

Advision Lesotho



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Most Basotho say government bungled teacher strike, is failing on education and youth

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 408 | Puleng Adams and Libuseng Malephane

Summary

Lesotho's public school teachers were on intermittent strike for most of the 2019 academic year, working just one week per month (Ramolibeli, 2020). With the economy in the doldrums (Majoro, 2019), teachers pursued their protest action against the government, pressing for better salaries and working conditions, payment of salary arrears, and a restructuring of the teaching service (Segoete & Phakisi, 2019; Lesotho Times, 2019).

Charges of government mismanagement added fuel to the fire, as critics said funds that could have been used to address teachers' demands were misused to service loans to members of Parliament at taxpayers' expense (Latela, 2019) and to support grossly wasteful government expenditures (Public Accounts Committee, 2016).

Meanwhile, the proportion of students who passed the junior secondary certificate examinations dropped from 65.5% in 2018 to 62.4% in 2019 (Examinations Council of Lesotho, 2019).

After further losses in learning time because of the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers have returned to the classroom since the lockdown was lifted in May 2020 (Motsoeli, 2020). But the dispute, which predates the current coalition government (in power since 2017), continues to simmer (Lesotho Times, 2020) even as final examinations are underway, and the possibility of further strike action remains.

The most recent Afrobarometer survey shows that Basotho are solidly behind the teachers' demands and believe that the government has mishandled the affair. Most also say the government is doing a poor job of addressing educational needs as well as the needs of the nation's youth in general. If the government could spend more money, Basotho would prioritize job creation for young people. In fact, a majority would willingly pay more taxes if that would mean funding for initiatives to help young people.

These findings suggest that Basotho want a less intransigent government response that will end the protracted dispute with teachers and address critical education and youth development needs of the population.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Seven rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018. Round 8 surveys in 2019/2021 are planned in at least 35 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Lesotho, led by Advision Lesotho, interviewed 1,200 adult citizens in February-March 2020. 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 Lesotho in 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2017.

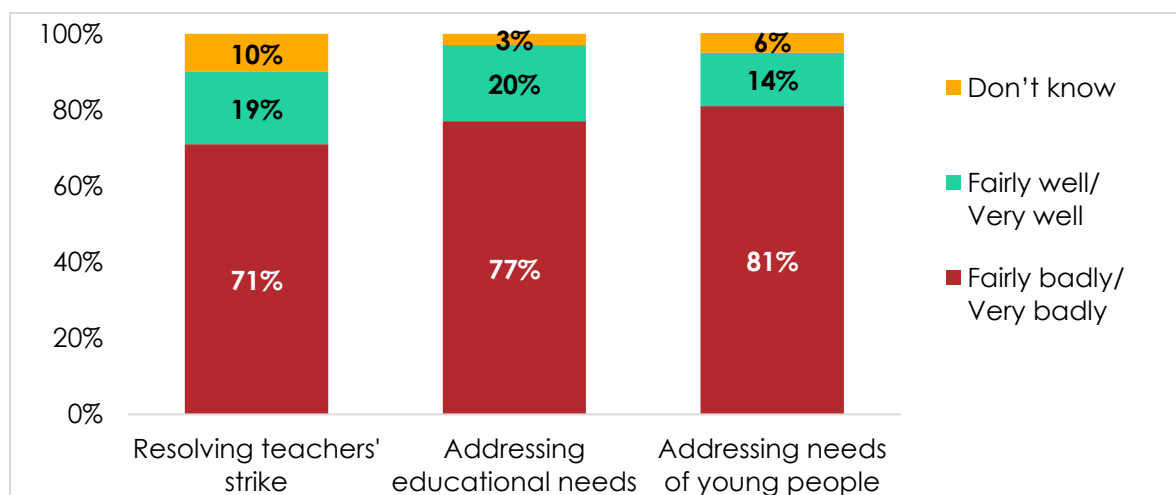
Key findings

- Seven in 10 Basotho (71%) believe the government has handled the dispute with teachers badly.
- An overwhelming majority (81%) of Basotho support the teachers' action, including 70% who say they "strongly support" it.
- Nearly three-quarters (73%) of citizens say that parents should be involved in the resolution of the dispute.
- About eight in 10 Basotho see the government's efforts in addressing educational needs (77%) and the needs of youth (81%) as inadequate.
- Six in 10 citizens (60%) say they would favour paying higher taxes in order to support programs to help young people.
- If the government could increase its spending on programs to help young people, job-creation initiatives would be citizens' highest priority.
- Unemployment is the most important problem that Basotho want their government to address. But citizens overwhelmingly (87%) give the government poor marks on job creation.

