

Declining trust

**Basotho perceptions of government corruption
and performance drive drop in popular trust**

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Introduction

In a democracy, citizens delegate powers to individuals and political parties charged with building and maintaining institutions that will ensure the people's well-being. In this arrangement, trust is one of the most important ingredients in the legitimacy and sustainability of political systems (Blind, 2006).

In Lesotho, popular trust in the police, the army, and the courts of law dropped sharply between 2014 and 2017, according to Afrobarometer public-attitude surveys. This occurred at a time of considerable upheaval in Lesotho that led the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to recommend a wide-ranging series of constitutional and institutional reforms (Adams, Nkuebe, & Malephane, 2018).

Politically, an attempted coup in 2014 led to the dissolution of the 2012 coalition government and an early election in February 2015, followed by what many saw as moves toward a "militarization" of the state. This included mass arrests in the army and the assassination of the former commander of the Lesotho Defence Force. Court orders for the release of some of the arrested soldiers were ignored. High-profile military-style killings rocked the nation, and opposition leaders fled to South Africa (Matlosa, 2017). The police were implicated in human-rights violations, including the death of Constable Mokalekale Khetheng in 2017 (Lesotho Times, 2017; Amnesty International, 2018).

At the same time, Lesotho's economic performance continued to be poor (World Bank, 2018), with high unemployment and emigration. Several high-profile corruption scandals made headlines, including one cited in a 2017 motion of no confidence in former Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili that led to a third general election in five years. The judiciary, meanwhile, came under fire for lack of independence from the executive, exemplified by the forced departures of the chief justice and the president of the appeal court (Sunday Express, 2016; Daybreak News, 2018).

Against this context of continuing crisis, this policy paper uses Afrobarometer survey data to examine causes and implications of the marked decline in popular trust in government. Analyses show that rising perceptions of official corruption have resulted in sharply lower levels of trust in institutions of public order, which in turn has negatively impacted citizens' perceptions of their democracy and increased the likelihood that Basotho may wish to leave the country. These findings confirm the damaging effect of corruption on trust and its potential to erode Lesotho's fledgling democracy, clearly pointing to a need for the government to fight corruption more effectively

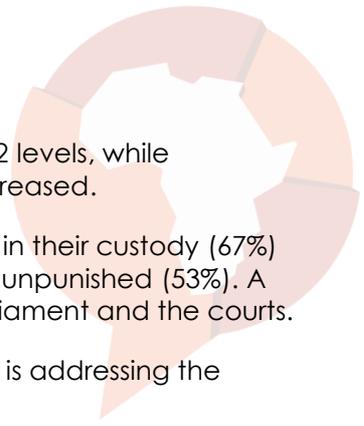
Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in Africa. 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 Lesotho, led by Advision Lesotho, interviewed 1,200 adult Basotho in December 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 Lesotho in 2012 and 2014.

Key findings

- Fewer than half of Basotho trust the three major institutions of order – the courts (49%), the police (44%), and the army (41%). The most trusted public figure is the King (69%).



- Trust in most government institutions has decreased from 2012 levels, while perceptions of corruption in government institutions have increased.
- A majority of Basotho say that police routinely abuse people in their custody (67%) and that officials who commit crimes “often” or “always” go unpunished (53%). A growing minority say the prime minister generally ignores Parliament and the courts.
- Citizens give the government generally poor marks on how it is addressing the country’s most important problems.
- A decline in political trust is driven in part by perceptions of corruption in government, disrespect for the rule of law, and inadequate government performance.
- Declining political trust tends to decrease perceptions of the supply of democracy in the country and to increase citizens’ propensity to consider emigrating.

What determines political trust?

Citizens evaluate their trust in government, its institutions and policies, as well as individual political leaders according to their efficiency and effectiveness, promise keeping, fairness, and honesty (Blind, 2006). As such, political trust is an important indicator of the public’s underlying feeling about its government (Newton & Norris, 2000). Political trust reflects a positive evaluation of the political world (Newton, 2007), a litmus test of how well the political system is performing in citizens’ eyes. The literature identifies a number of determinants of political trust (van der Meer, 2017; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2013), including:

- Perceptions of corruption decrease trust.
- Perceptions of fair treatment by decision makers or civil servants increase trust.
- When government performance is seen to be addressing important problems such as unemployment, poverty, and delivery of public services, people tend to trust the government.
- The rule of law and a properly functioning judiciary, police, and army are key drivers of political trust.

