Trust in government in Ghana: what the Afrobarometer surveys show

RFI Editorial · 24 November 2026 · https://relationalfuturesinstitute.org/insights/trust-in-government-ghana-afrobarometer

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Abstract

This working paper uses published Afrobarometer data only to describe trust in government in Ghana. Afrobarometer has surveyed nationally representative samples of Ghanaian adults since 1999. Its results show that trust in key state institutions has declined substantially over the past decade. Trust in the Electoral Commission fell from 75 per cent in 2005 to 33 per cent in 2022 and about 29 per cent in 2024. Between 2014 and 2024, trust in the president fell from 40 to about 28 per cent, in Parliament from 36 to about 24 per cent, and in the courts from 42 to about 35 per cent. In 2024, the army, civil society organisations, religious leaders and the Ministry of Health were the most trusted institutions, and political institutions the least. Ghanaians' trust is lower than the average across 39 African countries for most institutions. Low trust goes with high perceived corruption: in 2024, three-quarters said corruption had increased and only a quarter felt safe reporting it. The paper discusses what the data can and cannot show, and argues that rebuilding trust requires visible accountability, fair treatment and protection for those who report wrongdoing.

Keywords: trust in government, Ghana, Afrobarometer, Electoral Commission, institutional trust, corruption, democracy, public opinion

Trust in government in Ghana has been falling. For more than two decades, Afrobarometer, a pan-African research network whose national partner in Ghana is the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), has asked Ghanaians the same question: how much do you trust the president, Parliament, the Electoral Commission, the police, the courts and other institutions? The answers allow something rare in public debate: a consistent record of what citizens themselves think, measured the same way over time. This working paper sets out what that record shows.

The paper uses published Afrobarometer data only: survey summaries, dispatches, news releases and papers available on Afrobarometer's website. Where the paper combines published figures, for example adding the share who trust an institution "somewhat" to the share who trust it "a lot", it says so. It does not use unpublished data or other surveys.

How does Afrobarometer measure trust?

Figure 1 summarises the method. In its most recent Ghana survey, Round 10, CDD-Ghana interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 2,400 adult citizens between 5 and 22 August 2024. A sample of this size gives national results with a margin of error of plus or minus 2 percentage points at a 95 per cent confidence level (Afrobarometer, 2025a). Interviews are conducted face to face, in the language of the respondent's choice (Afrobarometer, 2024).

FIGURE 1. How Afrobarometer measures trust in Ghana

1 **A random national sample**
In 2024, 2,400 adult citizens, chosen through a random, stratified probability sample, interviewed from 5 to 22 August.

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2 **Face-to-face interviews**
Conducted by the national partner, CDD-Ghana, in the language of the respondent's choice.

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3 **The same question each round**
"How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?" Answers: not at all, just a little, somewhat, a lot.

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4 **Trust is counted as "somewhat" or "a lot"**
Afrobarometer reports the share giving either answer. Results are accurate to within about 2 percentage points, 95 times in 100.

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5 **Comparable over time and across countries**
Ghana has been surveyed since 1999, so trends can be followed across rounds and compared with other African countries.

Survey results describe what people say. They measure trust, not the actual integrity or performance of institutions.

Source: RFI, drawing on Afrobarometer, Summary of results, Round 10 survey in Ghana (2025), and Afrobarometer Dispatches No. 781 and 891.

The key question is asked in the same form in each round: "How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?" Respondents answer "not at all", "just a little", "somewhat" or "a lot". Afrobarometer usually reports trust as the share answering "somewhat" or "a lot". Because Ghana has been surveyed since 1999, this allows trends to be followed across rounds and compared with other countries.

