

West African Papers



# How is Life in West Africa's Cities?

Results from an Online Perception Survey  
of Life in Urban Areas

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## HOW IS LIFE IN WEST AFRICA'S CITIES?

### Results from an Online Perception Survey of Life in Urban Areas

This paper has been prepared by

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Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat

## WEST AFRICAN PAPERS

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## Abstract

The number of people living in African cities is expected to double over the next two decades. While the need to provide adequate infrastructure, create high quality jobs and manage pollution in fast growing cities has been well studied, these studies say little about subjective quality of city life. This paper presents findings from the first large-scale quality of life perception survey covering 27 cities in 17 countries in West Africa and the Sahel. Responses from nearly 9 000 urban West Africans provide an insight into perceptions of city life, local government quality, and policy priorities with the intention of giving residents a voice in the policy dialogue on the future of African cities. In addition to comparing perceptions across cities, the paper demonstrates the feasibility of an online approach to run large-scale online surveys in West African cities of different sizes and cultural contexts.

Le nombre de personnes vivant dans les villes africaines devrait doubler au cours des deux prochaines décennies. Alors que la nécessité de fournir des infrastructures adéquates, de créer des emplois de haute qualité et de gérer la pollution dans les villes à croissance rapide a été bien étudiée, ces études en disent peu sur la qualité subjective de la vie urbaine. Cet article présente les résultats de la première enquête à grande échelle sur la perception de la qualité de vie. Elle couvre 27 villes dans 17 pays d'Afrique de l'Ouest et du Sahel. Les réponses de près de 9 000 citoyens ouest-africains donnent un aperçu des perceptions de la vie urbaine, de la qualité des gouvernements locaux et des priorités politiques dans le but de donner aux résidents une voix dans le dialogue politique sur l'avenir des villes africaines. En plus de comparer les perceptions entre les villes, le document démontre la faisabilité d'exécuter des enquêtes en ligne à grande échelle dans des villes d'Afrique de l'Ouest de différentes tailles et avec des contextes culturels divers.

**Key words:** cities, urbanisation, well-being, perception survey, West Africa

**JEL classification:** I131, R50, Y80

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# The Sahel and West Africa Club

The Sahel and West Africa Club (SWAC) is an independent, international platform. Its Secretariat is hosted at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Its mission is to promote regional policies that will improve the economic and social well-being of people in the Sahel and West Africa. Its objectives are to improve the regional governance of food and nutrition security and improve the understanding of ongoing transformations in the region and their policy implications. SWAC Members and partners are Austria, Belgium, Canada, CILSS, the ECOWAS Commission, the European Commission, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, the UEMOA Commission and the United States. SWAC also has a memorandum of understanding with the University of Florida Sahel Research Group.

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# In brief. The West African city survey

## KEY FINDINGS

- Close to 9 000 people from 27 West African cities have been surveyed to capture how they perceive their cities and to uncover their policy priorities. Survey participants have been recruited through targeted Facebook advertisements based on their location, gender and age. The majority of participants are highly educated (87% have at least some post-secondary education) and are likely to have above-average income levels.
- Most participants hold positive views of their cities. More than half agree that their cities are good places to meet people and make new friends (76%), that they offer convenient shopping opportunities (63%) and are more interesting than other parts of the country (58%). The perception of positive attributes is similar across most cities and no statistically significant differences exist between cities of different sizes.
- The perception of negative attributes varies considerably between cities. Participants from larger cities are more likely to agree that their cities are too polluted, congested and noisy. Yet, city-size explains only a small part of the differences across cities, which indicates that the disadvantages of urban life are mostly shaped by national and local contexts and policies.
- While participants' socio-economic characteristics have some effects on the perception of urban life, their influence is relatively weak. Generally, the hometown of participants has a greater influence on their perception of urban life than socio-economic characteristics.

- Finding a good job is a challenge in West African cities. On average, only 25% of participants agree that it is easy to find a good job in their city. Notably, better-educated participants do not find it easier to find employment than less educated participants even though most participants agree that a good education is a prerequisite for getting a good job.
- Most participants have short commutes of less than 30 minutes. Cities where a majority of participants indicate that they commute for more than 30 minutes fall into two groups; i) they are among the three largest cities in the survey (Lagos, Abidjan and Accra) or ii) they have irregular urban footprints due to their location on peninsulas and are therefore prone to congestion (Monrovia, Conakry and Serrekunda).
- Trust in the effectiveness and accountability of local governments is low. Only 25% of participants agree that it is quick and easy to get an official document from the government. The share of participants who believe their vote makes a difference in how their city is governed is somewhat higher, but still low at 39%.
- Policy priorities of survey participants are similar across cities. Economic and health policy are considered the two most important policy fields - chosen by 71% and 60% of participants, respectively, as a priority policy area. In contrast, priorities for infrastructure investments vary strongly across cities, indicating that infrastructure needs are more specific to local contexts.
- Beyond providing a new perspective on the views of urban West Africans, the survey has demonstrated the feasibility of running large-scale online perception surveys in cities in sub-Saharan Africa. The approach offers new possibilities for information gathering and engagement with the public, for example - through online public consultation procedures.

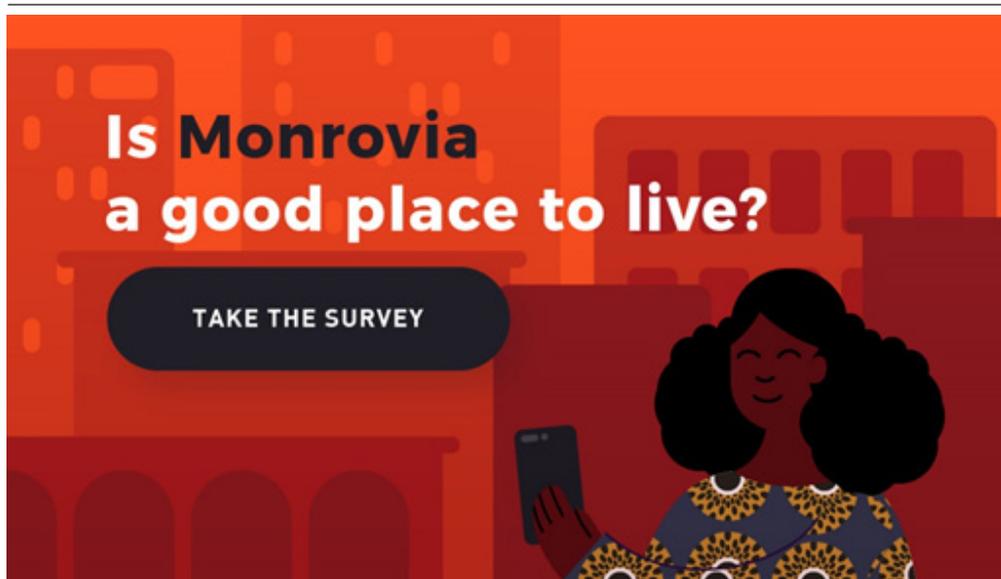
# Introduction

Africa is urbanising quickly. In 2020, approximately 660 million people were living in African cities with more than 10 000 inhabitants (OECD/SWAC, 2018<sub>[1]</sub>). Over the next two decades, this number is expected to double. Rapid urbanisation brings a range of challenges for African cities, including building essential infrastructure, generating sufficient jobs and reducing pollution. While these challenges have been extensively discussed in the academic and policy literature, a complete picture of the well-being of people living in African cities remains lacking.

The objective challenges faced by African cities say little about the subjective quality of life in these cities' from the perspective of residents. People may value characteristics of their cities that are hard to measure objectively, such as the ease and liberty of social connections, or the diversity and accessibility of entertainment. Moreover, many characteristics of urban life that can be measured objectively are perceived differently by different people. While traffic congestion, for example, can be easily measured and quantified, the degree to which it negatively affects well-being strongly depends on personal circumstances and is much harder to quantify.

Figure 1

Visual used in Facebook advertisements to recruit survey participants



This paper presents findings from the first large-scale perception survey on the quality of life in cities in West Africa. The survey provides new insights into the views of almost 9 000 urban West Africans by collecting information about how residents perceive benefits and drawbacks of living in large cities, their policy priorities for local policy makers as well as information on their daily commutes. The survey results allow for a focus on the views of young West Africans and analysis of gender differences in perceptions of urban life.

This paper has several objectives. First, it aims to provide a better understanding of the residents' views of urban life. These views are gathered with the intention of highlighting the importance of residents' perspectives and amplifying their voices in the local, national and international policy dialogue on the future of African cities. The second objective is to compare how residents' perceptions vary across cities, thereby complementing perception surveys- such as the Afrobarometer (2019<sub>[2]</sub>)- that does not focus explicitly on cities, as well as perception surveys of cities that have a much narrower geographical scope (e.g. Senlier and Yildiz, 2008<sub>[3]</sub>; Yeshitela, 2020<sub>[4]</sub>). Third, the paper serves as a proof-of-concept that demonstrates the feasibility of an online approach to run large-scale online surveys in West African cities of different sizes and cultural contexts by using Facebook to recruit participants.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides a brief overview of how the data was collected as well as key features of participants. Section 3 presents key survey results, highlighting notable patterns and examples from individual cities, but without providing an exhaustive discussion of results for all cities. The full set of results is presented in Annex A, and the questionnaire used to obtain the data is provided in Annex B. The raw data from the survey is available upon request.<sup>1</sup>

# The survey

The 2021 West African city survey results cover 27 cities in 17 countries in West Africa and the Sahel, including all political capitals and primary cities. It also covers eight secondary cities in order to document differences depending on city size. The smallest city in the survey is Praia, the capital of Cabo Verde, with 149 000 inhabitants and the largest is Lagos (Nigeria), with 11.8 million inhabitants. Collectively, the 27 cities covered by the survey are home to more than 50 million inhabitants (Table 1).

Almost 9 000 individuals responded to the survey. Participants were recruited through advertisements on Facebook that targeted users according to their location and demographic characteristics (gender and age). All advertisements used the same image, with text displayed in the city's official national language (English, French and Portuguese) and showing the respective city's name (Figure 1). Further details on the online recruitment and potential implications of the characteristics of surveyed participants can be found in Annex C.

Figure 2  
Cities covered by the West African City Survey

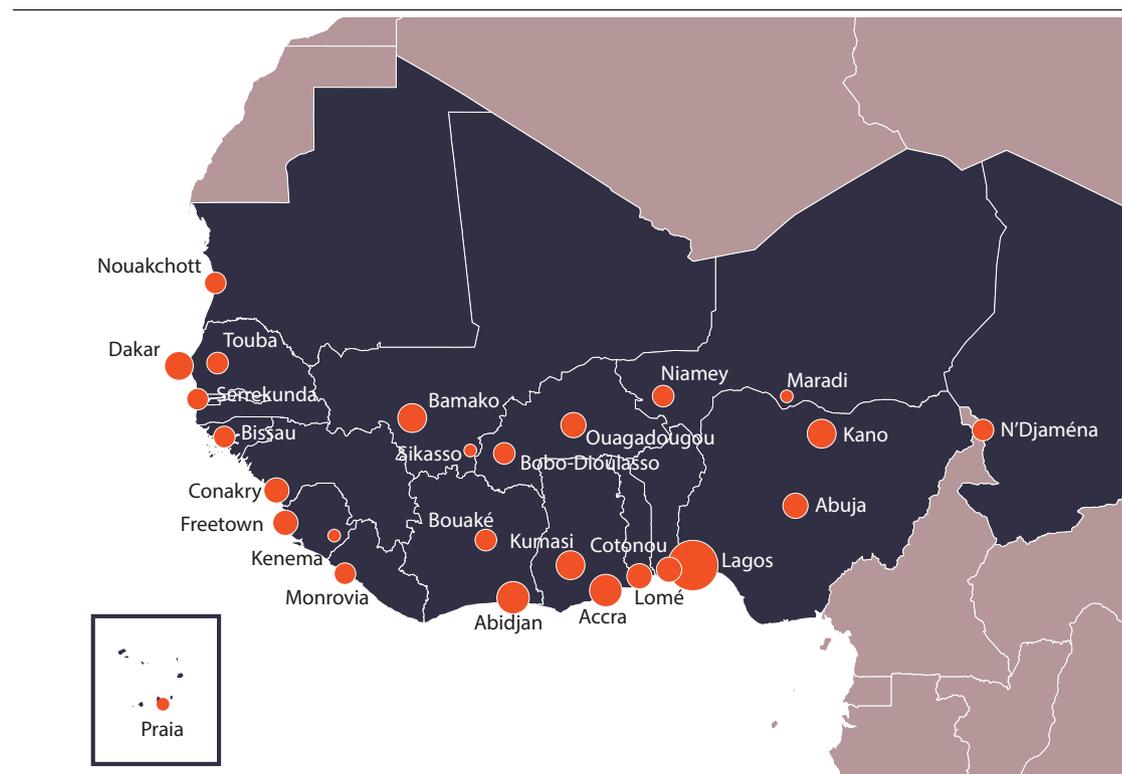


Table 1  
 Cities covered by the West African City Survey

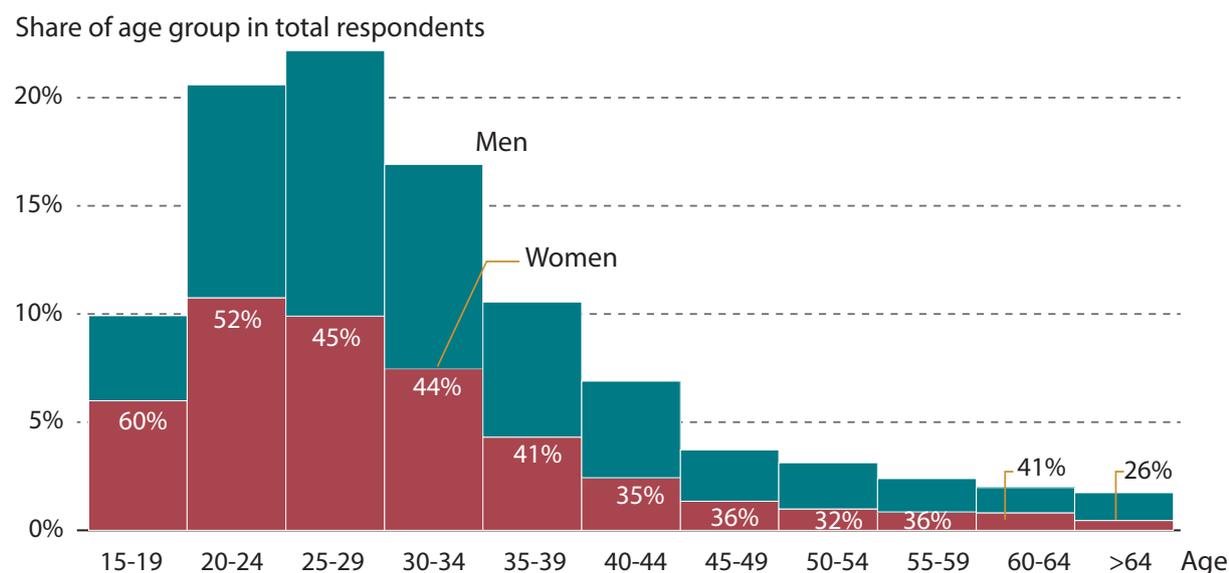
City	Country	Inhabitants (2015)	Number of participants				Total
			Men (15-29)	Women (15-29)	Men (30+)	Women (30+)	
Lagos	Nigeria	11 850 000	12	18	47	24	101
Abidjan	Côte d'Ivoire	4 720 000	107	159	86	107	459
Accra	Ghana	4 450 000	14	40	64	33	151
Kano	Nigeria	3 890 000	99	61	190	106	456
Dakar	Senegal	3 070 000	155	286	196	234	871
Kumasi	Ghana	2 800 000	82	38	95	51	266
Bamako	Mali	2 780 000	125	195	81	107	508
Ouagadougou	Burkina Faso	2 300 000	121	143	91	76	431
Conakry	Guinea	2 190 000	115	110	110	82	417
Abuja	Nigeria	2 000 000	31	38	57	96	222
Lomé	Togo	1 730 000	115	133	80	90	418
Cotonou	Benin	1 530 000	104	118	71	67	360
Freetown	Sierra Leone	1 460 000	32	15	74	39	160
N'Djamena	Chad	1 210 000	113	80	117	76	386
Monrovia	Liberia	1 190 000	30	24	53	27	134
Niamey	Niger	1 070 000	140	125	123	62	450
Nouakchott	Mauritania	1 060 000	106	126	131	99	462
Touba	Senegal	870 000	44	39	41	19	143
Serekunda	Gambia	790 000	33	39	40	34	146
Bobo-Dioulasso	Burkina Faso	660 000	103	77	115	60	355
Porto Novo	Benin	570 000	86	76	75	51	288
Bouake	Côte d'Ivoire	550 000	102	101	104	74	381
Bissau	Guinea-Bissau	410 000	39	38	49	31	157
Maradi	Niger	360 000	83	26	109	19	237
Sikasso	Mali	280 000	107	38	107	17	269
Kenema	Sierra Leone	200 000	49	17	55	18	139
Praia	Cape Verde	150 000	71	104	124	131	430
<b>Total</b>			<b>2 218</b>	<b>2 264</b>	<b>2 485</b>	<b>1 830</b>	<b>8 797</b>

Source: OECD/SWAC (2018<sub>[1]</sub>), <https://africapolis.org>

## PARTICIPANTS ARE DISPROPORTIONALLY WELL-EDUCATED AND WEALTHY

Most of the survey's participants are in their twenties and early thirties, which reflects the young demographic profile of West African cities. Nevertheless, approximately 500 participants (5%) are older than 50 years. The distribution in terms of gender is nearly even, with 46.4% of participants being female and 53.6% male.

Figure 3  
Age distribution of survey participants



The most noteworthy characteristic of participants is their education level (Figure 4). The majority of survey participants are highly educated, with 66% having some post-secondary education and 22% having a graduate degree. In contrast, the overall share of the adult population with post-secondary education ranges from 5% to 20% in most of the countries covered by the survey (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020<sub>[5]</sub>). Participants from larger cities are especially highly educated. On average, the share of participants with at least some post-secondary education increases by 0.4 percentage points for each 10% increase in the population of a surveyed city. High education levels are also visible in the occupation of participants. 27% of all participants are students, whereas the share of students rises to 49% among the under-30 years old.

The share of participants with at least some post-secondary education is 3 percentage points higher among women than among men, a difference that is not statistically significant. Female participants are also approximately 10 percentage points more likely to be students than male participants.

