

Justice Needs and Satisfaction in **Nigeria** 2025

Legal problems in daily life



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The Hague Institute for Innovation of Law (HiIL) is an organisation dedicated to ensuring that justice is accessible, affordable, and easy to understand. We call this people-centred justice.

Efficient and fair justice systems empower people to resolve disputes, rebuild trust, and strengthen communities, driving economic growth, social stability, and a thriving future for all. Our insights come from listening to people's experiences with legal problems.

To make justice systems work for everyone, we partner with Ministries of Justice, judiciaries and other stakeholders to identify challenges to justice delivery, design solutions that enable more individuals to prevent or resolve their justice challenges, and implement them in ways that fit different contexts and needs. This not only benefits people directly but also fosters safe, stable societies where economic growth, innovation, and entrepreneurship thrive.

Our work spans multiple countries, with programmes in Nigeria, Ethiopia, Tunisia, Niger, Burkina Faso, the Netherlands, Iraq and Syria.

HiIL has been present in Nigeria since 2015, working closely with key partners across the justice sector. Over the years we have organised Justice Transformation Labs in Imo, Kaduna, and Ogun states in order to use the justice data to identify pressing justice needs, develop goals, and pathways to begin addressing the justice gap. We have recently launched two community justice pilot projects in Imo and Ogun states, based on the Justice Innovation Lab solutions developed in 2023. HiIL has also worked with justice experts to develop guidelines on land justice and family justice. Furthermore, over the years HiIL has supported a wide range of justice innovators and published a JNS in 2018.

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Government of the Netherlands



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Glossary

Below is a list of terms that can be helpful to understand the context, data and findings presented in this report. The definitions are Hiil's, for the most part. When they are not, we include the source. We believe that justice should be accessible and easy to understand, and that includes the information gathered about it.

People-centred justice: People-centred justice (PCJ) is an approach that helps us in achieving SDG 16.3 - Equal access to justice for all. PCJ places individuals and their needs at the heart of the justice processes, instead of institutions. It envisions a well-functioning justice system that delivers timely and effective justice services based on the diverse needs and experiences of all the people it serves: people-centred justice focuses on addressing people's problems and on creating solutions for these problems.

Longitudinal study: A longitudinal study follows and repeatedly surveys particular individuals over a period of

time. This method tracks changes and developments over time, revealing insights which a single survey may not be able to provide¹.

Panel: Refers to the group of individuals who have been surveyed over three years and make up the sample for this study.

Legal problems: Legal problems refer to conflicts or disputes that people encounter in their everyday lives, which can be resolved through legal actions. Also referred to as 'justice problems' in this report, these problems exist whether people take action or not, or whether the problem is resolved or not. This concept is consistently used in all of Hiil's surveys and is explained to respondents when administering the questionnaire.

Justice gap: The gap between the fair resolutions people seek and those they are able to achieve. This includes people who are not able to resolve their legal problems, either because they are still waiting for a resolution

or have abandoned any hope of resolution, and those who resolve their legal problems but perceive the resolution as unfair.

Justice provider: A person or organisation that is involved, to a more or less systematic extent, in resolving legal problems. In this report, providers are also referred to as "third parties".

Justice journey: Refers to the journey a person takes from the moment they recognise they have a legal problem until an eventual resolution. The journey includes the search for legal information and advice and taking actions to try to resolve the problem, either by directly engaging the other party, via a third party or through a combination of both.

Justice need: The need to have a legal problem resolved in a way that

is fair, affordable, accessible, easy to understand, and results in an outcome that positively relieves the person of the most negative consequences of the problem.

Domestic violence: The term is used in this report to describe the types of violence that take place within the home or family between intimate partners as well as between other family members².

Source of help: This term encompasses any person or organisation a person turns to for help resolving their legal problem. This can include their social network (family, friends, community) as well as justice providers. The list of potential sources of help presented to people in this survey was adapted with the help of the Reference Group during the first year of the study (2023)³.

¹ Caruana, E. J., Roman, M., Hernández-Sánchez, J., & Solli, P. Longitudinal studies. *Journal of thoracic disease*, 7(11), E537–E540 (2015). <https://jtd.amegroups.org/article/view/5822/5680>

² Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2015), *Guidelines for Integrating Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action: Reducing risk, promoting resilience and aiding recovery*.

³ The list of all the sources of help sorted by alphabetical order: Area gangs/Cult groups; Central public authority; Colleague; Community/traditional leader (e.g., Emir, Oba, Eze, Baale, Mai Ungwa, Onyi Isi Obodo, Town Union President); CSO/NGO representative; Employer; Family member; Formal court; Free legal aid organisation; Friend; Government-based human rights organisation (e.g., NHRC, NAPTIP, Public complaints commission, etc.); Landlord; Lawyer; Local public authority (e.g., LGA Chairman, local Government, vigilantes, etc.); Medical professional; Negotiated directly with the other party; Neighbour; Other; Peer groups (self-regulating groups); Police; Religious Authority/Leader (Pastor, Imam, Deity); Teacher.

Executive Summary

What does the landscape of justice needs look like over time? How do people navigate their legal problems, and what factors contribute to resolution or persistence? This report addresses these questions by presenting the findings of a three-year longitudinal Justice Needs and Satisfaction Survey (JNS) conducted in Nigeria. Recognising that justice journeys are often complex and evolve, this study, which began in 2022, followed a representative panel of Nigerians to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences with legal problems and the justice system across multiple years.

In 2025, the final year of the study tracked the evolution of legal problems reported in previous years, explored new legal problems encountered, and gauged people's perspectives on the Nigerian justice system. We spoke with 6,573 people in the first year (2022), re-interviewed 4,912 people in the

second year (2023), and concluded with surveying 4,046 people from the original panel between December 2024 and January 2025. This longitudinal design offers a unique, people-centred lens through which to understand justice needs in Nigeria.

The study reveals that legal problems are a persistent reality for Nigerians, with **90% experiencing at least one legal problem during the four-year study period**. Encouragingly, when problems are resolved, they tend to remain so; as 90% of the problems reported as resolved in the first year stayed resolved by the third year. Furthermore, two-thirds of long-lasting legal problems, those ongoing since the first year, were at least partially resolved by the final year. However, the emergence of new problems alongside the number of unresolved problems contributes to a **persistent and growing justice gap**.

The study also explored why problems might resurface after being resolved. We found that **failure to address the underlying cause of the problem** (34%) and resolutions that were only partial or temporary (21%) were the most common causes. For long-lasting problems that were ultimately abandoned, a **lack of faith in achieving a positive outcome** through further action was the primary reason for abandonment (29%).

Interestingly, among long-lasting problems, Nigerians tend to rely less on the formal sector over time, **increasingly favouring direct negotiation with the other party and turning to community or traditional leaders for resolution**. This shift suggests a preference for alternative resolution pathways as problems persist, possibly due to cost or perceived ineffectiveness within the formal system.



Despite this, the study revealed that **Nigerians generally hold positive perceptions of the formal justice sector**, with over 50% expressing trust in its ability to resolve problems. However, there is simultaneously a prevalent belief that it is difficult for the average person to navigate the justice system – with 53% of people believing that it is designed for lawyers, rather than ordinary people.

Trust levels in specific justice actors show that religious authorities (80% trust) and community/traditional leaders (72% trust) enjoy the highest levels of trust, while the police have the lowest trust levels (57% do not trust). A **barrier to accessing justice was identified as the perceived and actual high costs involved**, with 27% believing this to be the main reason people abandon their legal problems.

In this report we also focus on domestic violence, a serious and prevalent issue. Among individuals participating in all three years and experiencing at least one legal problem, **30% reported experiencing domestic violence during the study period**. Resolution rates for domestic violence problems are relatively high:

68% of cases that were ongoing in year two were fully resolved by year three; however, **the high prevalence of problems underscores the continued need for intervention and support**.

Similar to other problem types, the most frequent reason for domestic violence problems resurfacing was the failure to address the root cause (40%). Notably, formal legal pathways such as courts, police, and lawyers were rarely the primary sources of help sought for domestic violence, even for long-lasting problems.

Based on the insights the panel participants provided throughout the surveys, Hiil proposes several actions for policymakers, service providers, and innovators working to ensure access to justice for all. These include:

- **Continuous collection of people-centred justice data** to monitor the justice gap and inform the development of high-quality justice services, whether through one-time surveys or multi-year longitudinal studies.

- **Focus resources on developing and improving accessible, quality, affordable, and timely justice services.** This will aid in addressing the initial barriers to accessing justice and ensure effective long-lasting resolutions, thereby reducing the justice gap.
- **Prioritise addressing the root causes of legal problems** to achieve lasting justice and prevent the recurrence of legal problems, paying particular attention to fairness in both the process and the outcome.
- **Recognise the tendency for people to turn to direct negotiation for resolution** as legal problems drag on, which should be considered in the design and provision of justice services.
- **Continue strengthening comprehensive efforts to prevent domestic violence** due to its high prevalence, and to provide accessible, affordable, high-quality, and safe support to all victims, regardless of gender or location, through people-centred and culturally sensitive services.

- **Foster a national commitment to the people-centred justice approach**, which includes data collection; identifying, developing, and scaling successful innovative solutions; creating an enabling environment; and ensuring accountability by aligning with the global movement towards people-centred justice.

In conclusion, this longitudinal JNS study provides insights into the evolving landscape of justice needs in Nigeria, highlighting the persistence of legal problems and the importance of addressing their root causes for lasting resolution. The findings highlight the significant barriers posed by cost and the continued prevalence of domestic violence problems, emphasising the need for a people-centred justice approach. By prioritising accessible, affordable, and effective justice services, and carrying out regular people-centred data collection, Nigeria can make significant strides narrowing the justice gap and cultivating a more just society for all.



1

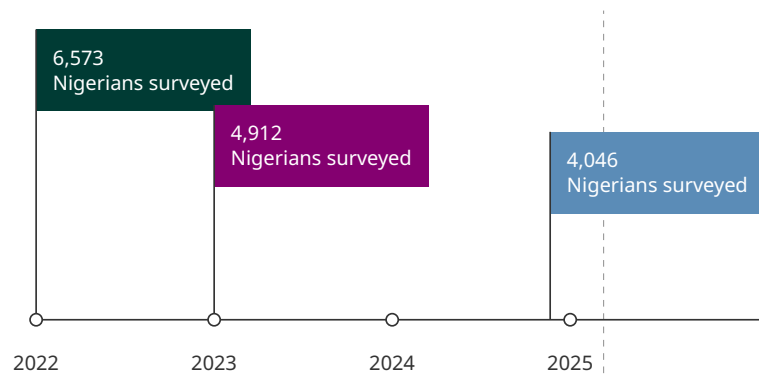
Introduction

Over the past 12 years, HiIL has conducted 40+ Justice Needs and Satisfaction Surveys globally. Each survey collects extensive people-centred data, concluding with a report highlighting the current state of people's justice needs and experiences. But what happens to people and their problems after we interview them? Do they manage to resolve the legal problems they were dealing with at the time? Are they able to move on with their lives after resolution? Do their problems resurface? Do they give up on reaching a resolution? Do they encounter new legal problems? While numerous Justice Needs and Satisfaction Surveys provide valuable snapshots of the legal landscape at a specific point in time, this longitudinal

study uniquely addresses the critical gap in understanding how people's legal problems evolve over time.

This report presents the findings from the three-year Justice Needs and Satisfaction study in Nigeria. Starting in 2022, we surveyed a representative group of 6,573 randomly selected Nigerians, followed by a 2023 survey where we interviewed 4,912 of the same people. From December 2024 to January 2025, a team of enumerators from Communication & Marketing Research Group Limited (CMRG) travelled across Nigeria for a third and final time, speaking to 4,046 of the same people from the two previous years.

