Challenges, Opportunities and New Trends in Governance Innovation across Africa

Presented at the Africa Regional Forum on Governance Innovation
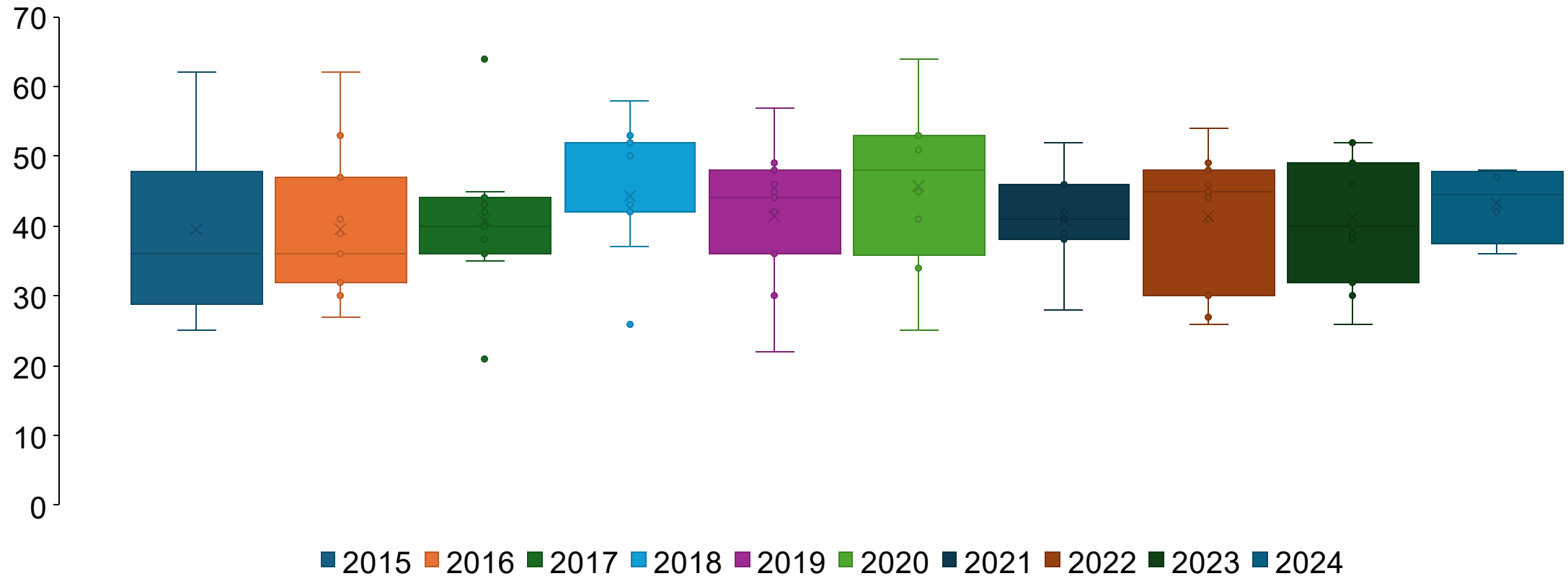*21 – 23 June 2025, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia*

June, 2025

< 50 percent of African population are satisfied with healthcare services in many countries and across years