While participants were given the opportunity to provide an indication of their average monthly income, the quality of this data does not allow for reliable analysis. Nevertheless, it is likely that many participants have income levels well above average. More than 20% of survey participants accessed the survey through recent models of the Apple iPhone or Samsung Galaxy S series that cost upwards of USD 500. The use of mid-range phones

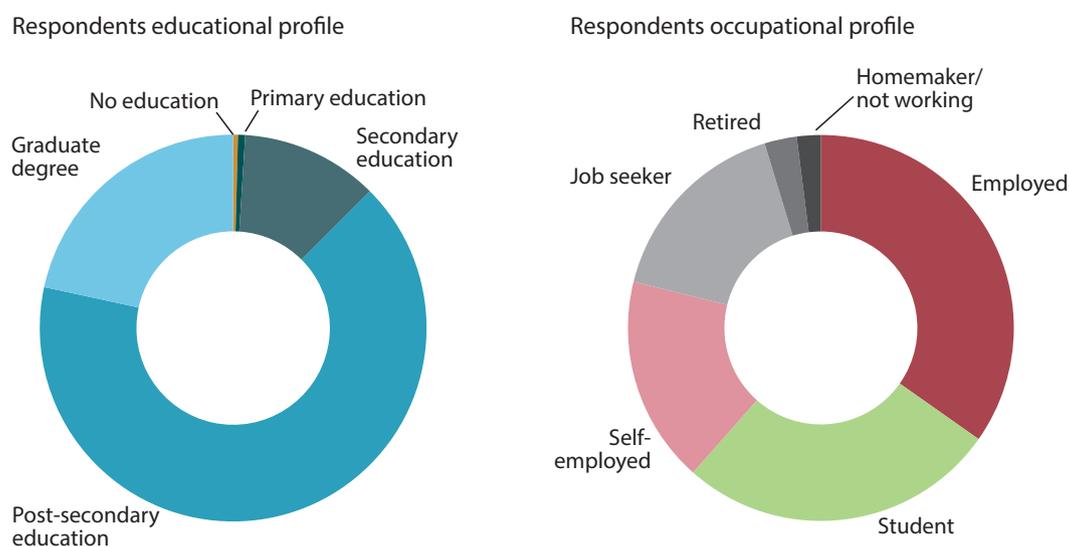
that still cost several hundreds of USD were even more widespread among participants.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as discussed in Annex C, participants might differ from the general population in other aspects, which potentially influence their responses, but which cannot be identified.

The fact that survey participants are not representative of the overall population must be kept in mind when interpreting the results of the survey. In particular, it is important to consider that the results might not reflect the views of poorer and less educated households with lower survey participation rates.

## PERCEPTION OF URBAN LIFE IN WEST AFRICA'S CITIES

The survey contains three sections: i) a set of questions on the perception of urban life, ii) a set of questions on public policy and iii) a set of questions on commuting times and modes (the questionnaire is provided in Annex B).

Figure 4  
Education (left) and occupation (right) of participants



These sections are complemented by a set of questions on the personal characteristics of participants, including age, gender; occupation, education; number of children, household size and time spent living in the city. For privacy reasons, questions concerning personal information were marked non-mandatory and participants did not have to complete them in order to submit the survey. Among the 8 797 participants, 4 796 (55%) provided personal information.

The section on perception of urban life consists of 16 statements. Most statements reflect an aspect that is commonly considered a benefit or a drawback of living in a ‘big city’. For each statement, participants could indicate their level of agreement on a five-point scale (5–strongly agree, 4–agree, 3–neither agree nor disagree, 2–disagree, 1–strongly disagree). In the analysis that follows, the five-point scale has been converted into a three-point scale (agree/disagree/neither) by merging responses 4 and 5 as well as 1 and 2. Thus, whenever the share of participants who agree with a statement is discussed, the corresponding numbers refer to the share of participants who ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ with the statement.

For all other questions (e.g. on policy priorities or on commuting modes), participants were presented with a set of options and could choose only one option or multiple options for their response, depending on the question. Results from these questions generally show the share of participants choosing an option.

Whenever aggregate results for all 27 cities are presented, they refer to unweighted averages across the 27 cities. They have been produced by averaging all responses for a city and subsequently taking the average of the 27 cities’ averages.

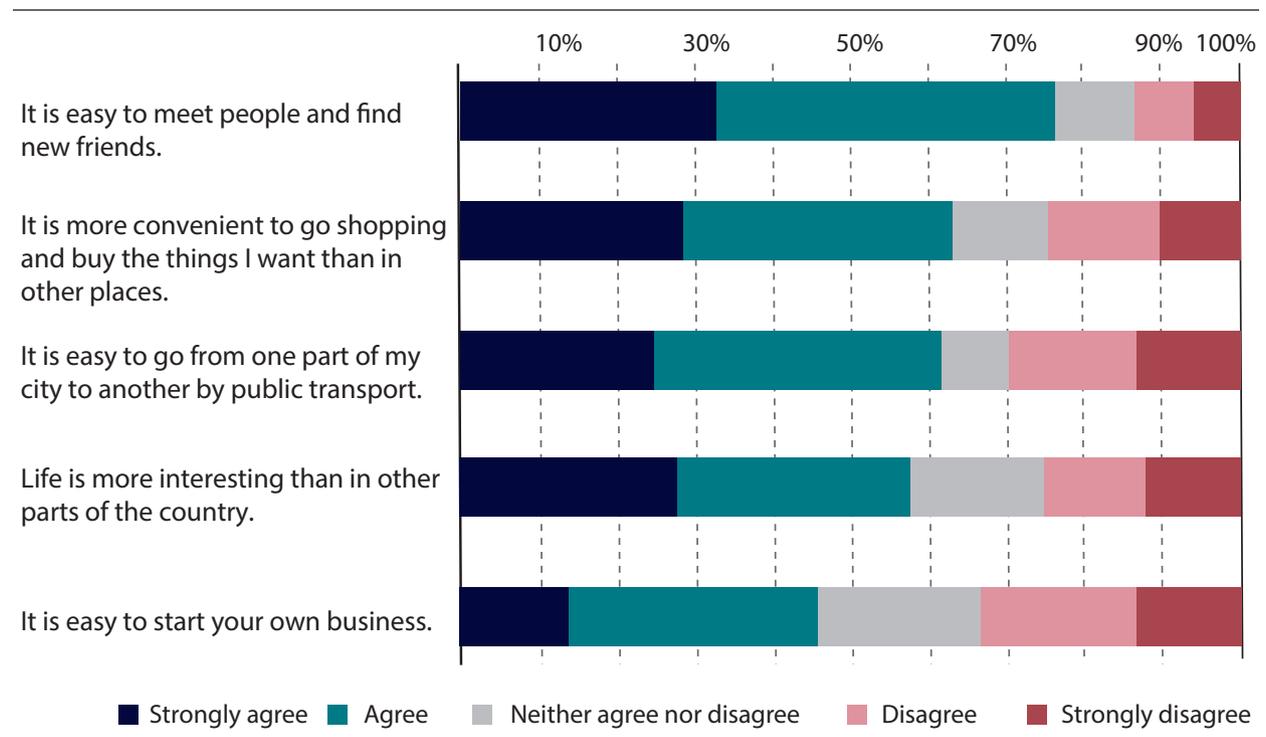
# How is life in your city? Survey results

## URBAN WEST AFRICANS HAVE A POSITIVE PERCEPTION OF LIFE IN CITIES

### *Most West Africans like their cities*

The majority of survey participants have a favourable view of their city. Participants agree to almost all statements that attribute positive characteristics to their respective cities (Figure 5). On average, 76% of participants agree that they are good places to meet people and make new friends. In some cities, such as Sikasso (Mali) and Bouaké (Côte d'Ivoire), the share of participants who agree with this statement exceeds 90%, while Abuja (Nigeria) is the only city where less than half of the participants agree. Likewise, 63% of participants find their cities convenient for shopping. The only notable exceptions in this respect are Porto Novo (Benin) and Touba (Senegal), where only 33% and 41% of participants respectively agree with this statement.

Figure 5  
Perception of positive attributes of West African cities



Note: Average across 27 West African cities.

Most participants are also happy with their cities' public transport systems. Only Conakry (Guinea) stands out in this dimension, with almost 70% of participants disagreeing that it is easy to move around the city by public transport. Overall, 58% of participants find their city more interesting than other parts of their country. While this is somewhat lower than the agreement rate seen with previous statements, there is no city where disagreement exceeds agreement.

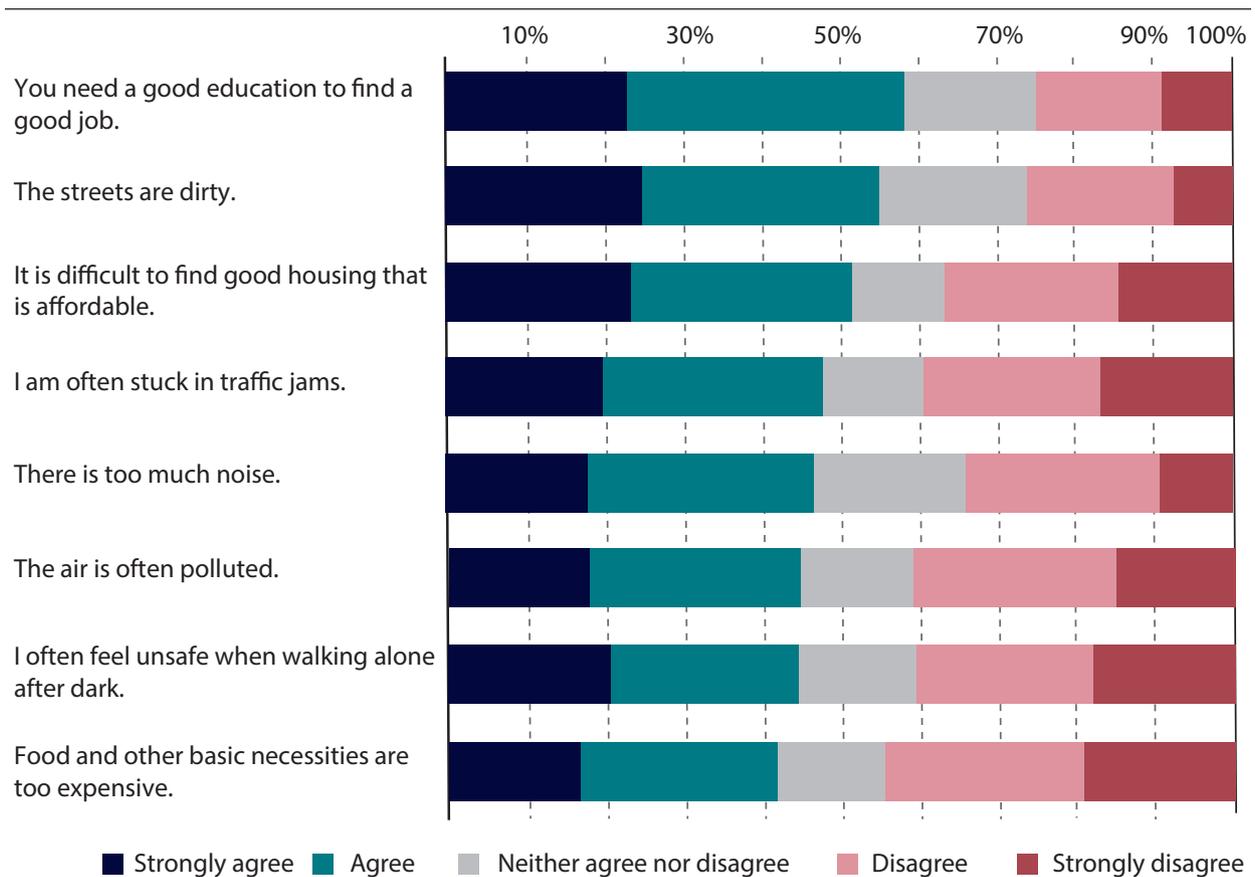
Agreement with positive attributes is unrelated to city size across the 27 cities. On average, smaller cities are perceived to be as attractive as larger cities. Likewise, there is no statistically significant difference in the perception of positive attributes between primary and secondary cities. These results show that urban West Africans appreciate the amenities of urban life. Social interactions, consumption opportunities, the ease of moving around that comes from short distances and the various kinds of entertainment attract people to cities all over the globe. West African cities are no exception in this respect, and it is likely that the positive perception of city life across these dimensions is a contributor to the strong urbanisation that West Africa is experiencing.

***The drawbacks of urban life are perceived differently from city to city***

When responses from all 27 cities are considered together, it appears as though negative attributes of cities are perceived similarly. Between 40% and 60% of all participants agree with each of the eight statements that refer to a negative attribute of their city (Figure 6). At 58%, the share of participants who agree that one needs a good education to find a good job is highest. By comparison, the share of participants who agree that food and other necessities are too expensive remains elevated at 42%, even though this is the negative attribute that receives the least agreement.

This seemingly homogenous pattern hides significant variation across the 27 sampled cities. For each statement shown in Figure 6, there are cities where large majorities of participants agree with a given statement and cities where large majorities disagree with it. For example, 93% of participants agree that Lagos is too noisy, but only 7% think the same about Abuja. Likewise, 83% of participants think the air in Dakar (Senegal) is often polluted whereas only 13% think the same about Kumasi (Ghana). And while an average of 44% of participants across all cities often feel unsafe when they are alone on the streets after dark, the share is 81% in Praia, but just 13% in Bobo-Dioulasso. Annex A shows that similar variations across the 27 cities exist for most negative attributes.

Figure 6  
Perceptions of negative attributes of cities

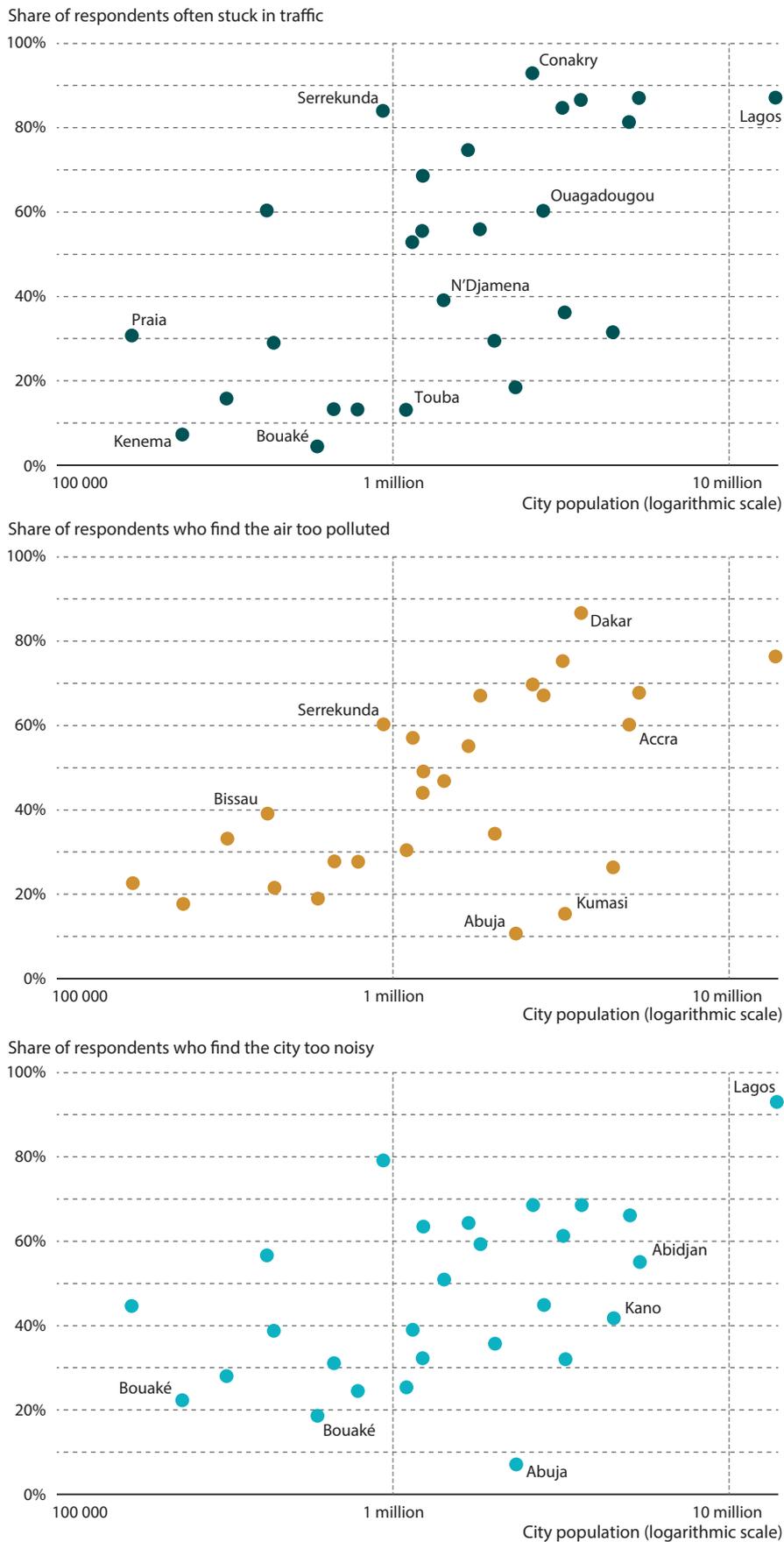


The diversity in perceptions of negative attributes across cities indicates that most cities face their own specific challenges. In addition, variation across cities demonstrates the risk of overly generalising across African cities and calls for the development of targeted policies instead of one-size-fits-all solutions. At the same time, it is an indication that policies can be effective as some cities have managed to avoid common pitfalls of urbanisation.

The share of participants that agree with negative attributes is correlated to the size of the 27 cities in the survey. On average, when a city increases in size by 10%, the share of participants that agree with a negative attribute goes up by 0.9 percentage points.<sup>3</sup> Among all negative attributes, congestion is most strongly related to city size. For each 10% increase in city-size, the share of participants who agree that they are often stuck in traffic increases by approximately 1.7 percentage points (Figure 7). Similarly, the share of participants who agree that the air is too polluted goes up on average by 1.2 percentage points and the share of participants who find their city too noisy rises by 0.9 percentage points. A 10% increase in city size also corresponds with an increase of 0.7 percentage points in the share of participants who find that basic necessities are too expensive as well as the share of participants who agree that it is difficult to find affordable housing.

