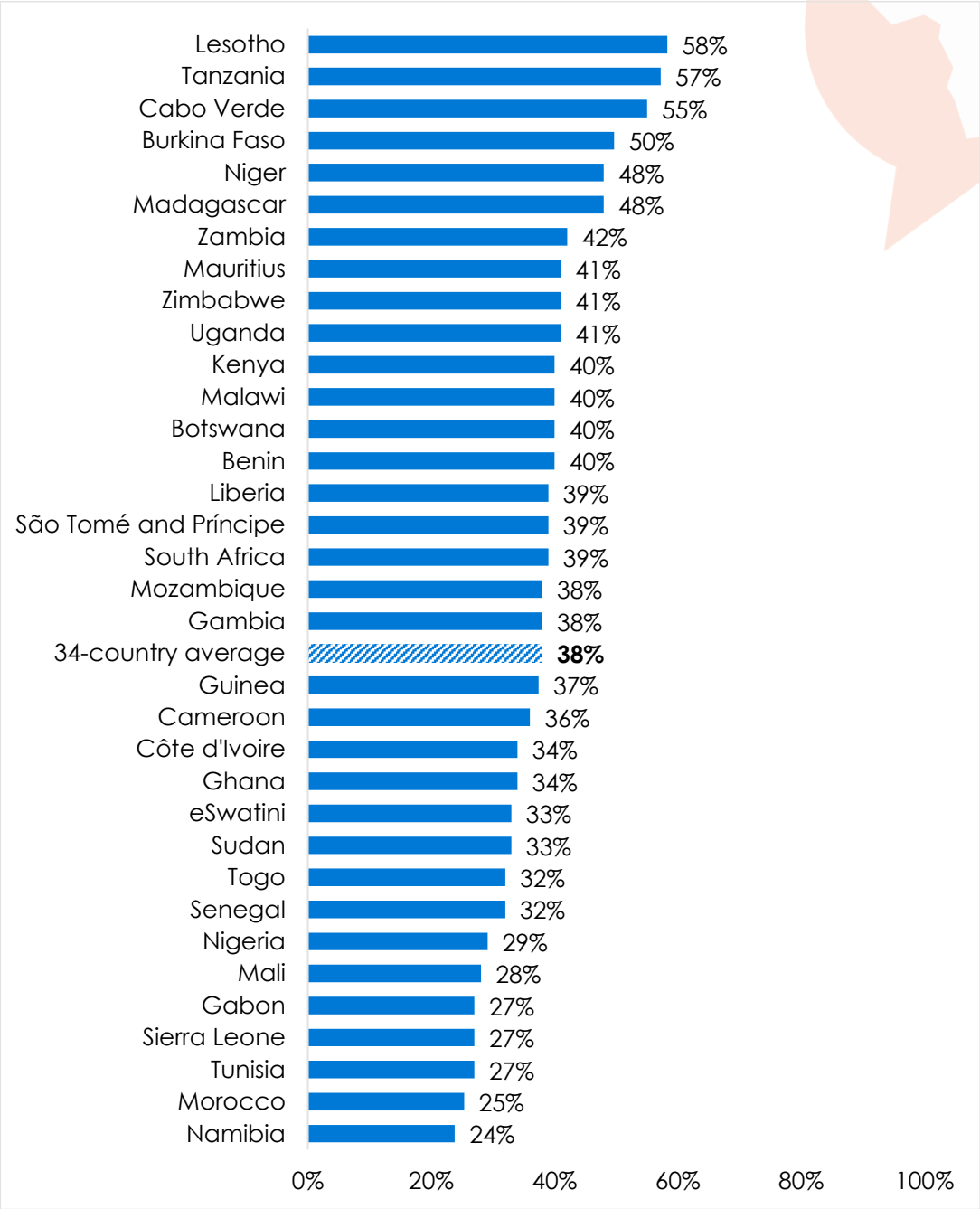
Transparency and accountability

Scholars have argued that transparent governance in public education contributes to greater citizen demand for accountability, reduced corruption, and better educational outcomes (Hubbard, 2007; Ablo & Reinikka, 1998). This suggests that citizens might be more satisfied with the government's performance on education if they think that schools are transparent in how they use tax money and responsive to reported problems.

Afrobarometer asked respondents how likely they thought it was that they could obtain information about a local school's budget and how the funds had been used. On average, just 38% saw this as "somewhat likely" or "very likely" (Figure 18). Only in three of the 34 countries were majorities confident they could get this information from school officials: Lesotho (58%), Tanzania (57%), and Cabo Verde (55%). In contrast, only one in four citizens thought this was likely in Namibia (24%) and Morocco (25%).

