

## With elections a year away, Mauritians are increasingly critical of government performance

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 267 | Sadhiska Bhoojedhur and Thomas Isbell

### Summary

With just a year to go until presidential and parliamentary elections in December 2019, electoral campaigning will soon get underway in Mauritius. Incumbents can tout a number of strengths. Mauritius ranks highly on many indicators of good governance and democracy, such as the Ibrahim Index of African Governance and the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index, and past elections have generally been considered free and fair (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2017; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2017). Economic growth has been stable and diversification into high-value sectors a success (African Development Bank Group, 2018). And while a recent scandal surrounding purchases of luxury items by former President Ameenah Gurib-Fakim made headlines, the issue was swiftly resolved and Gurib-Fakim stepped down (BBC, 2018; Deutsche Welle, 2018).

But if things look good on the surface, they are less than perfect in the eyes of the country's citizens. Afrobarometer survey data collected in 2017 show that popular evaluations of the government's performance have grown increasingly critical over the past half-decade. Large majorities see the government as doing a poor job on economic management, and even in areas where majorities offer praise – such as health care and education – popular approval is on a decline.

Overall, survey findings suggest that even if things aren't bad, progress may not be keeping pace with citizens' expectations.

### Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in African countries. Six rounds of surveys were conducted in up to 37 countries between 1999 and 2015, and Round 7 surveys were completed in 2018. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Mauritius, led by StraConsult Ltd, interviewed 1,200 adult Mauritians in October 2017. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Mauritius in 2012 and 2014.

### Key findings

- A majority (56%) of Mauritians see the country's economic situation as good. But almost as many (50%) say Mauritius is headed in "the wrong direction."
- Citizens' ratings of the government's performance on key economic indicators continued to decline. Only minorities say the government is doing "fairly well" or "very

well" on overall economic management (35%), improving living standards of the poor (34%), creating jobs (27%), and narrowing income gaps between rich and poor (22%).

- Popular appraisals of government performance are favourable but also declining with regard to the delivery of key public services such as health care, education, water, and electricity.
- When asked which problems the government should prioritize, Mauritians most widely cite unemployment (65%), poverty (38%), and crime/security (33%).

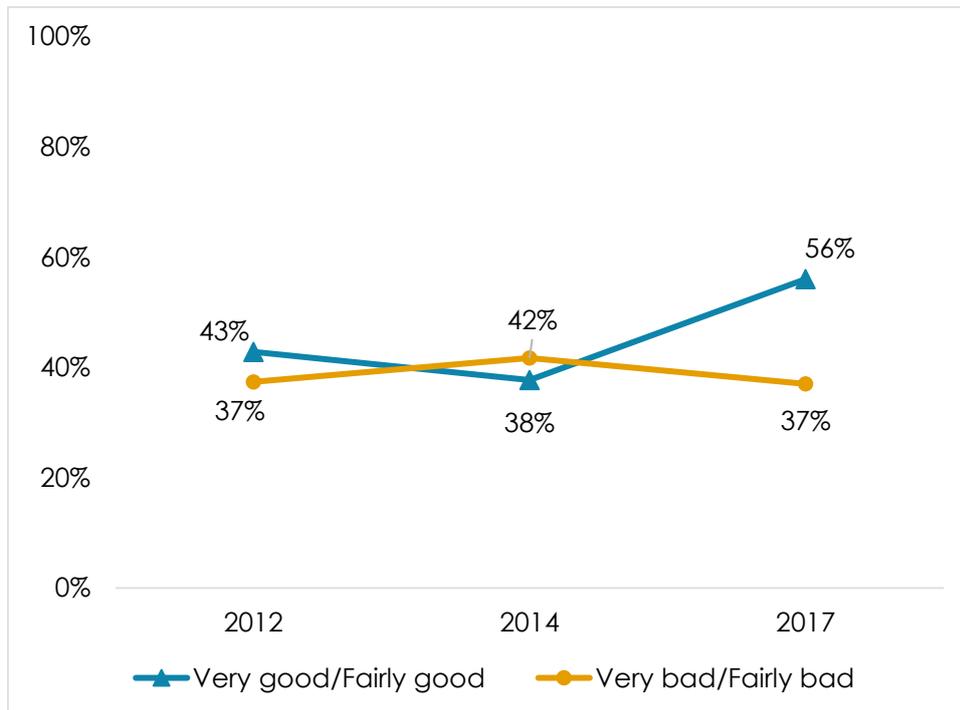
### Good economic conditions, wrong track

While a majority of Mauritians see their national economy as doing well, almost as many believe the country is headed in the wrong direction.

More than half (56%) of respondents describe the country's economic condition as "fairly good" or "very good," an 18-percentage-point improvement from 2014 (Figure 1). That still leaves almost four in 10 respondents (37%) who see the economic situation as "fairly bad" or "very bad."

