

Angolans perceive rising corruption and say citizens risk retaliation if they report it

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 906 | Carlos Pacatolo, David Boio, and Rossana Correia Sabino

Summary

Between 2017, when President João Lourenço took office, and 2022, Angola's ranking on Transparency International's (2017, 2022) Corruption Perceptions Index improved from 167th place to 116th. This 51-place gain reflected the country's investigations and court cases that suggested a commitment to the fight against corruption, especially involving figures close to former President José Eduardo dos Santos (VOA, 2021; Maka Angola, 2022).

But corruption scandals involving senior police and judicial officials have continued to emerge. One recent example was the dismissal of Eduarda Rodrigues, deputy attorney general and director of the National Asset Recovery Service, attributed to a "loss of trust," underlining the continuing difficulties in fighting corruption (Novo Jornal, 2024).

The issue of corruption is of extreme political importance, as perceptions of corruption weaken one of the pillars of political stability, public trust in institutions (Lagarde, 2018 ; Cho & Kirwin, 2007). This is especially worrying in the context of an electoral authoritarian political regime like Angola's, because mistrust deepens problems of political legitimacy (Boio & Pacatolo, 2024).

But studies indicate that in many African countries, anti-corruption reforms face institutional and political barriers that hinder their implementation (Badlam, Foster, Billings, & DePass, 2021) and increase public scepticism about the effectiveness of anti-corruption initiatives in general (Transparency International, 2023).

Ahead of International Anti-Corruption Day (9 December), this dispatch takes a look at how Angolans perceive their government's efforts to fight corruption.

Findings from Afrobarometer's 2024 survey show that a growing number of Angolans think corruption is on the rise, particularly in public institutions such as the Presidency, Parliament, the public administration, and the national police. A majority rate the government's performance in the fight against corruption as insufficient. Many Angolans report having to pay bribes to obtain government services, and most believe that ordinary people run the risk of retaliation if they report acts of corruption.

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 10 were launched in January 2024. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Angola, led by Ovilonwa – Estudos de Opinião Pública, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,200 adult Angolans between 27 March

and 19 April 2024. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Angola in 2019 and 2022.

Key findings

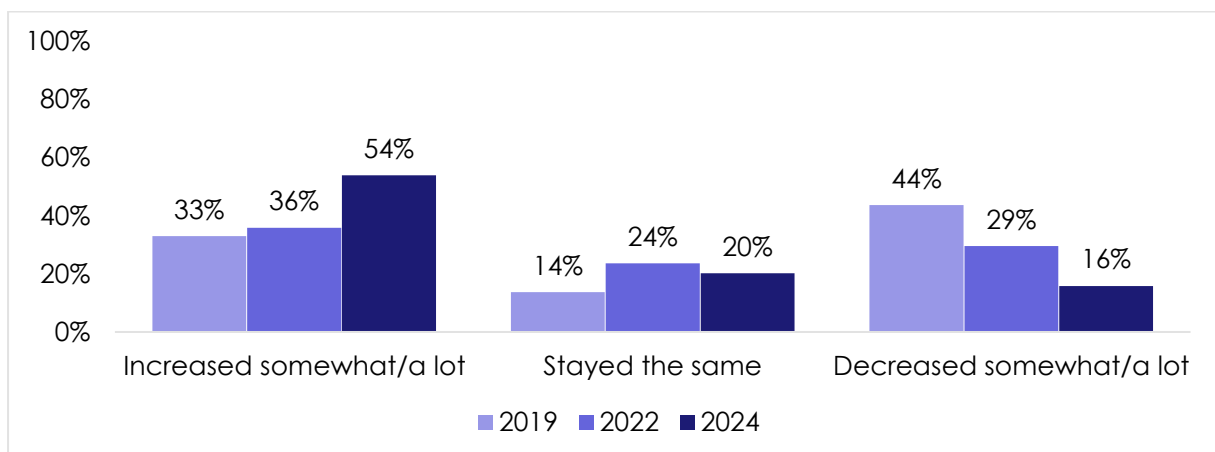
- A majority (54%) of Angolans say corruption in the country grew “somewhat” or “a lot” during the year preceding the survey, a remarkable 21-percentage-point increase compared to 2019.
- Nearly seven in 10 Angolans (68%) say the government is doing “fairly badly” or “very badly” on fighting corruption in government, a 14-point increase compared to 2019.
- More than six in 10 Angolans (63%) believe that ordinary people risk retaliation or other negative consequences if they report corruption, a 9-point increase compared to 2019.
- Among those who sought selected public services during the previous year, more than half (55%) say they had to pay a bribe to get assistance from the police, 38% to avoid problems with the police, 48% to obtain a government document, and 31% to obtain medical care.
- Almost half (47%) of Angolans think that “most” or “all” police officers are involved in corruption.
 - More than four in 10 (43%) say the same about officials in the Presidency, a 21-point increase compared to 2019.

