

## With lived poverty on the rise, Guineans grow pessimistic, critical of government performance

**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 306 | Sadhiska Bhoojedhur, Thomas Isbell, and Aliou Barry**

### Summary

Despite their country's tremendous reserves of bauxite, iron ore, gold, and diamonds, 55% of Guineans live under the poverty line. Growth in the mining sector has not trickled down to average citizens, many of whom face a dearth of jobs, frequent power cuts, and inadequate supplies of drinking water (Republic of Guinea, 2017). Government efforts, over the past five years, to curtail public spending, improve budget management, and enhance economic growth have not produced lower living costs, and public frustration is growing (United Nations Development Programme, 2019).

Findings from the most recent Afrobarometer public opinion survey show that Guineans are growing increasingly critical of the country's overall direction and their government's management of the economy. Most describe the country's economy and their personal living conditions as bad, and optimism about improvement in the near future is waning.

### 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 results of Round 7 surveys (2016/2018) are currently being disseminated. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Guinea, led by Stat View International, interviewed 1,200 Guinean adults in May 2017. A sample of this size gives results at the country level with a margin of error of +/- 3 percentage points at one level. 95% confidence. Previous surveys were conducted in Guinea in 2013 and 2015.

### Key findings

- The proportion of Guineans who went without enough food, clean water, and other basic necessities increased compared to 2013.
- About two-thirds of Guineans describe the county's economic situation (66%) and their personal living conditions (64%) as "fairly bad" or "very bad." Both assessments have deteriorated since 2015.
- The same majority (64%) feel that their country is heading in the wrong direction – a 14-percentage-point increase from 2015.
- The proportion of Guineans who think things will improve over the next 12 months has dropped from 64% in 2013 to 42%.

- Large majorities of Guineans give poor ratings to their government's performance on managing the economy (74%), improving living standards of the poor (84%), and narrowing income gaps (86%).

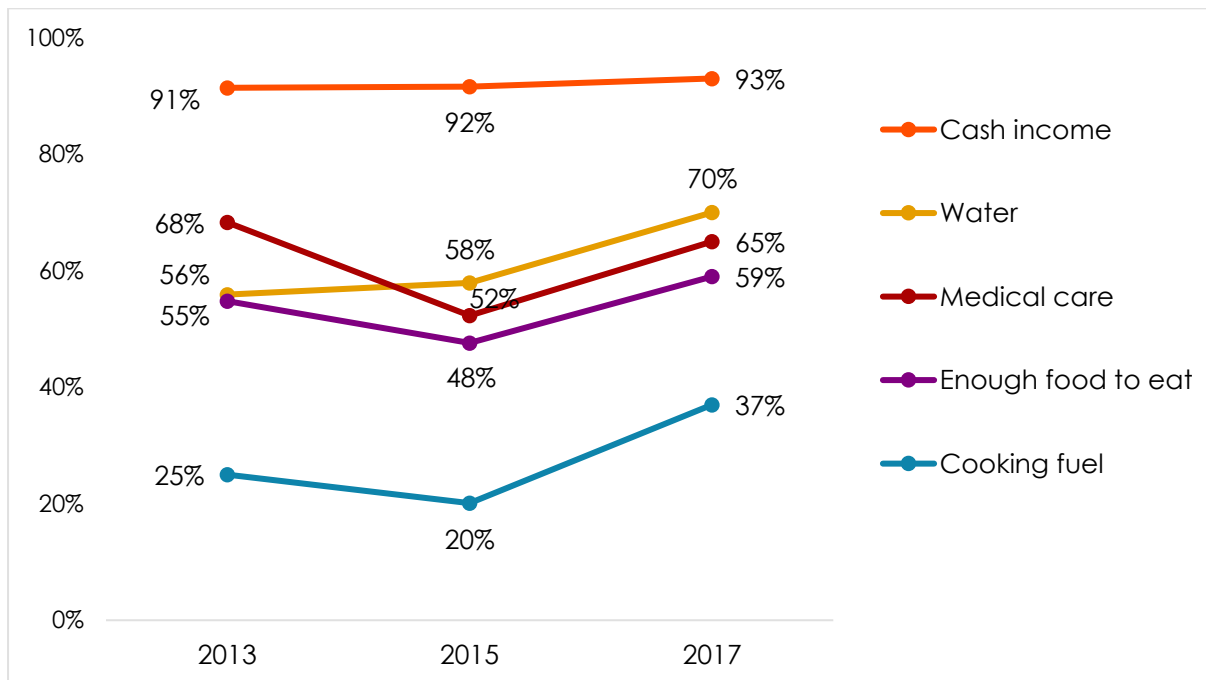
### An increase in lived poverty

The most recent Afrobarometer survey reveals that more Guineans are going without the basic necessities of life, experiencing what Afrobarometer describes as “lived poverty.” Cash income tops the list, with shortages experienced “several times,” “many times,” or “always” by nine out of 10 citizens (93%). A majority of respondents also say they repeatedly or often went without enough clean water (70%), medical care (65%), and enough food to eat (59%) during the 12 months preceding the survey, while 37% say they lacked sufficient cooking fuel at least “several times.”