TIMELINE: 3-YEAR JNS STUDY IN NIGERIA



The interviewers asked follow-up questions about the problems people reported in years one and two of the study, gaining insight into whether these problems had been resolved, resurfaced, abandoned, or were still ongoing. Participants were also asked about any new problems experienced in the previous 12 months between surveys, as well as opinion questions to gauge people's perspectives on the Nigerian justice system. In this third year we conducted an additional 30+ in-depth interviews with people who have had long lasting ongoing problems, in order to gain even deeper insight into their experiences. This report provides a people-centred understanding of people's justice needs and journeys, and how they evolve over time in Nigeria.

This report is organised as follows:

Chapter 1 gives an introductory overview, **Chapter 2** lays out the methodology of the study and provides an overview of the sample. **Chapter 3** dives into the evolution of legal problems over time, focusing on the current status of problems initially reported in year one of the study. **Chapter 4** takes a closer look at the long lasting ongoing legal problems, those that were not yet resolved in years one or two, particularly focusing on people's most serious problems. **Chapter 5** explores people's perceptions of the Nigerian justice system and **Chapter 6** focuses on domestic violence, one of Nigeria's most serious legal problems. Finally, **Chapter 7** provides the findings and implications derived from the data, including potential ways forward to decrease the justice gap in Nigeria.



2

Methodology

HiiL's Justice Needs and Satisfaction (JNS) Survey measures legal needs from a people-centred perspective, understanding justice as it relates to people's everyday lives. The standard JNS Survey asks people about their justice problems and their journeys to resolve these problems. This provides a valuable snapshot of the current justice gap, however; it has its limitations. A single survey does not allow for tracking the development of justice problems over time, or the many steps people take in their journeys, often over several years, to resolve problems. Even with regular repetition of the study, when surveying a new sample every time, there is little insight into how problems evolve over time: whether they resurface after resolution, who or what institutions

people turn to after years of trying to resolve, at what point people abandon, and whether people who experience legal problems are likely to face more.

To address this, HiiL carried out a new JNS methodological approach in Nigeria: a **longitudinal study**, where we have followed the justice journeys of a representative group of Nigerians over the past three years. In each year of the study we asked people questions about any new justice problems they encountered in the previous twelve months, as well as questions about problems they had reported in the previous years. This final report will summarise the findings from the third year of the study, as well as look back and compare with the findings of the two previous years.³

In all three years of the study, HiiL worked closely with a group of experts and key stakeholders from various Nigerian institutions and organisations, the **Reference Group**. This group was assembled during the first year of the study, participating in the adaptation of the survey and triangulation of preliminary results in each year.

The initial phase of this third and final year of research took place in 2024. In October 2024 we held an adaptation workshop with the Reference Group. Much of the survey was already adapted to the country's specific context; including the list of problem types and dispute resolution mechanisms, therefore we focused on adapting the new questions being added in this year. Simultaneously,

HiiL and Communication & Marketing Research Group Limited (**CMRG**) trained the enumerators to administer the survey instrument and conduct in-depth qualitative interviews. CMRG carried out the data collection for all three years of the study and many of the enumerators were involved in all three years. Data collection took place in December 2024 and January 2025. In March 2025, HiiL presented the preliminary study findings to the reference group as part of a triangulation workshop. The reference group provided valuable feedback, interpretations, and explanations, greatly enhancing the final report.



³ The year one (2023) and year two (2024) reports can be found here: <https://www.hiil.org/research/justice-needs-and-satisfaction-in-nigeria/>

New study elements in year three

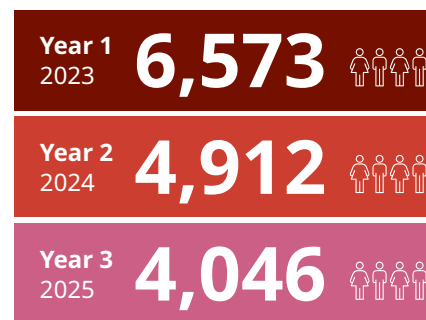
In this third and final year of the study we added a few new elements. First, in the survey we asked additional questions about problems which were reported as being previously resolved and later resurfacing to better understand which problems resurfaced and how those problems were originally resolved. This was included following feedback we received on the year two report both during the launch event and from the Reference Group. We also added an additional module asking people about their perceptions of the Nigerian justice system in order to better understand their experiences and choices.

Furthermore, we conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with 33 individuals. These individuals were selected from a list of previous participants who had a problem in year one which was ongoing or resurfaced in year two. At the end of the survey questionnaire the data collection platform, SurveyCTO, would

inform the enumerators whether the participant was eligible for the in-depth interview based on whether they met the problem criteria. Enumerators could then ask the person's permission to return and conduct a follow up interview. To further deepen the focus on domestic violence in the year one report, we asked enumerators to conduct at least ten of the interviews with people who had reported domestic violence problems. The remaining 20+ were open to any problem types.

We decided to add qualitative interviews to this year of data collection in order to gain a deeper understanding and context around these long ongoing problems. The questions asked about the choices people had made to resolve their problems or abandon them, the impact the problems had on their lives and why they thought the problems were still ongoing or resurfaced.

Panel retention



In year one of the study we surveyed a representative sample of 6,573 adult Nigerians. In year two, using contact details collected during the first interviews, we were able to relocate 4,912 people from the original panel. This is about 75% of the original sample, just above the average retention rate for longitudinal studies⁴. In year three, we were able to relocate 4,046 of the people who had participated in both previous years, an 82% retention rate from year two to year three. In both years the

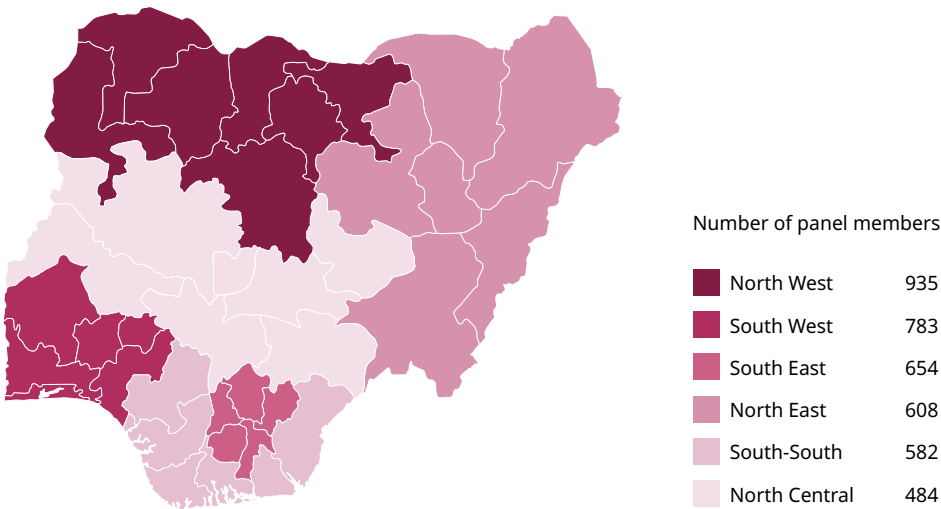
majority of 'lost' respondents could simply not be found anymore; a very small minority no longer wanted to participate in the study. Importantly, there are no major significant differences between the people who were interviewed again and those who dropped out of the study. Meaning, the samples in all three years of data collection were representative of the Nigerian adult population.

⁴ Teague, S., Youssef, G.J., Macdonald, J.A. et al. Retention strategies in longitudinal cohort studies: a systematic review and meta-analysis. BMC Med Res Methodol 18, 151 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-018-0586-7>

The Nigerian panel

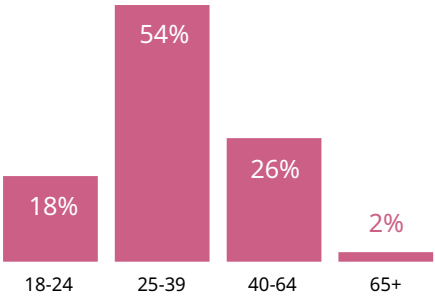
The representative panel is made up of adult Nigerians from all six geopolitical zones of the country. In year one, within each zone we selected three states that represented the economic diversity of Nigeria. In each state, we covered three senatorial districts. The map below shows the exact number of people surveyed from each zone. The distribution of panel members across the six zones is similar to the actual national distribution of the Nigerian population.⁵

NUMBER OF PANEL MEMBERS BY SIX GEOPOLITICAL ZONES



The panel members are split between men (51%) and women (49%) and are representative of both rural (50%) and urban (50%) areas. The age distribution of the panel ranges from 18-96 years old, with 98% of members falling between the ages of 18 and 64 and the remaining 2% being seniors aged 65 and over. The majority of the panel (72%) falls in the 18–39 age bracket.

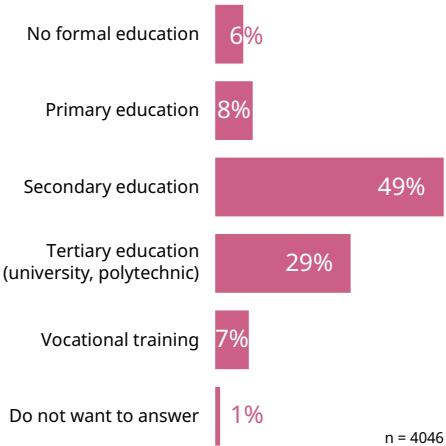
AGE CATEGORIES



n = 4046

Around 6% of the people in the sample have not received any formal education, while 8% only completed primary school. Half of the panel members completed secondary education (49%), 7% have undergone vocational training, and 29% earned a university degree. Younger people are more likely to have received secondary education than older people. Men are slightly more likely than women to have earned a university degree and while a small portion of the overall sample, women are twice as likely as men to have received no formal education.

EDUCATION LEVEL



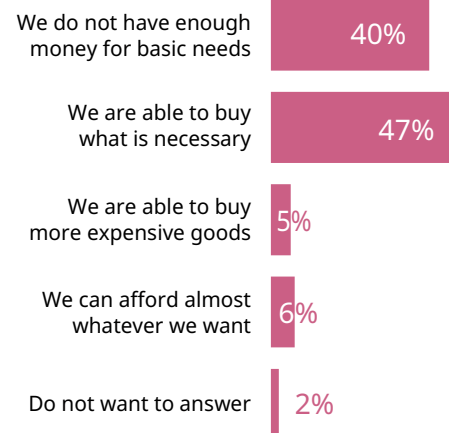
n = 4046

⁵ National Bureau of Statistics. (2021). Demographic statistics bulletin: 2021 Nigeria. <https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/elibrary/read/1241207>



In this report we have separated the panel members into two groups: those with no formal education or primary education, referred to as “no or primary education”, who make up 15% of the total, and those with secondary education or higher, referred to as “secondary or higher education”, who comprise 85% of the total.

FINANCIAL STATUS



n = 4046

People were also asked what their financial situation was and were given four broad answer options: can't afford basic needs, can afford just the basic needs, can afford more expensive goods and services, and can afford almost everything. Two categories were created from this question, the first being those who can't afford basic needs and the second being those who can afford basic needs, which joined all 3 categories of people who reported to be financially stable. 40% of the respondents disclosed that they lack the funds to pay for their basic needs, while 60% said they could cover their basic needs.⁶

⁶ All demographic questions were asked in year one of the survey. Respondents did not update their financial, educational, or other status in subsequent years.



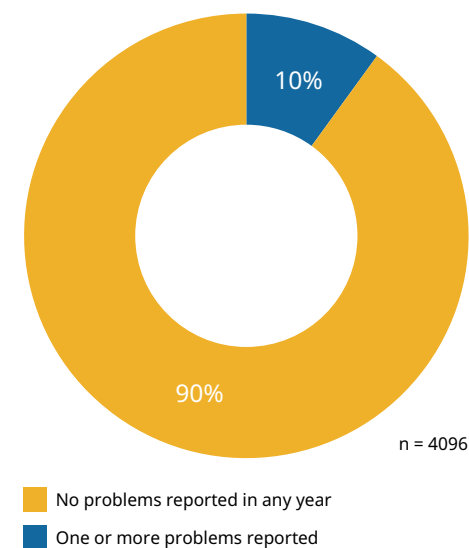
3

Legal Problem Evolution

This chapter examines the evolution of the legal problems Nigerians faced over the three year study. We explore how common it is for people to experience legal problems, whether experiencing a problem increases one's likelihood of experiencing more legal problems, and look into the resolution statuses of problems reported in year one. Additionally, we take a closer look at resurfaced problems: problems which were previously reported as resolved and have since resumed.

