

# World AIDS Day: Most African governments win high marks for efforts to fight HIV/AIDS

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**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 5 | Samantha Richmond, Carolyn Logan, and Brian Howard**

## Summary

HIV/AIDS remains the leading cause of death in Africa. Sub-Saharan Africa, the hardest-hit region, is home to 71% of the world's 35 million people living with HIV, including 91% of the world's HIV-infected children. Despite these grim statistics, better access to antiretroviral treatment and in some areas, stable or declining HIV incidence and prevalence rates offer cause for hope.

To the global celebration of World AIDS Day (December 1), Afrobarometer adds the voices of ordinary Africans, who increasingly perceive their governments to be doing a good job in addressing the HIV/AIDS epidemic, especially in countries that are also seen as improving basic health care services. The exception is North Africa, where citizens are more critical than the rest of the continent of government efforts against HIV/AIDS.

## Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is an African-led, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. Five rounds of surveys<sup>1</sup> were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and Round 6 surveys are currently underway (2014-2015). Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of between 1,200 and 2,400 respondents in each country. Samples of this size yield results with a margin of error of +/-3% (for a sample of 1,200) or +/-2% (for a sample of 2,400).

Findings presented here are based primarily on data from 34 countries collected in 2011-2013 during Round 5 of the Afrobarometer surveys. These results, from 51,605 respondents, represent the views of three-quarters of the continent's population. Comparisons over time are based on earlier survey rounds in 16 countries.

## Key findings

- Close to seven in 10 Africans (69%) perceive their governments to be doing a very good or fairly good job of combating HIV/AIDS in their country. But there are wide differences across countries: 94% of Botswana rate their government positively, compared to just 14% of Egyptians and 18% of Tunisians.
- East Africans express the highest level of satisfaction with government performance (79%). In contrast, North Africans are equally divided (37% each) between approval

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<sup>1</sup> Previous rounds of the Afrobarometer were conducted in 1999-2001 (Round 1, 12 countries), 2002-2003 (Round 2, 16 countries), 2005-2006 (Round 3, 18 countries), and 2008-2009 (Round 4, 20 countries). For further information, visit [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org).

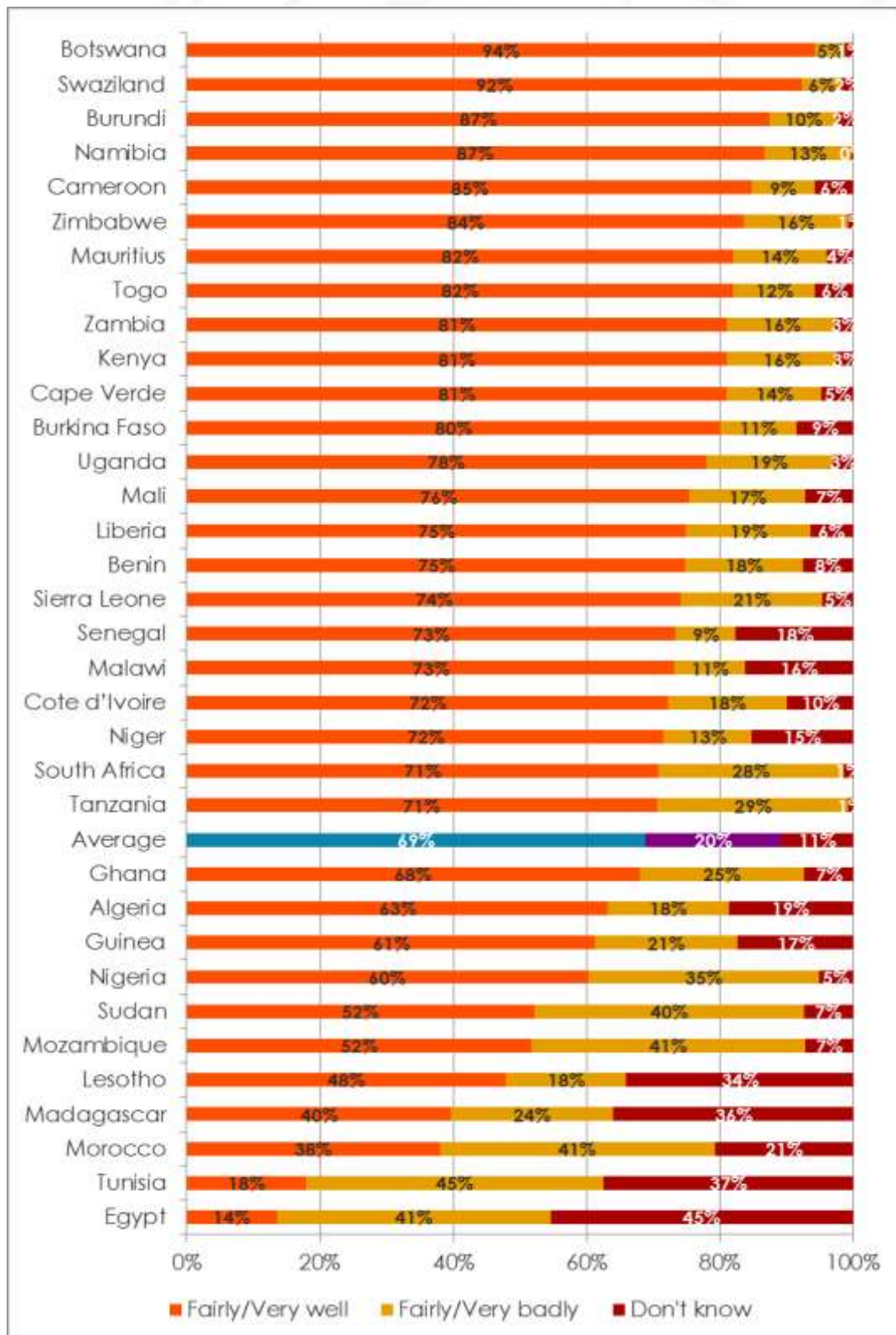
and disapproval, while almost as many North Africans say they don't know how their governments are performing.