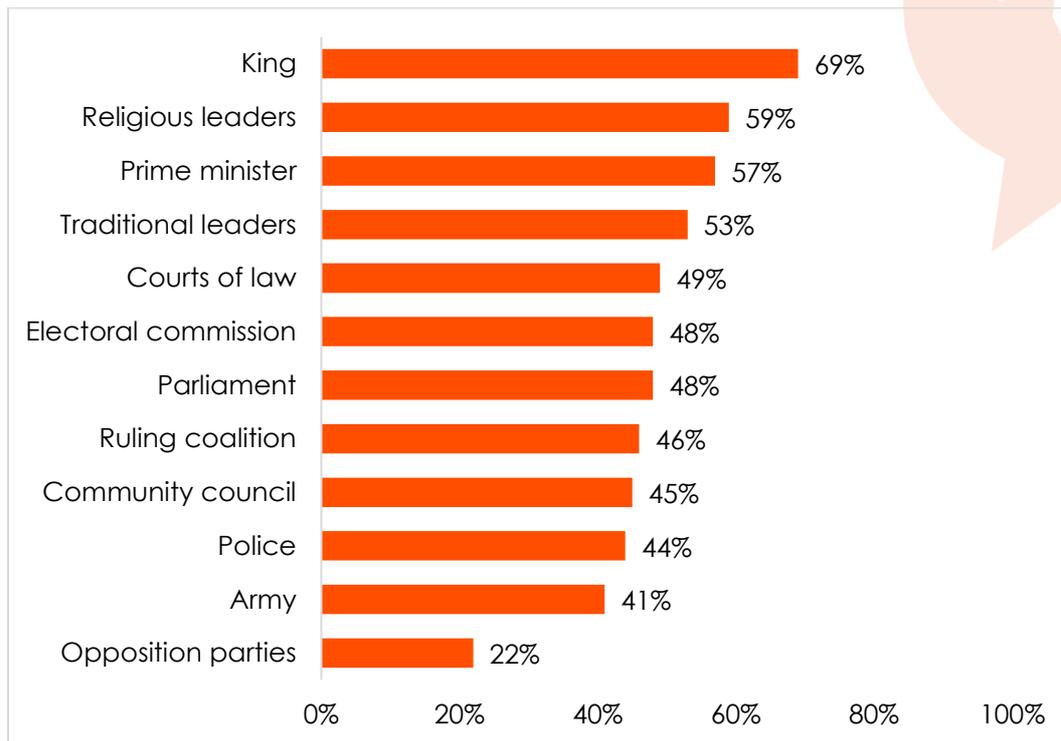
This paper will use Afrobarometer survey data from 2017 to test to what extent the above factors (our independent variables) have affected popular trust in government in Lesotho (our dependent variable). We will also examine the effect of trust in government on citizens’ perceptions of democracy and their interest in emigrating.

Citizens’ perceptions

Trust in government institutions

In Lesotho, the King is the most trusted public figure; more than two-thirds (69%) of Basotho say they trust him at least “somewhat,” including 57% who trust him “a lot.” Religious leaders (59%), the prime minister (57%), and traditional leaders (53%) rank near the top. But fewer than half of Basotho trust the three major institutions of order – the courts (49%), the police (44%), and the army (41%) (Figure 1).

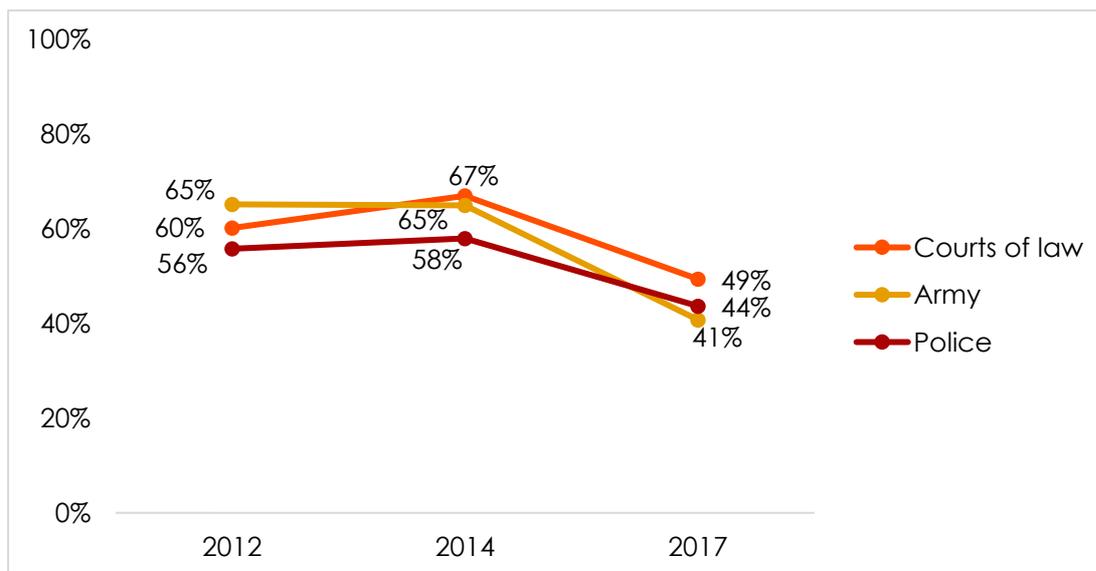
Figure 1: Citizens' trust in public institutions and figures | Lesotho | 2017



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust the following, or haven't you heard about them enough to say? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

Just three years earlier, a majority of Basotho trusted all three institutions of order; trust in the courts had even increased, from 60% to 67%, between 2012 and 2014. But popular trust in all three dropped sharply between 2014 and 2017: by 14 percentage points for the police, 18 points for the courts, and a remarkable 24 points for the army (Figure 2).