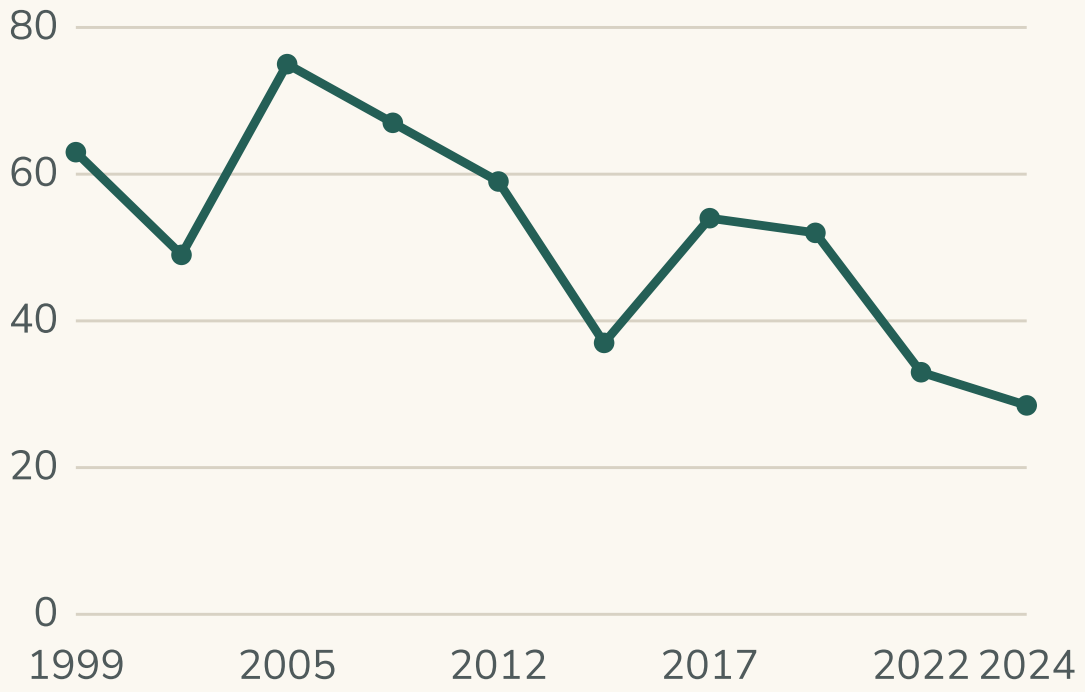
Two cautions apply throughout. First, the surveys measure what people say about institutions, not how well those institutions actually perform. Second, small differences

between rounds, of one or two points, are within the margin of error and should not be over-interpreted.

What has happened to trust in the Electoral Commission?

The Electoral Commission organises Ghana's elections, and trust in it matters for whether citizens accept their results. Afrobarometer's data show a long decline with sharp swings (Figure 2). Trust stood at 63 per cent in 1999, fell to 49 per cent in 2002, peaked at 75 per cent in 2005, and then declined: 67 per cent in 2008, 59 per cent in 2012, 37 per cent in 2014, a partial recovery to 54 per cent in 2017 and 52 per cent in 2019, and 33 per cent in 2022 (Asante-Darko, 2024). In the 2024 survey, 17.0 per cent said they trusted the Commission "somewhat" and 11.5 per cent "a lot", a combined 28.5 per cent, the lowest in the series (Afrobarometer, 2025a).

FIGURE 2. Trust in the Electoral Commission, 1999–2024



1999–2022 as published by Afrobarometer. The 2024 value is the sum of "somewhat" (17.0%) and "a lot" (11.5%) in the Round 10 summary of results, calculated by RFI.

Source: Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 781 (2024), Figure 13; Afrobarometer, Summary of results, Round 10 survey in Ghana (2025), Q37C.

The decline in trust has not been matched by a decline in support for elections. In 2022, 84 per cent of Ghanaians said elections were the best way to choose their leaders, a share that has stayed above 80 per cent across two decades, though down from a peak of 93 per cent in 2012. Eighty per cent said elections enable voters to remove leaders who do not do what the people want, and 62 per cent said elections ensure that members of Parliament reflect voters' views. Sixty-four per cent described the most recent national election, in 2020, as completely free and fair or free and fair with minor problems; that assessment had fallen as low as 46 per cent in the 2014 survey (Asante-Darko, 2024).