As shown in Figure 1, levels of deprivation increased significantly between 2015 and 2017 on four of the five indicators (food, water, medical care, and cooking fuel). Compared to 2013, more citizens went without enough water (+14 percentage points), food (+4), and cooking fuel (+12) in 2017.

When reported levels of deprivation of these five necessities are averaged in a Lived Poverty Index score, Guinea ranks second among the 34 African countries surveyed during 2016/2018 in the proportion of the population experiencing “high lived poverty” (not shown).

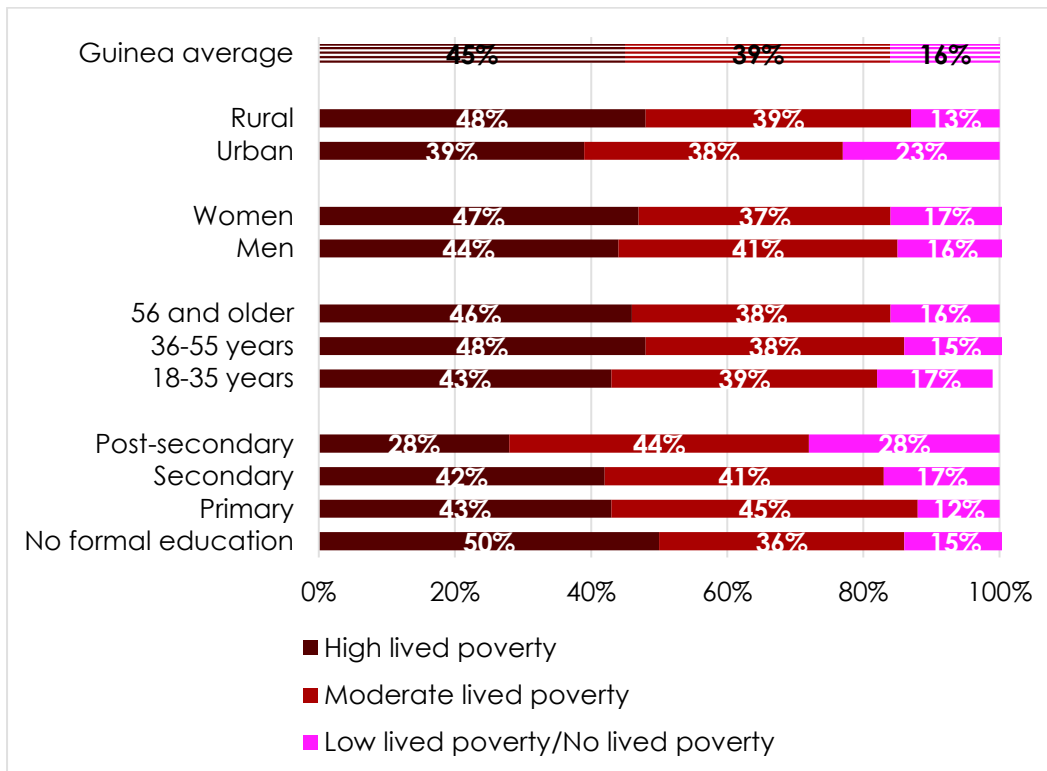
**Figure 1: Lived poverty | Guinea | 2013-2017**



**Respondents were asked:** 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? (% who say “several times,” “many times,” or “always”)

High levels of lived poverty are more common among rural residents (48%) than among their urban counterparts (39%). Citizens with no formal education are almost twice as likely to suffer frequent deprivation of basic necessities (50%) as those with post-secondary education (28%). But differences by gender and age group are modest (Figure 2).