Figure 7

Larger cities are more congested, polluted and noisy



When taking into account country-specific effects and comparing only cities within a country, the estimated effects of city-size on agreement with negative attributes more than doubles.<sup>4</sup> In this specification, statistically significant relationships can also be found between city-size and the share of participants who agree that streets are unclean as well as the share of participants who agree that they feel unsafe being alone on the streets after dark. These results indicate that the abovementioned relationship between negative attributes and city size is even larger when only cities within the same country are considered.

Even though city size is clearly correlated to the perception of negative attributes, it explains only 26% of the variation across cities. The remaining 76% in variation is due to city-specific factors that are unrelated to city size. This shows that the disamenities of urban life depend strongly on local contexts and indicates that downsides of life in big cities - such as congestion, pollution and high costs of living - can be successfully mitigated by the right policies.

## **SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS HAVE MODERATE EFFECTS ON PERCEPTIONS OF URBAN LIFE**

Perceptions of urban life differ depending on the personal circumstances of participants. Young people perceive certain aspects of a city differently than old people, just as a job seeker has different perceptions than someone employed in a well-paid job. To analyse differences in the perception of urban life, the perception of each surveyed dimension has been regressed on their socio-economic characteristics.<sup>5</sup> The results show that observable socio-demographic characteristics have some effects on an individual's perception of urban life but their influence among survey participants is moderate. In comparison, differences across cities matter much more than differences across all abovementioned socio-economic characteristics within one city.

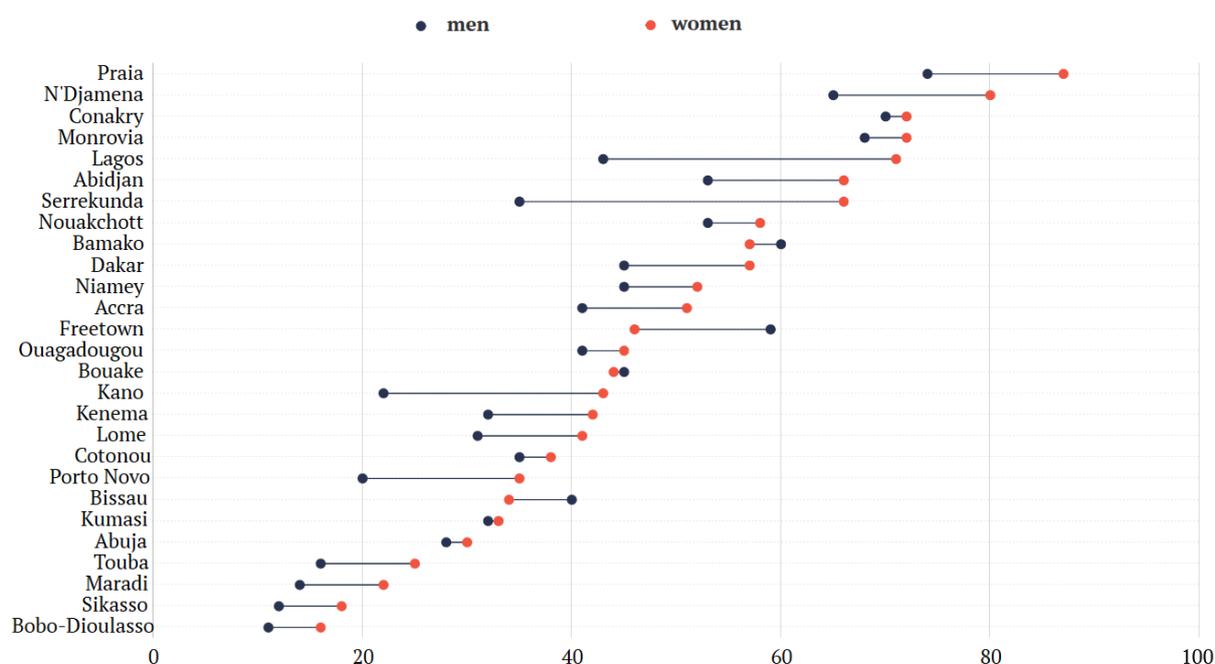
### ***Male participants tend to have a more positive perception of cities***

Between five and 10 percentage points more men than women agree that their cities are interesting, are good places to meet people and to find friends and that they are good places to go shopping. Men are also less concerned by air pollution and unclean streets, with approximately three percentage points fewer male than female participants agreeing with the respective statement. Gender has the strongest effect on whether participants agree that they often feel unsafe alone on the streets after dark (Figure 8). Women are eight percentage points more likely to agree that they feel unsafe than men. However, the comparison with Figure A.4 shows that the differences across cities in the perception of safety are much larger than the differences across gender.

Figure 8

Young women feel less safe than young men

Share of respondents aged 15-29 in % who agree that they often feel unsafe walking alone after dark



### ***Young people view their cities more positively than older people***

There is a strong relationship between age and a feeling of insecurity. Perhaps surprisingly, younger people tend to feel less secure alone than older people. For each 10% increase in age, the share of participants who agrees that they feel unsafe declines by one percentage point.

This aside, younger participants view their cities more positively than older participants. Age differences are most pronounced with respect to perceptions of public transport. A 10% increase in the age of participants reduces the share who agree that it is easy to move around the city by public transport by two percentage points. Older people are also less likely to find their cities interesting and to agree that it is easy to make friends. Moreover, a 10% increase in age leads to a one-percentage point increase in the share of participants who agree that it is difficult to find good housing and who consider basic necessities too expensive.

### ***Native residents are more satisfied with their cities than newcomers***

Natives are more likely to appreciate the social aspects of their hometowns than residents who were born elsewhere. Participants who moved to their city within the last year are 16 percentage points less likely to agree that it is easy to find friends than participants who were born there. The gap is smaller for participants who moved to the city further back in time, but it does not disappear. Even participants who moved to their city more than 10 years earlier are four percentage points less likely to agree that it is a good place to find friends.

Natives also have a more positive impression of their city along other dimensions, even if the differences are less pronounced. On average, they find their city more interesting, consider it easier to move around by public transport and are less bothered by insecurity, air pollution and noise. However, there is no sign that natives find it easier to obtain a job than people born elsewhere. No statistical differences exist between natives and non-natives when it comes to the share of participants in employment and the share of participants who agree that it is easy to find a job.

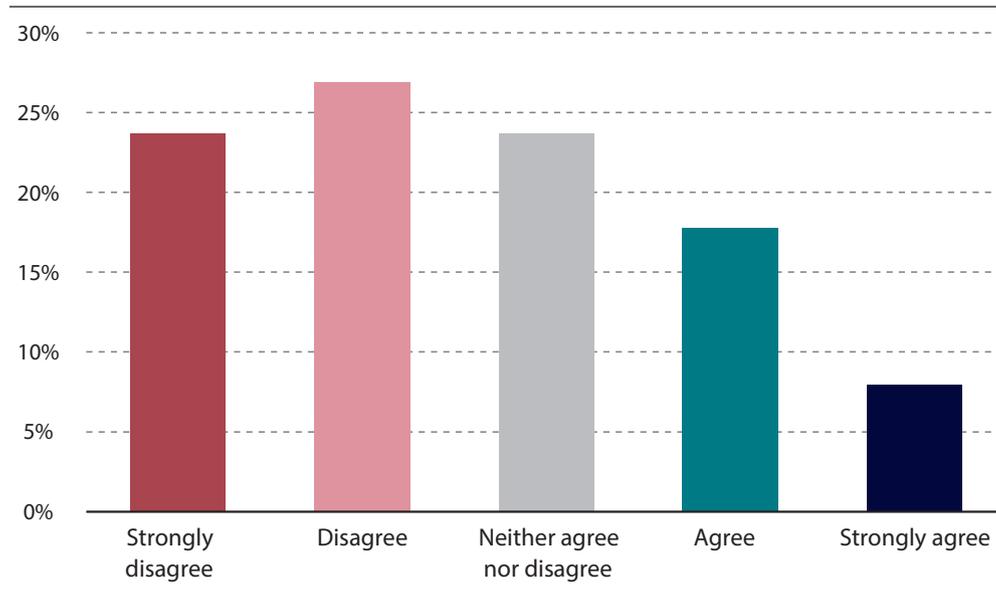
## COMMUTES IN WEST AFRICAN CITIES ARE SHORT, BUT FINDING A GOOD JOB IS DIFFICULT

### *Finding a good job in West African cities is challenging*

Cities are centres of economic activity, yet only 25% of participants agree that it is easy to find a good job in their city and more than half of participants disagree with the statement. The share of those that agree with the statement is particularly low in Bissau (Guinea-Bissau) and Lomé (Togo), at 10%. In contrast, Kano (Nigeria) and Maradi (Niger) are the only cities where majorities of participants agree that it is easy to find good jobs (56% and 53%, respectively). While these results highlight the importance of job creation in African cities, they need to be put into perspective. It is not unusual for job availability to be perceived poorly in perception surveys. For example, a perception survey of European cities found that only 37% of participants agreed that it is easy to find a job (Eurostat, 2019<sub>[6]</sub>).

Figure 9

It is easy to find a good job



Note: Average across 27 West African cities.

Not surprisingly, participants that are currently looking for work are 7.1 percentage points less likely to agree that it is easy to get a good job than those that are employed. Likewise, students are 6.8 percentage points less likely to agree that it is easy to get a job than the employed, while the gap for the self-employed is 3.8 percentage points. This potentially indicates that the decision to study or to become self-employed is partly a response to the difficulty of finding stable employment.

Age plays an important role in shaping perceptions around how easy it is to find a job, which is due to the effect of age on employment status. Older participants are significantly more likely to be in employment than younger participants. 54.7% of participants aged 30 and older are employed in somebody else's business, while the share is only 18.7% for participants younger than 30 years. When controlling for employment status, no differences exist among participants of different ages.

While 58% of participants also think that a good education is needed to find a good job, this is not reflected in the perceptions of better-educated participants, who do not find it easier to get a job than less educated participants. There is also no indication that people who have moved into a city within the last year find it more difficult to get a job. Their average occupational profile is virtually identical to those of participants of who have lived in the city for longer periods. Moreover, new arrivals are just as likely to agree that it is easy to find a job as other participants.

### ***Most participants have short commutes to and from work***

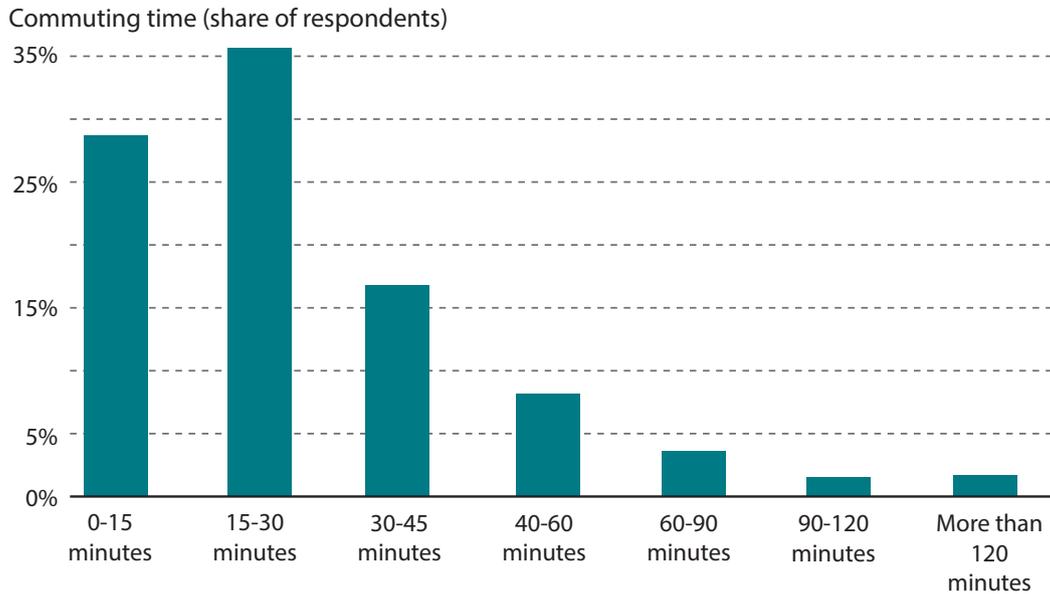
On average, 64% of participants spend less than 30 minutes (one way) on their commute (Figure 10). Not surprisingly, the average length of commutes depends strongly on the size of the city. On average, the share of participants who commute for more than 30 minutes increases by 1.4 percentage points when city-size increases by 10%. Lagos, the largest city in West Africa, has the longest commutes with 82% of participants indicating that they commute for more than 30 minutes each way. Likewise, in Abidjan and Accra, the second and third largest cities in the survey, more than half of participants commute for more than 30 minutes each way.

However, city-size is not the only factor determining the length of commutes. An irregular city shape is another important factor that causes long commutes. In Monrovia 63% of participants spent more than 30 minutes for their commute even though the city has only 1.2 million inhabitants. This is due to the elongated shape of the city on the Cape Mesurado peninsula, which creates congestion and separates it from the parts of the urban area that are located on the opposite bank of the Mesurado River. Likewise, Conakry and Serrekunda, the two other cities where a majority of participants commute for more than 30 minutes, are equally located on peninsulas.

Figure 10

Typical commuting times are less than 30 minutes

Share of participants by length (one-way) of their commute



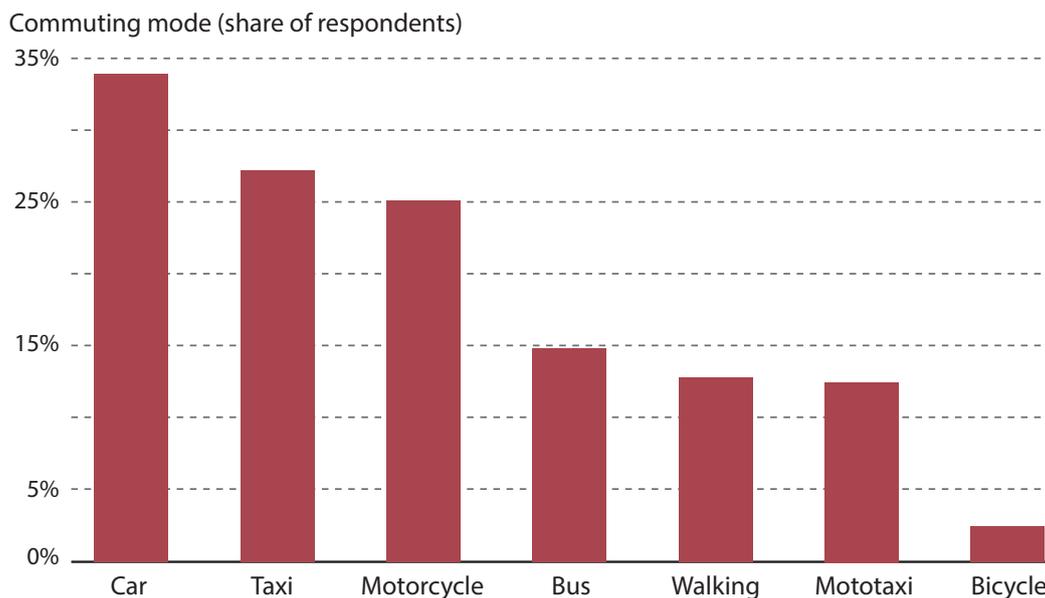
Note: Average of 27 West African cities.

Modes of commuting vary from city to city. On average, cars, taxis and motorcycles are each used by more than a quarter of participants (Figure 11).

Figure 11

Commuting by public transport or by walking is rare among participants

Share of participants by mode of commuting



Note: Average across 27 West African cities. Participants could indicate multiple modes of transport used for their commute.

However, in many cities there is one dominant mode of commuting. Motorcycles, for example, are used by 60% to 80% of participants in Bobo-Dioulasso, Kenema, Ouagadougou and Sikasso. More than 50% of participants in Abidjan, Bissau, Bouake and Serrekunda commute by taxi, while Lagos is the only city where more than 50% of participants commute by bus. Soft modes of transport (walking, cycling) are limited among participants. Significant minorities walk to work in Kenema (32%), Lagos (25%), Praia (24%), Toubia (23%) and Dakar, while Kano is the only city where more than 10% of participants cycle to work.

Commuting modes and commuting times are likely to depend strongly on the socio-demographic characteristics of the participant. Income levels influence where participants live and what modes of transport they can afford.

The lack of reliable information on the income of participants does not allow for in-depth analysis of this relationship but the data provides some indication that income matters strongly for commuting patterns. All else equal, participants that do not have stable employment are 15 percentage points more likely to commute more than 30 minutes each way than those that are employed. They are also 24 percentage points less likely to use their own car for commuting.<sup>6</sup>

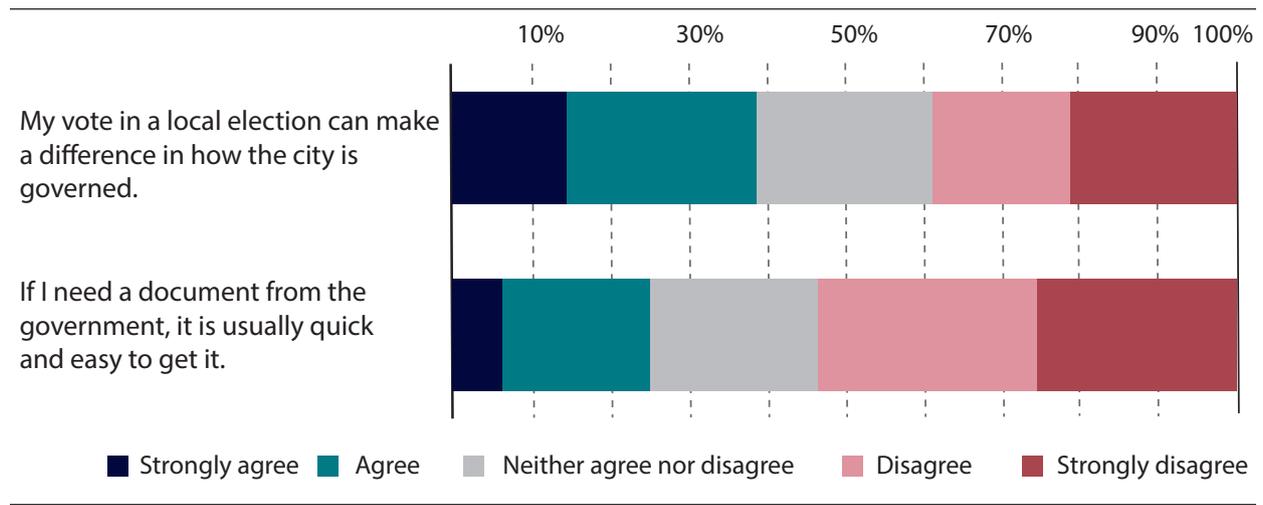
## **LOCAL GOVERNMENTS NEED TO IMPROVE THEIR RESPONSIVENESS AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

### ***Trust in the effectiveness and accountability of government is limited***

Less than 40% of the survey's participants agree that their vote in a local election makes a difference in how their city is governed. The effectiveness of public administrations is viewed even more sceptically with only 25% of participants agreeing that it is quick and easy to get a necessary document from the government.