Trust in the Commission divides along party lines. In 2022, only 23 per cent of opposition supporters trusted it, but even among people who felt close to the ruling party, half (49 per cent) trusted it only "just a little" or "not at all". Younger citizens (30 to 31 per cent) were less trusting than their elders (38 to 39 per cent). The dispatch also noted that civil society organisations had criticised two appointments to the Commission as partisan and likely to intensify public mistrust (Asante-Darko, 2024).

Views of the 2020 election itself also divided. Eighty per cent of ruling-party supporters said it was generally free and fair, against 51 per cent of opposition supporters. The share rose with economic status, from 55 per cent among the poorest to 76 per cent among the well-off. Opposition supporters were twice as likely as ruling-party supporters to say they feared intimidation or violence during elections "somewhat" or "a lot" (23 per cent against 12 per cent), and the poorest were three times as likely as the well-off to say so (35 per cent against 12 per cent) (Asante-Darko, 2024).

Ghanaians' wider democratic commitments remain strong. In 2022, 72 per cent agreed that many political parties are needed to give voters real choices, and 89 per cent rejected one-party rule. Sixty-nine per cent said that in a democracy it is better if power sometimes changes hands between parties. Asked about the role of the opposition between elections, 57 per cent said it should cooperate with the government to develop the country, while 41 per cent said its main role was to monitor and criticise the government. Excluding those too young to vote at the time, 83 per cent said they had voted in the 2020 election, though only 76 per cent of 18- to 35-year-olds did so, against 90 to 94 per cent of older citizens (Asante-Darko, 2024).

The picture, then, is of citizens who strongly support elections but doubt the institution that runs them. That gap is a risk for any close contest.

Which institutions do Ghanaians trust?

The 2024 survey asked about fourteen institutions and leaders. Adding the published shares who trust each "somewhat" or "a lot" gives the following picture (Afrobarometer, 2025a; sums calculated by RFI):

- **Most trusted:** the Ghana Armed Forces (about 65 per cent), non-governmental and civil society organisations (about 52 per cent), religious leaders (about 49 per cent), the Ministry of Health (about 49 per cent) and traditional leaders (about 42 per cent).
- **Middle:** courts of law (about 35 per cent).
- **Least trusted:** the Electoral Commission (about 29 per cent), the police (about 28 per cent), the president (about 28 per cent), opposition parties (about 28 per cent), Parliament (about 24 per cent), the ruling party (about 22 per cent), the respondent's assembly member (about 21 per cent) and the Metropolitan, Municipal or District Chief Executive (about 21 per cent).