Government failing on education, youth

Seven in 10 Basotho (71%) say the government is doing a poor job of resolving the current teachers' industrial action, including 60% who describe its performance as "very bad." They also disapprove of the government performance on addressing the needs of the youth (81%) and on addressing the country's educational needs (77%) (Figure 1).

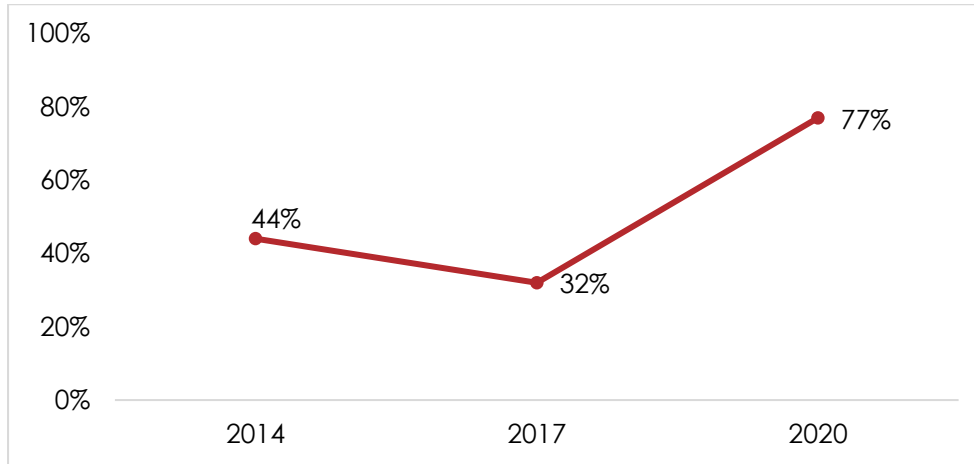
Figure 1: Government handling of teachers' strike, educational needs, and needs of youth | Lesotho | 2020



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? Addressing the needs of young people? Resolving the teachers' industrial action?

Disapproval of the government's performance on education has more than doubled since 2017 (32%) (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Government addressing educational needs badly | Lesotho | 2014-2020



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 badly" or "very badly")

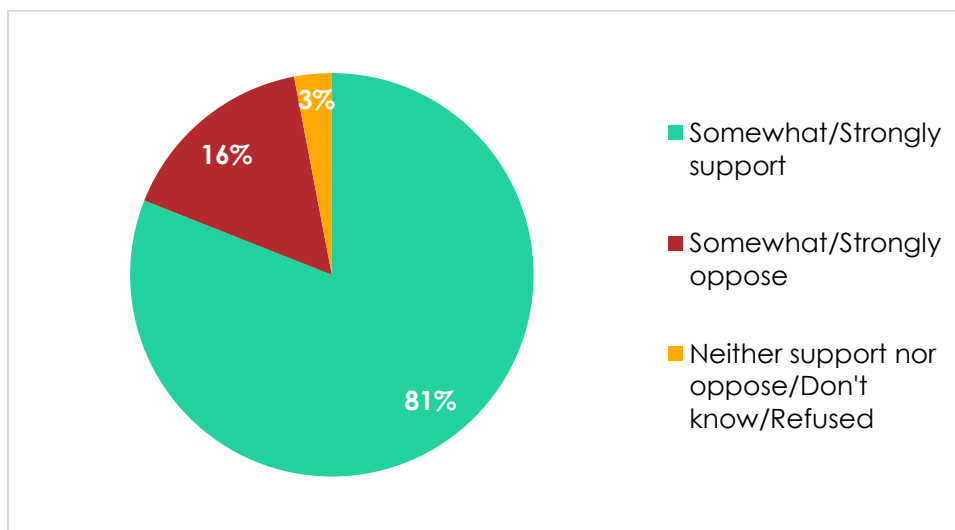
Support for teachers' industrial action

More than eight in 10 Basotho (81%) say they "somewhat support" or "strongly support" the teachers' industrial action, while fewer than two in 10 (16%) oppose it (Figure 3).

While support for the teachers is strong across key socio-demographic groups, it is strongest among urban residents (86%), citizens with post-secondary education (88%), and supporters of opposition political parties (85%) (Figure 4).