SDG 16.6.2 Proportion of population who say that overall they are satisfied with the quality of healthcare services (%)
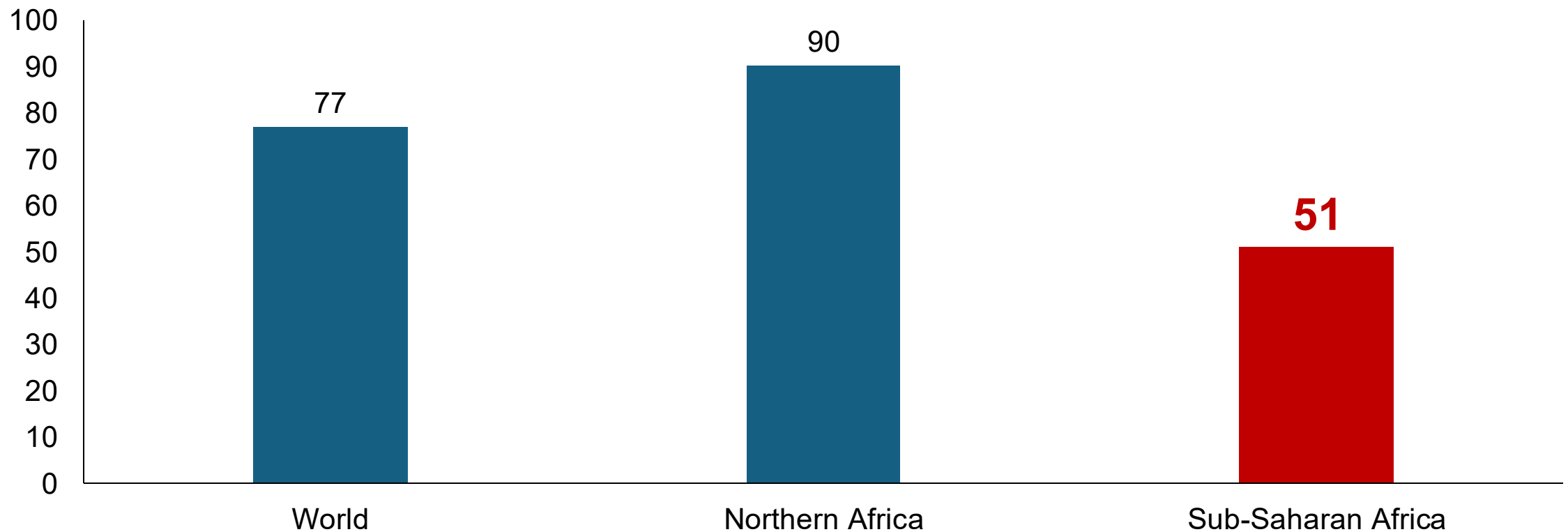
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In 2023, only 51 percent of births of children under 5 have been registered in Africa (other than North Africa)

SDG 16.9.1 Proportion of children under 5 years of age whose births have been registered with a civil authority

Source: ECA calculation based on UNDESA, Global SDG Database, accessed 19 June 2025.

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Access to key public services remains uneasy, especially for identity document, police assistance and medical care

Ease of accessing public services (Afrobarometer, 2024)
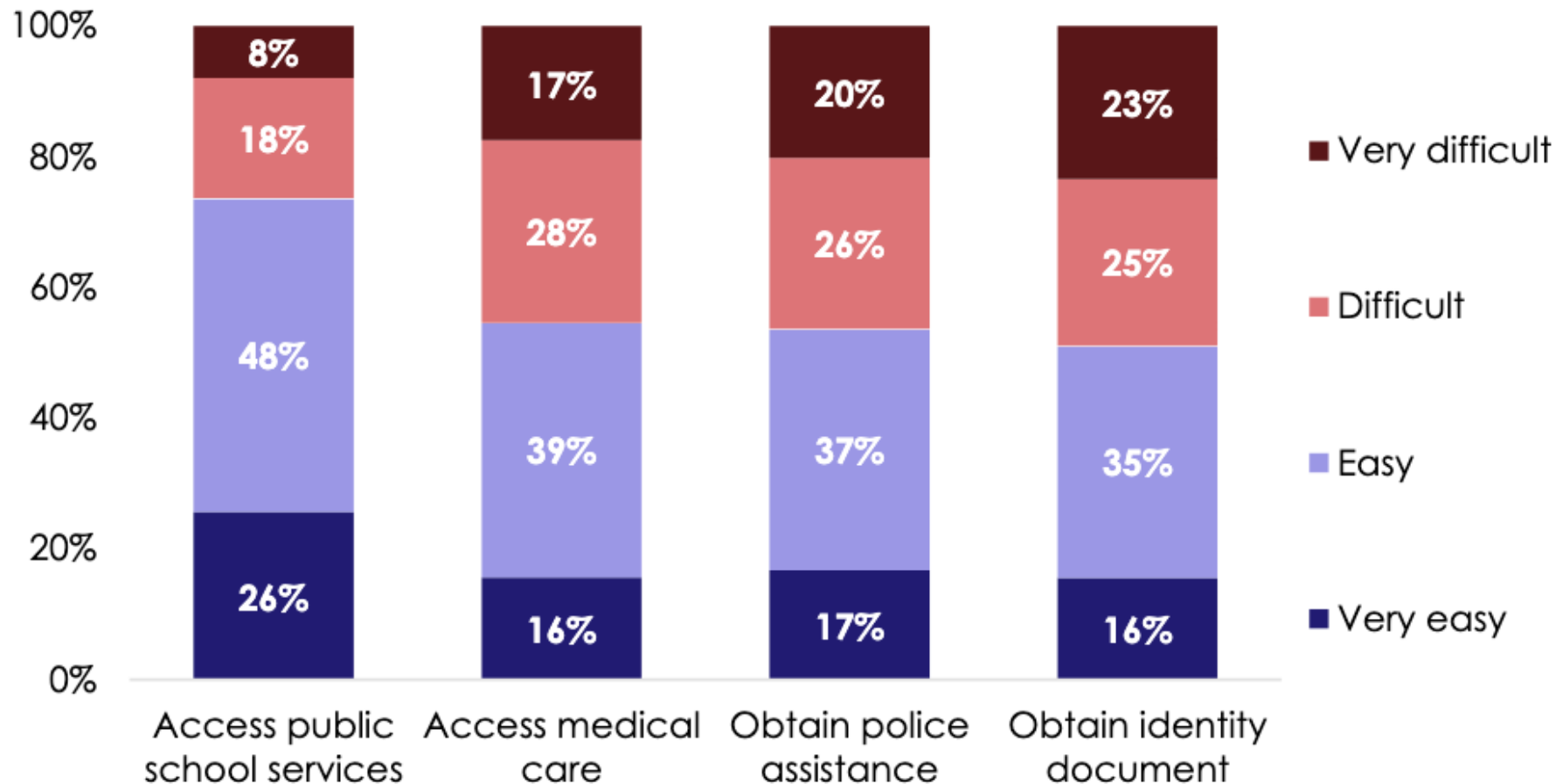
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Youth and poor citizens report higher barrier in accessing public services