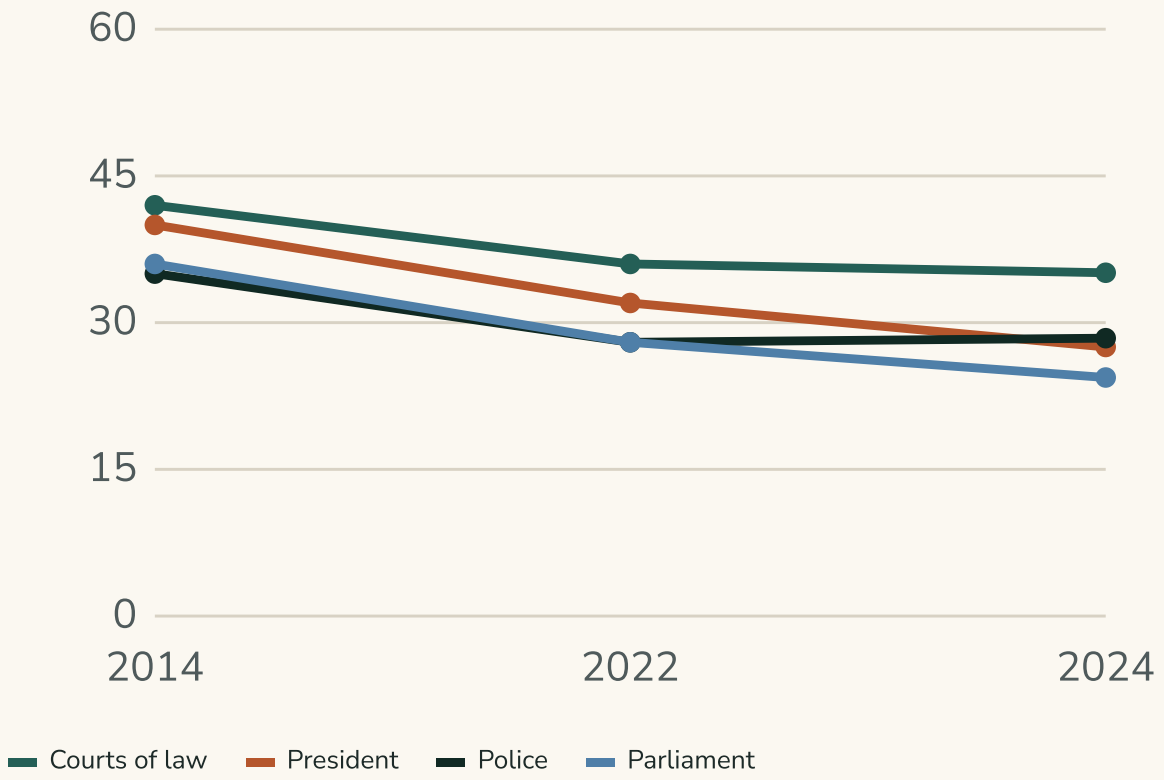
The pattern is clear. The institutions people trust most are those seen as standing outside party politics: the army, civil society, religious leaders and, to a lesser extent, traditional leaders. The least trusted are explicitly political offices, including local ones. Large shares express no trust at all: 42.7 per cent said they did not trust the president at all, 39.7 per cent Parliament, 39.0 per cent the Electoral Commission and 41.9 per cent the police.

There are differences within the population. Rural residents were much more likely than urban residents to trust traditional leaders "a lot" (27.6 per cent against 15.2 per cent). Men were more likely than women to trust the president "somewhat" (17.2 per cent against 10.7 per cent). Women were slightly more likely than men to say they had not heard enough about the courts to say (4.4 per cent against 1.5 per cent).

How has trust changed over the decade?

Comparing three surveys, 2014, 2022 and 2024, shows a broad decline in trust in the core institutions of the State (Figure 3). Trust in the president fell from 40 per cent in 2014 to 32 per cent in 2022 and about 28 per cent in 2024. Trust in Parliament fell from 36 to 28 to about 24 per cent. Trust in the courts fell from 42 to 36 to about 35 per cent. Trust in the police fell from 35 per cent in 2014 to 28 per cent in 2022 and stayed at about that level in 2024 (Afrobarometer, 2014 data; Asante-Darko, 2024; Afrobarometer, 2025a).

FIGURE 3. Trust in the president, Parliament, police and courts, 2014, 2022 and 2024



Share who trust each institution "somewhat" or "a lot". 2024 values are sums of the published "somewhat" and "a lot" shares, calculated by RFI.

Source: Afrobarometer Round 6 Ghana presentation on trust and corruption (2014 data); Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 781, Figure 15 (2022); Afrobarometer, Summary of results, Round 10 survey in Ghana (2025), Q37A, B, G and I (2024).

The decline was already visible earlier. Afrobarometer's analysis of its Round 6 survey reported that between 2002 and 2014 the proportion of Ghanaians expressing little or no trust in public institutions increased significantly, while the proportion trusting opposition parties rose by 17 percentage points over the same period (Afrobarometer, 2014 data). In 2014, majorities already expressed little or no trust in the tax department, local government, the police, Parliament, the ruling party, the Electoral Commission, the president and the courts.

The 2014 survey also showed who was most distrustful. Distrust was much lower in the northern regions than in the south: for example, 39 per cent in Upper East said they had little or no trust in the tax department and in local government, against 71 and 70 per cent in Greater Accra. Distrust also rose with education. Among people with no formal education, 38 per cent had little or no trust in the Electoral Commission and 39 per cent in

the president; among those with tertiary education, the figures were 65 per cent for both. Women were more likely than men to express little or no trust in public institutions (Afrobarometer, 2014 data). The more educated, and those in the southern regions, were in other words often the most sceptical, a pattern that runs against the idea that distrust comes mainly from lack of information.

