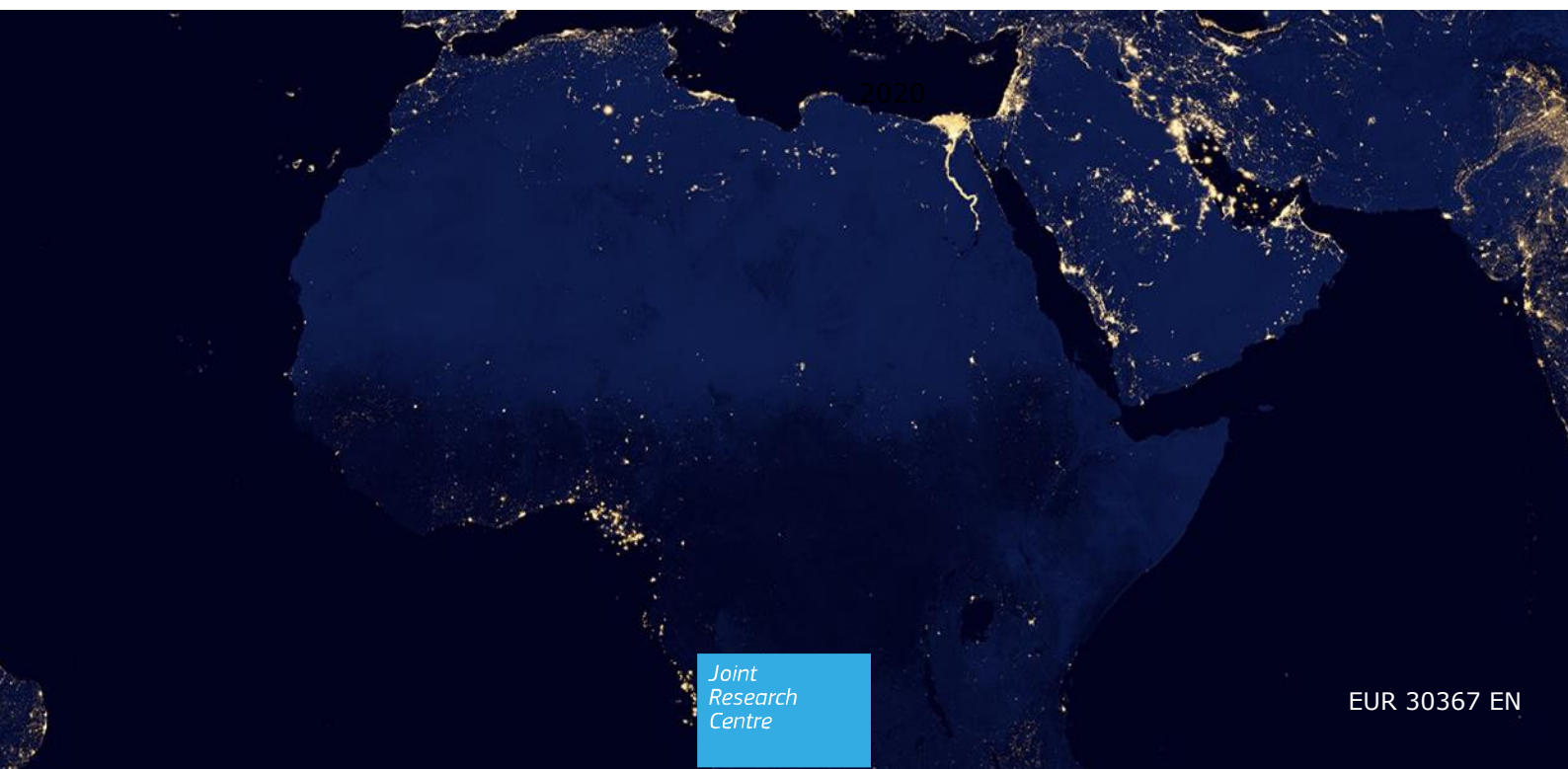European Commission

# JRC TECHNICAL REPORT

# Youth Perspectives in Africa: how young people view politics, society and the environment

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# Contents

# Abstract

In early 2020, the European Commission proposed a series of new partnerships with Africa, addressing the Green Transition and Energy Access, Digital Transformation, Sustainable Growth and Jobs, Peace, Security and Governance, and Migration and Mobility. Understanding the views of young people from across the African continent will be vital to building these partnerships. Africa has the youngest population structure and the fastest growing youth population of all continents, and youth will continue to be an important dimension for relations between Europe and Africa in the future. In this context, this report asks what the opinions are of young Africans on a range of salient topics and what this can mean for sustainable development and relations between Africa and the European Union. The focus here is on: (1) Climate change, (2) Digital infrastructure and information access, (3) Governance, in particular political participation, trust in institutions and corruption, and (4) Gender equality. We examine these with data from the Afrobarometer public opinion survey in 34 countries.

# Key Messages

In early 2020, the European Commission proposed a series of new partnerships with Africa, addressing the Green Transition and Energy Access, Digital Transformation, Sustainable Growth and Jobs, Peace, Security and Governance, and Migration and Mobility. Understanding the views of young people from across the African continent will be vital to building these partnerships. Africa has the youngest population structure and the fastest growing youth population of all continents and Commissioner Urpilainen has described it as 'a continent of youth brimming with confidence, full of potential' (European Commission 2020).

This report examines the perspectives of young people in Africa on a series of thematic areas of importance to EU-Africa relations and sustainable development. These tell us about the concerns and hopes of Africa's young people and point towards the sorts of societies they would like to live in in the future.

We find that, in general, young Africans are informed about the causes and impacts of climate change, but have low levels of trust in political institutions and are concerned about corruption. However, there are also important variations from place to place, in particular in rural or urban contexts, and according to young people's education level which need to be taken into consideration.

Africa's young people also represent an opportunity for change in the future. They tend to consider that ordinary citizens can make an impact on stopping climate change and corruption and perceive there to be a trend towards gender equality. Although they have lower levels of trust in political institutions and participation in formal political processes than older citizens, Africa's young people are more willing to voice their concerns outside of electoral politics.

Specifically, the study provides insights on young Africans' perspectives on the following thematic areas:

### 1. Climate change:

Awareness of climate change, its significance and its causes varies among youth populations in Africa. More young people are familiar with the term 'climate change' than older people, and young urban residents and those with higher education levels in particular tend to have the greatest awareness of climate change and its causes. It is less common for young rural residents and those with lower education levels to have heard of climate change, but they are more likely to have perceived its negative effects, in particular on agriculture. Of the young people who have heard of climate change, over two-thirds (67%) think that it needs to be stopped, and half (49%) feel that ordinary Africans can do either 'a little' or 'a lot' to stop it.

### 2. Digital infrastructure:

Young people are more connected than older citizens, more frequently owning mobile phones and regularly using the internet. Over a quarter (26%) of Africans between 18 and 35 years say that they use the internet everyday, and whereas 47% of young people access the internet at least a few times a month, only 23% of those over 35 do. But access to digital resources and infrastructure varies greatly for different groups. In particular, there are significant digital divides between rural and urban residents and those with lower or higher education levels. Whereas 60% of young urban residents access the internet a few times a week or everyday, only 25% of rural residents do. Whilst 79% of those with only a primary level of education never use the internet, this is only the case for 10% of young people with a tertiary level education.

### 3. Media and information access:

Access to digital infrastructure is also shaping shifts and divisions in the way that young people consume news and information in Africa. Different social groups access diverse forms of media, and therefore potentially also different news stories and political and social

messages. They also express ambivalent views towards the free press; when asked whether they felt that 'The media should have the right to publish any views and ideas without government control' or 'The government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things that it considers harmful to society', half of respondents agreed with the first statement (48% of respondents) and the other half with the second statement (50%).

### 4. *Political participation*:

Youth levels of political engagement and participation in Africa are generally low, albeit with significant differences from place to place. As well as distinctions between countries, the data points towards generational and territorial differences in political participation. In general, young Africans engage relatively little with formal political institutions, shown by levels of voting and the tendency to contact the government for action or help which are both lower than for older people. But they are slightly more likely than older citizens to engage in protest movements, especially the young people who are male, highly educated, and reside in towns and cities.

### 5. *Trust in institutions*:

Young Africans generally have low levels of trust in political institutions and political parties, but relatively high levels of trust in other institutions, particularly the army and religious leaders. The lowest level of trust is in opposition political parties (32% of respondents trust them somewhat or a lot), followed by Parliament, the President and ruling political party of their respective country (in all, 42% of respondents trust them somewhat or a lot). The most trusted institutions are the army (64% trust them somewhat or a lot) and religious leaders (69% trust them somewhat or a lot). Trust in institutions is closely correlated with perceptions of corruption; where young people consider an institution to be more corrupt, they tend to trust it less.

### 6. *Corruption*:

Young people consider corruption to be extensive in political and business organisations but considerably less so among traditional and religious leaders. Over one-third of respondents aged 18 to 35 considered there to be a high level of corruption by their President or Prime Minister (36% of respondents), Members of Parliament (38%), government officials (41%) and local government councillors (35%). Even greater was the proportion of young people who considered the police to be highly corrupt (50%). By contrast, social institutions were considered to be less corrupt, with less than a quarter of respondents (22%) perceiving high levels of corruption among traditional leaders and NGOs (22%). Religious leaders are viewed most positively, with only 17% of respondents considering them to be at highly corrupt. Young people are aware of the possibility to bring about change in their countries. A majority (54%) of 18 to 35 year olds in Africa agree or strongly agree that ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption. The percentage is higher among respondents with tertiary education (60%).

### 7. *Gender equality*:

The available figures show a trend in Africa towards greater gender equality. Young people, in the main, hold a shared understanding of the importance of gender equality. They also tend to consider that their governments are making positive progress. Nevertheless, there is still a way to go to make a significant impression on the unequal practices which young people consider to have remained the same over recent years.

Data for this study comes from the Afrobarometer survey, which is carried out by a network of partner organisations coordinated by Afrobarometer in 34 countries on a regularly repeated cycle. From 1999 to 2018, there have been seven full survey rounds, and the data can be freely accessed and used online.[1] For our analysis we use data from the latest round, which ran from 2016 to 2018.

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[1] For more information, see the dedicated website here: http://afrobarometer.org/about

# 1  Introduction

Over recent years there has been increasing recognition of the important role that young people can play in international affairs and development. In June 2020, the Council Conclusions on Youth in External Action stressed the contribution of young people to building stronger, more legitimate, peaceful and democratic societies, for example (Council of the EU 2020). The United Nations has also underlined young peoples' role as 'agents of change' for the Sustainable Development Goals, with 'the potential to make the most effective transformation of the world into a better place for all' (United Nations 2018).

The role of young people is particularly significant in Africa, which has the youngest population structure and the fastest growing youth population of all continents. The African Union's Youth Charter recognises this by stating that 'youth are partners, assets and a prerequisite for sustainable development and for the peace and prosperity of Africa' (African Union, 2006: 2). In 2020 Commissioner for International Partnerships Jutta Urpilainen described Africa as 'a continent of youth brimming with confidence, full of potential' (European Commission 2020a). Introducing the EU's new strategy with Africa, she also recognised the importance of young people to relations between our continents when she stated that 'my key priority now is to ensure that the Strategy with Africa is owned by the youth and women, as it responds to their aspirations' (European Commission 2020b).

The new strategy with Africa, which was proposed by the European Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in early 2020, is based on five key partnership areas, specifically (1) Green Transition and Energy Access, (2) Digital Transformation, (3) Sustainable Growth and Jobs, (4) Peace, Security and Governance, and (5) Migration and Mobility (JOIN(2020) 4 final). This report supports the development of these partnerships by shining light on the ways that they are viewed by young people in Africa. It follows from the JRC Technical Report 'Youth Perspectives in Africa: what are the most important issues for 18-35 year olds?' (Kalantaryan and McMahon 2020). That report highlighted how economic issues were the most salient concern of young people across Africa, with unemployment in particular being the highest-ranked for young men and for young women, for those who reside in rural or urban contexts, those with higher and lower levels of education and for people in work as well as people who were out of work.

Whilst the findings from our previous report underline the importance of sustainable growth and jobs for Africa's future development, here we describe the views of young people in Africa aged 18 to 35 on the other areas of relevance to the strategy. Specifically, we focus on climate change, digital infrastructure and information access, governance (in particular political participation, trust in institutions and corruption) and gender equality. The first three are key areas for the EU's partnership with Africa, whilst the fourth has been highlighted by Commissioner Urpilainen as a priority for the strategy's implementation. Migration and mobility is examined throughout by describing the views of young people who wish to migrate. This is significant in light of the higher tendency of young people to express a wish to migrate than older people (Migali et al 2018). Together, their perspectives tell us about the concerns and hopes of Africa's young people and point towards the sorts of societies they would like to live in. The report is structured around individual chapters addressing the following; (1) Climate change; (2) Digital infrastructure and information access; (3) Governance, in particular political participation, trust in institutions and corruption; (4) Gender equality. These are followed by a concluding chapter.

As with our previous report, our findings here are drawn from an analysis of data from the Afrobarometer survey (Afrobarometer 2019). The survey is carried out by a network of partner organisations coordinated by Afrobarometer in 34 countries on a regularly repeated cycle. From 1999 to 2018, there have been seven full survey rounds, and the

data can be freely accessed and used online.[2] For our analysis we use data from the latest round, which ran from 2016 to 2018. The survey provides information on how respondents view politics, the economy, social issues and environmental issues and is geographically broad and nationally representative, so can provide insights into the views of young people across most of the continent.

Finally, as the Covid-19 pandemic has spread around the world concerns about healthcare have gained a more urgent significance. The data analysed for this paper does not enable us to trace the opinions of young Africans about healthcare in today's rapidly-evolving context. But an understanding of young African's opinions on the topics we do examine is important against the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic. A recent survey from the International Labour Organisation, for example, found that the economic impact of the pandemic on young people had been 'systematic, deep and disproportionate', especially for women and those in lower-income countries. It also found, moreover, that young people were 'determined to step up and partner safely and effectively with governments, social partners, civil society and other institutions to "Build Back Better"' (ILO 2020). Young people are likely to see their opportunities diminished as a result of the crisis, but can also be a resource for a sustainable recovery. By highlighting the views of young people across a range of social, political and environmental areas, this research can contribute to understanding the directions they would like a post-Covid Africa to take.