[8] Pearson's correlation coefficient r=.262, p<.001

Figure 18: Obtaining public school budget information | 34 countries | 2016/2018



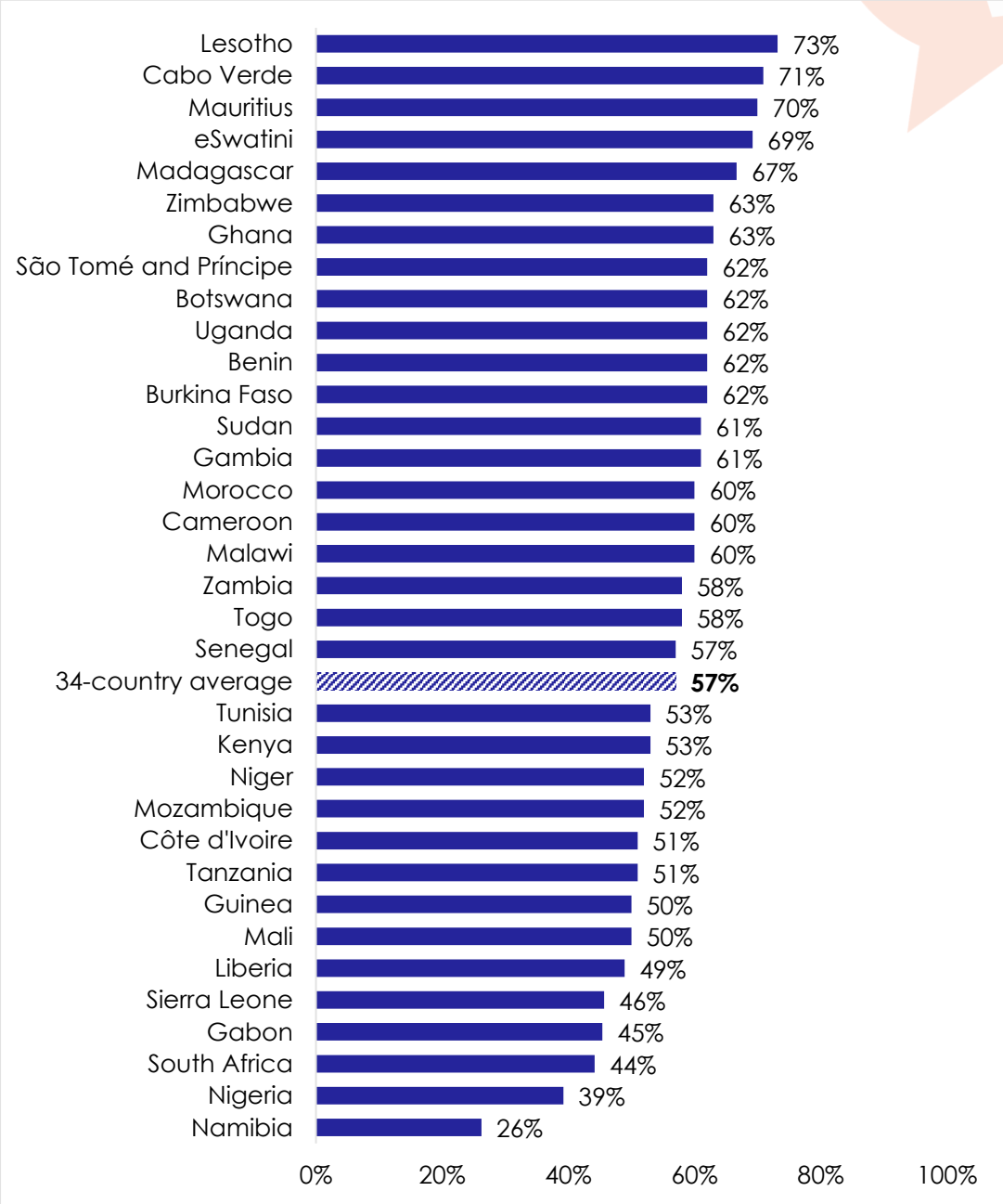
Respondents were asked: *How likely is it that you could get the following information from government or other public institutions, or haven't you heard enough to say: If you went to the local school to find out what the school's budget is and how the funds have been used? (% who said "somewhat likely" or "very likely")*

Considerably more Africans thought school officials would respond to reports of teacher misconduct such as absenteeism or mistreatment of students. A majority (57%) of respondents said it was "somewhat likely" or "very likely" that they could get someone to take action if they reported teacher misconduct, while 36% were skeptical (Figure 19).

We again find Lesotho (73%) and Cabo Verde (71%) at the top of the scale, and Namibia (26%) at the bottom. Tanzania and Niger offer interesting parallels: Both rank highly in terms of easy access to services (Figure 15) and to budgetary information (Figure 18) and register a relatively low prevalence of bribery to obtain school services (Figure 16), but in both the

perceived likelihood of official action in response to reported misconduct is below average (51% and 52%, respectively).

