

Ghanaians voice dissatisfaction with living conditions, government economic performance

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 332 | Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny and Samuel Adusei Baaye

Summary

Ghana has made giant economic strides over the past decade. In 2011 the country climbed from lower-income to middle-income status, and both per-capita income and gross domestic product roughly doubled between 2008 and 2018 (World Bank, 2019a, 2019b).

Fueled in part by newly discovered oil, the economy overcame a sluggish period (2014-2016) during which it needed a U.S. \$918 million loan (International Monetary Fund, 2015) designed to boost growth and reduce poverty. By 2019, economic growth had rebounded to around 8%, inflation and average lending interest rates had declined to 9.8% and 16.23% respectively (African Development Bank, 2019), and the IMF was projecting Ghana to be the world's fastest-growing economy (DW Africa, 2019).

But have these expert kudos and macroeconomic strides translated into concrete gains recognized by average citizens contending with the high costs of utilities, transportation, communications, and everyday living (Ghanaweb, 2019)?

Results of the latest Afrobarometer survey show that Ghanaians' assessments of the government's economic performance have worsened sharply compared to 2017. Few citizens are content with the country's economic situation and their personal living conditions, and a majority say the country is headed in the wrong direction.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer leads a pan-African, nonpartisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across Africa. Seven rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018. Round 8 surveys are planned in at least 35 countries in 2019/2020. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Ghana, led by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), interviewed 2,400 adult Ghanaians in September 2019. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Ghana in 1999, 2002, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2017.

Key findings

- Only three in 10 Ghanaians (30%) describe the country's economic conditions as "fairly good" or "very good," a decline from 35% recorded in 2017.
- Fewer than four in 10 (37%) say their personal living conditions are "fairly good" or "very good."

- And only 31% say the country's economic condition has improved over the past year. But more than half (54%) are optimistic that things will be "better" or "much better" in 12 months' time.
- Six in 10 Ghanaians (59%) say the country is "going in the wrong direction." The share of citizens who see the country as "going in the right direction" declined by 15 percentage points from 2017, to 35%.
- Majorities of citizens say the government is performing "fairly badly" or "very badly" in narrowing income gaps (66%), improving living standards of the poor (56%), and creating jobs (54%).
- Approval ratings on indicators of the government's economic performance have declined sharply compared to 2017, with approval on management of the economy recording the steepest drop, by 20 percentage points.

Economic and personal living conditions

About six in 10 Ghanaians describe the country's economic conditions (62%) and their personal living conditions (58%) as "fairly bad" or "very bad" (Figure 1).

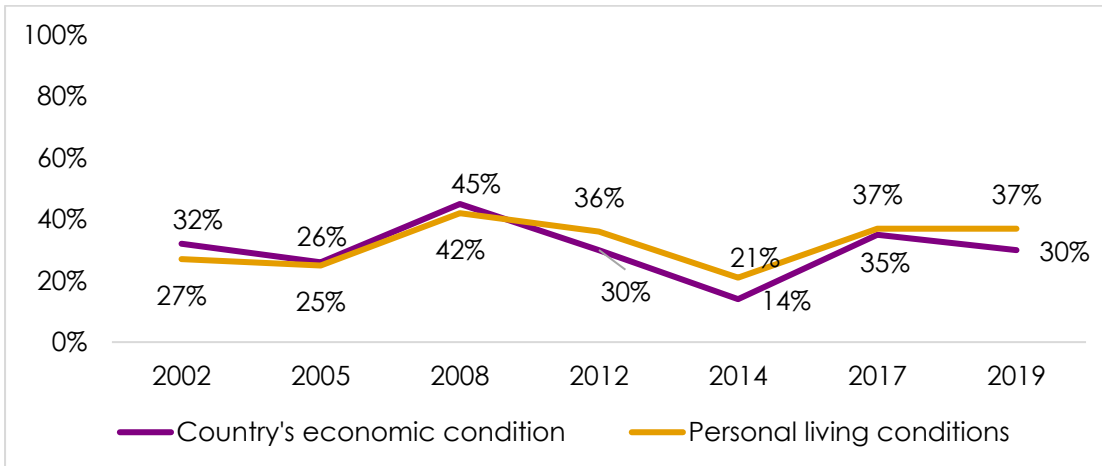
Figure 1: Country's economic condition, personal living conditions | Ghana | 2019



Respondents were asked: In general, how would you describe: The present economic condition of this country? Your own present living conditions?