Corruption levels and government performance

A growing number of Angolans see corruption as increasing in their country. More than half (54%) of respondents say corruption increased during the year preceding the survey, 21 percentage points more than in 2019 (33%) (Figure 1). Over the same period, the proportion of those who say that corruption decreased dropped dramatically, from 44% to 16%.

These assessments may be linked to recent scandals involving senior figures in the judiciary and suggest an erosion of public confidence in the president's promises to fight corruption.

Figure 1: Level of corruption | Angola | 2019-2024



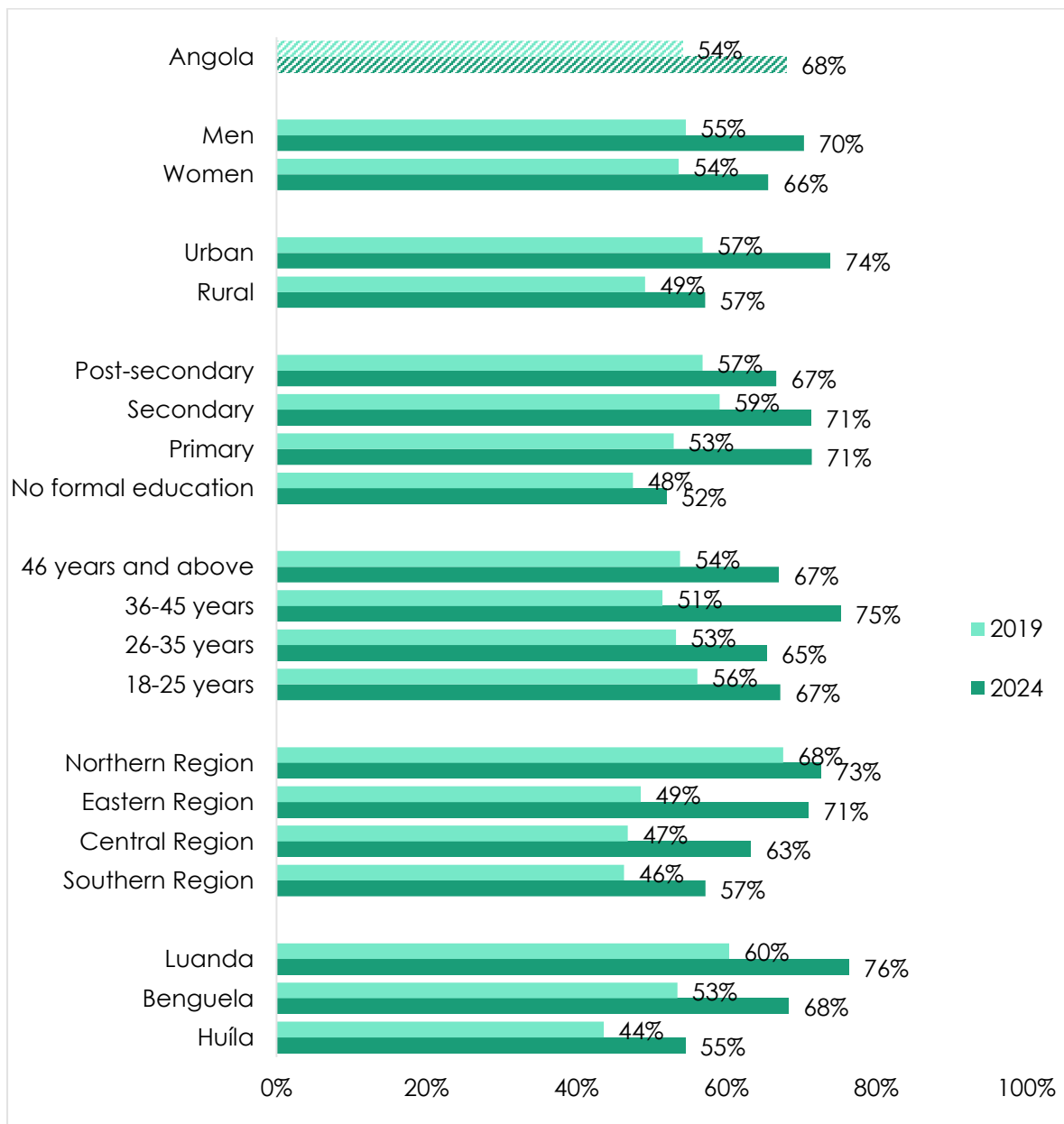
Respondents were asked: In your opinion, over the past year, has the level of corruption in this country increased, decreased, or stayed the same?