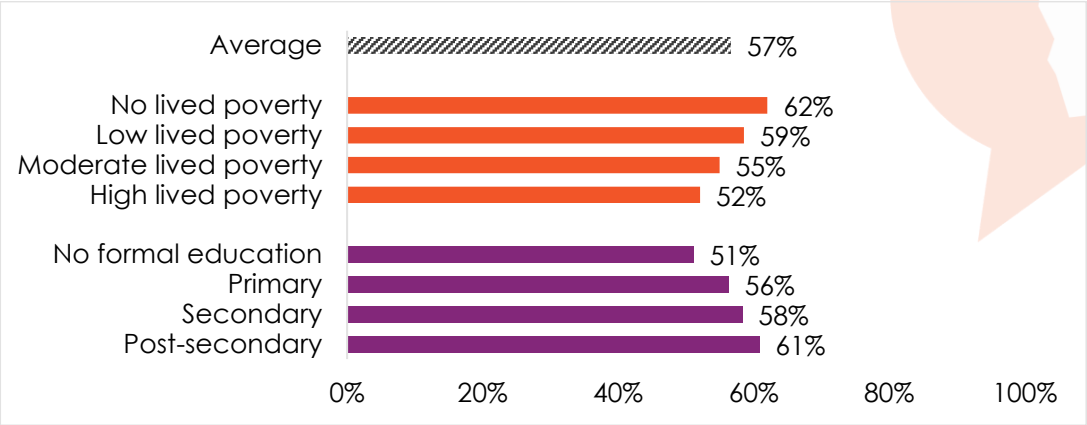
Figure 19: Likelihood of response to reported teacher misconduct | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: *How likely is it that you could get someone to take action if you went to a government office or other public institution to report the following problems, or haven't you heard enough to say: If you went to the local school to report teacher misbehaviour such as absenteeism or mistreatment of students? (% who said "somewhat likely" or "very likely")*

In addition to cross-national differences in perceived accountability of teachers, we see differences between wealthy and poor respondents, as well as across levels of education. Both poorer and less-educated Africans were up to 10 percentage points less likely to say that schools would act on reports of teacher misconduct compared to their better-off and more-educated counterparts (Figure 20).

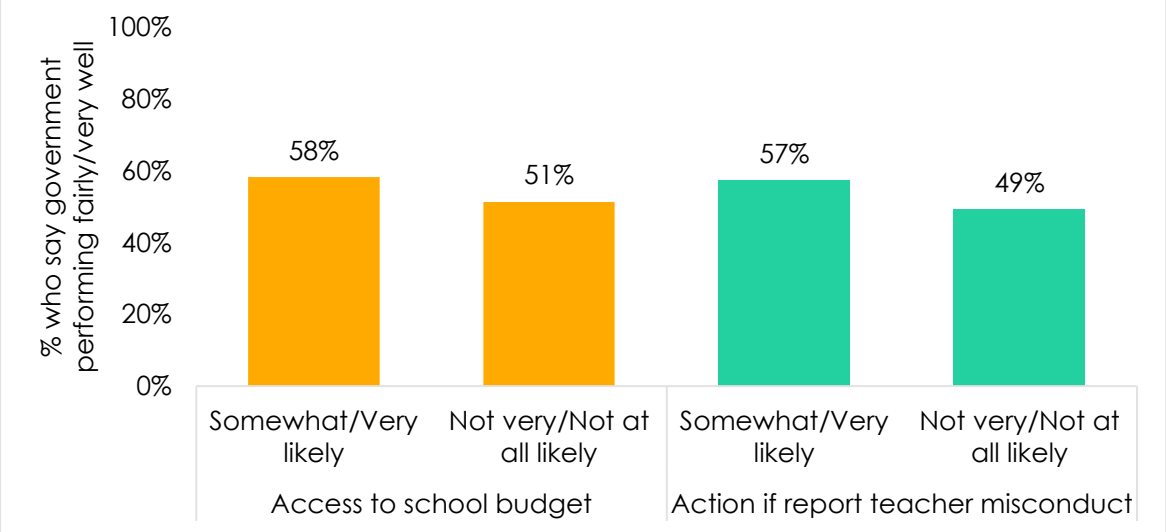
Figure 20: Likelihood of response to reported teacher misconduct | by lived poverty and education level | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: *How likely is it that you could get someone to take action if you went to a government office or other public institution to report the following problems, or haven't you heard enough to say: If you went to the local school to report teacher misbehavior such as absenteeism or mistreatment of students? (% who said "somewhat likely" or "very likely")*

We find that these metrics of school performance also seem to be associated with evaluations of government performance in the education sector (Figure 21). Respondents who believed that they could access information on their schools, and those who believed they could have teachers held accountable, were more likely (58% and 57%, respectively) to give government positive performance reviews than were those who were less optimistic about school transparency and accountability (51% and 49%, respectively).

Figure 21: Satisfaction with government performance on education | by perceptions of transparency and accountability | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked:

How likely is it that you could get the following information from government or other public institutions, or haven't you heard enough to say: If you went to the local school to find out what the school's budget is and how the funds have been used?

How likely is it that you could get someone to take action if you went to a government office or other public institution to report the following problems, or haven't you heard enough to say: If you went to the local school to report teacher misbehavior such as absenteeism or mistreatment of students?

How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Addressing educational needs?

In the previous section, we identified perceived accessibility of school services as a factor associated with satisfaction with government performance on education. The results in this section suggest a second important dimension for schools – transparency and accountability. Citizens who said that they could obtain information about a school's budget were also more likely to say that officials would act if teacher misconduct was reported.[9] And as we will see in the next section, these factors matter when it comes to public evaluations of government performance on education.