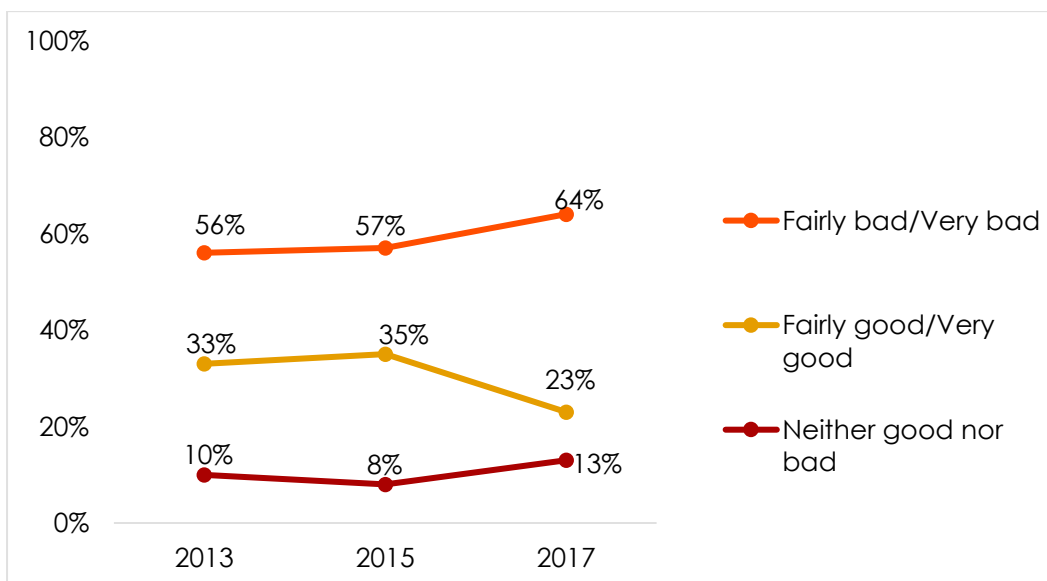
**Figure 2: Levels of lived poverty** | by socio-demographic group | Guinea | 2017



**Respondents were asked:** 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?

Almost two-thirds (64%) of Guineans describe their personal living conditions as “fairly bad” or “very bad.” Since 2013, the share of citizens who say that their living situation is good has decreased from around one in three (33%) to fewer than one in four (23%) (Figure 3).

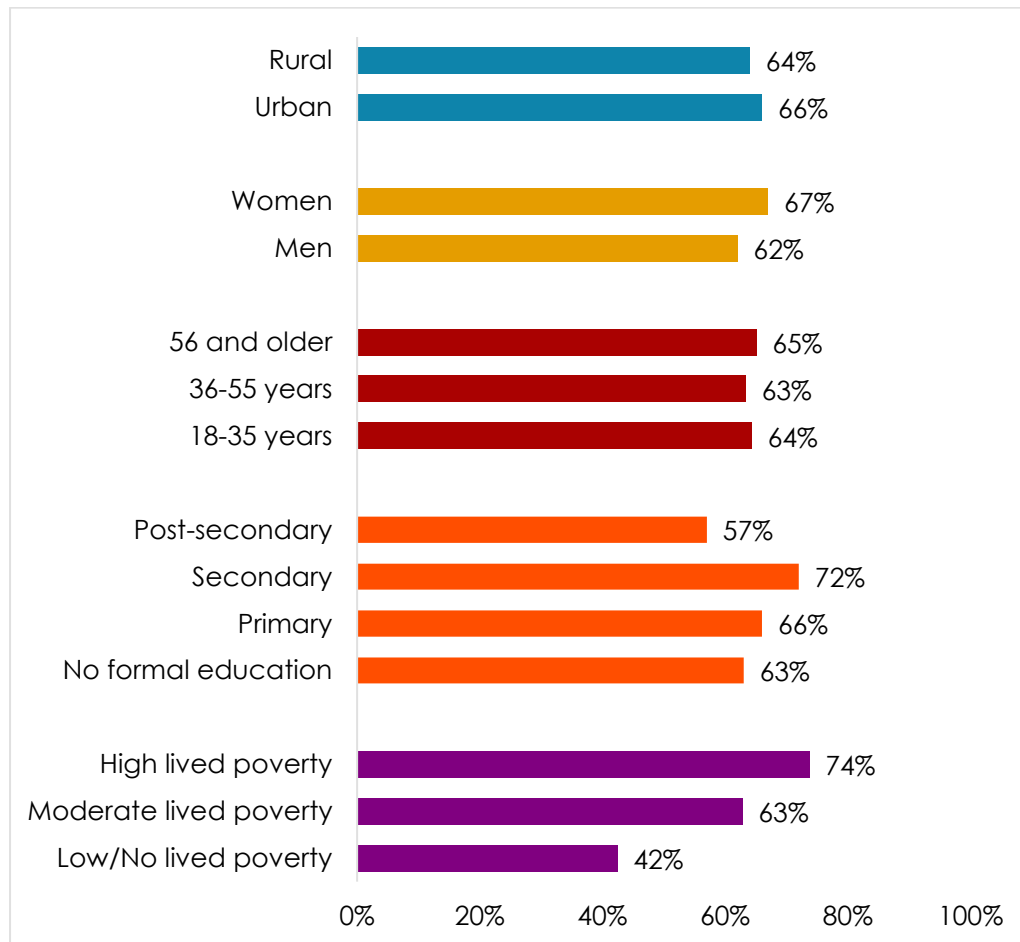
**Figure 3: Personal living conditions** | Guinea | 2013-2017



