

Basotho see progress in fight against corruption but fear retaliation if they report incidents

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 270 | Libuseng Malephane and Thomas Isbell

Summary

Corruption poses a serious threat to economic development and democratic governance in Africa. In recent years, Lesotho has been shaken by a number of corruption scandals involving high-ranking politicians. Allegations of corruption in the government fleet-service contract with Bidvest featured significantly in the split of the leading Democratic Congress (DC) party and the no-confidence vote that ended the Pakalitha Mosisili government in 2017 (Post, 2017; Matlosa, 2017). Lesotho's ranking in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index dropped from 55th in 2013 to 83rd in 2016 before rebounding to 74th in 2017 (Transparency International, 2018).

In an attempt to combat corruption and restore public confidence, the government has taken some steps to shift the tide. After elections in June 2017, Parliament's new Public Accounts Committee conducted its hearings on national television, allowing Basotho to hear about charges that government officials misappropriated public funds. The Lesotho Auditor General has consistently criticized the government's consolidated financial statements (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2017, 2018), which the Public Accounts Committee studies and references in following up with government departments on their use of public funds, for non-compliance with legal requirements.

Afrobarometer's most recent survey in Lesotho shows that while citizens are divided as to whether corruption has increased or decreased in the country, a majority say the government is doing a good job of fighting it. The police and government officials are most widely seen as corrupt, while religious and traditional leaders are most commonly seen as not being involved in graft. Many Basotho affirm that ordinary people can fight corruption, but two out of three say they risk retaliation if they report corruption to the authorities.

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 findings from 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 Lesotho, led by Advision Lesotho, interviewed 1,200 adult Lesotho citizens between 25 November and 11 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 2005, 2008, 2012, and 2014.

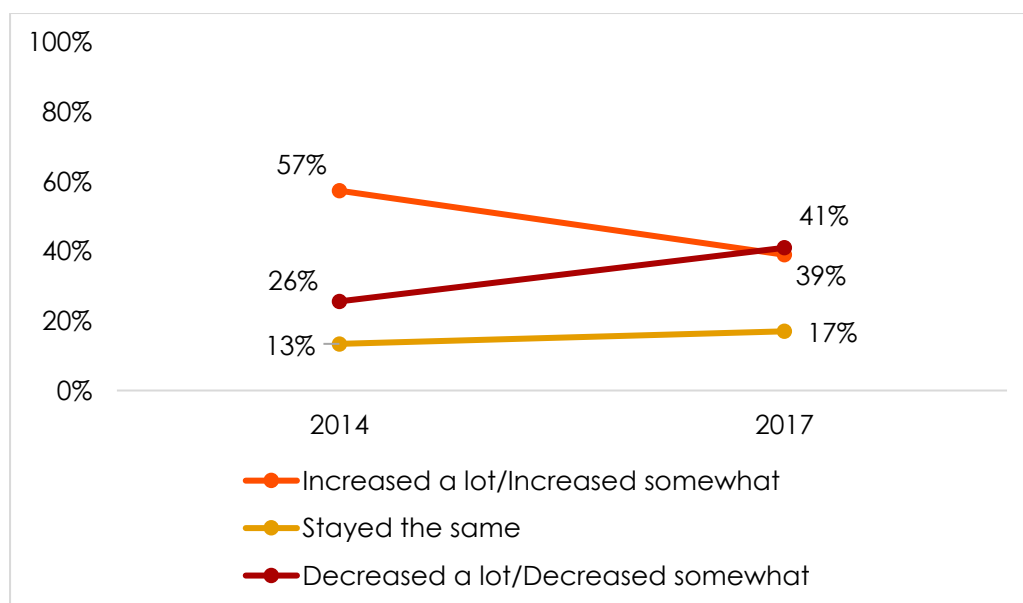
Key findings

- A growing number of Basotho see the level of corruption in the country as having decreased over the previous year (41%, up from 26% in 2014). About the same proportion (39%) say corruption has increased.
- Citizens give increasingly positive assessments of the government's performance in fighting corruption. Six in 10 (60%) say the government is doing "fairly well" or "very well," up from 35% a decade ago.
- But growing majorities of Basotho say that at least "some" elected and government officials, police officials, and judges are corrupt.
- Police, government officials, and members of Parliament are seen as the most corrupt public officials. Religious and traditional leaders are most widely seen as free of corruption.
- Two-thirds (65%) of Basotho say that ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption, and even more (70%) think it's likely that authorities will act on reports of corruption. But two-thirds (68%) also say that people risk retaliation if they report corruption.
- Basotho have mixed views on the impartiality of two entities with important roles to play in ensuring the integrity of Lesotho's public sector – the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO) and the Police Complaints Authority (PCA).

Level of corruption and government performance in fighting it

Basotho are about evenly divided in their views on whether the level of corruption in the country increased (41%) or decreased (39%) during the year preceding the survey. This is a more positive assessment than that offered in 2014, when perceptions of increased corruption outpaced those of decreased corruption by 2 to 1 (57% to 26%) (Figure 1).