Legal problems are an extremely common occurrence in Nigerian's lives. Rather than obtaining a one time static view of how many people experience legal problems, by surveying people annually for three years, we were able to really see just how common legal problems are in Nigerian's lives. Among the people who participated in all three years of the study, 90% had experienced at least one legal problem in the four year period measured. Of those who encountered at least one legal problem, many regularly dealt with more than one problem in a year. In the first year (2023), people reported an average of 2 problems each.

PROBLEM PREVALENCE: COMBINED THREE YEARS
among participants of all three years



In the second year (2024), the same respondents reported an average of 1.44 new problems each. And in this third year (2025), people reported an average of 1.4 new problems. While this average number of new problems decreases each year, it reveals that new legal problems are regularly arising.



The impact of these legal problems on people's lives is significant. With the high likelihood of Nigerians facing legal problems, many will have to deal with the consequences such problems have on their lives. A common theme throughout the in-depth interviews was the large negative impact legal problems have – from financial hardship to illness, stress, and difficulty working, these problems can affect every facet of people's lives.



“I was sick and decided to go to the hospital, they checked my blood pressure and it was rising and the doctor asked if something was disturbing me, I had to open up to the doctor about the issue; and the doctor advised me to let it go... He advised that I drop the whole case because it is already making me sick.”

— Male participant with a neighbour problem he reported as abandoned in year three.

“Mentally, I was not stable. Sometimes, especially in that period, I easily fell sick...It really affected me. Most of us, especially my business, it really affected my business.”

— Male participant with a land problem which he reported as still ongoing in year three.

“The impact was heavy on me and my family. First, the stress of extra financial burden...My husband was deeply troubled and always thinking about the incident and from there he fell sick.”

— Female participant with a neighbour problem which was reported as resolved via direct negotiation in year three.

“It affects my children so much because I'm no longer staying with them. My brothers and my sisters took them.”

— Female participant with a money problem which she reported as abandoned in year three. As a result of the dispute she lost her business and could not afford to care for her children while trying to rebuild financially.

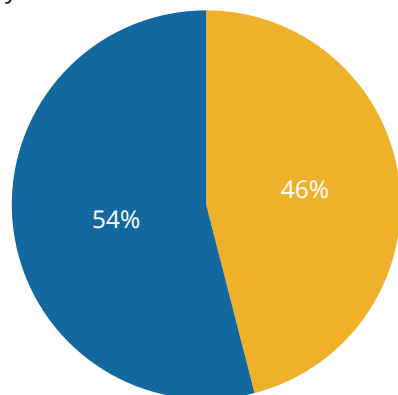


The year two results revealed that people who reported one or more legal problems during year one were slightly more likely to report one or more new legal problems the following year. The results of year three further supported this hypothesis. People who reported one or more legal problems during year two were more likely to report one or more new legal problems in year three (38% vs. 28%). After surveying these people over three years, it indeed seems that experiencing legal problems slightly increases the risk of subsequently experiencing more legal problems. It may also be that certain people are more prone to experience legal problems than others or that certain people are more likely to report or recognise something as a legal problem, especially after already experiencing a problem.

While people who experience legal problems may be more likely to experience more legal problems in the future, it is noteworthy that the percentage of new problems reported decreases each year. It is likely that people reported more problems, in especially the first year, because they include problems that started more than a year ago but were still affecting them. In the second and third year of the study, these problems would not be included, because they were already recorded during the first year interview.

PROBLEM PREVALENCE COMPARISON BY YEAR

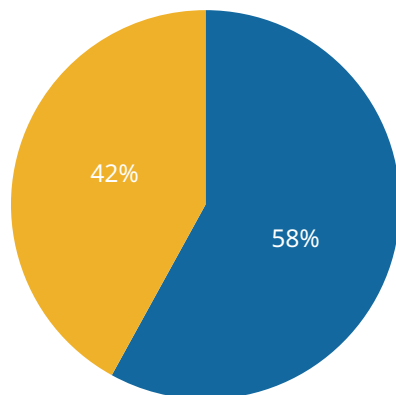
No problems in
year one



n = 980

■ No problems in year two
■ One or more problems in year two

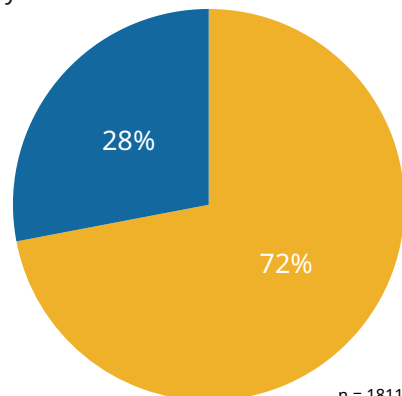
One or more problems in
year one



n = 4022

■ No problems in year two
■ One or more problems in year two

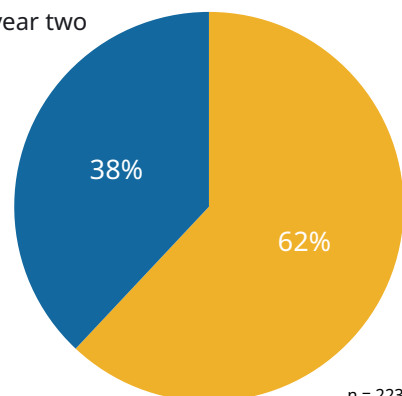
No problems in
year two



n = 1811

■ No problems in year three
■ One or more problems in year three

One or more problems in
year two



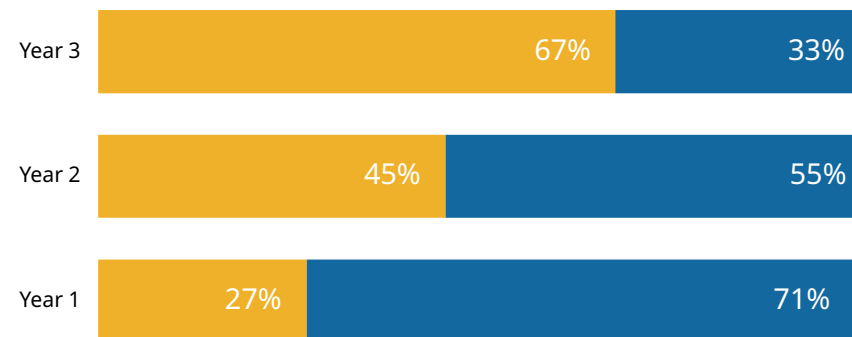
n = 2235

■ No problems in year three
■ One or more problems in year three

Charts from
**Nigeria JNS 2024
Report**



PROBLEM PREVALENCE PER YEAR among participants of all three years



■ No problems in the previous 12 months
■ One or more problems in the previous 12 months

n = 4096



3.1

The evolution of resolved problems

To understand the evolution of the justice gap and the demand for justice, the third year of data collection looked at the following types of legal problems:

- Ongoing problems from year one that were still ongoing in year two
- Ongoing problems from year one that were resolved in year two
- Resolved problems from year one that were still resolved in year two
- Resolved problems from year one that resurfaced and ongoing in year two
- By measuring the current status of these four types of problems we can assess the justice landscape in Nigeria three years after the first data collection, gaining a deeper understanding of the nature and evolution of legal problems.

The data collection also looked at the following types of problems:

- New ongoing problems from year two
- New resolved problems from year two

New problems reported in year two will not be as prominent in this report's analysis, allowing space to more deeply analyse year one problems, seeing how they evolve over a three year period.

The majority of problems that reach resolution stay resolved over time

Generally, once a problem is resolved, it is very likely to stay resolved. Last year, we saw that 75% of the resolved problems from year one were still resolved in year two. This time around, 90% of these problems are still resolved. Meaning, not only is a problem likely to stay resolved, but that

likelihood increases with each year that it is still resolved. This demonstrates the durability of the resolutions Nigerians reach, and indicates that if a legal problem is going to resurface, it is more likely to happen in the first year after resolution.

RESOLUTION STATUS IN YEAR THREE problems resolved in year one and still resolved in year two





The same can be said for problems that were resolved in year two. 90% of problems that were resolved in year two were reported as still resolved this year. This number is even higher than the 75% of problems that stayed resolved between years one and two. This could potentially be because problems which took two years to resolve may have reached a more permanent resolution rather than

problems which are resolved more quickly. As problems drag on, people often turn to various different sources of help and resolution mechanisms to resolve their problems. As a result, problems resolved after a longer period may be more likely to reach a resolution which addresses the root cause of the problem, are more permanent, or are reached and recorded in the formal system.

RESOLUTION STATUS IN YEAR THREE problems ongoing in year one and resolved in year two



■ Resurfaced
■ Still resolved
■ Don't remember/Don't want to answer

n = 1346 problems

If a problem does resurface after previously being resolved, it is highly likely that the problem will be resolved again within the year. Among problems that were already resolved when reported in year one and then resurfaced in year two, 83% were resolved in year three. Only 7% of resurfaced problems were still ongoing and 5% had been abandoned.

The overall trend of problems staying resolved suggests that the initial barriers to accessing justice and achieving a resolution are the most critical to address. If problems can make it to a resolution, they are likely to stay resolved. The key to improving justice therefore lies in increasing the accessibility of justice services and in making sure those services achieve the outcomes that people need.

RESOLUTION STATUS IN YEAR THREE problems resolved in year one that were ongoing in year two



■ Ongoing
■ Abandoned
■ Resolved (partially or completely)
■ Don't remember/Don't want to answer

n = 696 problems

3.2

The evolution of resurfaced problems





Problems which were reported as resolved at some point in the study and were subsequently reported as ongoing in a following year are classified as **resurfaced problems**. In this section, the analysis includes new problems from both year one and year two. While the previous sections in this chapter have focused solely on problems reported in year one, we have included the year two problems here to ensure a larger sample for analysis. The number of resurfaced problems is overall quite low so this allows us to be able to make stronger observations about the data.

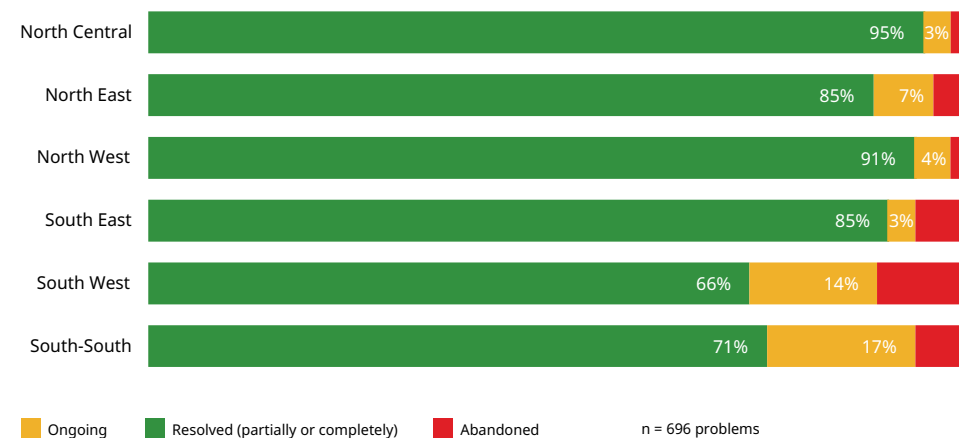
Neighbour and family problems are the most likely to resurface

Different problem types are more likely to resurface over time. Problems initially resolved in year one concerning safety and security, as well as money problems, showed the highest likelihood to reappear two years later in year three. For problems resolved in year two, neighbour problems and family problems were the most likely to resurface within one year (year three). The higher rate of recurrence

in neighbour and family problems may be linked to their frequent resolution through direct negotiation or with the help of their social networks. These resolutions may not always effectively address the underlying causes of the legal problems.