Percentage of sub-population report "difficult" or "very difficult" to access public services (Afrobarometer 2024)
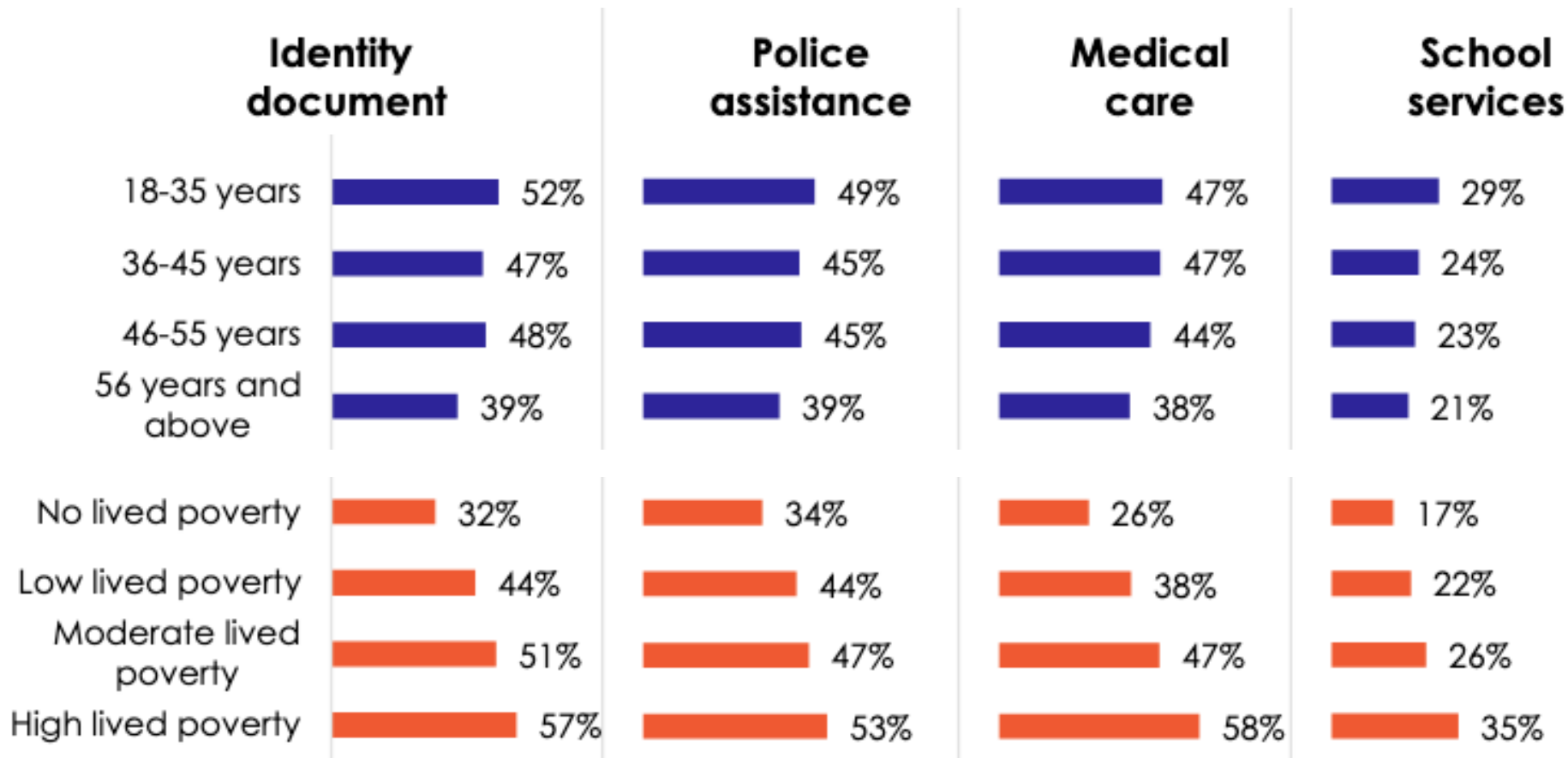
	Identity document	Police assistance	Medical care	School services
18-35 years	52%	49%	47%	29%
36-45 years	47%	45%	47%	24%
46-55 years	48%	45%	44%	23%
56 years and above	39%	39%	38%	21%
No lived poverty	32%	34%	26%	17%
Low lived poverty	44%	44%	38%	22%
Moderate lived poverty	51%	47%	47%	26%
High lived poverty	57%	53%	58%	35%