**Respondents were asked:** In general, how would you describe your own present living conditions?

Women are somewhat more likely than men to see their living situation as bad (67% vs. 62%) (Figure 4). And as one would expect, negative assessments of personal living conditions follow respondents' level of lived poverty, ranging from 42% among those with no or low lived poverty to 74% among with high lived poverty. Guineans with secondary education (72%) are more likely to say their living situation is bad than their counterparts with less or more education, perhaps suggesting that their economic expectations are most commonly disappointed. Negative assessments differ little by age or urban-rural location.

**Figure 4: Personal living conditions** | by socio-demographic group | Guinea | 2017



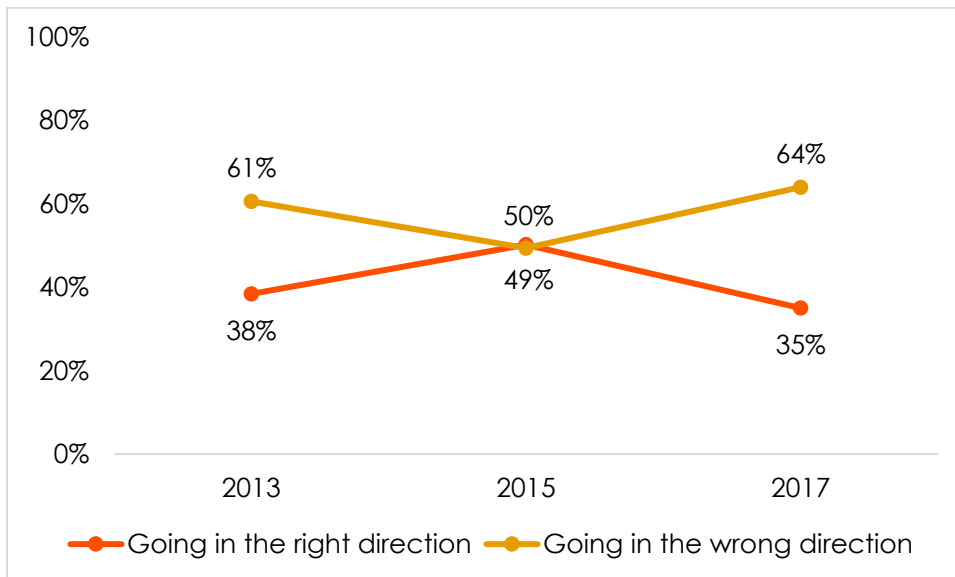
**Respondents were asked:** *In general, how would you describe your own present living conditions? (% who say "fairly bad" or "very bad")*

### Macro-economic assessments

More than six in 10 Guineans (64%) feel that their country is heading in the wrong direction – an increase of 14 percentage points from 2015. Only one-third (35%) of respondents say their country is going in the right direction (Figure 5).

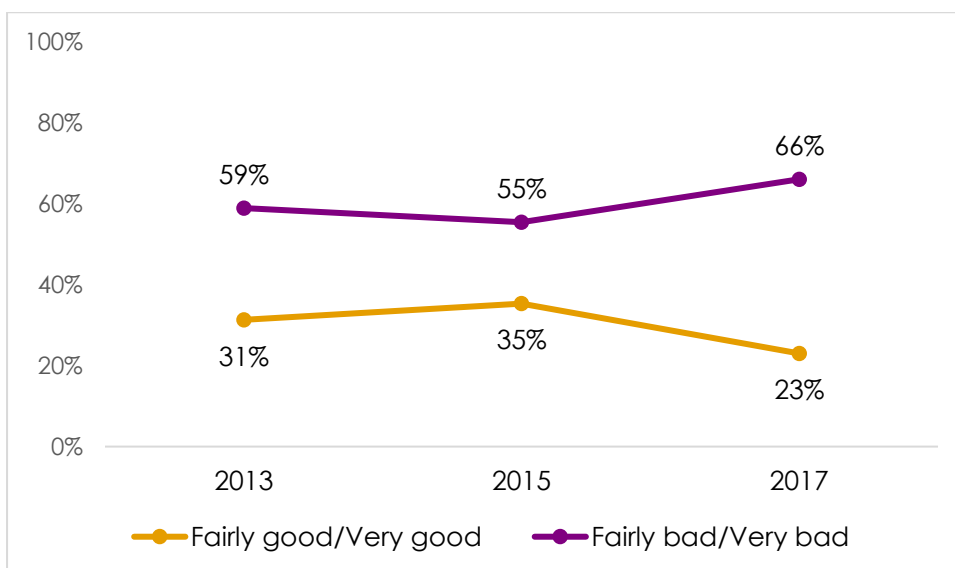
Similarly, two-thirds (66%) of Guineans (66%) rate the country's economic condition as "fairly bad" or "very bad," up from 55% in 2015 (Figure 6).