Generally, there were few demographic differences around the resolution status of resurfaced problems.

RESOLUTION STATUS IN YEAR THREE problems that were resurfaced in year two



However, there was a notable difference among the geopolitical zones. In the South West and to a lesser extent in the South South zones, resurfaced problems more often remained ongoing or were abandoned in year three.

When discussed with the Reference Group, it was hypothesized that people in these zones may be less likely to turn to institutional mechanisms to resolve their problems. As a result problems are often resolved through informal mechanisms which may lack the formal recording and enforcement mechanisms that contribute to more lasting resolutions.

This was reinforced by the in-depth interviews. One participant in the South South geopolitical zone had a land grabbing problem which was ongoing in all three years. At one point the problem was resolved by the community elders who judged in his favour. However, the other party claimed that the elders did not make a correct judgement and subsequently took the land again, causing the problem to resurface. Given that the elders’ decision was not formally recorded or enforceable, this person continued facing the same problem over several years. At the time of the interview, the person had taken the case to court in hopes of a more permanent resolution.

Resolutions which fail to address the root cause of the problem appear less likely to last

HOW WAS THE RESURFACED PROBLEM
ORIGINALLY RESOLVED

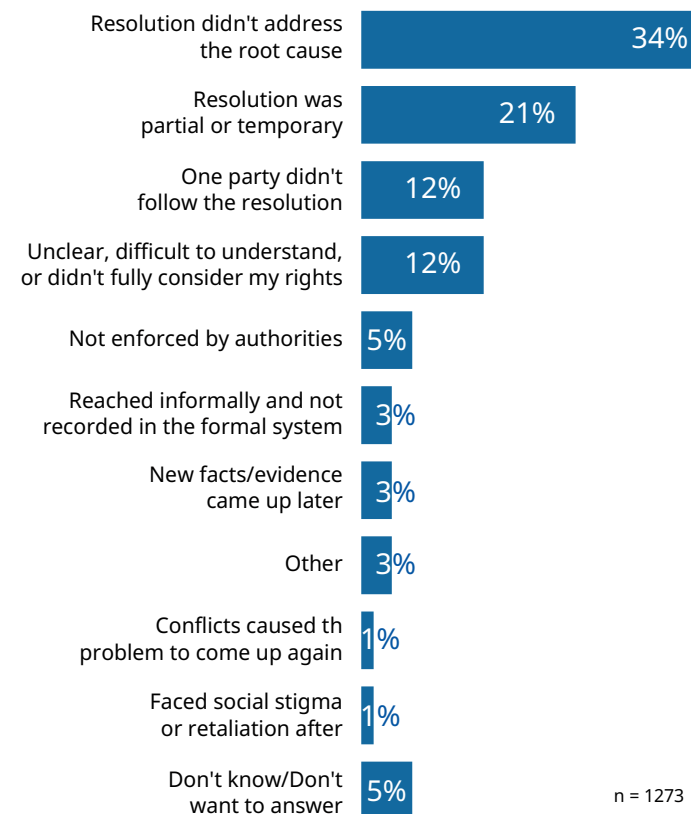


n = 1211

To better understand why problems resurface, we asked respondents how these problems were originally resolved. Direct negotiation was the most common answer (45%), followed by the police (13%), and community/traditional leaders (9%). The increased likelihood of resurfacing for problems resolved through direct negotiation aligns with the hypothesis that the informal nature of these agreements may not guarantee long term resolution. Indeed, when asked why respondents thought their problem had resurfaced, they most commonly selected that the resolution did not address the root cause of the problem (34%) or that it was a partial or temporary resolution (21%).

These results underscore a critical challenge: how can justice systems ensure resolutions tackle the root causes of legal problems, rather than merely addressing surface-level symptoms? Regardless of the resolution pathway – direct negotiation, formal mechanisms, informal mechanisms, etc. – the key to preventing problems resurfacing and fostering lasting justice appears to lie in effectively addressing the deeper causes of legal problems.

WHY DO PEOPLE THINK THEIR PROBLEM RESURFACED?





4

Long-Lasting Problems

Approximately 10% of the adult population in Nigeria has one or more long-lasting legal problems. We define long-lasting legal problems as those problems that were first reported in year one of this study and remained consistently categorised as ongoing throughout the subsequent years.

LONG-LASTING PROBLEMS
from year one



One or more long lasting problems
No long lasting problems

n = 4046

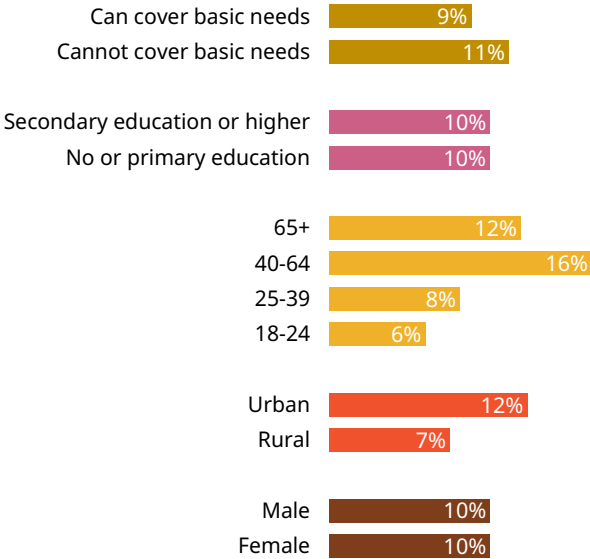
The urban poor in Nigeria often face long-lasting legal problems

Relatively, people facing long-lasting legal problems are disproportionately poor, live in urban areas and are among the older cohorts, particularly, in the middle-adulthood bracket. The first year of this study found that poorer Nigerians were more likely to have experienced at least one legal problem, but their average number of problems was slightly lower than for wealthier people. This means that

their overrepresentation among people with long-lasting problems may be a reflection of their higher likelihood of facing legal problems.

Looking at the geopolitical zones, it is the South-West where more people report long-lasting problems, 21% of its inhabitants. Other regions fluctuate between 6% (South-South and North West) and 10% (North East), which

ONE OR MORE LONG-LASTING PROBLEMS



n = 4046

means between a 100% to a 300% increase in the prevalence of people with long-lasting problems. People in Lagos tend to disproportionately appear more often among those with long-lasting legal problems, with one in four respondents from the state experiencing one or more. The urban poor in Lagos are suffering from these problems.

Based on our previous research in Nigeria, and consistent with studies in other countries, ongoing legal problems tend to be rated as having a relatively higher impact on people's lives than resolved or abandoned problems. Nigerians will strive to get their problem resolved as long as needed when the impact of the problem is higher than the (emotional, monetary) cost of attempting resolution.



Two-thirds of last-longing legal problems finally found resolution in the final year

More than two-thirds of the legal problems that were ongoing in years one and two of this study were deemed as (at least, partially) resolved. Approximately one in five of the long-lasting legal problems is still considered ongoing, adding to the updated justice gap. Taken together, the data keeps showing that

legal problems are dynamic and the Nigerian legal system, while resolving a substantial proportion of problems, keeps piling up other problems.

More than 80% of the formerly long-lasting problems that got resolved did it in a (very) fair way.

RESOLUTION STATUS IN YEAR THREE: long-lasting problems



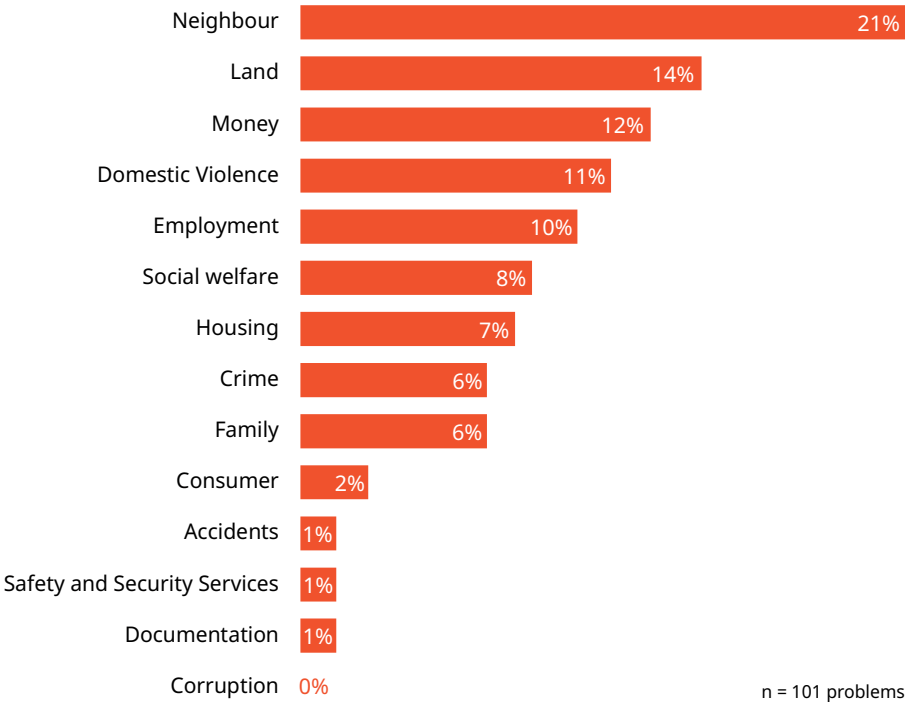
■ Ongoing
 ■ Resolved (partially or completely)
 ■ Abandoned
 ■ Don't remember/Don't want to answer

n = 516

Neighbour-related, land, debt-related and domestic violence are the categories that more often appear as long-lasting. Together, they represent almost 60% of the problems.

Approximately, one in five long-lasting problems remained ongoing in the final year of the project, three years or more after their first appearance in people’s lives.

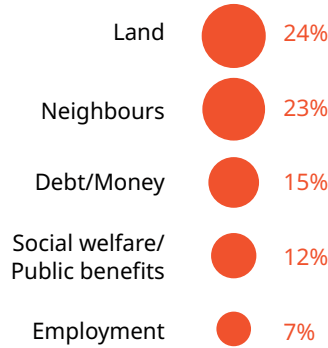
PROBLEM CATEGORIES
long-lasting problems



n = 101 problems

Taken together, the most common categories of legal problems that remain ongoing account for almost 80%. Note that only problems around social welfare did not appear among the most common categories of all long-lasting problems, meaning that they are overrepresented in this group, while domestic violence is underrepresented, meaning that domestic violence problems tend to finally find resolution more often, after a long road.