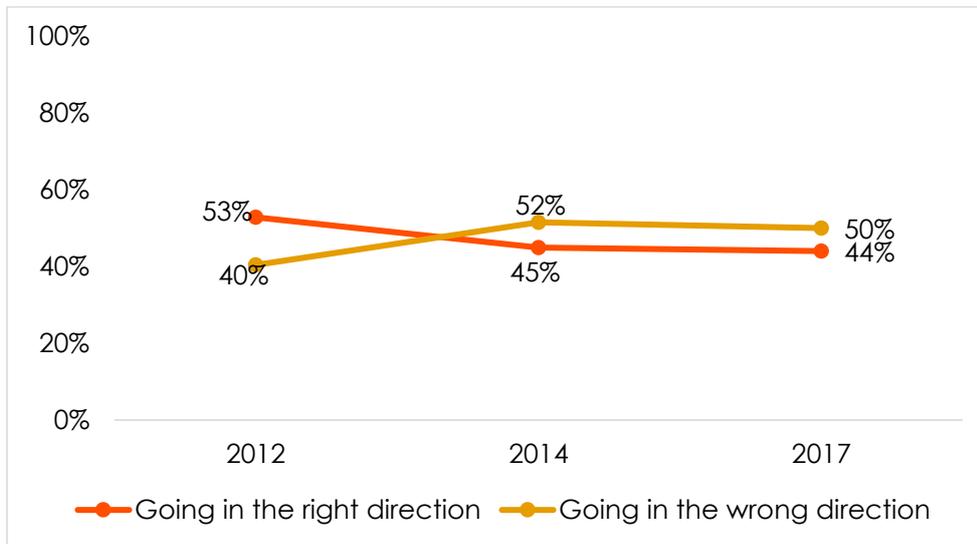
Despite this brightening economic outlook, half (50%) of Mauritians say the country is going in the wrong direction, a 10-point increase from 2012 (Figure 2).

**Figure 1: Country's economic condition | Mauritius | 2012-2017**



**Respondents were asked:** *In general, how would you describe the present economic condition of this country?*

**Figure 2: Overall direction of the country | Mauritius | 2012-2017**

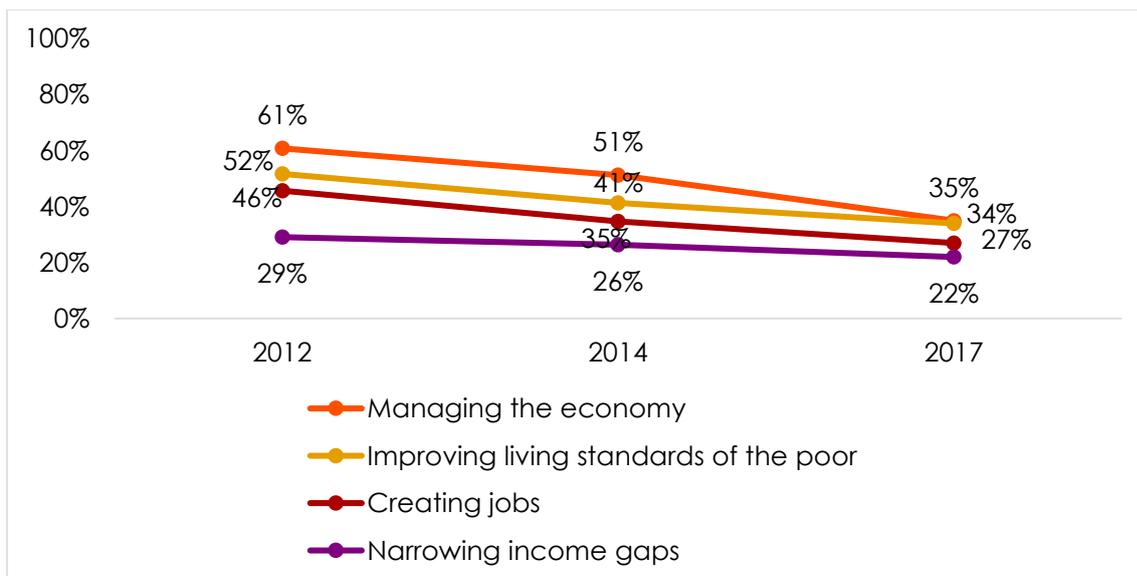


**Respondents were asked:** Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction?

### Government seen as failing on economic issues

The fact that more Mauritians disapprove than approve of the country's overall direction may be related to growing perceptions that the government is performing poorly on economic management issues. Only one in three Mauritians (35%) say the government is doing "fairly well" or "very well" on management of the economy, down from 61% in 2012. We see similar declines in popular approval of the government's performance on improving living standards of the poor, from 52% to 34%; on creating jobs, from 46% to 27%; and on narrowing income gaps, from 29% to 22% (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Government performance on key economic issues | Mauritius | 2012-2017**



**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Managing the economy? Improving the living standards of the poor? Creating jobs? Narrowing gaps between rich and poor? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")