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[2] For more information, see the dedicated website here: http://afrobarometer.org/about
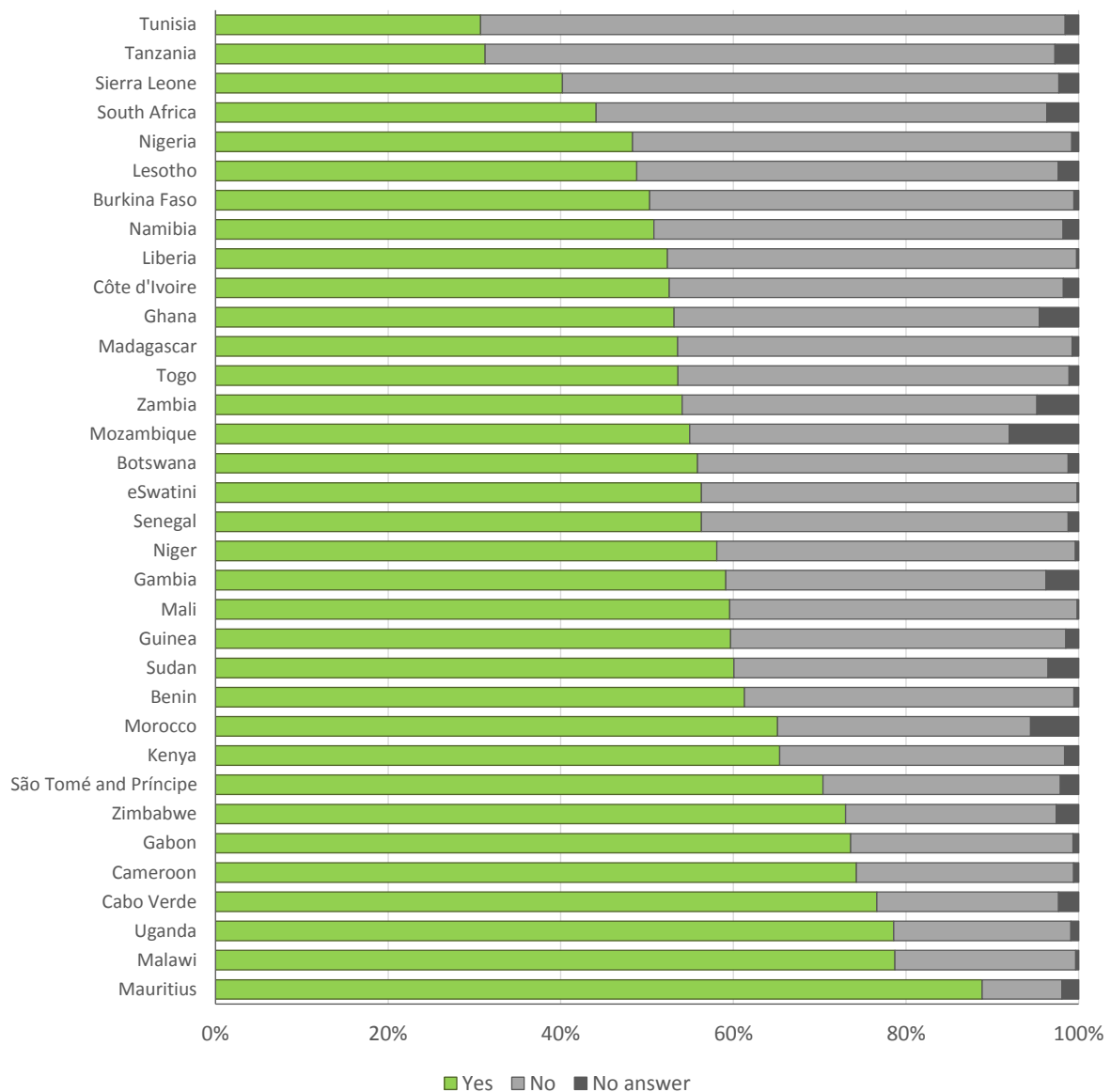
## 2 Climate Change

Climate change will be a defining feature of Africa's future and is at the forefront of EU-Africa relations. The green transition and energy access are the first priority of the European Commission's communication Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa (JOIN(2020) 4 final), which clearly states that 'the fight against climate change and environmental degradation is this generation's defining task', affecting all aspects of sustainable development on the continent. Similarly, the UN has stated that 'Climate Change is the defining issue of our time and we are at a defining moment … Without drastic action today, adapting to these impacts in the future will be more difficult and costly' (United Nations, no date).

In Africa, the impact of climate change is predicted to be particularly significant. According to UN Environment, no continent will be struck as severely by the impacts of climate change as Africa (UN Environment, no date). The African Union's draft strategy on climate change emphasises the wider-reaching implications, stating that 'the effects of climate change that have already occurred are widespread and significant, affecting agriculture, energy, human health, terrestrial and marine ecosystems, water resources, and some industries across the world and especially the African continent' (African Union 2014). Climate change is also likely to impact on migration patterns in the future (Alessandrini et al 2020). Public awareness and participation can play a key role in the response to climate change by fostering changes in practices which contribute to reducing the human impact on the environment, as noted in the UN's Rio Declaration on Environment and Development from 1992 (United Nations 1992).

The Afrobarometer survey provides insights into the potential contribution of Africa's young people to addressing climate change. Examining the question 'Have you heard about climate change or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet?' shows the general awareness of climate change among African youth (Figure 1). A majority (59%) of Africa's young people have heard of the term 'climate change', which is slightly above the proportion of those over 35 years of age who have (57%). But this figure varies widely across different countries. The countries where the largest proportion of young people have heard of climate change are Mauritius (89% of respondents), Malawi (79%) and Uganda (79%). The countries where the least young people have heard of climate change are Tunisia (31%), Tanzania (31%) and Sierra Leone (40%).

Figure 1. Proportion of people aged 18-35 who have heard of climate change



Source: Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC

However, within the youth population there are also differences in perceptions and experiences of climate change along gender, territorial and education lines. Specifically:

(a) Young men tend to be more familiar with the term climate change than young women: 65% of young men have heard of it, but only 53% of young women have.

(b) Young people who live in urban contexts more frequently say that they have heard of climate change (64% of respondents) than young people in rural contexts (54%). They also more frequently associate climate change with human activity than rural residents (36% vs 26% of respondents). In contrast, young people in rural contexts are more likely to be aware of the negative impacts of climate change: whereas 26% of young rural residents considered that climatic changes had made agricultural production 'much worse', only 16% of young urban residents did.

(c) Young people with higher levels of education are more likely to have heard of climate change than those with lower levels of education. 79% of those with a tertiary education have heard of it compared with only 43% of those with a primary education. More young people with higher education levels (46%) associate climate change with human activity than young people with a primary level education (20%). Moreover, as with rural residents, those with lower education levels are more likely to consider that climatic changes have had a negative effect on agriculture: 27% of those with a primary level education consider that agricultural production has gotten much worse, compared with only 16% of those with a tertiary level education.

(d) Those in employment are more aware of climate change than those who are unemployed or inactive, although the differences among them are relatively small.

(e) Young people who wish to migrate are more aware of climate change than those who do not; 67% of people who say that they wish to migrate are aware of climate change compared with 52% of those who do not.

In sum, young urban residents and those with higher education levels tend to have a greater awareness of climate change and its causes than others. But young rural residents and those with lower education levels are more likely to have perceived the effects of climate change, in particular on agriculture. This finding is reinforced by responses to the question How much, if at all, do you think climate change is affecting life in your country? Overall, a clear majority of young people who have heard of climate change, consider it to be making life 'somewhat worse' or 'much worse' in their country (60% of all respondents aged 18 to 35 who have heard of climate change). But there are differences in the severity of the effects these young people associate with climate change according to where they live and their education level. Of those who have heard of climate change, young people who live in rural contexts more often state that climate change is making life 'much worse' (33% of respondents) than those who live in urban contexts (25%). And whereas 34% of this cohort who have only a primary level education consider climate change to be making life 'much worse' only 26% of those with tertiary education levels do. This difference in the perceived severity of climate change's effects is likely to be due to people in rural contexts and with lower education levels experiencing them directly, in particular when it comes to their impact on agriculture.

Finally, it should also be noted that young people can represent a force for change in the future. Of the young people in the survey who had heard of climate change, over two-thirds (67%) agreed that climate change needed to be stopped. This is in line with the views of older citizens too (68% agreed it needed to be stopped). Half of the young people who had heard of climate change (49%) also felt that ordinary Africans could do either 'a little' or 'a lot' to stop it. This outcome is similar for young men (51%) and young women (46%), for urban (50%) and rural dwellers (47%). But young people with lower education levels, despite being those who consider the effects of climate change to be most severe, tend to be less positive about the capacity of ordinary Africans to stop it: whereas 27% of young people with tertiary education who have heard of climate change think that they can do 'a lot' to stop it, only 19% of those with primary level education do.

# 3 Digital infrastructure and information access

The digital transformation of economies and societies around the world can bring wide-reaching benefits, but also challenges. Mobile connectivity, access to computing and technological innovation are part of a foreseen Fourth Industrial Revolution which could raise global income levels, but also increase inequality and discontent if not managed appropriately (Schwab 2016). In recognition of this, the European Commission's communication Towards a comprehensive Strategy with Africa states that 'access to safe and affordable digital services needs to be ensured for all' and that reforms and investments should 'harness digitalisation as a driver for growth across all sectors of the economy' (JOIN(2020) 4 final).

In this section we examine young African's perspectives on two aspects of digital transformation, with implications for social, economic and political life on the continent. First, we focus on access to the internet and mobile technology. Second, we analyse access to forms of media and information sources. Around the world, the media and channels for publicly disseminating information have undergone extensive transformations. Less people buy print newspapers and access traditional media sources such as radio and television, and more people access information through digital and social media, from online news sources to Facebook, Twitter and others. This has in turn brought about significant changes in the way that people consume and share information, with mobile internet ensuring articles and videos can be shared and commented wider and quicker than ever before. At the same time, however, these transformations have proved to be fertile grounds for the dissemination of misinformation and so-called 'fake news', sometimes with dramatic consequences.

## 3.1 Digital infrastructure

The survey shines light on the extent to which young people in Africa access digital resources and infrastructure, in particular their ownership of a computer, a mobile phone and frequency of accessing the internet. The data shows that access to digital resources is greater for younger people than for older generations, but unevenly spread between different countries and social groups. Ownership of a mobile phone is extensive across the continent, whereas it is less common for young people to own a computer. Whereas 28% of those aged between 18 and 35 years own a computer or use one that someone else owns, compared with 22% of those over 35 years of age. Regarding mobile phones, 90% of those aged between 18 and 35 own one or use one that somebody else owns whereas 87% of those over 35 years of age do. And whereas 47% of young people access the internet at least a few times a month, only 23% of those over 35 do. Over a quarter (26%) of Africans between 18 and 35 years say that they use the internet every day.

Important gender, territorial and educational inequalities can be observed in young people's access to computers, mobile phones and the internet (Figure 2). These can Significant differences are particularly evident according to where people live and their education level. Whereas 43% of young people in urban contexts have their own computer or can use someone else's, this is the case for only 15% of young people in rural contexts. And whereas only 4% of young people with only a primary level education own their own computer, 55% of those with a tertiary level education do. A gap is also evident, albeit to a lesser degree, between men and women: two-thirds (67%) of young men do not have access to a computer, which rises to three-quarters (74%) in the case of young women.

Figure 2. Do you or anyone in your household own a computer?
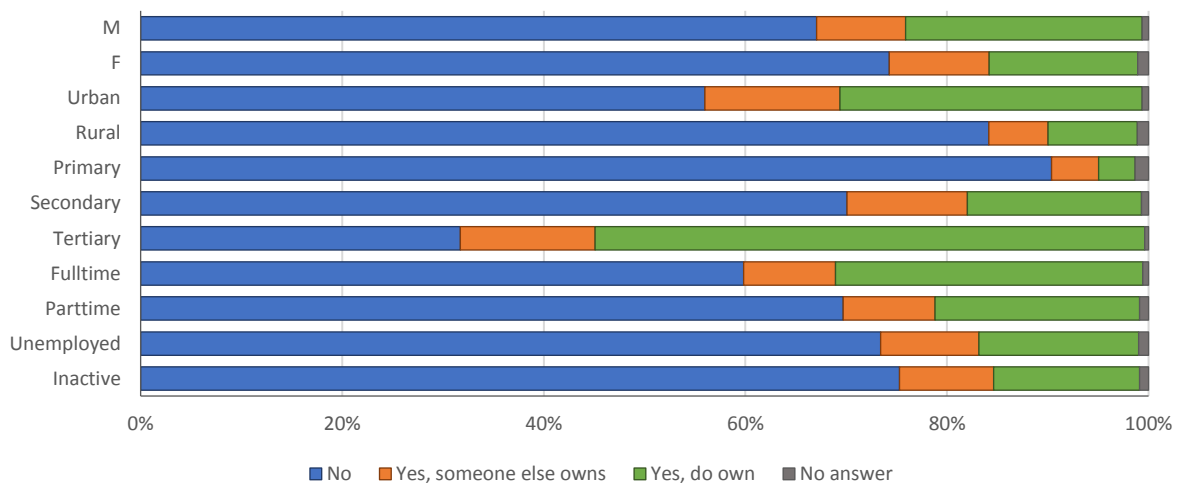


Source: Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC

In contrast to computer ownership, mobile phone ownership among African youth is more extensive and less unequally spread among different groups (Figure 3). Nearly all young people who reside in urban contexts (96%) reported owning their own mobile phone or being able to use someone else's, and a vast majority of those in rural contexts also do (84%). This is important because, for many young people, mobile phone ownership is vital for accessing the internet. Over half of those aged 18 to 35 who own a mobile phone (58%) use it to access the internet. This is considerably higher than for older citizens (35%). But significant differences remain between people with different education levels: 19% of young people with only primary education do not have access to a mobile phone, compared to only 6% of those with secondary level education and 1% of those with a tertiary level education. It is also more common for people in employment to have a mobile phone than those not in employment, and slightly more men (86%) than women (74%) own their own mobile phones.

Figure 3. Do you or anyone in your household own a mobile phone?
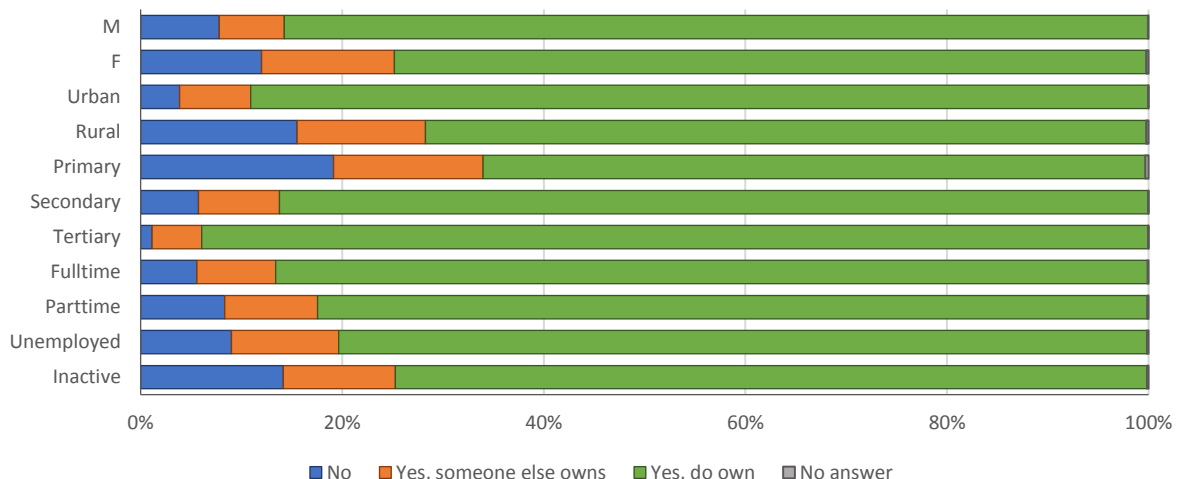


Source: Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC

There are also significant differences in internet access for Africa's young people (Figure 4). This is reflected in the frequency with which particular groups use the internet. In particular, whereas 60% of urban residents state that they access the internet a few times a week or everyday this is the case for only 25% of rural residents. Among those with only a primary level of education, 79% state that they never use the internet, but among young

people with a tertiary level education this is the case for only 10%. Those who are employed also tend to access the internet more frequently than those who are unemployed or inactive. Of note is also the finding that people who wish to migrate tend to use the internet more frequently than those who do not wish to migrate, although more research is required to unpack this further.