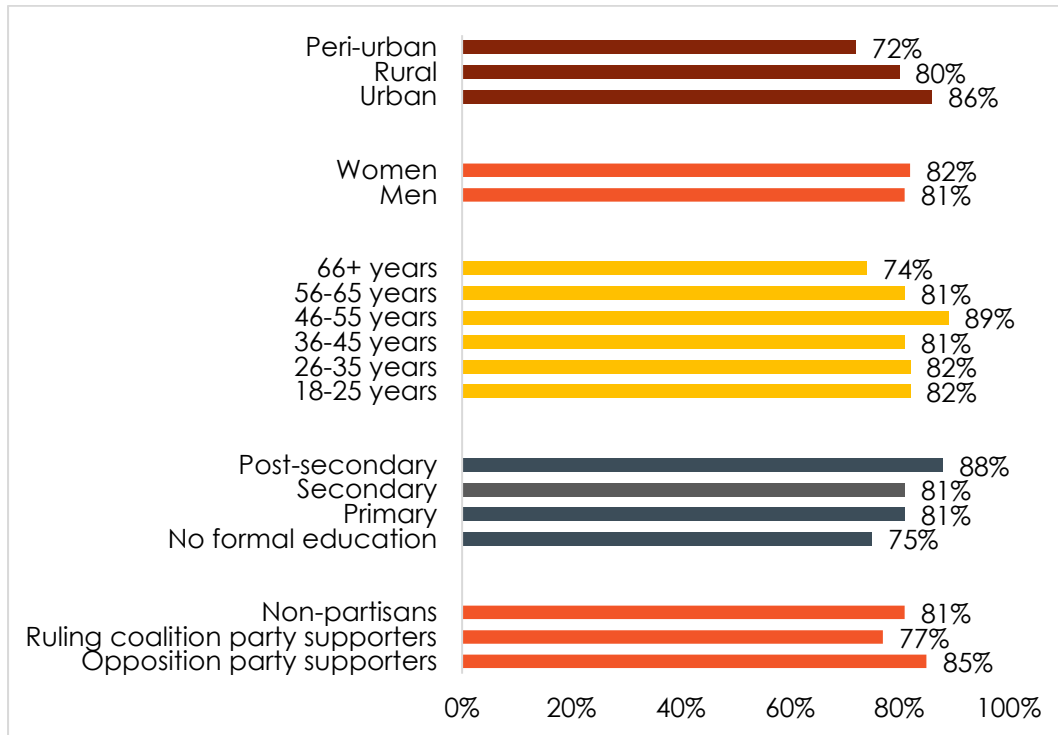
Nearly three-quarters (73%) of Basotho say that parents should be involved in resolving the teachers' strike, including a clear majority (57%) who say parents should be "very involved" (Figure 5).

Figure 3: Support for teachers' strike | Lesotho | 2020



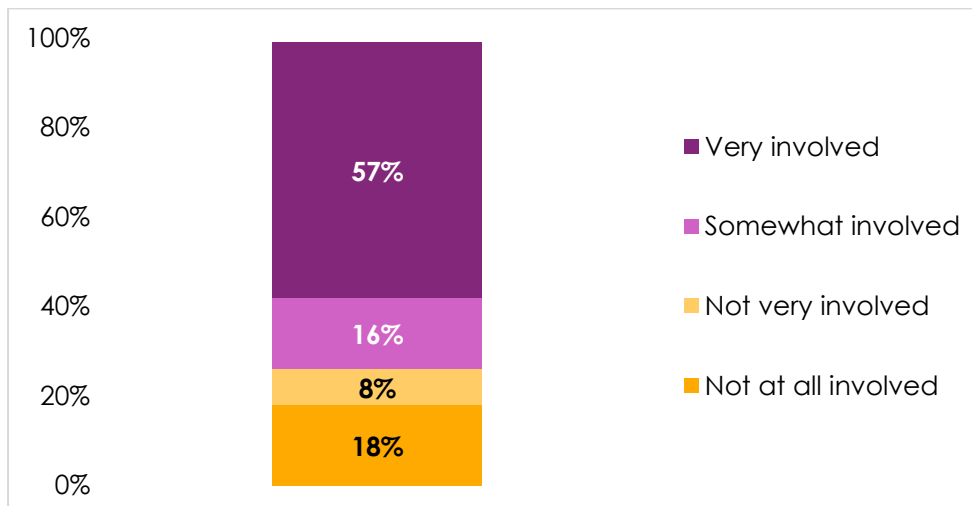
Respondents were asked: Over the past 12 months, Lesotho has experienced a long-standing industrial action by teachers demanding higher wages. Do you support or oppose this industrial action by teachers, or have you not heard enough to say?