Indeed, more than two-thirds (68%) of Angolans say the government is doing “fairly badly” or “very badly” in fighting corruption, an increase of 14 percentage points compared to 2019 (54%) (Figure 2).

This assessment is particularly widespread in cities (74%), in the Northern and Eastern regions (73% and 71%), and in Luanda (76%).

Compared to 2019, growth in the prevalence of this perception has been especially pronounced among urban residents (up by 17 percentage points), among men (+15 points), and in the Eastern Region (+22 points).

Figure 2: Government performing badly in fight against corruption | by demographic group | Angola | 2019-2024



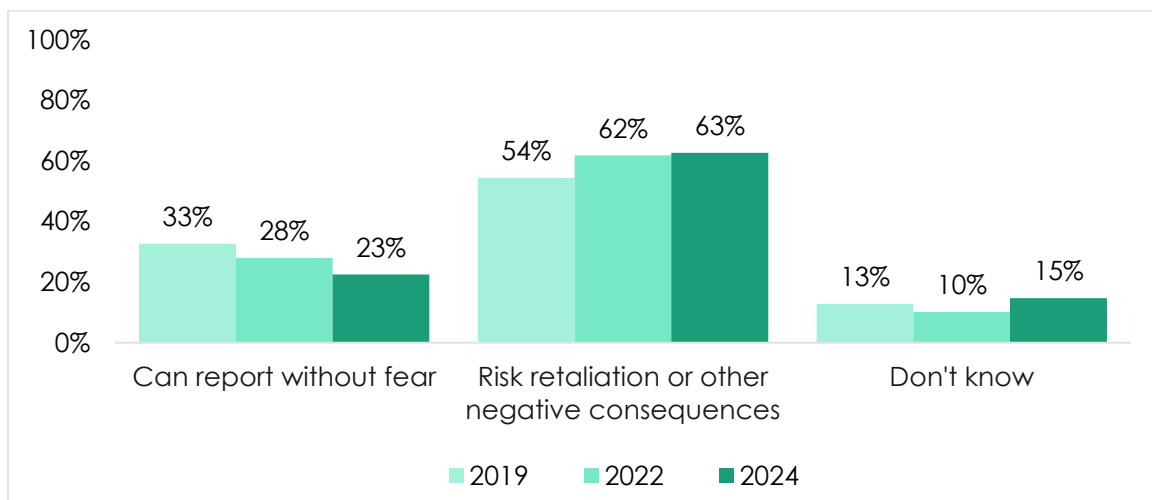
Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Fighting corruption in government? (% who say “fairly badly” or “very badly”)

Can people report corruption without fear?

Another worrying trend concerns reporting corruption cases: The proportion of Angolans who say people can report corruption without fear of retaliation decreased by 10 percentage points, from 33% in 2019 to just 23% in 2024 (Figure 3). Almost two-thirds (63%) of citizens now think that reporting incidents of corruption to the authorities carries the risk of retaliation or other negative consequences.

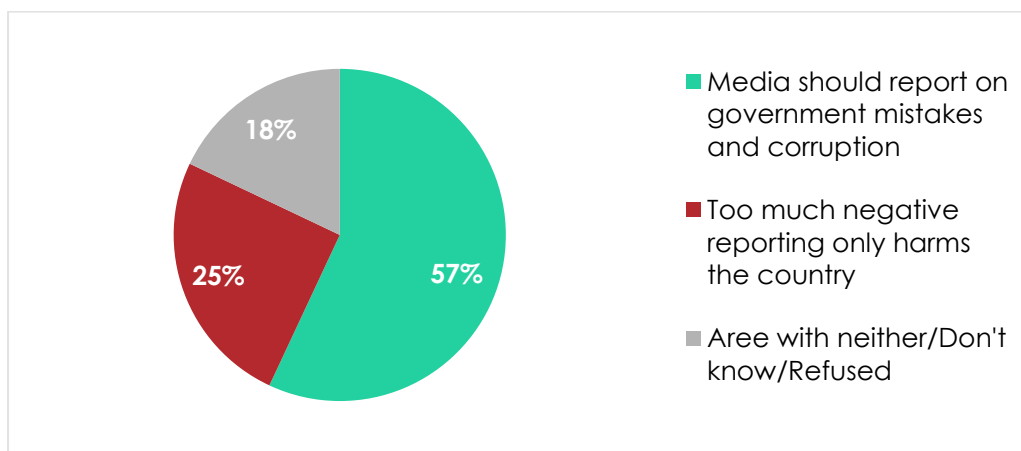
At the same time, findings show that there is at least some popular desire for more transparency: 57% of citizens say the media “should constantly investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption.” Only one in four (25%) instead say that too much negative reporting only harms the country (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Can people report cases of corruption without fear? | Angola | 2019-2024



Respondents were asked: In this country, can ordinary people report incidents of corruption without fear, or do they risk retaliation or other negative consequences if they speak out?