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Summary: Current status and challenges for African governments

- **Two big challenges for African countries**
  - Limited capacity to offer quality public service to a fast-growing, youthful, and fast-urbanizing population
  - "Leave no one behind" requires innovative and efficient solutions to public service delivery

- **3 Historical Constraints**
  - Infrastructure gaps
  - Resource limitation
  - Protracted policy limitation

- **Governance innovation offers opportunities**
  - Emerging technologies offer a disruptive, non-linear pathway to leapfrog these constraints & accelerate progress at scale.
  - We can reimagine how the state works, making governments more efficient, transparent and agile

Opportunities Unlocking Governance Innovation in Africa

$\Rightarrow$**Youth Demographic Dividend**

▪By 2050 Africa will account for *one quarter of the global labor force* and over 40% by 2100 (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2023). This youth bulge, if equipped with digital skills, presents an extraordinary governance opportunity. Startup culture, civic-tech movements, and youth-led civic oversight platforms flourish, offering fresh energy and innovation.

$\Rightarrow$**Mobile-First and Fintech Revolution**

▪Mobile penetration is transformative. Platforms like M-Pesa (Kenya) have extended financial access, and digital lending via behavioral scoring is increasing credit outreach. These advances support citizen engagement, transparency, and resource flows, effectively modernizing governance.

Opportunities Unlocking Governance Innovation in Africa

⇒**E Government Platforms**

- Countries like Rwanda (Irembo), Kenya (Huduma), Namibia (Nam X), and Mauritius have deployed e service portals delivering hundreds of citizen-facing services online. These platforms reduce bureaucratic delays, enhance accountability, and reinforce institutional trust.

⇒**AI and Blockchain for Governance**

- African geographies are rapidly adopting AI and blockchain. Mauritius and Kenya lead in AI strategy and deployment; Ghana is pioneering blockchain government applications; Tanzania and Egypt follow closely. Use cases include land registries, procurement tracking, traffic management, and predictive crop analytics.