Some institutions moved differently. Trust in the army was 56 per cent in 2014, 67 per cent in 2022 and about 65 per cent in 2024. Trust in traditional leaders, 50 per cent in 2014, was 25 per cent in 2022 but about 42 per cent in 2024. Trust in religious leaders was 63 per cent in 2014, 43 per cent in 2022 and about 49 per cent in 2024. The published sources do not explain these swings, and they should be read with caution: they may reflect real changes, events around the time of fieldwork, or differences between survey rounds.

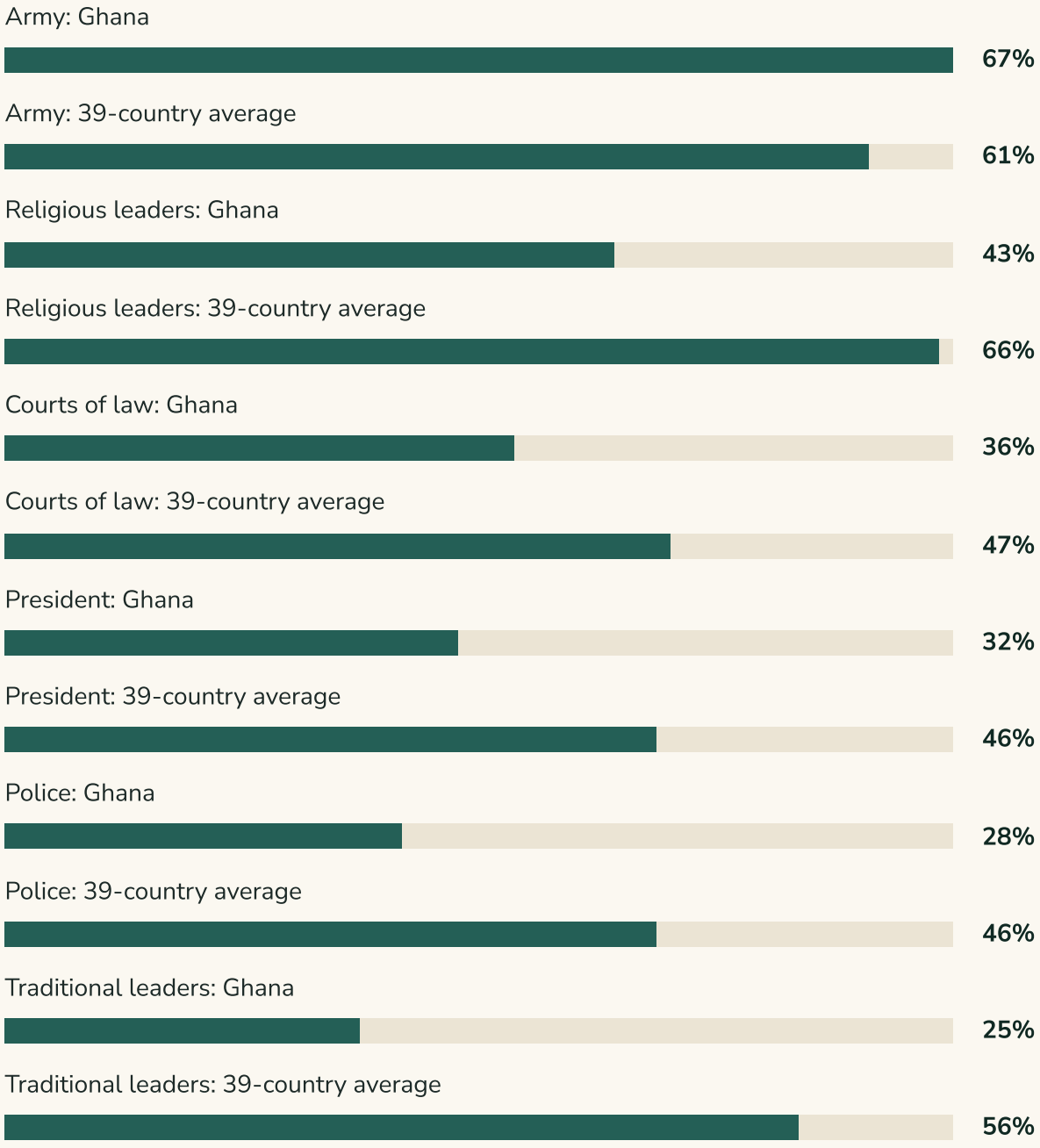
How does Ghana compare with the rest of Africa?