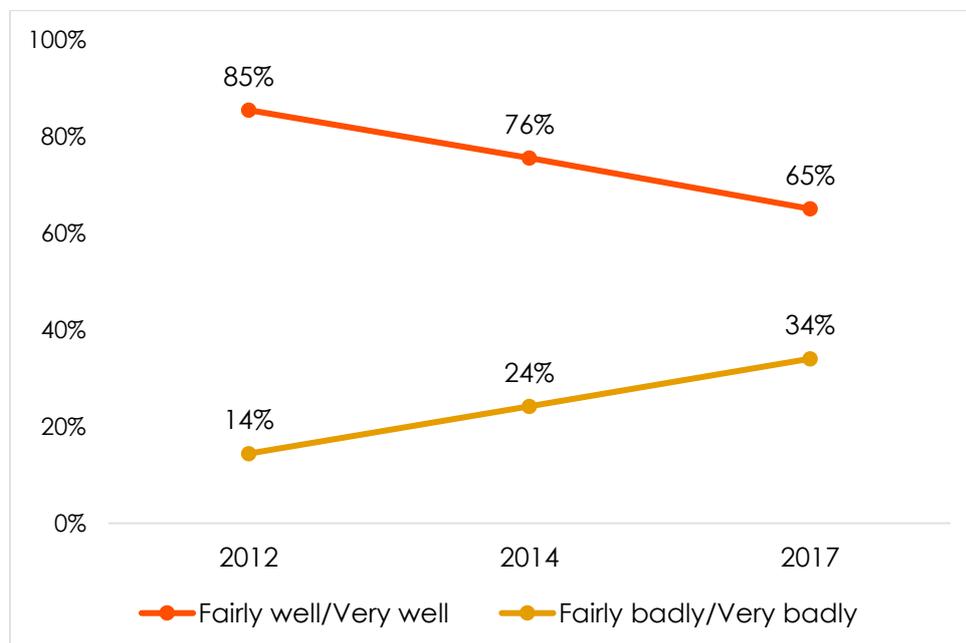
## Declining performance ratings on service delivery

With regard to the delivery of key public services such as health care, education, water, road infrastructure, and electricity, citizens' ratings of government performance are more favourable but also on a clear decline.

### Health services

Two-thirds (65%) of Mauritians give the government good marks ("fairly well" or "very well") on improving basic health services. But as with economic management, this rating has witnessed a double-digit decline (20 percentage points) since 2012 (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Government performance on improving basic health services | Mauritius | 2012-2017**



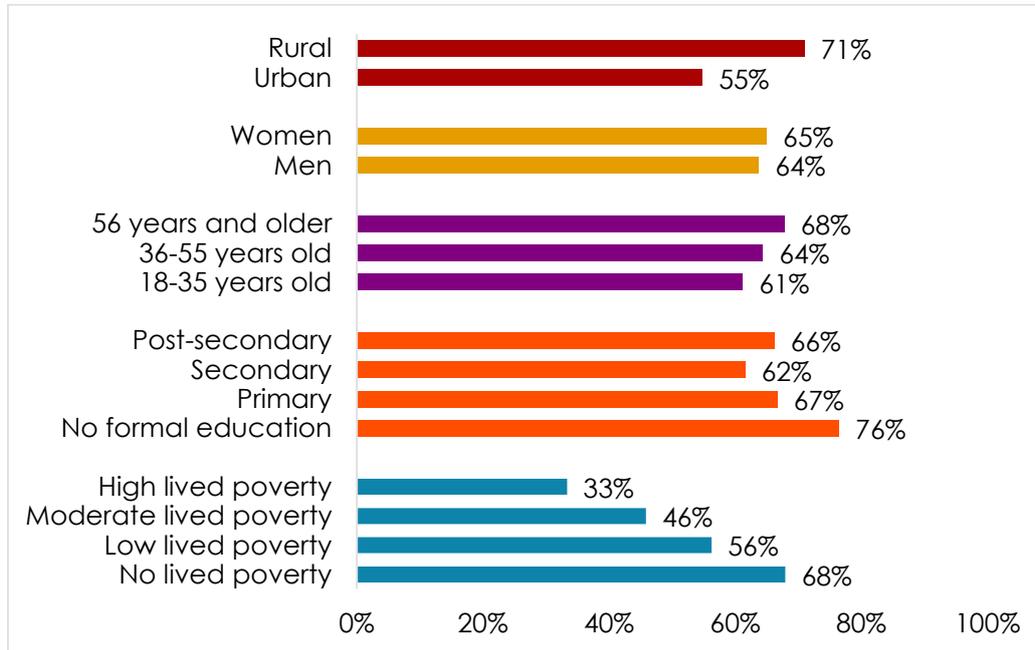
**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Improving basic health services?

Praise for the current government's efforts to improve basic health services is more common among rural respondents (71%), older Mauritians (68% of those aged 56 and above), those with no formal education (76%), and the wealthiest respondents (68%)<sup>1</sup> (Figure 5).

The prevalence of negative assessments of the government's performance on health services increased across all key socio-demographic groups. Between 2012 and 2017, increases were especially large among the poorest citizens (54 percentage points), urban residents (29 points), and respondents with secondary education (25 points) (Figure 6).