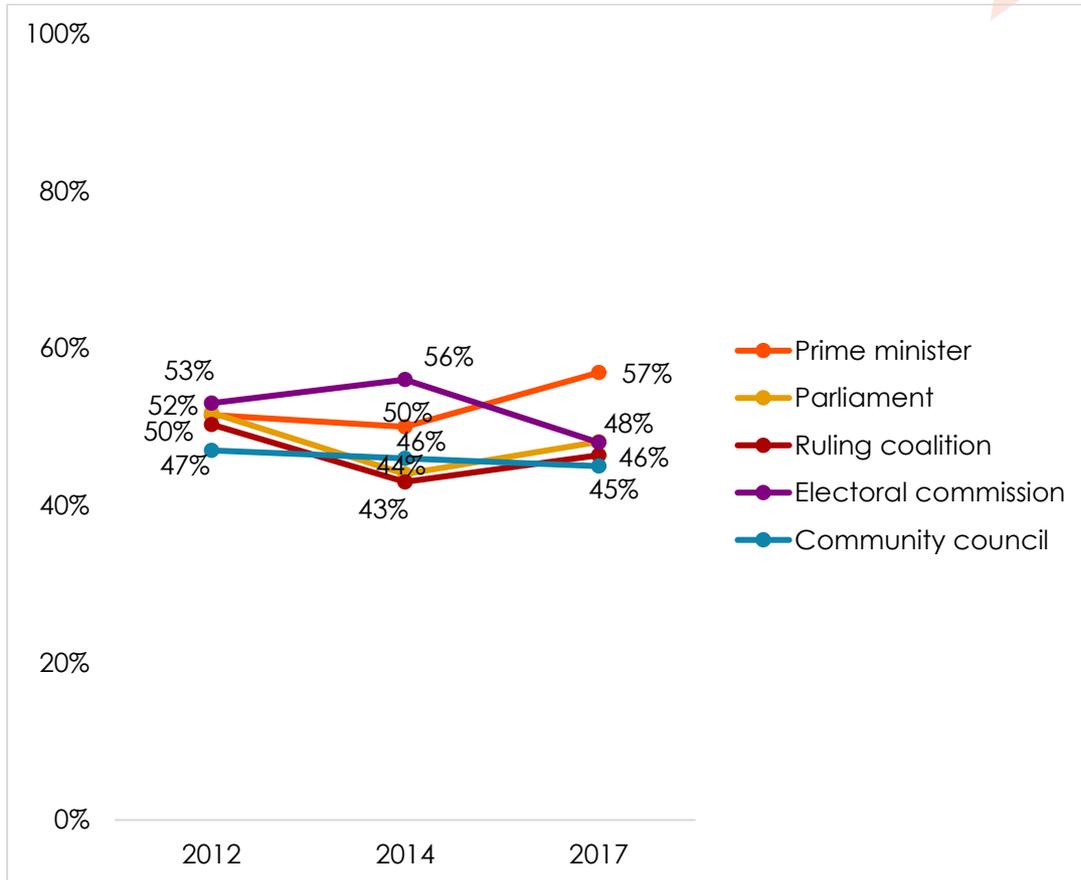
Figure 2: Citizens' trust in institutions of order | Lesotho | 2012-2017



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust the following, or haven't you heard about them enough to say? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

Trust in the Independent Electoral Commission followed a similar pattern, increasing slightly in 2014 but then dropping to 48% in 2017 (Figure 3). Trust in the elective institutions of Parliament and ruling-coalition parties moved in the opposite direction, decreasing between 2012 and 2014 and then rising slightly in 2017, though remaining at less than half of respondents (48% for Parliament, 46% for the ruling coalition). Trust in the local community council remained fairly stable, while trust in the prime minister increased to 57% in 2017.

Figure 3: Citizens' trust in elective and electoral institutions | Lesotho | 2012-2017



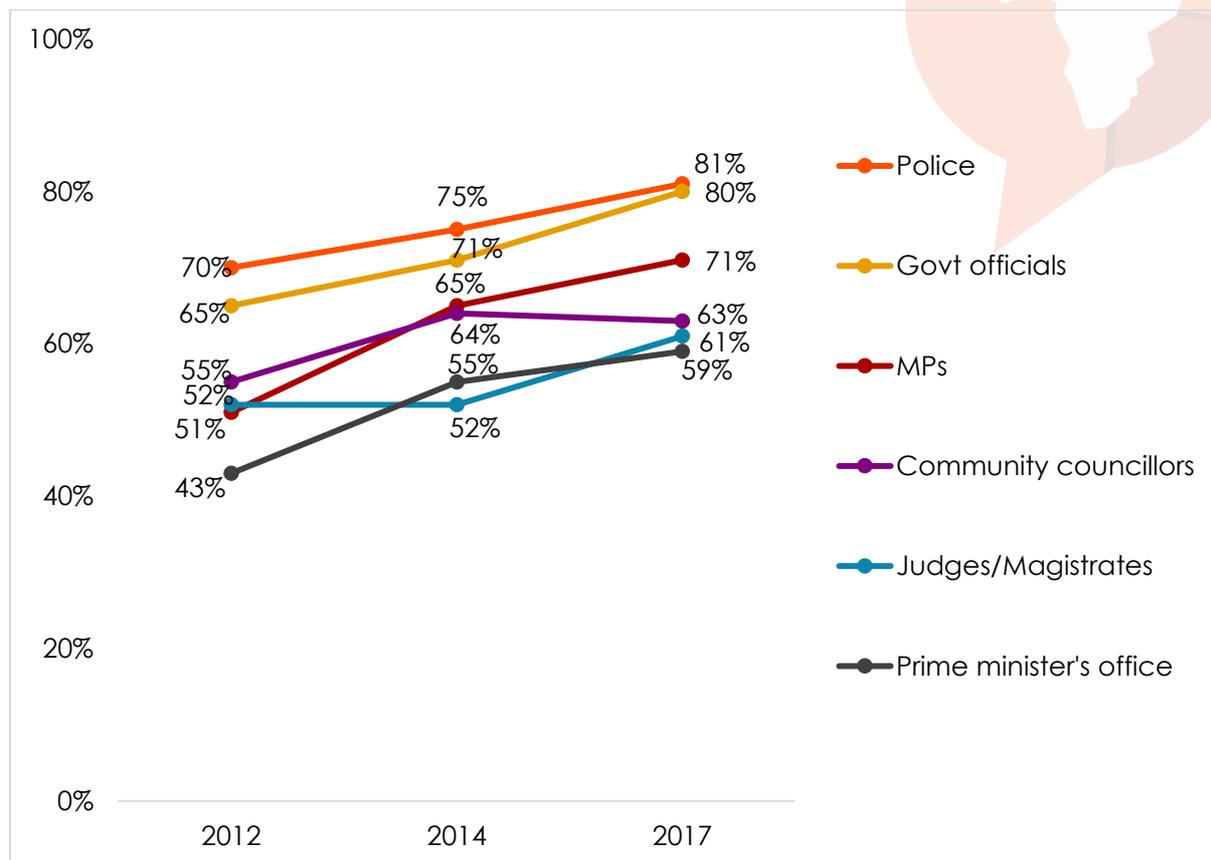
Respondents were asked: How much do you trust the following, or haven't you heard about them enough to say? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

