



# Grading the nation?

## Kenyans' opinions on government, leadership and corruption

### 1. Introduction

With a little over a year having passed since the 2017 elections, it is a good time to take stock of political matters not from the perspective of party politics but instead looking at particular political issues. And there have been several interesting developments during or since the election campaigns of 2017 on which the views of citizens are important. Prominent among these are the high-profile handshake that took place in March 2018 between President Uhuru Kenyatta and his long-time opponent, Raila Odinga, and the related Building Bridges Initiative that aims to create “a united nation for all Kenyans living today and all future generations.” Further, there is also President Kenyatta’s promise to make addressing corruption the main focus of his final five years as President.

This research brief presents data on citizens’ views on these matters and other governance

and political issues. What do citizens see as the main problems that they and the country face at the moment? Do they feel the country is heading in the right direction? Do they approve of the handshake, and of the performance of key actors? And do they think the renewed focus on corruption is likely to deliver success?

Data for this brief comes from Twaweza’s flagship Sauti za Wananchi, which is a nationally-representative, high-frequency mobile phone panel survey. Information on the overall methodology is available at [www.twaweza.org/sauti](http://www.twaweza.org/sauti). For this brief, data were collected from 1,607 respondents from Kenya’s Sauti za Wananchi panel in the twenty-second round of calls to the panel, conducted between September 27 and November 2, 2018. The poll has +/-2.4% margin of error at 95% confidence level.

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Sauti za Wananchi



The key findings are:

- Half of citizens say the cost of living is the most serious problem facing Kenya today
- 7 out of 10 citizens say Kenya is heading in the wrong direction
- Citizens are most satisfied with Kenya's direction in the education sector, least satisfied on economic matters
- Among institutions of accountability within and outside government, the media has the highest approval rating
- 7 out of 10 citizens approve of the President's performance
- 7 out of 10 citizens approve of the handshake between President Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga
- 2 out of 10 citizens have been asked for a bribe in the past year; most of them paid
- 8 out 10 citizens think the President will not succeed in fighting corruption
- The most well-known corruption scandal among citizens is the National Youth Service (NYS) case

## 2. Nine insights about governance and politics in Kenya

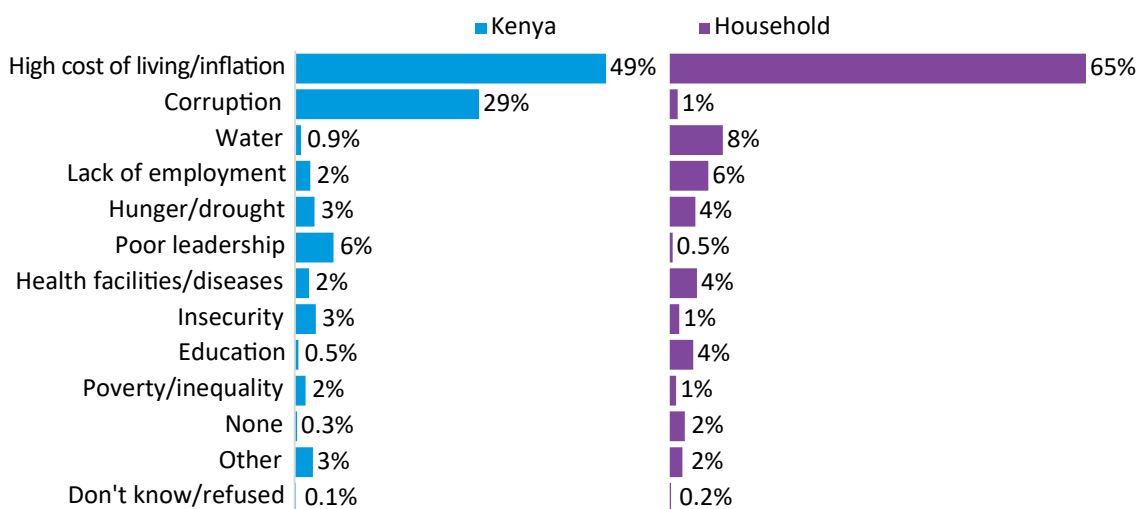
### Insight 1: Half of citizens say the cost of living is the most serious problem facing Kenya today

Half of citizens (49%) say the high cost of living/inflation is the most serious problem facing Kenya today. Two out of three (65%) say this is the biggest problem facing their own households.