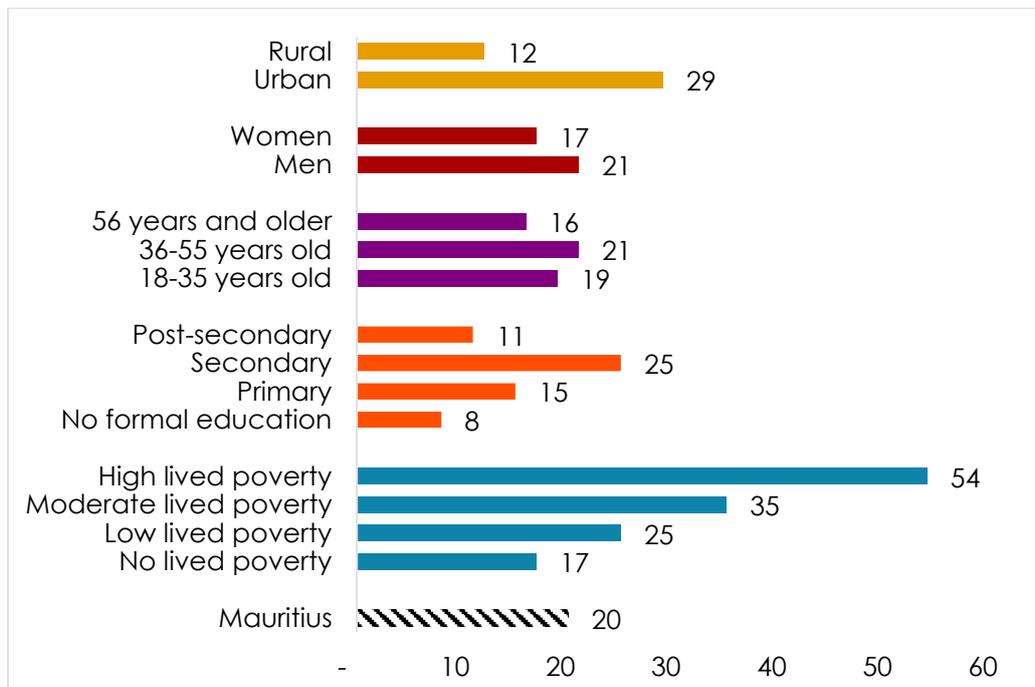
<sup>1</sup> Afrobarometer assesses lived poverty based on responses to the following questions: *Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: Enough food to eat? Enough clean water for home use? Medicines or medical treatment? Enough fuel to cook your food? A cash income?*

**Figure 5: Government performing well in improving basic health services**  
 | by socio-demographic group | Mauritius | 2017



**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Improving basic health services? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")

**Figure 6: Increase in negative evaluations of government performance on health care**  
 | percentage points | by socio-demographic group | Mauritius | 2012-2017

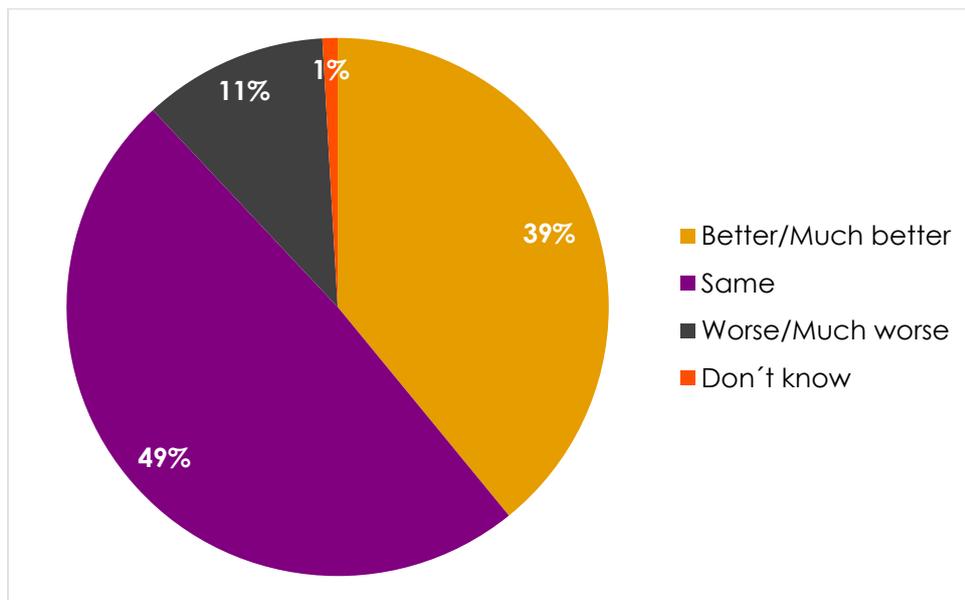


**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Improving basic health services? (Figure shows change between 2012 and 2017 in the percentage of respondents who say "fairly badly" or "very badly")

On the other hand, only one in 10 Mauritians (11%) say that their ability to obtain needed medical care has gotten worse, while almost four times as many (39%) say it has improved compared to “a few years ago.” Half (49%) see no change in their ability to get health care (Figure 7).

One way to interpret these findings may be that while people’s ability to obtain health care, which is provided free in public facilities, has improved or held steady, citizens expect their government to ensure greater progress in this sector, for example with respect to the quality of care.

**Figure 7: Has access to medical care gotten better or worse? | Mauritius | 2017**



**Respondents were asked:** Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same: Your ability to get medical care when you need it?

### Education

Assessments of government performance on education show a similar pattern as those on health care. While almost two-thirds (64%) of Mauritians say the current government is addressing educational needs “fairly well” or “very well,” this approval rate continues a sharp decline from the 90% recorded in 2012 (Figure 8).