Figure 4: Should the media report on government mistakes and corruption? | Angola | 2024



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: The news media should constantly investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption.
 Statement 2: Too much reporting on negative events, like government mistakes and corruption, only harms the country.

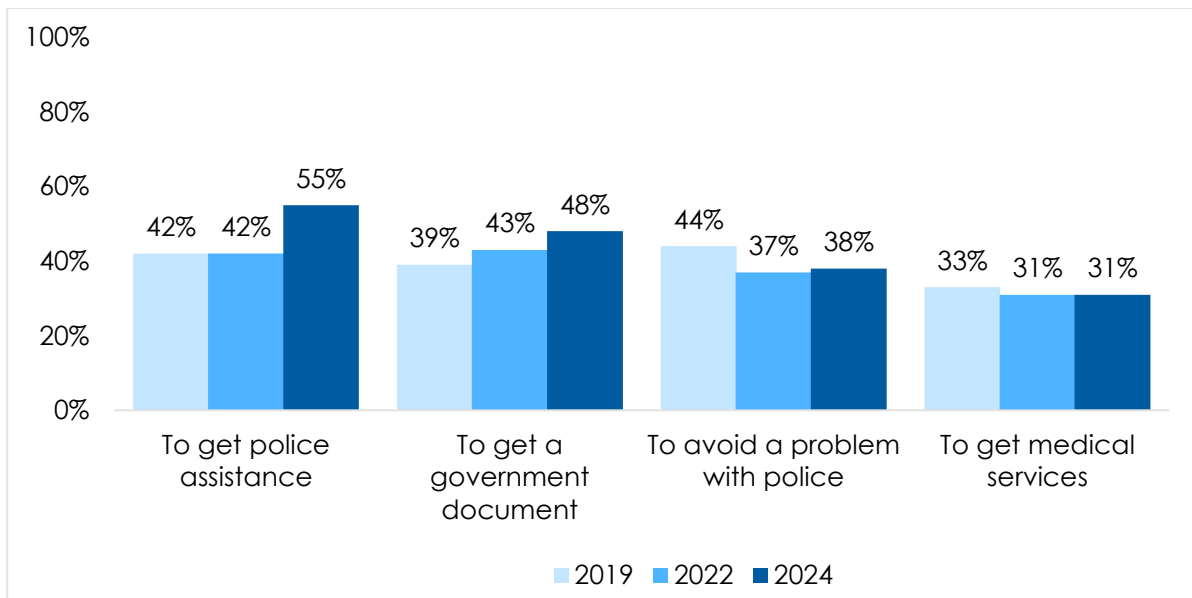
Personal experience with corruption

The data suggest that Angola, like most African countries, faces endemic corruption of the “petty corruption” type. Among respondents who say they requested police assistance during the preceding year, more than half (56%) say they had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour to get the help they needed, up from 42% in 2019 and 2022 (Figure 5).

Almost half (48%) of those who tried to get a government identity document, such as a birth certificate, driver’s license, or passport, report that they paid a bribe, an increase of 9 percentage points compared to 2019.

Somewhat fewer report having to pay bribes among those who encountered the police in other situations, such as at checkpoints or during traffic stops (38%, down from 44% in 2019), and those who sought care at a public health clinic or hospital (31%, about the same as in previous surveys).