Corruption in government institutions

While popular trust levels have fluctuated, perceptions of corruption in government institutions have moved in a single direction – upward (Figure 4). The proportion of citizens who say "some," "most," or "all" of these officials are corrupt increased from 70% in 2012 to 81% in 2017 for the police and from 52% to 61% for judges and magistrates. Officials of the prime minister's office, members of Parliament (MPs), other government officials, and community councillors suffered similar increases in public perceptions of corruption.

Over the same period, Lesotho's score on the Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index decreased from 45 to 42, indicating corruption becoming worse (Transparency International, 2018). These negative perceptions of corruption may be fueled in part by a highly publicized fraud case involving a government fleet-management tender (Matlosa, 2017).

Figure 4: Perceptions of corruption in government institutions | Lesotho | 2012-2017



Respondents were asked: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say "some of them," "most of them," or "all of them")

Rule of law and fairness

On some rule-of-law indicators, citizens' perceptions have grown more negative (Figure 5). The proportion of Basotho who say that the prime minister "often" or "always" ignores the country's courts and laws, though still a small minority, almost doubled between 2014 and 2017, rising from 14% to 25%. Similarly, almost one in four Basotho say the prime minister

often/always ignores Parliament (23%), twice the proportion who held this view in 2012 (11%).

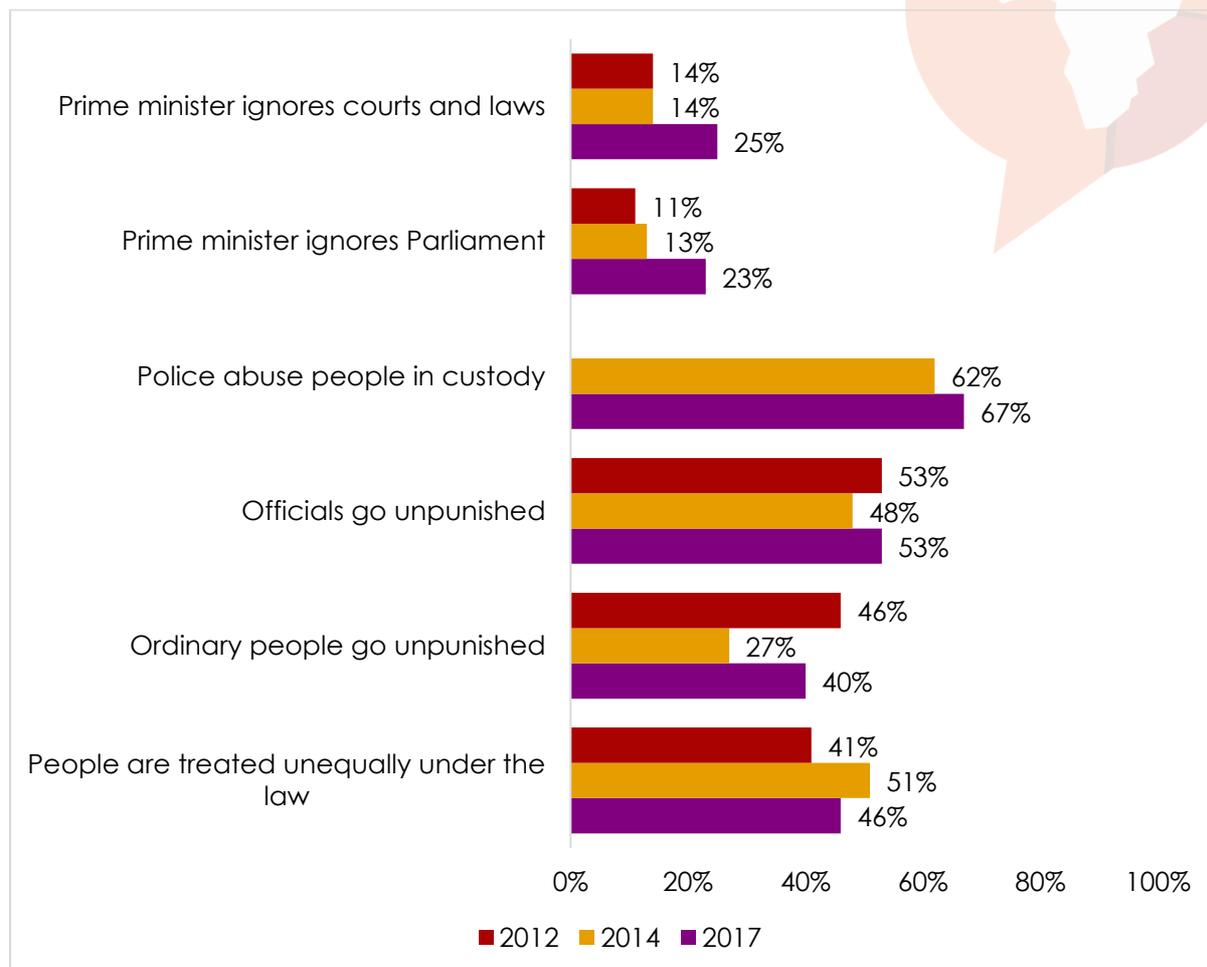
Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It's easy and free at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

Two-thirds (67%) of respondents say the police "often" or "always" abuse or torture people in their custody, a 5-percentage-point increase from 2014.