**Figure 5: Overall direction of the country | Guinea | 2013-2017**



**Respondents were asked:** Some people might think the country is going in the wrong direction. Others may feel it is going in the right direction. So let me ask you about the overall direction of the country: Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction?

**Figure 6: Country's present economic condition | Guinea | 2013-2017**

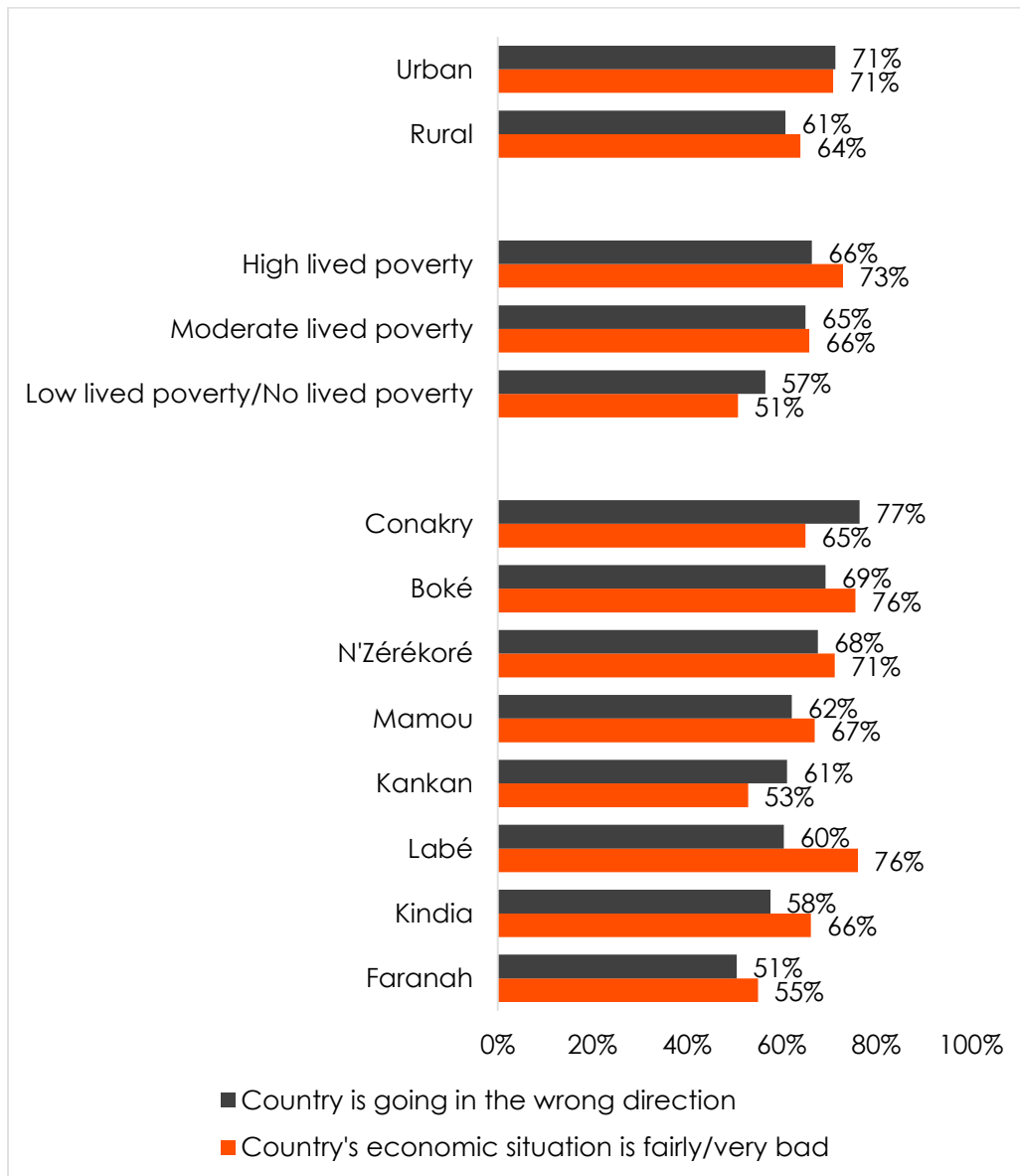


**Respondents were asked:** In general, how would you describe the present economic condition of this country?

Urbanites are generally more negative in their view on the country's direction and economic situation than rural residents. And the poorest respondents are more likely to say that Guinea is headed in the wrong direction (66%) and to offer negative assessments of the economic situation (73%) than those who are economically better off (Figure 7).