Rural residents are more likely than their urban counterparts to feel that the government is doing a good job on education (71% vs. 53%). Approval is also higher among men (66%)

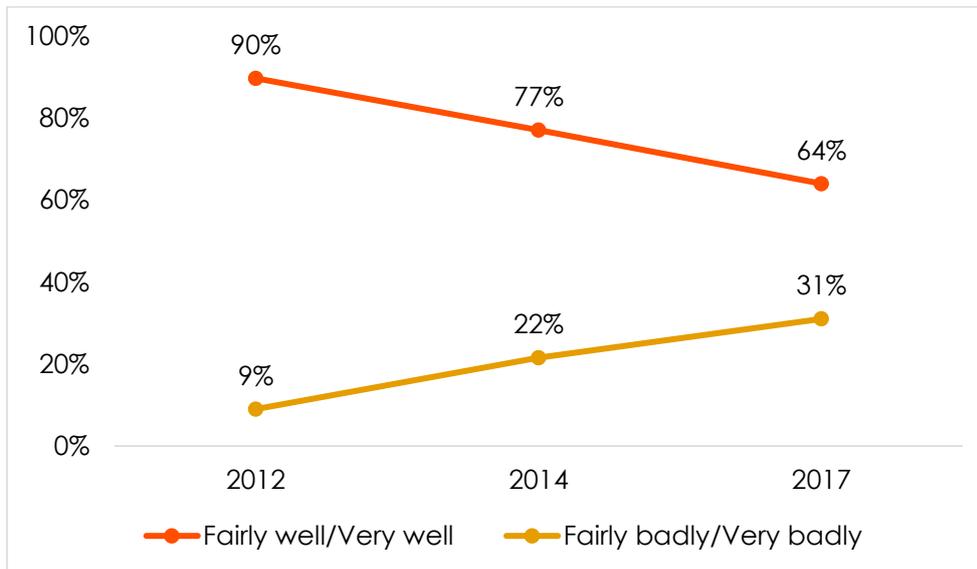
middle-aged respondents (67%), those who have no formal education (71%), and wealthy respondents (67%) (Figure 9).

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Increases in negative assessments (fairly/very badly) of how government is handling educational needs have been most pronounced among urbanites (by 33 percentage points between 2012 and 2017)

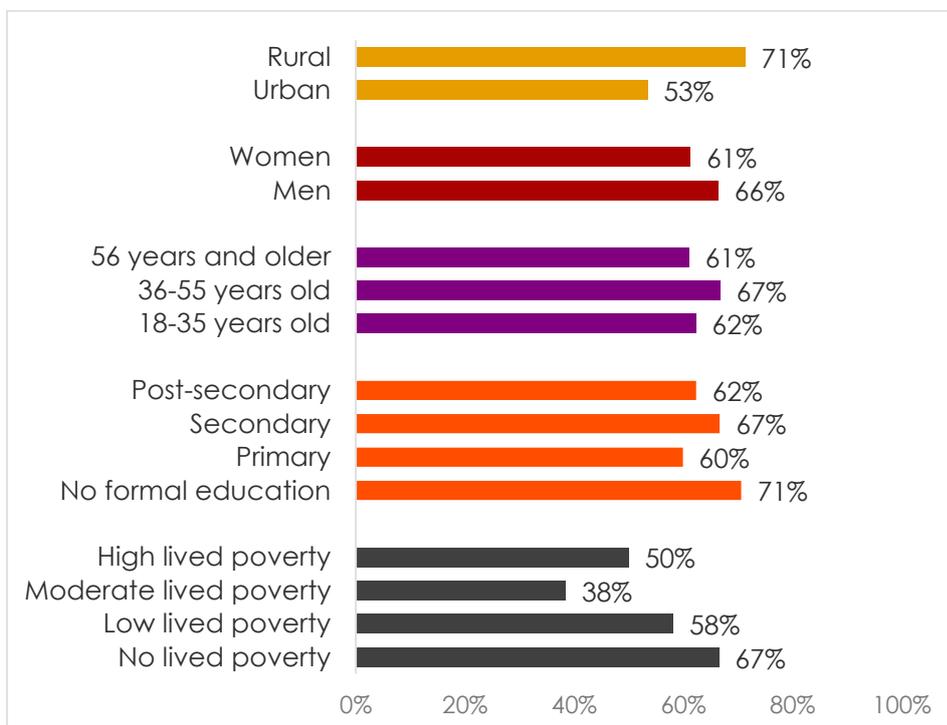
and respondents with moderate lived poverty (40 percentage points). Negative evaluations have risen at similar rates (about 20 points) across gender groups, age groups, and education levels (Figure 10).

