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Dispatch No. 207 | 18 May 2018

Nigerians optimistic about economic outlook despite persistent poverty, inadequate services

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 207 | Oluwole Ojewale and Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye

Summary

After a 2016 recession blamed mainly on low oil revenues and unchecked corruption (Daily Post, 2017), Nigeria's economy has been showing signs of improvement. Despite foreign-exchange shortages, poor infrastructure, and likely political tensions ahead of the February 2019 general elections, economic projections have been positive, including expected gross domestic product (GDP) growth of about 2.6% in 2018 (Focus Economics, 2018).

But how likely are these projections to improve life for everyday Nigerians? Poverty alleviation and economic development have been refrains in presidential election campaigns over the years, from Olusegun Obasanjo's poverty eradication, rural infrastructure, social welfare, and youth empowerment schemes to Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's seven-point agenda to Goodluck Jonathan's Transformation Agenda. In the same vein, President Muhammadu Buhari's Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (2017-2020) aims at restoring Nigeria's economic growth (Office of the Chief Economist, 2017).

But many election promises never translate into delivery of services that could improve the living conditions of most Nigerians. Almost half (47%) of the country's population still live in poverty (World Poverty Clock, 2018); the African Development Bank Group (2018) estimates that eight out of 10 Nigerians live on less than \$2 a day. And while Nigeria's Constitution calls upon the state to ensure that its people have adequate shelter and food, a living wage, medical benefits, and other necessities, many citizens still grapple with limited access to basic goods and services.

Afrobarometer's latest survey in Nigeria indicates that a majority of citizens see economic conditions as bad and the country as going in the wrong direction – although on both indicators, public perceptions are less gloomy than a few years ago, and an overwhelming majority are optimistic that the economy will be better in a year's time.

More than one-third of Nigerians repeatedly went without basic life necessities during the previous year, and many say that obtaining public services was difficult, took "a long time," and required the payment of a bribe.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 35 countries in Africa. Six rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2015, and Round 7 surveys (2016/2018) are currently underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer national partners in Nigeria, CLEEN Foundation and Practical Sampling International, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample

of 1,600 adult Nigerians between 26 April and 10 May 2017. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Nigeria in 1999, 2002, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2012, and 2015.

Key findings

- A majority (60%) of Nigerians say the country's economic condition is "fairly bad" or "very bad." Almost the same proportion (57%), however, describe their personal living conditions as "fairly good" or "very good."
- Almost half (48%) of Nigerians say the country's economic condition is "worse" or "much worse" than a year ago. But an overwhelming majority (82%) are optimistic that things will be "better" or "much better" in 12 months' time.
- The government receives a favourable performance rating on fighting corruption (59% of citizens say it is doing "fairly well" or "very well") but not on managing the economy (33%), improving living standards of the poor (25%), creating jobs (25%), ensuring food security (19%), keeping prices stable (18%), and narrowing income gaps (16%).
- About one-third of Nigerians experienced "moderate lived poverty" (27%) or "high lived poverty" (10%) during the previous year. About half went without enough food (51%), medical care (48%), and cooking fuel (47%) at least once, while more than three-fourths (77%) went without a cash income.

Country's economic situation and personal living conditions

Six in 10 Nigerians (60%) say the country's economic condition is "fairly bad" (20%) or "very bad" (40%). But almost the same proportion (57%) describe their personal living conditions as "fairly good" or "very good" (Figure 1).

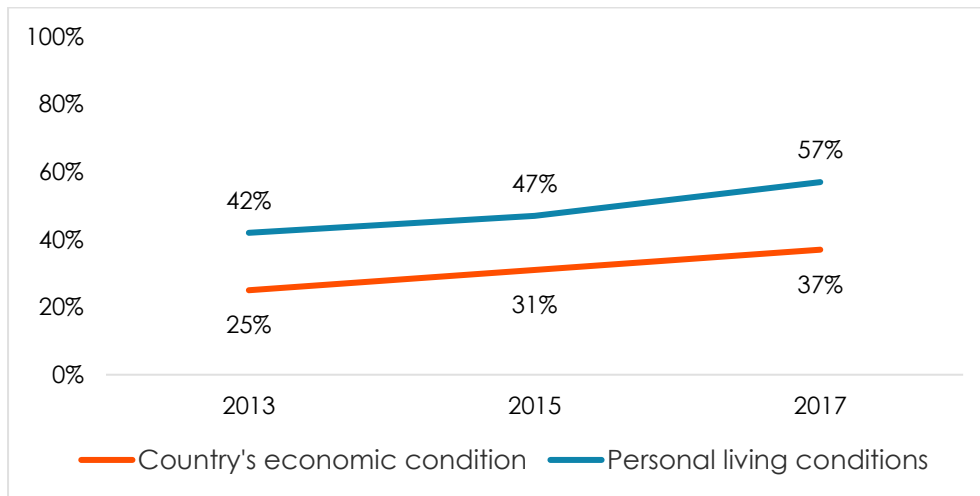
On both indicators, public perceptions have improved significantly. Since 2013, favourable assessments have increased by 12 percentage points with regard to the country's economic condition and by 15 points with regard to personal living conditions (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Country's economy and personal living conditions | Nigeria | 2017