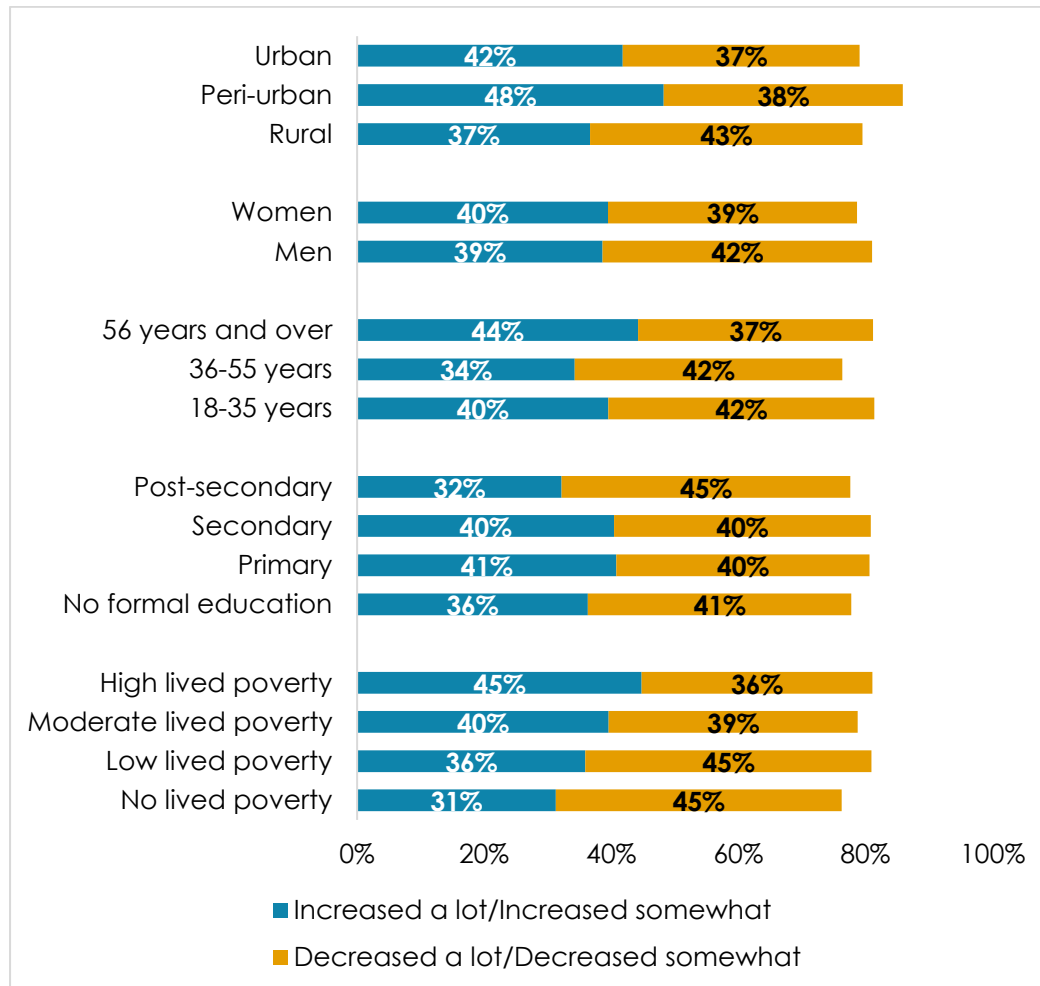
Figure 1: Level of corruption | Lesotho | 2014-2017



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, over the past year, has the level of corruption in this country increased, decreased, or stayed the same?*

The perception of decreasing corruption is especially common among rural residents (43%), young and middle-aged respondents (42% each), Basotho with post-secondary education (45%), and those with low or no lived poverty (45%) (Figure 2).¹

Figure 2: Level of corruption | by socio-demographic group | Lesotho | 2017

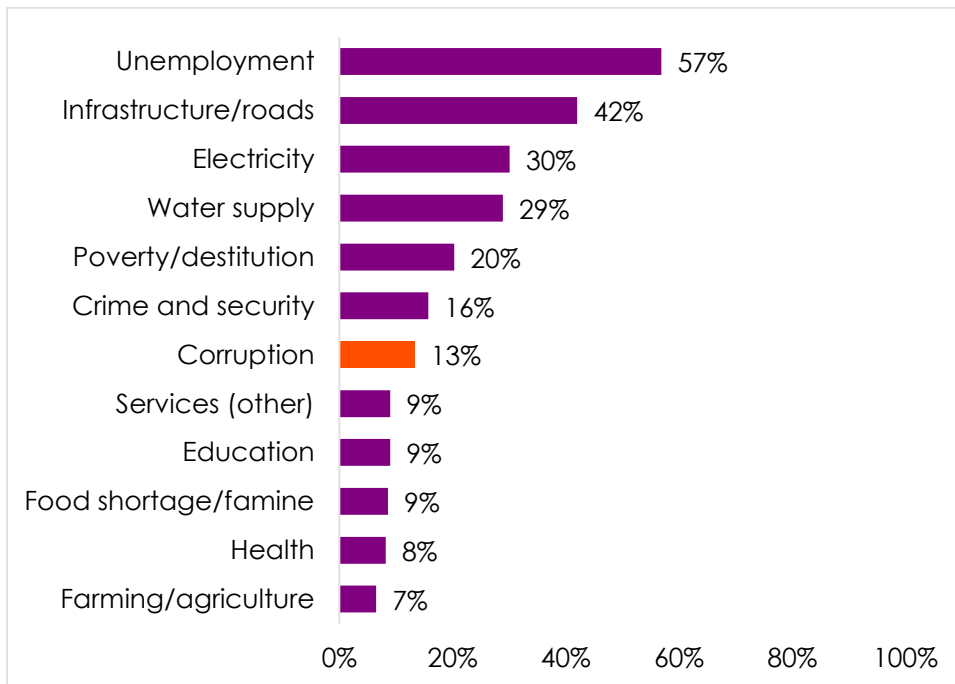


Respondents were asked: In your opinion, over the past year, has the level of corruption in this country increased, decreased, or stayed the same?

Even if a growing number of Basotho see corruption as having decreased, it remains a significant problem in the public mind, ranking at No. 7 among the “most important problems” that citizens say their government should address (Figure 3). Cited by 13% of respondents as one of their three priority problems, it trails well behind unemployment (57%) and infrastructure/roads (42%) but places ahead of education (9%), food shortage (9%), health (8%), and agriculture (7%).

¹ Afrobarometer assesses lived poverty based on responses to the following questions: “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?”