⇒**Regional Coordination and Smart Africa Movement**

- The Smart Africa Alliance, chaired by Rwandan President Kagame, links AU with ITU, AfDB, UN ECA, GSMA, and private-sector actors to harmonize ICT policies and expand broadband access. Similarly, continental mechanisms like the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) support peer-led governance strengthening

Emerging Trends Shaping Governance Innovation

⇒**AI-Driven E Governance**

▪ Kenya integrates AI into agriculture (crop health drones), healthcare (Tambua Health diagnostics), credit scoring, and civil service performance. Rwanda, Egypt, Mauritius and others are establishing AI incubators, fiscal incentives, PPPs, and research funds. But awareness of associated ethical and privacy risks remains essential.

⇒**Blockchain Transparency and Anti Corruption**

▪ Blockchain shows promises for procurement and land registration. Ghana envisions a nationwide blockchain government; Kenya pilots blockchain procurement tracking. Its immutable record-keeping can reduce corruption and raise trust—where tech infrastructure and regulation allow.

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Emerging Trends Shaping Governance Innovation

⇒**Smart Cities and IoT Governance**

- Projects aligned with smart cities involve IoT for services like water, energy, traffic surveillance. Although finance is a constraint, success relies on embedding socio-legal reforms alongside infrastructure .

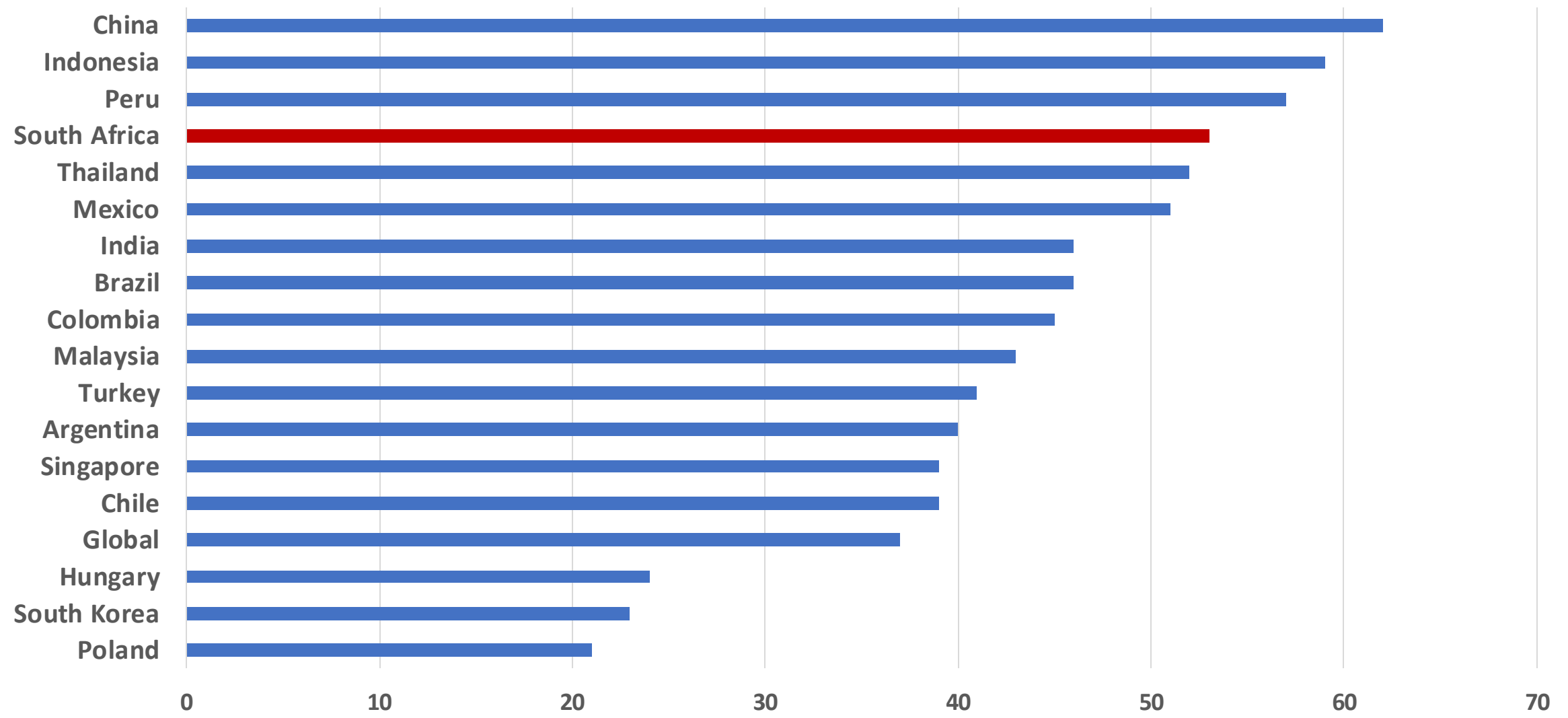⇒**Open Government and Citizen Co creation**