PERCENTAGE OF THE REMAINING
ONGOING PROBLEMS

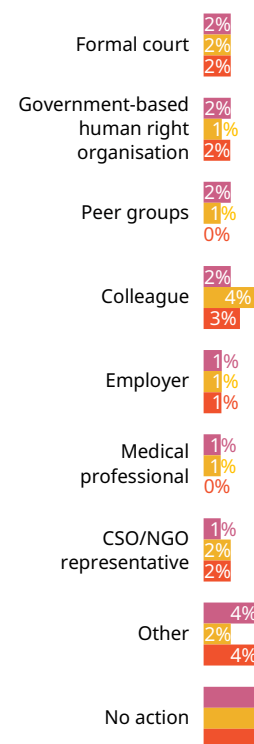
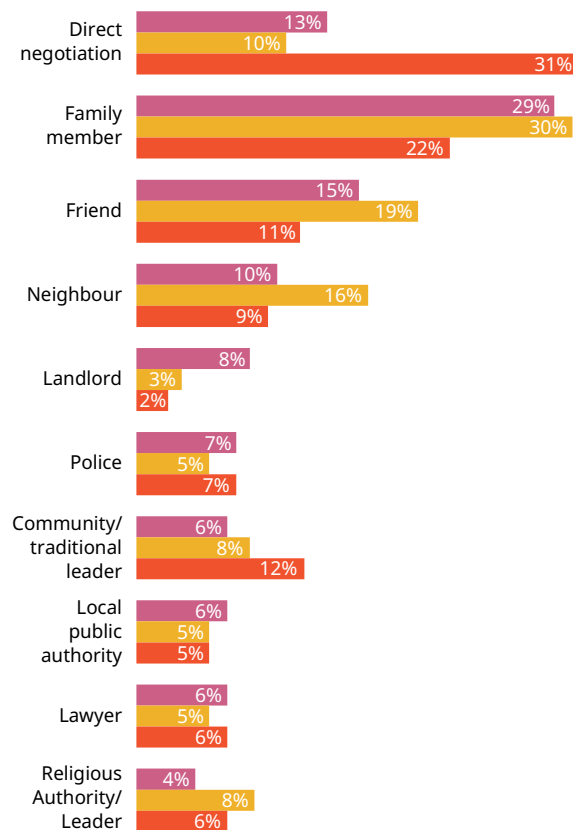


n = 101 problems



Zooming in on the most serious problems: increasing importance of traditional/customary/community justice

SOURCES OF HELP
long-lasting problems



Throughout the project, and as in every JNS, we asked the people about what they did to try to resolve their most serious problem. Collecting this information for every problem people have would be extremely tolling for both the respondents and the enumerators. Therefore, we concentrate on the most serious problems.

Many last-longing problems were also the person's most serious one, which enables us to map out the most common sources of help along these long roads of justice. Particularly looking at how sources of help differ through the years.

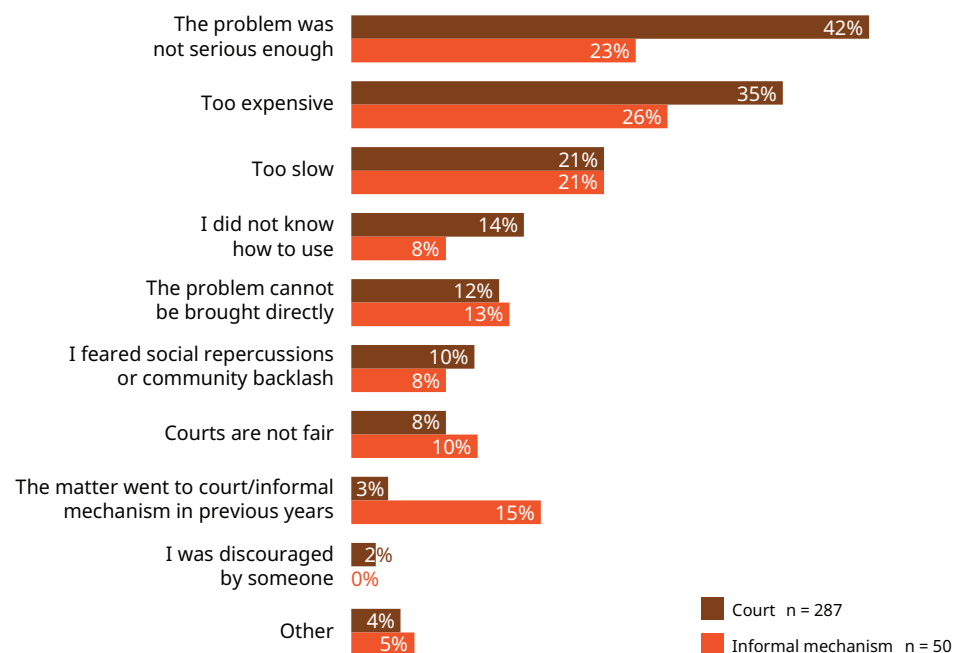
Most of the sources of help tend to be less preferred as years go by, with two exceptions: direct negotiation with the other party, and community/traditional leaders. This suggests that people do not turn to the formal sector for help as years go by, but instead prefer to resolve problems via bilateral negotiations or seeking support from community or customary justice services.

Year 1 n = 433 actions
Year 2 n = 454 actions
Year 3 n = 399 actions

With this result in mind, the question of why people do not turn to formal courts becomes relevant. Nigerians seem to reserve going to court for the most impactful problems they may have, as they most commonly report that they choose not to go to

court because their problem is not serious enough. In addition to this determination, people also make cost/benefit analysis and conclude that courts are too expensive to attempt turning to them for help.

WHY NOT BRING THE PROBLEM TO A COURT/INFORMAL MECHANISM



The road to justice can be long and complicated, people often turn to many sources of help along their journey

A recurring theme throughout the qualitative interviews was the sheer number of sources of help people turned to in an effort to resolve their problems. People often described trying many different avenues, consulting people in their networks, reporting to formal institutions, turning to community mechanisms.



“I don’t look at it as a criminal case as such. There were a few people I reported him to. I reported the issue to our Baale (community leader). The Baale came there to see things for himself and also attempted to resolve the issue. Our Landlords Association also intervened to find solution to the issue. Thereafter, I took it up at the local government level.”

— Male participant with a neighbour dispute which was finally resolved in year three.

“While we kept on praying for him, we went to different places and people in a bid to get the problem resolved, but it was not working... We went to report the issue at the police station. At one point, I reported to our community religious leader (Imam) to see if they could resolve the problem, but things continued getting harder... People eventually intervened to resolve the issue between us amicably... The Imam and members of our families settled the issue.”

— Female participant with a long-lasting family problem that was resolved in year three.

“When the farm was invaded and destroyed, I met with the owner of the animals and requested for compensation but she could not help... From there, I went to our community leader to report the issue. The community leader and other elderly neighbors were consulted.”

— Female participant with a neighbour problem which was reported as resolved via direct negotiation in year three.



29% of abandoned problems are abandoned due to a lack of hope that taking action can lead to a positive outcome

People were also asked questions about why they had abandoned their long-lasting most serious problems. Because so few people abandon their long-lasting problems, this question was only asked about the 44 long-lasting, most serious problems which had been reported as abandoned in year three. While this is a small number, making it difficult to draw

conclusions from the results, the answers were supported by what people shared during the qualitative interviews. 29% of problems were abandoned because people did not believe taking further action would lead to a positive result. This is more than three times higher than the next selected reason, that it was too expensive to continue taking action.

REASONS FOR ABANDONING A LONG-LASTING PROBLEM in year three



When discussing where their problems currently stand, people often shared a lack of hope that further action would lead to a resolution. There was a general pessimism about the options for their problem, often also associated with the cost of pursuing justice.



“Apart from my husband, a colleague and another friend that I mentioned the issue to, I have not taken any more serious action. I reported to them because I thought they, especially my husband would help but none was able to help. I have left everything to God to judge between me and her.”

— Female participant with an abandoned money problem.

“Yes. I abandoned it. What am I going to do? I leave everything to God.”

— Female participant with a long-lasting family problem that was resolved in year three.

“I did not take any action because I did not know anybody to report them to, so I handed them over to God...I didn't even consider reporting to the police. Many people told me to report it to the police. I told myself that would not go and report it at the police station so that they won't turn it to another issue. God is there for me.”

— Female participant with an abandoned money problem.

“I don't have the money to start going to court. After all, I don't see myself winning the battle with the government.”

— Male participant with an abandoned land problem.

“I saw that the case will not favour me because the woman has money and knows people, and in the courts and police stations, it is the person that has money that they recognise. I checked my pocket, and I saw that I did not have that kind of money, so I decided to drop the issue.”

— Female participant with an abandoned money problem.





5

Perceptions of the Nigerian Justice System

Nigerians tend to hold positive perceptions of the formal justice sector, despite believing it is designed for lawyers instead of ordinary people

This chapter explores the levels of trust that Nigerians have in the justice sector and their ability to find solutions to their legal problems. It also provides data on trust in specific typical actors and perceptions on why people abandon their legal problems.

The questions in this chapter were asked to all returning respondents, regardless of whether they experienced a legal problem in the current year.

The following statements were posed to the respondents, to which they shared to what extent they agreed or disagreed with each:

- I trust the formal Nigerian justice system to resolve people's problems.
- If I had a neighbour dispute and wanted outside help to resolve it, I would know where to go and report it.
- If I had a land dispute, I believe the legal system would help resolve it fairly.
- The government is generally doing a good job in preventing and resolving domestic violence disputes.
- The criminal justice system in Nigeria is effective in prosecuting and convicting criminal offenders.
- The justice system is generally designed for lawyers, not ordinary people.

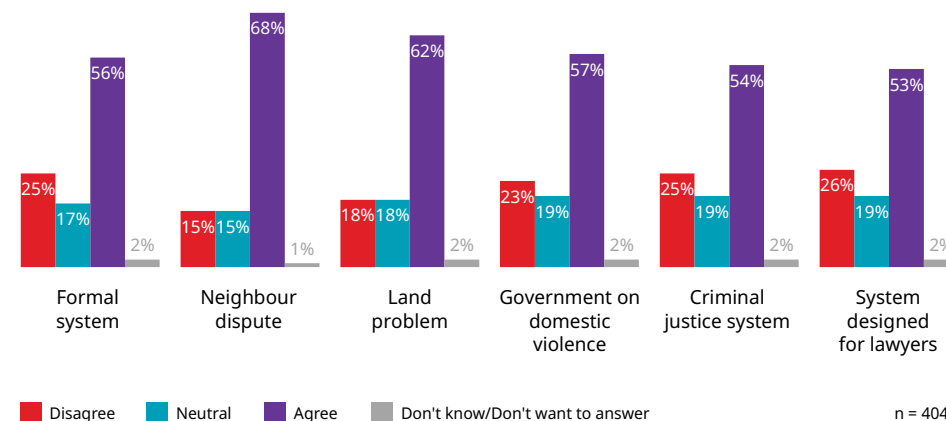
More than 50% of Nigerians report trusting the formal justice sector to resolve people's problems. Still, a quarter of the people disagree with the statement.

Almost 70% of the people said they would know where to go to report a neighbor-related problem, and more than 60% would be able to do so for a land problem.

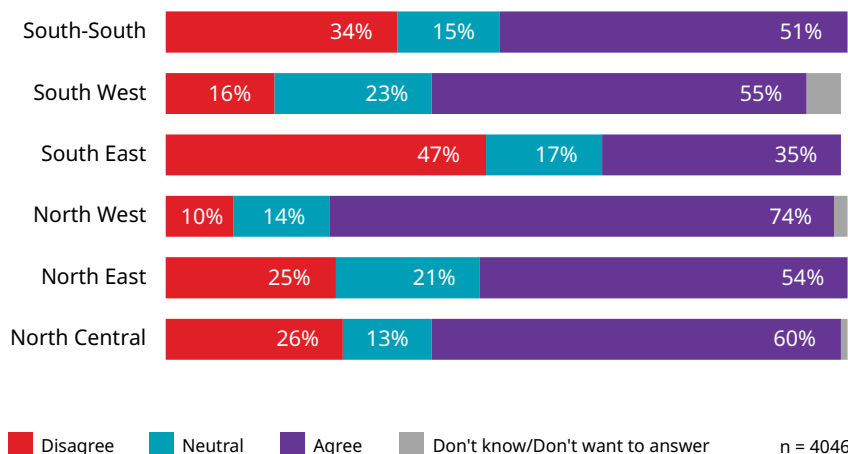
Around 57% of the people believe that the Federal Government of Nigeria is generally doing a good job in dealing with domestic violence.

While more than 50% of Nigerians think the criminal justice system is effective, a similar percentage considers the formal justice system to be designed for lawyers.