A few notable exceptions stand out from the weak perception of local government effectiveness. Sikasso is the only surveyed city where more than half of all participants (53%) agree that it is quick and easy to get a document from the government, while in Bobo-Dioulasso, Bouake and Maradi more than 40% of participants agree with the statement. Notably, these cities are among the smallest in the sample. In contrast, results are more mixed with regard to perceptions of electoral accountability of governments. While in three cities (Abuja, Lagos and N'Djamena), less than 20% of participants think their vote in a local election makes a difference to how the city is governed, it exceeds 50% in eight other cities. Perhaps not coincidentally, Sikasso is also the city where most participants agree that their vote makes a difference to how the city is governed (69%). Other cities where more than half of all participants think their vote makes a difference include Bobo-Dioulasso, Bouake, Kenema, Maradi, Monrovia, Praia and Serrekunda.

Figure 12  
Perceptions of local governments

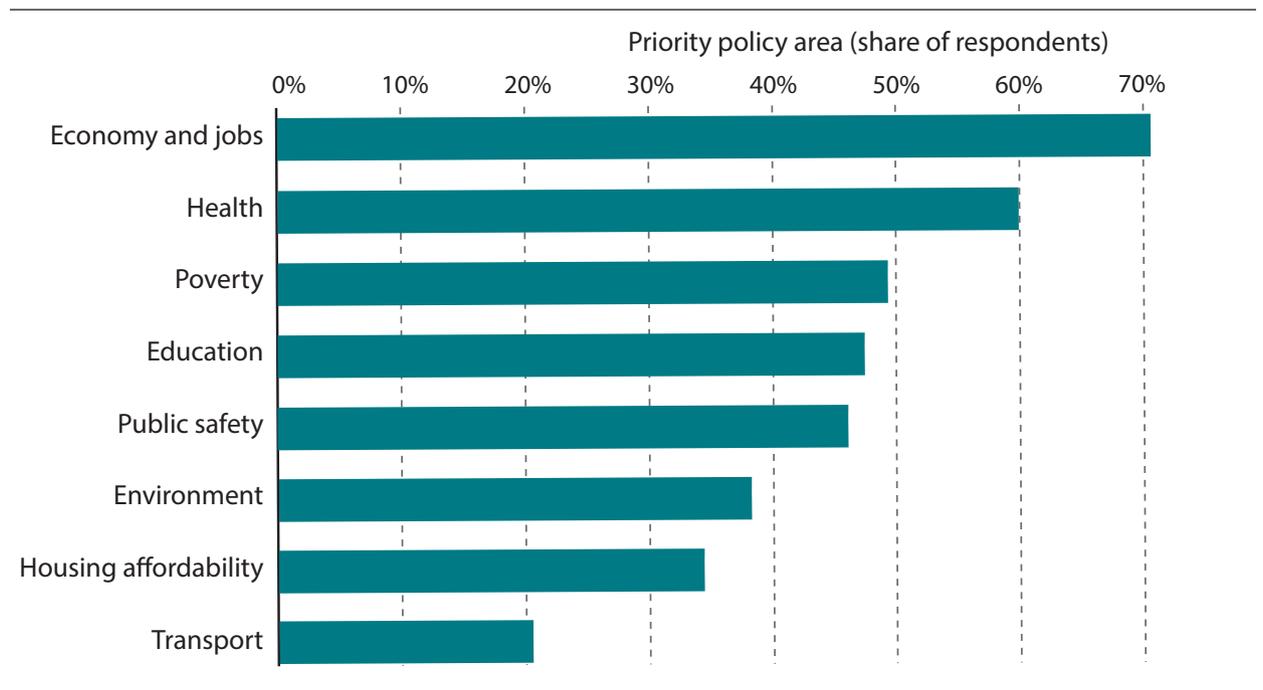


Note: Average across 27 West African cities.

**The economy is the top policy priority almost everywhere**

The results show that the economy is a clear priority for survey participants. When given the option to select multiple priorities out of a list of eight policy areas, 71% of participants choose the economy (Figure 13). It is not only the top priority, on average, across the 27 covered cities; but is also ranked first in 21 cities individually. This result is not surprising given that only 25% of participants agree that it is easy to find a good job (see above). It shows that governments’ performance will be primarily measured by their ability to build dynamic economies that benefit all residents.

Figure 13  
The economy is the top policy priority of urban West Africans



Note: Average across 27 West African cities. Participants could indicate multiple policy priorities.

Health care provision is the second most frequently chosen policy priority, listed by 60% of participants as a priority. As the survey was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the policy field might have received a boost in public attention from coverage of the crisis. The third most common policy priority is alleviating poverty, with 49% of participants indicating this policy area as a priority. It is closely followed by improving education policy (47%), public safety (46%), and environmental policies (38%). Housing policy (34%) and transport policy (20%) come in last.

The ranking of policy priorities is similar across the 27 cities, with only minor variations. Praia is a noticeable exception as the only city where participants rank reducing crime and improving public safety as the main policy priority. Likewise, Dakar stands out from other cities because participants rank environmental policy as the top priority. This policy field is commonly ranked sixth and only made it into the top three in Cotonou and Freetown besides Dakar.

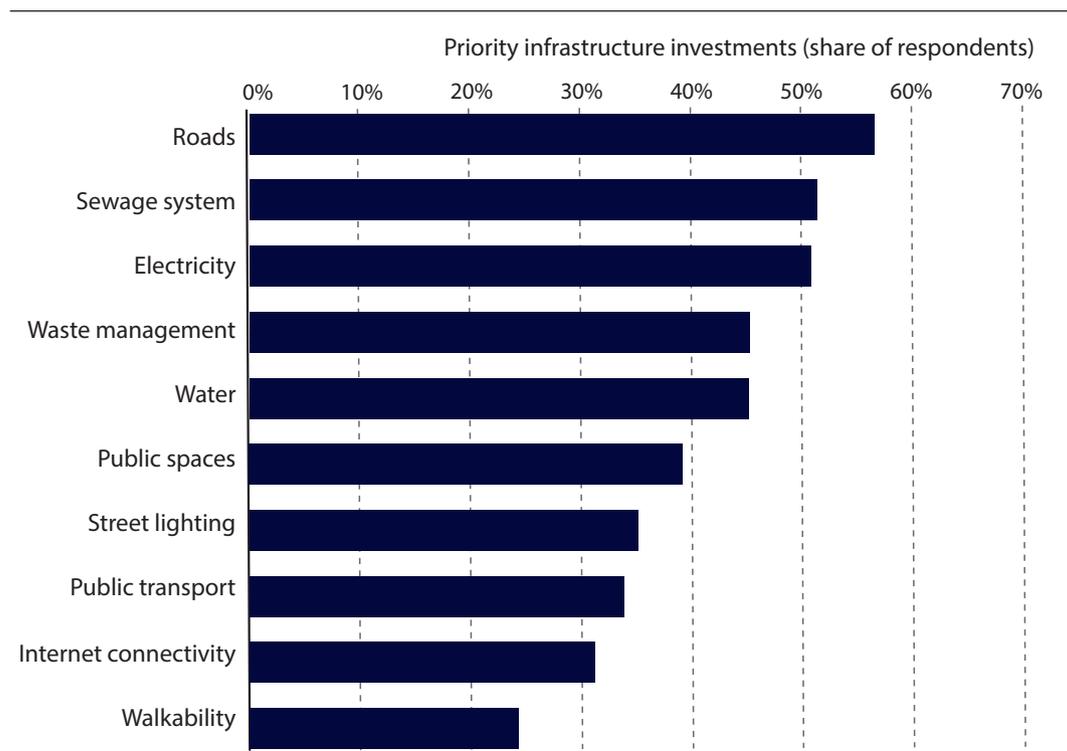
Policy priorities vary depending on the socio-demographic characteristics of participants, but the differences tend to be small and few obvious patterns emerge. For example, the share of participants who consider the economy a policy priority is 10 percentage points higher among participants that are currently looking for a job than among participants that are in employment. Likewise, the share of participants for whom housing is a policy priority is five percentage points higher among participants with children than among participants without children.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Infrastructure priorities differ strongly across cities***

To find out what urban residents perceive as the most urgent investment needs, the survey included a section on priorities for infrastructure investments. Participants could choose priorities out of a list of 10 types of infrastructure. From this list, three investment priorities are chosen by more than half of all participants: road infrastructure (56%), sewage infrastructure (51%) and electricity grid infrastructure (51%).

In the case of infrastructure priorities, the aggregate pattern hides important differences across cities – in contrast with the results on policy priorities, which are largely comparable across cities. For example, investing into the electricity grid is the top priority of participants in seven of the 27 surveyed cities (Freetown, Kano, Lagos, Monrovia, N’Djamena, Niamey and Serrekunda). The same investment priority ranks ninth out of 10 in the two surveyed Ghanaian cities, Accra and Kumasi. Likewise, the prioritisation of investments into water provision infrastructure varies strongly across cities. It ranks in the top three priorities in eight cities (Bissau, Bouake, Conakry, Dakar, Freetown, Kano, Monrovia and Praia), whereas it is among the bottom three priorities in three other cities (Cotonou, Kumasi and Porto Novo).

Figure 14  
Infrastructure investment priorities in West African cities



Another example includes the need to invest in public spaces. With 62% support, it is by far the most important investment priority for participants from Porto Novo, even though it ranks well below average in most other cities. Investment in making cities more walkable have the lowest priority in most cities but is ranked the third most important priority among participants in Praia.

Younger and older participants have different investment priorities. Younger participants are significantly more favourable of investments in internet connectivity and public spaces, whereas older participants place greater emphasis on investments in sewage systems, waste management, and water provision.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, other characteristics of participants, including occupation, education, gender and marital status are only weakly correlated to particular investment priorities.

# Conclusion and outlook

The West African City Survey has provided a snapshot of how urban residents in 27 cities perceive their quality of life. It shows that urban West Africans appreciate many aspects of their cities, even if common challenges persist. In most cities, the majority of participants find it easy to make friends, consider their cities more interesting than other parts of the country, like the convenience for shopping and ease of travelling around.

A key challenge in all but two of the surveyed cities is the perceived difficulty of finding a good job. This perceived lack of good jobs stands out from other challenges as it affects almost all of the 27 surveyed cities. In contrast, issues such as congestion, air pollution, noise, insecurity and high costs of living are perceived as major drawbacks in some cities but not in others. The fact that most downsides of urban life are much more dominant in some cities than in others indicates that they are not inevitable features of cities. Rather, they are determined by the evolution of cities over time and can be mitigated through good urban policies. The results for individual cities presented in Annex A can help policy makers and researchers identify cities that work well, along certain surveyed dimensions, and learn from their good practices. These results may also be of interest for local policy makers that seek to understand the views of residents or that aim at targeting policy priorities at the needs of the public. This, combined with stronger involvement of residents in policy planning and service delivery, could also improve the lack of trust in electoral accountability, a key challenge emerging from the survey.

The survey has also shown that the approach is easily scalable to cover a much larger number of cities and/or participants. It gives policy makers and researchers a tool to collect information on the views of citizens and use this information when developing public policies. Compared to traditional in-person surveys, costs and logistical challenges of such an approach are low. However, several caveats exist. The most important being that participants to the survey are disproportionately well educated and are likely to have much higher incomes than the average resident. Their responses are not necessarily representative of the views of poorer and less educated residents.

The possibilities offered by the survey's approach go well beyond data collection for research purposes and might even be adapted for use in public consultation procedures. Many cities across the globe already use digital consultation procedures to collect feedback from residents about planned infrastructure projects and policy initiatives. Given the technical ease of implementing such a platform, it requires only moderate administrative resources and has the potential to be used as a powerful new tool to interact with citizens.

## NOTES

- 1 Contact [africapolis@oecd.org](mailto:africapolis@oecd.org) to request data access.
- 2 This information has been collected through Google Analytics.
- 3 This and following results are based on a simple OLS regression of the share of participants who agree with a statement on log population size a city (i.e.  $agree_i = \beta_1 \log(pop_i) + \epsilon_i$ ). Including country-dummies in the regression tends at least to double the size of the point estimate. All results are significant at the 95% confidence level, except the result on costs-of-living, which is significant at the 90% confidence level without country-dummies and significant at the 95% confidence level when including country dummies.
- 4 By including a set of country-dummies in the OLS regression.
- 5 The following linear regression is estimated for each perception-based question:  
 $agree_{ri} = \beta_1 \log(age_{ri}) + gender_{ri} + child_{ri} + educ_{ri} + occup_{ri} + tlived_{ri} + city_i + \epsilon_{ri} \quad (2)$   
 $agree_{ri}$  is a dummy-variable that takes the value 1 if the participant  $r$  in city  $i$  agrees or strongly agrees with the respective statement and 0 otherwise.  $age_{ri}$  is the age of the participant in years.  $gender_{ri}$  and  $child_{ri}$  are dummy variables, indicating the gender of the participant and whether he or she has children.  $educ_{ri}$  is a set of dummy variables for the education level of the participant (no education, primary education, secondary education, undergraduate degree, graduate degree).  $occup_{ri}$  is a set of dummy variables indicating the occupation of the participant (employed, self-employed, student, caring for family, looking for work, retired).  $tlived_{ri}$  is a set of dummy variables indicating the time the participant has lived in the city (less than 1 year, 1-3 years, 3-5 years, 5-10 years, more than 10 years, born in the city). Finally,  $city_i$  is a set of dummy variables indicating in which of the 27 covered cities the participant lives. Unless otherwise mentioned, all subsequent results are based on coefficients from these estimations that are statistically significant at the 95% or higher confidence level.
- 6 Results based on a linear regression, which is using the share of participants who select the respective commuting mode/commuting time as left-hand-side variable and the set of covariates listed in equation (2) as right-hand-side variables. The coefficients mentioned are statistically significant at the 99% confidence level.
- 7 Results based on a linear regression using support of each policy priority as left-hand-side variable and the set of covariates listed in equation (2) as right-hand-side variables. The coefficients mentioned are statistically significant at the 99% confidence level.
- 8 Results based on a linear regression using support of each investment priority as left-hand-side variable and the set of covariates listed in equation (2) as right-hand-side variables. The coefficient on log-age is significant at the 99% confidence level in all specifications.

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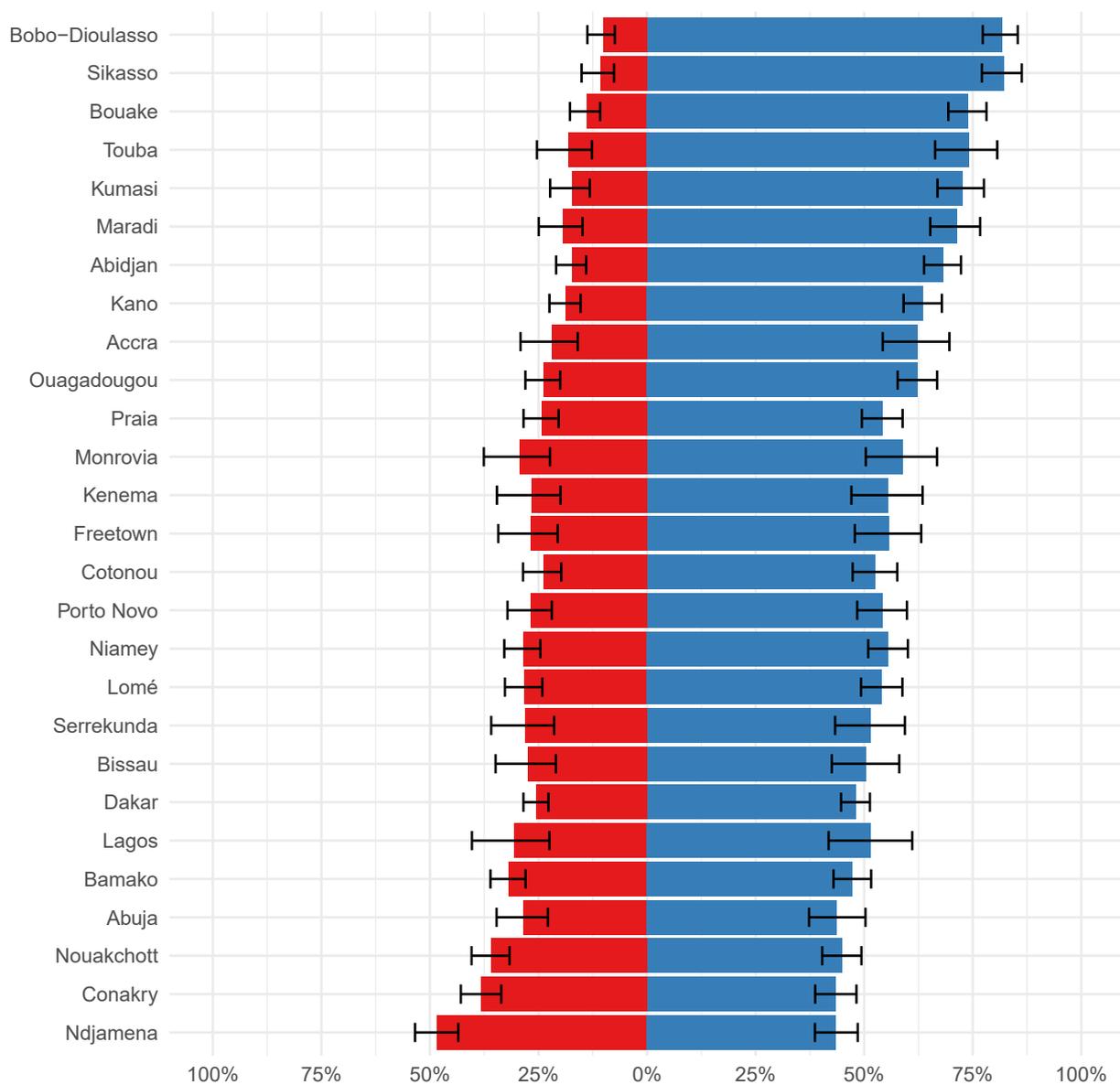
# Annex A. Perception of urban life by city

All figures also show 95% confidence intervals that provide a measure of the random variation in outcomes that occurs when a random sample of a finite size is drawn. Confidence intervals vary in size across cities because the number of participants differs across cities (Table 1). It is important to keep them in mind in particular when comparing outcomes across cities. The more strongly confidence intervals overlap, the higher the probability that different responses across cities are just statistical noise rather than reflecting systematic differences across the cities.