Three out of ten citizens (29%) say corruption is the most serious problem facing Kenya today.

At household level, no other problems come close to the cost of living, but next on the list come water (8%) and lack of employment (6%).

**Figure 1: What is the most serious problem facing Kenya/your household today?<sup>1</sup>**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 23  
(September 27 to November 2, 2018; n=1,607)

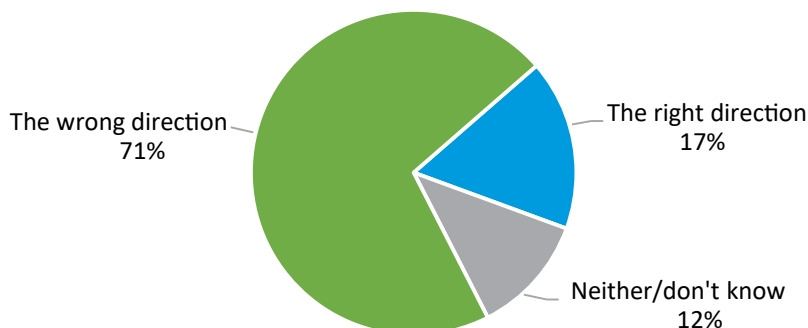
## **Insight 2: 7 out of 10 citizens say Kenya is heading in the wrong direction**

Seven out of ten citizens (71%) say the country is currently heading in the wrong direction, four times as many as those (17%) who say the country is going in the right direction.

This perspective is consistent across demographic groups, with the exception of the poor and those with lower levels of education. Among the poorest, one out of three citizens (32%) are positive about the country's direction, and a little under half (44%) of those with no formal education feel the same, though still in both cases a majority say Kenya is going in the wrong direction (not shown in charts).

1 Percentages in charts may not add up to 100% due to rounding

**Figure 2: Overall when you think about Kenya today, would you say that the country is going in the right direction or going in the wrong direction?**

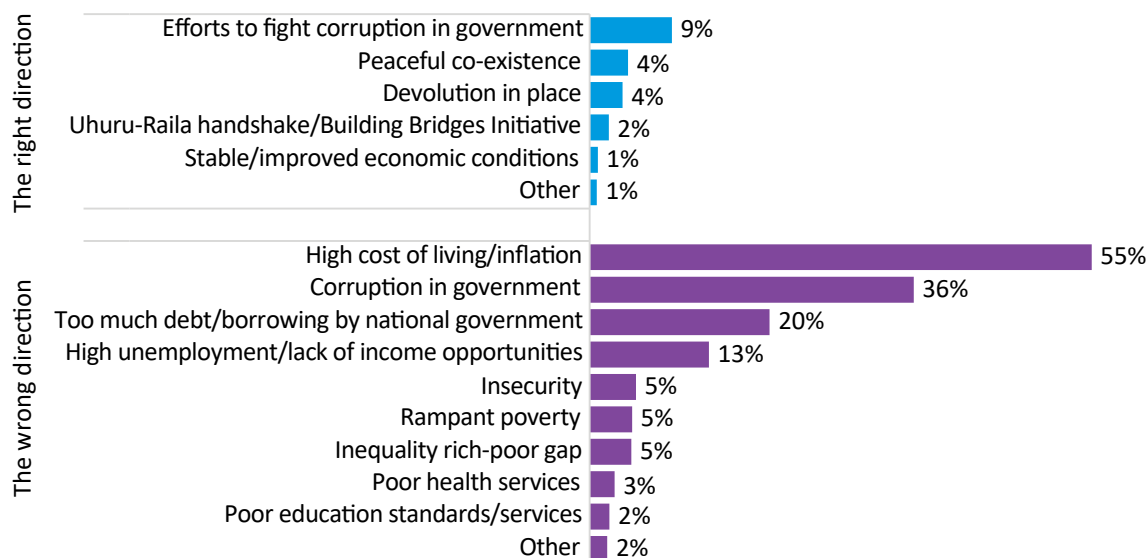


**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 23  
(September 27 to November 2, 2018; n=1,607)

The main reasons given for thinking the country is going in the wrong direction are the high cost of living, cited by over half (55%), followed by corruption (36%), national debt (20%) and high unemployment (13%).

The main reason given by those with positive views on the country's direction is efforts to fight corruption in government. This is cited by one out of ten citizens (9%).