**Figure 8: Government performance on education | Mauritius | 2012-2017**



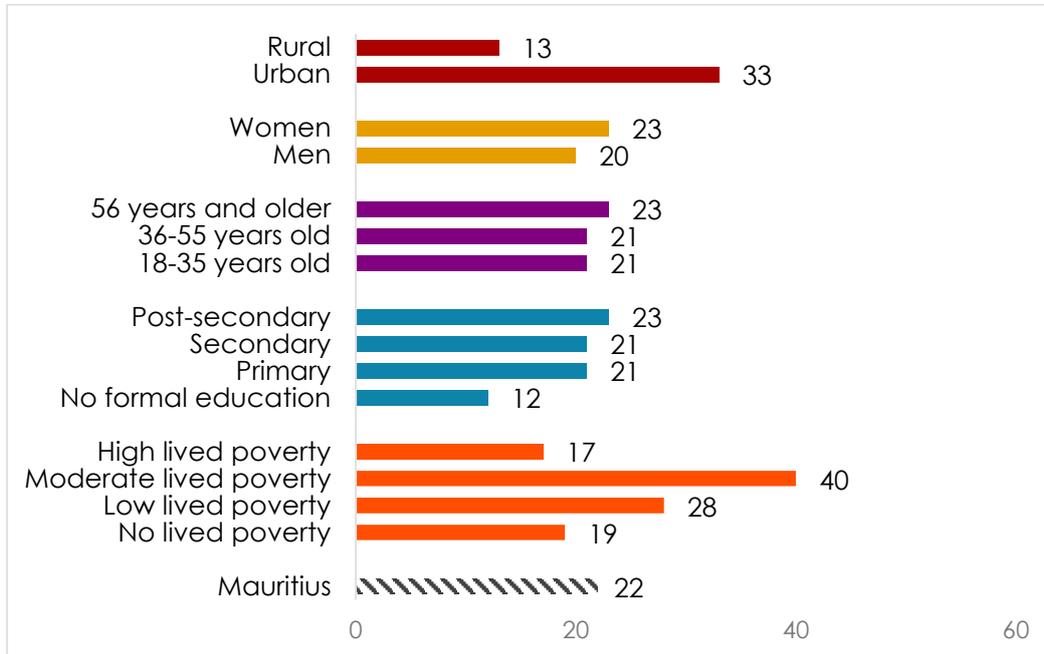
**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Addressing educational needs?

**Figure 9: Government performing well on education | by socio-demographic group | Mauritius | 2017**



**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Addressing educational needs? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")

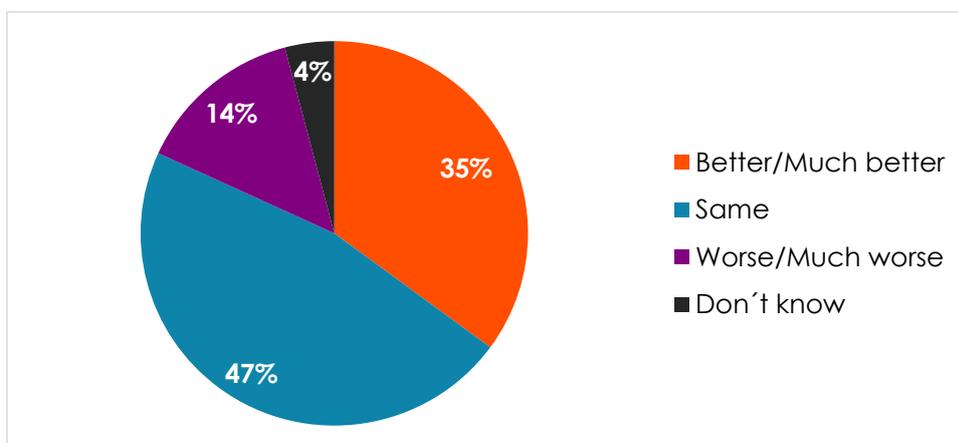
**Figure 10: Increase in negative evaluations of government performance on education** | percentage points | by socio-demographic group | Mauritius | 2012-2017



**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Addressing educational needs? (Figure shows change between 2012 and 2017 in the percentage of respondents who say "fairly badly" or "very badly")

As with health care, relatively few Mauritians (14%) say the government's effectiveness in addressing education needs has actually deteriorated over the past few years. More than twice as many (35%) think it has improved, and a plurality (47%) say it has remained the same (Figure 11). Again, one possible interpretation may be that while things have mostly stayed the same or gotten better, citizens expect more.

**Figure 11: Has government effectiveness on education gotten better or worse?** | Mauritius | 2017

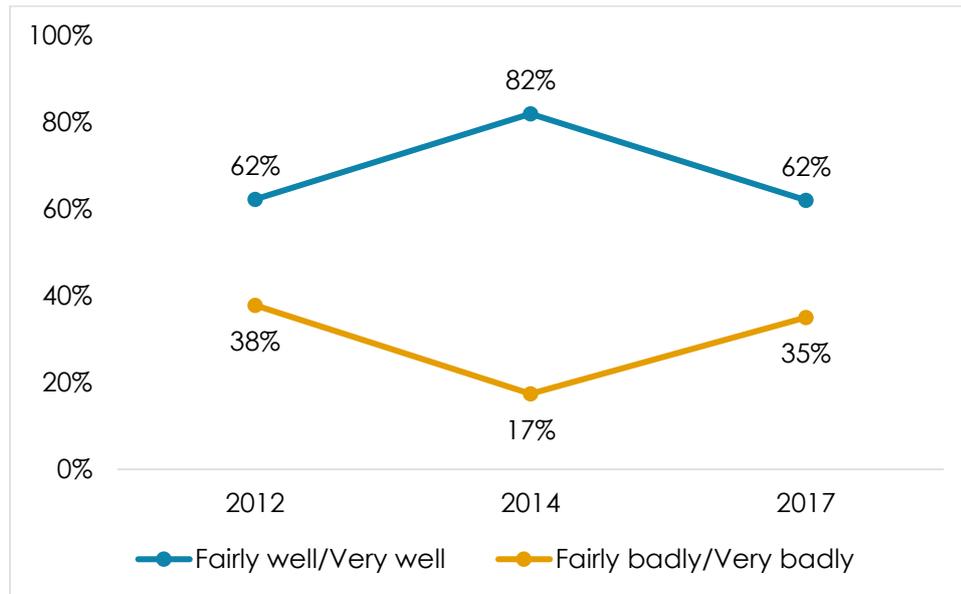


**Respondents were asked:** Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same: The government's effectiveness in addressing educational needs?