- Across 16 countries tracked since 2002, positive ratings of government performance have increased significantly, from 65% in 2002 to 74% in 2012.
- Improvements have been greatest in Cape Verde (27 percentage-point increase), South Africa (25 points), Malawi (24 points), and Botswana and Namibia (both 20 points).
- However, ratings of government performance in combating HIV/AIDS have dropped sharply since 2005 in Madagascar (down 34 percentage points), Ghana (13 points), and Tanzania (10 points).

### **Most governments get high marks**

On average, African governments get high marks for their efforts to combat HIV/AIDS. More than two-thirds (69%) of citizens say their government is doing either "fairly well" or "very well" in handling the issue (Figure 1). Several of the southern African countries hardest hit by the disease are among those giving their governments the highest marks, including Botswana (94% fairly/very well), Swaziland (92%), and Namibia (87%). In stark contrast, fewer than one in five give their government positive marks in Egypt (14%) and Tunisia (18%), while more than two in five give the government negative reviews (41% in Egypt and 45% in Tunisia); nearly as many don't have an opinion (45% and 37%, respectively).

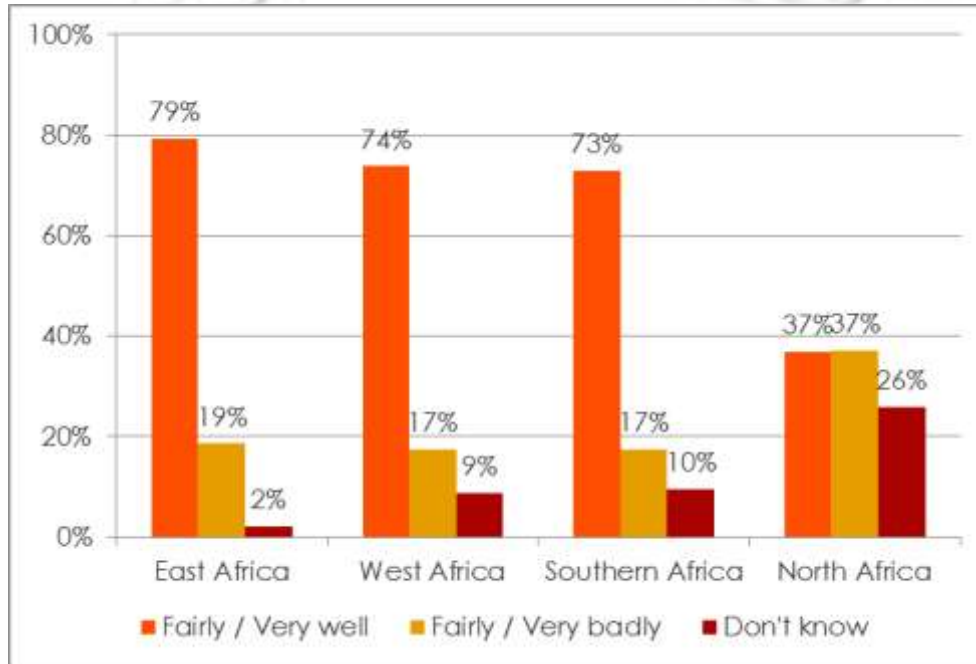
Figure 1: Governments' handling of the fight against HIV/AIDS | 34 countries | 2011-2013



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Combating HIV/AIDS?