Figure 5: Paid bribe to obtain public services | Angola | 2019-2024

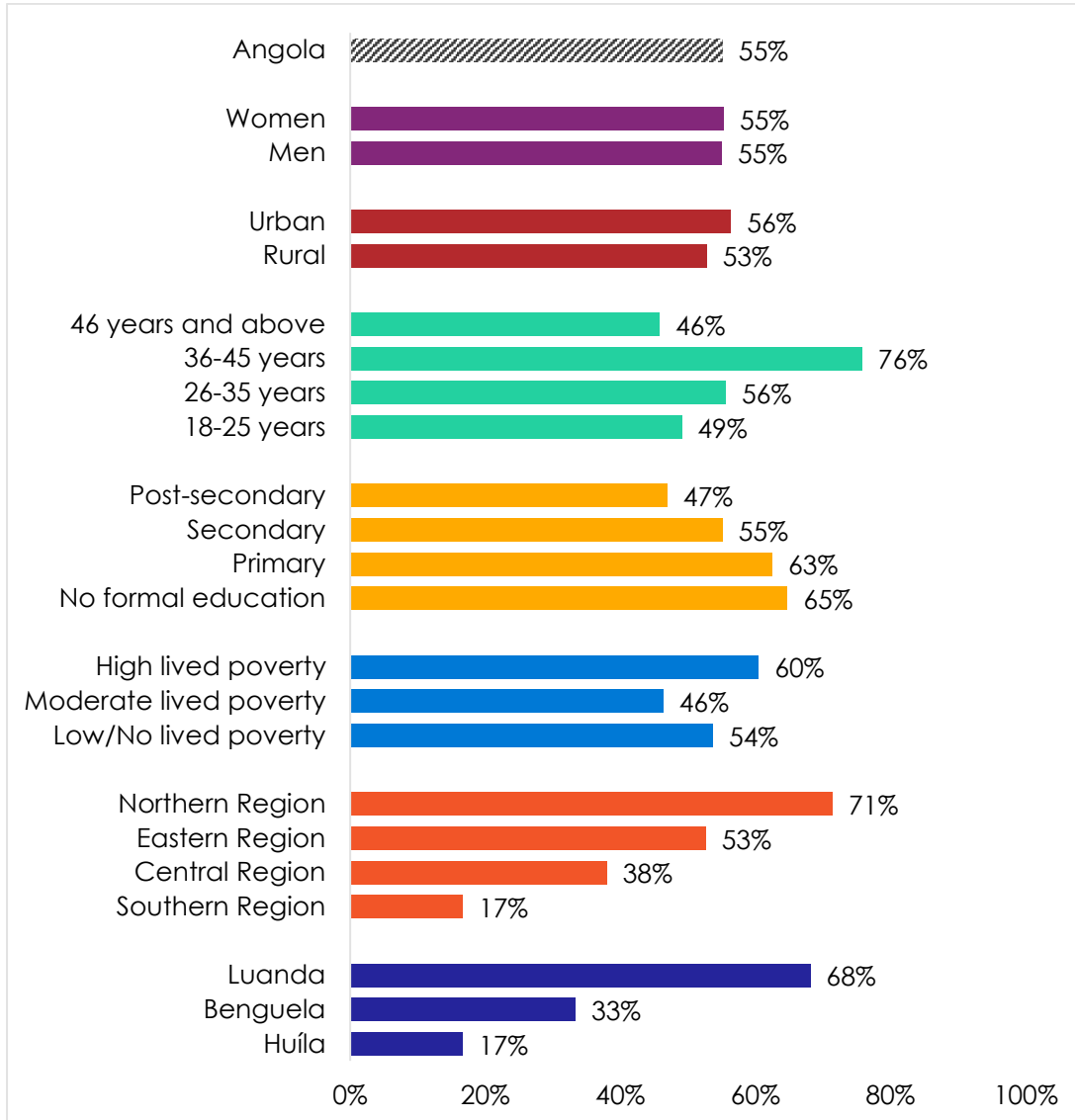


Respondents who had contact with selected public services during the previous year were asked: How often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour [in order to obtain the needed services]? (% who say they paid a bribe “once or twice,” “a few times,” or “often”) (Respondents who had no contact with these services are excluded.)

More than half of Angolans (55%) have resorted to bribery to get police assistance. This practice was more common among respondents aged 36-45 years (76%), among those living in the North of the country (71%) and in Luanda province (68%), and among the least educated (65%) and the poorest respondents (60%) (Figure 6).

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Figure 6: Paid bribe to get police assistance | by demographic group | Angola
 | 2024



Respondents who said they requested police assistance during the previous year were asked: How often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a police officer in order to get the assistance you needed? (% who say “once or twice,” “a few times,” or “often”) (Respondents who did not request police assistance are excluded.)