Comparing determinants of citizens' satisfaction with public education

So far, we have examined four possible factors that might contribute to citizen satisfaction with government performance on education: respondents' personal characteristics such as economic status and education level, the availability (proximity) of a school, the accessibility of education services, and citizens' ability to hold schools to account. An ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis allows us to compare these four factors to see which are the best predictors of citizens' evaluations of government performance. Results are shown in Table 1.

Our first two models include only respondents who had contact with a school during the previous 12 months (n=14,029). A reference model (Model 1) with variables related to respondents' socioeconomic status and the physical location of schools confirms our earlier findings that respondents' age, gender, and residence within walking distance of a school do not affect their evaluations of government performance. In contrast, all else being equal, rural residents, less-educated respondents, and economically better-off citizens held more positive views of how government attends to educational needs.

Next, in Model 2, we include the remaining two sets of explanatory variables (easy access to services and transparency/accountability of government schools). By comparing the unstandardized B values across the two models, we can see that the effects of respondents' rural location, lower level of education, and greater material wealth remain significant and stable. However, the experienced ease of accessing services and perceived transparency and accountability of schools are also important. Among Africans who had contact with a school in the previous 12 months, those who said that services were easily accessible were more satisfied with their government's provision of these services. Similarly, respondents who perceived school officials and teachers to be accountable were also more satisfied.

Interestingly, whether or not respondents were asked to pay a bribe did not have a significant effect on their overall evaluations of government performance.

Taken together, these results demonstrate that quite apart from educational outcomes such as literacy, the processes through which educational services are delivered also matter to citizens. These are important findings and have the potential to inform policy development.

However, this analysis does not yet allow us to generalize findings to those sections of the population that did not have contact with a school during the previous year. Therefore, in Model 3 and Model 4, we rerun the analysis using the full sample. To account for the fact that 64% of citizens did not have contact with a school, we adjust the variables for accessibility in Model 4 by creating dummy variables for which the excluded category is "no contact" and other categories capture either positive or negative responses to the questions on ease of obtaining services and bribe-paying.

Comparing the unstandardized B values across all four models, we see that the same socio-economic variables (rural location, less education, greater wealth) continue to have a significant positive and relatively stable effect. In addition, Model 4 allows us to answer the question of whether citizens who had either a positive or negative experience with a

[9] Pearson's correlation coefficient r=.313, p<.001. The results remain constant when we split the sample into respondents who had contact with a public school during the previous 12 months and those who did not (missing values and "refused" and "don't know" responses were excluded from the analysis).

government school have a different level of satisfaction with government performance than respondents who did not have any contact at all. In contrast to the results from Model 2 (where we only considered respondents who did have contact with a school), we do not find statistically significant differences among these three groups' levels of satisfaction with government performance. In contrast, the variables measuring perceived transparency and accountability remain significant. Although this complicates the interpretation of how direct experience with a school shapes overall satisfaction with government performance, it also provides useful signposts for future research.

Table 1: Factors explaining citizens' satisfaction with government performance on education | 34 countries | 2016/2018

	Satisfaction with government performance on education			
	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**	**Model 4**
(Constant)	.608	.491	.618	.578
Availability of infrastructure				
School within walking distance	-.014	-.010	-.016**	-.016**
Demographic factors				
Age	.004	-.001	-.003*	-.005**
Gender (female)	.011	.008	.008	.006
Location (rural)	.055***	.044***	.056***	.049***
Education	-.022***	-.021***	-.024***	-.026***
Lived Poverty Index score	-.089***	-.080***	-.089***	-.083***
Accessibility of school services				
Easy to obtain services		.098***		-.015
Difficult to obtain services				-.113
No bribe/favour		.004		.057
Paid bribe				.053
Transparency and accountability				
Access to school budget		.048***		.044***
Action if report teacher misconduct		.059***		.057***
Explained variance (adj. R^2)	.027	.044	.027	.038
Number of observations	14,029†	12,971†	39,121	35,194

***Note**: Cell entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients (B)); *significance=<.10, **significance=<.05, ***significance=<.01; †=only includes respondents who had contact with a school during previous 12 months*

As can be seen from the relatively low R^2 values across all four models, the explanatory power of these four factors is quite modest. Therefore, we now turn to a more indirect mechanism that is often argued to have a positive effect on education: democracy.

Democratic dividend

A common point of departure for scholarly work in the area of service delivery is to suggest a positive relationship between a country's level of democracy and the quality of public services. A growing literature focuses on investments in public services (inputs), the physical infrastructure needed for the delivery of services (outputs), and outcomes such as adult literacy rates. Proponents of a "democracy advantage" often point to a combination of sources of accountability that contribute to improved quality of public services, including competitive elections, the role of political (opposition) parties, civil society, and the media (Blair, 2000; Halperin, Siegle, & Weinstein, 2010; Harding, 2020; Hiskey, 2003; Keefer, 2013; Lieberman, 2015; Trotter, 2016).