Ghana is not alone. Afrobarometer's continental analysis found that across 39 countries surveyed between late 2021 and mid-2023, majorities trusted only three of eleven institutions: religious leaders (66 per cent), the army (61 per cent) and traditional leaders (56 per cent). Across 30 countries surveyed regularly between 2011/2013 and 2021/2023, the share trusting Parliament fell by 19 percentage points, from 52 to 33 per cent (Afrobarometer, 2024).

The decline was broad. Across the 30 regularly surveyed countries, average trust in the ruling party fell by 15 points (from 49 to 33 per cent), in the president by 12 points (from 60 to 48 per cent) and in the courts by 10 points (from 59 to 49 per cent) between 2011/2013 and 2021/2023. Across the continent, rural residents were more trusting than urban residents, for example of the president (50 against 42 per cent) and the courts (51 against 42 per cent) (Afrobarometer, 2024).

Within this continental picture, Ghana stands out for low trust (Figure 4). In its 2022 survey, Ghana's average trust across the institutions measured was 34 per cent. Ghanaians trusted the army more than the continental average (67 per cent against 61 per cent), but trusted religious leaders (43 against 66 per cent), the courts (36 against 47 per cent), the president (32 against 46 per cent) and the police (28 against 46 per cent) much less. Trust in traditional leaders, at 25 per cent, was the lowest of all the countries surveyed, against an average of 56 per cent (Afrobarometer, 2024).

FIGURE 4. Trust in Ghana compared with the average of 39 African countries, 2021/2023



Share who trust each institution "somewhat" or "a lot". Ghana's figures are from its 2022 survey.

Source: Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 891 (2024), Table 4.

What do Ghanaians say about corruption?

Trust and corruption are closely connected in Afrobarometer's findings. In August 2024, three-quarters of Ghanaians (74 per cent) said the level of corruption had increased over

the previous year, including 63 per cent who said it had increased "a lot"; only 7 per cent said it had decreased. The share saying corruption was increasing had been 83 per cent in 2014, 36 per cent in 2017, 53 per cent in 2019 and 77 per cent in 2022 (Afrobarometer, 2025b).

Perceptions of corruption were highest for the police: 63 per cent said "most" or "all" police officials were corrupt. More than half saw widespread corruption in the Presidency (54 per cent), among tax officials (53 per cent) and among members of Parliament (51 per cent). Eighty-two per cent said the government was doing "fairly badly" or "very badly" at fighting corruption, an increase in dissatisfaction of 49 percentage points since 2017. Only 26 per cent believed people could report corruption without fear of retaliation, down 4 points since 2022, and 71 per cent said people who report corruption risk retaliation or other negative consequences (Afrobarometer, 2025b).

Experiences with the police help explain the low trust. In 2022, among citizens who had asked the police for help in the previous year, half (50 per cent) said it was difficult to get assistance and 45 per cent said they had to pay a bribe. Among those who encountered the police in other situations, such as checkpoints or traffic stops, 36 per cent said they had paid a bribe to avoid problems. Only 22 per cent said the police "often" or "always" act professionally and respect citizens' rights, though 86 per cent thought it likely that the police would take reports of gender-based violence seriously. Many said the police routinely engage in criminal activities (39 per cent) and use excessive force against criminals (40 per cent) and protesters (33 per cent) (Twum, 2022).