**Figure 3: Why do you say that the country is heading in the right/wrong direction?**  
(multiple responses permitted)



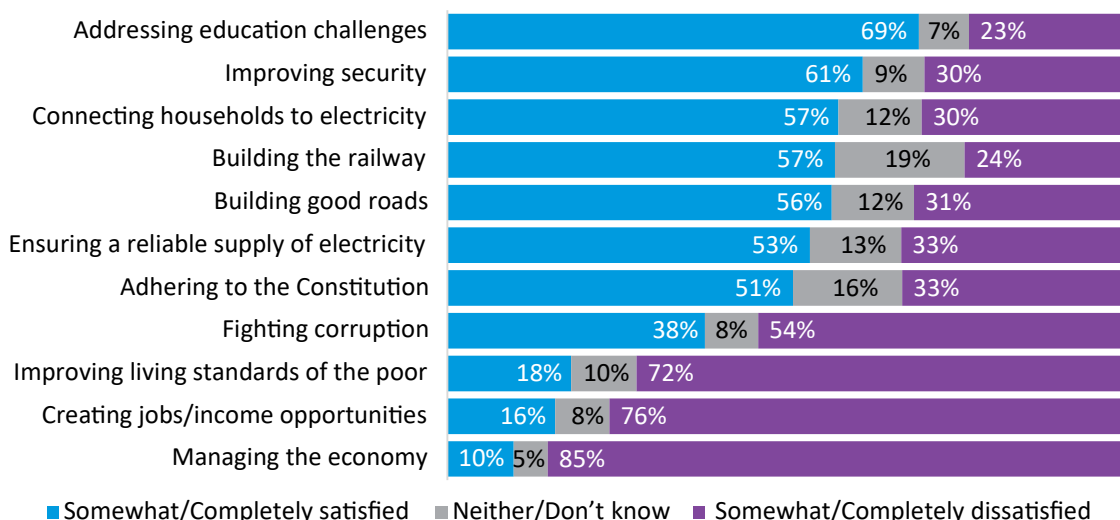
**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 23  
(September 27 to November 2, 2018; n=1,607)

### Insight 3: Citizens are most satisfied with Kenya's direction in the education sector, least satisfied on economic matters

Seven out of ten citizens (69%) are satisfied with the country's direction in addressing education challenges, more than for any other issue in the survey. Six out of ten (61%) are positive about efforts to improve security, and almost as many say the country is doing well at connecting households to electricity supplies (57%), building the railway (57%), building roads (56%), ensuring reliable electricity supplies (53%) and adhering to the Constitution (51%).

Citizens are less positive about the country's direction in other areas. Majorities say the country is heading in the wrong direction in economic management (85%), creating jobs (76%), improving living standards (72%) and fighting corruption (54%).

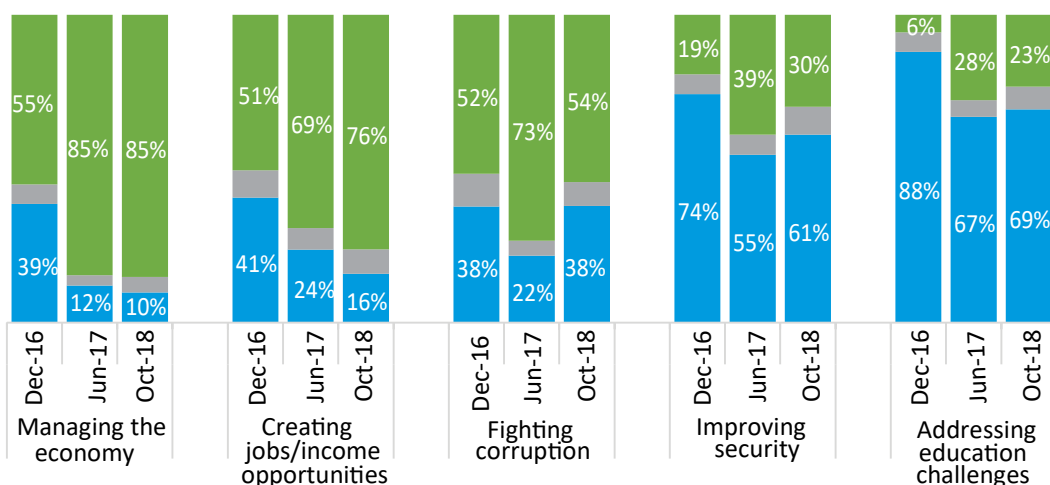
**Figure 4: Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the direction Kenya is headed in the following areas?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 23  
(September 27 to November 2, 2018; n=1,607)

On economic management and job creation, citizen satisfaction with the national direction has declined over the past two years. Trends in other areas are less conclusive.