On average, East Africans offer the most positive ratings of their governments' efforts to combat HIV/AIDS (79%), followed by West Africans (74%) and southern Africans (73%) (Figure 2). In North Africa, where HIV prevalence is generally lower than in the other regions, citizens are much more critical: Only 37% give a positive assessment, while an equal number offer negative ratings and fully 26% say they don't know how their governments are doing.

**Figure 2: Governments' handling of the fight against HIV/AIDS, by region**  
 34 countries | 2011-2013



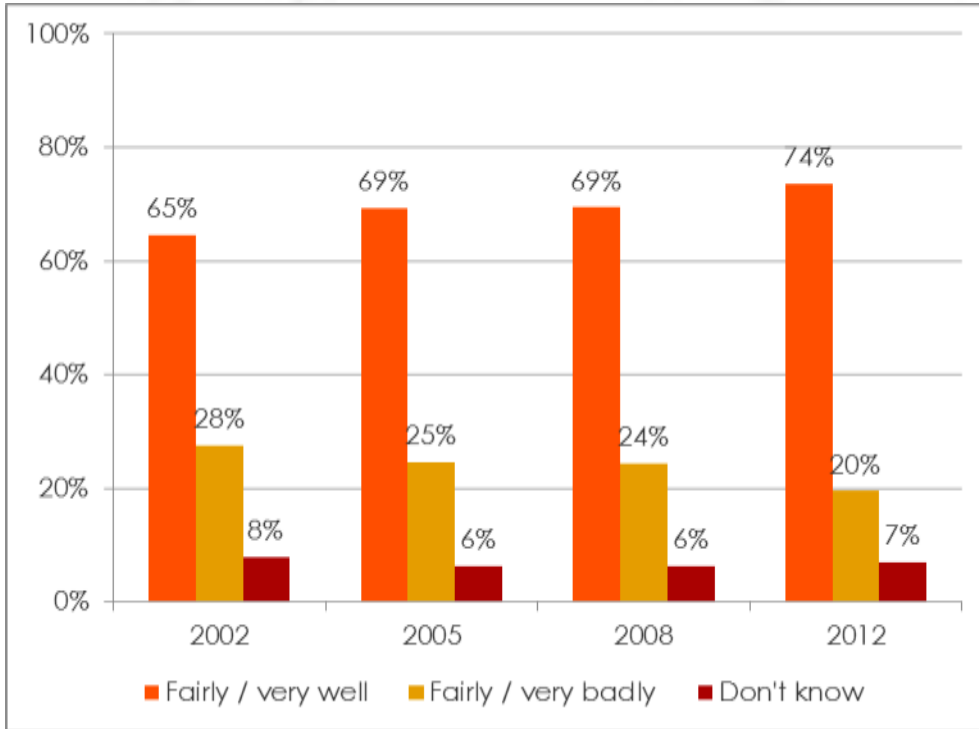
### Gains in the past decade

In the 16 countries<sup>2</sup> where assessments of government performance on HIV/AIDS have been tracked since 2002, there has been a gradual improvement, from 65% of respondents giving positive ratings in 2002 (Round 2) to 74% in 2012 (Round 5) (Figure 3). These trends likely reflect the fact that access to antiretroviral treatment for HIV/AIDS has improved substantially during this period while overall incidence rates have decreased or stabilized in many African countries over the past decade.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The 16 countries tracked since Round 2 in 2002-2003 are: Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

<sup>3</sup> 2012 Report on Global AIDS Epidemic  
[http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/epidemiology/2012/gr2012/20121120\\_UNAIDS\\_Global\\_Report\\_2012\\_with\\_annexes\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/en/media/unaids/contentassets/documents/epidemiology/2012/gr2012/20121120_UNAIDS_Global_Report_2012_with_annexes_en.pdf)