More than half (53%) of Basotho say officials who break the law often/always go unpunished, an increase of 5 percentage points from 2014 but identical to the 2012 survey result. The proportion who say that ordinary lawbreakers go unpunished increased by 13 percentage points, to 40%, but remains below the 2012 level (46%).

And almost half (46%) say people are often/always treated unequally under the law, a drop of 5 percentage points from 2014 but higher than the 2012 level (41%).

Figure 5: Perceptions on the rule of law and fairness | Lesotho | 2012-2017



Respondents were asked: *How often, in this country:*

- Does the prime minister ignore the courts and laws?
- Does the prime minister ignore Parliament?
- Do the police abuse or torture people in their custody?
- Do officials who commit crimes go unpunished?
- Do ordinary people who break the law go unpunished?
- Are people treated unequally under the law?

(% who say "often" or "always")

Government performance

When asked what they consider the most important problems that the government should address, Basotho most frequently cite unemployment; 57% of respondents mention a lack of jobs among their top three priorities (Figure 6). Unemployment is followed by infrastructure/roads (42%), electricity (30%), water supply (29%), and poverty/destitution (20%).

Citizens give the government generally poor marks on its performance in addressing these issues (Figure 7). Only about one in four (27%) say the government is doing "fairly well" or "very well" on creating jobs, while fewer than four in 10 approve of the government's performance on maintaining roads and bridges (37%), providing a reliable supply of electricity (37%), and providing water and sanitation services (38%). Fewer than half (46%) applaud the government's efforts to improve living standards of the poor.

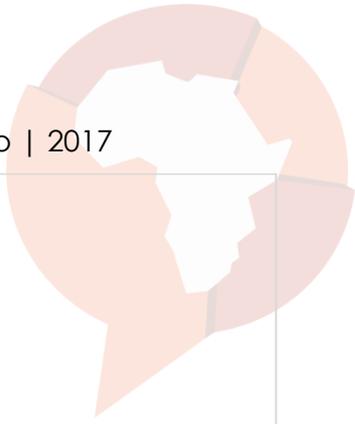
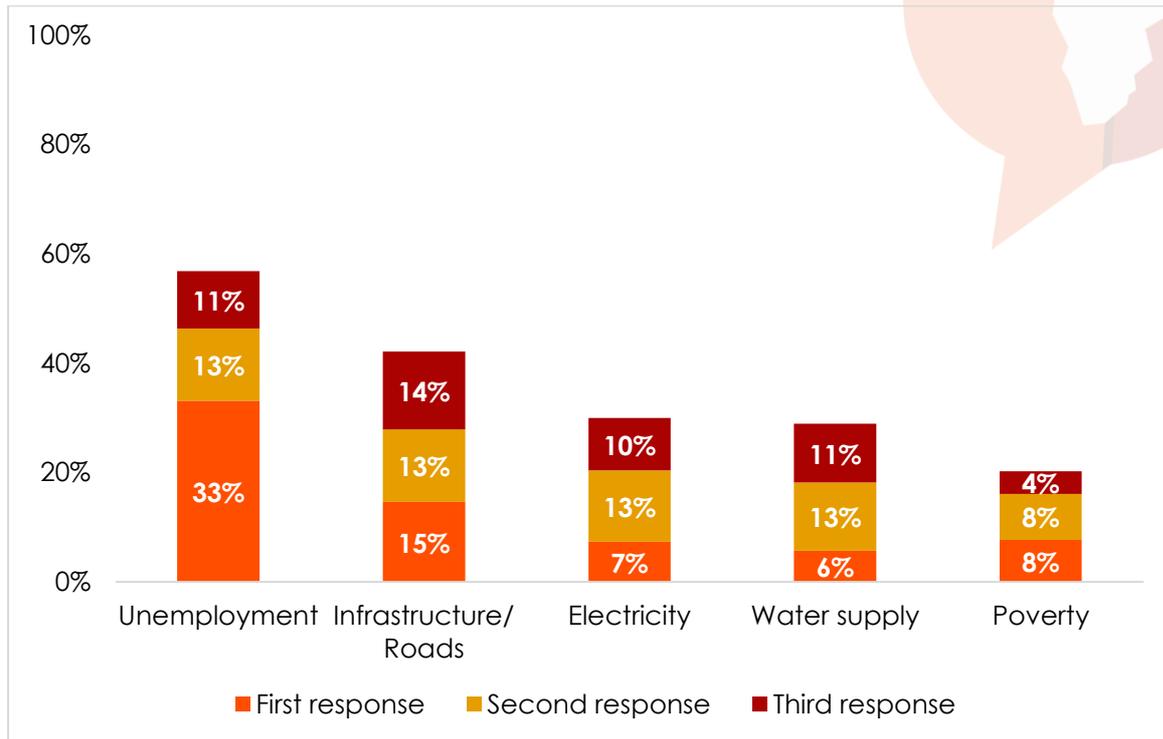
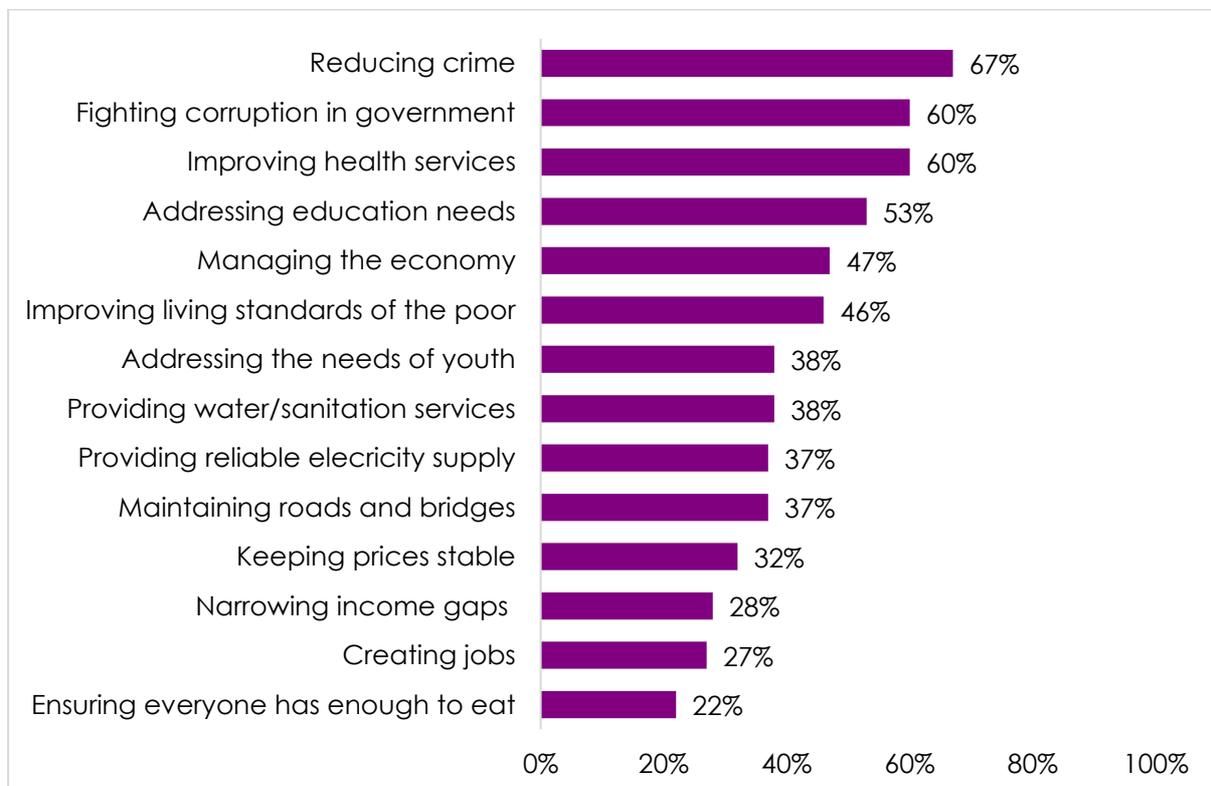