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

Figure 2: Positive assessments of country's economy and personal living conditions
 | Nigeria | 2013-2017

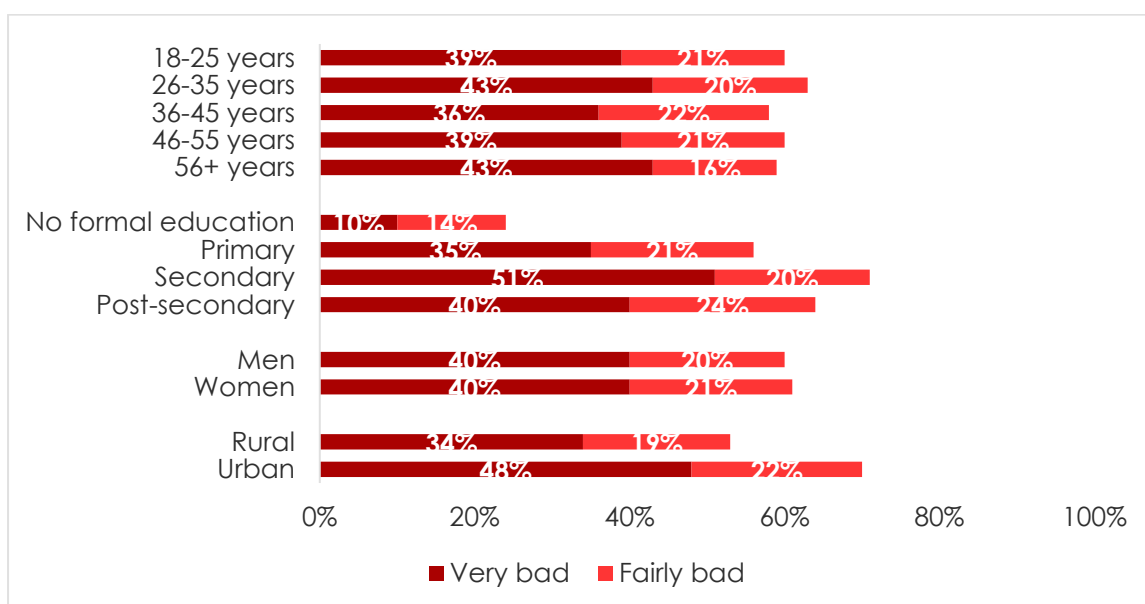


Respondents were asked: In general, how would you describe: The present economic condition of this country? Your own present living conditions? (% who say "fairly good" or "very good")

Negative assessments of the country's economic condition are widespread across all age groups and both genders but are far less common among respondents with no formal education (24%) than among their more-educated counterparts. Urbanites are more likely than rural residents to see the economy as bad, 70% vs. 53% (Figure 3).