Compared to 2017, there has been a modest (5-percentage-point) decline in the proportion of citizens who describe the country's economic conditions as "fairly good" or "very good," while the share who say the same about their personal living conditions has remained unchanged (Figure 2).

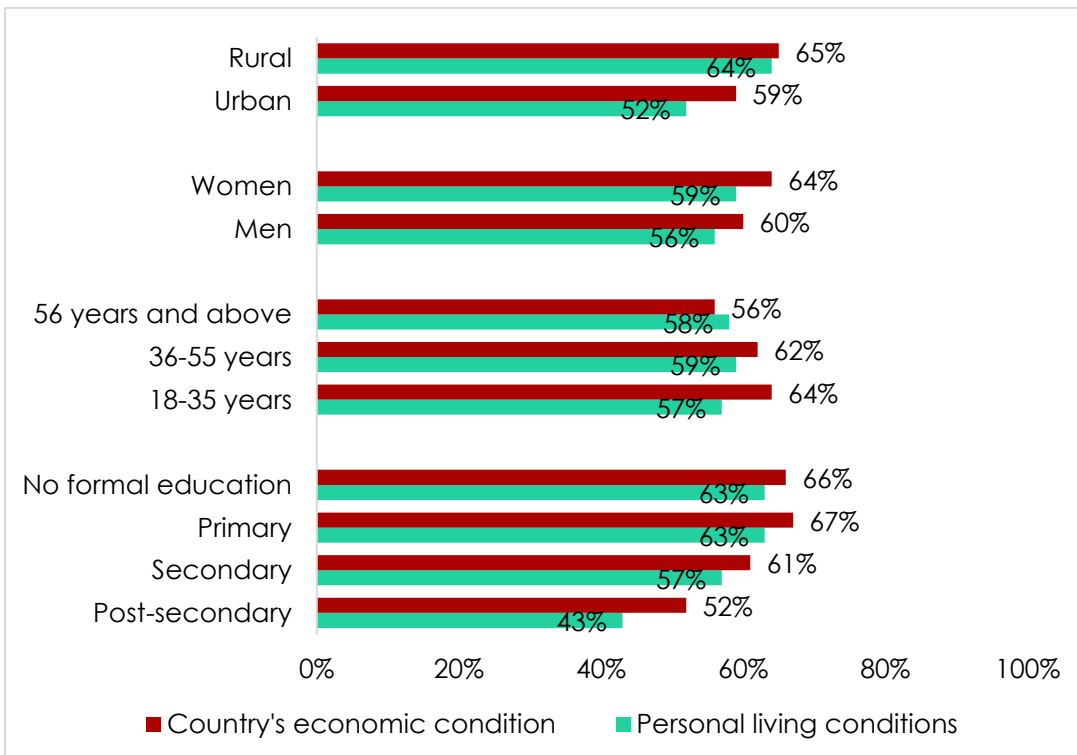
Figure 2: Country's economic condition, personal living conditions are good
 | Ghana | 2002-2019



Respondents were asked: In general, how would you describe: The present economic condition of this country? Your own present living conditions? (% who say "fairly good" or "very good")

Negative assessments of the country's economic condition and personal living conditions are widespread across key socio-demographic groups. But they are stronger among rural residents and those with no formal or only primary education than among urbanites and the highly educated. Young adults are more likely than older citizens to describe the country's economic condition as bad (64% among those aged 18-35 vs. 56% among those aged 56 and above) (Figure 3).