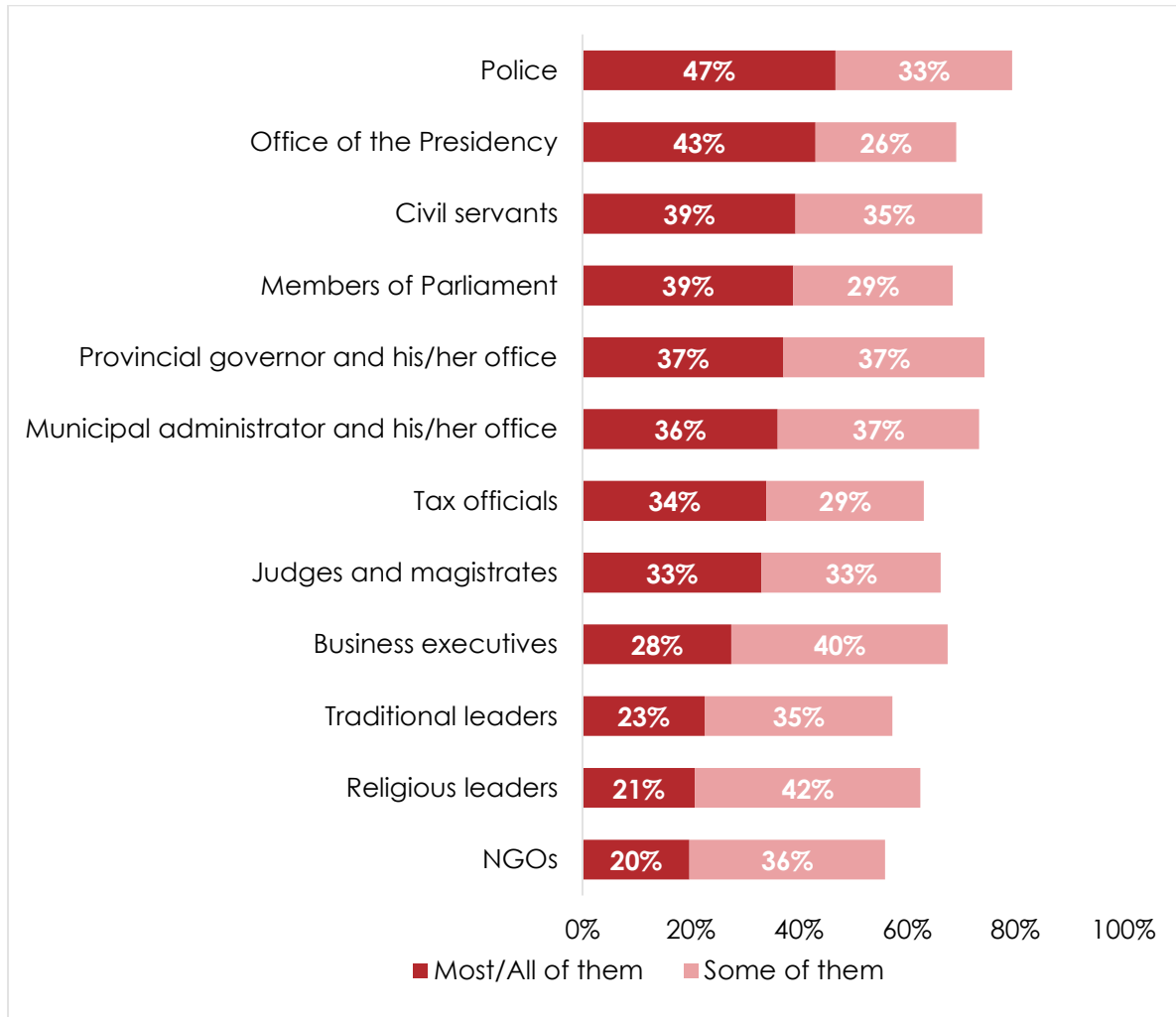
Who is corrupt?

Among 12 key public institutions and groups of leaders the survey asked about, the police are most widely seen as corrupt: Almost half (47%) of Angolans say “most” or “all” police officials are involved in corruption, in addition to 33% who think that “some of them” are corrupt (Figure 7).

The Presidency of the Republic comes next, with 43% of citizens saying that “most” or “all” officials in the Presidency are corrupt, followed by civil servants (39%) and members of Parliament (39%).

Non-governmental organisations (20%), religious leaders (21%), and traditional leaders (23%) fare best in respondents' assessments of institutional corruption.