## PERCEPTION OF URBAN LIFE

Figure A.1

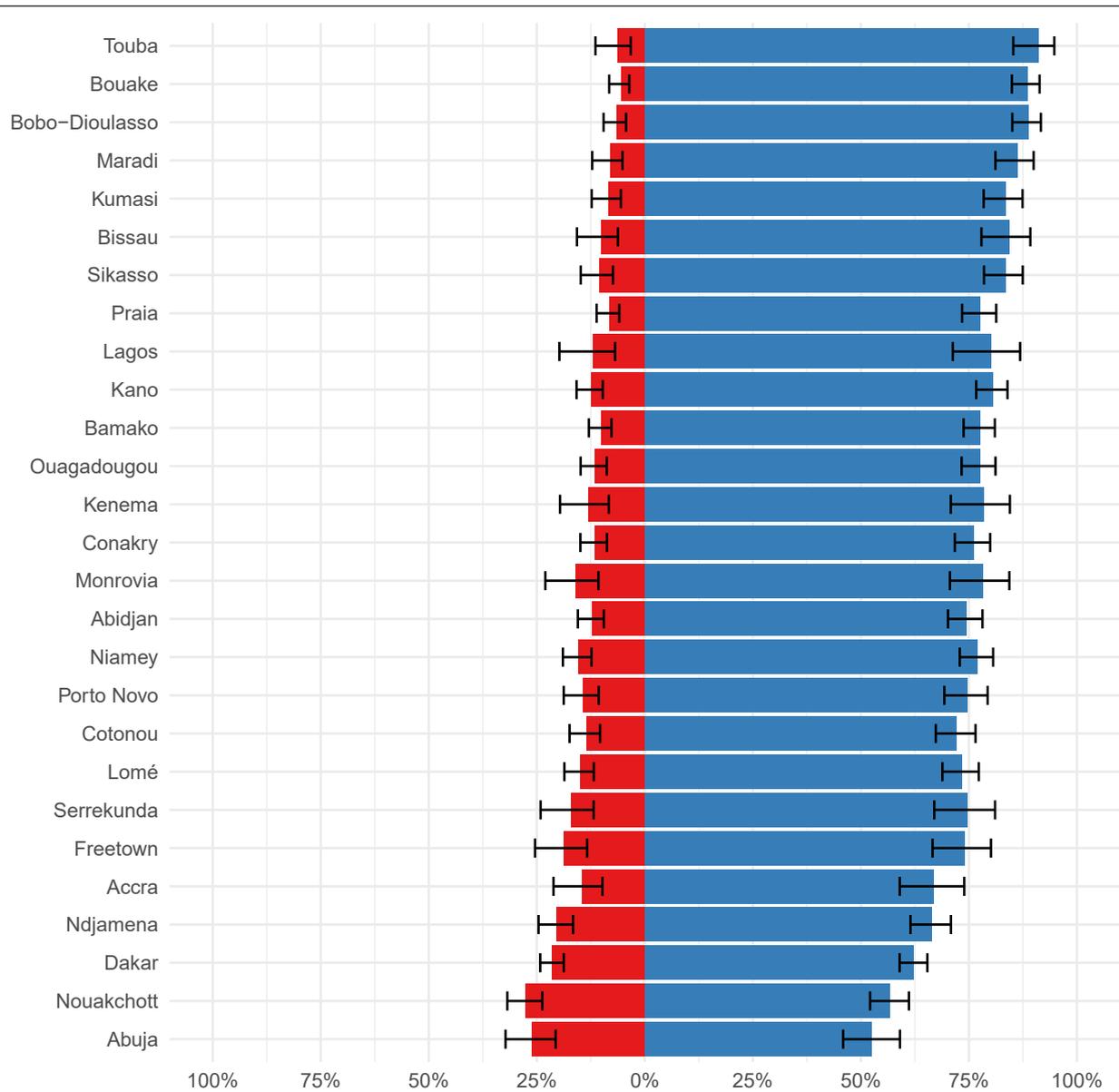
Life is more interesting than in other parts of the country



Note: Red bars indicate the share of participants who disagree/strongly disagree; blue bars indicate the share of participants who agree/strongly agree. The 95% confidence interval for sampling errors is provided by the corresponding whiskers.

Figure A.2

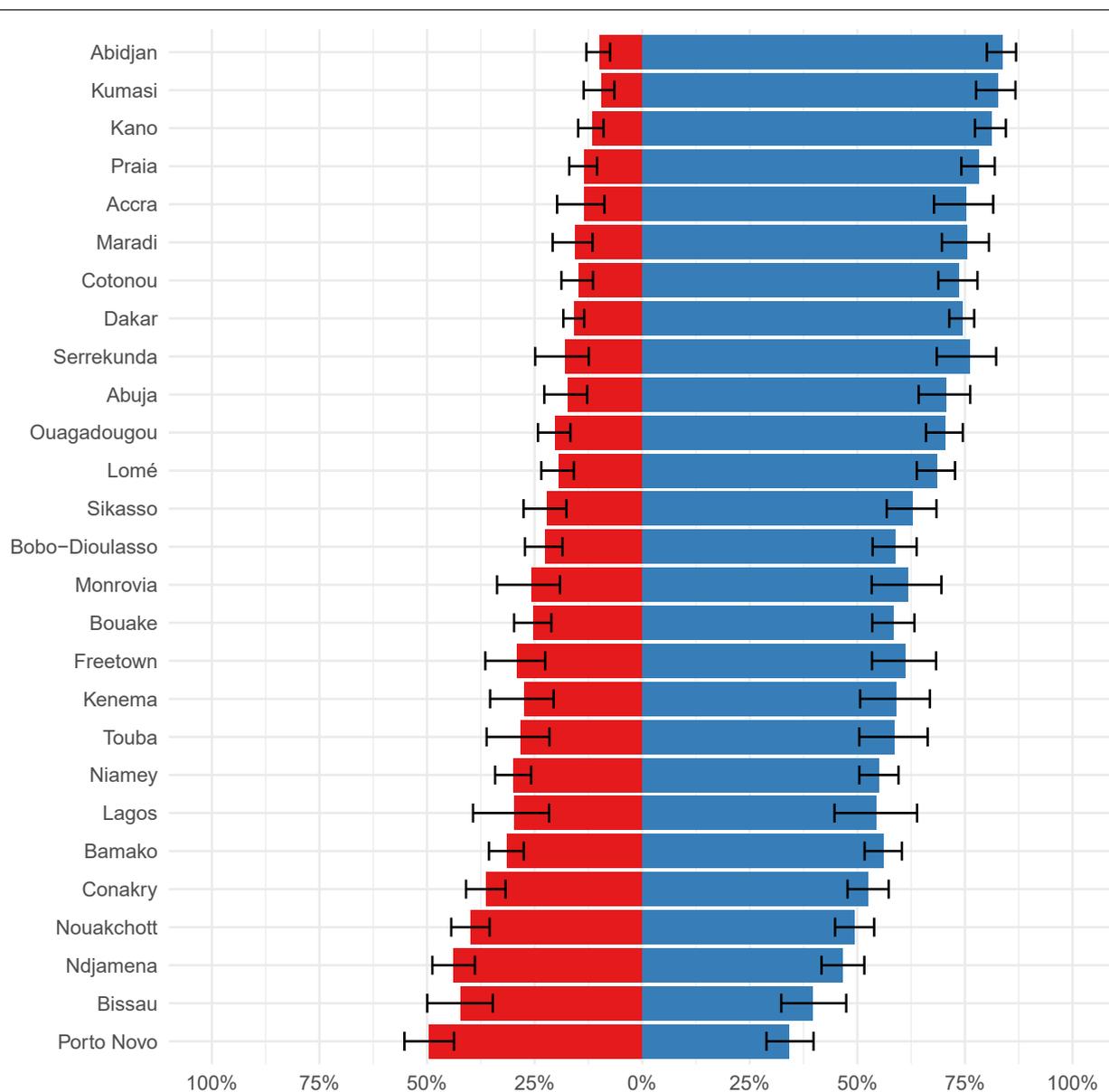
It is easy to meet people and find new friends



Note: Red bars indicate the share of participants who disagree/strongly disagree; blue bars indicate the share of participants who agree/strongly agree. The 95% confidence interval for sampling errors is provided by the corresponding whiskers.

Figure A.3

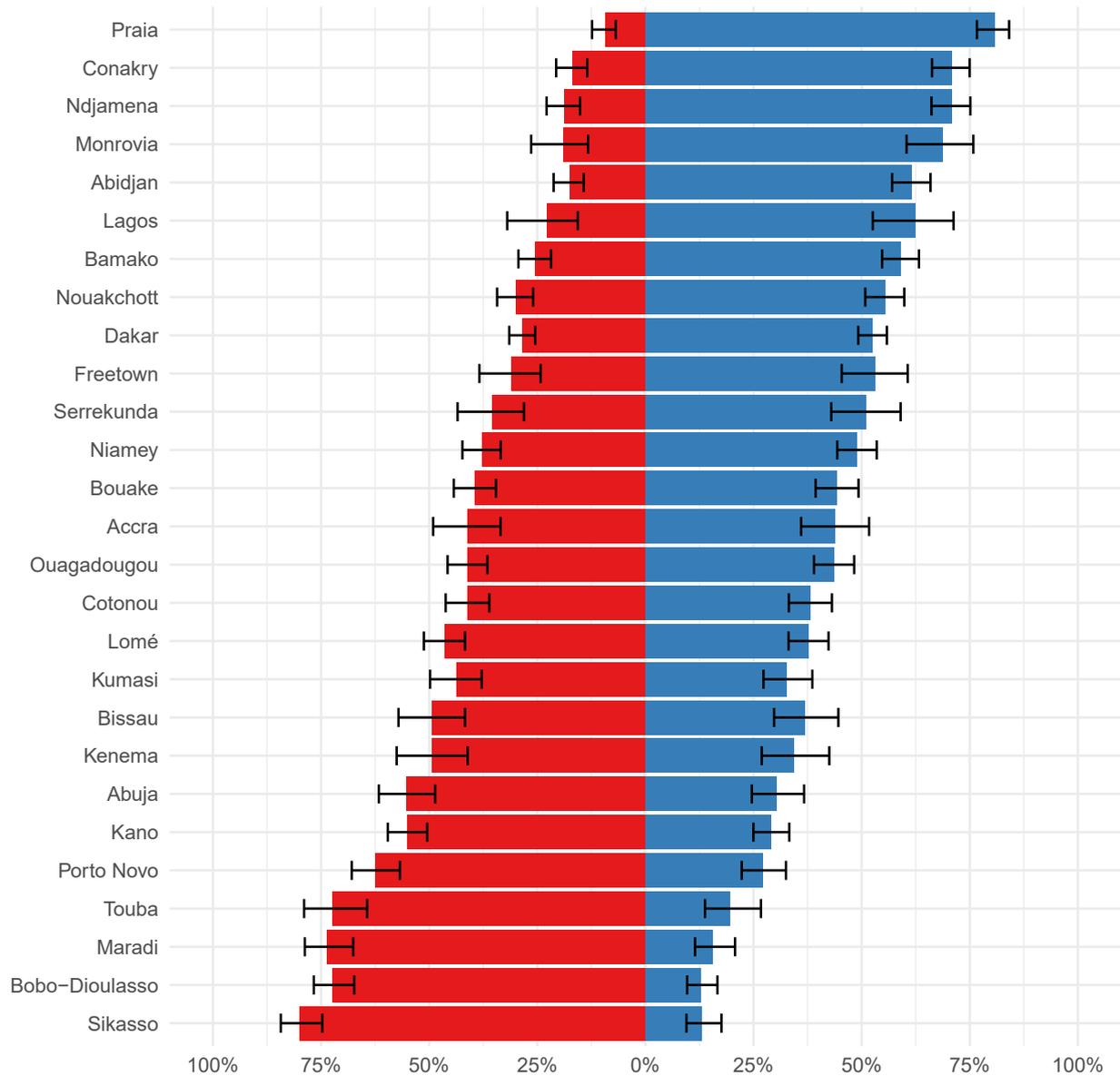
It is more convenient to go shopping and buy the things I want than in other places



Note: Red bars indicate the share of participants who disagree/strongly disagree; blue bars indicate the share of participants who agree/strongly agree. The 95% confidence interval for sampling errors is provided by the corresponding whiskers.

Figure A.4

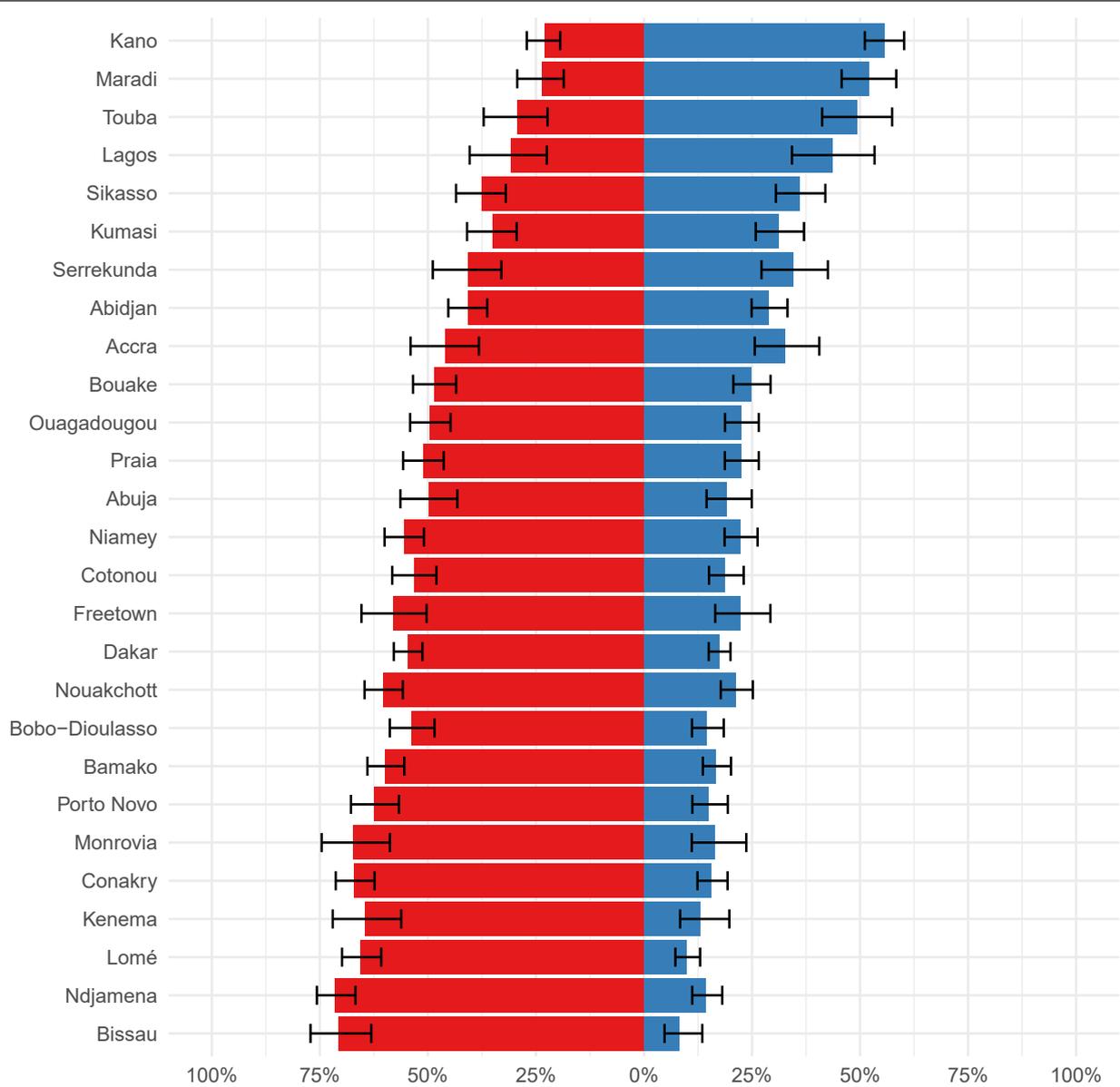
I often feel unsafe when walking alone in the streets after dark



Note: Red bars indicate the share of participants who disagree/strongly disagree; blue bars indicate the share of participants who agree/strongly agree. The 95% confidence interval for sampling errors is provided by the corresponding whiskers.