Figure 4. How often do you use the internet?
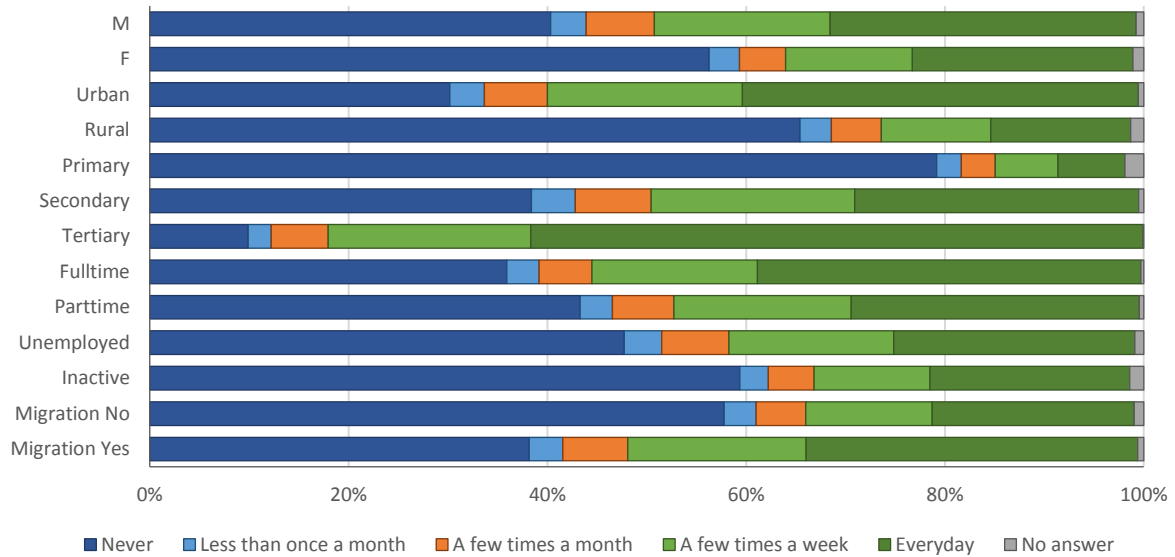


Source: Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC

Finally, as well as gaps in access to digital resources and infrastructure between groups of young Africans, there are also notable distinctions between countries. As can be seen in Figure 5, in some countries a large proportion of young people access the internet very frequently. For example, 87% of young people in Mauritius and 85% in Cabo Verde report using the internet a few times a week or every day. Yet in other countries a much smaller proportion of young people use the internet. For example, 84% of young people in Niger and 82% in Madagascar state that they never use the internet. These figures highlight how, despite a general increase in access to digital resources and the internet for young people in Africa compared with older citizens, there are important inequalities within and between countries which could have implications for future development if they are to persist.

Figure 5. How often do you use the internet?
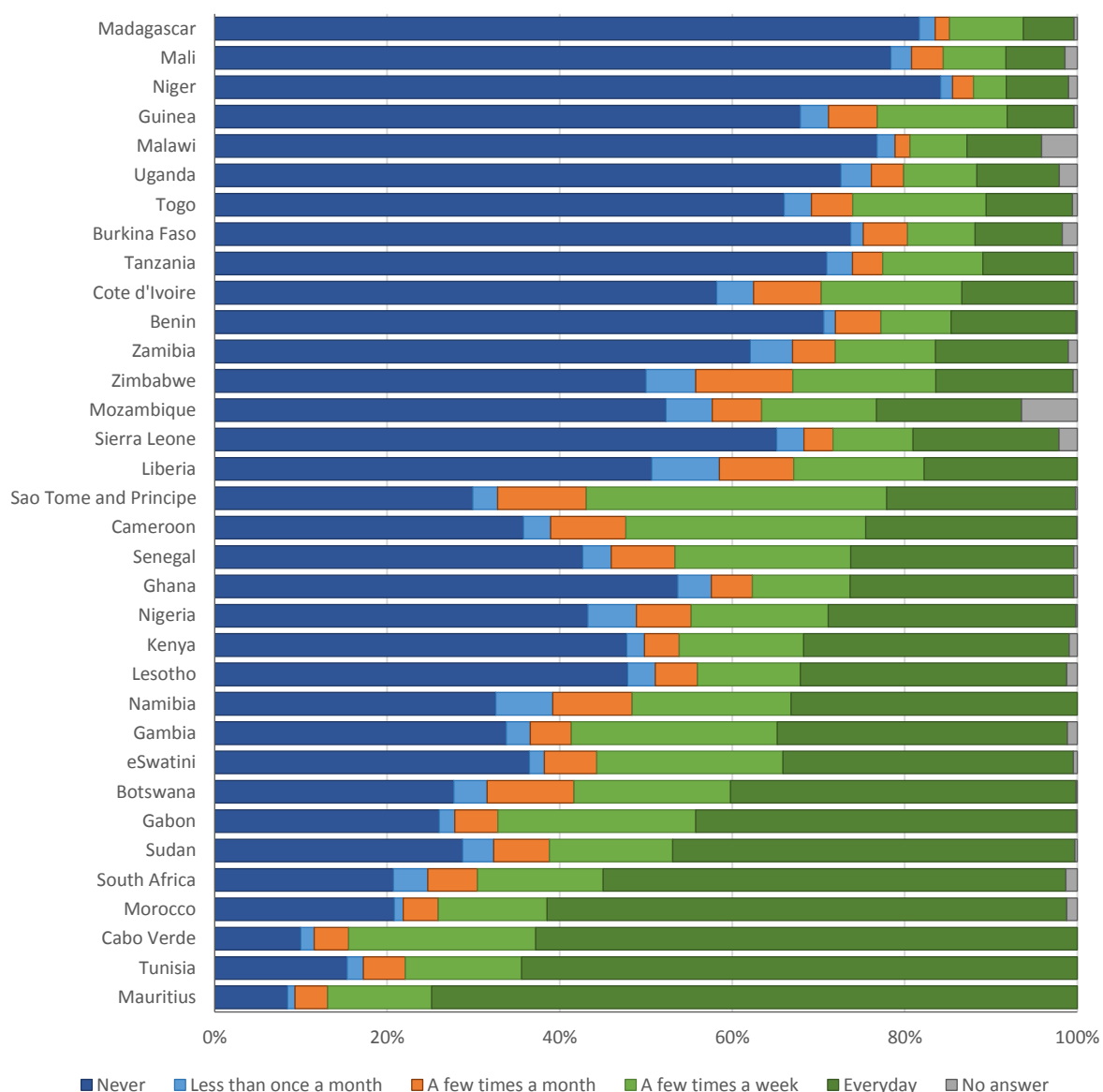


Source: Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC

## 3.2  Media and information

In Africa several characteristics of the media landscape can be noted. Traditional media continues to be significant, particularly in rural environments where radio is key to information dissemination (Fombad and Veli Jiyane 2016). But transformations in media and information production, transmission and consumption witnessed elsewhere have also been evident in Africa (Musau 2016). As digital and social media has expanded, so too has the spread of misinformation and fake news, as has been highlighted in Nigeria (Anderson 2019), Kenya (Portland Communications 2017) and South Africa (Chenzi 2020), for example. And Freedom House reports continued low levels of press freedom in many countries (Repucci 2019). Despite a slight increase in press freedom in sub-Saharan Africa there has been a decrease in North Africa, for example. These is important for Africa's young people, especially those who distrust political leaders and institutions and consider corruption to be widespread (see Governance chapter below), as a strong, transparent and independent media can be a vital tool to hold those in positions of power to account and to promote social and economic development.

The Afrobarometer survey asks a series of questions that are useful for understanding young people's views on the media and use of different forms of media to get the news, specifically; radio, television, newspapers, internet and social media. The data highlights the importance of forms of 'traditional' media for young people in Africa. As shown in Figure 6, 62% of the survey respondents aged 18 to 35 frequently get news from the radio and 49% from television.[3] This is considerably higher than those who get their news from digital sources, specifically the internet (35%) and social media (37%). Newspapers fall far behind the rest, with only 18% of young people getting the news from them.

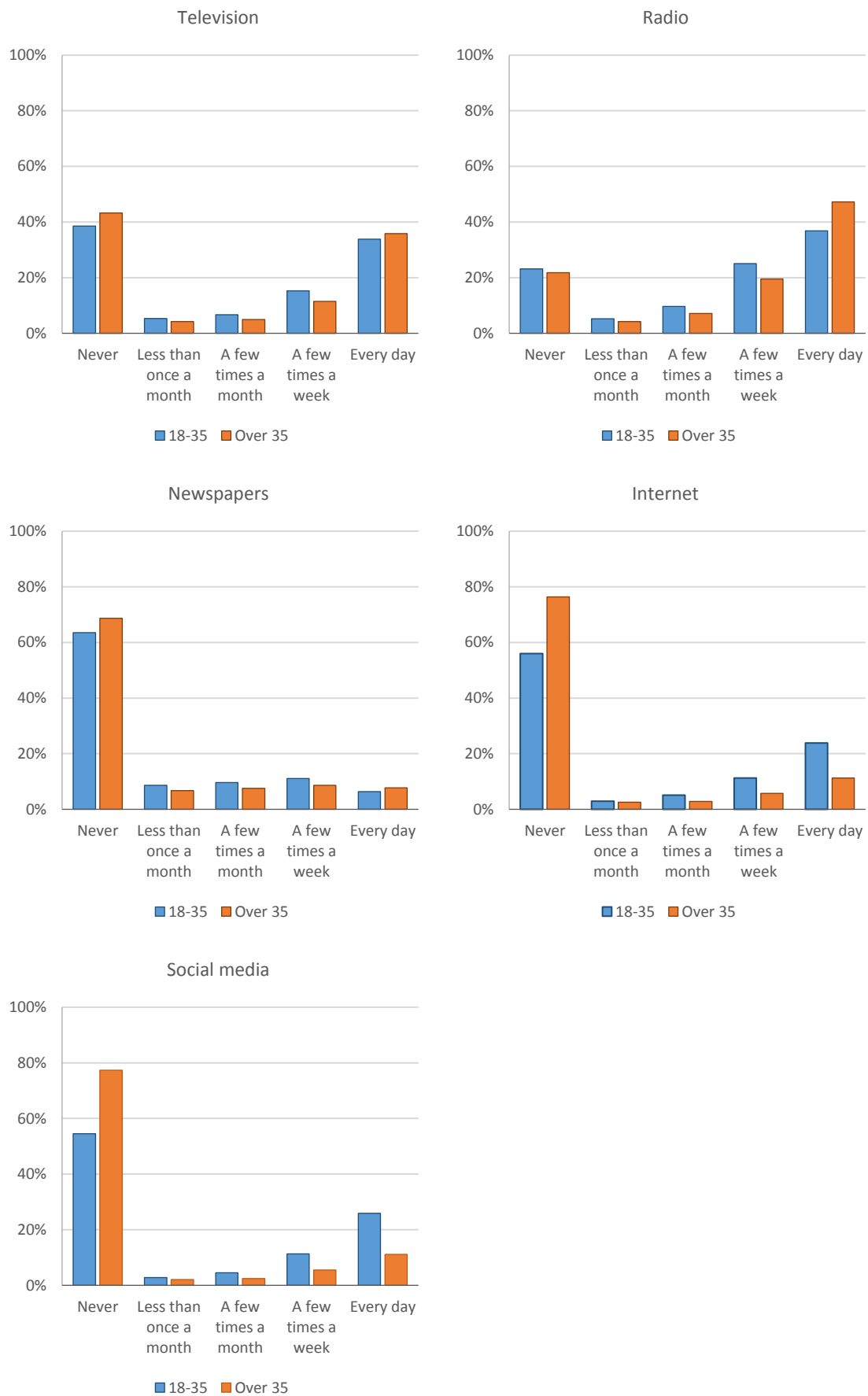Figure 6. How often young Africans get news from different sources
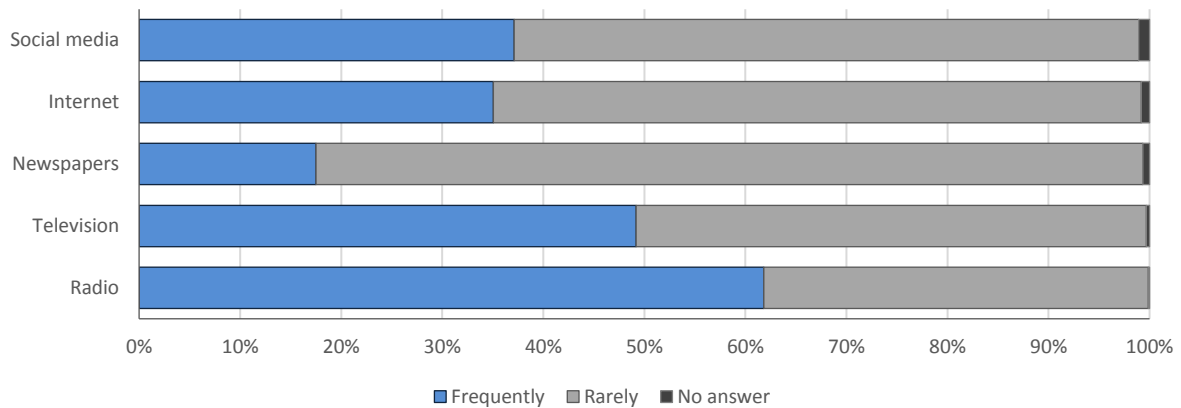


Source: Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC

Moreover, young people's use of different media sources varies compared to that of older generations and this suggests shifting trends are to come in the future. Figure 7 shows the frequency with which 18 to 35 and over 35 year olds get the news from different sources. It shows in particular that the radio continues to be a widespread source of news for all ages, but also that young people more frequently get the news from the internet and social media compared to older generations. This may indicate younger generations moving away from traditional media sources and relying more on digital and social media.

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[3] The Afrobarometer survey gives the following possible answers: Never; Less than once a month; A few times a month; A few times a week; Every day; Refused; Don't know. Our figures were calculated by summing responses for A few times a month, A few times a week and Every day to determine 'Frequently' getting news from a source, and summing Never and Less than once a month to determine 'Rarely' getting news. 'No answer' was calculated by summing Refused and Don't know.

# Figure 7. How often young and older Africans get the news from different media sources

## Television



■ 18-35  ■ Over 35

## Radio



■ 18-35  ■ Over 35

## Newspapers



■ 18-35  ■ Over 35

## Internet



■ 18-35  ■ Over 35

## Social media



■ 18-35  ■ Over 35

Source: Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC

Looking in more detail at the survey data also highlights significant divisions within the youth population. This reflects potential lines of fragmentation, whereby different social groups access diverse forms of media, and therefore potentially also different news stories and political and social messages. These divisions can be traced along lines of gender, territory, education and employment status. Specifically:

(a) Young women less frequently access the news on all media sources, with especially large gaps between the frequency with which young men and young women get their news from social media and the internet (Figure 8)

(b) There are significant differences in the frequency with which young people in rural and urban contexts access news media, and the ways that they do so (Figure 9). Rural residents rely most frequently on the radio to get their news. Urban residents are more frequent users of all media, with particularly significant differences in terms of their use of social media, internet and television

(c) Large differences are visible in the overall access of news media and the sources of the news according to young people's education levels (Figure 10). People with tertiary level education more frequently get the news from all sources than those with only primary or secondary level education. People with tertiary level education most frequently access social media (76% of respondents), the internet (75%) and television (76%), whereas those with primary level education very rarely access these (11%, 10% and 28% respectively) and rely mostly on the radio to get the news (55%)

(d) A similar trend is notable according to young people's employment status; those who are inactive or unemployed tend to get the news less than people who are employed, across most media sources (except for the internet) (Figure 11).