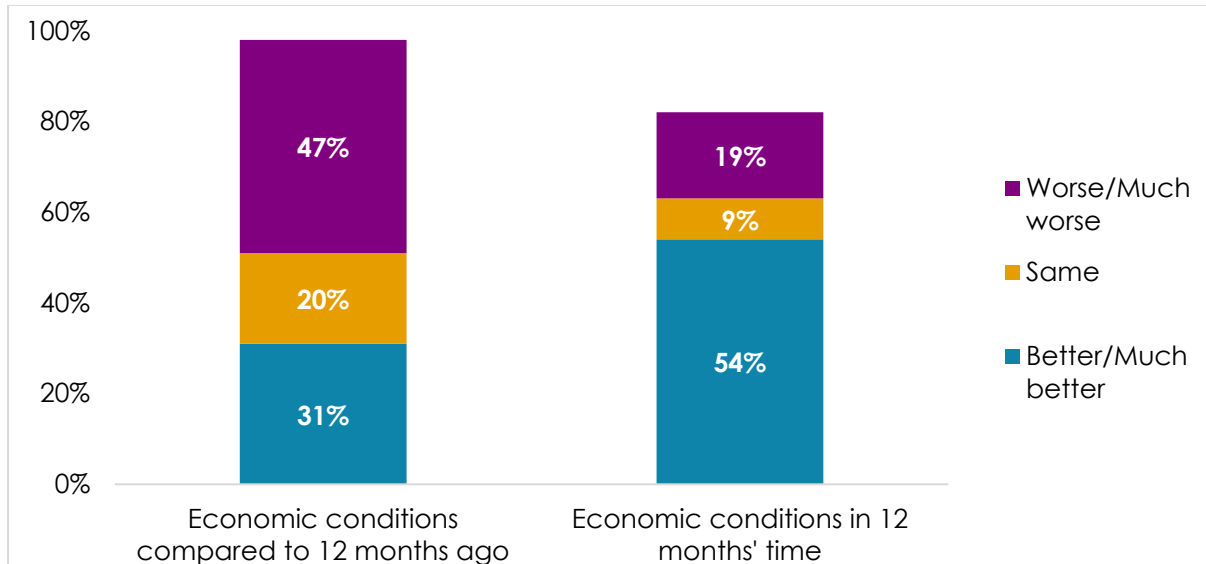
Figure 3: Country's economic condition, personal living conditions are bad
 | by socio-demographic group | Ghana | 2019



Respondents were asked: In general, how would you describe: The present economic condition of this country? Your own present living conditions? (% who say "fairly bad" or "very bad")

Almost half of citizens (47%) say the country's economic condition has gotten "worse" or "much worse" over the past 12 months. But a majority (54%) are optimistic that things will be "better" or "much better" in 12 months' time (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Economic conditions: Looking back and ahead | Ghana | 2019



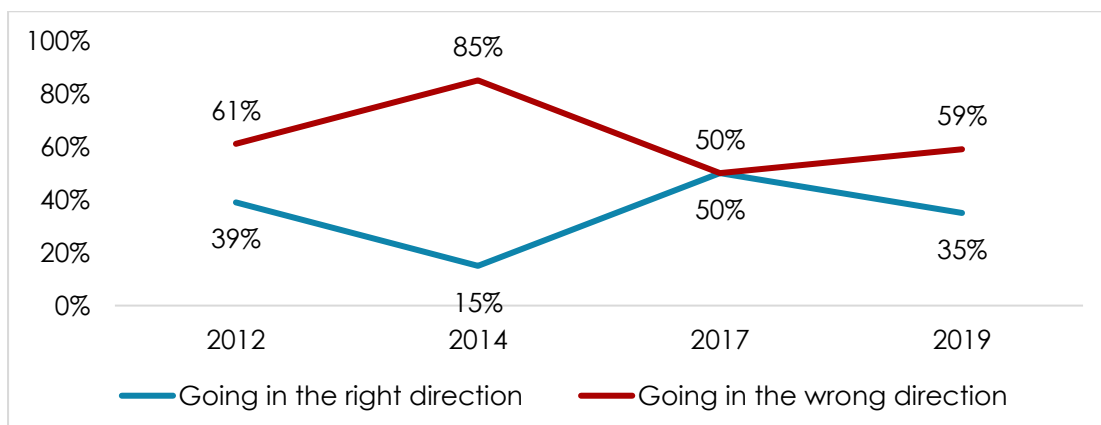
Respondents were asked:

Looking back, how do you rate economic conditions in this country compared to 12 months ago? Looking ahead, do you expect economic conditions in this country to be better or worse in 12 months' time?