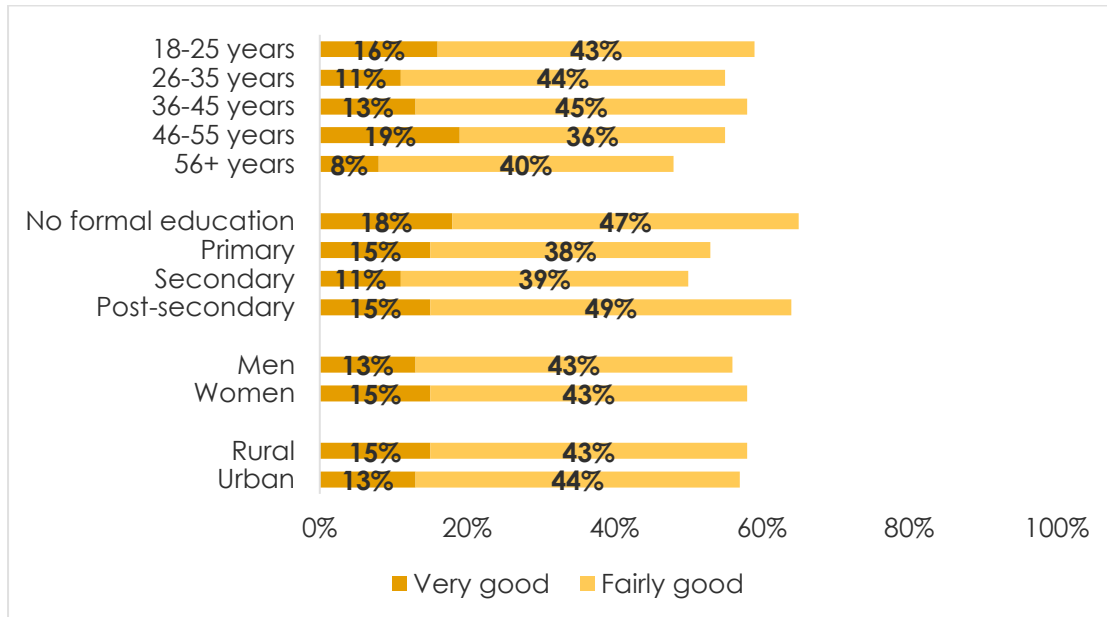
On the other hand, the perception of personal living conditions as fairly or very good is widespread across age groups, genders and geographical locations, but is slightly more common among respondents with no formal education (65%) and post-secondary education (64%) (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Negative assessments of the country's economic situation
 | by socio-demographic group | Nigeria | 2017



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

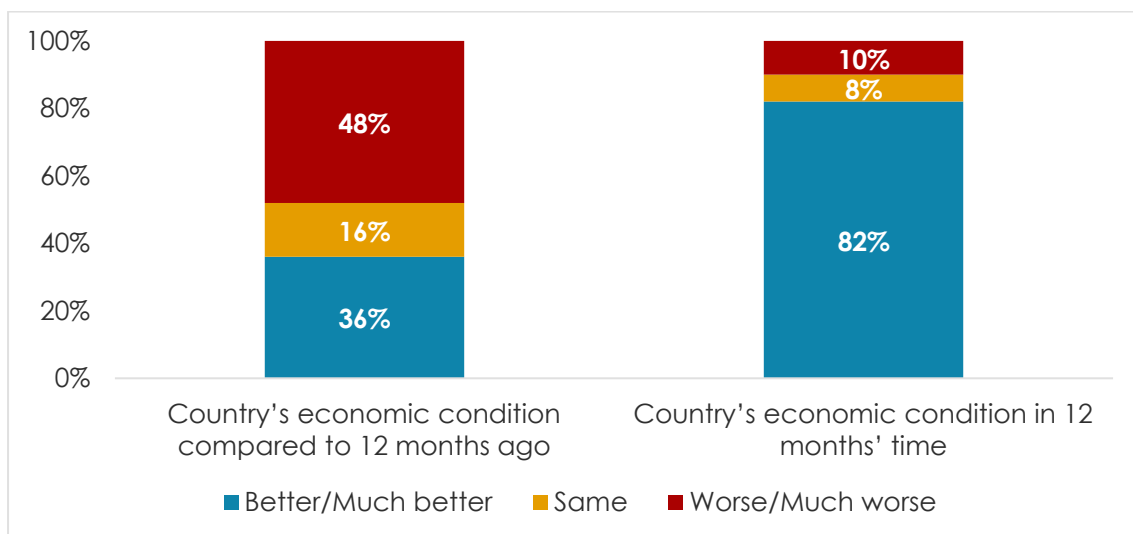
Figure 4: Positive assessments of personal living conditions | by socio-demographic group | Nigeria | 2017



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

Almost half (48%) of Nigerians say the country's economic condition is "worse" or "much worse" than a year ago, outnumbering their compatriots who see the economy as "better" or "much better" (36%). However, an overwhelming majority (82%) are optimistic that things will be "better" or "much better" in 12 months' time (Figure 5). Citizens' perceptions on the past and future conditions of the economy appear to align with the country's GDP growth rate, which improved from -1.5% in 2016 to 0.8% in 2017 and is projected to hit 2.6% in 2018 and 2.5% in 2019 (Focus Economics, 2018; African Development Bank Group, 2018).