Regional differences emerge as well. Residents in Conakry are most likely to see the country as moving in the wrong direction (77%, compared to 51% in Faranah and 58% Kindia). Broadly, the pattern is similar with regard to negative views on the economic situation, although respondents in Labè are most critical (76%).

**Figure 7: Country's overall direction and economic condition** | by socio-demographic group and region | Guinea | 2017



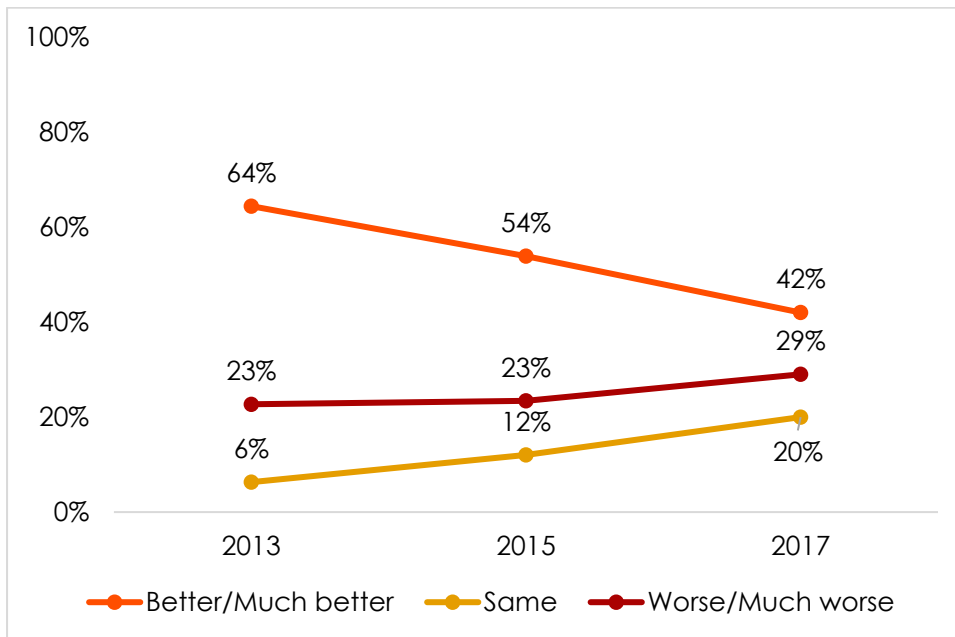
**Respondents were asked:**

*Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction?  
 In general, how would you describe the present economic condition of this country?*

Moreover, Guineans are becoming less optimistic about the country's economic development in the near future. While four in 10 (42%) still say they think the economy will be "better" or "much better" in 12 months' time, this share is down from 64% in 2013 and 54% in 2015. Three in 10 (29%) think things will get worse, while one in five (20%) expect more of the same in the coming year (Figure 8).

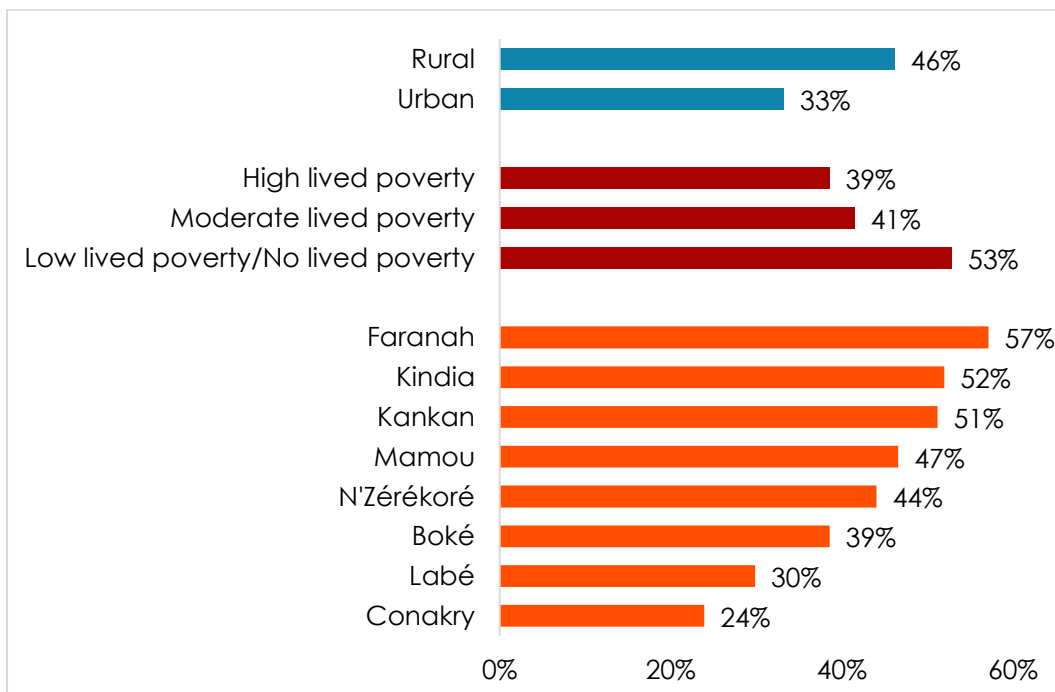
Rural residents are more optimistic (46%) than their urban counterparts (33%); those living in Conakry are particularly unlikely to expect things to improve in the short term (24%). The wealthiest respondents are more optimistic that the economy will improve (53%) than their compatriots who are less well off (39%-41%) (Figure 9).