Yet despite this expectation of an economic upturn, a majority of Ghanaians are pessimistic about the direction of the country: Six in 10 respondents (59%) say the country is "going in the wrong direction." Only about one-third (35%) say the country is "going in the right direction," a 15-percentage-point decline from 2017 after a 35-point gain between 2014 and 2017 (Figure 5).

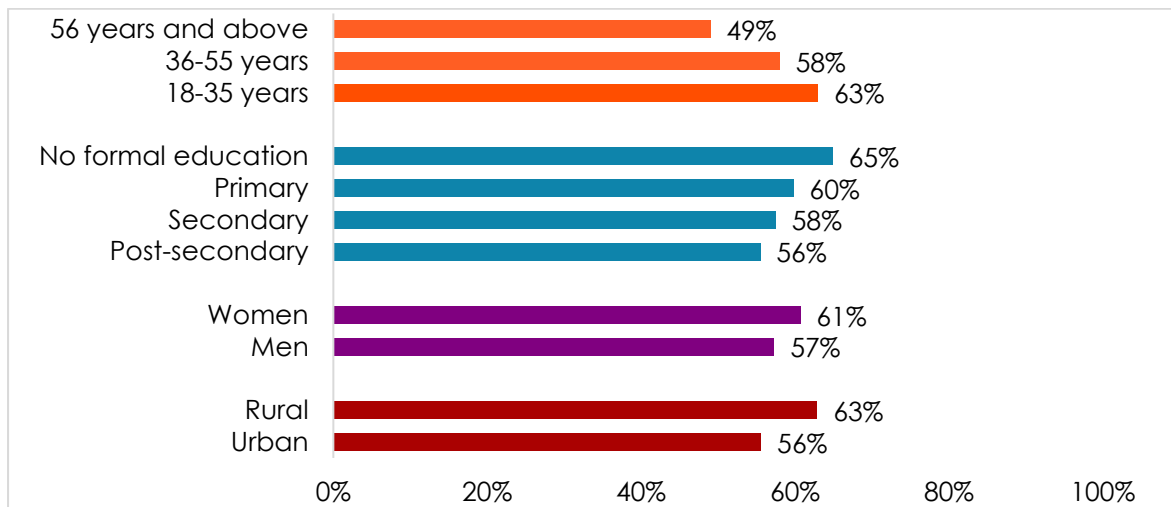
Pessimism about the direction of the country is more widespread among young adults (63% of those aged 18-35 years), rural residents (63%), and less-educated citizens (60%-65%) than among older citizens (49% of those aged 56 and above), urban residents (56%), and highly educated citizens (56% of those with post-secondary education) (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Is the country going in the right direction? | Ghana | 2012-2019



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

Figure 6: Country is going in the wrong direction | by socio-demographic group
 | Ghana | 2019



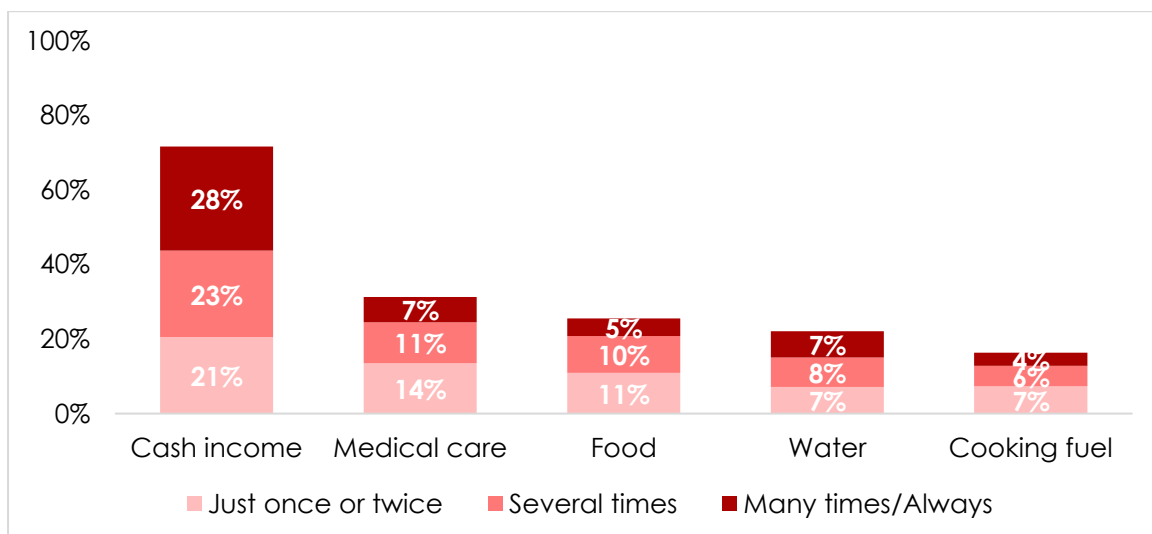
Respondents were asked: Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction? (% who say "wrong direction")