Figure 6: Most important problems facing the country | Lesotho | 2017



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that the government should address? (Note: Up to three responses per respondent were recorded.)*

Figure 7: Approval of government performance | Lesotho | 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? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")*

Determinants of political trust in Lesotho



To test the effect of citizens' perceptions of official corruption, the rule of law and fairness, and government performance on popular trust in the government, we use a linear regression. Our variables¹ are constructed as follows:

Trust in government index (dependent variable): an average of trust in government institutions of prime minister, Parliament, Independent Electoral Commission, community council, ruling coalition, police, army, and courts of law.

Government corruption index: an average of perceived corruption in the office of the prime minister and among members of Parliament, Government officials, community councillors, police, and judges and magistrates.

Violation of the rule of law index: an average of citizens' perceptions of how often competition between political parties leads to violent conflict and how often the prime minister ignores Parliament and the courts/laws of the country.

Fairness index: an average of perceptions of how often people are treated unequally under the law, how often officials who commit crimes go unpunished, and how often ordinary people who break the law go unpunished.

Government economic performance index: an average of citizens' assessments of how well or badly the government is managing the economy, improving living standards of the poor, creating jobs, keeping prices stable, and narrowing gaps between rich and poor.

Do perceptions of government corruption, the rule of law and fairness, and government performance affect citizens' trust in government institutions? To answer this question, we use a linear regression model. We include the control variables of location (urban/rural), age of the respondent, and education level of the respondent to establish whether these demographic factors have any effect on whether the respondent trusts the government.

Results of the regression model (see Table 1 below and Table A.1 in the Appendix) show that popular perceptions that officials are corrupt, that the rule of law is not respected, and that the government is performing poorly on economic issues all tend to reduce public trust in Lesotho's government. The effect is strongest for perceived corruption (B=-.331).

Table 1: Determinants of political trust – linear regression model | Lesotho | 2017

	B (standardized coefficient)	Significance (p-value)
Government corruption index	-0.331	0.000
Violation of the rule of law index	-0.110	0.002
Fairness index	-0.066	0.058
Government economic performance index	0.099	0.004
Gender	-0.012	0.724
Education	0.019	0.616
Urban/rural	0.040	0.266
Age	0.044	0.220

¹ A factor analysis on each variable shows each construct to be a reliable measure, with Cronbach alpha scores ranging from good for the rule of law (.689) and fairness (.770) to excellent for government economic performance (.850) and government corruption (.867).



Perceptions of unfair treatment under the law also show a negative effect on trust ($B=-.066$), though this finding lies just beyond statistical significance ($p=.058$). There was no effect from the demographic variables of respondents' gender, education level, and age.