*Water and sanitation*

With regard to providing water and sanitation services, popular assessments of the government's performance returned to the 2012 level, wiping out a 20-percentage-point gain in 2014. Six in 10 Mauritians (62%) now say their government is handling this matter fairly/very well (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: Government performance on providing water and sanitation services**  
 | Mauritius | 2012-2017

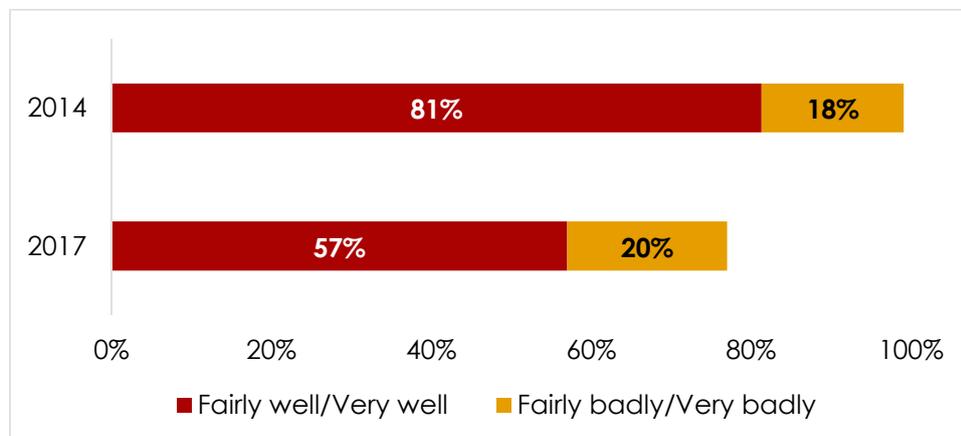


**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Providing water and sanitation services?

*Road and bridge maintenance*

A smaller majority (57%) of Mauritians say the government is performing "fairly well" or "very well" on road and bridge maintenance, but again we see a sharp decline in popular approval – by 24 percentage points since 2014 (Figure 13).

**Figure 13: Government performance on maintaining roads and bridges** | Mauritius  
 | 2017

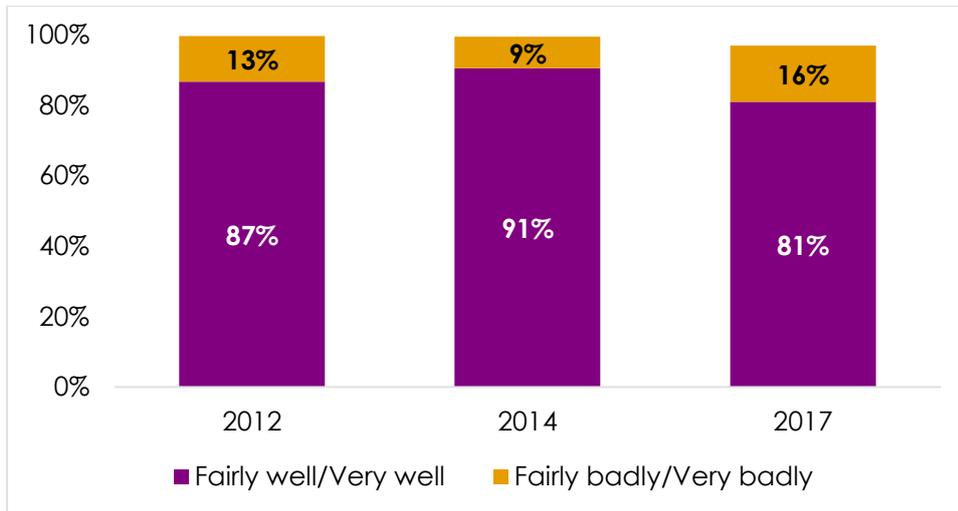


**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Maintaining roads and bridges?

**Electricity**

Among key public services, the provision of electricity earns the government its highest marks – 81% fairly/very well – and the smallest decline (10 percentage points since 2014) (Figure 14).