(e) Young people who say that they wish to migrate tend to more frequently access the news across all media sources than people who do not wish to migrate, with especially large differences in the use of internet and social media (Figure 12).

Figure 8. News sources frequently accessed by young men (M) and young women (F)
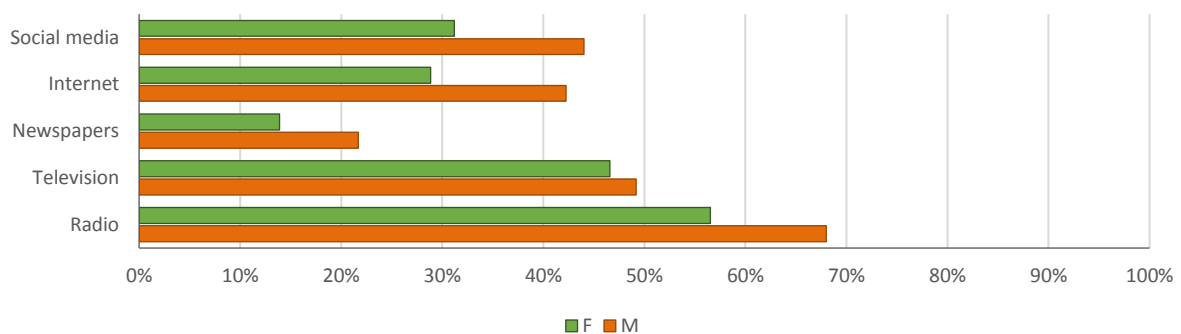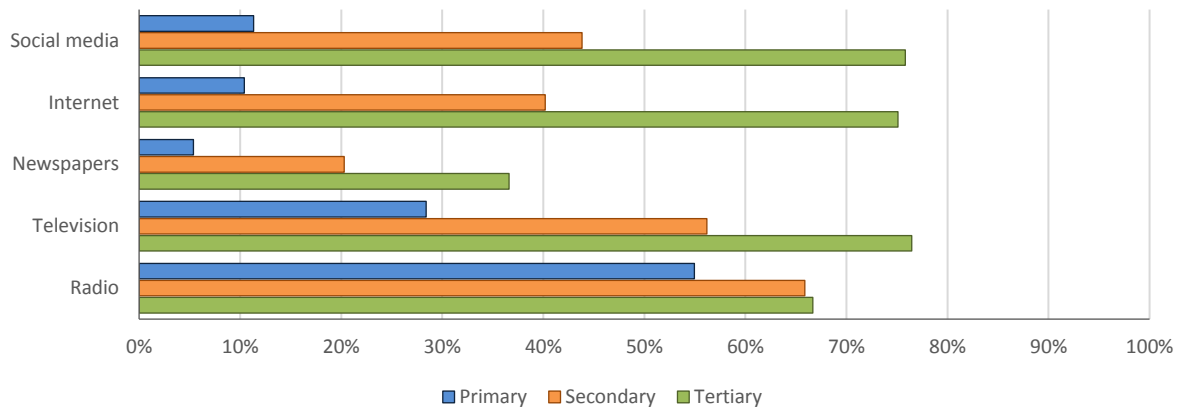


Source Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC

Figure 9. News sources frequently accessed by young people in rural and urban contexts
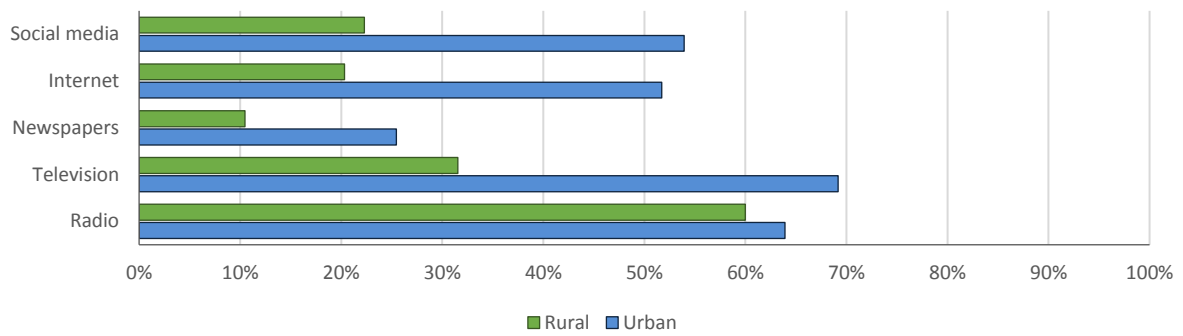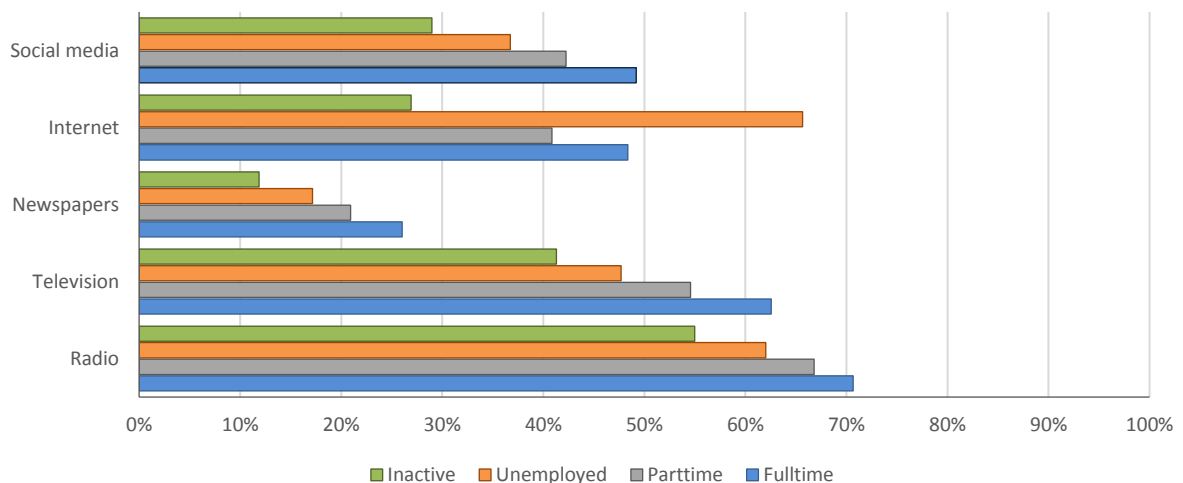


Source Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC

Figure 10. News sources frequently accessed by young people according to education level
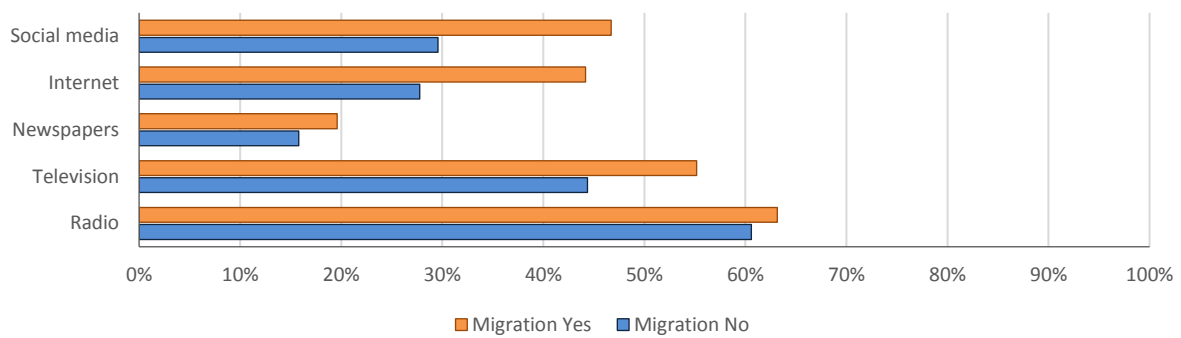


Source Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC

Figure 11. News sources frequently accessed by young people according to employment status



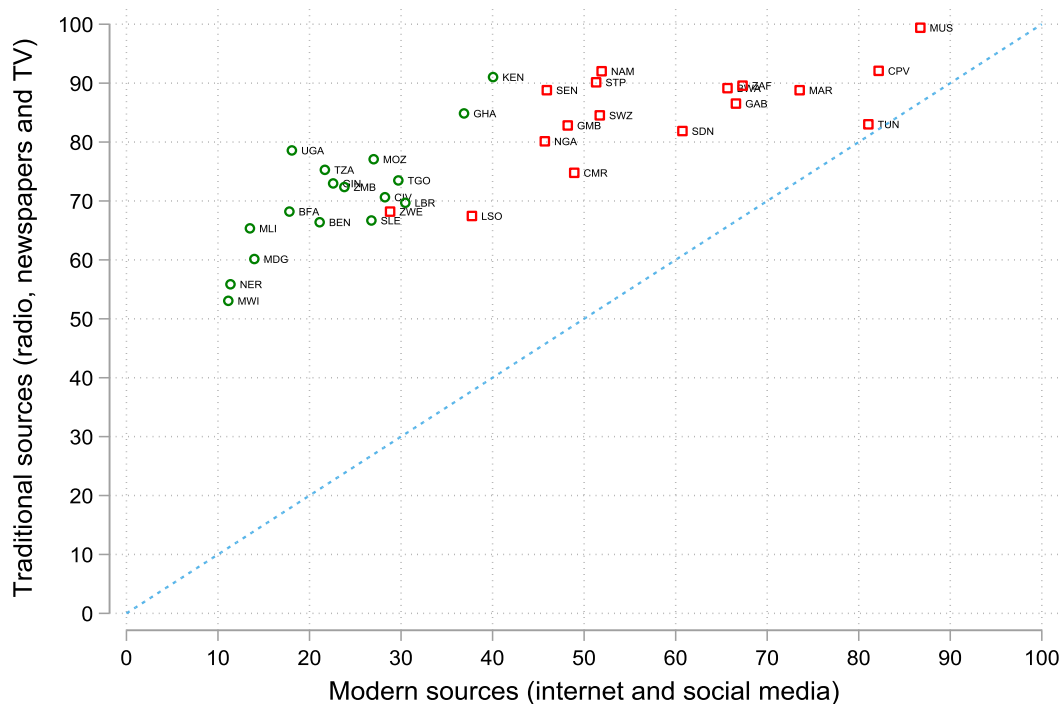Source: Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC

## Figure 12. News sources frequently accessed by young people who wish to migrate



Source Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC

Not surprisingly the extent to which modern sources are used to get news is defined by the level of internet penetration in the country. Figure 13 compares the usage of traditional and modern sources use across countries. In particular, the vertical axis represents the percentage of respondents who gets news from traditional sources (radio, newspapers and TV) more than a few times per week. The horizontal axis represents the percentage of respondents who gets news from modern sources (internet and social media such as Facebook or Twitter) more than a few times per week. The figure shows that traditional sources prevail in all countries, whereas modern sources are more widespread (marked by red circles) in countries with more extensive access to mobile internet. In this way, the digital divides described above can translate into differences in the way that young people access news and information.

## Figure 13. Traditional and modern sources for getting news



Source: Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC
Note: Green quadrats (red circles) indicate countries where the share of respondents having access to mobile internet is below (above) the one observed for the whole sample of respondents aged 18 to 35 (46%).

Finally, the data also highlights divided opinions among young people regarding the importance of a free media. When asked whether they felt that 'The media should have the right to publish any views and ideas without government control' or 'The government should have the right to prevent the media from publishing things that it considers harmful to society', half of respondents agreed with the first statement (48% of respondents) and the other half with the second statement (50%).[4]

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[4] 2% of respondents stated that they did not know.

# 4   Governance

As Africa's young people enter adulthood, their role in governance will become increasingly important. The demographic structure of many African countries has resulted in large youth 'bulges', and as those large populations of young people enter adulthood they could become an influential constituency shaping their countries' political futures. Paasonen and Urdal (2016) argue that youth bulges have historically been associated with political crisis and conflict. This is especially the case when labour markets are unable to provide sufficient opportunities for the growing population and when young people are excluded from decision making and political representation. However, youth populations can also energise calls for political change, such as during the Arab Spring protests which spread across much of North Africa in 2011 (Anderson 2013; Floris 2012) and student protests in South Africa through the 2000s (SAHO 2015).

In this section we examine young people's views of three dimensions of importance for governance in Africa; political participation, trust in institutions, and corruption. Together, they describe the extent to which young Africans consider that their voice can and will be heard in decision making processes, that decision makers will take their point of view into account and that that they will act as they are expected to.

## 4.1  Political participation

In Africa, the available evidence suggests that, in general, young people do not yet play a central role in their countries' politics. In 2011, Resnick and Casale found that Africa's youth tend to vote less and express a lower level of partisanship than older generations, and are no more likely to protest than older citizens either (Resnick and Casale 2011). Similarly, Afrobarometer data from 2015 highlighted 'a disconnect between the continent's "youth bulge" and democratic processes' as levels of youth participation in elections and other modes of engagement such as contacting political representatives remained generally low (Nkomo and du Plooy 2015). Most recently, a policy paper from 2016 argued that low levels of political participation among young Africans meant that 'African governments and development partners have considerable work to do to achieve the goal of increased civic and political participation among youth, particularly young women' (Lekalake and Gyimah-Boadi 2016).

Our analysis mirrors the findings noted in previous studies (see Figures 14 and 15). When it comes to elections, young Africans vote less than older generations. Whereas 79% of over 35s interviewed for the survey had voted in their last elections, only 58% of people aged 18 to 35 had done. The findings also show that the participation of young women (56% had voted) was similar to that of young men (59% had voted), but that there are distinctions according to where people live and their education level and employment status: more young people who live in rural locations voted in their last elections than those who live in urban locations (62% vs. 53%) and voting was also more frequent among those who had only completed primary education compared with those with secondary and tertiary education, and among those who were in work compared with those who were not. Less people who wish to migrate (56%) voted than those who do not wish to migrate (60%), but the difference was only small.