**Figure 8: Country's economic condition in 12 months' time | Guinea | 2013-2017**



**Respondents were asked:** Looking ahead, do you expect economic conditions in this country to be better or worse in 12 months' time?

**Figure 9: Country's economic condition will improve in 12 months' time | by socio-demographic group and region | Guinea | 2017**

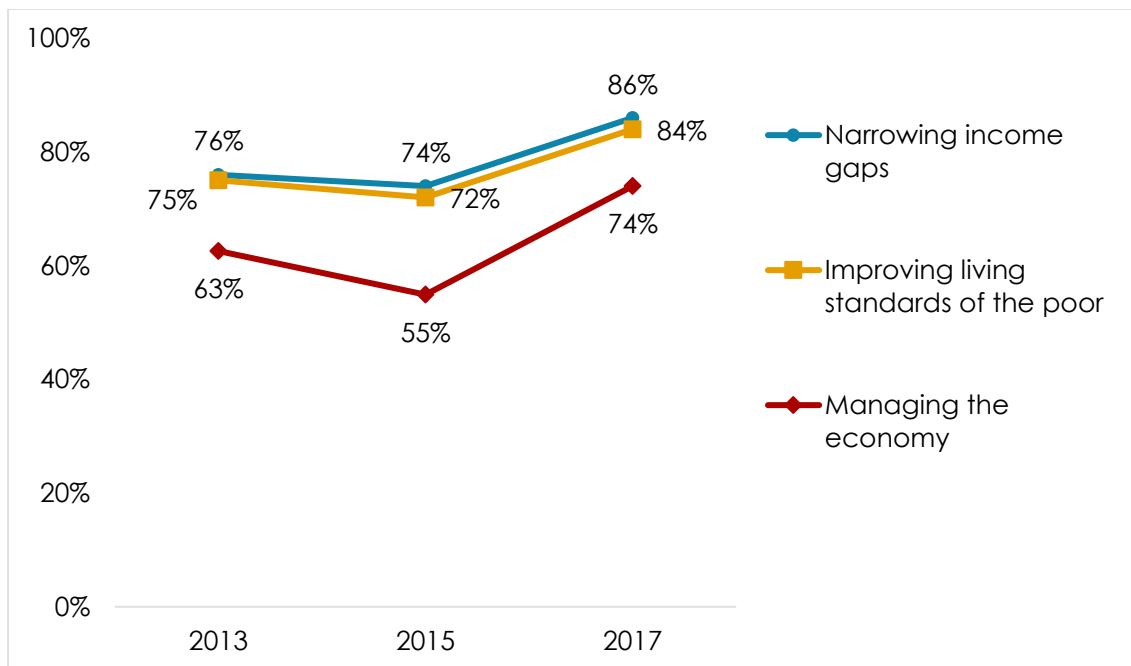


**Respondents were asked:** Looking ahead, do you expect economic conditions in this country to be better or worse in 12 months' time? (% who say "better" or "much better")

## Government performance on economic issues

Considering Guineans' perceptions of the country's overall direction and economic condition, it is not surprising that they give the government poor marks on its management of the economy. Three-fourths (74%) of respondents say the government is performing "fairly badly" or "very badly" on economic management, and even larger majorities give a thumbs-down on improving living standards of the poor (84%) and narrowing gaps between rich and poor (86%). On all three indicators, negative ratings have increased by about 10 percentage points compared to 2013 (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Government performing poorly on economic issues | Guinea | 2013-2017**



**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?

Narrowing gaps between rich and poor?