**Figure 3: Governments' handling of the fight against HIV/AIDS | 16 countries | 2002-2012**

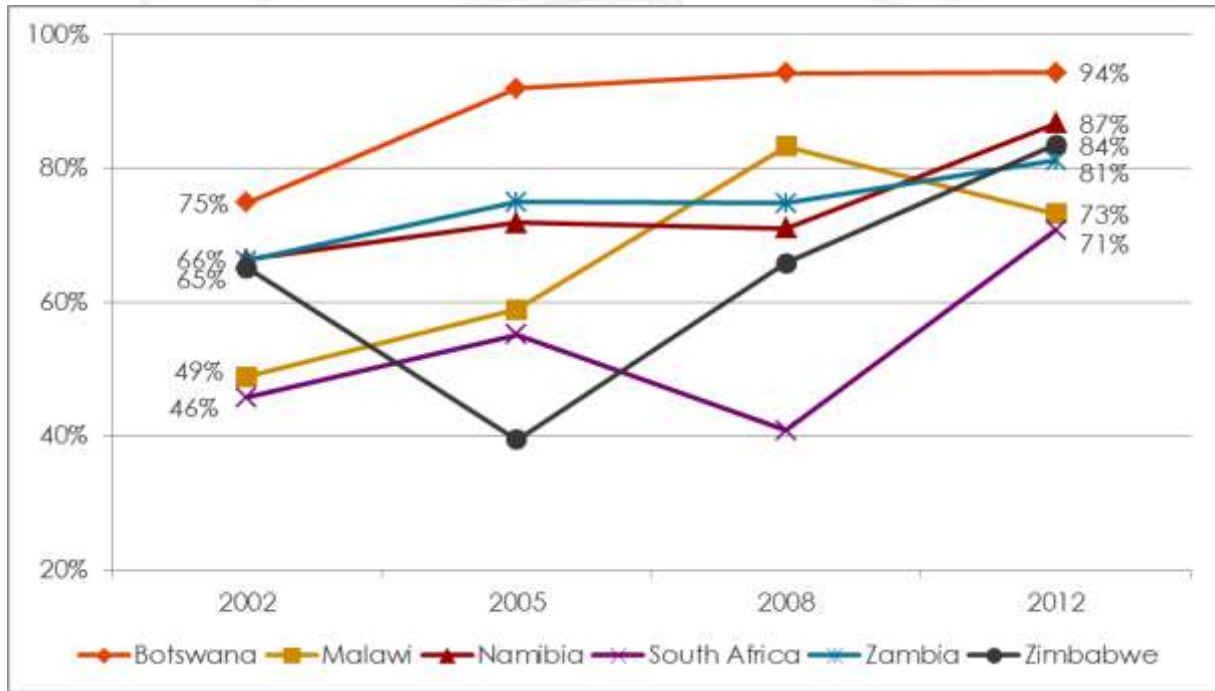


### Disparate country trends

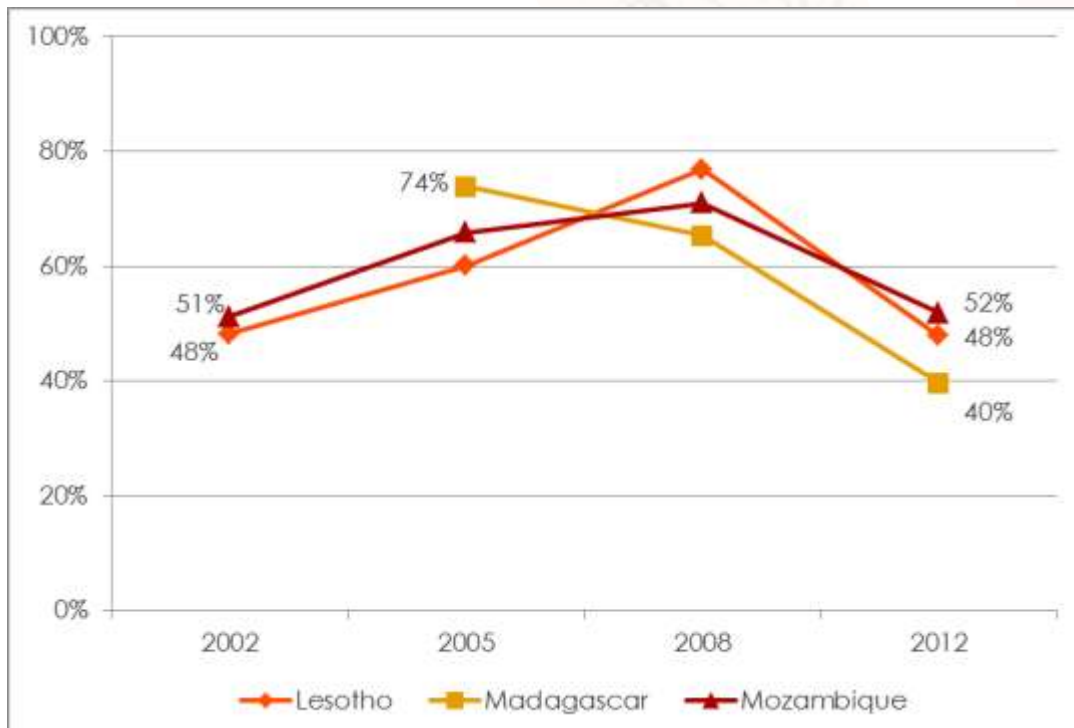
The overall positive trend is evident in many countries, but there are also notable exceptions. In southern Africa, six of nine countries saw substantial improvement in government ratings between 2002 and 2012, led by South Africa with a 25 percentage point improvement (from 46% to 71% positive) and Malawi (a 24-point gain, from 49% to 73%) (Figure 4a). But both of these countries, as well as Zimbabwe, have seen somewhat erratic patterns of rise and fall in government ratings over the years, albeit with a strong positive trend overall.