Figure 7: Perception of corruption in institutions and among leaders | Angola | 2024



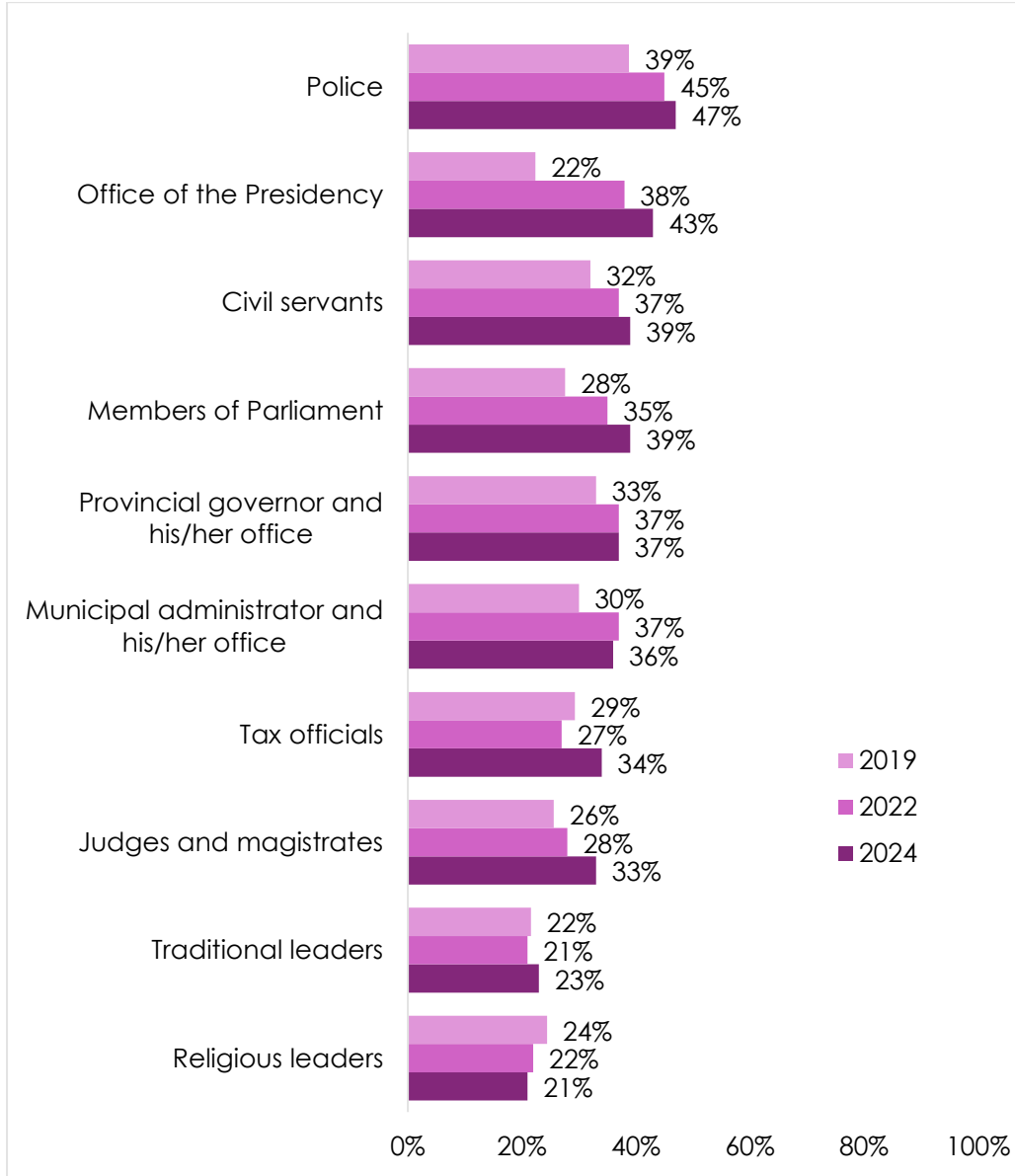
Respondents were asked: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

Compared to 2019, public perceptions of widespread corruption increased for all of these institutions and leaders except for religious and traditional leaders, including a 21-percentage-point increase for the Presidency (Figure 8).

The perception that "most" or "all" officials in the Presidency are involved in corruption is particularly prevalent among residents of Luanda (57%) and the Northern Region (46%), the most educated citizens (51%), urbanites (51%), and men (46%) (Figure 9).