**Figure 5: Are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the direction Kenya is headed in the following areas?**



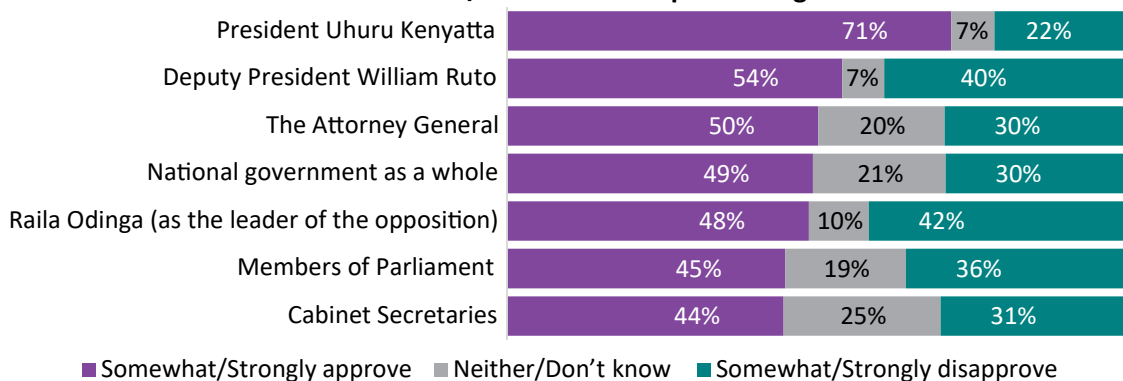
■ Completely/Somewhat satisfied ■ Neither/Don't know /Refused ■ Completely/Somewhat dissatisfied

**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 23  
(September 27 to November 2, 2018; n=1,607)

### Insight 4: 7 out of 10 citizens approve of the President's performance

Seven out of ten citizens (71%) approve of the President's performance, more than any other national political leader. The Deputy President's performance has the approval of just over half of citizens (54%), with approval for the performance of the leader of the opposition, Raila Odinga, following closely behind (48%).

**Figure 6: Do you approve or disapprove of the way the following individuals/institutions are performing?**

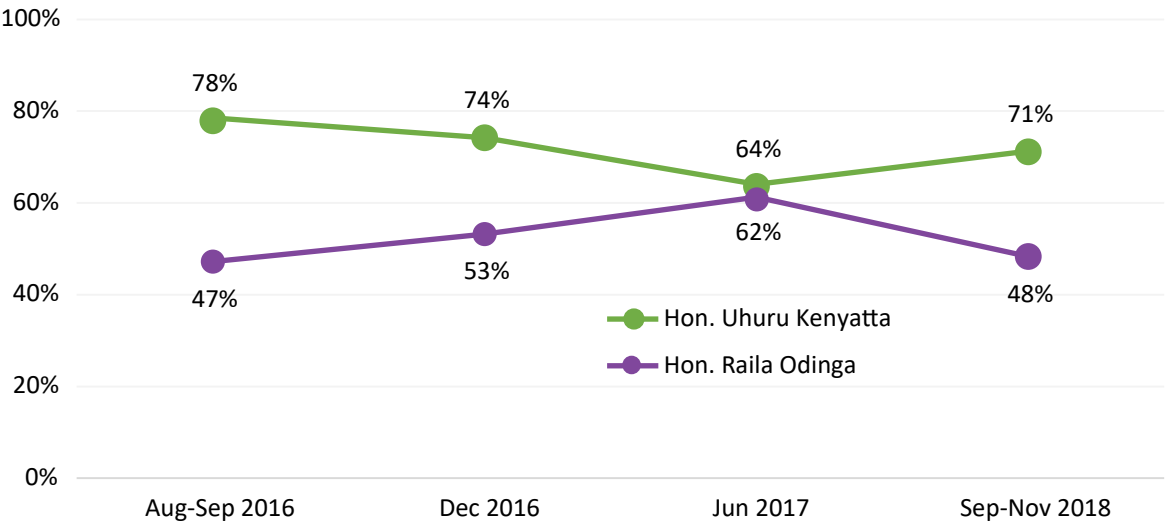


**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 23  
(September 27 to November 2, 2018; n=1,607)

The President's approval rating appeared to be declining in June 2017, two months before the elections. However, while the number of citizens who "strongly approve" of his performance has

continued to drop, his overall approval rating has recovered from 64% in mid-2017 to 71% in late 2018. Performance ratings for the leader of the political opposition, Raila Odinga, have followed the opposite pattern, rising to 62% in 2017, almost level with President Uhuru Kenyatta, and now declining to 48%.