**Figure 14: Government performance on providing a reliable electricity supply**  
 | Mauritius | 2012-2017

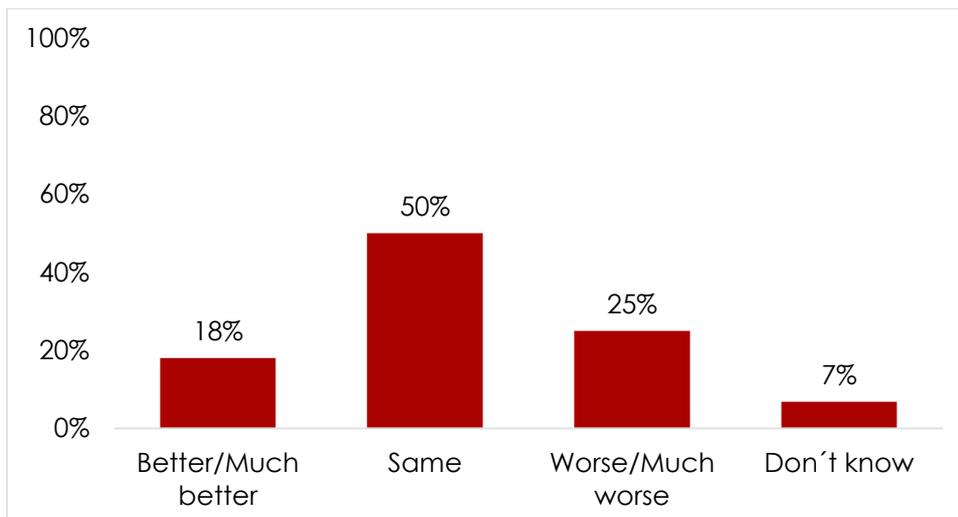


**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Providing a reliable supply of electricity?

**Government assistance in solving problems**

Overall, Mauritians register little dramatic improvement or deterioration, over the past few years, in their ability to get government assistance to resolve problems. Half (50%) of respondents say nothing has changed, while the rest are divided between those who say the government has become more helpful (18%) and less helpful (25%) (Figure 15).

**Figure 15: Better or worse: Government assistance in resolving problems** | Mauritius  
 | 2017

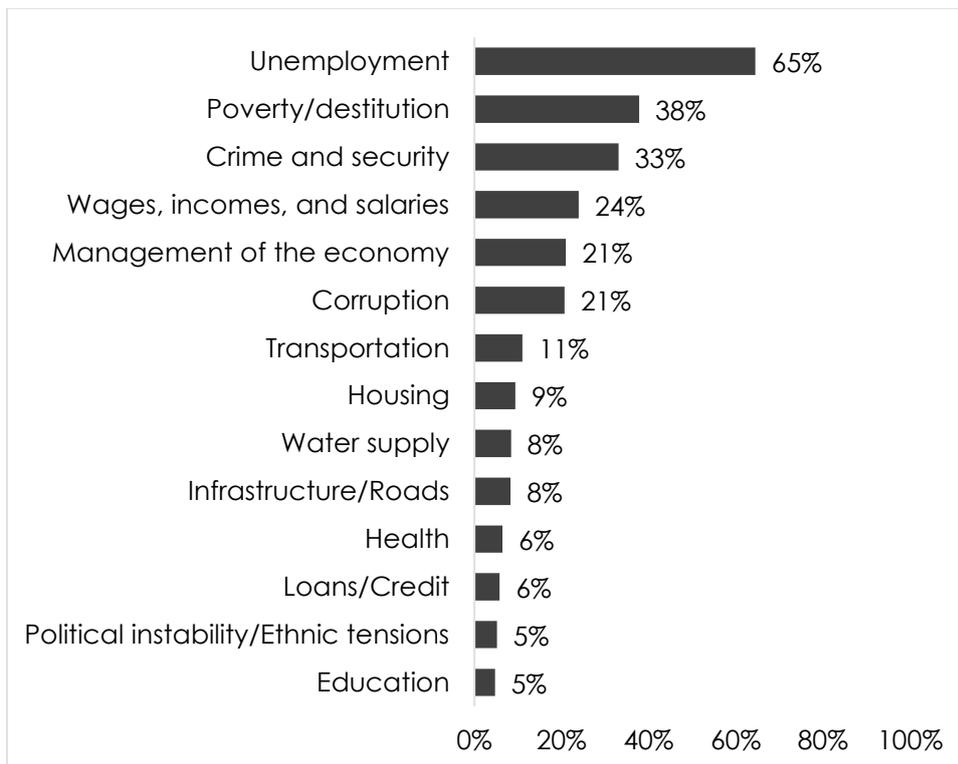


**Respondents were asked:** Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same: The ability of ordinary people to get assistance from government to resolve problems for themselves or their communities?

## Most important problems that government should address

If we are interested in which issues might affect Mauritians' voting decisions in the upcoming elections, one indicator could be their views on what are the country's most important problems that the government should address. By far the most frequently cited problem is unemployment: Two out of three respondents mention a lack of jobs among their top priorities. Poverty and crime/security follow with 38% and 33%, respectively (Figure 16). About one in five respondents cite wages (24%), management of the economy (21%), and corruption (21%) among their top concerns.

**Figure 16: Most important problems** | Mauritius | 2017



**Respondents were asked:** *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Respondents could give up to three answers.)*

## Conclusion

Despite strong economic growth, many Mauritians say the country is headed in the wrong direction, and popular assessments of the government's performance have declined significantly on a wide range of economic policy and service-delivery issues. When asked which problems the government should prioritize, Mauritians most strongly emphasize unemployment, poverty, and crime. These findings should give candidates for election a good understanding of what ordinary citizens expect going forward.

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Financial support for Afrobarometer Round 7 has been provided by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Open Society Foundations, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development via the U.S. Institute of Peace, the National Endowment for Democracy, and Transparency International.

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**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 267 | 28 December 2018**