(% who say "fairly badly" or "very badly")

Assessments of the government's performance on improving living standards of the poor are particularly negative among people in the cities, where 91% say it is doing "fairly badly" or "very badly," compared to 80% in rural areas. Negative evaluations increase with respondents' poverty level, ranging from 73% among those with no or low lived poverty to 88% among the poorest (Figure 11).

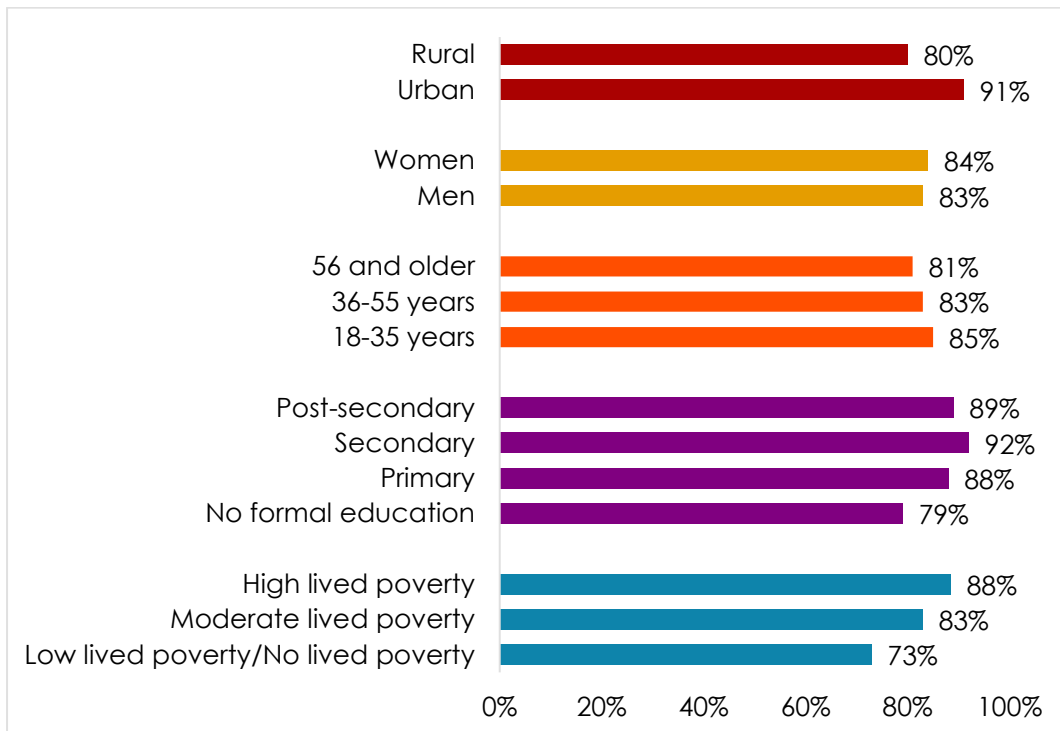
Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It's easy and free at [www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis](http://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis).

The response pattern is similar with regard to the government's performance on narrowing gaps between rich and poor, with more critical responses among urban residents,

younger respondents, those with secondary or post-secondary education, those experiencing some level of lived poverty (not shown).



**Figure 11: Government performing poorly on improving living standards of the poor**  
 | by socio-demographic group | Guinea | 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 the living standards of the poor? (% who say "fairly badly" or "very badly")

## Conclusion

The survey's findings that lived poverty and negative assessments of personal and national economic conditions are on the rise should be a matter of great concern for the Guinean government. A significant portion of the population see their country as heading in the wrong direction and disapprove of the government's performance on economic issues. Under its new National Economic and Social Development Plan 2016-2020 (Republic of Guinea, 2017), the government will need to refine strategies for sharing the nation's wealth with average citizens.

## References

Republic of Guinea. (2017). Plan national de développement économique et social 2016-2020.

United Nations Development Programme. (2019). A propos de la Guinée.

**Sadhiska Bhoojedhur** is a research analyst at StraConsult Ltd, the Afrobarometer national partner in Mauritius. Email: [sadhiska.bhoojedhur@gmail.com](mailto:sadhiska.bhoojedhur@gmail.com).

**Thomas Isbell** is a PhD student at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. Email: [tisbell@afrobarometer.org](mailto:tisbell@afrobarometer.org).

**Aliou Barry** is national investigator for Stat View International, the Afrobarometer national partner in Guinea. Email: [aliou.newton@gmail.com](mailto:aliou.newton@gmail.com).

Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, directs a pan-African, non-partisan research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 35 countries is provided by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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.

Donations help the Afrobarometer Project give voice to African citizens. Please consider making a contribution (at [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org)) or contact Felix Biga ([felixbiga@afrobarometer.org](mailto:felixbiga@afrobarometer.org)) to discuss institutional funding.

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



Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 306 | 1 July 2019