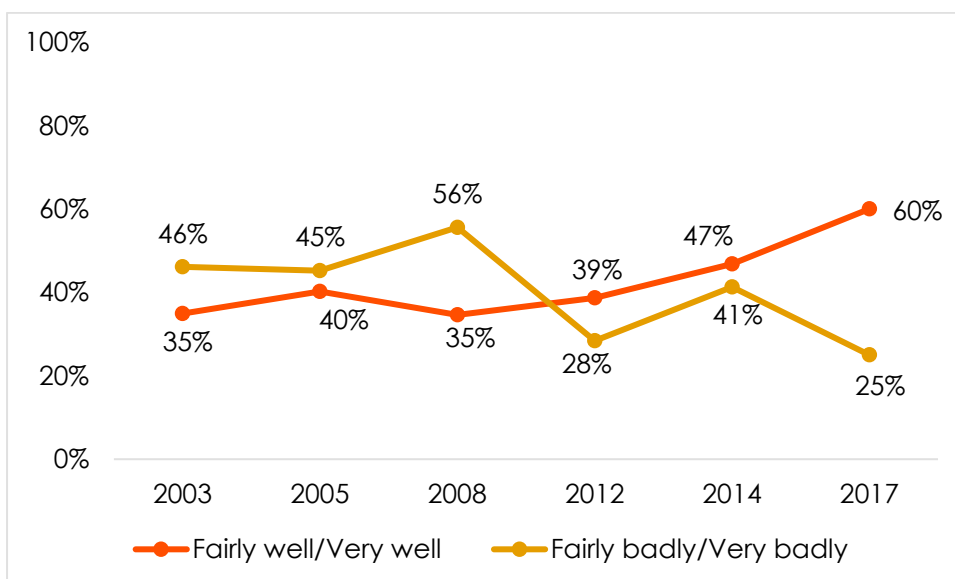
Figure 3: Most important problems (top 12) | Lesotho | 2017



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Note: Respondents could offer up to three responses. Figure shows % of responses citing each problem.)

Despite mixed views on the overall level of corruption in the country, Basotho give increasingly positive reviews of the government's efforts to fight corruption. Six in 10 respondents (60%) say the government is performing "fairly well" or "very well" on the issue, up from 35% in 2008 and 47% in 2014 (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Government performance in fighting corruption | Lesotho | 2003-2017



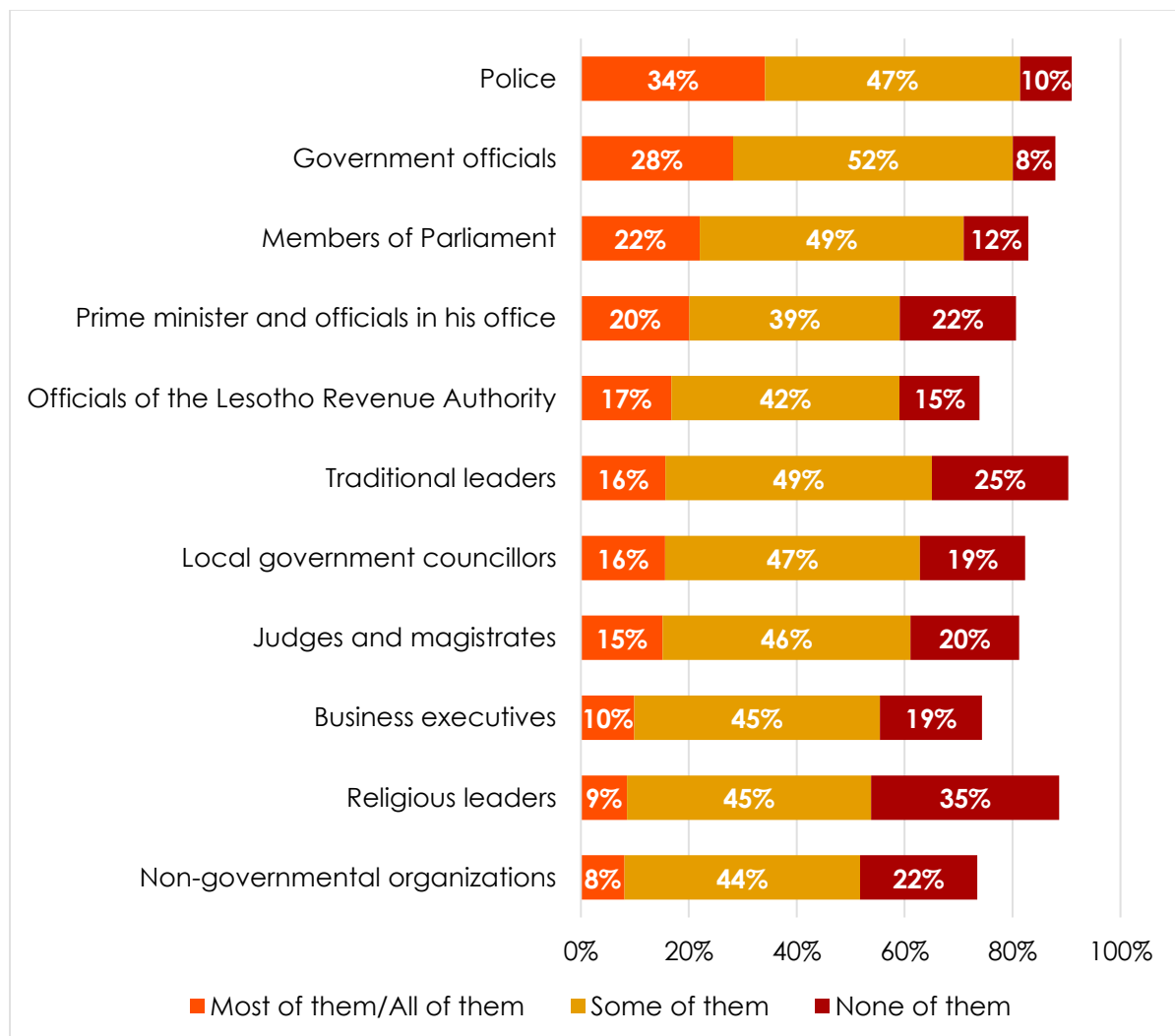
Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Fighting corruption in government?

Perceived corruption among elected leaders and officials

When asked about corruption among elected leaders and officials, Basotho most commonly cite the police as corrupt: One-third (34%) of respondents say “most” or “all” police officials are corrupt, in addition to 47% who say “some” of them are corrupt. Government officials, members of Parliament, and the prime minister and officials in his office follow, with 28%, 22%, and 20% of respondents, respectively, describing “most” or “all” of them as corrupt (Figure 5).

Most likely to be described as completely free of corruption are religious leaders (35%), traditional leaders (25%), and non-governmental organizations (22%).