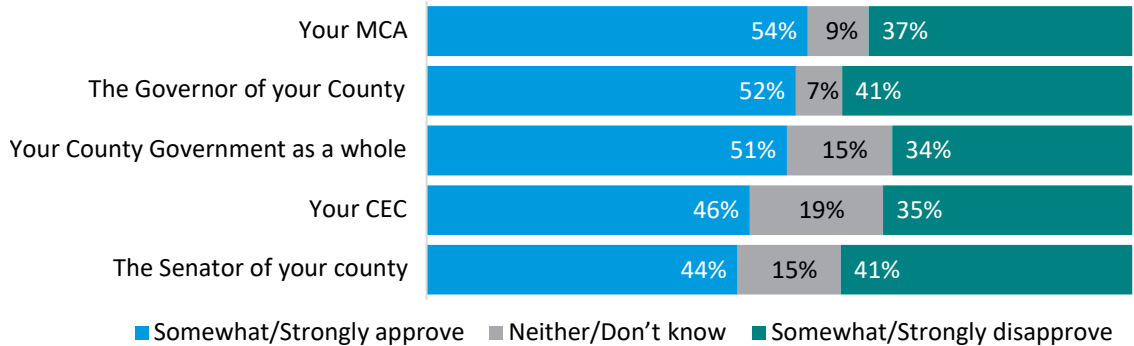
**Figure 7: Do you approve or disapprove of the way the following individuals are performing?**  
(% who approve or strongly approve)



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Rounds 5, 9, 13 and 23

At sub-national levels of government, approval of key individuals hovers around 50%. Just over half of citizens approve of the performance of their Members of the County Assembly (MCAs) (54%), their county governor (52%), and their county government as a whole (51%). Just under half approve of the performance of their County Executive Committee (CEC) (46%) and the senator of their county (44%).

**Figure 8: Do you approve or disapprove of the way the following individuals are performing?**

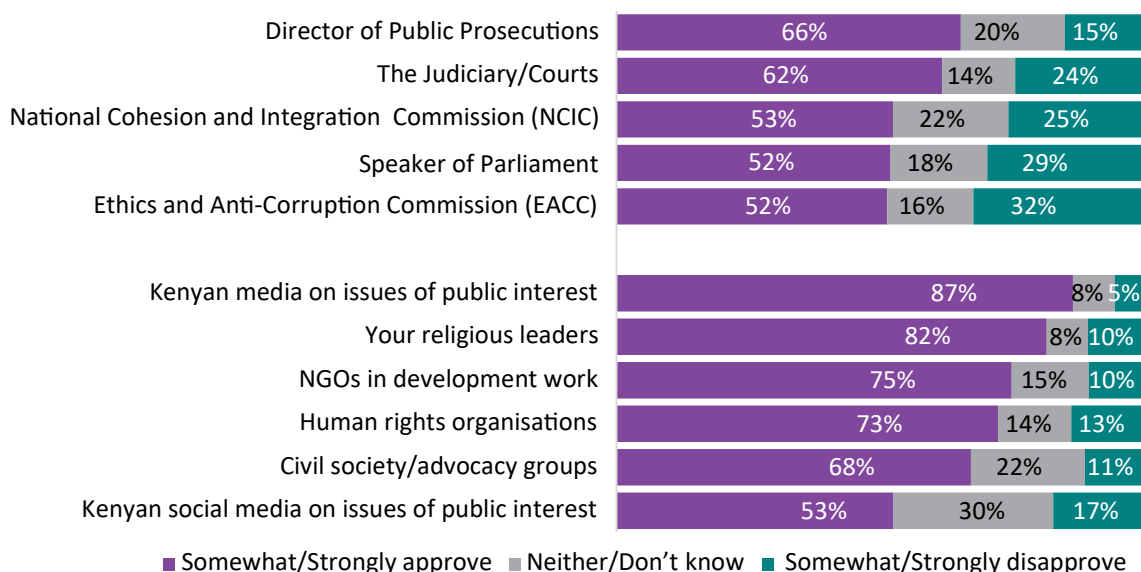


**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 23  
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## Insight 5: Among institutions of accountability within and outside government, the media has the highest approval rating

Among other public and non-state institutions with formal or informal roles to play in public debate and accountability, the most highly rated is the Kenyan media (87%). This is followed by religious leaders (82%), NGOs in development work (75%) and human rights organisations (73%).