These perceptions sit alongside rising insecurity. In 2022, 43 per cent of Ghanaians said they had felt unsafe walking in their neighbourhood and 41 per cent had feared crime in their home at least once in the previous year, and the shares experiencing this at least "several times" had more than doubled over the previous decade. Afrobarometer's field teams found a police station within easy walking distance of only about a third (35 per cent) of the areas they visited. Only 8 per cent of citizens had asked the police for help in the previous year, while 49 per cent had encountered them in other situations (Twum, 2022). For most people, contact with the police comes through encounters such as checkpoints and traffic stops rather than through asking for help.

The courts face a similar problem. In the 2024 survey, 44 per cent of Ghanaians said "most" or "all" judges and magistrates were corrupt, 73 per cent said officials who break the law frequently go unpunished, and 62 per cent said people are often or always treated unequally under the law. Half (50 per cent) were "not very" or "not at all" confident that ordinary people who are wronged can obtain justice in the courts, against 47 per cent who were confident, and the well-off were more confident than the poor (54 per cent against 42 to 51 per cent). Fewer than half said they could probably find legal advice (47 per cent) or afford to take a legal problem to court (37 per cent), only 45 per cent thought such a case would be resolved fairly and 38 per cent that it would be resolved in good time, and just 21

per cent knew of legal-aid services in their community. Sixty-two per cent believed judges and magistrates often or always decide cases on the basis of the influence of powerful people rather than the law. And while 79 per cent said the president must always obey the laws and the courts, fewer than half (47 per cent) thought he usually did. Asked where they would turn with a legal problem, only 3 per cent named a local court; more would go to the police (38 per cent), an elder or traditional court or leader (30 per cent), or a family member (9 per cent) (Essima and Mingle, 2025).

How do Ghanaians judge their leaders' performance?

Trust is not the same as approval, but the two moved together in 2024. Asked in August 2024 about the performance of the then president over the previous twelve months, 24.1 per cent approved and 7.3 per cent strongly approved, while 24.2 per cent disapproved and 41.8 per cent strongly disapproved (Afrobarometer, 2025a). In total, about two-thirds disapproved.

Assessments of particular policies were also low. In 2022, only 27 per cent said the government was doing a "fairly" or "very" good job of reducing crime, the lowest level since the surveys began in 1999 and 34 points lower than in 2016 (Twum, 2022).

Do Ghanaians trust one another?

Afrobarometer also asks about trust between people. In 2024, about 60 per cent of Ghanaians trusted their relatives "somewhat" or "a lot", but only about 37 per cent trusted their neighbours, about 29 per cent trusted "other Ghanaians", about 33 per cent trusted people from other religions and about 33 per cent trusted people from other ethnic groups (Afrobarometer, 2025a; sums calculated by RFI).

This matters for interpreting the institutional figures. Trust in the president or the police, at around 28 per cent, is close to trust in fellow citizens in general. Low institutional trust may therefore be part of a broader pattern of guarded trust beyond family and close community, not only a verdict on particular governments. The survey data alone cannot settle which way the influence runs.

Why does trust matter?

Afrobarometer's continental analysis notes that, in many countries, especially developing countries, low trust in government institutions is associated with acceptance of illegal behaviour such as tax fraud, with increased polarisation, and with decreased support for the provision of public goods, all of which can hinder development (Afrobarometer, 2024, citing Beesley and Hawkins, 2022). An early Afrobarometer working paper on corruption

and trust set out the underlying concern: corruption is presumed to corrode public trust in state institutions and processes and to undermine their effectiveness, and the authors tested this with African survey data (Armah-Attoh et al., 2007).

In Ghana's case, the data show three practical consequences. People who do not trust the courts look elsewhere for justice: to the police, to traditional authorities, or to family (Essima and Mingle, 2025). People who fear retaliation do not report corruption (Afrobarometer, 2025b). And people who doubt the Electoral Commission may be less ready to accept a close result, even while they value elections (Asante-Darko, 2024). Each of these weakens the institutions further, because institutions that are not used and not believed find it harder to show that they work.