Figure 14. Youth participation in elections: Understanding that some people were unable to vote in the most recent national election, which of the following statements is true for you?
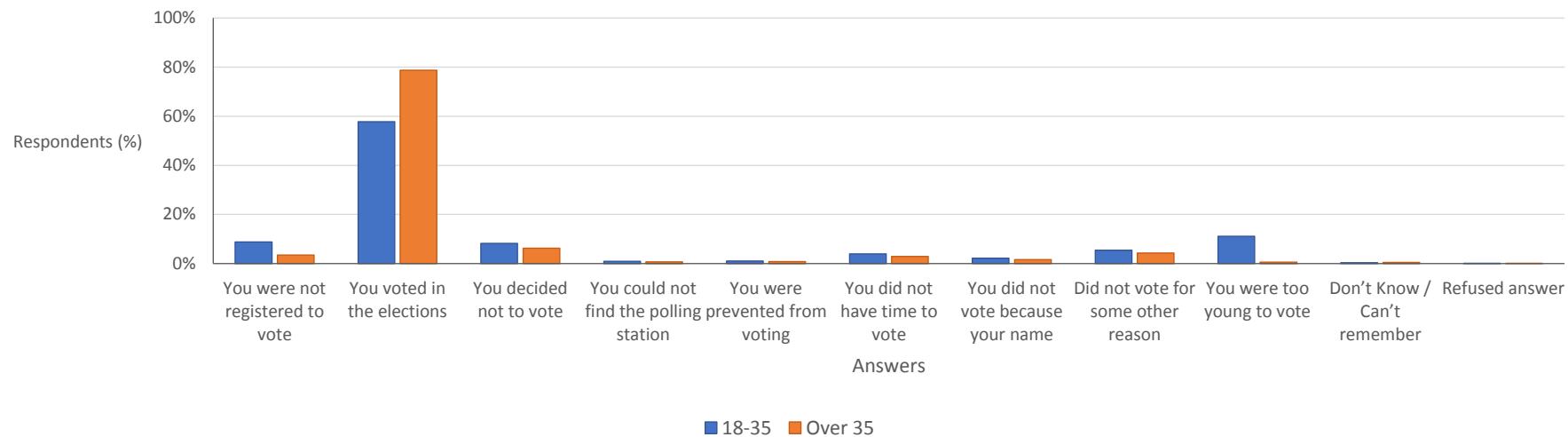


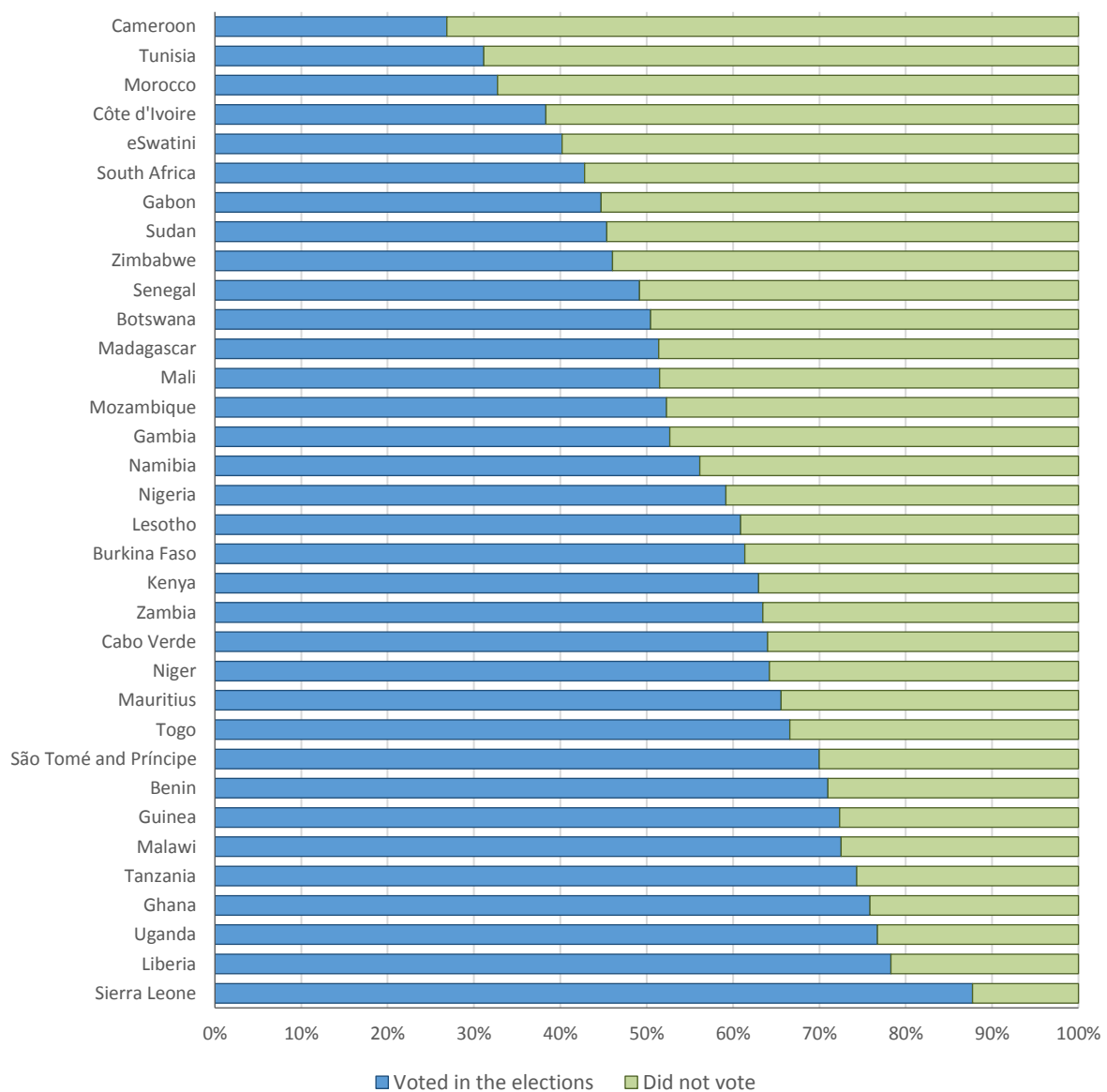Source: Afrobarometer (elaboration JRC)

Figure 15. Youth participation in elections
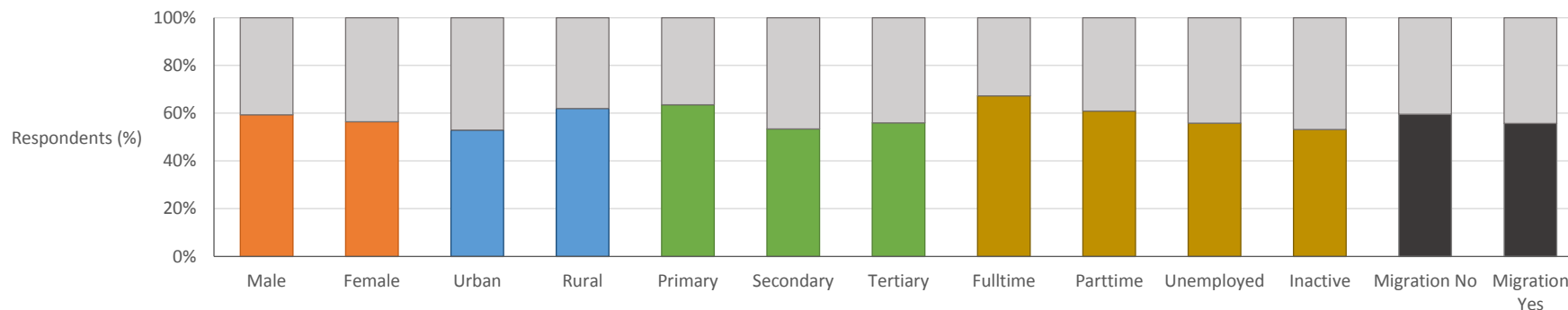


Source: Afrobarometer (elaboration JRC), coloured bars signify people who voted in the elections, grey bars show people who did not.

However, looking at voting patterns in individual countries reveals significant differences from place to place (Figure 16). In Cameroon, for example, only 27% of young people voted in their previous elections. By contrast, in Sierra Leone 88% of young people voted in their previous elections. The reasons for people voting or not are too varied to examine in detail for all of the countries listed here, but in general low levels of voting could be the result of structural conditions, such as legal and practical barriers to people placing votes, or of personal choices such as disinterest in the available candidates, avoiding engagement with a political system which is deemed to be illegitimate, or even satisfaction with the status quo. Regardless of the reasons for people voting or not, it is generally accepted that active political communities with strong electoral turnouts are an important foundation for healthy, strong and durable democracies (Mo Ibrahim Foundation 2019). With this in mind, the available data suggests that while it is clear that some African countries create the conditions for widespread youth participation in democracy, in others it is equally clear that young people have only a very small voice in electoral politics.

Figure 16. Voting of 18-35 year olds in African countries



Source: Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC

Electoral politics is, nevertheless, only one form of political participation. Other avenues which can be examined in the Afrobarometer survey include (a) joining others to collectively request action from government; (b) contacting a government official for help;

and (c) attending a demonstration or protest march. The data shows that, overall, young people in Africa less frequently join others to request action from their government or contact government officials for help than older people (see Figure 17). However, they *more* frequently participate in demonstrations and protests. This is especially the case for young men, more than young women (14% of young men participate in demonstrations and protests compared with only 9% of young women), those with higher education levels (17% of those with tertiary level education participate in demonstrations compared with only 8% of those with primary level education), and those who reside in towns and cities (14% of young people in urban locations participate in demonstrations and protests compared with only 9% of young people in rural locations). In contrast, slightly more young people who live in rural settings lobby government for action or contact government officials for help than in urban settings (24% of young rural residents would request action from government and 15% would contact government officials, compared with 18% and 14% of urban residents). Regarding employment status, there is little variation in the tendency of young people to lobby government, contact officials or protests among people who are in or out of work.

Figure 17. Forms of political participation of young and older people in Africa
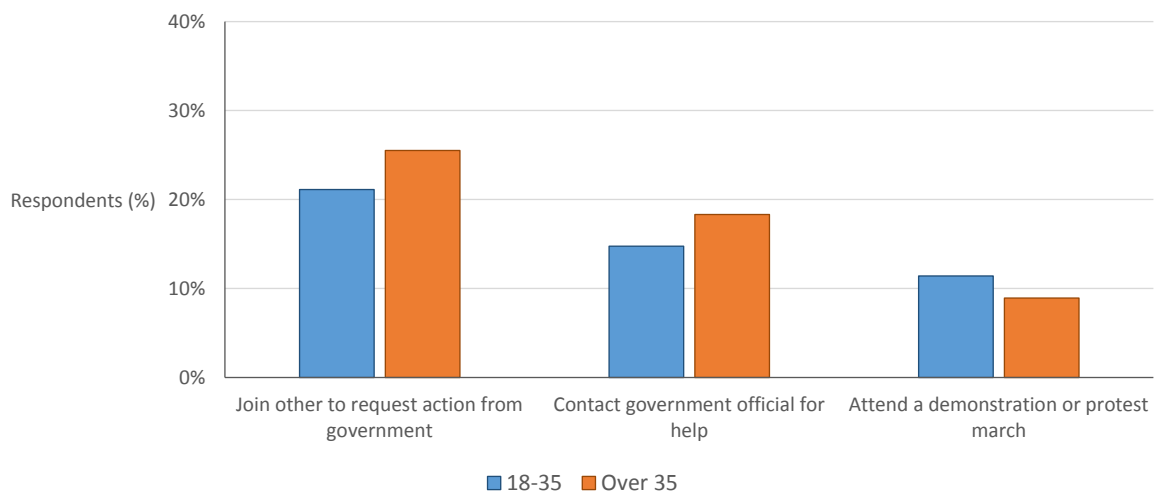


Source: Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC

Finally, the general picture is underpinned by differences from one country to another (see Figure 18). The countries where the largest proportion of the youth population take part in demonstrations and protests are South Africa (27% of respondents), Cabo Verde (20%), Tunisia (20%), Nigeria (19%), Gabon and Sudan (both 18%). The countries where the smallest proportion do are Tanzania (3% or respondents), Mauritius, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Madagascar (all 4% of respondents). In some countries where there are lower levels of electoral participation among 18 to 35 year olds, such as Tunisia, South Africa, Gabon and Sudan, young people are more likely to participate in demonstrations and protests compared with other countries.

Figure 18. Proportion of young people who take part in demonstrations and protests in African countries
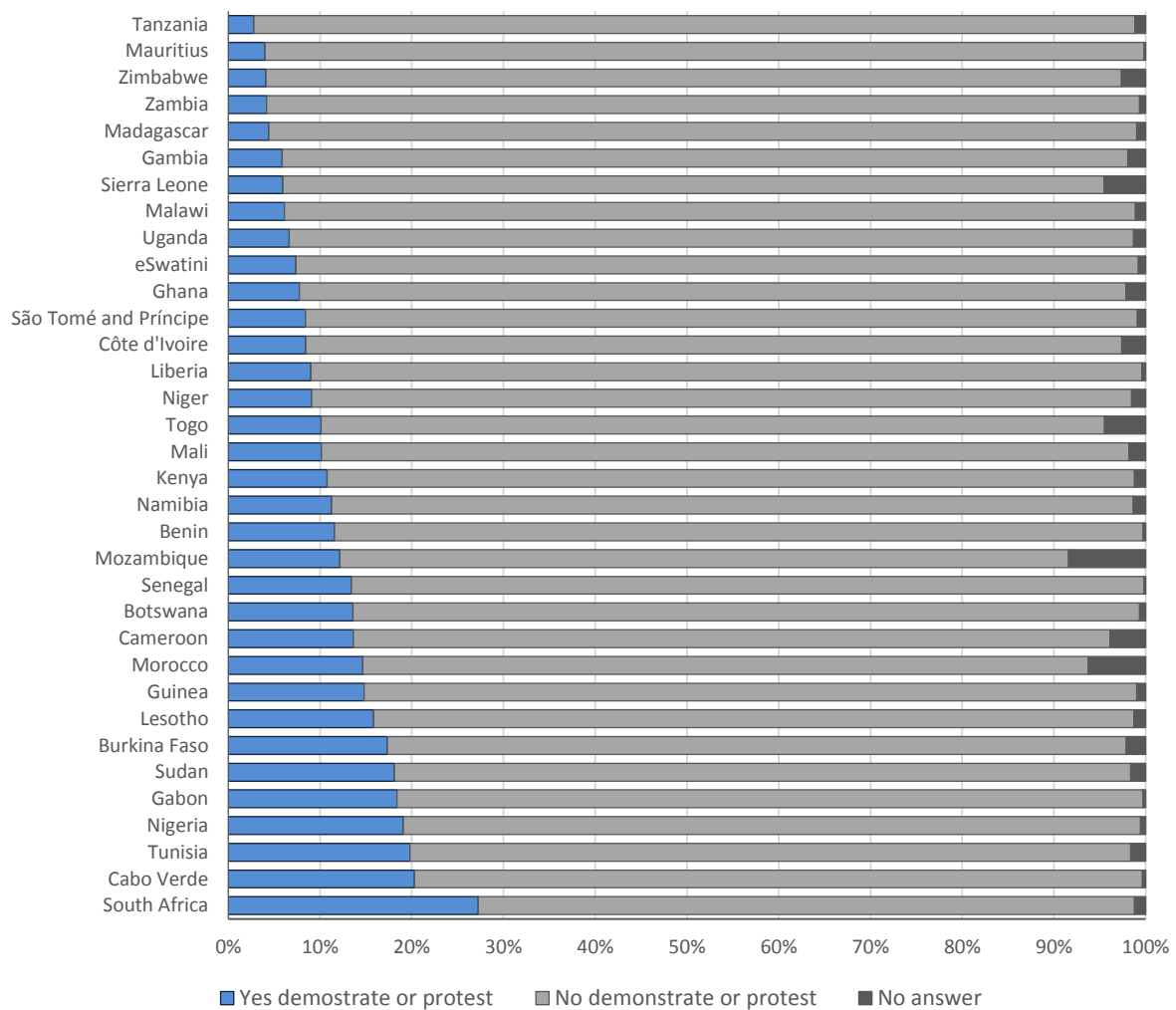


Source: Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC

The resultant picture from the Afrobarometer survey is one of low levels of political engagement and participation of young Africans overall, but with significant differences from place to place. As well as distinctions between countries, the data points towards generational and territorial differences in political participation. In general, young Africans engage little with formal political institutions, shown by levels of voting and the tendency to contact the government for action or help which are both lower than for older people. But they are slightly more likely than older citizens to engage in protest movements, especially the young people who are male, highly educated, and reside in towns and cities. This could reflect a lack of trust in institutions, implying that young people are willing to push for social and political change, but reject existing political structures and processes. This will be the topic of the next section.