Figure 5: Country's economic condition: Looking back and ahead | Nigeria | 2017



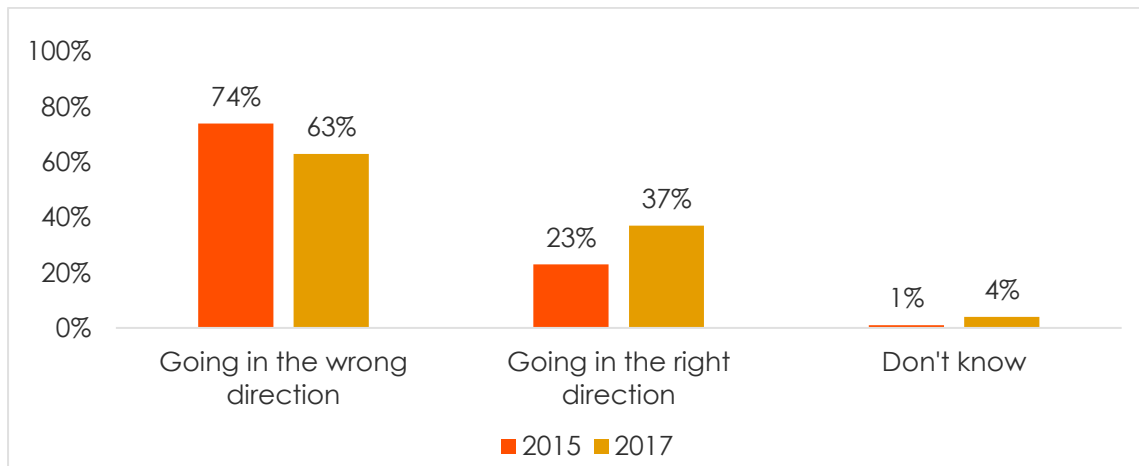
Respondents were asked:

- 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?

Direction of the country and government performance

Overall, Nigerians are pessimistic about the direction of the country – but less pessimistic than three years ago. Almost two-thirds (63%) of respondents say the country is “going in the wrong direction,” an improvement from the three-fourths (74%) recorded in 2015 (Figure 6).

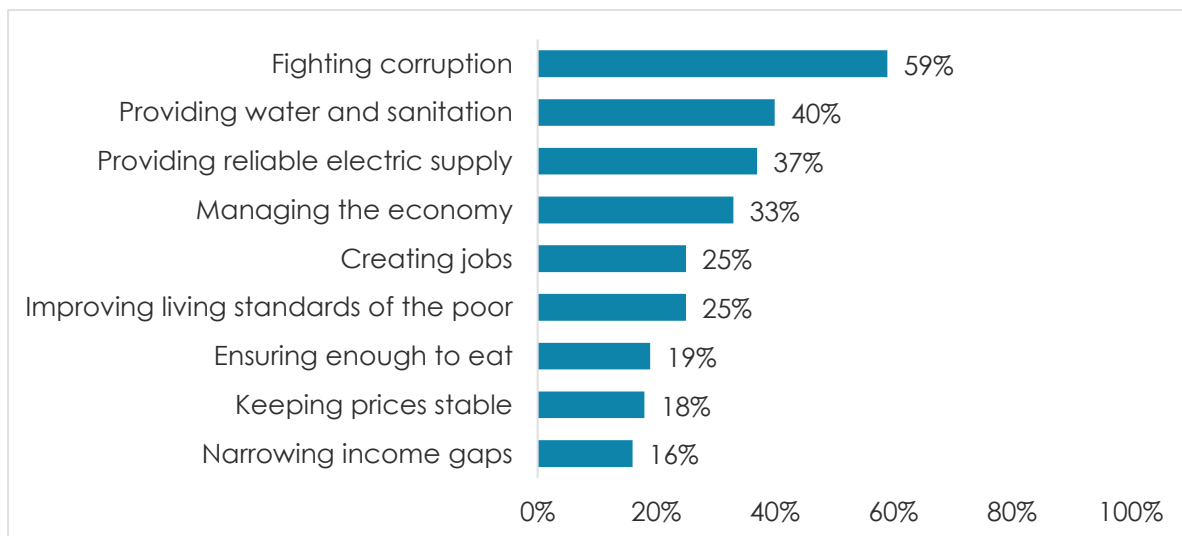
Figure 6: Overall direction of the country | Nigeria | 2015-2017



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

Aligning with their views on the economy and the direction of the country, Nigerians' assessments of their government's performance are largely critical. Only one-third of respondents say the government is doing “fairly well” or “very well” in managing the economy (33%), and even fewer approve of the government's efforts to improve the living standards of the poor (25%), create jobs (25%), ensure food security (19%), keep prices stable (18%), and narrow income gaps (16%) (Figure 7). Slightly more say the government is performing well on providing water and sanitation (40%) and reliable electric supply (37%). The government is rated most favourably for its performance in fighting corruption (59%).