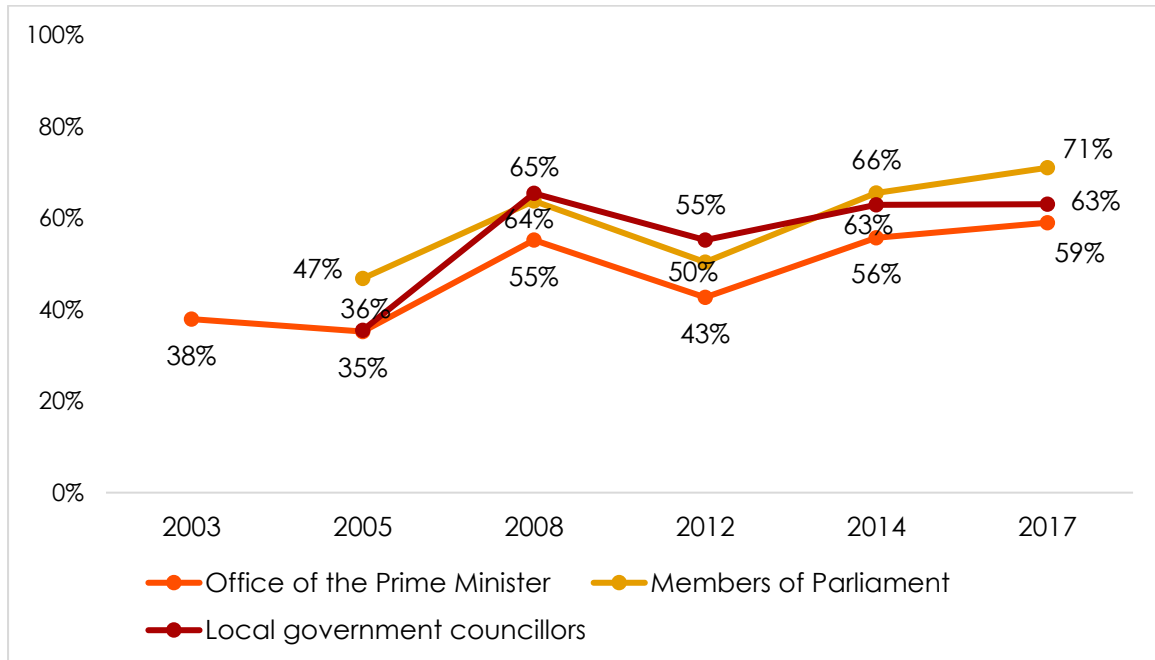
Figure 5: Perceived corruption among officials | Lesotho | 2017



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?

With regard to elected officials, popular perceptions of corruption are highest for members of Parliament (71% of respondents say at least “some of them” are corrupt) and lowest for local government councillors (59%). Assessments for these officials have followed similar trajectories over time, increasing by 17-30 percentage points between 2005 and 2008, declining by about 10 points from 2008 and 2012, then rising consistently since then (Figure 6).

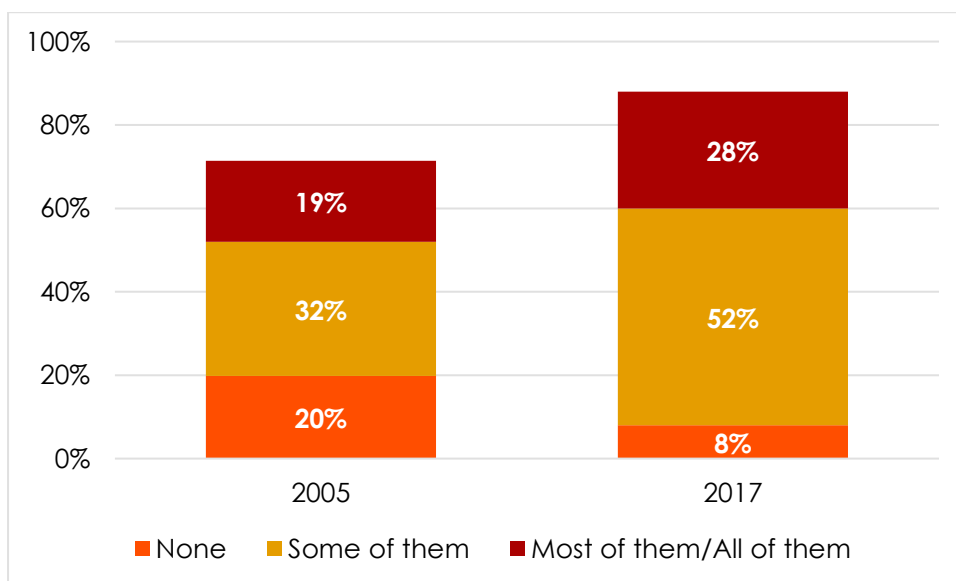
Figure 6: Perceived corruption among elected officials | Lesotho | 2003-2017



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: The prime minister and officials in his office? Members of Parliament? Members of your community council?
 (% who say "some of them," "most of them," or "all of them" are corrupt)

Perceived corruption among government officials has worsened as well. Between 2005 and 2017, the proportion of citizens who say that "most" or "all" government officials are corrupt increased by 9 percentage, while the share who think that "some of them" are corrupt grew by 20 points (Figure 7). Combined, 80% of Basotho now think that at least "some" government officials are corrupt, compared to 51% in 2005.

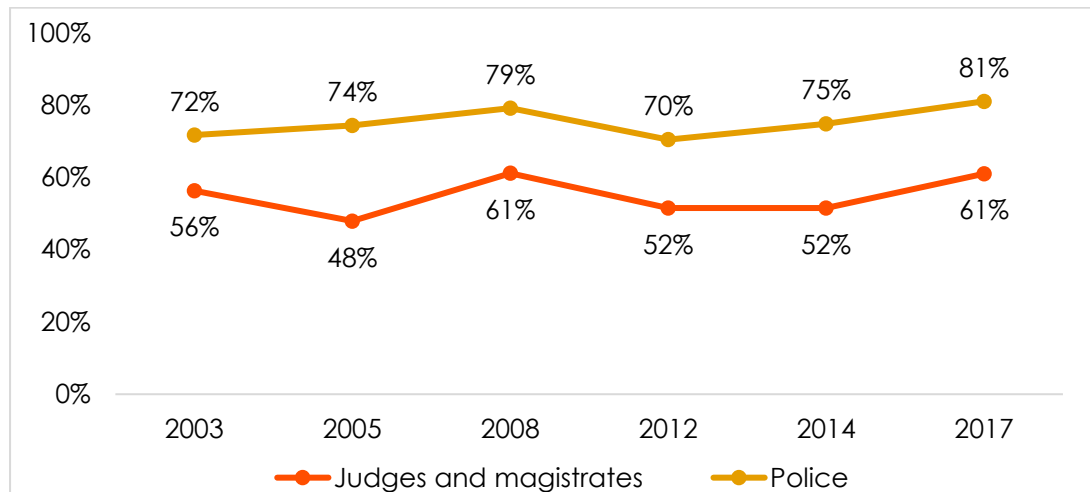
Figure 7: Perceived corruption among government officials | Lesotho | 2005 vs. 2017



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: Government officials?