## 4.2 Trust in institutions

Trust can be defined as the belief that another person or organisation will reliably do what they are expected to do. Understood this way, trust is closely related to perceptions of sincerity, honesty and corruption, which will also be touched upon in the following section. More generally, however, trust is an important glue for contemporary societies as it reflects the perceived legitimacy of political and social institutions and the strength of social cohesion among different groups (OECD 2017). This is particularly significant in countries

with large youth bulges in their populations which, as noted above, have often been associated with social and cultural shifts and a potential for political unrest and conflict.

Researchers and political leaders have shown concern about the public's level of trust in political institutions in Africa and its implications for sustainable development. In 2018, for example, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa Vera Songwe stated that building trust between governments and their citizens and combatting corruption in public services were essential for African nations to build a 'better, more just, peaceful and prosperous continent' (UNECA 2018). Michelle Gavin of the Council for Foreign Relations has also underlined how a lack of trust in public institutions in could be a significant challenge for African countries seeking to address the Covid-19 pandemic (Gavin 2020).

For our study we examine the survey questions which ask respondents to score how much they trust the following political and social figures and organisations: the President, the Parliament or national assembly, local elected government, the ruling political party, the opposition political parties, the police, the army, courts of law, traditional leaders and religious leaders. Respondents could answer that they trusted each of these; (a) not at all; (b) just a little; (c) somewhat; (d) a lot, or they could refuse to answer or say that they did not know. For the ease of making comparisons, we group (a) and (b) into one category showing 'low level of trust' and (c) and (d) into another category showing 'high level of trust'.

Overall, our results suggest that young Africans generally have low levels of trust in political institutions and political parties, but relatively high levels of trust in other institutions, particularly the army and religious leaders (Figure 19). The lowest level of trust is in opposition political parties (32% of respondents trust them somewhat or a lot), followed by Parliament, the President and ruling political party of their respective country (in all, 42% of respondents trust them somewhat or a lot). The most trusted institutions are the army (64% trust them somewhat or a lot) and religious leaders (69% trust them somewhat or a lot). The difference is even starker when examining only the proportion of respondents who trust each institution 'a lot': whereas only 14% of young Africans trust 'the opposition party' a lot, for the army it is 46% and for religious leaders this is 50% of young Africans.

Figure 19. Trust in political and social institutions among young Africans
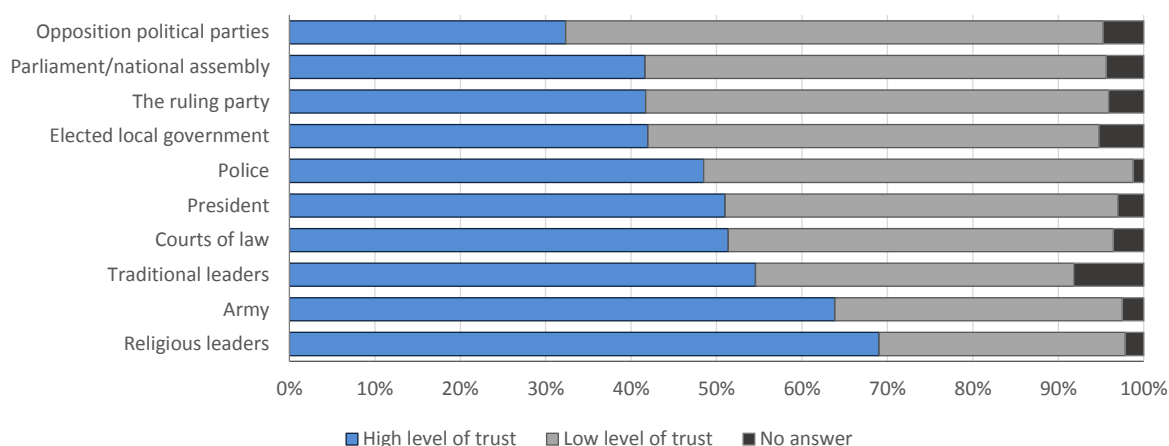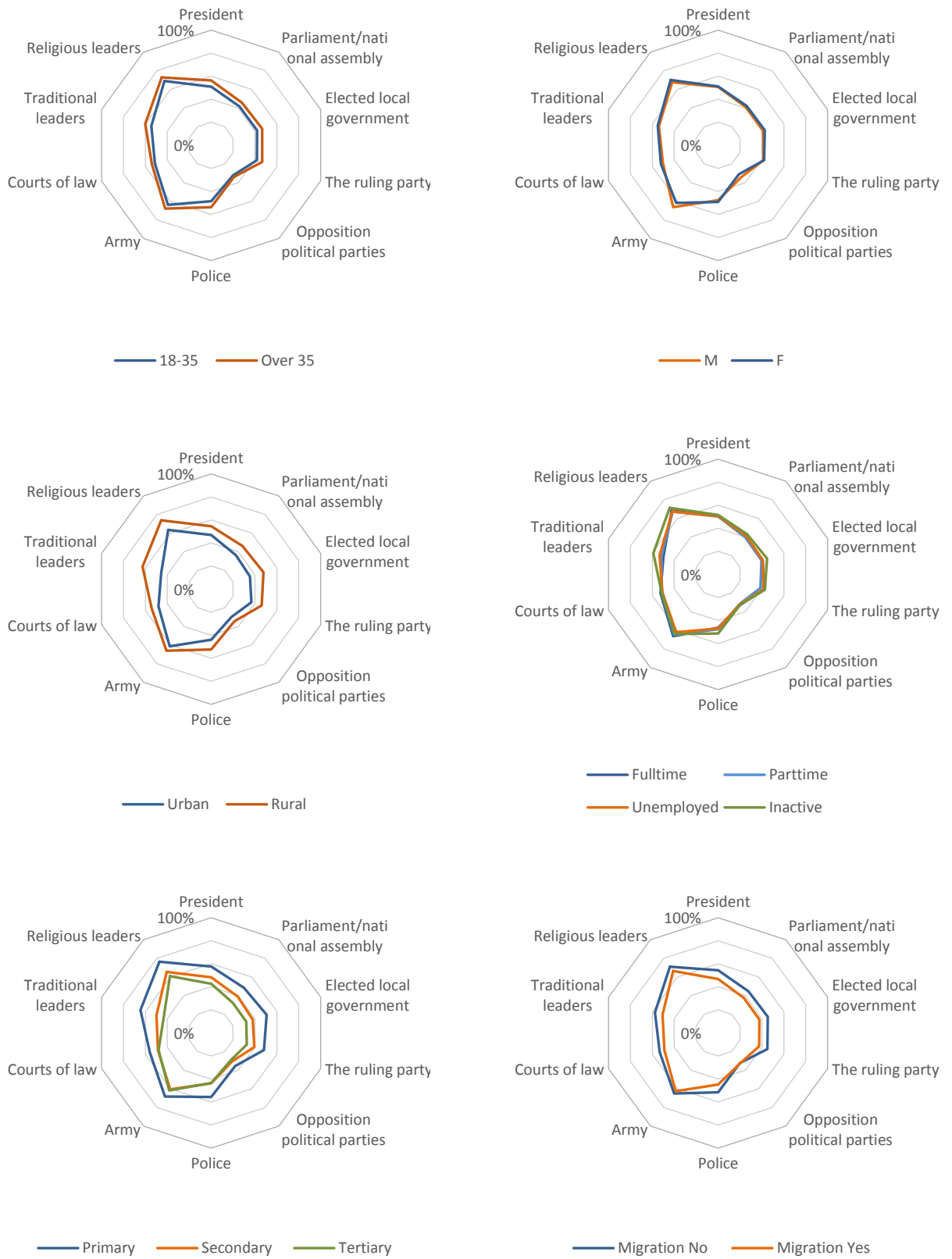


Source: Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC

Trust in institutions among African youth reflects a general trend of low levels of trust in political institutions and higher levels of trust in the army, traditional leaders and religious leaders. This can be seen in the charts on Figure 20, which show the proportion of respondents who say that they have a high level of trust in each of the different institutions. When the line is closer to the centre, it signifies that less people have said they have a high level of trust in that particular institution. As can be seen in the charts,

there is little difference in the views of younger and older generations, the views of young men and young women, the views of young people according to whether they are employed or not, or whether they wish to migrate elsewhere.

Moreover, there are distinctions across certain groups in the extent to which young people trust different institutions (see Figure 8). In general, urban residents tend to trust institutions less than rural residents. This is true for political institutions, especially local government, and for social institutions, in particular traditional leaders. There is further differentiation in young people's trust of institutions according to their education level. The general pattern of lower levels of trust for political institutions than for the army and religious leaders is clearly visible for all young people across all education levels. But across the board those with primary education express levels of trust in institutions which are considerably higher than people with secondary or tertiary education levels. This is especially the case regarding:

(a) local government, which 51% of people with primary education trust somewhat or a lot, compared with 38% of people with secondary education and 32% of people with tertiary education;

(b) the police, which 56% of people with primary education trust somewhat or a lot, compared with 43% of people with secondary or tertiary education;

(c) traditional leaders, which 65% of people with primary education trust somewhat or a lot, compared with 50% of people with secondary education and 43% of people with tertiary education

(d) religious leaders, which 76% of people with primary education trust somewhat or a lot, compared with 65% of people with secondary education and 61% of people with tertiary education

Figure 20. Proportion of respondents expressing high levels of trust in institutions



Source: Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC

## 4.3 Corruption

Corruption is a broad term which can involve a range of practices, individuals and public or private organisations. Examples include rigging elections, bribing public officials, money laundering, tax avoidance, and so on. Perceptions of corruption affect the trustworthiness in political and social institutions: when people consider people or institutions to be corrupt, they are less likely to trust them to reliably act as they are supposed to. In this way, corruption can weaken the glue which keeps societies together. In this vein, then-Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan noted in 2002 that corruption 'undermines democracy and the rule of law, leads to violations of human rights, distorts markets, erodes the quality of life and allows organized crime, terrorism and other threats to human security to flourish' (United Nations 2004).

Corruption in Africa has been high on the agenda of international organisations and aid donors for decades. For the UN, ending corruption has been described as 'priority number one' for African business (Africa Renewal 2010). The International Monetary Fund highlights the value and importance of reducing corruption in governments in Sub-Saharan Africa (Sobrinho and Thakoor 2019). And Transparency International has stated that 'Corruption is hindering Africa's economic, political and social development', whilst also noting that a majority of African citizens 'also feel optimistic that they, as citizens, can make a difference in the fight against corruption' (Transparency International 2019).

However, the Afrobarometer survey enables us to unpack the perceptions that young people in Africa have of corruption in their societies. Figure 21 shows the proportion of respondents to the survey who consider some or most of people in different organisations and institutions to be corrupt in response to the question 'How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption?'[5] The results show that young people consider corruption to be extensive, but to different degrees, in political, business and social organisations. Over one-third of respondents aged 18 to 35 considered a high level of corruption by their President (36% of respondents), Members of Parliament (38%), government officials (41%) and local government councillors (35%). Even greater was the proportion of young people who considered the police to be highly corrupt (50%). By contrast, social institutions were considered to be less corrupt, with less than a quarter of respondents (22%) perceiving high levels of corruption among traditional leaders and NGOs (22%). Religious leaders are viewed most positively, with only 17% of respondents considering them to be at highly corrupt.

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[5] Possible responses to the survey question were: None; Some of them; Most of them; All of them; Refused; Don't know/ Haven't heard. We calculated the proportion of respondents who considered a low level of corruption by adding together responses for None and Some of them. A High level of corruption was calculated by summing together responses for Most of them and All of them.

Figure 21. Proportion of Africans considering there to be high levels of corruption in different organisations and institutions
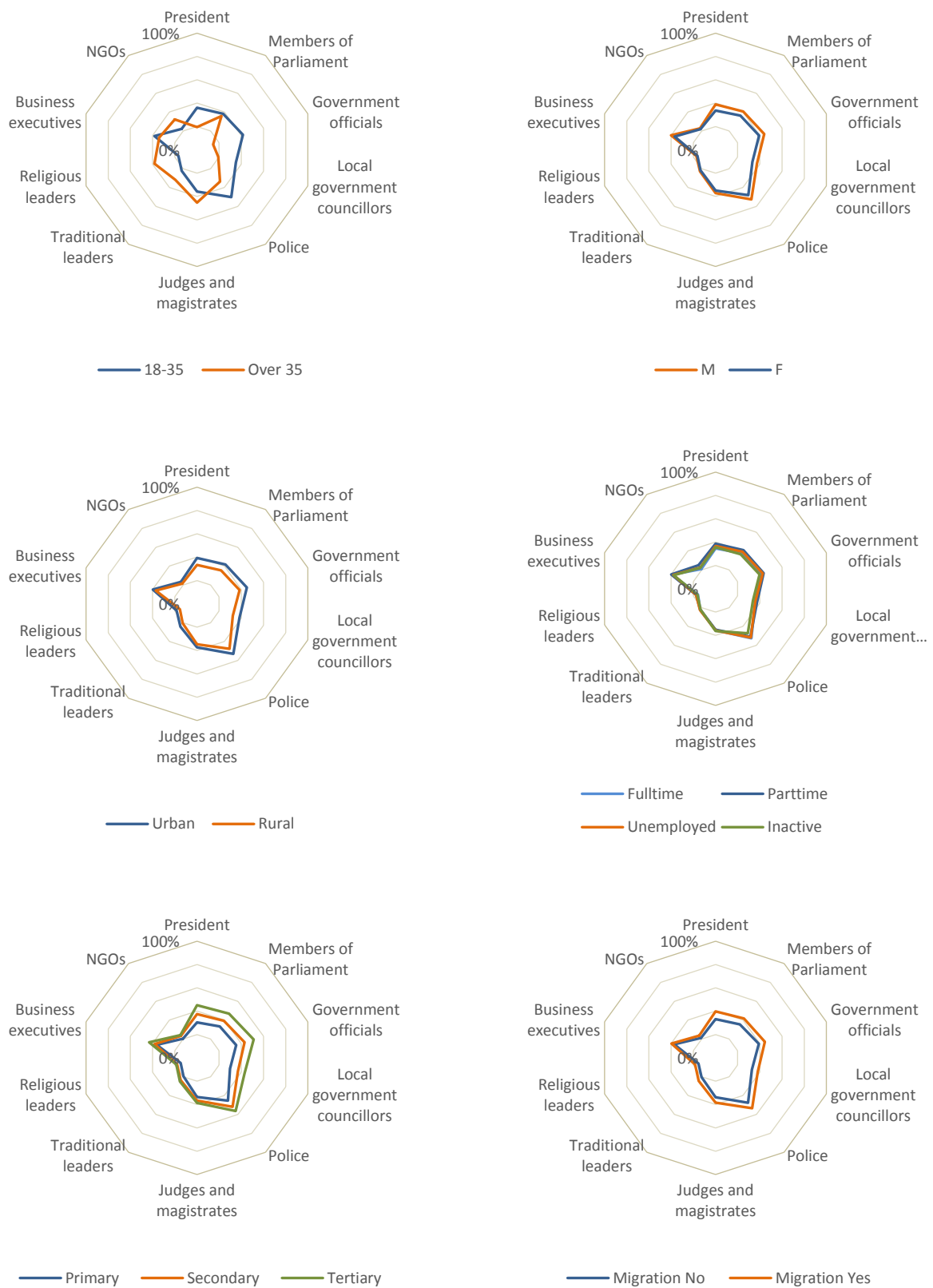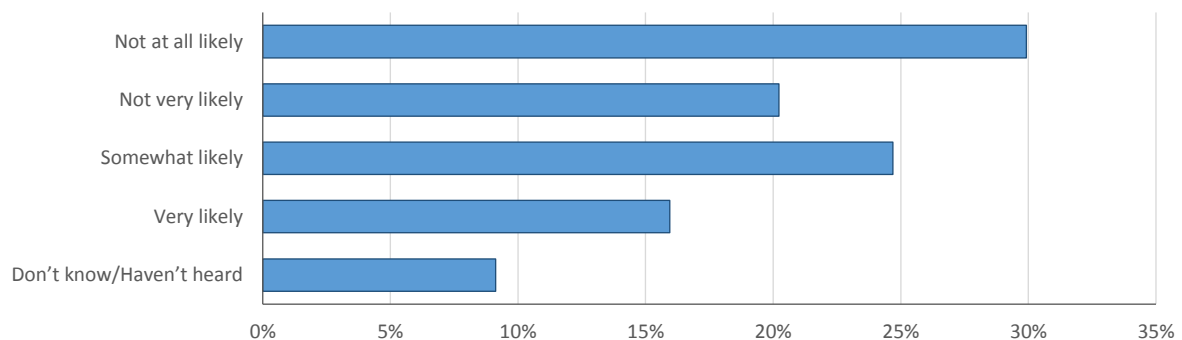