Figure 7: Assessment of government performance | Nigeria | 2017



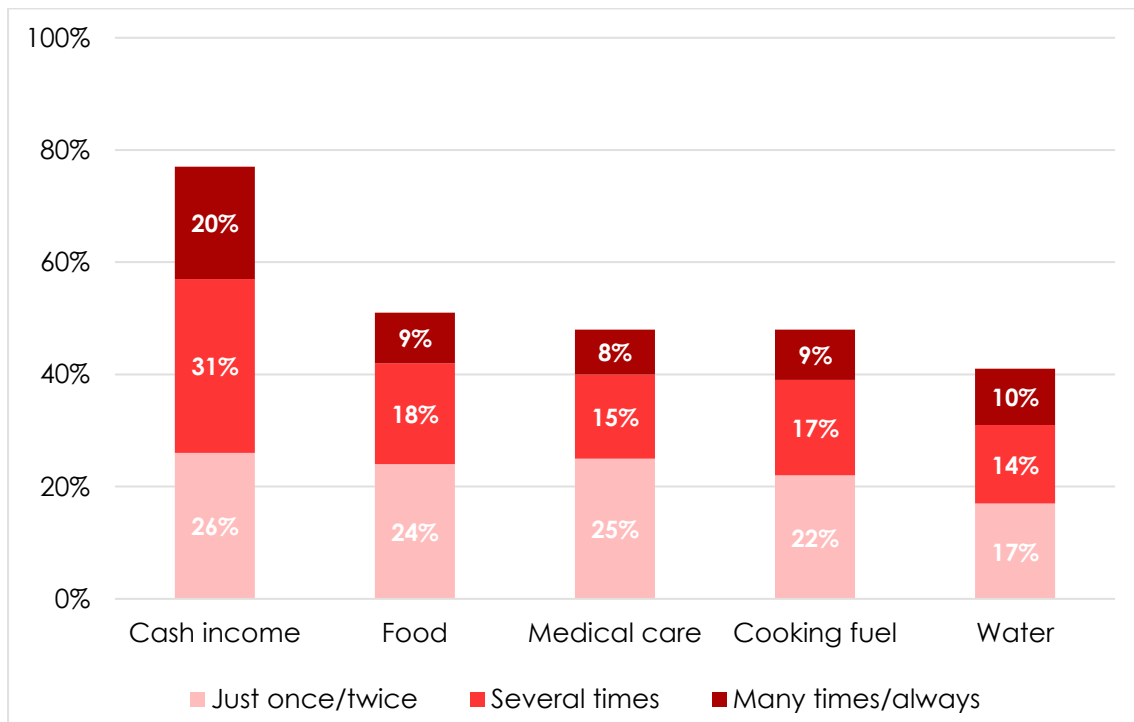
Respondents were asked: *How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say “fairly well” or “very well”)*

Nigerians' experience with deprivation

Afrobarometer measures "lived poverty" by asking respondents how often, during the previous year, they or their families went without five basic necessities – enough to eat, enough clean water, medicines or medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income.

The most common form of deprivation experienced by most Nigerians is the lack of a cash income: More than three-fourths (77%) of respondents went without a cash income at least once during the previous year, including 20% who did so "many times" or "always" (Figure 8). About half went without enough food (51%), medical care (48%), and cooking fuel (47%) at least once, while four in 10 (41%) went without enough water.