Trends have been equally erratic, but considerably less positive, in Lesotho and Mozambique, both of which initially reported improvements that have since dissipated. In Madagascar, the trend has been consistently negative, with the sharpest declines in ratings witnessed in any country, from a respectable 74% positive rating in 2005 to just 40% positive in 2005, the fourth-lowest rating across 34 countries (Figure 4b).

**Figure 4a: Improving government handling of the fight against HIV/AIDS: Southern Africa | 2002-2012 | % 'fairly well' or 'very well'**



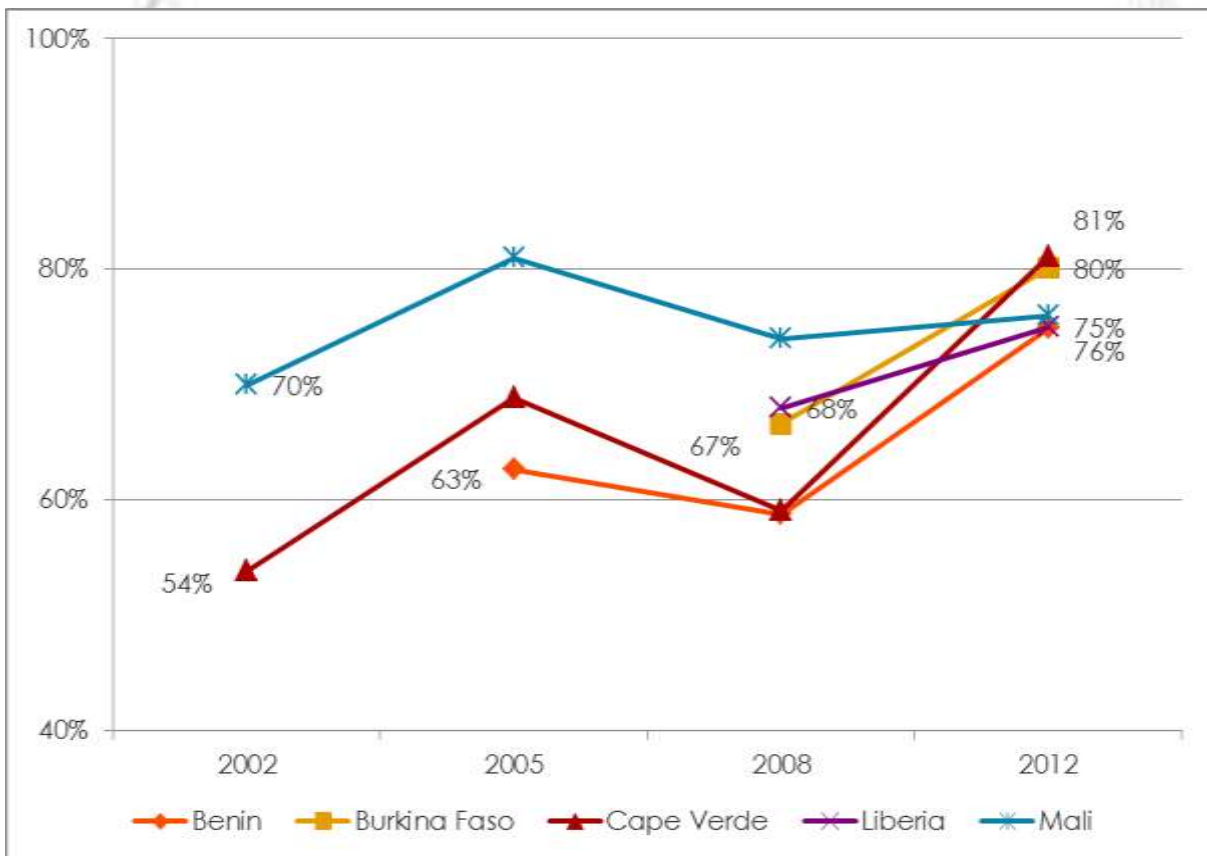
**Figure 4b: Static or declining government handling of the fight against HIV/AIDS: Southern Africa | 2002-2012 | % 'fairly well' or 'very well'**