- Digital tools enable direct citizen input on budgets, policy, and feedback systems. Kenya's platforms expose corruption; continental frameworks like APRM foster peer-driven transparency. This trend strengthens democratic legitimacy and ensures governance is responsive.

Opportunities offered by AI in Public Service Delivery and Governance

- **AI enables governments to deliver more, at lower cost & with greater impact.**

- **AI can enhance public-service delivery by**

  - streamlining bureaucratic processes,
  - reducing corruption and
  - improving citizen engagement.

- **Examples:**

- In health care, AI can improve diagnostics, optimize resource allocation and extend access to quality care to remote communities
- In education, AI can personalize learning and overcome geographical distances
- In agriculture, AI can strengthen food security

Perspective on how the use of artificial intelligence (AI) can improve life worldwide in EMs as of 2024 (%)

Country	Value
China	
Indonesia	
Peru	
South Africa	
Thailand	
Mexico	
India	
Brazil	
Colombia	
Malaysia	
Turkey	
Argentina	
Singapore	
Chile	
Global	
Hungary	
South Korea	
Poland	

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Opportunities Unlocking Governance Innovation in Africa

Structural governance challenges that stand way in AI deployment

- capacity deficits,

- information asymmetries and

- fragmented institutions

African governments can adopt a dual-track strategy that balances immediate, high-impact interventions with the development of long-term structural readiness.

Outline

❑ Current status and challenges for African governments

❑ Opportunities and new trends in governance innovation

❑ **Conclusion: What African government can do**

Conclusion - to harness opportunities and mitigate challenges, African governments should:

➤ **Invest in inclusive digital infrastructure**

▪ Expand rural broadband, reduce costs via partnerships like Smart Africa, subsidize access, and boost energy grids.

➤ **Build institutional and human capital capacity**

▪ Scale up digital literacy, public sector tech training, and governance graduate programmes such as African School of Governance

➤ **Modernize regulatory frameworks**

▪ Harmonize data, cyber, AI, and blockchain policies through AU conventions and Smart Africa protocols; ensure agile legal structures.

3 principles for AI capacity building Example of Egypt National AI Strategy

➢ AI should enhance human labour, not replace it. Priority on improving processes and outcomes, not cutting jobs.

➢ Focus on expanding the labour market. This means generating new opportunities and equipping all generations, not just the young, with the skills they need.

➢ Some people cannot be upskilled or reskilled, and it's vital not to leave them behind. Social policies, int. cooperation

Source: The National Council for Artificial Intelligence, 2021. Egypt National Intelligence Strategy. [online] The National Council for Artificial Intelligence Available at: https://mcit.gov.eg/Upcont/Documents/Publications_672021000_Egypt-National-AI-Strategy-English.pdf

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Conclusion - to harness opportunities and mitigate challenges, African governments should:

➢**Promote PPPs and innovation funding**

▪Encourage private investment via fiscal incentives, venture funds (e.g., Rwanda Seed Fund), and open data.

➢**Embed ethics, privacy, and accountability**

▪Implement legal safeguards for AI and blockchain; develop digital ethics councils; protect citizens' rights in data flows.

➢**Foster citizen participation**

▪Deploy civic-tech platforms, enhance participatory budgeting, and scale APRM style peer review for transparency.

➢**Promote regional alignment**

▪Scale interoperability in governance tools, cross-border digital trade, and replicate successes like Rwanda's Irembo across clusters.

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