Effect of declining political trust on perceived supply of democracy

As a “central indicator of the public’s underlying feeling about its polity” (Newton & Norris, 2000), political trust is an important predictor of support for a regime. Citizens who distrust government institutions and see problems go unsolved over a series of administrations may begin to question the legitimacy of the political system itself (Hetherington, 1998).

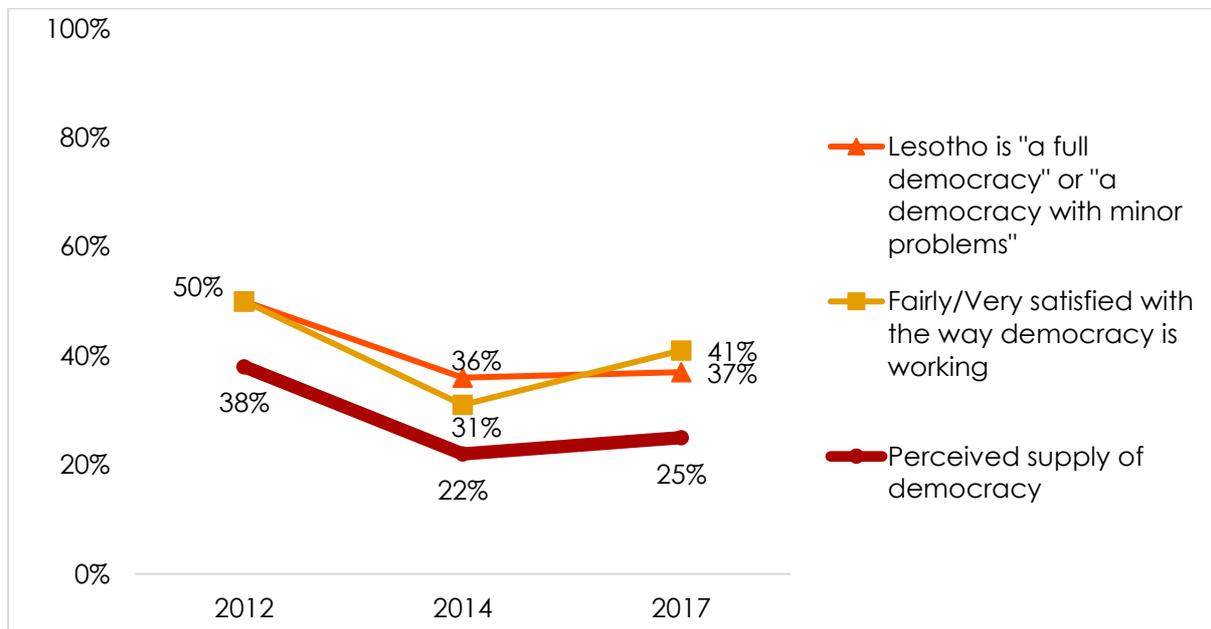
Against the backdrop of Lesotho's persistent poverty and its series of political crises, we examine whether there is a relationship between political trust and the perceived supply of democracy, measured as the extent to which citizens consider their country a democracy and whether they are satisfied with the way democracy is working.

Perceived supply of democracy

Not quite four in 10 of Basotho (37%) see their country as a functioning democracy (either “a full democracy” or “a democracy with minor problems”). Slightly more (41%) say they are “fairly” or “very” satisfied with the way their democracy is working. Both indicators have declined from 50% in 2012, though satisfaction rose by 10 percentage points from the 2014 response (Figure 8).

Afrobarometer combines these two variables to create a measure of the perceived supply of democracy in a country, meaning the proportion of respondents who both see the country as a functioning democracy and are at least fairly satisfied with the way their democracy is working. In Lesotho, this perceived supply of democracy dropped sharply between 2012 and 2014, from 38% to 22%, before easing up slightly to 25%.

Figure 8: Perceived supply of democracy | Lesotho | 2012-2017



Respondents were asked:

In your opinion, how much of a democracy is Lesotho today? (% who say Lesotho is “a full democracy” or “a democracy with minor problems”)

Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Lesotho? (% who say “fairly satisfied” or “very satisfied”)

“Perceived supply of democracy” is the percentage of respondents who say both that Lesotho is a democracy and that they are satisfied with the way democracy is working.

Political trust and perceived supply of democracy

In line with the literature, a linear regression analysis shows that citizens who trust the government are indeed more likely to perceive an adequate supply of democracy in their country (B=.230, p=.000) (see details in Table 2 below and in Table A.2 in the Appendix). The demographic variables of education, age, gender, and location have no statistically significant effect on the perceived supply of democracy.

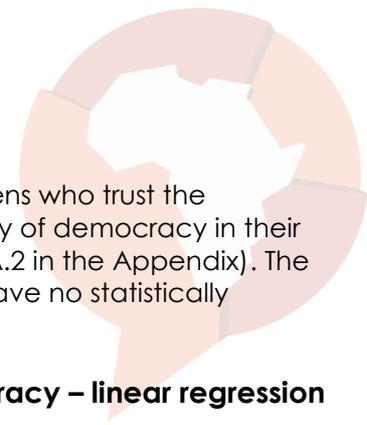


Table 2: Effect of political trust on perceived supply of democracy – linear regression
| Lesotho | 2017