**Figure 9: Do you approve or disapprove of the way the following individuals/institutions are performing?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 23  
(September 27 to November 2, 2018; n=1,607)

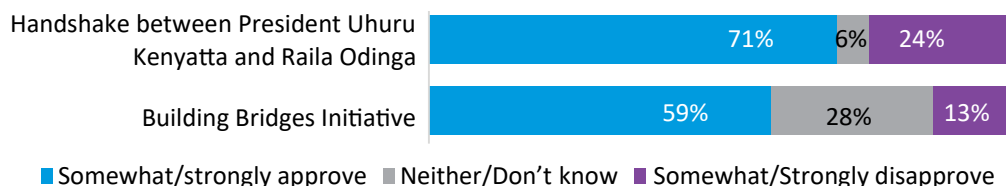
## Insight 6: 7 out of 10 citizens approve of the handshake between President Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga

Seven out of ten citizens (71%) approve of the symbolic handshake between President Uhuru Kenyatta and opposition leader Raila Odinga. One out of four citizens (24%) disapprove of the handshake.

Citizens are less certain about the Building Bridges Initiative. Six out of ten (59%) approve of the initiative, and one out of eight (13%) disapprove, leaving three out of ten (28%) who are unsure or don't know.



**Figure 10: Do you approve or disapprove of the handshake between President Uhuru Kenyatta and Raila Odinga? And the Building Bridges initiative?**



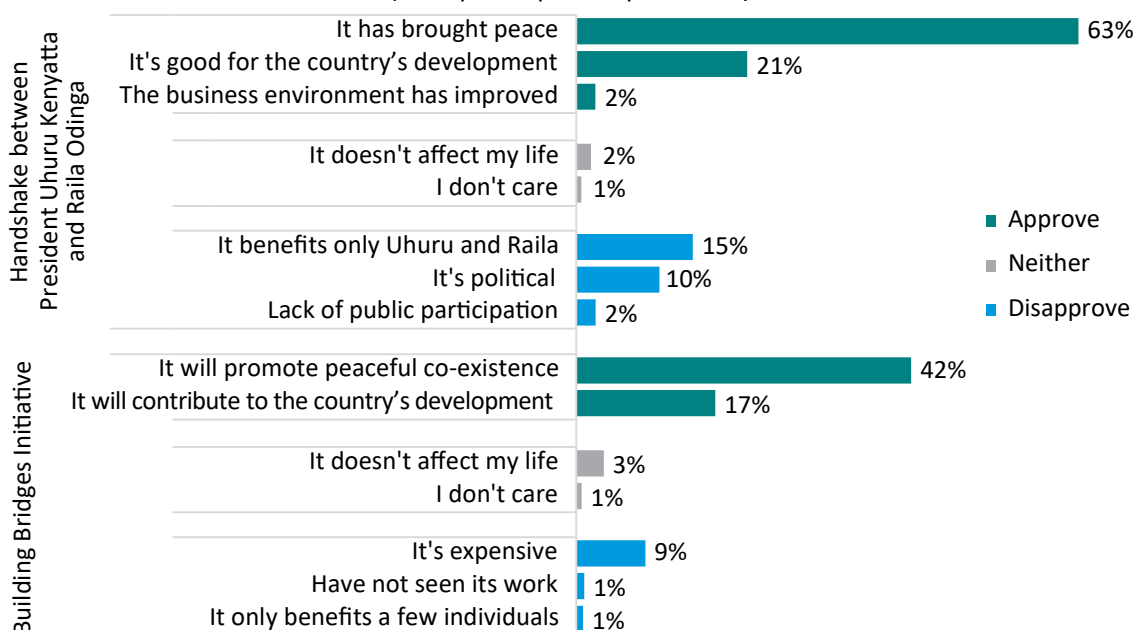
**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 23  
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The main reason given for approving of the handshake is that “it has brought peace”, cited by six out of ten citizens (63%), with others saying it is good for the country’s development (21%).