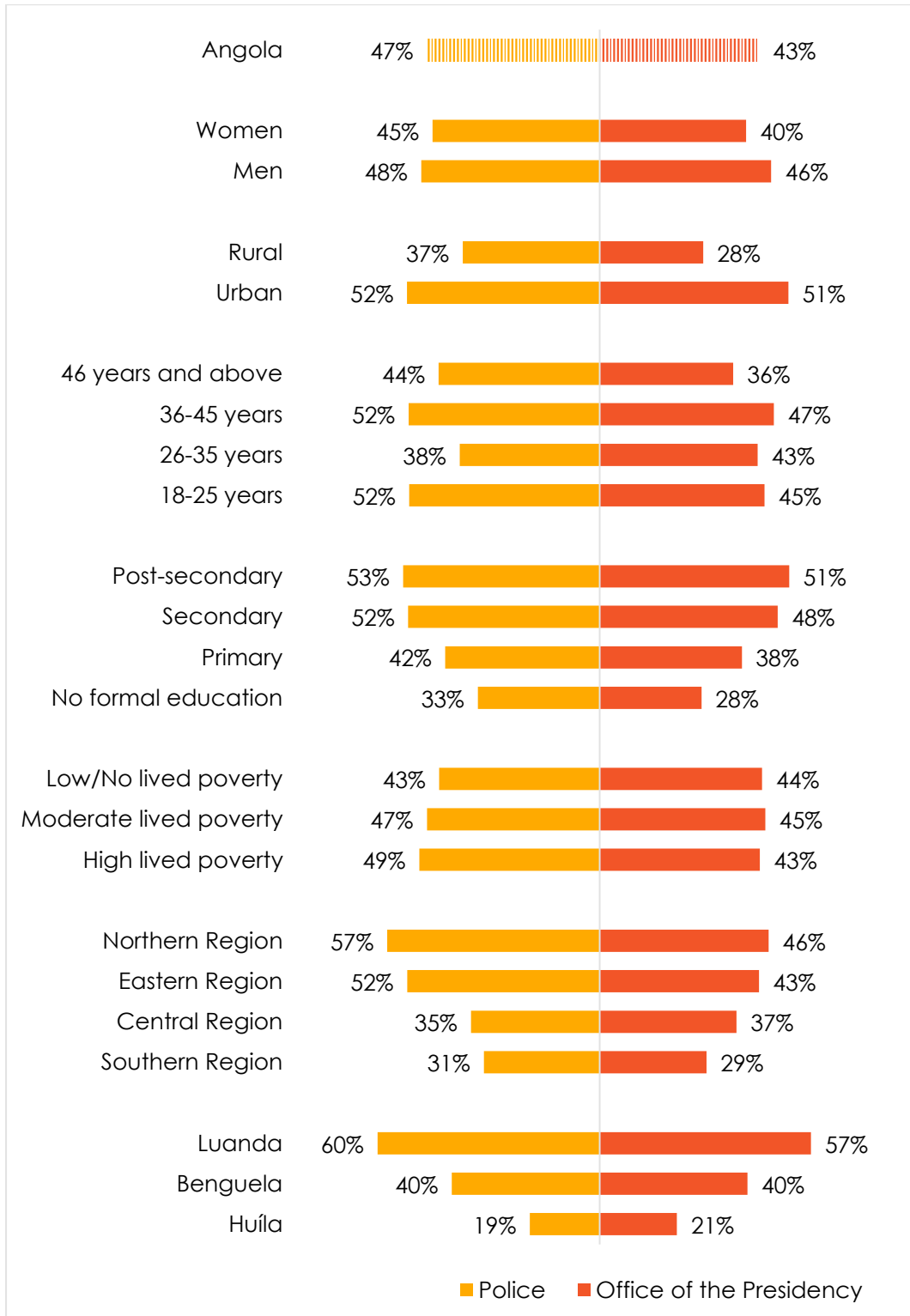
Similarly, perceptions of widespread corruption among the police are especially common among residents of Luanda (60%), the Northern Region (57%) and cities (52%), as well as the most educated respondents (53%). In addition, the poorest citizens (49%) are more likely to see most/all police as corrupt than well-off respondents (43%).

Figure 8: Widespread corruption among institutions and leaders | Angola
 | 2019-2024



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

Figure 9: Perception that most/all officials in the Presidency of the Republic and police officials are corrupt | by demographic group | Angola | 2024



Respondents were asked: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The President and officials in his office? Police? (% who say "most of them" or "all of them")

Conclusion

Survey findings paint a worrying picture of official integrity in Angola, marked by widespread and growing perceptions of worsening corruption in many institutions, especially in the police and the Presidency. This scenario highlighting the fragility of major state institutions is especially pronounced among urban residents and more educated citizens, perhaps reflecting their greater contact with public services and greater exposure to information.

These perceptions highlight the challenges that Angola faces in fighting corruption. As noted by Hope (2016), corruption in Africa tends to be systemic and rooted in political structures, which hinders effective reforms and generates a cycle of public distrust. Bayart (2009) argues that in many African regimes, corruption is used as a tool to maintain patronage networks and perpetuate political power. The reforms initiated by President Lourenço since 2017 seem to have had limited practical impact as the population expresses growing scepticism about the government's ability to combat corruption. As a result, the situation in 2024 reflects an urgent need for structural reforms and greater accountability to reverse the upward trend in the perceptions of corruption and restore trust in public institutions.

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