For example, several studies have shown that democracies spend more on primary education (Stasavage, 2005), have higher levels of school enrollment (Brown, 1999) and attendance (Harding & Stasavage, 2014), and achieve higher levels of literacy (Lake & Baum, 2001).

These encouraging findings prompt two related questions. First, does democracy have a positive impact on the availability and quality of public schools? Second, are Africans living in democracies more likely to be satisfied with how their government handles their educational needs?

Perceived supply of democracy and its impact on public education

About half (51%) of all Africans surveyed in 2016/2018 saw their country as a functioning democracy (either "a full democracy" or "a democracy with minor problems"). Fewer than half (43%) said they were "fairly satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the way their democracy was working. When we combine these two indicators, only one in three Africans (34%) both saw their country as a functioning democracy *and* were satisfied with the way democracy was working, perceiving what we call a full "supply of democracy." Four in 10 (41%) perceived no supply of democracy, meaning they saw their country as "a democracy with major problems" or not a democracy at all and they expressed dissatisfaction with the way democracy was working.

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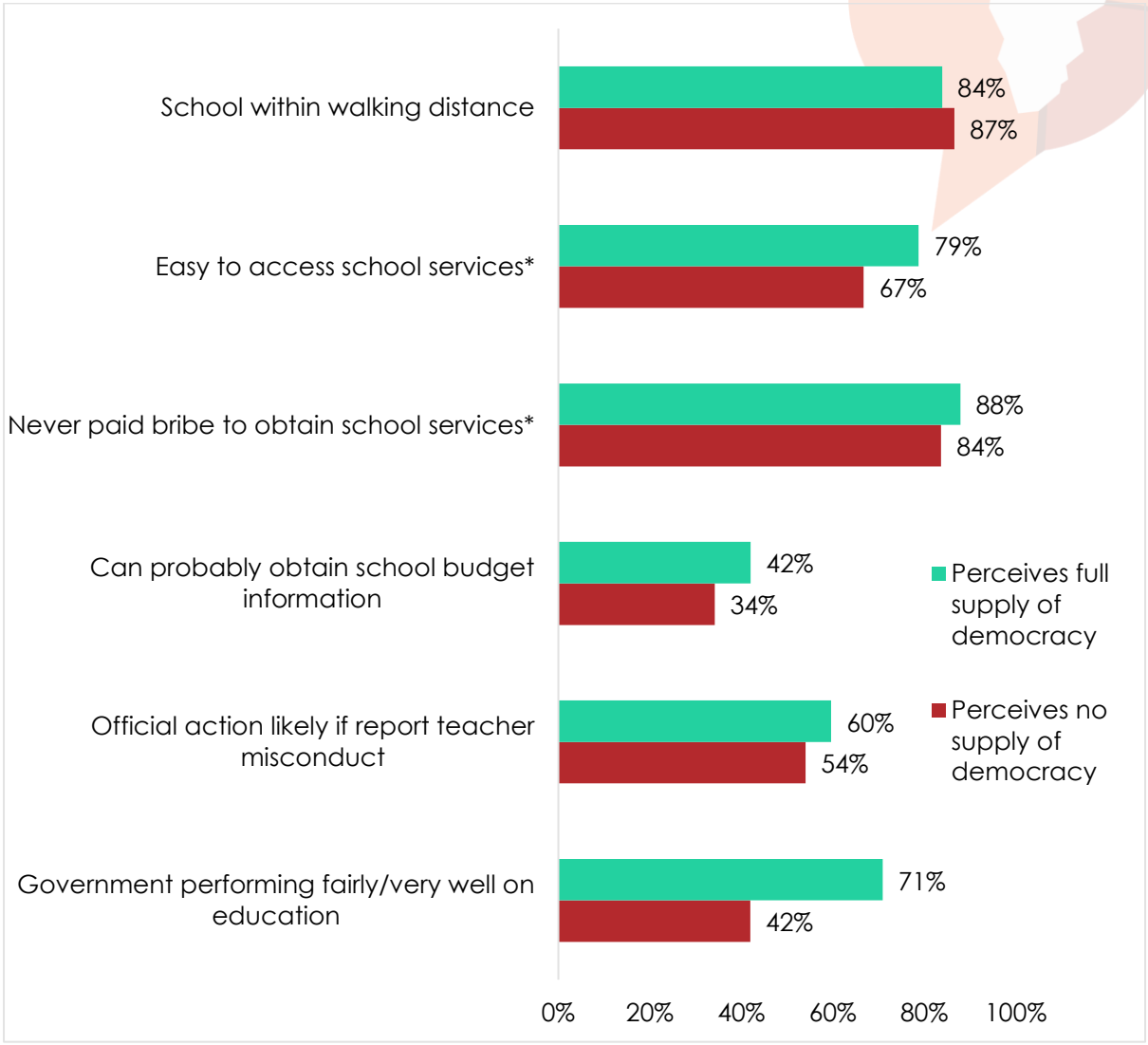
To provide partial answers to our questions concerning the impact of democracy on education, we can disaggregate our findings on school availability and perceptions of accessibility of services, transparency, and accountability, comparing respondents who saw their country as providing an adequate supply of democracy to those who did not.