Similar reasons are given for approving of the Building Bridges Initiative, either that it will promote peaceful co-existence (42%) or contribute to the country’s development (17%).

The main reasons given for disapproving of the handshake are that it only benefits the two individuals involved (15%) or that “it is political” (10%). One out of ten (9%) disapprove of the Building Bridges Initiative on the grounds that it is expensive.

**Figure 11: Why do you approve/disapprove of the handshake? And the Building Bridges Initiative?**  
(multiple responses permitted)

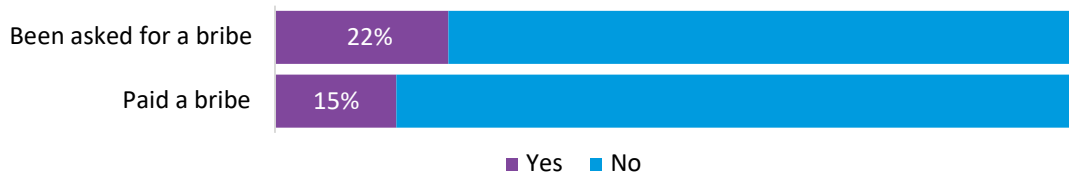


**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 23  
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### Insight 7: 2 out of 10 citizens were asked for a bribe in the past year

Two out of ten citizens (22%) have been asked for a bribe in the past year. One out of six citizens (15%) paid a bribe, amounting to around three out of four of those who were asked for a bribe.

**Figure 12: In the last one year, have you been asked for a bribe (in cash or other form) anywhere or by anyone? And have you paid a bribe?**



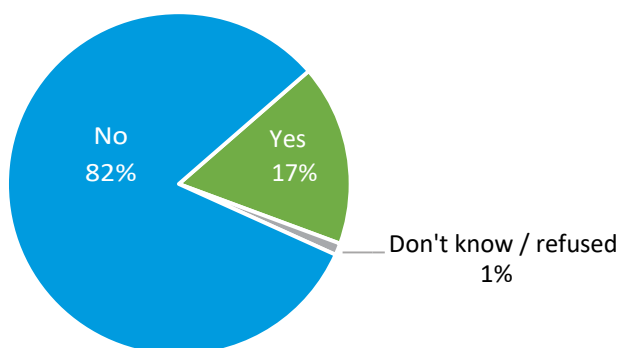
**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 23  
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The most common location or institution where bribes were requested and paid was during interactions with the police. One out of eight citizens (12%) report having been asked for a bribe by a police officer in the past year, most of whom (8%) paid a bribe (not shown in charts).

### Insight 8: 8 out 10 citizens think the President cannot fight corruption

Eight out of ten citizens (82%) think President Kenyatta will not succeed in his intention to focus on fighting corruption during his final five years in office. One out of six citizens (17%) think he will succeed.

**Figure 13: President Kenyatta has stated that fighting corruption in government is going to be the focus of his last five years in government. Do you think he will succeed?**



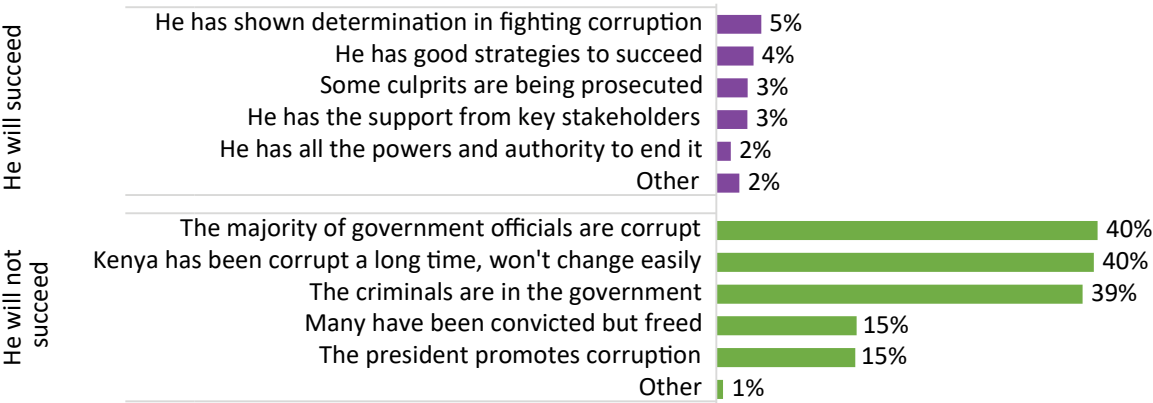
**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 23  
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Citizens give three main reasons for this lack of confidence: that the majority of government officials are corrupt (40%), that Kenya has been corrupt for a long time and will not change easily (39%) and that those responsible for corruption are in government (39%). Smaller

numbers also said that many of those who have been convicted of corruption were later freed (15%) and that the President himself promotes corruption (15%).