Source: Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC

The views described above are largely consensual among young people with different backgrounds. There is little variation in the views of young men and young women, or between the views of young people who are working or not. Young people in urban contexts tend to generally consider slightly more people to be involved in corruption than young people in rural contexts, and young people who wish to emigrate consider there to be more corruption than young people who do not but these are only small differences. The only point of difference is noticeable between young people with different education levels; those with secondary and tertiary education consider there to be more corruption across the board compared with those with only a primary education.

Young people also consider that corruption is deeply embedded and difficult to address in their societies. When asked how likely they thought it was that someone would take action if they went to a government office or other public institution to report corruption, the most common response from young people was 'not at all likely' (see Figure 22). Over two-thirds of respondents aged 18 to 35 (68%) also considered that they if they spoke out against corruption they would be risking retaliation.

Figure 22. Responses from 18 to 35 years olds to: How likely is it that you could get someone to take action if you went to a government office or anti-corruption commission to report corrupt behavior like misuse of funds or requests for bribes by government officers, police, or school or clinic staff?
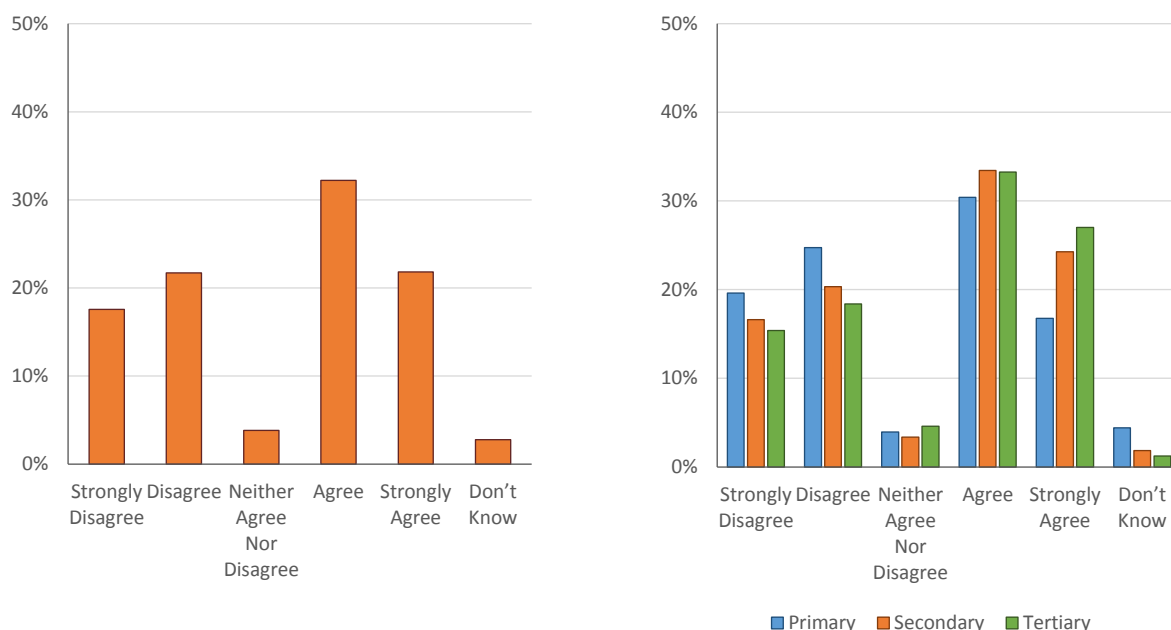


Source: Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC

Moreover, the survey also shines some light on the potential for young people to bring about change in their societies. Figure 10 shows that 41% of respondents aged 18 to 35 considered that they would be very likely or somewhat likely to get action if they reported corruption. Figure 23 also shows that a majority (54%) of 18 to 35 year olds in Africa agree or strongly agree that ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption. This data suggests that young people are aware of the possibility to bring about change in their countries. Education can play an important role in this change, as highlighted by the fact that a greater proportion of respondents with tertiary education (60%) agree or strongly agree that ordinary people can make a difference, compared with those with primary education (47%).

Figure 23. Responses from 18 to 35 years olds to: Ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption
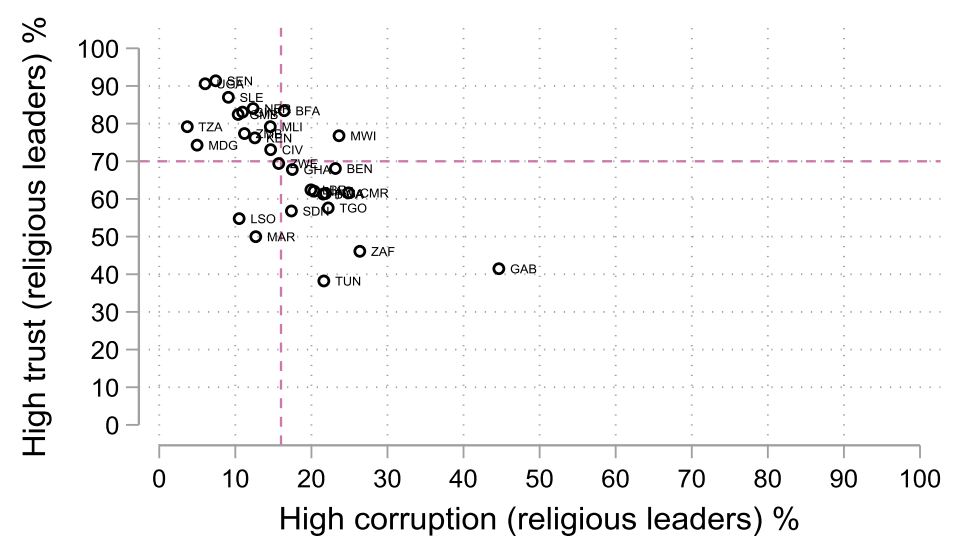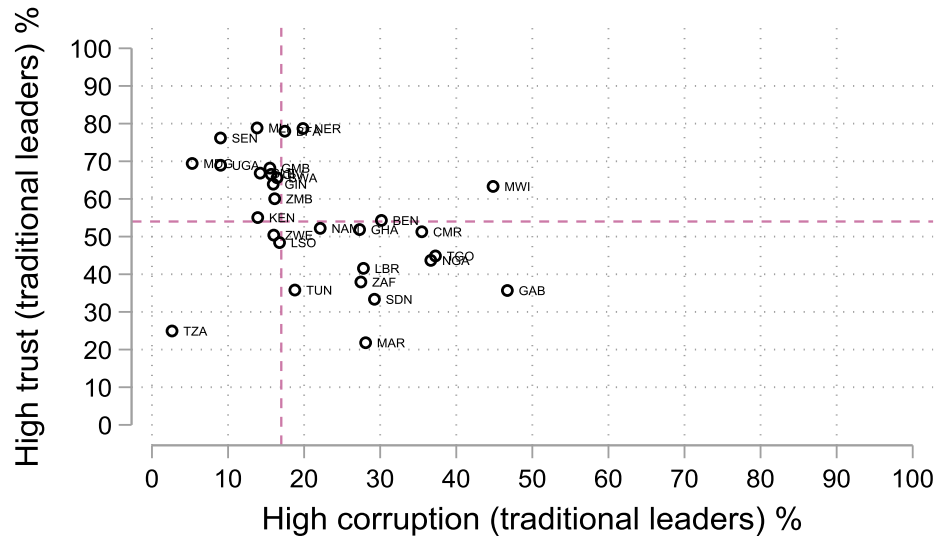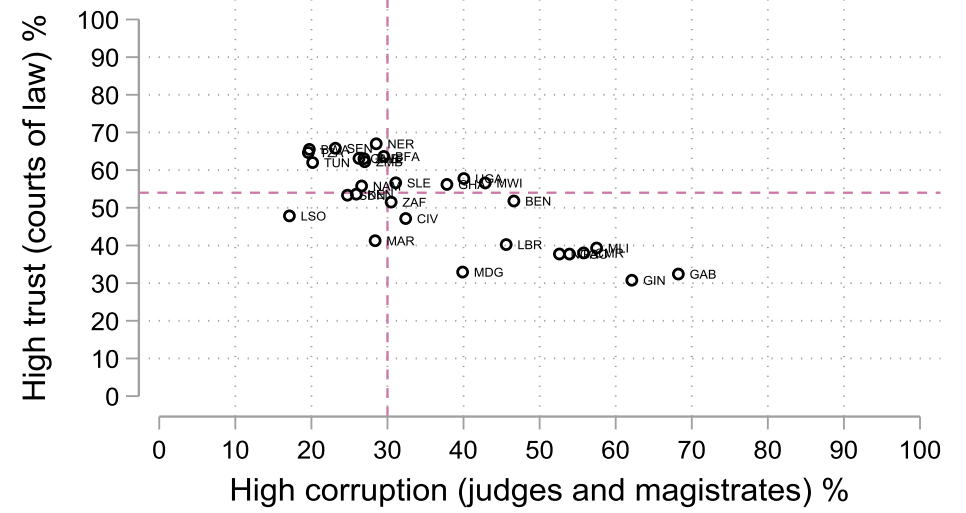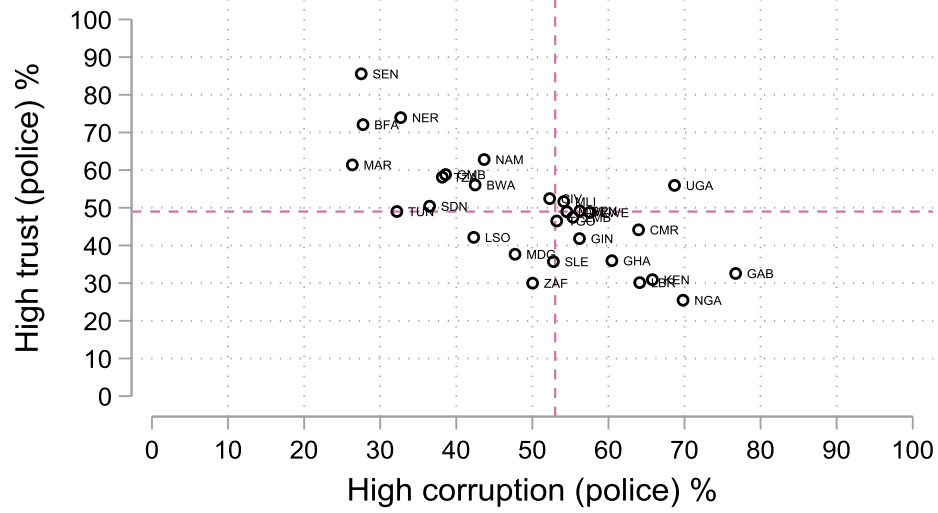


Source: Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC

As noted above, trust and corruption are also often closely inter-related. Examining perceptions of both highlights clearly how young people trust institutions less when they consider them to be corrupt. We show this by confronting the trust and corruption specific indicators (percentage of young individuals perceiving the corruption to be high and expressing high trust) for individual countries on the charts below (Figure 24). Each point on a chart signifies a country from the survey. The horizontal axis shows the perception of corruption: the further placed to the right a country is, the higher percentage of respondents considered the institution in question to be highly corrupt. The vertical axis, moreover, shows the perception of trust: the further towards the top that a country is placed, the higher percentage of respondents expressed a high level of trust in that institution. The horizontal and vertical lines crossing the chart show the corresponding median which divides the whole set of countries into two groups: half of the countries are above (to the right) and half are below (to the right) it. This enables us to group countries into four categories and compare them according to the proportion of the youth population which considers them highly trustworthy and/or highly corrupt. For instance, in countries appearing in the in upper-left segment, a large part of young individuals express high trust to towards an institution of interest and only few consider it corrupt.

As can be seen in the scatterplots, countries where young people frequently consider political and social institutions to be highly corrupt tend to also be the countries where the least young people consider those institutions to be highly trustworthy. Clear examples include Gambia and Nigeria for members of parliament, local government councillors and the police. By contrast, the charts also show how countries where relatively few young people consider political and social institutions to be corrupt tend to be the countries where more young people trust those institutions. Clear examples are Tanzania, in terms of political institutions (the presidency, members of parliament, government officials and local government) and Senegal in reference to the police, traditional leaders and religious leaders. Cases where high corruption is accompanied by high trust are not observed. In this way, raising young people's trust of governance institutions goes hand in hand with lowering corruption.

Figure 24. Relationship between young Africans' perceptions of corruption and trustworthiness of political and social institutions

# 5 Gender equality

Over recent decades, important steps have been made to promote gender equality worldwide. Gender equality is a human rights and a development issue, and as such achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls is a dedicated objective of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. But situations of inequality continue to persist, particularly in relation to education, employment, healthcare and in terms of violence and discrimination.

Gender equality is particularly significant for Africa's development. The African Union has recognised this with the development of a specific gender strategy in 2009 and a subsequent strategy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, since 2018 (African Union 2018). The strategy has the aim of mitigating and eliminating the constraints women and girls face to participate fully in economic activities, political affairs and social endeavours. In the EU's communication Towards a comprehensive strategy with Africa, gender equality is emphasised as a key part of fostering good governance, democracy and the protection of human rights. Overall, moreover, there is a trend towards greater gender equality in various areas of African society and politics. The African Development Bank, in its Gender Equality Index, highlights the sizeable contribution of women to the continent's economy, stating that 'they are more economically active as farmers and entrepreneurs than women in any other region of the world' (African Development Bank 2015). Young people can play an active role in furthering this trend towards equality as they transition to adulthood.