SIX PERCEPTION QUESTIONS: RESPONSES



I TRUST THE FORMAL NIGERIAN JUSTICE SYSTEM TO RESOLVE PEOPLE'S PROBLEMS

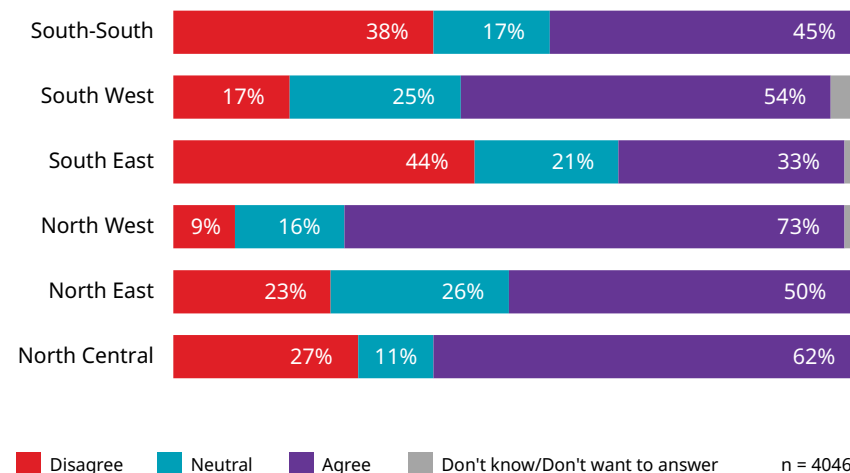


In terms of demographic differences, almost all of the variables provide no significant differences. The only exception – across the board – is that people in the North-West geopolitical zone are more likely than others to agree with the statements presented, and those in the South East to disagree. The largest difference is that three out of four Nigerians in the

North-West zone believe the justice system is designed for lawyers. The data does not definitively point to any key reasons for this, the Reference Group gave a few hypotheses but this finding could benefit from further research and a deep dive into the experiences and differing contexts across the geopolitical zones.



THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM IN NIGERIA IS EFFECTIVE IN PROSECUTING AND CONVICTING CRIMINAL OFFENDERS

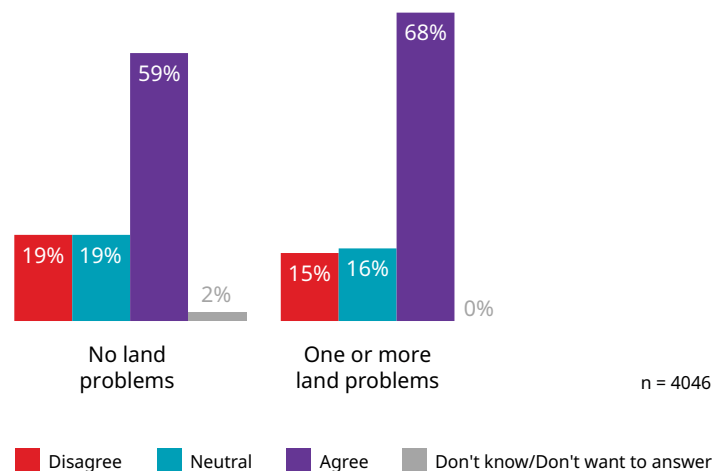


Exposure to specific legal problems as a potential learning opportunity

Three of the questions relate to specific problem categories: neighbours, land, and domestic violence. When separating the sample between those who have experienced such problems

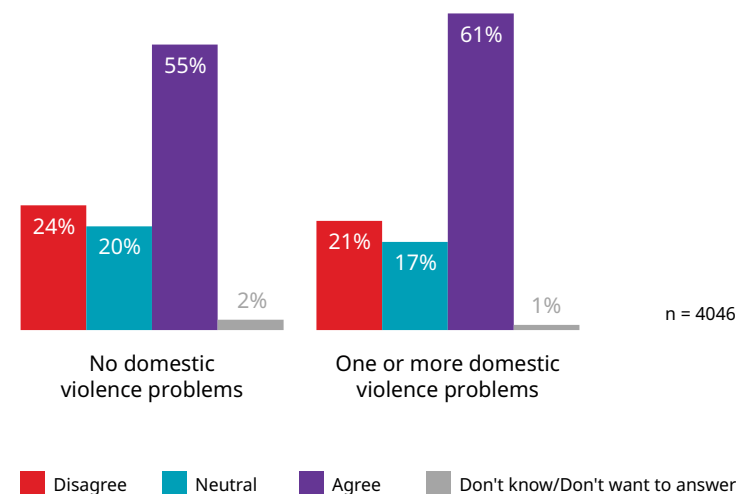
in the past three years from those who did not, we observe a slight increase in positive perceptions that the legal system can resolve problems fairly.

IF I HAD A LAND DISPUTE, I BELIEVE THE LEGAL SYSTEM WOULD HELP RESOLVE IT FAIRLY among those who had land problems and among those who did not



THE GOVERNMENT IS GENERALLY DOING A GOOD JOB IN PREVENTING AND RESOLVING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE DISPUTES.

Among those who had domestic violence problems and among those who did not



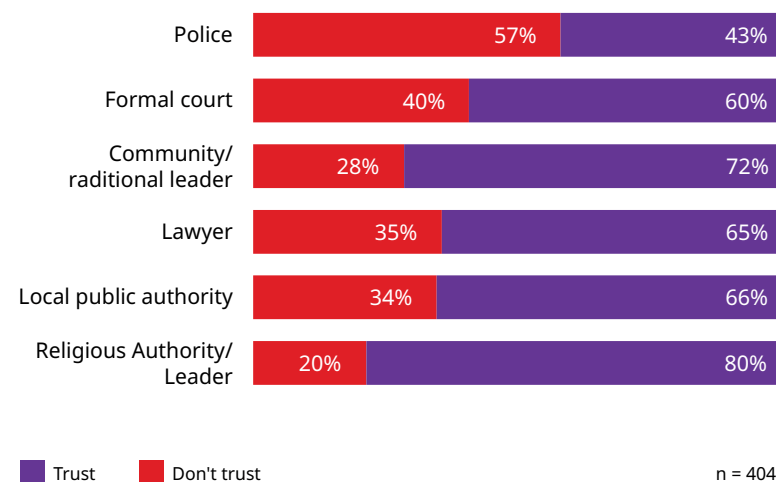
In line with the positive perceptions of the system as a whole, Nigerians tend to trust key actors in the justice sector, with one exception

Nigerians overwhelmingly trust religious authorities and traditional leaders. Eight out of ten and seven out of ten, respectively, declare trusting them.

Lawyers, local public authorities and formal courts also have more than 60% of trust among Nigerians. Only the police accumulate more people distrusting them, at 57%.

Similar patterns as in previous questions appear. No demographic variables provide significant differences, except for geopolitical zones, with the North West inhabitants showing consistently higher levels of trust across the board.

TRUST IN JUSTICE ACTORS

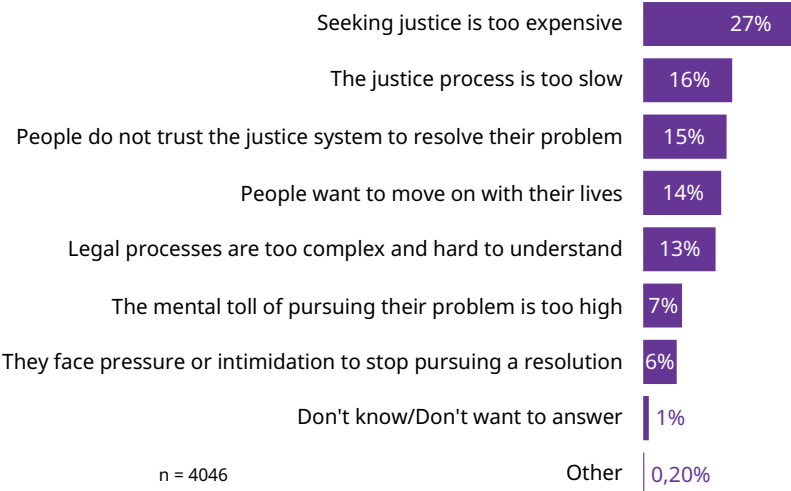


Barriers for justice: both perceptions and facts suggest that justice is too expensive in Nigeria

When asked about the main reasons people think other people abandon their legal problems, the answer category “seeking justice is too expensive” appears in a quarter of all responses, by far the most common answer. Data on why people who actually abandon their legal problems do so tends to confirm this, as “It was too expensive to continue pursuing a resolution” is the second most common answer among those who did, only after “I did not believe taking more action would lead to a positive outcome”.

After costs, there is a cluster of answer categories that are statistically indistinguishable from each other, including perceptions of justice being too slow, lack of trust in obtaining resolution, a need to move on with their lives and complexity in the rules and procedures of justice.

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE MAIN REASONS PEOPLE ABANDON THEIR JUSTICE PROBLEMS?





6

Domestic Violence

Three out of every ten Nigerians experience at least one domestic violence problem in a four year period

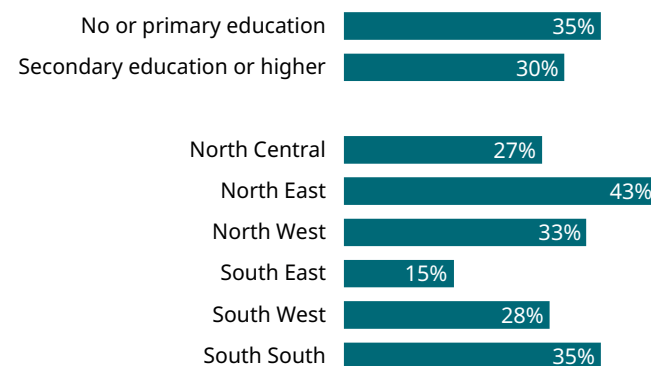
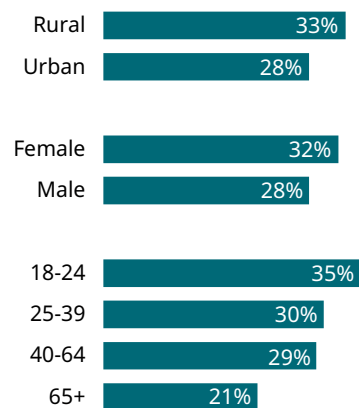
Domestic violence is one of the most prevalent and serious legal problems Nigerians experience. Even so, the previous years revealed that domestic violence problems are resolved at relatively high rates. This chapter will explore the evolution of domestic violence problems over the three years.

Of the people who participated in all three years of the study, and had at least one legal problem, 30% of them experienced a domestic violence problem at some point in the four year period measured. This high prevalence indicates the common and pervasive nature of this legal problem.

levels of education, young people, and those living in rural locations are all slightly more likely to experience domestic violence.

The differences between demographic groups in terms of who experiences domestic violence problems are generally quite small. More vulnerable groups: women, people with lower

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACROSS DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS
as % of people with problems



n = 4046

Amongst the geopolitical zones we saw slightly greater differences. The most significant being the higher likelihood of domestic violence problems in the North East region: 43% of people in the North East region reported experiencing at least one domestic violence problem in the four year period measured. This is almost three times as likely as in the South East region where only 15% of people reported experiencing a domestic violence problem. The higher reported rates in the North East may be due to a myriad of factors; the region's experience with conflict,

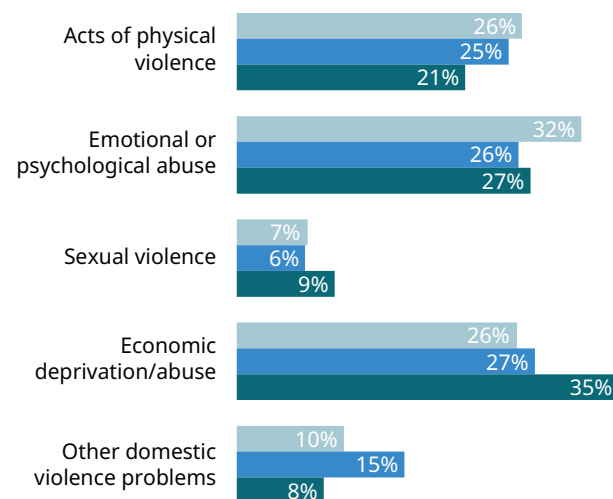
socio-economic challenges, potentially differing cultural and social norms, and so on. These regional differences underscore the need for tailored interventions and solutions which fit the context in order to effectively address these serious legal problems.