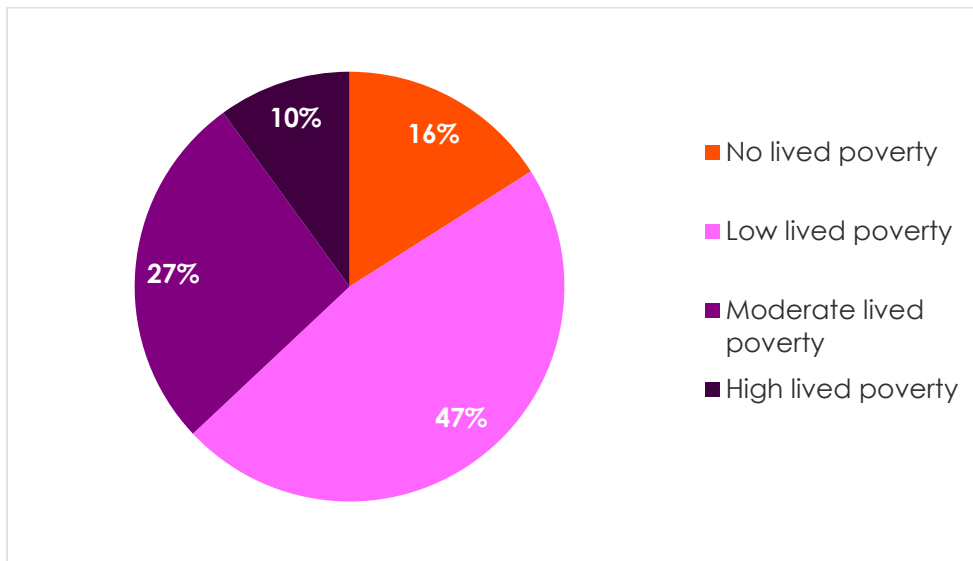
Figure 8: Deprivation of basic necessities | Nigeria | 2017



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

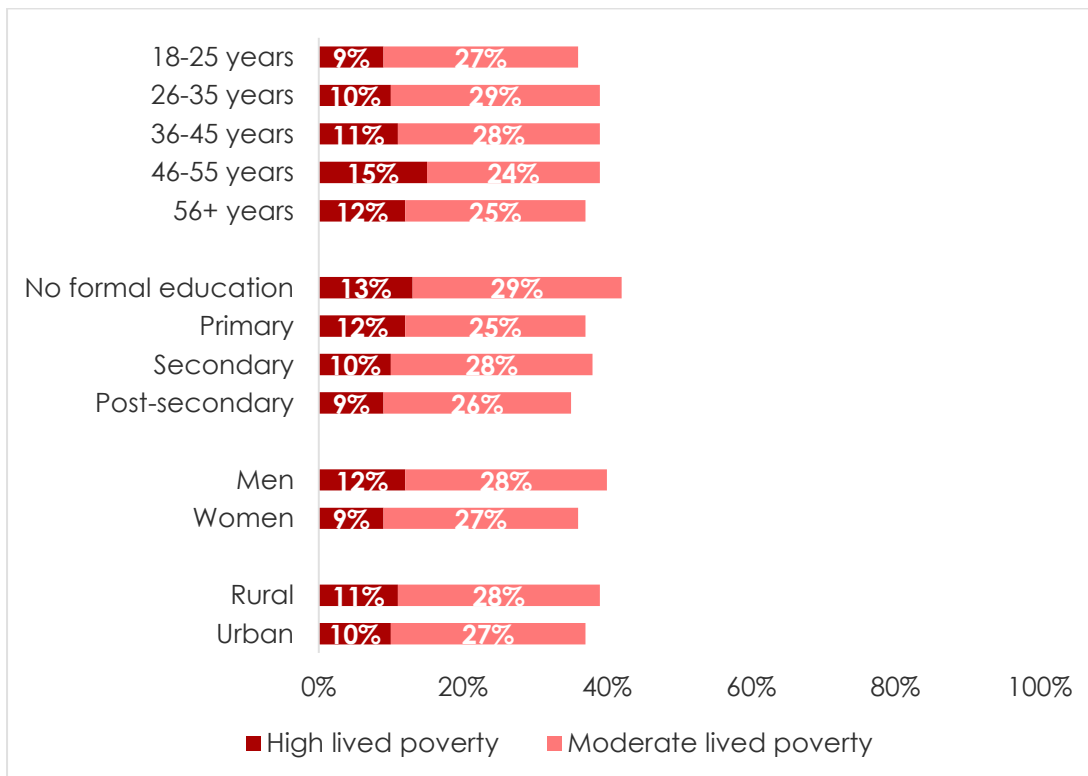
Based on these responses, more than one-third of Nigerians experienced "moderate lived poverty" (27%) or "high lived poverty" (10%) during the previous year (Figure 9), meaning they repeatedly went without basic life necessities. Moderate/high lived poverty is somewhat more frequent among citizens with no formal education (42% vs. 35%-38% among more-educated respondents), but differences by age group, gender, and urban-rural residence location are small (Figure 10). Many Nigerians, including the president, have attributed the prevalence of poverty in the country to the high rate of corruption (Premium Times, 2015). In order for Nigeria to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal to "eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere by 2030," the World Poverty Clock (2018) estimates that an average of about 13 citizens need to escape extreme-poverty status every minute, but in fact Nigeria is moving in the opposite direction, gaining an average of six extremely poor people per minute.