Figure 4: Support for teachers' strike | by socio-demographic group | Lesotho | 2020



Respondents were asked: Over the past 12 months, Lesotho has experienced a long-standing industrial action by teachers demanding higher wages. Do you support or oppose this industrial action by teachers, or have you not heard enough to say? (% who say "somewhat support" or "strongly support")

Figure 5: Involvement of parents in resolving teachers' strike | Lesotho | 2020



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how involved should parents be in the resolution of the teachers' industrial action?

Programs for youth

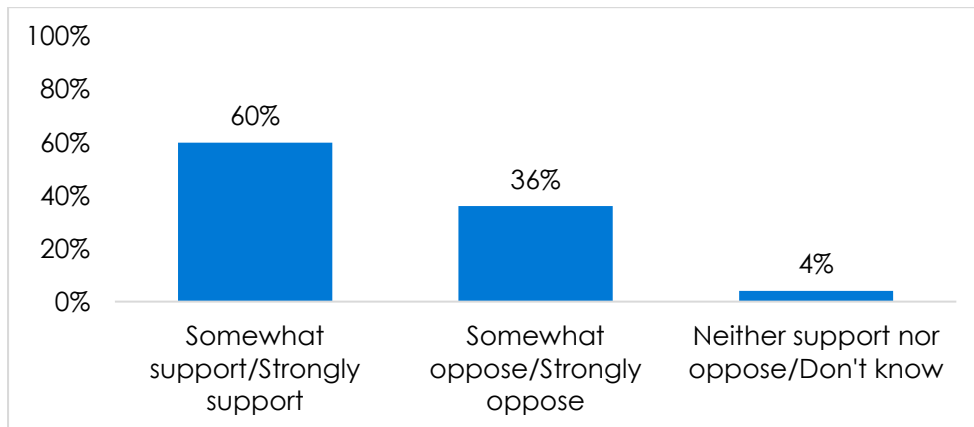
Given Lesotho's median age of 24 years (Statista, 2020), policies that further the development of young people would be expected to be a priority. Citizens' overwhelming dissatisfaction with the government's efforts to address youth needs (81% disapproval, as shown in Figure 1 above) is reinforced by their willingness to pay for better programs. Six in 10 Basotho (60%) say they would be "somewhat" or "strongly" supportive if the government

decided to make people pay more taxes in order to fund programs to help young people (Figure 6).

Women (62%) and young respondents (65% of those aged 18-25) express above-average levels of support for youth programs funded through higher taxes, but majority support for the idea is consistent across key socio-demographic groups (Figure 7).

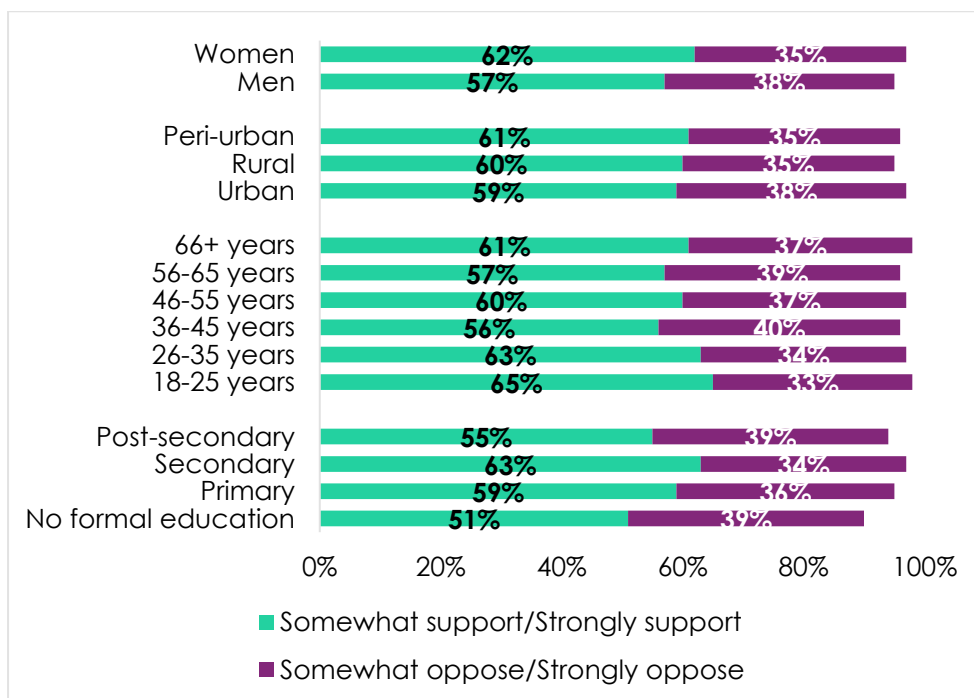
If the government could indeed increase its spending on programs to help young people, initiatives to create jobs (cited by 60% of respondents) would be citizens' highest priority. Education (15%) would rank second, followed by jobs training (9%) and business loans (9%) (Figure 8).