Domestic violence is not only physical violence

HiiL's definition of domestic violence is deliberately broad, including non-physical forms of domestic violence, such as emotional or psychological abuse, economic deprivation, intimidation, and other forms of domestic violence.

Emotional or psychological abuse was most often reported across the three years. While there is an increase in the percentage of sexual violence problems reported, it is important to note that the total number of domestic violence problems reported

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROBLEM TYPES
REPORTED PER YEAR
as a % of all domestic violence
problems reported in the year



Year 1 Year 2 Year 3

n = 2684

by this sample in year three was much lower than the previous years. In year one, people reported 1645 domestic violence problems, in year two the same group of people reported 668 new domestic violence problems, and in year three, the same group reported an additional 371 new domestic violence problems. This downward trend is in line with the findings for all problems, indicating that people with domestic violence problems may be slightly more likely to experience additional domestic violence problems, but not at a significant rate.

In the third year of the study, we did not ask further questions about the impact of legal problems on people's lives. However, the data from year one demonstrated that people who experienced domestic violence problems typically face multiple negative consequences. Specifically, around 84% of individuals who reported domestic violence as their most serious problem in year one experienced at least one negative consequence, with an average of 2.0 negative consequences.



MOST COMMON CONSEQUENCES EXPERIENCED AS A RESULT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROBLEMS as % of people with problems, most serious problem only



This negative impact was also expressed during the in-depth interviews. One woman who had experienced a domestic violence problem shared:

“It had a great impact on my life alongside my children... My children typically cry whenever we fight and they won’t eat... The problem affected my business, and I had to return some customers’ clothes to them because I couldn’t cope, my friends were the ones who assisted me with sewing at some points. The problem was too much, and I lost my appetite and couldn’t eat. I had to skip meals due to lack of concentration.”

Chart from Nigeria JNS 2023 Report

n = 93

Resolved domestic violence problems are highly likely to stay resolved

In line with the rest of the problem categories, once a domestic problem is resolved, it is likely to stay resolved over time. Among domestic violence

problems reported as resolved in year two⁷, 87% were still resolved in year three.

RESOLUTION STATUS IN YEAR THREE: Domestic violence resolved in year two



Resolved Resurfaced Don't remember

n = 1023 problems

⁷ In order to look at all problems that were resolved at the time of interviewing in year two, this calculation combines answers from three problem categories: (1) year one ongoing, year two resolved; (1) year one resolved, year two resolved; (3) year two resolved.

RESOLUTION STATUS IN YEAR THREE: Domestic violence resolved in year two



n = 350 problems

Completely resolved Partially resolved Ongoing Abandoned Don't remember

Among domestic violence problems that were ongoing in year two⁸, 68% were reported as completely resolved in year three, with another 10% partially resolved.

These results demonstrate what we found in previous years, that domestic violence problems, while very serious, are likely to get resolved, and stay resolved.

⁸ In order to look at all problems that were ongoing at the time of interviewing in year two, this calculation combines answers from three problem categories: (1) year one ongoing, year two ongoing; (1) year one resolved, year two ongoing; (3) year two ongoing.

Perceived lack of positive outcomes prevents further action on domestic violence problems

Only a small percentage of people experiencing domestic violence do not take any (further) action to try to resolve the issue. The most common reason people give for abandoning their problems is a belief that taking (further) action will not lead to a positive outcome. In year one we learned that nine out of ten Nigerians experiencing a domestic violence problem take action to resolve it. However, the few who abandoned their problem and do not take further action cited negative expectations about the outcome they can achieve or that it is

too expensive to continue pursuing a resolution. When reflecting on this in year one, the reference group confirmed that some victims may be reluctant to report abuse due to fear of retribution, lack of trust in the legal system, limited legal awareness, cultural and religious beliefs, and financial dependence. These factors can inhibit victims from seeking help, highlighting the importance of raising awareness and providing confidential and empathetic support to victims of domestic violence.



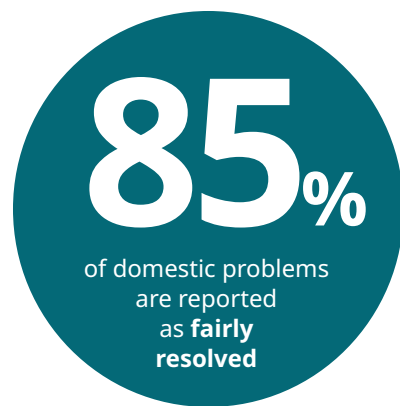
MAIN REASON FOR NO LONGER TAKING ACTION abandoned domestic violence problems reported across the three years



n = 74 problems

For each partially or completely resolved domestic violence problem reported, we asked about people's perception of the fairness of the resolution. A large majority of problems are reported as being fairly or very fairly resolved (85%). Only a small percentage of problems (10%) are reported as having an unfair resolution.

The perceived fairness of the resolutions could potentially be one of the reasons that domestic violence problems have a low rate of resurfacing once resolved. We hypothesize that fairly resolved problems may have resolutions which tackle the root cause of the problem. Another possible reason for the lasting resolution may be that oftentimes the resolution of a



domestic violence problem includes being separated from the perpetrator. Domestic violence problems may be less likely to reach a resolution while the victim is still living with or in close contact with the perpetrator and if a resolution includes safety and distance, it lasts. For example, we asked people during the in-depth interviews if their problem had resurfaced after being resolved.

FAIRNESS OF THE RESOLUTION partially or completely resolved problems



One woman who had a resolved domestic violence problem shared,

“No way. I already told you we parted ways and how did he want to beat me where I am? If he should try it, I will send gangsters to beat him up. I heard he has remarried but that is his problem. I have my children, both male and female. Since we have parted ways, nothing can come between us.”

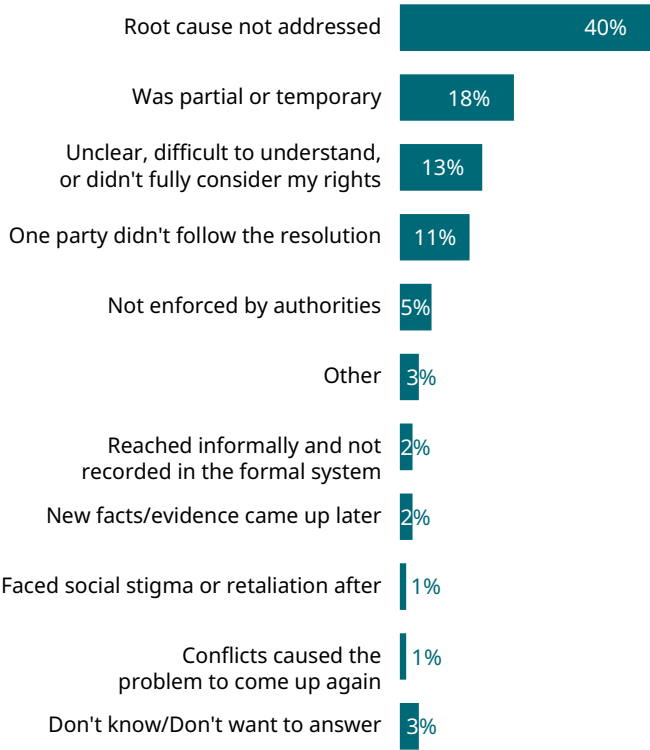
Addressing the root cause of problems can lead to lasting resolutions

People whose domestic violence problem had resurfaced at some point across the three years were asked why they believe it resurfaced. The majority of people believe it was because the resolution did not address the root cause of the problem (40%). This was followed by the resolution being partial or temporary (18%) and that the resolution was unclear, difficult to understand, or did not fully consider the person’s rights (11%).

The data in this chapter suggests a key factor in the lasting resolution of domestic violence problems: the perceived fairness of the outcome. With a significant majority of people reporting fair resolutions, it indicates

that these resolutions are likely addressing the core issues and people’s desired outcomes. Addressing root causes, as shown by the reasons people believe their problems resurface, appears to be an important element in preventing problem resurfacing. However, when people perceive resolutions as unfair, partial, temporary, or failing to address the underlying causes, the likelihood of the problem resurfacing increases.

WHY DO DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROBLEMS RESURFACE?



People are still taking action to resolve their most serious and long ongoing domestic violence problem

We asked people whether they had taken additional action in the past year to resolve their most serious problem from year one. These are problems that were ongoing in year one and could have been resolved or ongoing in year two, and were reported as ongoing in year three. For people that had a domestic violence problem as their most serious problem in year one, 90% took additional action in the past year to resolve the problem. It is important to note here that this sample of most serious year one problems which are ongoing in year three and are a domestic violence problem is only 54 problems. While this is a small sample, it does align with the 90% of people taking action in year three to resolve any most serious ongoing problem from year one.

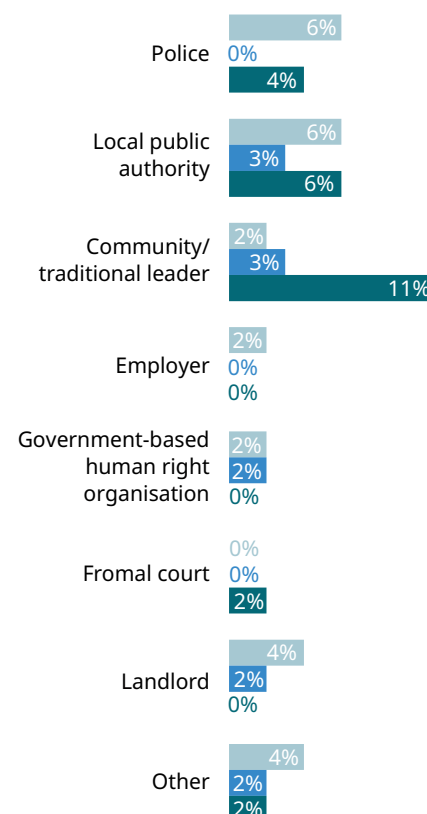
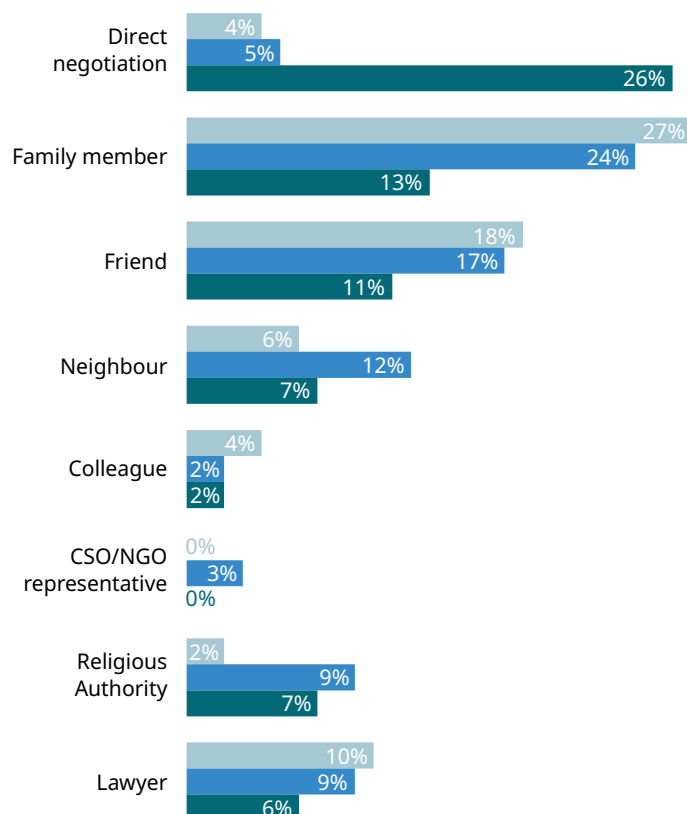
Taking multiple actions over several years was also demonstrated in-depth interviews where survivors shared their journeys of consulting a variety of sources of help. One survivor shared that she first went to the police station to report the assault. When asked what the police did, the woman responded, "They didn't really help the situation because they wanted me to pay to do things and I didn't have the money. They told me I had to pay for everything." Following this experience, the woman turned to the Lagos State Government Secretariat but unfortunately, the service was too slow and the officials were often too busy to take up her case. The survivor also turned to the Human Rights Commission for help but in her experience the employees were

not sympathetic and their support was counter-productive. After not getting help at multiple places, this woman could have abandoned her legal problem. Instead, she kept taking action and trying to obtain a resolution. When problems are this serious and this impactful, people will keep trying to find justice.