When it comes to the law, perceptions of corruption have been consistently lower with regard to judges and magistrates than to police, but both have increased in recent years, to 81% and 61%, respectively, who say at least “some of them” are involved in graft (Figure 8). Allegations of corruption in the judiciary have made recent headlines in cases where the government asked the Chief Justice to resign or face corruption charges (African Legal Information Institute, 2018; Lesotho Times, 2017) and the repeated postponement of corruption charges against a former government minister (Lesotho Times, 2015).

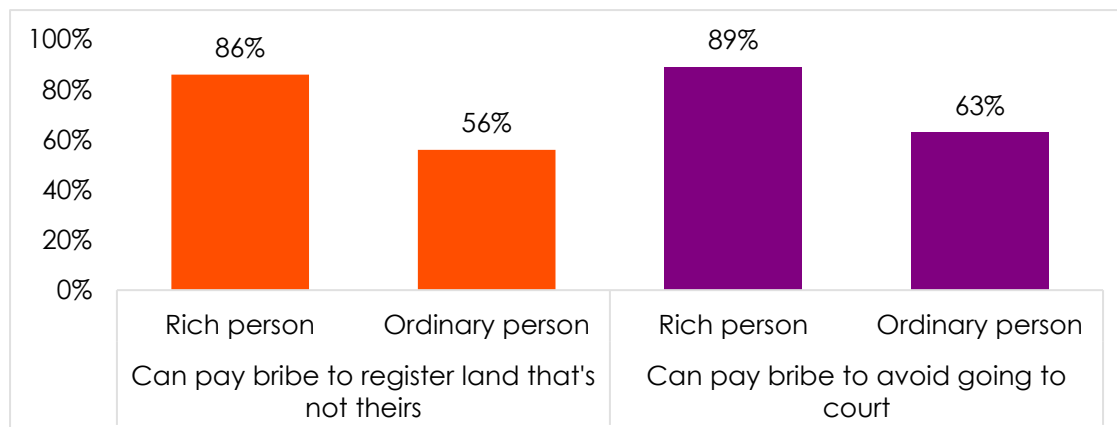
Figure 8: Perceived corruption among police and in courts | Lesotho | 2003-2017



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: Police? Judges and magistrates? (% who say “some of them,” “most of them,” or “all of them” are corrupt)

The widespread perception that at least some government officials and some judges and magistrates are corrupt is also reflected in citizens' view that it is “somewhat likely” or “very likely” that people can get away with paying bribes or using personal connections to gain unlawful advantages. Almost nine out of 10 Basotho think a rich person could use corrupt methods to register land that does not belong to him or her (86%) or to avoid going to court (89%). Smaller majorities (56% and 63%, respectively) say an ordinary person could get away with the same things (Figure 9).

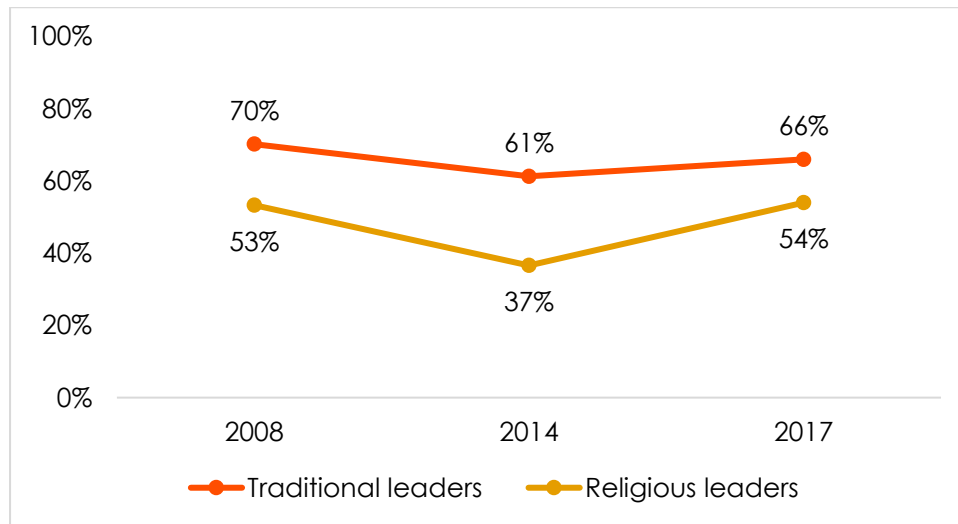
Figure 9: Can pay bribe to register land or avoid going to court | Lesotho | 2017



Respondents were asked: In this country, how likely do you think it is that an ordinary person/rich person could pay a bribe or use personal connections to get away with: Registering land that does not belong to them? Avoid going to court? (% who say “somewhat likely” or “very likely”)

Perceived corruption among traditional and religious leaders also increased from the previous survey round (Figure 10). Two-thirds (66%) of Basotho say at least “some” traditional leaders are corrupt, up from 61% in 2014. And a majority (54%) say the same about religious leaders – a 17-percentage-point increase compared to 2014 and on a par with levels recorded in 2008 (53%).