Figure 6: Higher taxes to support youth programs? | Lesotho | 2020



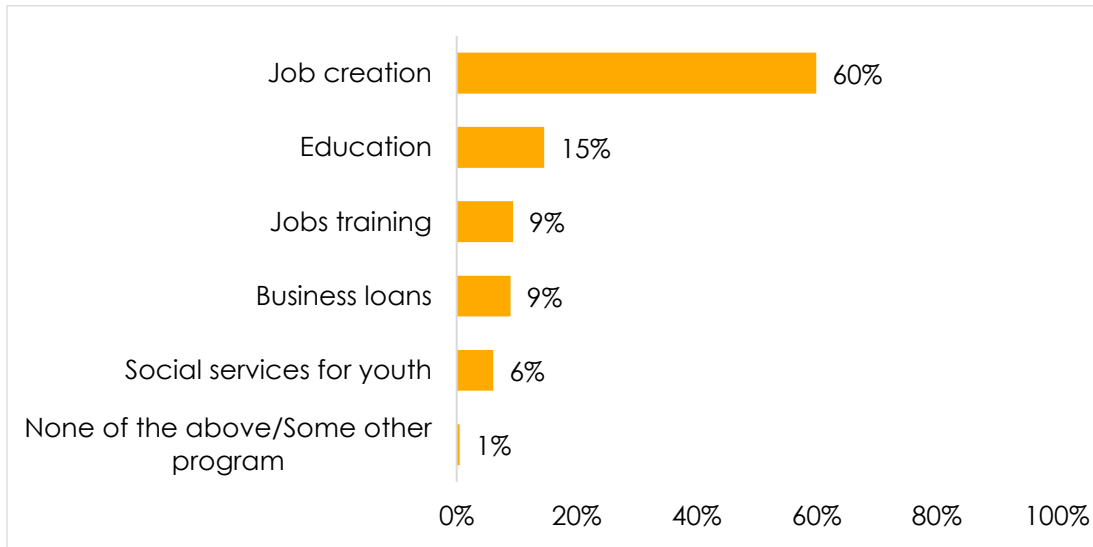
Respondents were asked: *If the government decided to make people pay more taxes in order to support programs to help young people, would you support this decision or oppose it?*

Figure 7: Support for higher taxes to fund youth programs | by socio-demographic group | Lesotho | 2020



Respondents were asked: *If the government decided to make people pay more taxes in order to support programs to help young people, would you support this decision or oppose it?*

Figure 8: Youth programs with highest priority for additional investment | Lesotho | 2020



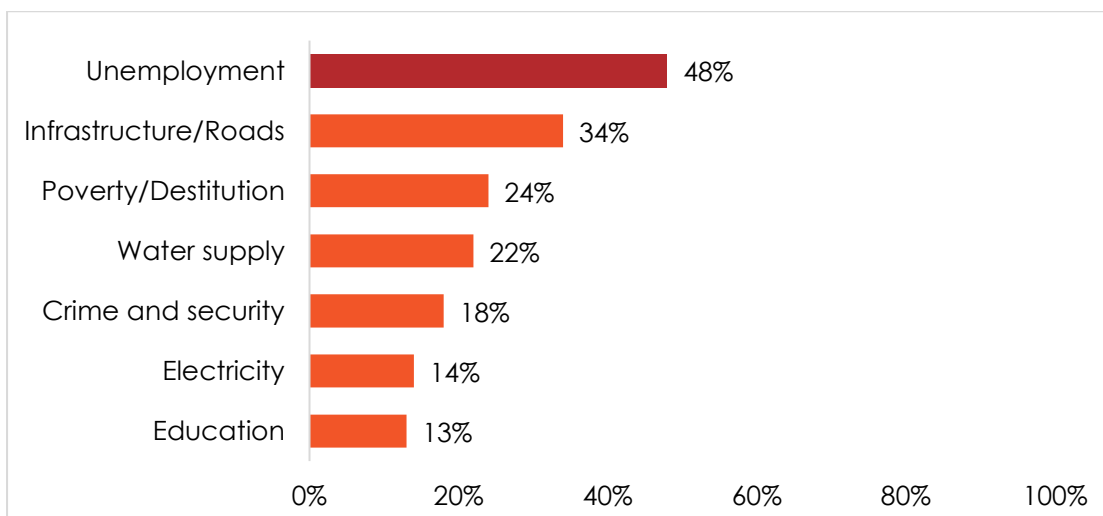
Respondents were asked: *If the government could increase its spending on programs to help young people, which of the following areas do you think should be the highest priority for additional investment?*