More people turned to direct negotiation to resolve their serious and ongoing domestic violence problems in year three

SOURCES OF HELP CONSULTED FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROBLEMS IN EACH YEAR
as % of actions taken



In this section we are working with a smaller sample of sources of help consulted each year to resolve domestic violence problems (49 actions in year one, 58 actions in year two, and 54 actions in year three), it is difficult to determine any real trends in the data. However, one interesting trend is the increase in direct negotiation in year three. In year one, 4% of the respondents carried out direct negotiation, 5% in year two, and 26% in year three.

Year 1 n = 49 actions
Year 2 n = 58 actions
Year 3 n = 54 actions



This is aligned with the overall jump to direct negotiation for all problems in the data. Because these are serious, long ongoing problems, it is likely that after three+ years and after turning to other options, people are exasperated to resolve the problem, they may have already spent a lot of money on the resolution and feel they have no other external options. As a result, they turn to directly negotiating with the other party.

Formal courts, police, and lawyers are less often turned to, even when a problem has been ongoing for several years. This was also reflected throughout the in-depth interviews. For example, one woman with an abandoned physical domestic abuse problem stated, “We went to the police station, and there was little they could do to interfere in the husband-and-wife matter, so they asked us to settle it.”

However, in contrast, the results of the perception question about domestic violence (see Chapter 5) revealed that people who have experienced a domestic violence problem are more positive about the government’s ability to resolve and prevent these problems⁹. We asked the Reference Group why people who have experienced domestic violence problems might be more positive about the government’s ability to resolve and prevent them. The group hypothesized that the community is often aware of domestic violence problems. People may avoid turning to their community because the community might try to make peace and reach a resolution, solely for the sake of peace in the community – reaching a resolution which may be at the victim’s expense. There is also the social perception and reputation that people may want to uphold in their community, causing

fear of sharing a domestic violence problem with their network. Victims may feel that the government is a more neutral party in these situations and choose to turn there. For example, during the in-depth interview, when asked why she did not involve family or other third party to resolve her now abandoned domestic violence problem, one woman shared,

“I have dignity for myself, and I didn’t want to have business with anybody or a third party on the matter... I didn’t want to even involve my parents because I believe they might not be able to help in this case.”

⁹ Participants were read the following statement and answered to what extent they agreed or disagreed with it: The government is generally doing a good job in preventing and resolving domestic violence disputes.



7

Findings and Recommendations

This three-year longitudinal study provides a people-centred perspective on Nigerians' legal problems and justice journeys over time, through their personal experiences and perceptions. The resulting data reveals a significant justice gap, with many problems taking years to resolve, while new problems continue arising. The study's insights provide guidance on where justice leaders should focus their efforts to address this gap, emphasising the need for a more people-centred and data-driven approach. While there are some positive insights – such as Nigerian's resilience to not give up and continue pursuing resolution, and the lasting nature of the resolutions achieved – the status quo needs to be improved. This final chapter summarises the study's main findings and their implications for Nigerian policymakers, justice providers, and legal innovators.

Regular collection of people-centred justice needs data is crucial for improving access to justice in Nigeria

People-centred justice data, such as the insights into people's legal needs and justice journeys, is imperative for understanding the justice gap and improving the availability of high-quality justice services.

To ensure that justice services remain relevant and effective in addressing people's needs in an ever changing context, it is essential to regularly collect people-centred justice data. Different data collection methods, such as one-time surveys or longitudinal studies offer unique benefits. One-time surveys can provide a snapshot of the most pressing justice needs at a specific moment in time. This can allow for broad assessments and identification of immediate priorities. On the other hand, longitudinal studies offer an extended perspective – revealing pressing justice needs, the evolution of legal problems, resolution pathways, and people's engagement with the justice system over time. This can help to identify persistent problems, understand the

impact of different interventions, and provide a deeper understanding of the complexity of people's justice journeys.

For policymakers both of these approaches provide valuable insights. One-time surveys can inform immediate policy adjustments and resource allocation, while longitudinal studies can guide the development of long-term strategies and the evaluation of systemic reforms. The choice between these methods depends on the specific research questions and policy objectives. A regular data collection model could involve a combination of approaches: periodic national surveys to capture broad trends, complemented by targeted longitudinal studies focusing on specific vulnerable groups or pressing legal issues. Establishing a sustainable mechanism for such ongoing data collection will empower Nigerian decision-makers to proactively address evolving justice needs.

It is our hope that with the conclusion of this study, Nigerian decision-makers can establish such a mechanism for regularly collecting and utilising people-centred justice data.

Prioritise access to quality, affordable, timely justice services

The data in this study reveals that problems in Nigeria are likely to stay resolved once a resolution is reached. The initial barriers to accessing justice and achieving a resolution are, therefore, the most critical to address. Improving the accessibility of justice services and making sure they provide quality, timely support for people to achieve the outcomes they need is key to decreasing the justice gap. Because, while problems are taking years to resolve, new problems are constantly arising, only widening the justice gap even further. Prioritising accessible justice services which can provide effective resolutions in a timely manner is necessary.

A lack of faith in the ability to achieve positive outcomes and the perceived cost of justice services act as significant barriers to accessing justice. Therefore, improving the quality, cost, and accessibility of justice services may also improve people's willingness to turn to the justice system for help resolving their problems.

Address the root causes of legal problems for lasting justice

Achieving a resolution does not always mean that people's justice needs are met. Resolutions which fail to address the root cause of the problem or are temporary solutions are less likely to last. This in itself is a critical challenge: justice systems need to ensure resolutions tackle the root causes of legal problems, rather than merely addressing the surface level symptoms. Regardless of the resolution pathway – direct negotiation, formal mechanisms, informal mechanisms, etc. – the key to preventing problems resurfacing and fostering lasting justice appears to lie in effectively addressing the deeper causes of legal problems.

The data further reveals that fairness is an important element in achieving lasting resolution. Problems tend to resurface less frequently when the resolution reached is perceived as fair. While we cannot definitively say there is direct correlation from this data alone, it does suggest that fair resolutions are more likely to tackle the underlying causes of these problems. On the other hand, when individuals perceive resolutions

as unfair, temporary, or failing to address the fundamental issues, the likelihood of the problem recurring increases. This points to a need for justice mechanisms which are not only accessible, but also just and effective in addressing the grievances and circumstances which lead to a legal problem in the first place.

Furthermore, after surveying the same group of people over three years, the data shows that experiencing legal problems slightly raises a person's risk of subsequently experiencing more legal problems. Finding durable solutions for these problems may help to lower the recurrence rate and lessen how often people are dealing with multiple legal problems at the same time.

Understand and support direct negotiation as a key resolution pathway, while strengthening other resolution pathways

The three year study gives us deeper insight into what people do when a problem does not resolve quickly. We had hypothesised that people would initially turn to their social networks and communities to resolve their problems. If that did not work, they might then turn to community justice mechanisms, traditional leaders, or religious authorities. And if that did not work, they would then turn to the formal system, particularly lawyers and courts. We thought that people would try to resolve their problems through what they thought was the easiest, cheapest, fastest methods – increasing in complexity with time.

This is not the case. Instead, after years of trying to resolve their problems, people overwhelmingly turn to direct negotiation. As the Reference Group reflected, after so many years of dealing with a burdensome problem, people are exhausted and may not want to pursue formal avenues which feel complex and costly. Instead, people at this point may even be willing

to accept a less appealing resolution through direct negotiation, if only to be done with the problem and move on with their lives.

Unfortunately, problems resolved through direct negotiation tend to resurface more often. Therefore, this may not be an ideal solution for people, even if it does achieve resolution. Given that these resolutions tend to resurface, and the frequency with which direct negotiation is being turned to, there is a need to better understand these resolution pathways and provide structured support – enabling this pathway to address underlying issues and achieve formally recognised resolutions. This is in addition to providing more accessible, quality services so that people have other effective options available to them, as discussed above.

The high prevalence of domestic violence underscores the need for continued and comprehensive efforts to prevent it and provide support to victims, regardless of gender or location

The data reveals a high prevalence of domestic violence in Nigeria, with 30% of the population reporting experiencing such problems within the last four years. This underscores the need to address this issue both in prevention and access to justice efforts. While domestic problems tend to have a high rate of resolution, the volume of cases highlights the widespread impact of domestic violence on individuals, families, and communities across Nigeria.

The high prevalence rate indicates that focusing resources on preventing domestic violence from occurring in the first place is key. This might include public awareness campaigns, educational programmes, as well as investigating and addressing root causes of domestic violence. In addition to prevention, strengthening access to justice services for victims of domestic violence is of utmost

importance. Justice services need to be accessible, affordable, of high quality, and safe for all victims of domestic violence, regardless of gender or location. The approaches used by these services also need to reflect people's needs and the pathways they actually want to take when they have a problem. People-centred services that are gender and culturally sensitive can help to encourage people to use these services and seek resolution.

Further research is also needed to better understand the resolutions people receive – what works to achieve the outcomes people seek, what kinds of resolutions last, and what prevents people from seeking help or reaching a resolution.

The need for national commitment to people-centred justice

The significant access to justice challenges and the widening justice gap present considerable challenges in Nigeria, however, there are many opportunities for positive change. A transformation which places people at the centre of the justice system is required as continuing with the status quo will not be enough to meet the needs of the millions of people facing unresolved justice problems.

This transformation includes gathering data on legal needs, pinpointing successful interventions, developing and scaling innovative solutions, cultivating an enabling environment for progress and ensuring accountability. These elements have been tested and implemented in various countries, including Nigeria, where HiiL has supported justice transformation and justice innovation labs, developed best practice guidelines for land and family problems, and is currently piloting innovative Community Justice Centres in Imo and Ogun States.

Comprehensive system-wide changes can present their own challenges to achieve, yet they are essential to tackle the justice gap on a large scale and the societal and economic advantages would outweigh the costs.

A global movement towards people-centred justice is gaining traction as more and more countries are adopting policies and services that prioritise the needs of the people. Nigeria has joined this movement in its efforts to improve access to justice in the country. It is important to maintain such commitment and continue transforming the justice system into one that is more inclusive and effective in serving people.

About the JNS

Justice is not just about the number of reported crimes. Nor is it about courts and laws. It is about common people. Their daily lives, their pain and frustration – and the justice outcomes they get or do not get.

That is why we listen to people in each country to measure their satisfaction. We collect the voices of thousands with our Justice Needs & Satisfaction Survey (JNS) tool. It is the state of play that reveals people's actual legal problems, experiences and access to justice. Adjusted to the specific context of the country it provides in-depth understanding for people working in the justice sector.

We also make the data available to policy-makers through clever interfaces so that they can work with the findings.

The responsible use of this data leads to knowledge, creates empowerment, and builds accountability.

The countries we have worked in since 2014 include Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Colombia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Honduras, Iraq, Mali, Morocco, the Netherlands, Tunisia, Niger, Nigeria, Uganda, Ukraine, and the United States. In partnership with UNHCR, we have conducted studies on the justice needs of forcibly displaced and stateless populations in Ethiopia, Burkina Faso and Iraq.

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