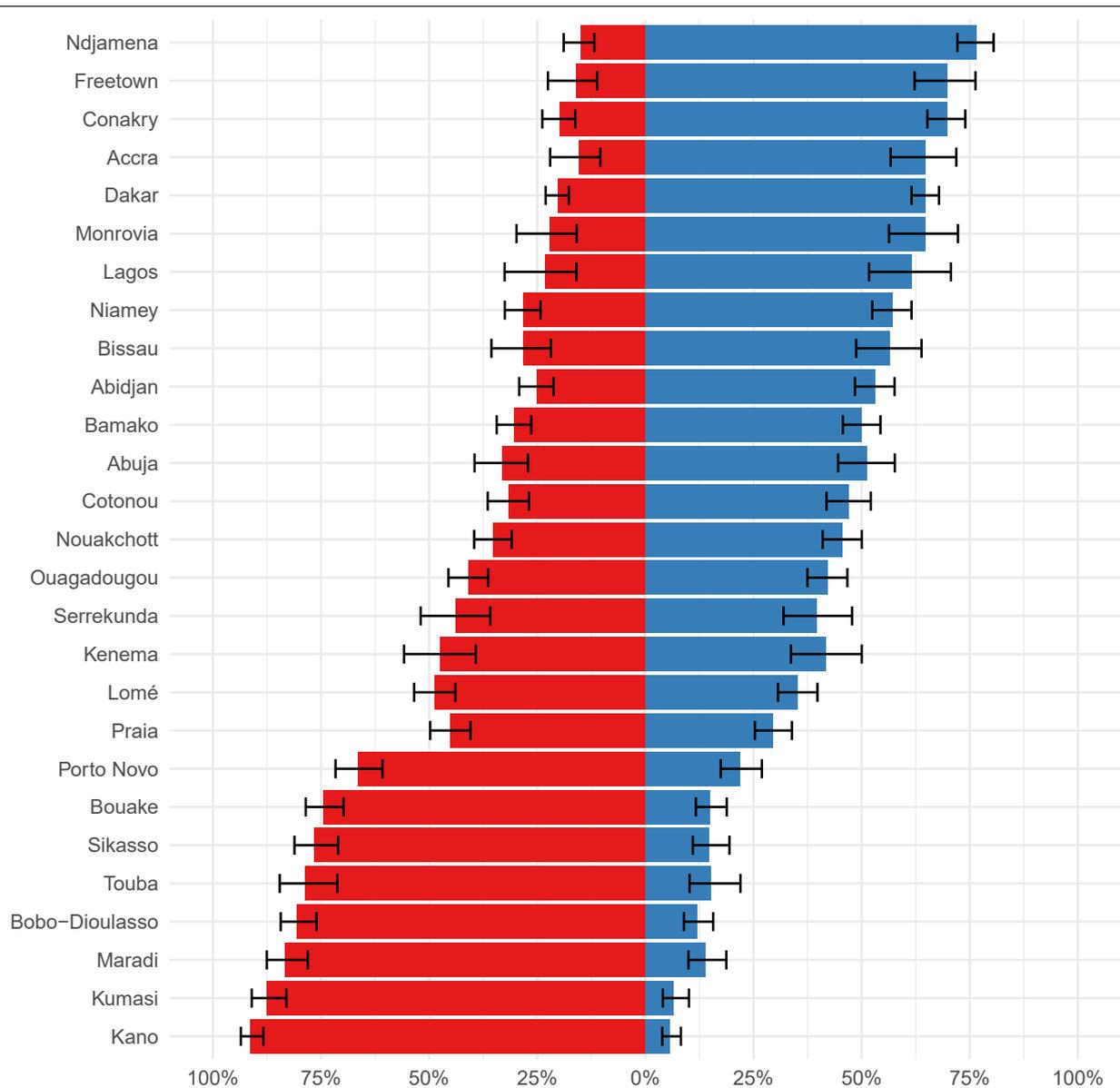
Figure A.5

It is easy to find a good job and earn money



Note: Red bars indicate the share of participants who disagree/strongly disagree; blue bars indicate the share of participants who agree/strongly agree. The 95% confidence interval for sampling errors is provided by the corresponding whiskers.

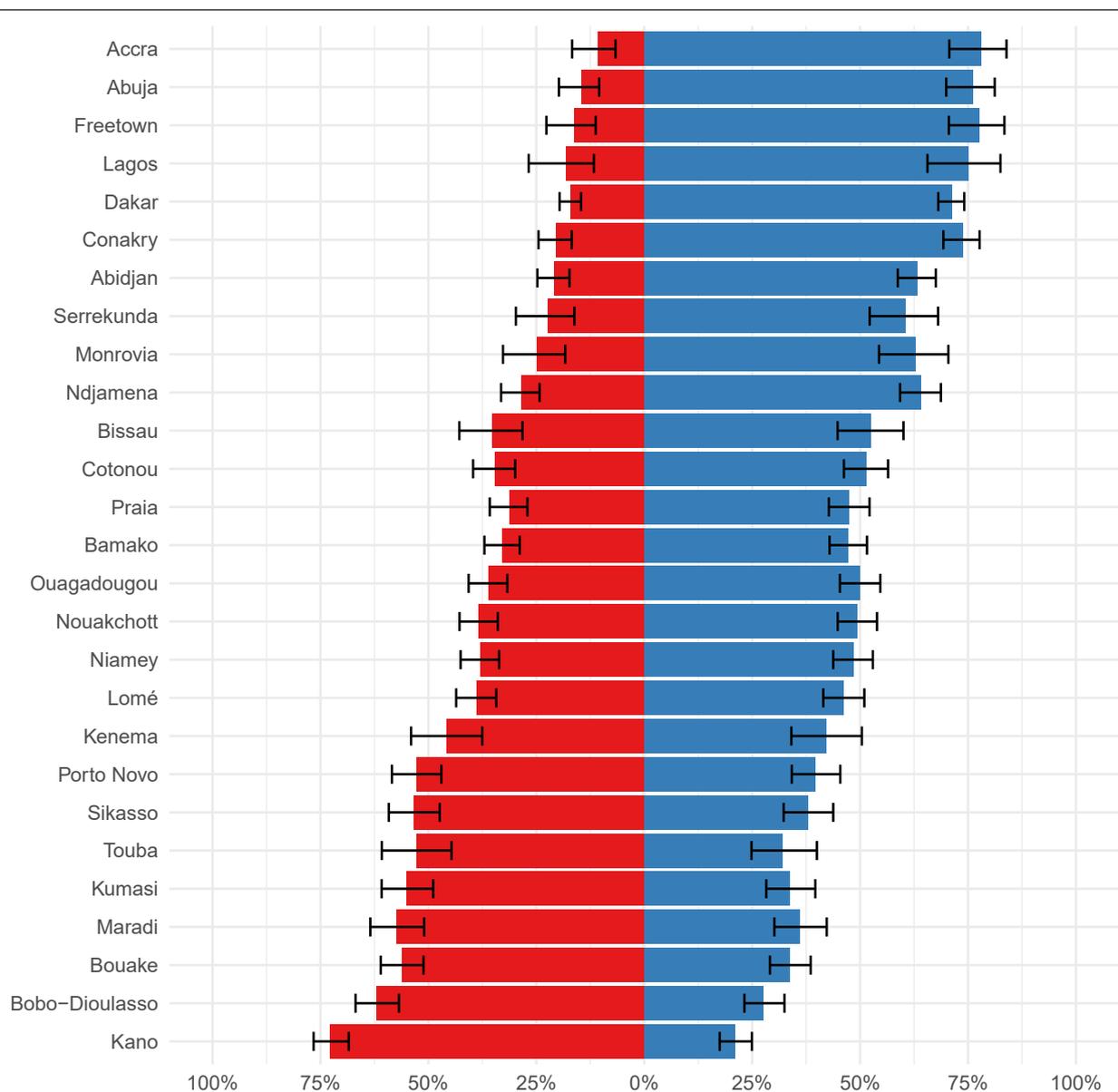
Figure A.6  
Food and other basic necessities are too expensive



Note: Red bars indicate the share of participants who disagree/strongly disagree; blue bars indicate the share of participants who agree/strongly agree. The 95% confidence interval for sampling errors is provided by the corresponding whiskers.

Figure A.7

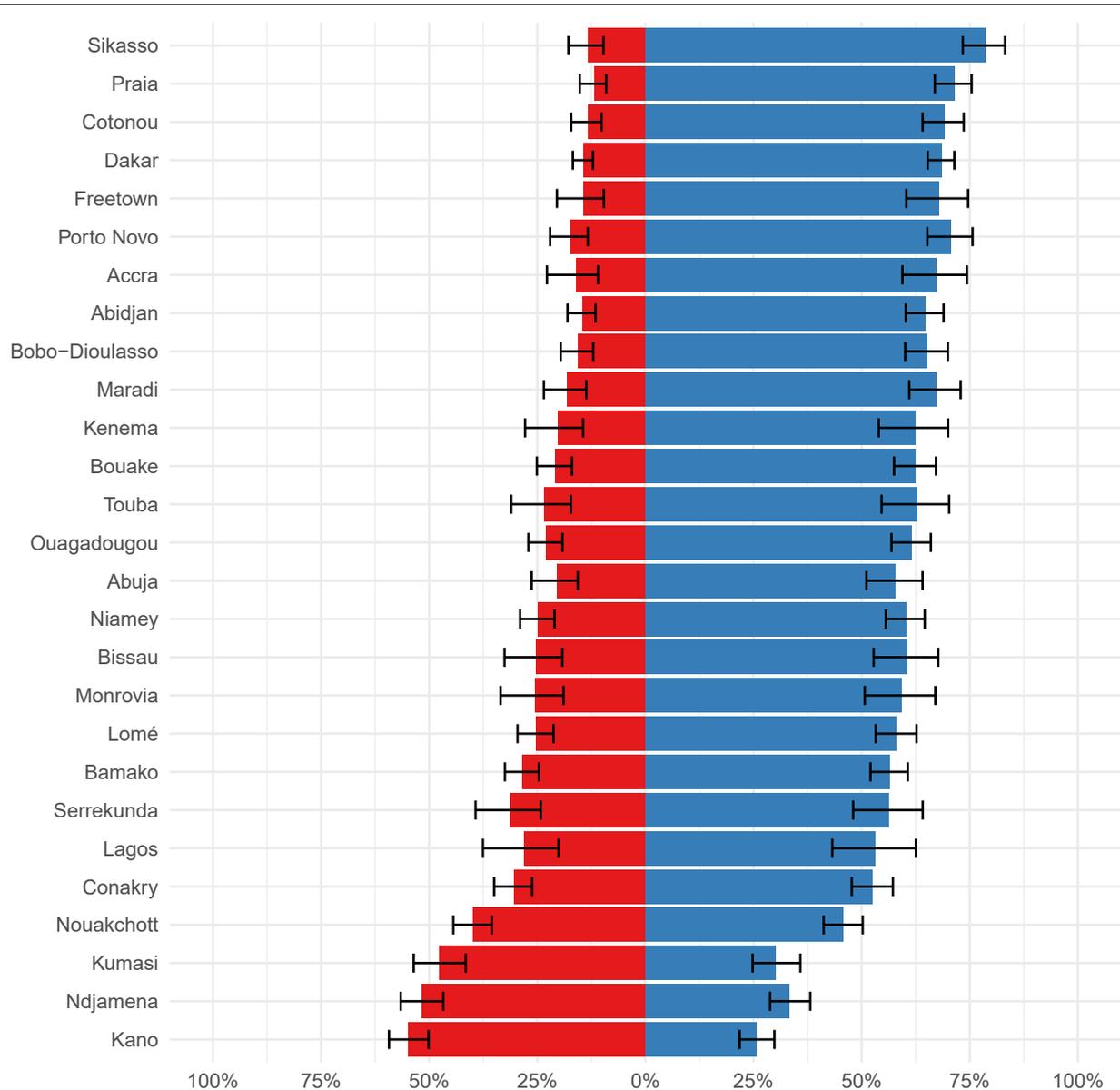
It is difficult to find good housing that is affordable



Note: Red bars indicate the share of participants who disagree/strongly disagree; blue bars indicate the share of participants who agree/strongly agree. The 95% confidence interval for sampling errors is provided by the corresponding whiskers.

Figure A.8

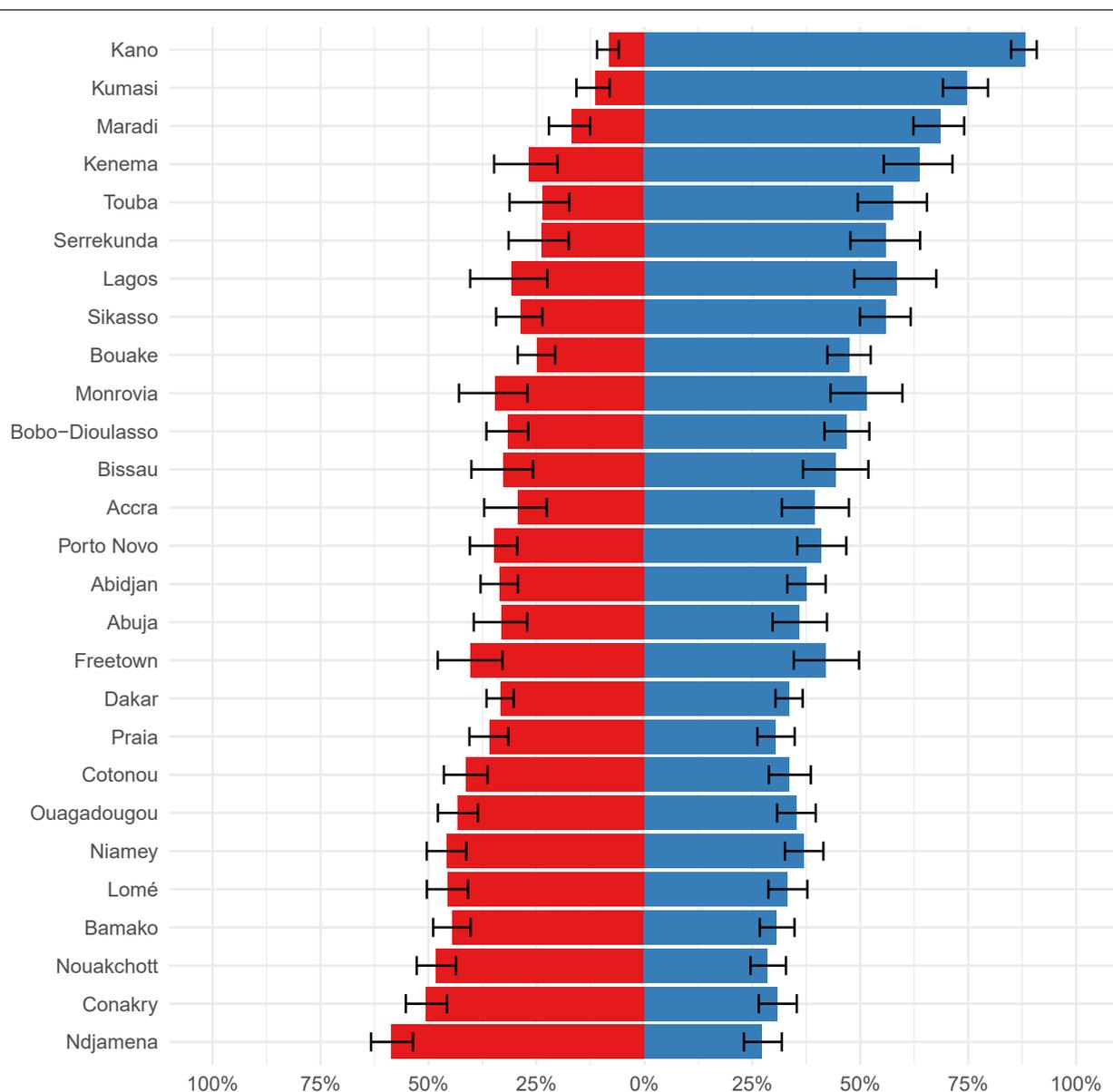
You need a good education to find a good job



Note: Red bars indicate the share of participants who disagree/strongly disagree; blue bars indicate the share of participants who agree/strongly agree. The 95% confidence interval for sampling errors is provided by the corresponding whiskers.