Most important problems

Citizens' prioritization of job creation to help young people reflects their view that unemployment is the most important problem that the government should address. Almost half (48%) of respondents cite a lack of jobs as one of their top three priorities for government action, well ahead of infrastructure/roads (34%), poverty/destitution (24%), water supply (22%), and other problems (Figure 9).

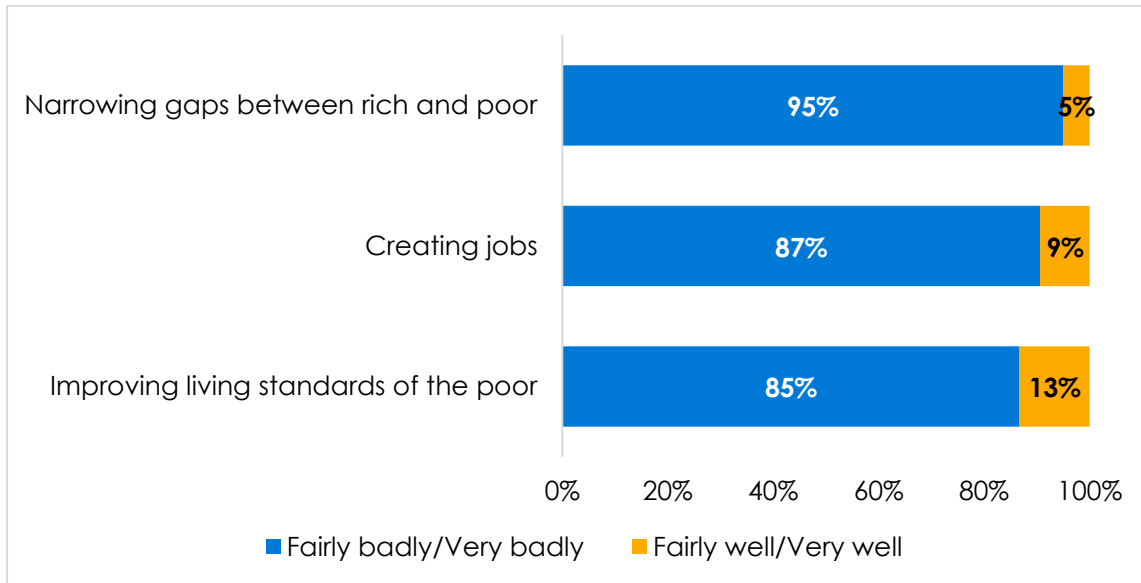
However, citizens' overwhelmingly rate the government's performance as "fairly bad" or "very bad" on job creation (87%) as well as on narrowing gaps between the rich and poor (95%) and improving living standards of the poor (85%) (Figure 10).

Figure 9: Most important problems that government should address | Lesotho | 2020



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Up to three responses per respondent. Figure shows % of respondents who cited each problem as one of their priorities.)*

Figure 10: Government performance on economic issues | Lesotho | 2020



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?

Conclusion

Citizens of Lesotho not only supported the teachers in their strike action but also believe the government has mishandled the issue. Considering the negative impact of an unsettled teaching service on learning and thus on the development of a skilled labor force, disapproval of the government's performance suggests that leaders are seen as unresponsive not only to the needs of the teachers but also to the concerns of ordinary Basotho, particularly with regard to youth development.

So urgent is this problem that a majority of Basotho would willingly pay more taxes in exchange for programs to help young people, especially job-creation initiatives. Job creation, which is citizens' top priority for government action, will be fundamental if Lesotho is committed to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially goals 1 (no poverty), 8 (decent work and economic growth), and 10 (reduced inequalities).

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Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is 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.

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