Figure 9: Levels of lived poverty | Nigeria | 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? Gone without enough clean water for home use? Gone without medicines or medical treatment? Gone without enough fuel to cook your food? Gone without a cash income?

Figure 10: Moderate and high lived poverty | by socio-demographic group | Nigeria | 2017

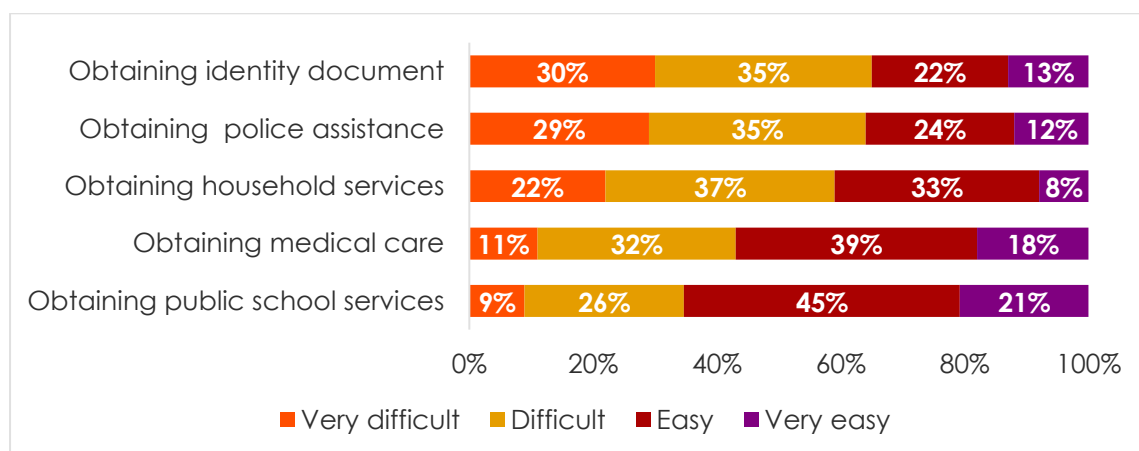


Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Gone without enough food to eat? Gone without enough clean water for home use? Gone without medicines or medical treatment? Gone without enough fuel to cook your food? Gone without a cash income?

In addition to suffering deprivation of basic necessities, many Nigerians experience limited access to public services, often compounded by delays and corruption. Among Nigerians who tried to obtain certain public services during the previous year, majorities say it was “difficult” or “very difficult” to obtain identity documents (65%), police assistance (64%), and household utility services (59%) (Figure 11). Fewer found it difficult to access medical care (43%) and assistance from a public school (35%).

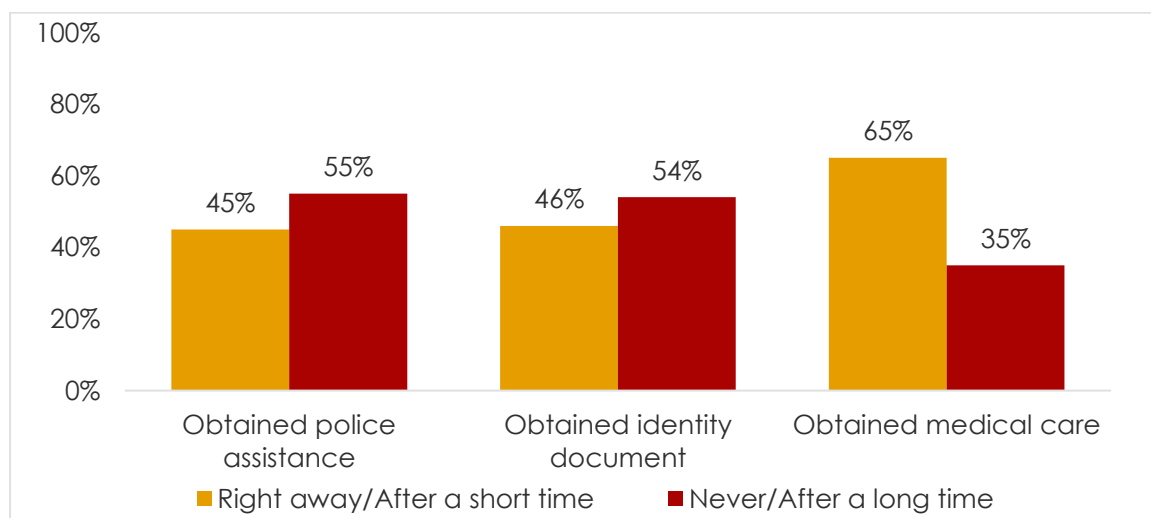
Majorities also say they had to wait “a long time” to obtain police assistance and identity documents, or else they never received them (Figure 12). Access to medical care was faster (65% obtaining the service “right away” or after “a short time”). More than two-thirds (68%) say they had to pay a bribe to obtain police assistance, while substantial proportions (20% to 44%) say they had to pay a bribe to obtain other services (Figure 13).