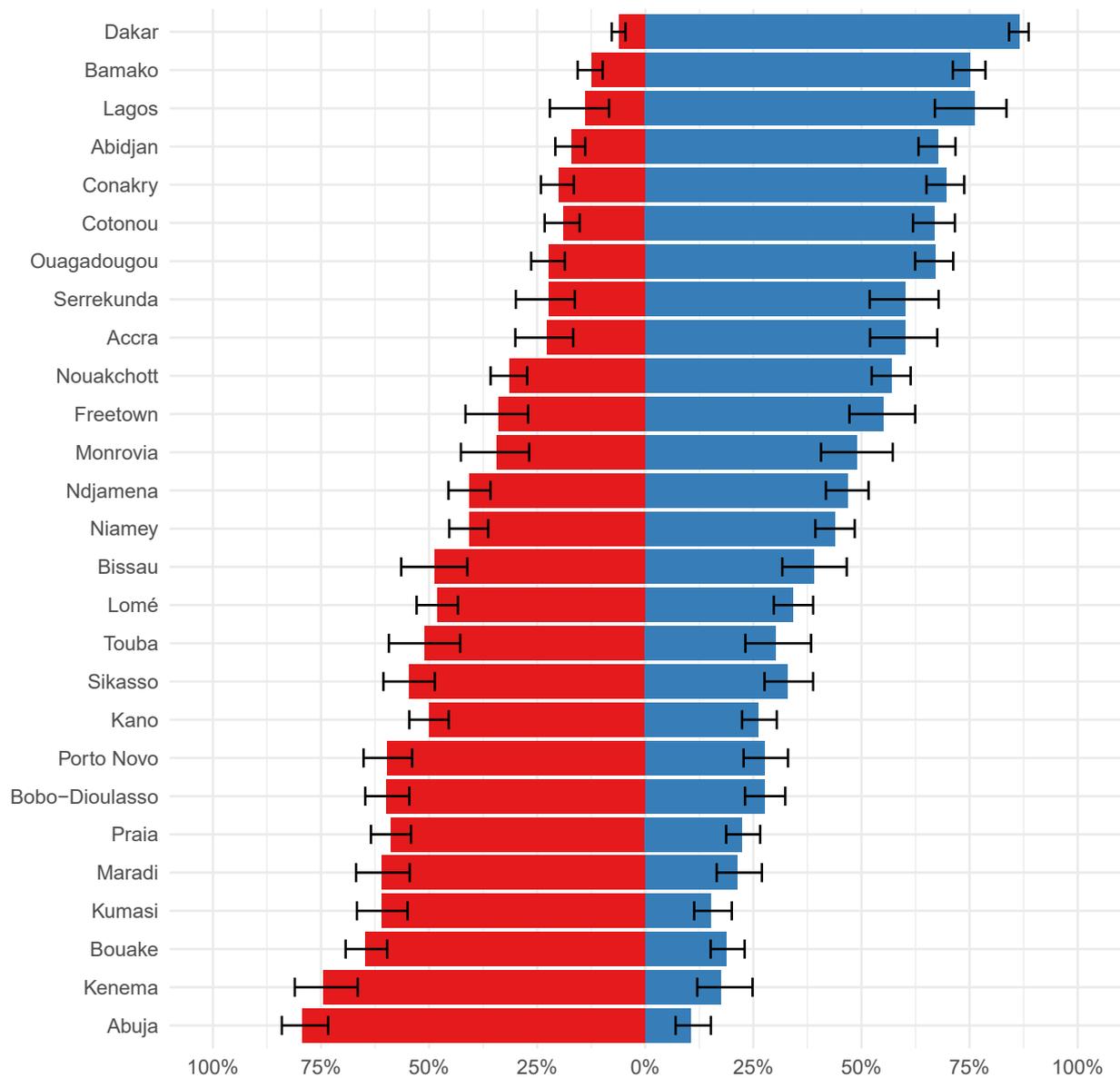
Figure A.9

It is easy to start your own business



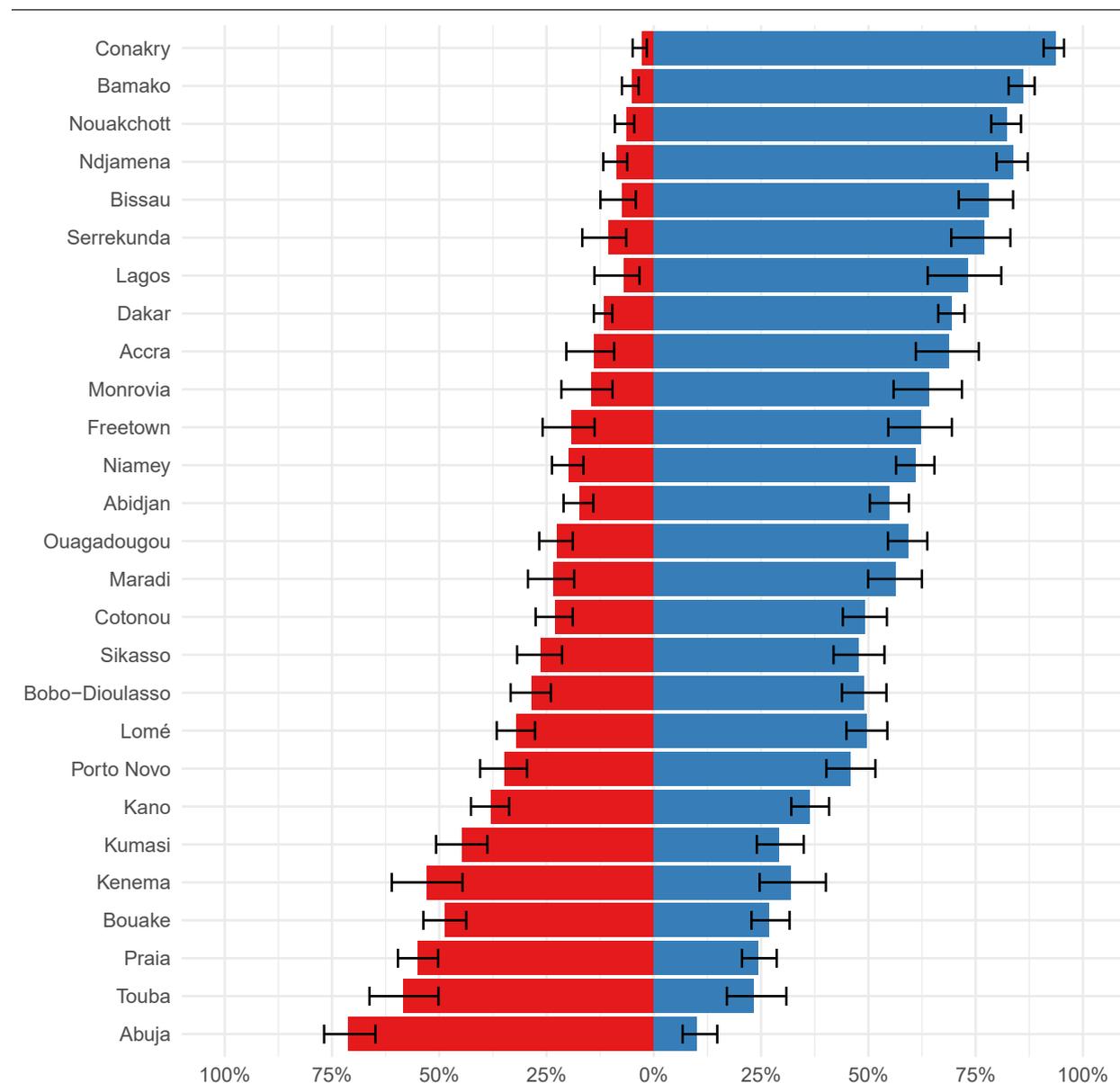
Note: Red bars indicate the share of participants who disagree/strongly disagree; blue bars indicate the share of participants who agree/strongly agree. The 95% confidence interval for sampling errors is provided by the corresponding whiskers.

Figure A.10  
The air is often polluted



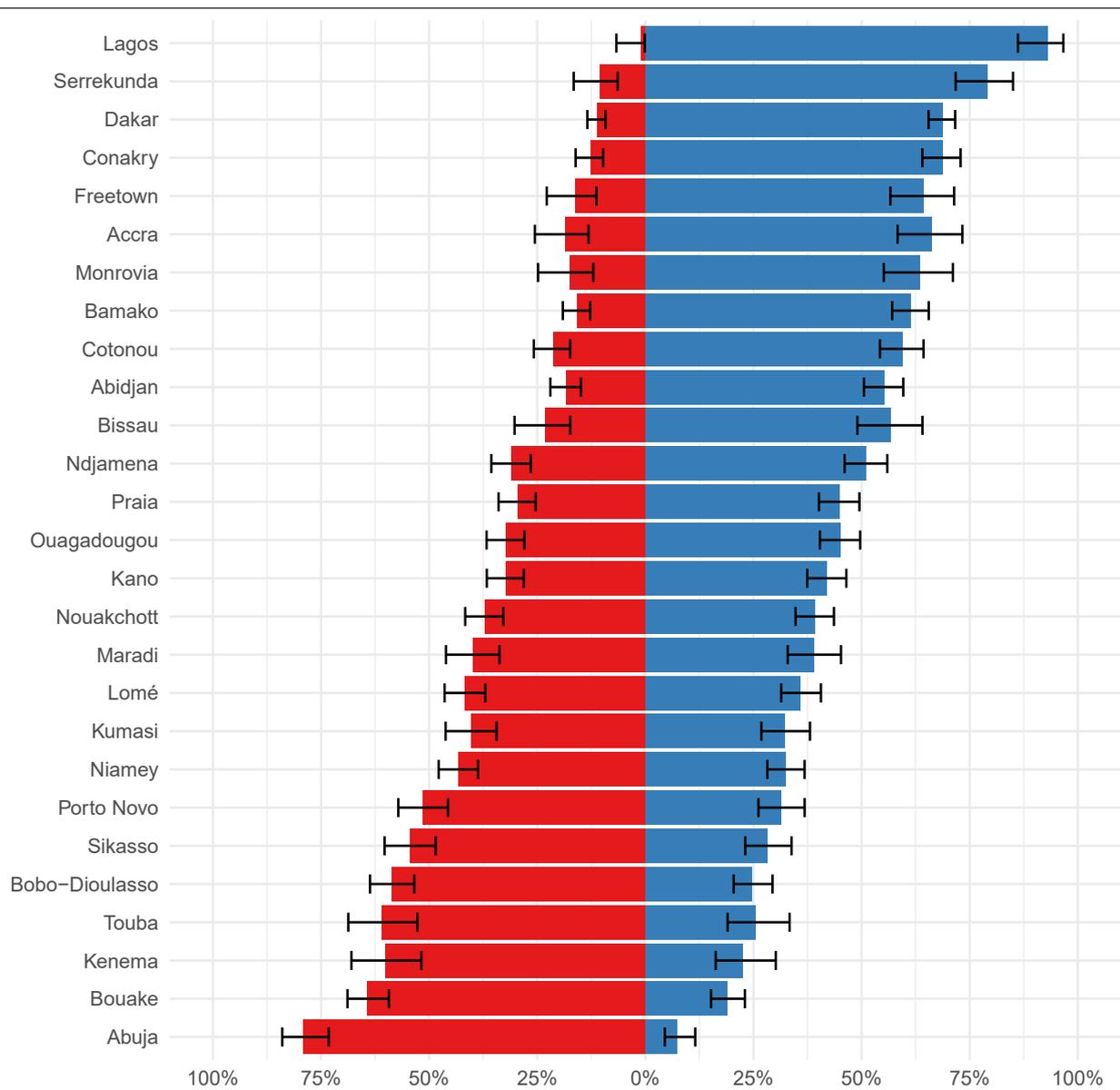
Note: Red bars indicate the share of participants who disagree/strongly disagree; blue bars indicate the share of participants who agree/strongly agree. The 95% confidence interval for sampling errors is provided by the corresponding whiskers.

Figure A.11  
The streets are dirty



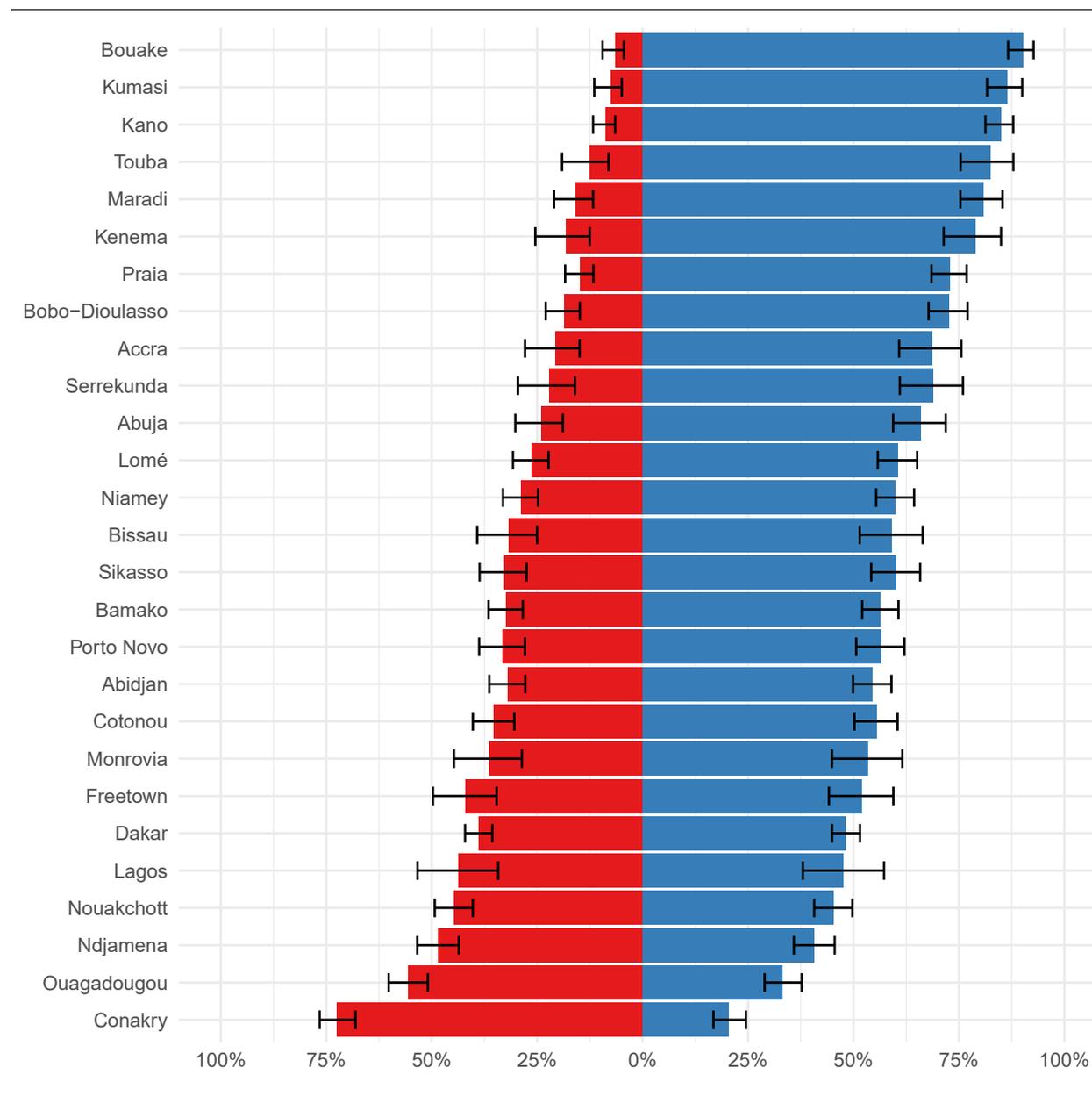
Note: Red bars indicate the share of participants who disagree/strongly disagree; blue bars indicate the share of participants who agree/strongly agree. The 95% confidence interval for sampling errors is provided by the corresponding whiskers.

Figure A.12  
There is too much noise



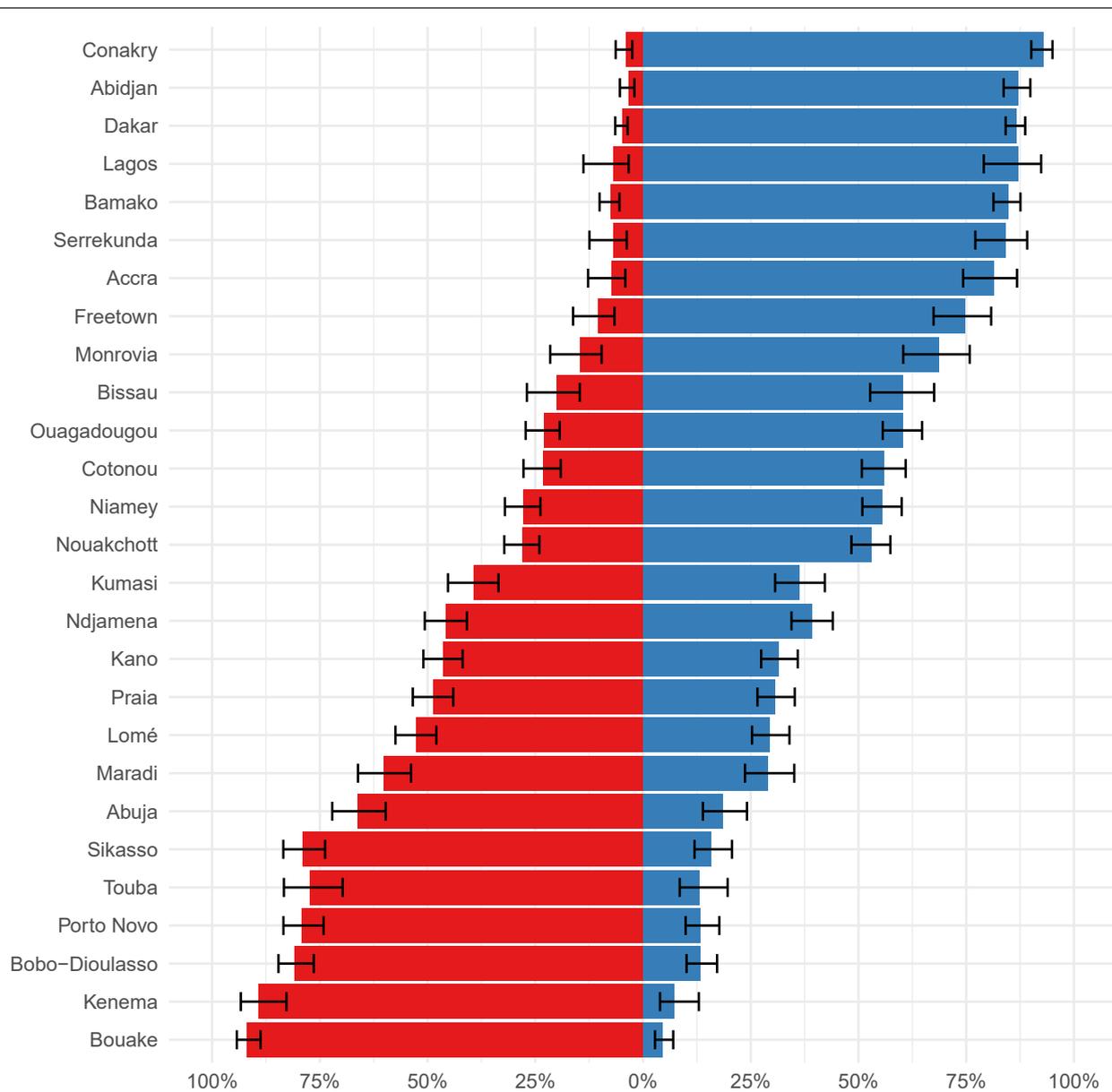
Note: Red bars indicate the share of participants who disagree/strongly disagree; blue bars indicate the share of participants who agree/strongly agree. The 95% confidence interval for sampling errors is provided by the corresponding whiskers.

Figure A.13  
It is easy to go from one part of my city to another by public transport



Note: Red bars indicate the share of participants who disagree/strongly disagree; blue bars indicate the share of participants who agree/strongly agree. The 95% confidence interval for sampling errors is provided by the corresponding whiskers.

Figure A.14  
I am often stuck in traffic jams

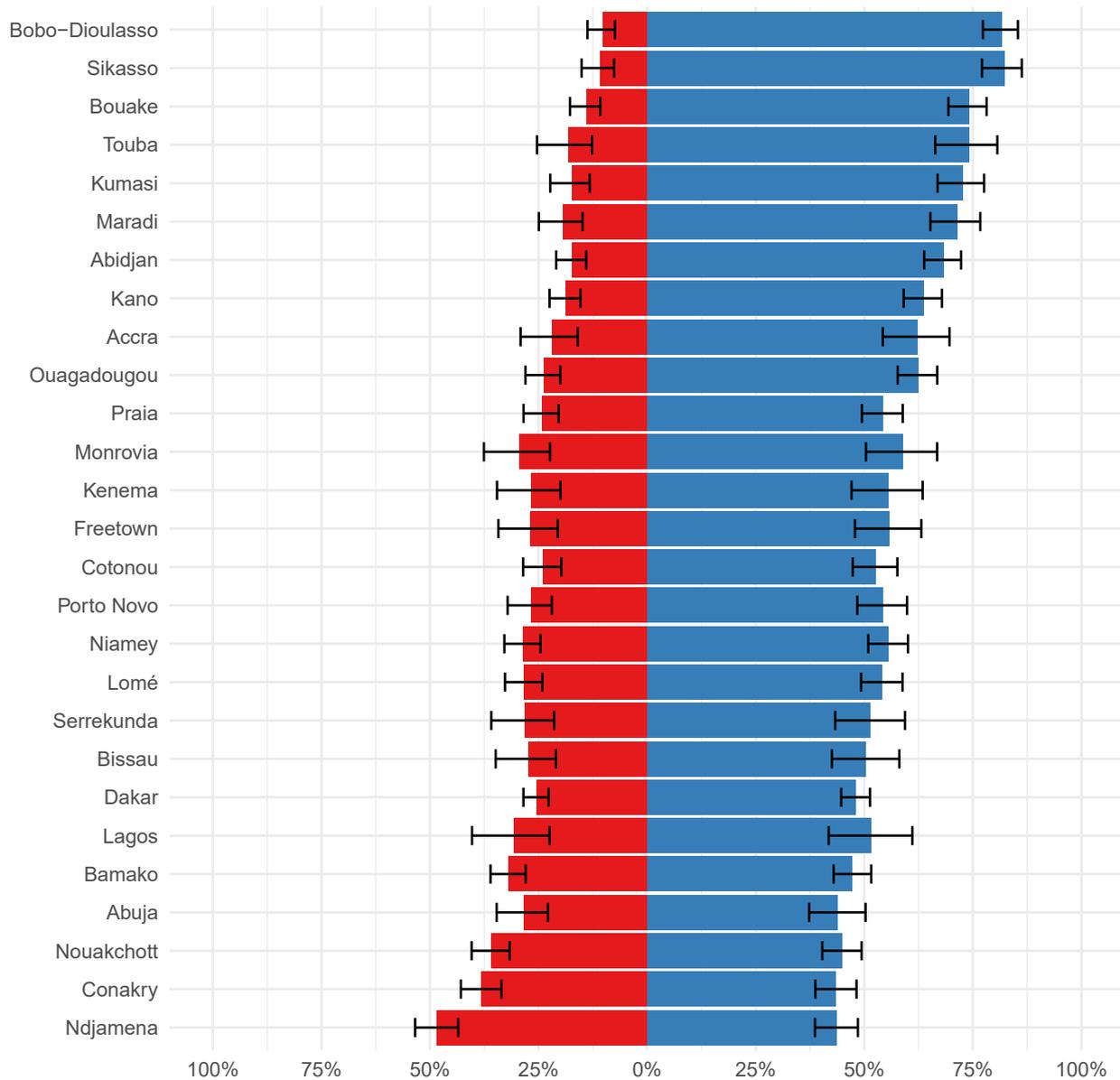


Note: Red bars indicate the share of participants who disagree/strongly disagree; blue bars indicate the share of participants who agree/strongly agree. The 95% confidence interval for sampling errors is provided by the corresponding whiskers.

## PERCEPTIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND POLICY PRIORITIES

Figure A.15

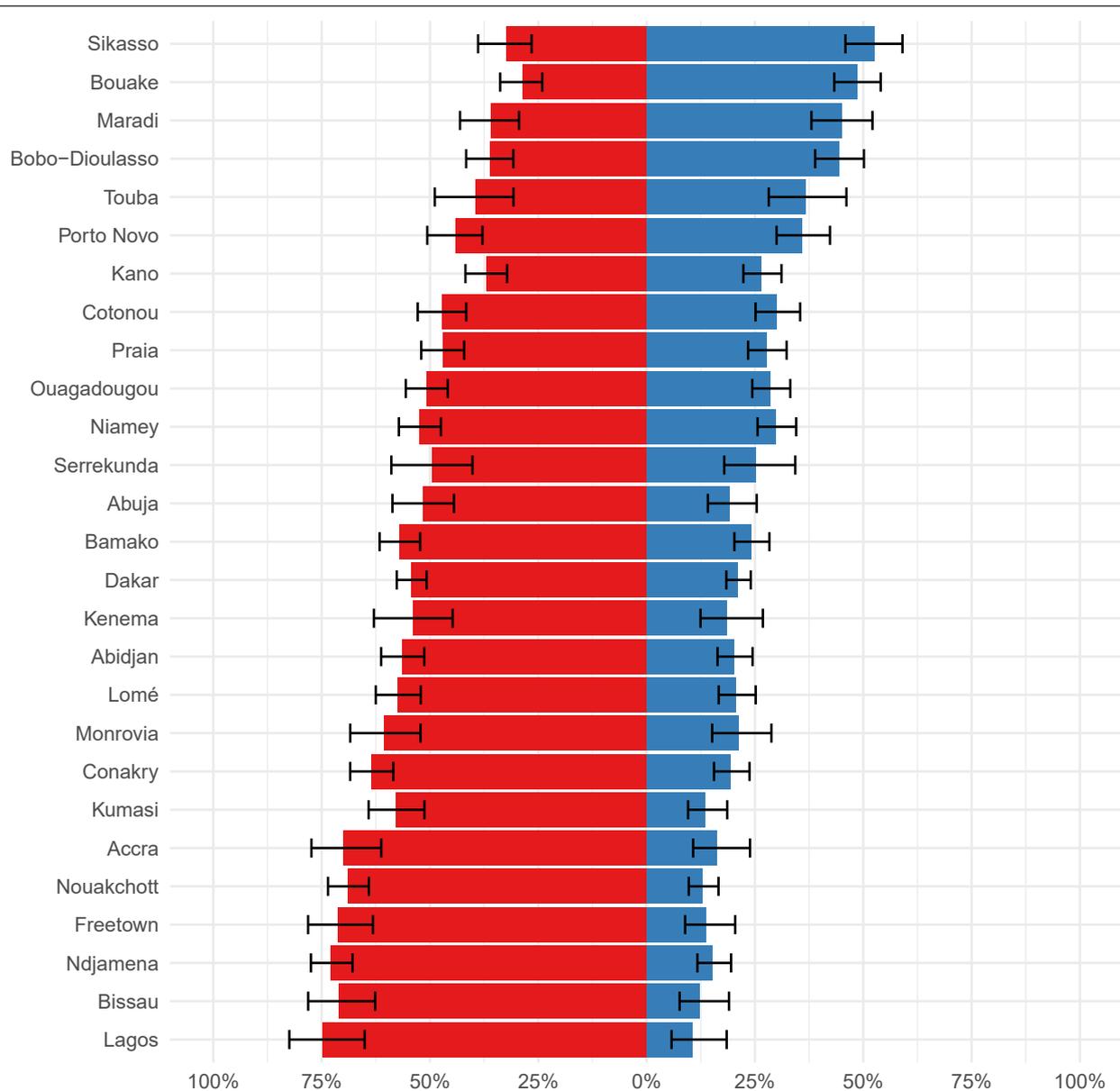
If I need a document from the government, it is usually quick and easy to get



Note: Red bars indicate the share of participants who disagree/strongly disagree; blue bars indicate the share of participants who agree/strongly agree. The 95% confidence interval for sampling errors is provided by the corresponding whiskers.

Figure A.16

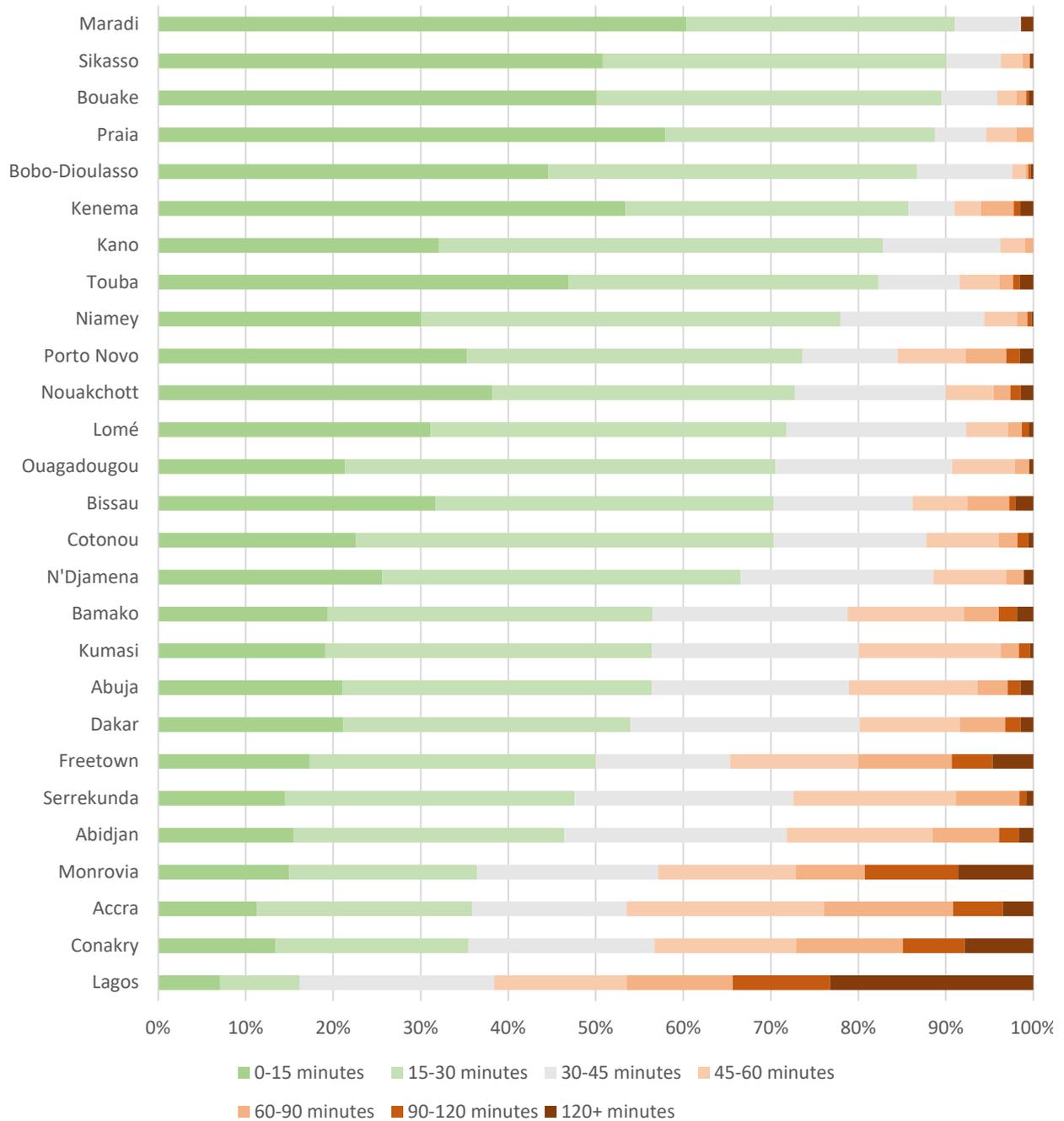
My vote in a local election can make a difference in how the city is governed



Note: Red bars indicate the share of participants who disagree/strongly disagree; blue bars indicate the share of participants who agree/strongly agree. The 95% confidence interval for sampling errors is provided by the corresponding whiskers.

## COMMUTING TIMES AND MODES

Figure A.17  
Length of daily commute (one-way)



# Annex B. Questionnaire

**Instructions:** Please tell us whether you agree or disagree with the following statements about your city. When you have answered all questions, click on 'submit' at the bottom of the page to see what other people think about your city. Answering the entire survey will not take more than 10 minutes!

## Perception of urban life:

On a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:

### In my city:

1. Life is more interesting than in other parts of the country
2. It is easy to meet people and find new friends
3. It is more convenient to go shopping and buy the things I want than in other places
4. I often feel unsafe when walking alone in the streets after dark
5. It is easy to find a good job and earn money
6. Food and other basic necessities are too expensive
7. It is difficult to find good housing that is affordable
8. You need a good education to find a good job
9. It is easy to start your own business
10. The air is often polluted
11. The streets are dirty
12. There is too much noise
13. It is easy to go from one part of my city to another by public transport
14. I am often stuck in traffic jams
15. If I need a document from the government, it is usually quick and easy to get it
16. My vote in a local election can make a difference in how the city is governed

### Commuting:

17. To go to work, I usually [walk, cycle, take a motorcycle, drive, take a bus, take a taxi, take a mototaxi, other] – select all that apply
18. To go to work, it takes me [less than 15 minutes, 15-30 minutes, 30-45 minutes, 45-60 minutes, 60-90 minutes, 90-120 minutes, more than 120 minutes] – choose one

**Policy priorities:**

19. Which of the following tasks of the government do you consider most important for your city? (select three)
- Creating more jobs and improving the economy
  - Improving the environment (reducing air pollution, noise, waste management, etc.)
  - Improving housing affordability and quality
  - Improving the quality and accessibility of health care
  - Improving the quality of schools and making it easier for people to attend them
  - Reducing crime and improving public safety
  - Reducing poverty and helping the poorest
  - Reducing traffic congestion
20. What are the most important infrastructure investments in your city? (select three)
- Improving public transport
  - Improving roads
  - Making it easier and safer for pedestrians to walk around the city
  - Improving the attractiveness of public places and creating more parks to make the city more liveable
  - Improving the stability and speed of internet connection
  - Providing electricity to more households and improving the stability of the electricity supply
  - Providing more households with clean running water
  - Improving the sewage and water drainage system
  - Improving street lighting
  - Improving waste collection and disposal

**Personal information:**

21. What is your age?
22. What is your gender?
23. In which city do you live?
24. How long have you been living in your city?
25. How many children do you have?
26. How many people live in your household?
27. What is your level of education?
28. What is your occupation?
29. How much money do you earn every month?

# Annex C.

## Sampling procedure

The survey has been conducted online. Participants have been recruited through advertisements on Facebook that were targeted to individual cities and demographic groups. For each city, four different ads were used targeting young men, young women, old men and old women, whereby the young group covered age 15-29 and the old group was defined as 30 years and older. Thus, a total of 108 different ads were run on Facebook, each of which was shown only to users in a particular city and demographic group. Ad settings on Facebook were set to maximise the number of clicks that the ad receives.

By clicking on the ad, users were redirected to the survey platform. Each ad used a distinct URL to redirect participants, which made it possible to identify the home city and demographic group of each participant based on Facebook's automatic classification and allowed a cross-validation of the self-reported information with the information provided by the Facebook algorithm. No personal information that would allow the identification of a participant has been collected.

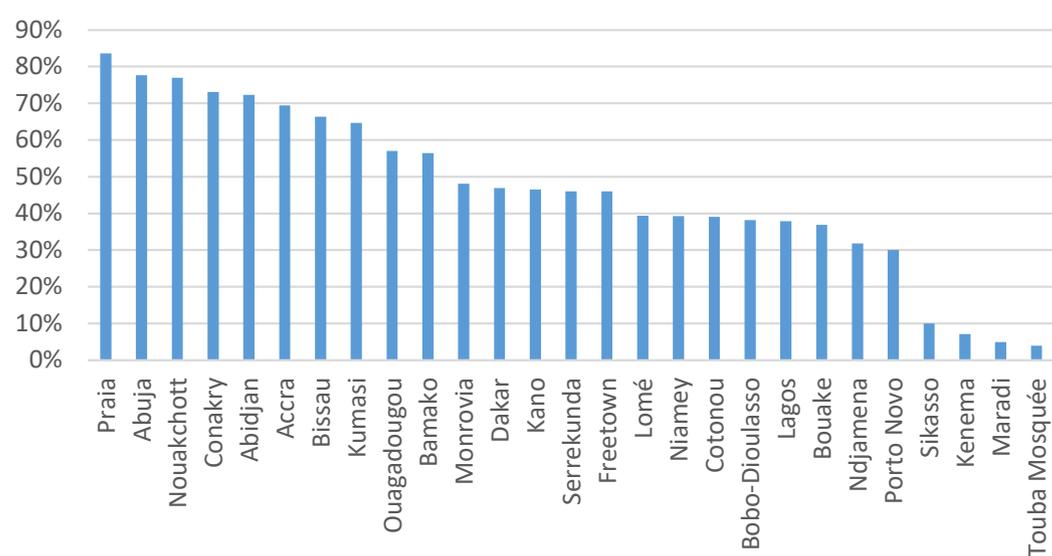
Response rates and sample sizes vary strongly across cities (Table 1) due to several reasons. The share of Facebook users that click on the ad after seeing it differs across cities as well as the share of user who submit the completed questionnaire after reaching it by clicking on the Facebook ad. Moreover, Facebook charges for ad impressions based on a dynamic pricing algorithm. Thus, the number of users that can be reached for a given ad budget vary significantly across cities. This affects the number of participants as the initial survey design allocated an identical ad budget for each city.

Even though the survey design aims at obtaining a roughly representative sample by age and gender, it is unlikely to be representative of the population of the 27 cities along other characteristics. The opinions and views of participants are therefore not necessarily representative of the views of residents that have not participated in the survey.

To understand why survey participants are not representative of the overall population, it is helpful to consider how participants are chosen. First, the sample of potential participants is restricted to active Facebook users.

Figure C.1 shows the share of Facebook users in the 27 cities based on user statistics provided by Facebook and population data from Africapolis (2018<sub>[1]</sub>). While the figures are unlikely to be exact estimates, it is obvious that Facebook use is widespread in most cities. Nevertheless, a significant share of residents in all cities do not use Facebook. In particular, the poor who cannot afford internet access and the illiterate are excluded from participating in the survey. Moreover, people who do not speak the language of the questionnaire (French, English, and Portuguese, respectively) cannot participate. Thus, these groups are not represented among participants.

Figure C.1  
Facebook user share by city



Note: This graph shows the number of regular Facebook users (provided by the Facebook ad manager) divided by the total population of the city as defined in the Africapolis database. Facebook does not provide information on how it determines the place of residence of its users nor how it defines the geographical boundaries of a city. Therefore, the user shares provided in this figure should be seen as indicative approximations rather than precise estimates.

Source: OECD calculation based on Africapolis (2018<sub>[1]</sub>) and information provided by the Facebook Ad Manager.

Additional uncertainty is introduced by the proprietary algorithm that Facebook uses to determine which users see the ad for the survey. The algorithm aims at maximising the number of people who click on the ad for a given budget, but also includes other considerations such as keeping users engaged on Facebook. As very little information on the algorithm is available publicly, it is unclear whether users that have been shown the ad are representative of the overall population of Facebook users.

Lastly, there is the issue of who answers the questionnaires after seeing an ad. Those who see an ad and decide to answer the survey potentially have different opinions about their city than those who see the ad and decide do not answer. This is a problem for all survey-based research, but it is potentially more important for online surveys. Only 1.4% of all Facebook users who saw an ad for the survey clicked on it to be redirected to the survey page and only 13% of users who were redirected to the survey page completed the questionnaire.

In some cities, the observable characteristics of participants vary. For example, participants might come disproportionately from a particular demographic group (e.g. young men). In principle, it is possible to weigh responses from underrepresented demographic more strongly to counteract this underrepresentation. However, this has not been done. Sample sizes in some demographic groups are very small (Table 1). When weighting according to demographic characteristics, these responses would receive disproportionately large weights, which would increase the expected error of the estimates from random sampling. As there is little evidence that responses differ strongly across demographic groups, the increase in sampling error would likely outweigh the benefits from having a more representative sample.

**West African Papers**

## **How is Life in West Africa's Cities?**

### **Results from an Online Perception Survey of Life in Urban Areas**

The number of people living in African cities is expected to double over the next two decades. While the need to provide adequate infrastructure, create high quality jobs and manage pollution in fast growing cities has been well studied, these studies say little about subjective quality of city life. This paper presents findings from the first large-scale quality of life perception survey covering 27 cities in 17 countries in West Africa and the Sahel. Responses from nearly 9 000 urban West Africans provide an insight into perceptions of city life, local government quality, and policy priorities with the intention of giving residents a voice in the policy dialogue on the future of African cities. In addition to comparing perceptions across cities, the paper demonstrates the feasibility of an online approach to run large-scale online surveys in West African cities of different sizes and cultural contexts.

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