The Afrobarometer survey provides a starting point to examine young people's perceptions and experiences of gender inequality and their view on what should come in the future. As can be seen in Figure 25, equality is strongly perceived by young people in Africa. When asked whether women and men enjoy equal opportunities in education, employment and land ownership, a vast majority of respondents agree or strongly agree that it is the case. These views are widely shared, with very little difference between the views of young men and young women, rural or urban residents, those with higher or lower levels of education, those who are employed or not and those who wish to migrate. This is also visible among young people across different African countries. In all countries for which we have data,[6] a significant majority of young people agree or strongly agree that girls and boys have an equal chance in education. The country with the smallest proportion of its youth population which agrees is Malawi, but even so 73% of the Malawian youth population does agree and this is still a significant majority. The view that women and men have equal chances to earn an income and access paying jobs is also shared by a large majority of young people in all of the countries in the survey. Slightly less consensus across countries is evident on the issue of land ownership or inheritance for women, with less than a quarter of young people in two countries agreeing that there is equality in this area (21% of respondents in Niger and 24% in Morocco).

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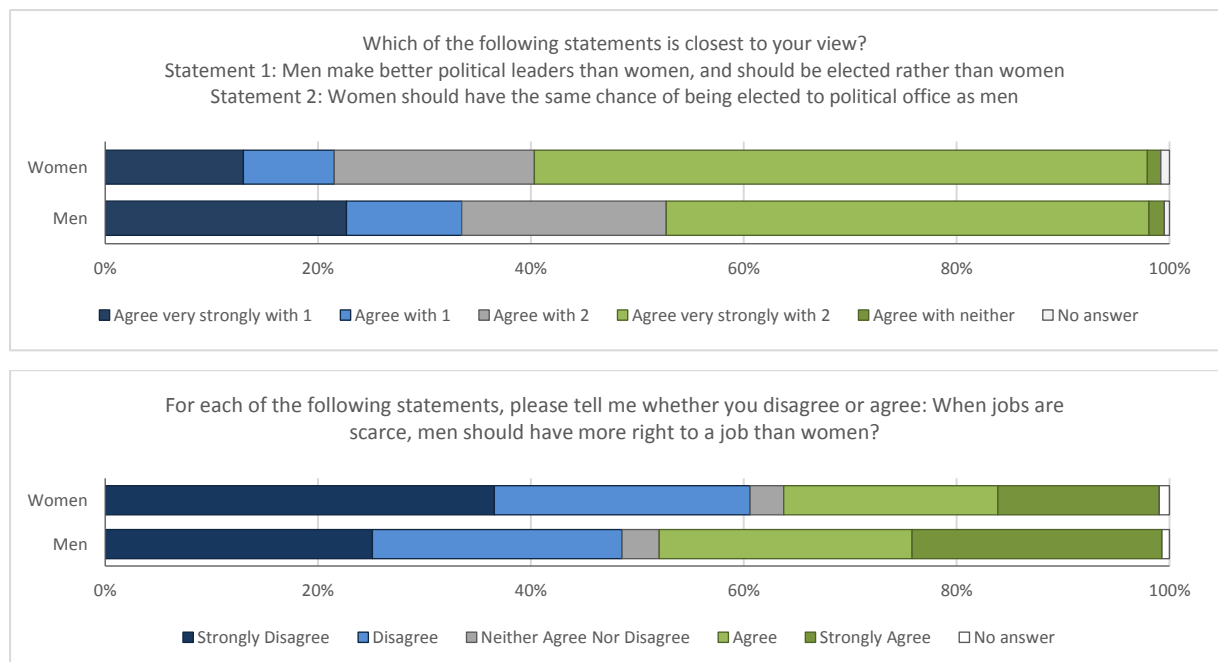[6] Kenya is removed due to a lack of data from Afrobarometer

Figure 25. Responses from 18 to 35 years olds to the question: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: Girls and boys/women and men have an equal chance at (a) education; (b) earning an income; (c) a paying job; (d) owning/inheriting land
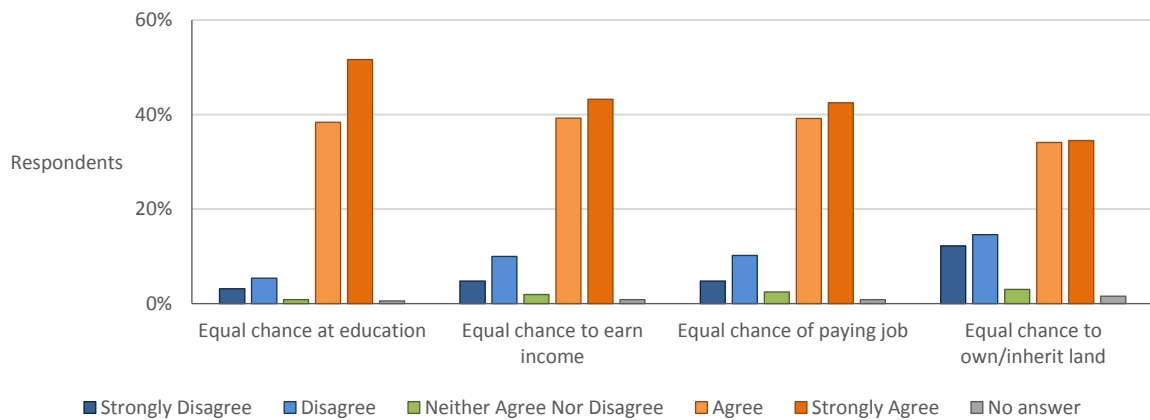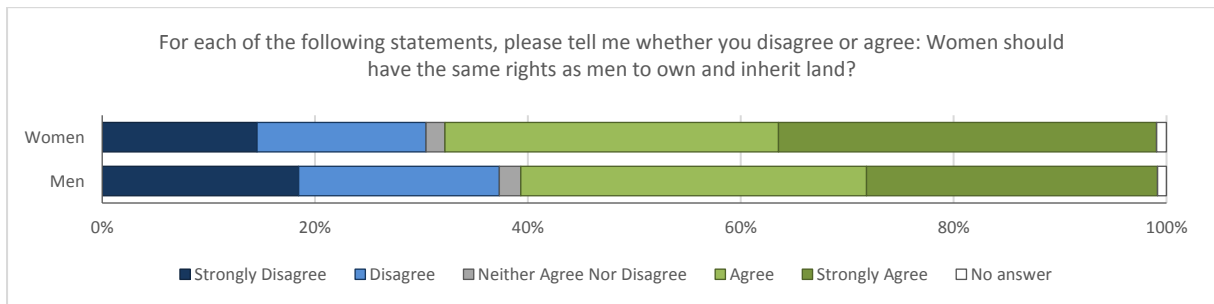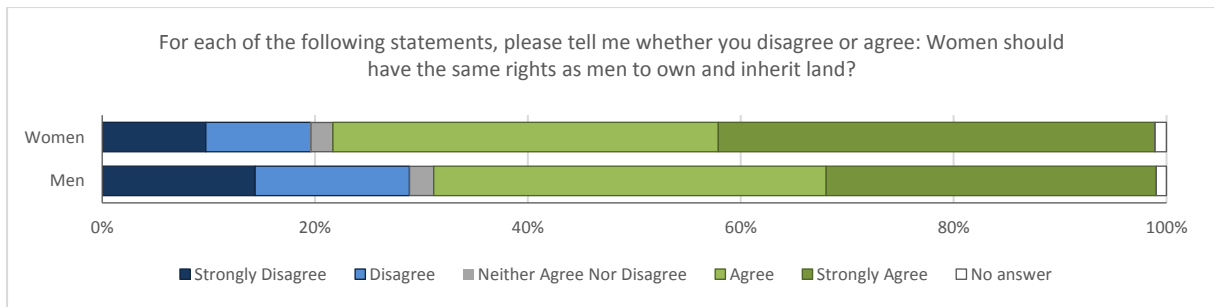


Source: Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC

However, although equality appears to be broadly experienced by young people across the African continent, especially in terms of access to education, underpinning these experiences there are distinct values about what equality should look like. In terms of political representation, overall a large majority of young people (70%) agree that women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men. But whereas 77% young women agree with that statement, only 64% of young men do (see Figure 26). Similar gender divides can be seen in relation to women's economic participation and family roles. As the charts below show, less men than women consider that societies should be more equal.

Figure 26. Gender divides in values of African youth

For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: Women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land?

(Women / Men chart with legend: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree, No answer)



For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: Women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land?

(Women / Men chart with legend: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree Nor Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree, No answer)
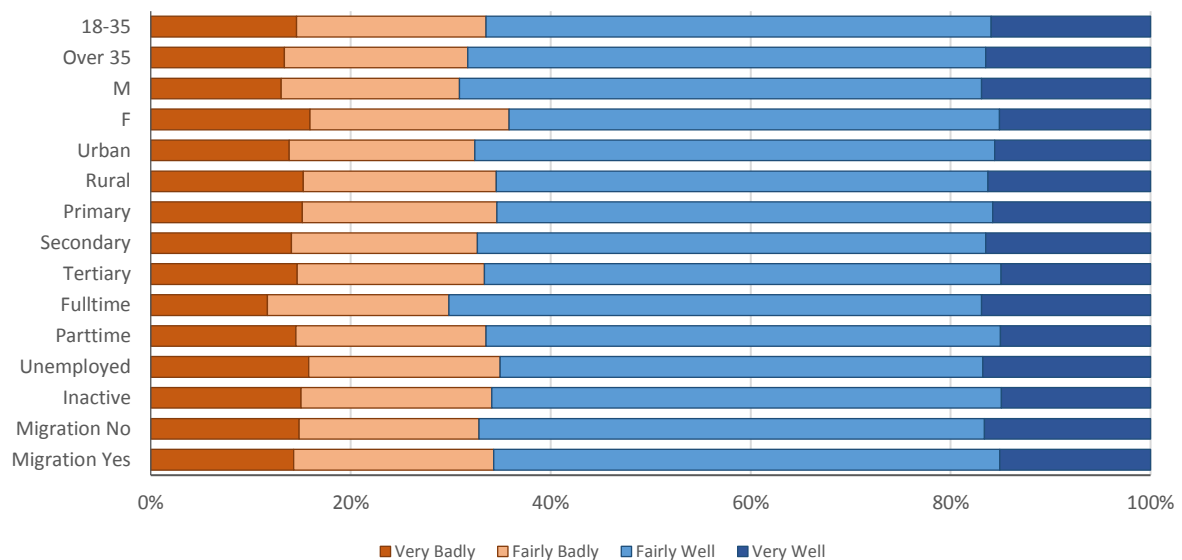
Source: Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC

In sum, there is still a way to go to reach consensus on equality in political, economic and social fields. Nevertheless, the survey also gives insights into the direction of travel that young Africans consider their countries to be taking so far on this topic. Specifically, it asks 'How well or badly would you say the current government is handling promoting equal rights and opportunities for women?' (see Figure 27). Overall, young people from across the survey generally consider that their governments are doing fairly well or very well on this topic, and this view is shared by young people across territorial divides between rural and urban, education levels and employment status. There is a slightly less positive rating, however, from young women (although a majority still consider that their governments are doing well).

Figure 27. How well or badly would you say the current government is handling promoting equal rights and opportunities for women?
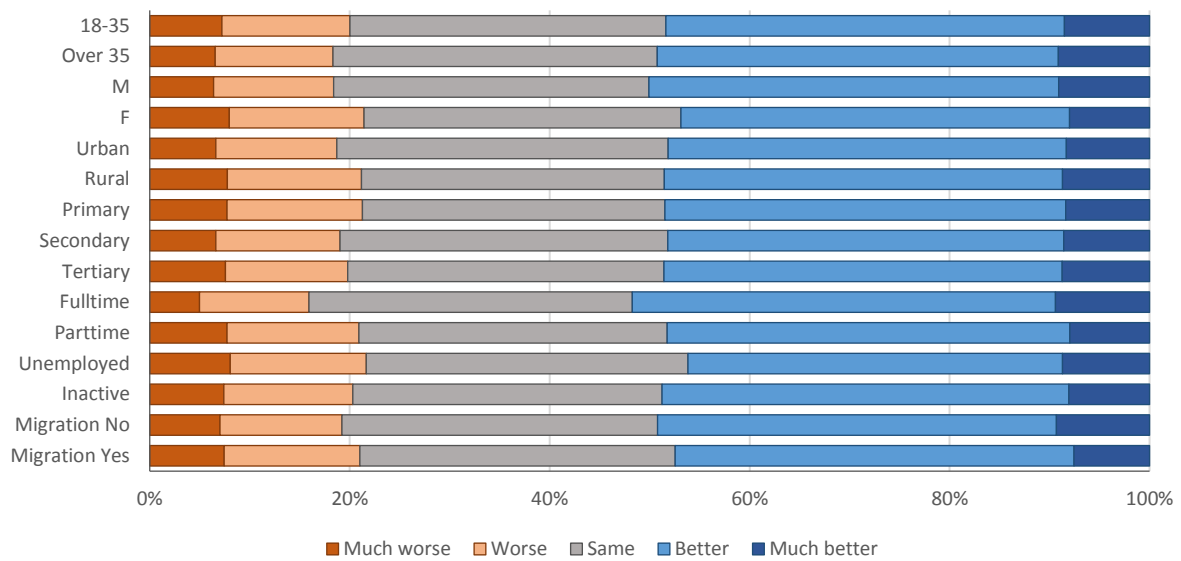


Source: Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC

As a result, young people in Africa generally report that gender equality is improving in their country. This is evidenced by responses to the question '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? Equal opportunities and treatment for women compared to few years ago.' Around half of 18 to 35 year olds in Africa (47%) consider that equal opportunities and treatment for women have got better or much better over recent years, and only a minority (19%) consider the situation to have got worse or much worse (Figure 28). This general trend is shared across all groups of young people, both men and women, urban and rural residents, those with higher or lower education levels and those with different employment status or intentions to migrate.

These figures show a trend in Africa towards greater equality. Young people, as they transition to adulthood, are likely to push this further as they hold, in the main, a shared understanding of the importance of gender equality. Nevertheless, there is still a way to go to make a significant impression on the unequal practices which have remained the same over recent years.

Figure 28. Youth perceptions of equal opportunities and treatment for women compared to few years ago



Source: Afrobarometer, elaboration JRC

# 6 Conclusions

In this report we have described the ways that young people in Africa consider a range of issues which are likely to shape the future of their societies in different ways. We find widespread concern around issues related to climate change and corruption, and indications of social change as young people consider that they can impact on climate change, broadly accept values related to gender equality and are more likely to protest and demonstrate to have their voice heard than older citizens.

But we also find important divides in the opinions and experiences of different groups which could have an impact on future developments. In particular, there are generational gaps between young people and older citizens in terms of digital connectivity and information access, political participation and values around gender equality. There are also significant differences in the views and experiences of young rural and urban residents, which highlight quite distinct lifestyles, opportunities and challenges. Young people in rural contexts are less informed about climate change and less connected through computing and the internet than young people in towns and cities. At the same time, young people in urban contexts are less trusting of political and social institutions and less likely to take part in formal political processes than their rural counterparts. Similar differences are found in the views of young people with lower or higher levels of education too.

By highlighting the perspective of Africa's youth, this study has sought to provide a resource to support future partnerships between our continents. Understanding these views, and the similarities and differences across different social groups and places, will be vital as millions of young people enter adulthood across the continent.

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