What would rebuild trust?

The survey evidence points to several directions. They are implications of the published data, not tested remedies.

Make accountability visible. When 73 per cent say officials who break the law go unpunished, the most direct route to trust is visible enforcement: prosecutions and sanctions that citizens can see, applied regardless of party.

Protect people who report wrongdoing. With only a quarter believing they can report corruption safely, credible protection for whistleblowers and complainants is a precondition for using public reporting channels at all.

Reduce everyday extortion. The police experiences recorded by Afrobarometer, from bribes at checkpoints to difficulty getting help, shape trust more than any campaign. Reducing these everyday encounters would matter.

Strengthen the independence of the Electoral Commission in practice. Support for elections remains high. Transparent appointments, open processes and early publication of results data would give citizens of every party grounds to trust the referee.

Build on the institutions people trust. Civil society, religious and traditional leaders, and the health service retain more trust than political institutions. Working with them, for example on dispute resolution, civic education and monitoring, can extend the reach of public action while political institutions rebuild their standing.

Keep measuring. The value of the Afrobarometer series lies in its consistency. Continued, regular surveys allow Ghanaians to see whether reforms change what citizens think.

What are the limits of this paper?

This paper uses published Afrobarometer data only. The 2024 trust figures are sums of published percentages calculated by RFI, and may differ by a point from Afrobarometer's own rounded figures. Survey results are subject to sampling error and to the circumstances at the time of fieldwork, such as the approach of an election. Trust is measured as stated attitude, not as behaviour or institutional performance. The data cannot explain on their own why trust has fallen; they show what citizens say, by how much and among whom.

Conclusion

The published Afrobarometer surveys tell a consistent story about trust in government in Ghana. Ghanaians remain strongly committed to elections and democratic choice, but their trust in the institutions that govern them, from the Electoral Commission to the president, Parliament, the police and the courts, has fallen substantially over the past decade and is low by African standards. The institutions they trust most stand outside party politics. Perceptions of corruption are high, and few feel safe reporting it. Rebuilding trust will not come from appeals to confidence, but from institutions behaving in ways that citizens can see, consistently and over time.

Frequently asked questions

Do people in Ghana trust the government?

Fewer than in the past. In Afrobarometer's 2024 survey, only about 28 per cent of Ghanaians said they trusted the president "somewhat" or "a lot", about 24 per cent trusted Parliament and about 22 per cent trusted the ruling party. In 2014, 40 per cent trusted the president and 36 per cent trusted Parliament.

What does Afrobarometer show about trust in government and institutions in Ghana?

It shows that the army (about 65 per cent), civil society organisations (about 52 per cent), religious leaders and the Ministry of Health (about 49 per cent each) are the most trusted, while political institutions such as Parliament, the ruling party and local government officials are the least trusted. Trust in the Electoral Commission fell to a record low of about 29 per cent in 2024.

What is in the Afrobarometer report on Ghana?

Afrobarometer's Round 10 survey of Ghana, conducted in August 2024 with 2,400 adults, covers democracy, elections, trust in institutions, corruption, the economy, public services, social attitudes and more. The full summary of results and related briefings are published free on Afrobarometer's website.

How do Ghanaians see corruption?

In 2024, 74 per cent of Ghanaians said corruption had increased over the past year, 63 per cent said most or all police officials were corrupt, and 82 per cent said the government was doing badly at fighting corruption. Only 26 per cent believed people could report corruption without fear of retaliation.

Why does trust in government matter?

Afrobarometer notes research showing that low trust in public institutions is associated with acceptance of illegal behaviour such as tax fraud, increased polarisation and less support for public goods, all of which can hold back development. Trust also affects whether people accept election results and use courts and police to resolve problems.

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How to cite: RFI Editorial (2026). Trust in government in Ghana: what the Afrobarometer surveys show. RFI Working Paper No. 5. Relational Futures Institute. https://relationalfuturesinstitute.org/insights/trust-in-government-ghana-afrobarometer