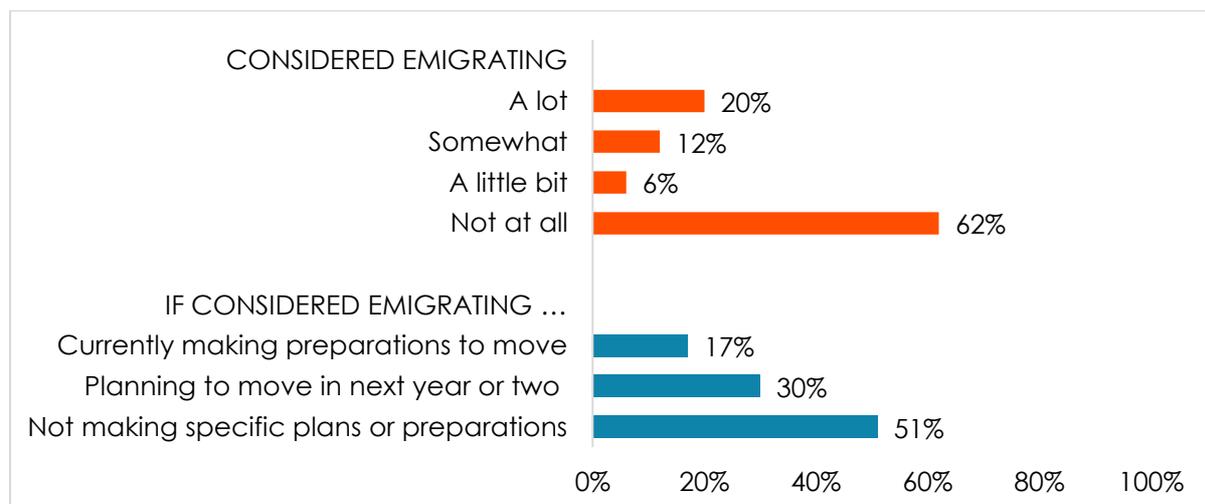
	B (standardized coefficient)	Significance (p-value)
Government trust index	.230	.000
Lived poverty index	-.088	.004
Education	-.008	.790
Age	-.011	.715
Urban/rural	-.012	.700
Gender	-.029	.327

Effect of declining political trust on emigration

It seems plausible to speculate that people who don't trust their government may be more likely to consider emigrating than their compatriots with greater trust in state institutions. In Lesotho, emigration is a reality for many citizens who leave to look for jobs in South Africa.

About four in 10 Basotho (38%) say they have considered moving to another country to live. This includes 20% who have given the idea “a lot” of thought (Figure 9). Among those who have considered emigration, 17% say they are currently making concrete preparations to leave, such as getting a visa, while 30% say they are planning to leave within the next year or two but not yet taking specific steps, and 51% say they're not yet making specific plans (Nkuebe, Malephane, & Isbell, 2018).

Figure 9: Considered emigration | Lesotho | 2017



Respondents were asked: How much, if at all, have you considered moving to another country to live?
Respondents who said they had considered emigration “a lot,” “somewhat,” or “a little bit” were asked: How much planning or preparation have you done in order to move to another country to live?

A regression analysis confirms that as political trust declines, more citizens are likely to consider emigration ($B=-.076$, $p=.013$) (see details in Table A.3 in the Appendix).

Conclusion

Perceptions of official corruption have increased considerably in Lesotho, resulting in lower levels of popular trust in government, particularly trust in institutions expected to maintain law, order, and security. This in turn has negatively affected citizens' perceptions of their democracy and increased the likelihood that Basotho may wish to leave the country.

These findings confirm the damaging effect of corruption on trust and its potential to erode Lesotho's fledgling democracy, clearly pointing to a need for the government to fight corruption more effectively. This will require that the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO) be given the necessary independence and resources to fulfil its mandate and gain citizens' confidence.

The judiciary must be seen as impartial and free of political interference if it is to ensure that the rule of law is upheld and there is public trust in the courts.

Successful management of the economy cannot happen without political stability. It is the hope of Basotho that the ongoing constitutional and institutional reform process will result in real peace and stability for Lesotho.



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Appendix

Regression tables



Table A.1: Which variables have an effect on trust in government – regression model

	Unstandardized coefficient	Std. error	Standardized coefficient	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.929	0.199		9.684	0
Corruption index	-0.455	0.048	-0.331	-9.534	0
Violation of the rule of law index	-0.059	0.019	-0.11	-3.121	0.002
Fairness index	-0.048	0.025	-0.066	-1.899	0.058
Government performance index	0.049	0.017	0.099	2.854	0.004
Urban/rural	0.071	0.063	0.04	1.114	0.266
Education	0.008	0.017	0.019	0.502	0.616
Age	0.002	0.002	0.044	1.227	0.22
Gender	-0.02	0.057	-0.012	-0.353	0.724

Dependent variable: Political trust index

Table A.2: Effect of political trust on perceived supply of democracy – regression model

	Unstandardized coefficient	Std. error	Standardized coefficient	t	Sig.
(Constant)	.699	.133		5.246	.000
Political trust index	.277	.030	.230	7.638	.000
Lived Poverty Index	-.085	.029	-.088	-2.900	.004
Gender	-.048	.049	-.029	-.980	.327
Age	.000	.001	-.011	-.365	.715
Education	-.001	.005	-.008	-.267	.790
Urban/rural	-.021	.054	-.012	-.385	.700

Dependent variable: Perceived supply of democracy

Table A.3: Effect of political trust on likelihood of considering emigration – regression model

	Unstandardized coefficient	Std. error	Standardized coefficient	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.798	.210		8.547	.000
Political trust index	-.115	.046	-.076	-2.491	.013
Lived Poverty Index	.101	.045	.069	2.226	.026
Gender	-.259	.076	-.103	-3.391	.001
Age	-.005	.001	-.130	-4.242	.000
Education	.006	.011	.017	.539	.590
Urban/rural	-.134	.084	-.050	-1.594	.111

Dependent variable: Considered emigration

AFRO BAROMETER

LET THE PEOPLE HAVE A SAY



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Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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