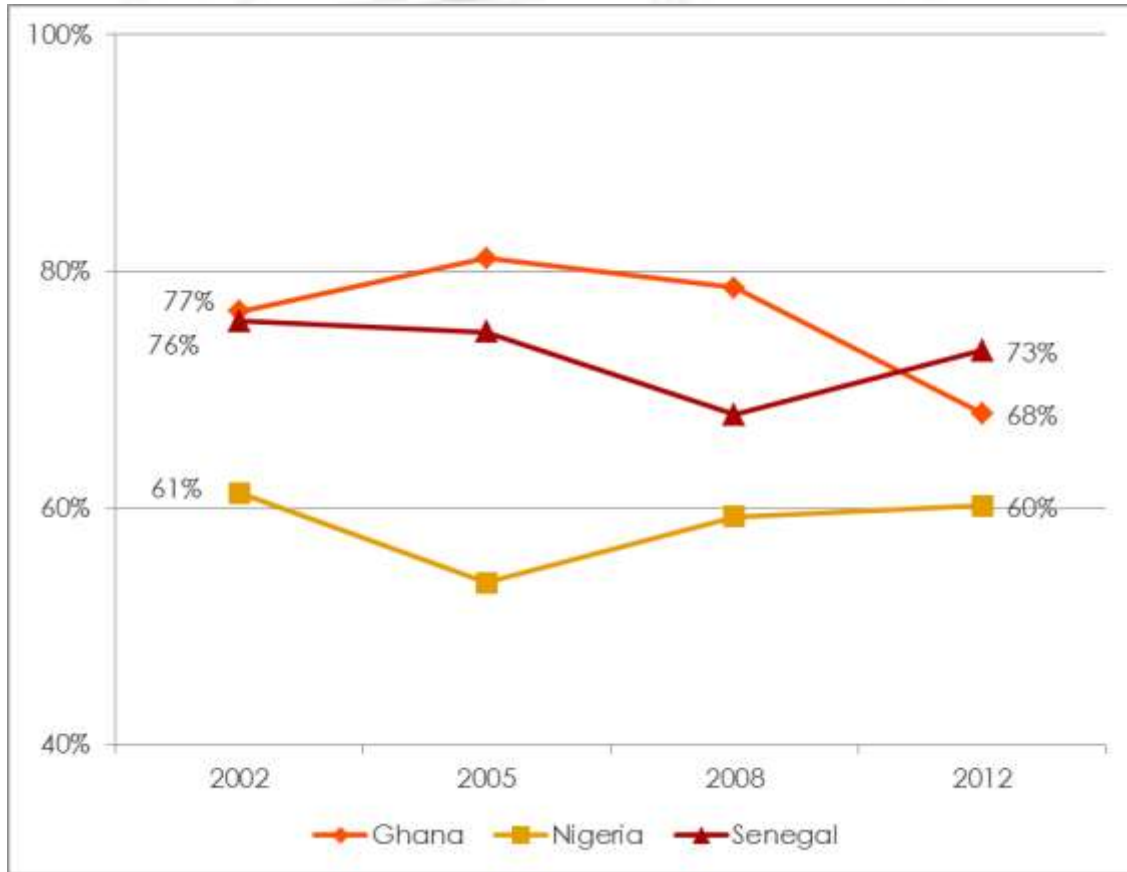
Some countries in West Africa have also reported significant gains, although only Cape Verde (27-point increase) matches the leading countries in southern Africa (Figure 5a). The patterns are again mixed, but five countries in the region have witnessed improvements (Figure 5b).

In contrast, Senegal and Nigeria have at best held steady, while ratings in Ghana, after reaching a high of 81% in 2005, have dropped 13 percentage points (Figure 5b). Negative ratings have nearly doubled in Ghana during the same period, from just 13% in 2005 to 25% in 2012.