Figure 11: Difficulty obtaining public services | Nigeria | 2017



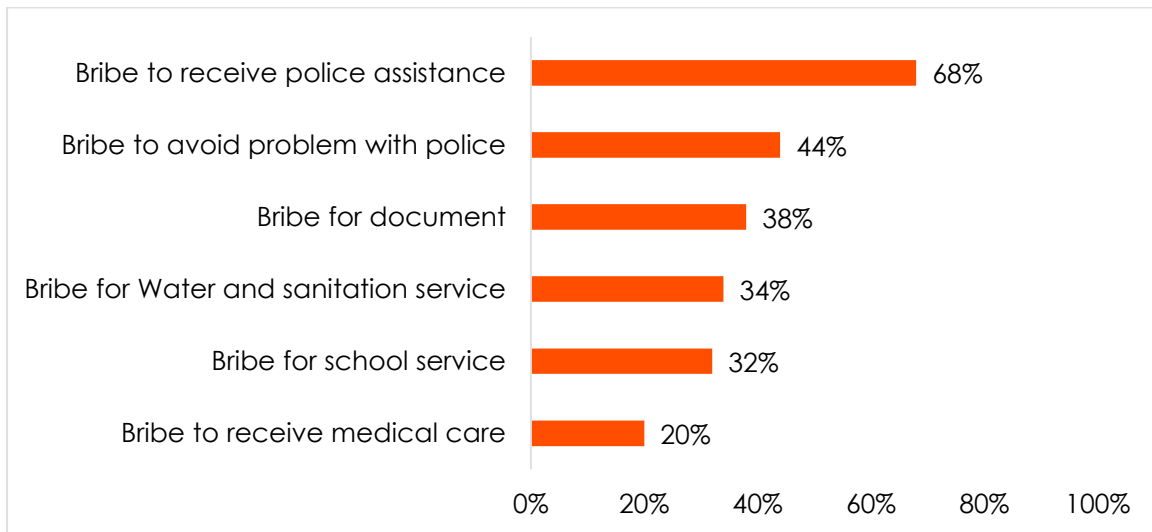
Respondents were asked: In the past 12 months, have you: Had contact with a public school? Had contact with a public clinic or hospital? Tried to get an identity document like a birth certificate, driver’s license, passport or voter’s card, or permit from government? Tried to get water, sanitation, or electric services from government? Requested assistance from police? [If yes:] How easy or difficult was it to obtain the service? (Respondents who did not seek to obtain these services are excluded.)

Figure 12: Time taken to obtain public services | Nigeria | 2017



Respondents who said they had contact with selected public services during the previous year were asked: How long did it take you to obtain the service? (Respondents who did not try to obtain these services are excluded.)

Figure 13: Paid bribe to obtain public services | Nigeria | 2017



Respondents who said they had contact with selected public services during the previous year were asked: And how often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour: For a teacher or school official in order to get the services you needed from the schools? For a health worker or clinic or hospital staff in order to get the medical care you needed? For a government official in order to get the document you needed? For a government official in order to get the services you needed? For a police officer in order to get the assistance you needed? For a police officer in order to avoid a problem during one of these encounters? (% who say "once or twice," "a few times," or "often") (Respondents who did not try to obtain these services are excluded.)

Conclusion

Nigerians are optimistic about the country's economic prospects – even if things are still far from rosy. The government must work to ensure that economic growth is reflected in the living conditions of its citizens. It must also invest in strengthening public service agencies to rid them of the corruption and long delays that too many citizens routinely experience.

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.

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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.

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 (USAID) via the U.S. Institute of Peace, the National Endowment for Democracy, and Transparency International.

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