Deprivation of basic necessities

Ghanaians' concerns about the country's economy and their own living conditions are also reflected in their experience of "lived poverty," Afrobarometer's experiential measure based on how often people go without five basic necessities of life: enough to eat, enough clean water, medicines or medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income. (For more on lived poverty, see Mattes, Dulani, & Gyimah-Boadi, 2016).

The most common form of deprivation experienced by Ghanaians is the lack of a cash income. Almost three-fourths (72%) of respondents say they went without a cash income at least once during the year preceding the survey, including 28% who did so "many times" or "always" (Figure 7). One-third (32%) say they went without needed medical care at least once, while about one in four didn't have enough food (26%) and clean water (22%).

Figure 7: Deprivation of basic necessities | Ghana | 2019

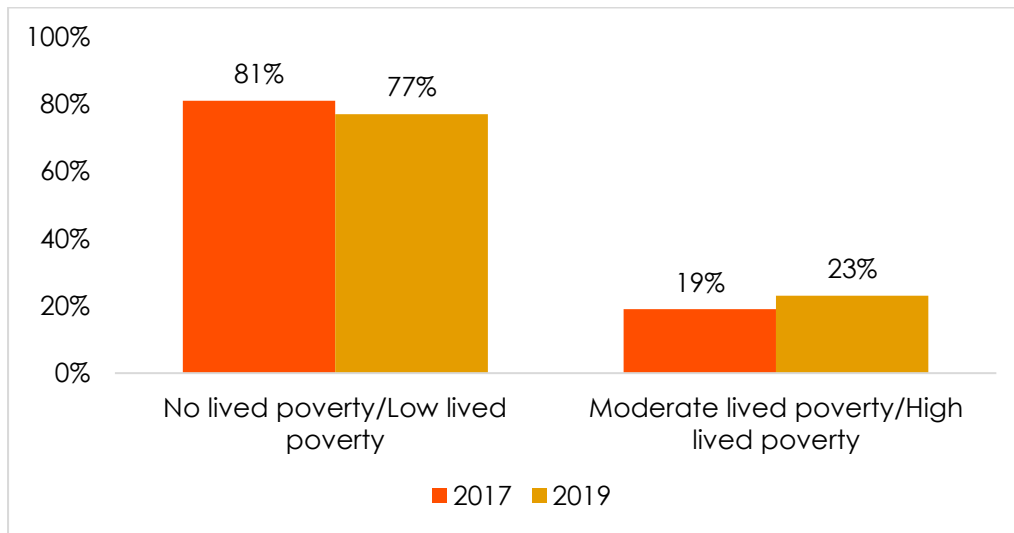


Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: Enough food to eat? Enough clean water for home use? Medicines or medical treatment? Enough fuel to cook your food? A cash income?

An average of the responses to the questions on deprivation of basic necessities is calculated to create the Lived Poverty Index, whose scores range from 0 (no lived poverty) to 4 (high lived poverty).