**Figure 5a: Improving government handling of the fight against HIV/AIDS: West Africa**  
 | 2002-2012 | % 'fairly well' or 'very well'



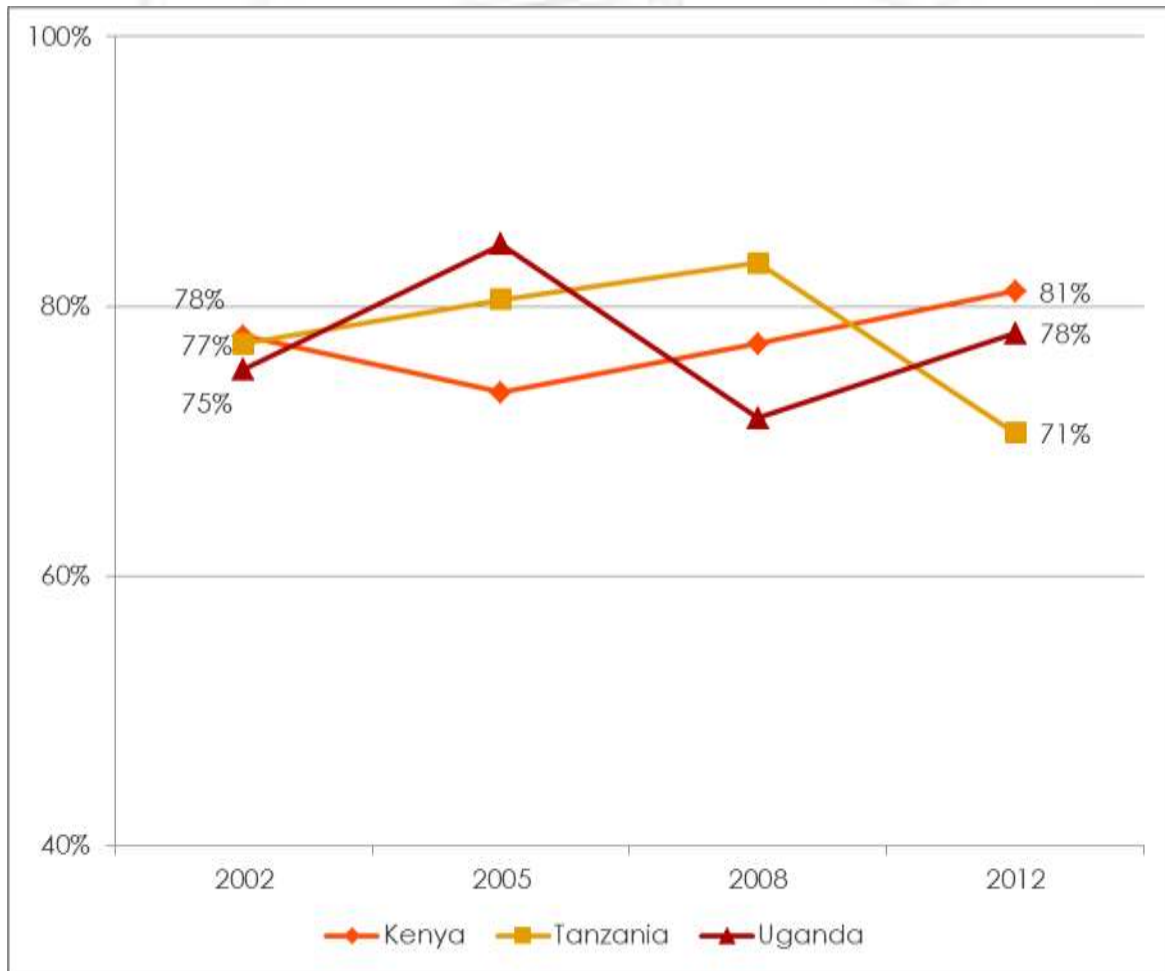
**Figure 5b: Static or declining government handling of the fight against HIV/AIDS: West Africa | 2002-2012 | % 'fairly well' or 'very well'**



In East Africa, Kenya and Uganda have seen only marginal improvement over the past decade (each gaining 3 percentage points between 2002 and 2012), while Tanzania has lost 7 percentage points overall and has witnessed a sharp decline between 2008 and 2012 – from 83% positive to 71% (Figure 6). Negative ratings of government performance in Tanzania have increased from 15% to 29% over the same period.