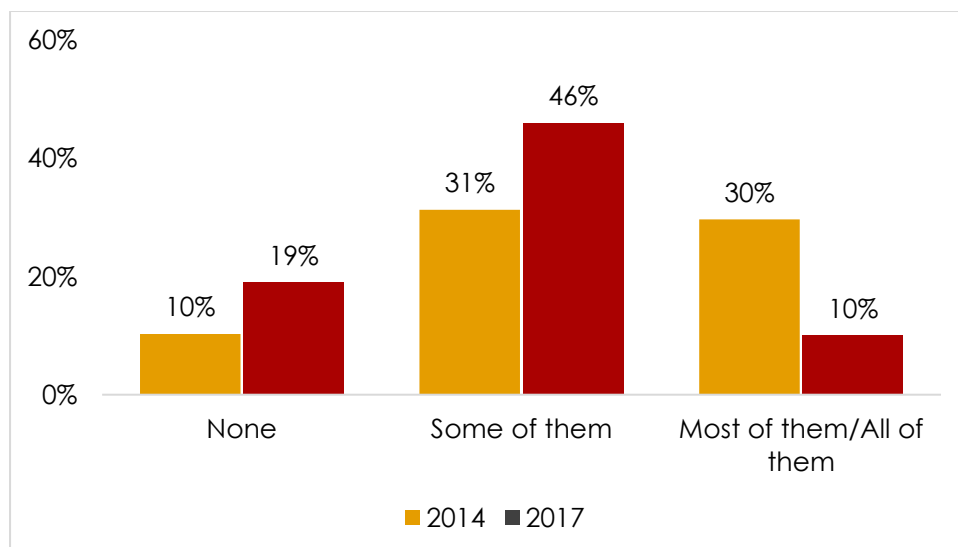
Figure 10: Traditional and religious leaders | Lesotho | 2008-2017



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: Traditional leaders? Religious leaders? (% who say “some of them,” “most of them,” or “all of them” are corrupt)

But perceptions of the prevalence of corruption among business executives has become slightly less harsh compared to 2014. Only 10% of respondents say that “all” or “most” business leaders are corrupt (down from 30% in 2014), while 46% see “some” as corrupt (up from 31% in 2015). Almost twice as many Basotho as in 2014 say that “none” are corrupt (19% in 2017 vs. 10% in 2014) (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Perceived corruption among business executives | Lesotho | 2014-2017

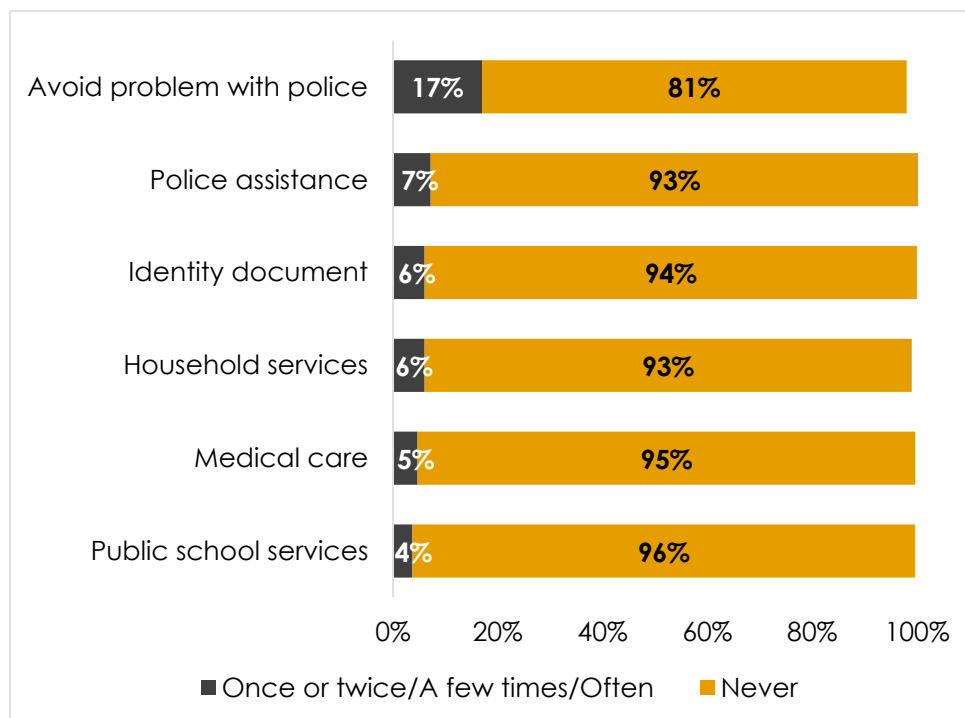


Respondents were asked: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Business executives?

Personal experience of paying bribes for services

Despite the widespread perception of at least some corruption among all elected leaders and officials, most Basotho say they did not personally have to pay bribes to obtain public services during the year preceding the survey. Among survey respondents who said they had contact with key public services during the year, one in six (17%) say they had to pay a bribe at least once or twice to avoid a problem during an encounter with the police, such as at a checkpoint, during an identity check or traffic stop, or during an investigation. Fewer than one in 10 say they had to pay a bribe to obtain police assistance (7%); obtain a government identity document, such as a birth certificate, driver's license, passport, voter's card, or permit (6%); obtain household services such as water, sanitation, or electricity (6%); get medical care (5%); or obtain services at a public school (4%) (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Personal experience of paying bribes for public services | Lesotho | 2017