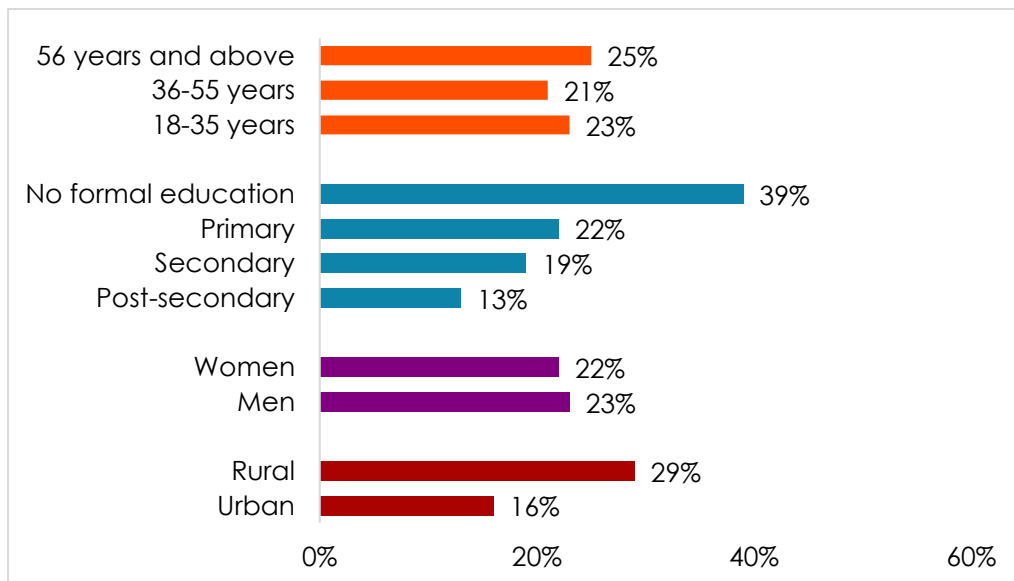
Almost one in four Ghanaians (23%) experienced moderate (19%) or high lived poverty (4%) during the past year, a 4-percentage-point increase compared to 2017 (19%) (Figure 8). Moderate/high lived poverty was most common among citizens with no formal education (39%, vs. 13% among respondents with post-secondary education) and rural residents (29%, compared to 16% in urban areas) (Figure 9).

Figure 8: Lived poverty | Ghana | 2017-2019



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?

Figure 9: Moderate/high lived poverty | by socio-demographic group | Ghana | 2019



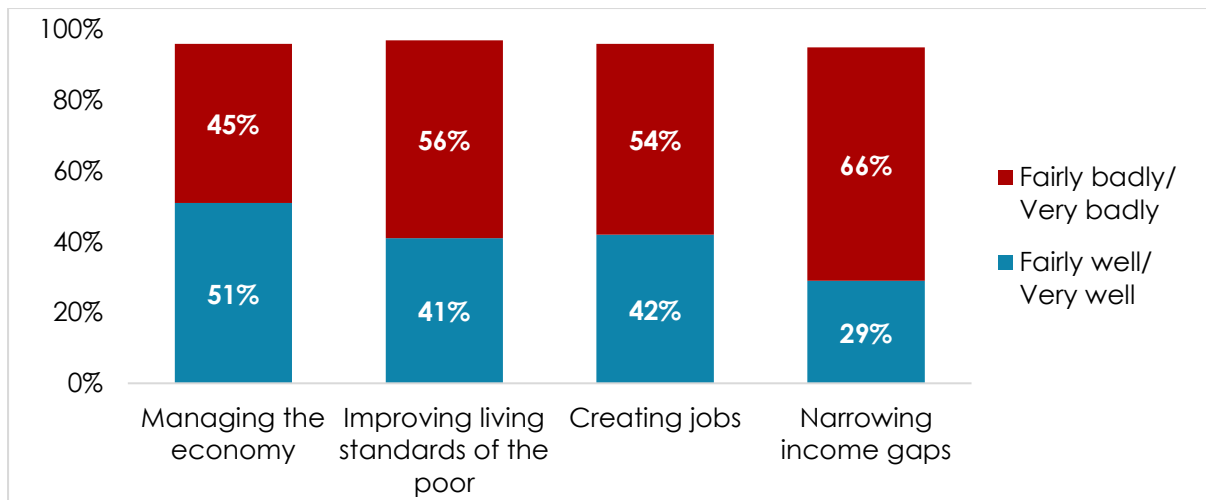
Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: Enough food to eat? Enough clean water for home use? Medicines or medical treatment? Enough fuel to cook your food? A cash income?