**Figure 6: Static or declining government handling of the fight against HIV/AIDS: East Africa | 2002-2012 | % 'fairly well' or 'very well'**

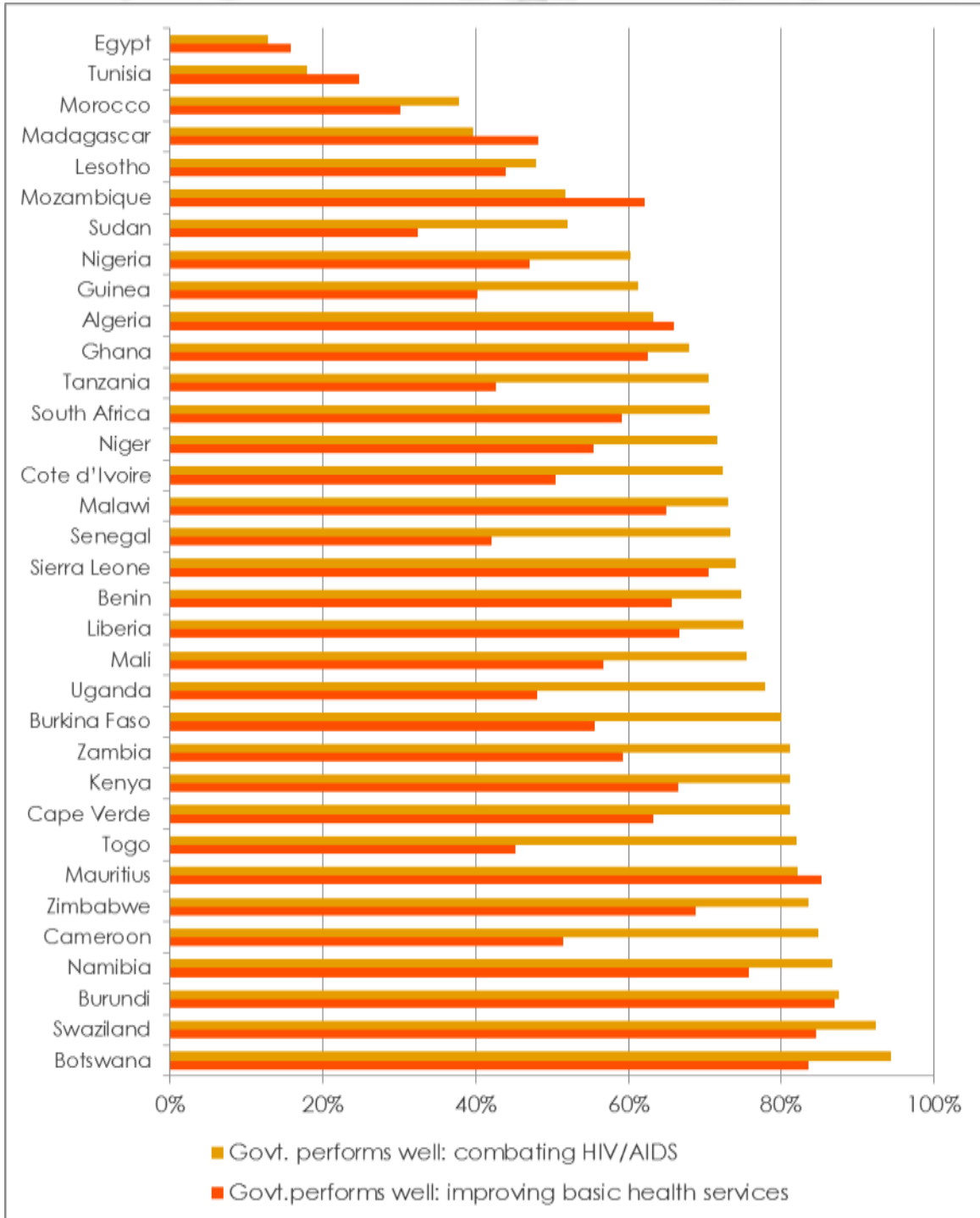


### The link to improved basic health services

In every country except Mozambique, Algeria, and Mauritius, citizens give their governments higher ratings for their handling of the fight against HIV/AIDS than they do for improving basic health care services more generally (Figure 7). However, it is also clear that the two issues are highly correlated, pointing to the importance of having access to basic health care for ensuring the continued well-being of those living with HIV.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Pearson's  $r = .781$  significant at the 0.01 level for the correlation at the country level between the percentage who say the government is handling improving basic health services well and the percentage who say the government is handling the fight against HIV/AIDS effectively.

**Figure 7: Governments' handling of HIV/AIDS and basic health services**  
 34 countries | 2011-2013 | % 'fairly well' or 'very well'



**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: a) Improving basic health services? b) Combating HIV/AIDS?

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Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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For more information, please visit [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org)

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