We find that compared to Africans who saw no supply of democracy in their country, those who saw a full supply of democracy were no more likely to have a school within easy walking distance. But they were more likely to report easy access to school services (79% vs. 67%) and to perceive schools as transparent (likely to provide budget information) (42% vs. 34%) and accountable (likely to take action in response to reports of teacher misconduct) (60% vs. 54%) (Figure 22).

They were also far more likely to see the government as performing fairly or very well on education (71% vs. 42%).

Figure 22: Perceived supply of democracy and assessments of public education | 34 countries | 2016/2018



** Questions about the ease of accessing school services and bribe-paying were posed only to respondents who say they had contact with a public school during the previous 12 months. The other questions were posed to all respondents.*

To separate the indirect effects of democracy (via the perceived accessibility, transparency, and accountability of local schools) from democracy's broader impact as a regime type that empowers people to engage in bottom-up levels of accountability, we return to two of our initial regression models (models 2 and 4), but now also include "supply of democracy" as a potential explanatory variable (Table 2).

When we compare the explanatory power of our initial four sets of predictors, which explain 2.7%-4.4% of variance, to that of our revised models that include a measure of democracy and explain 8.5%-9.2% of variance, we can clearly see that the perceived supply of democracy has a significant positive effect on citizens' satisfaction with public education. Africans who believe they live in a well-functioning democracy are significantly more likely to be satisfied with how the government delivers education. This finding holds true whether we only consider respondents who had contact with a school in the previous 12 months (Model 5) or all respondents (Model 6).

Table 2: Factors explaining citizens' satisfaction with government performance on education | 34 countries | 2016/2018

	Satisfaction with government performance on education	
	Model 5	Model 6
(Constant)	.364	.430
Availability of infrastructure		
School within walking distance	-.005	-.006
Demographic factors		
Age	-.003	-.006***
Gender (female)	.009	.008
Location (rural)	.035***	.039***
Education	-.012**	-.016***
Lived Poverty Index score	-.058***	-.061***
Accessibility of school services		
Easy to obtain services	.079***	-.007
Difficult to obtain services		-.085
No bribe/favour	.003	.038
Paid bribe		.035
Transparency and accountability		
Access to school budget	.032***	.031***
Action if report teacher misconduct	.054***	.052***
Democracy advantage		
Perceived supply of democracy	.130***	.130***
Explained variance (adj. R^2)	.092	.085
Number of observations	12,965†	35,129

Note: *Cell entries are unstandardized OLS regression coefficients (B)); *significance=<.10, **significance=<.05, ***significance=<.01; †=only includes respondents who had contact with a school during previous 12 months*

Small steps matter: The long-term impact of democracy

So far, we have focused on the immediate environment and experiences of citizens, as well as their perceptions of how their country is governed, and considered how these factors shape their views of government performance in providing education. In this final section, we take a step back to analyze whether broader mechanisms of democratic accountability have a cumulative positive effect on these performance evaluations. In other words, are countries that have honored basic democratic tenets such as free and fair elections over longer periods of time better at providing the kind of education that citizens want?

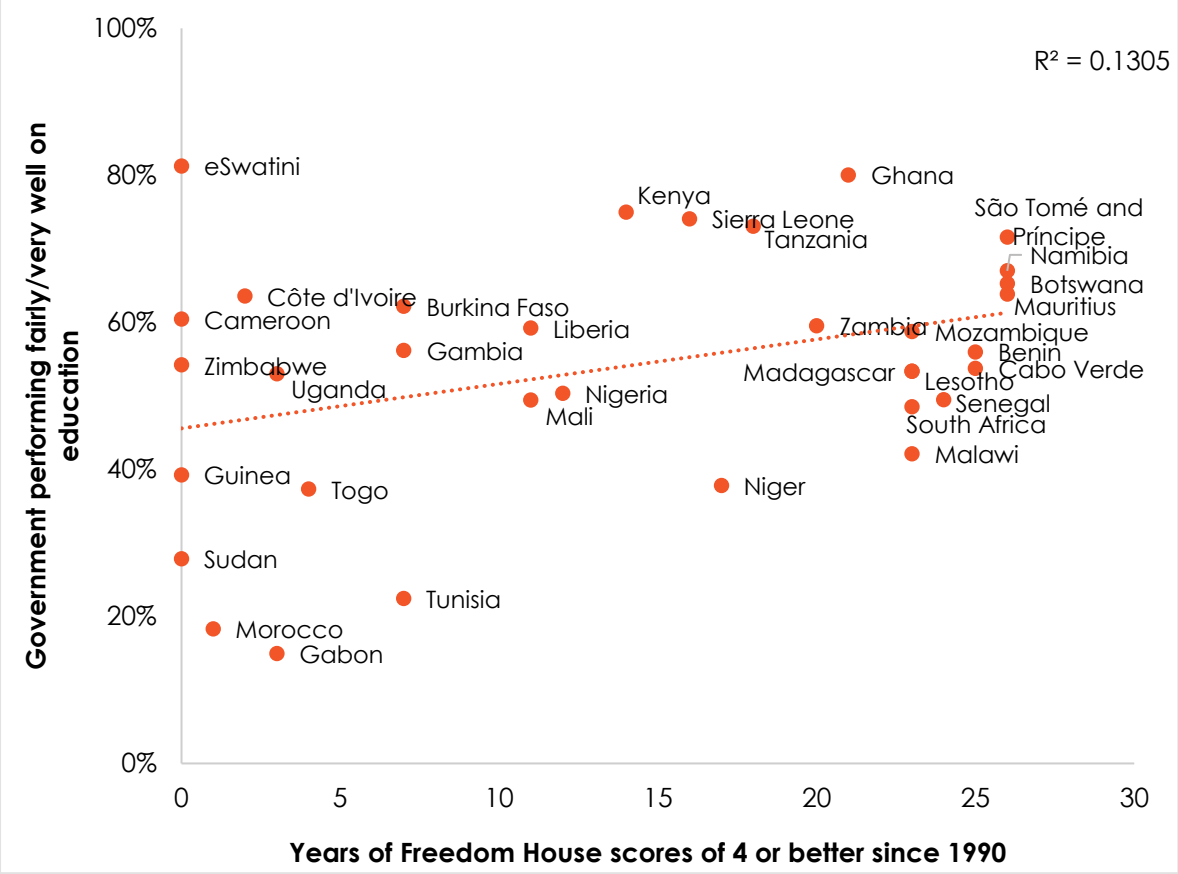
We measure the long-term effects of democracy using Freedom House (2019) assessments going back to the beginning of the third wave of democratization in Africa in the last decade of the 20th century. Specifically, we count the number of years a country has passed