Evaluation of government performance on the economy

About half (51%) of Ghanaians say the government is performing “fairly well” or “very well” in managing the economy. But majorities say it is doing “fairly badly” or “very badly” in narrowing income gaps (66%), improving living standards of the poor (56%), and creating jobs (54%) (Figure 10).

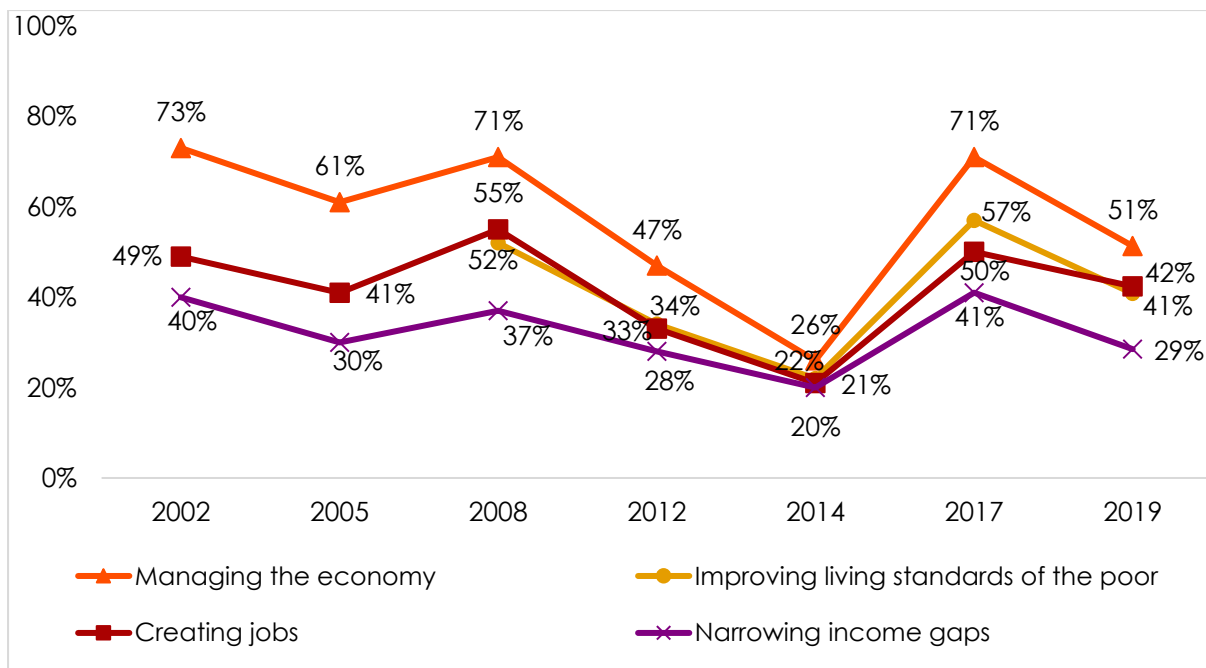
Approval ratings on all four indicators of the government's economic performance have declined sharply compared to 2017, including a 20-percentage-point drop on managing the economy (Figure 11).

Figure 10: Evaluation of government's economic performance | Ghana | 2019



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?

Figure 11: Positive assessments of government's economic performance | Ghana | 2002-2019



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”)

Conclusion

The most recent Afrobarometer survey suggests that impressive macroeconomic achievements have not yet translated into concrete improvements that most Ghanaians recognize in their daily lives. Citizens are dissatisfied with the country's economic situation and their own living conditions, and these perceptions are mirrored in sharply declining evaluations of the government's performance on key economic indicators. Even so, a majority of Ghanaians are optimistic that economic conditions will improve, an indication of goodwill that the government can capitalize on as it tackles key economic challenges.

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Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, heads 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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