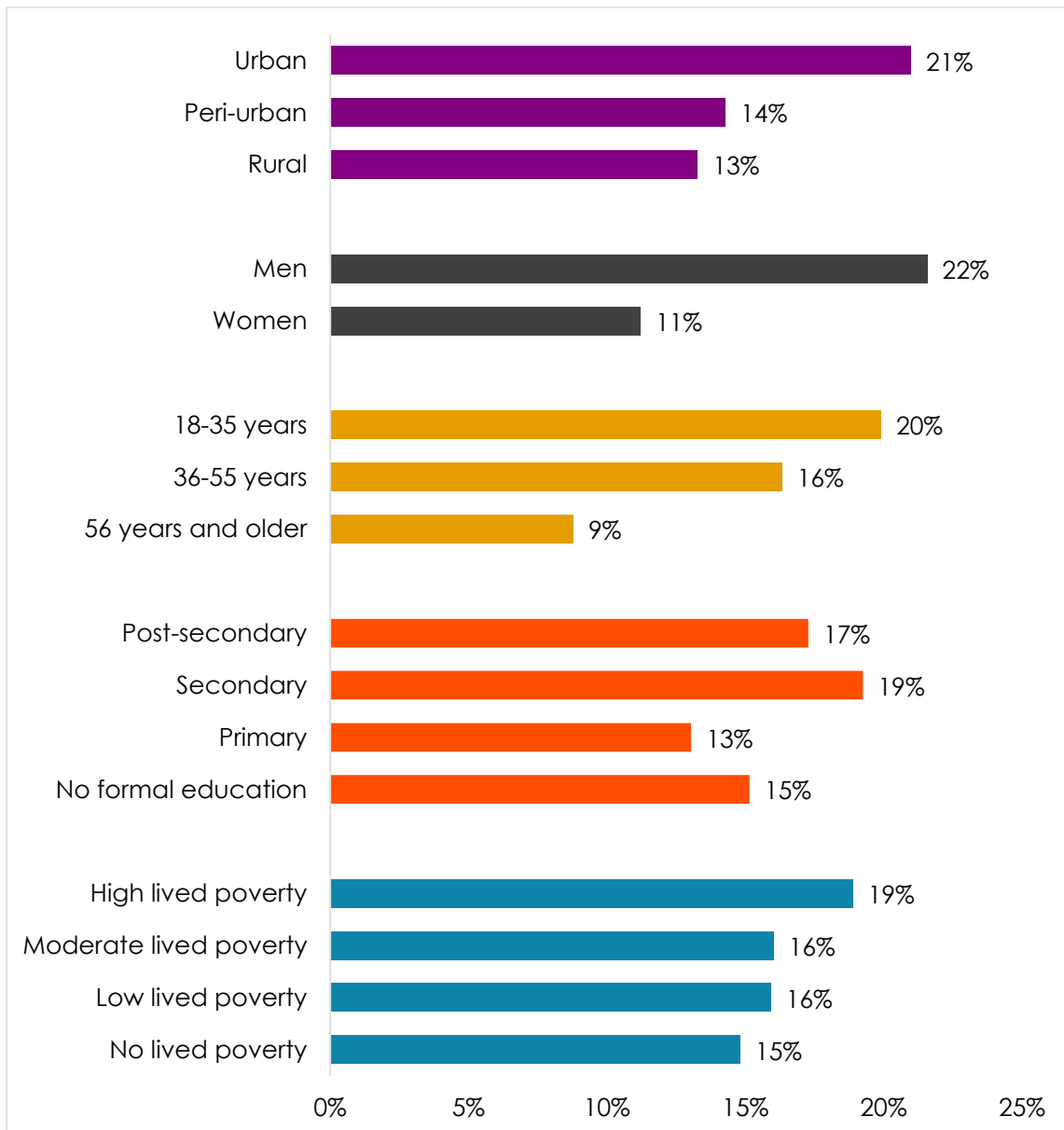
Respondents who said they had contact with selected public services were asked: How often, if ever did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for:

- A police officer in order to avoid a problem during one of these encounters?
- A teacher or school official in order to get the services from the school?
- A government official in order to get the household services you needed?
- A police officer in order to get the assistance you needed?
- A health worker or clinic or hospital staff in order to get the medical you needed?
- A government official in order to get the document you needed.

(Note: Respondents who said they had no contact with these services during the previous year are excluded.)

Paying a bribe to avoid a problem with the police is more commonly reported by urban than rural residents (21% vs. 13%) and by men compared to women (22% vs. 11%) (Figure 13). Younger Basotho are also more likely than their elders to report having to pay a bribe for this reason (20% among 18- to 35-year-olds vs. 16% of 36- to 55-year-olds and 9% of those aged 56 or older).

Figure 13: Paying bribes to avoid problems with the police | by socio-demographic group | Lesotho | 2017



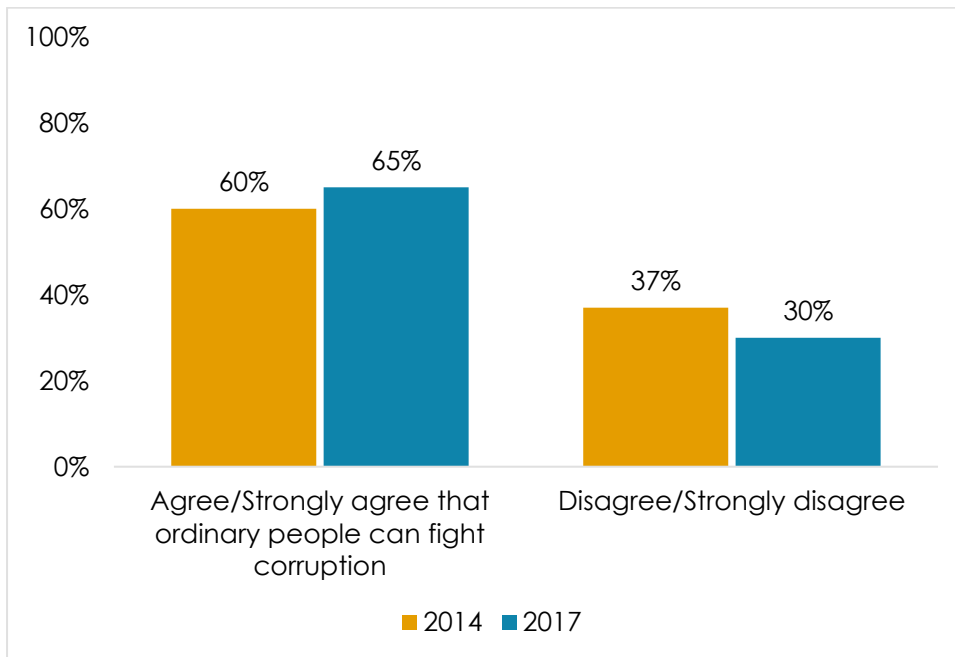
Respondents who said they had encountered the police at checkpoints, during identity checks or traffic stops, or during an investigation were asked: How often, if ever did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a police officer in order to avoid a problem during one of these encounters? (Note: Respondents who said they had not encountered the police in such a situation are excluded.)

Fighting corruption

Despite widely shared perceptions of corruption among those in power, two in three Basotho (65%) believe that ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption, a 5-percentage-point increase from 2014 (Figure 14).