the threshold of being an electoral democracy[10] and compare it to citizens' levels of satisfaction with government performance on education.

The results, displayed in Figure 23, are encouraging for citizens who live in electoral democracies on the continent. The more years a country has been an electoral democracy during the past quarter-century, the more likely it is that its citizens are satisfied with the delivery of public education services. The correlation between these two variables at the country level is statistically significant, as shown in Table 3, which also reveals statistically significant relationships between our measure of cumulative years as an electoral democracy and citizens' perceptions of easy access to school services and transparency (access to school budget information). However, our measure is not significantly correlated with the other aspects of the education system (school within walking distance, not paying a bribe,[11] and accountability).

In sum, we find evidence that a country's regime type matters for the provision of education. Although democracy does not seem to affect all aspects of the education system equally, it nevertheless has a net positive effect.

Figure 23: Years as a democracy and assessments of government performance on education | 34 countries | 2016/2018



[10] A country is counted as an electoral democracy if it scored 4.0 or lower on both the political rights and civil liberties dimensions of the original Freedom House scale of 1 (free) to 7 (not free) for a given year. Using 1990 as a reference year for the third wave of democratization (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997), we count the number of years of electoral democracy between 1990 and the year prior to Afrobarometer Round 7 data collection in the country.

[11] When we apply a more stringent definition of democracy (number of consecutive years classified as "free" by Freedom House, counting backward from the year of Round 7 fieldwork), the measure is positively correlated with not having to pay a bribe to access school services (results not shown).

Table 3: Years as a democracy and assessments of education quality | 34 countries | 2016/2018

	Electoral democracy (years since 1990)
School within walking distance	-.098
Easy to obtain school services	.424**
No bribe/favour	.150
Action likely if report teacher misconduct	.027
Likely to be able to access school budget information	.335*
Government performing fairly/very well on education	.361**

Note: *Table shows Pearson's correlation coefficients (2-tailed); *significance=<.10, **significance=<.05, ***significance=<.01; n=34*

Conclusions

Afrobarometer Round 7 findings point to promising signs for education in Africa, including steady if modest progress in educational attainment and the widespread perception of equal opportunity for girls.

Even so, the SDG4 target of "inclusive and equitable quality education and … lifelong learning opportunities for all" remains an ambitious challenge, particularly in countries (such as Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, and Guinea) where a majority of adults have no formal schooling at all, and even more so in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Countries vary dramatically in how citizens think their governments are doing on education. At one end of the spectrum, eight out of 10 respondents in Ghana and eSwatini said their government was doing a fairly or very good job. At the other end, fewer than one in five Gabonese and Moroccans agreed.

By testing four sets of possible explanations for these evaluations, statistical analysis reveals that the accessibility of school services and the perceived transparency and accountability of school officials have a significant and positive impact on how citizens view their government's efforts to provide education. More broadly, democracy matters: Citizens are more likely to be satisfied with the delivery of education if transparency and accountability at the school level are embedded in a broader political system that encourages these qualities.