The main reasons given for optimism are that the President has shown determination on this issue (5%), or that he has good strategies to succeed (4%).

**Figure 14: Why do you think he will/will not succeed?**  
(multiple responses permitted)

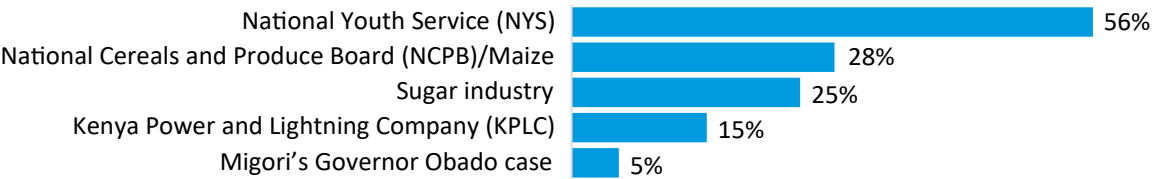


**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 23  
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**Insight 9: The most well-known corruption scandal among citizens is the National Youth Service case**

A little over half of citizens (56%) say they have heard of the National Youth Service case of alleged corruption. Other scandals are less well-known, including the National Cereals and Produce Board case (28%), the sugar industry case (25%), and the Kenya Power and Lighting Company (KPLC) case (15%). One out of twenty citizens (5%) has heard of the case involving Migori Governor Obado.

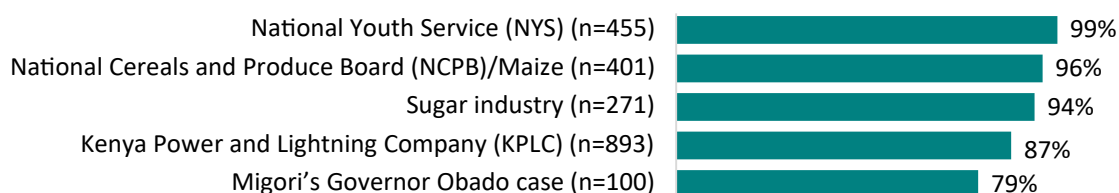
**Figure 15: In the last year, which corruption scandals have you heard of?**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi* Mobile Phone Survey, Round 23  
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Among those who have heard of these cases, the majority believe the allegations to be true.

**Figure 16: Do you think it is/was true? (Among those to have heard of the case)**



**Source:** *Sauti za Wananchi Mobile Phone Survey, Round 23*  
(September 27 to November 2, 2018; n=1,607)

### 3. Conclusions

This brief presents citizens' views on political and governance matters, not looking at party politics so much as the key issues on the political scene. It includes three particularly striking findings.

First, there is clear and strong – though not universal – public support for the handshake between President Kenyatta and Raila Odinga, which is seen as making a valuable contribution to national peace and development. Support for the Building Bridges Initiative is also high, though not as high as for the handshake, largely because the initiative appears to be less well known.

Second, there is clear public concern about the direction of the national economy. This is cited as the main problem facing the country as a whole and most households. It is the main reason given for the large majority of citizens who are dissatisfied with the country's overall direction and the area where citizens are least satisfied with the country's direction. And satisfaction with the country's economic direction has dropped considerably since 2016, suggesting that people are facing increasingly difficult economic circumstances. At the same time, the government scores strong approval on its work on economic building blocks including access to electricity, education and transport infrastructure.

Third, corruption is also an area of widespread public concern, and there is scepticism around the President's anti-corruption efforts. A large majority of citizens think the President's focus on corruption in his second term will not succeed, largely because they see corruption as too deeply ingrained in the workings of Kenyan government and society to be addressed that easily.

Putting these three points together, the clear conclusion for national leaders is that while citizens certainly do value political reconciliation efforts, they are also increasingly desperate for the government to address the day-to-day economic difficulties they are facing.