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Appendix

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

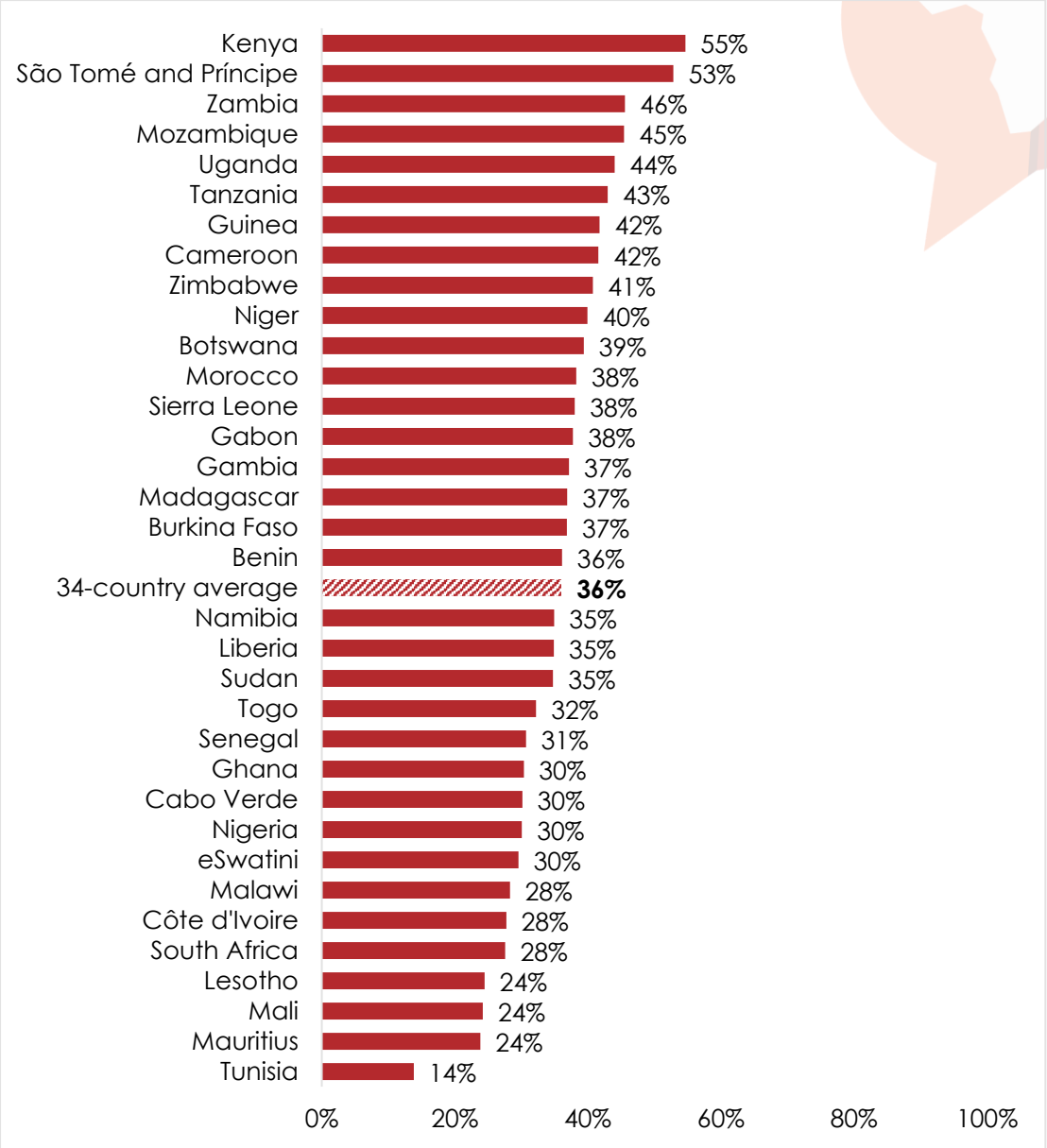
Country	Months when Round 7 fieldwork was conducted	Previous survey rounds
Benin	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
Botswana	June-July 2017	1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014
Burkina Faso	Oct 2017	2008, 2012, 2015
Cameroon	May 2018	2013, 2015
Cabo Verde	Nov-Dec 2017	2002, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014
Côte d'Ivoire	Dec 2016-Jan 2017	2013, 2014
eSwatini	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 Principe	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-Jan2017	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

Table A.2: Years of free and compulsory education, by country

Country	Years free primary/ secondary education	Years compulsory primary/secondary education
Benin	6	6
Botswana	10	0
Burkina Faso	10	11
Cabo Verde	8	10
Cameroon	6	6
Côte d'Ivoire	10	10
eSwatini	7	7
Gabon	10	10
Gambia	9	9
Ghana	9	9
Guinea	6	6
Kenya	12	12
Lesotho	7	7
Liberia	6	6
Madagascar	12	5
Malawi	8	8
Mali	12	9
Mauritius	13	11
Morocco	9	9
Mozambique	7	7
Namibia	7	7
Niger	8	8
Nigeria	9	9
São Tomé and Príncipe	6	6
Senegal	11	11
Sierra Leone	9	9
South Africa	12	9
Sudan	11	8
Tanzania	11	7
Togo	5	10
Tunisia	11	9
Uganda	13	7
Zambia	7	7
Zimbabwe	0	7

Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Statistics (for 2017 or the most recent year available)

Figure A.1: Contact with schools in previous 12 months | 34 countries | 2016/2018



Respondents were asked: *In the past 12 months, have you had contact with a public school? (% "yes")*

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