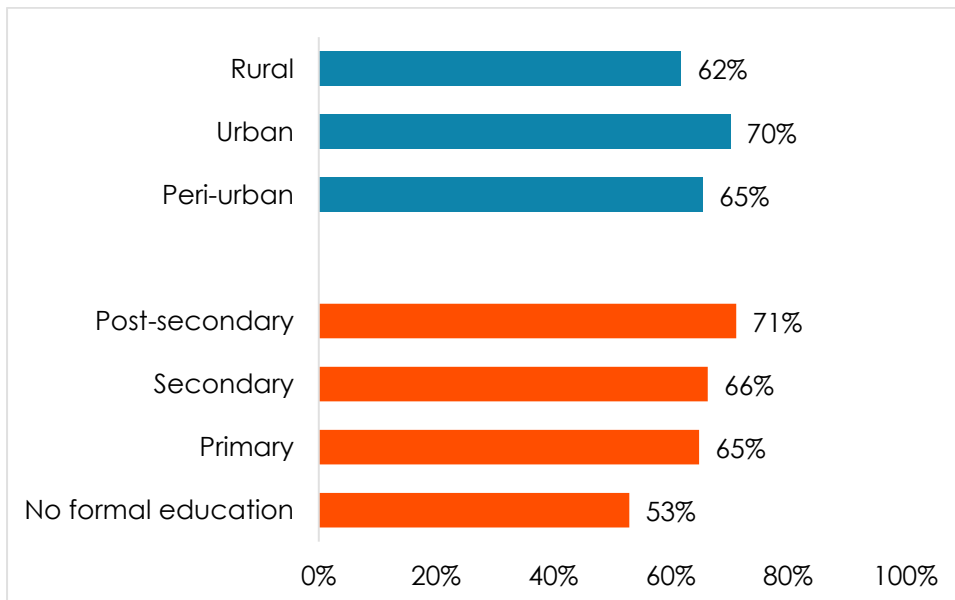
Urban residents (70%) and the best-educated citizens (71%) are somewhat more likely to believe they can help fight corruption than rural dwellers and less-educated respondents (Figure 15).

Figure 14: Can ordinary people help fight corruption? | Lesotho | 2014-2017



Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: Ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption?

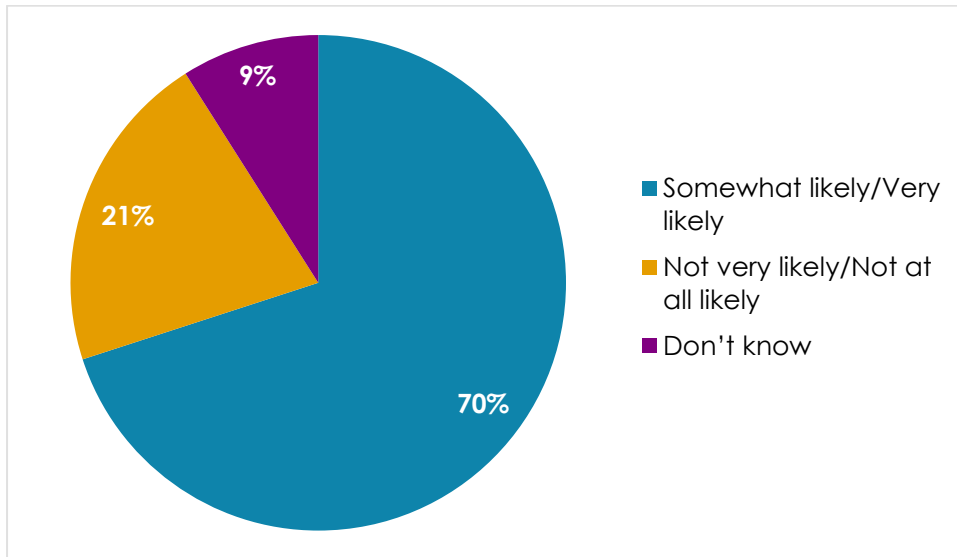
Figure 15: Ordinary people can help fight corruption | by location and education level | Lesotho | 2017



Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: Ordinary people can make a difference in the fight against corruption?

Most Basotho believe that the authorities will act if corruption is reported to them: Seven in 10 respondents (70%) consider this “somewhat likely” or “very likely” (Figure 16). Only one in five (21%) say it’s unlikely that action would be taken.

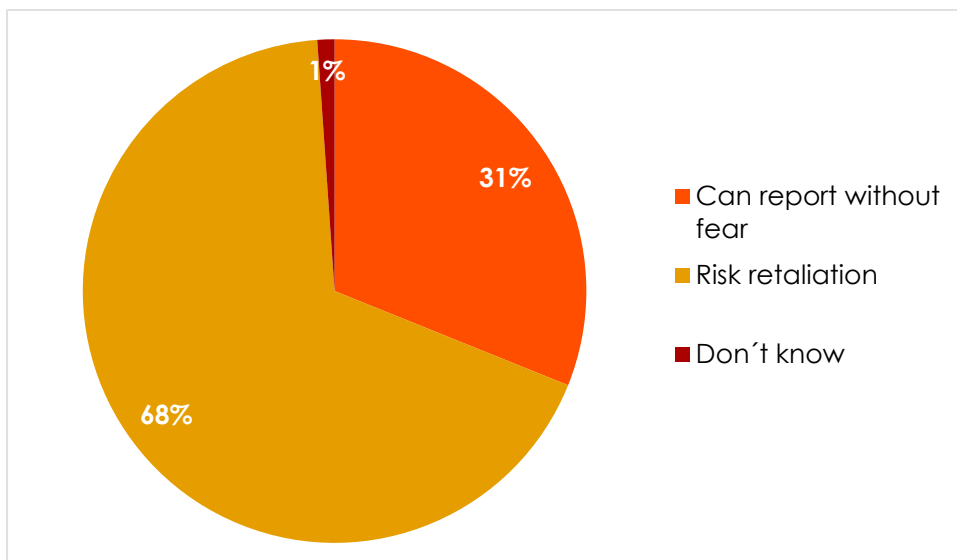
Figure 16: Likelihood of response if corruption is reported | Lesotho | 2017



Respondents were asked: How likely is it that you could get someone to take action if you went to a government office or other public institution to report the following problems, or haven't you heard enough to say: If you went to your regional office of the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO) to report corrupt behaviour like misuse of funds or requests for bribes by government officers, police, or school or clinic officers?

However, more than two-thirds (68%) of Basotho say that in reporting corruption to the authorities, they risk retaliation or other negative consequences. Fewer than one in three (31%) believe that ordinary people can report corruption without fear (Figure 17).

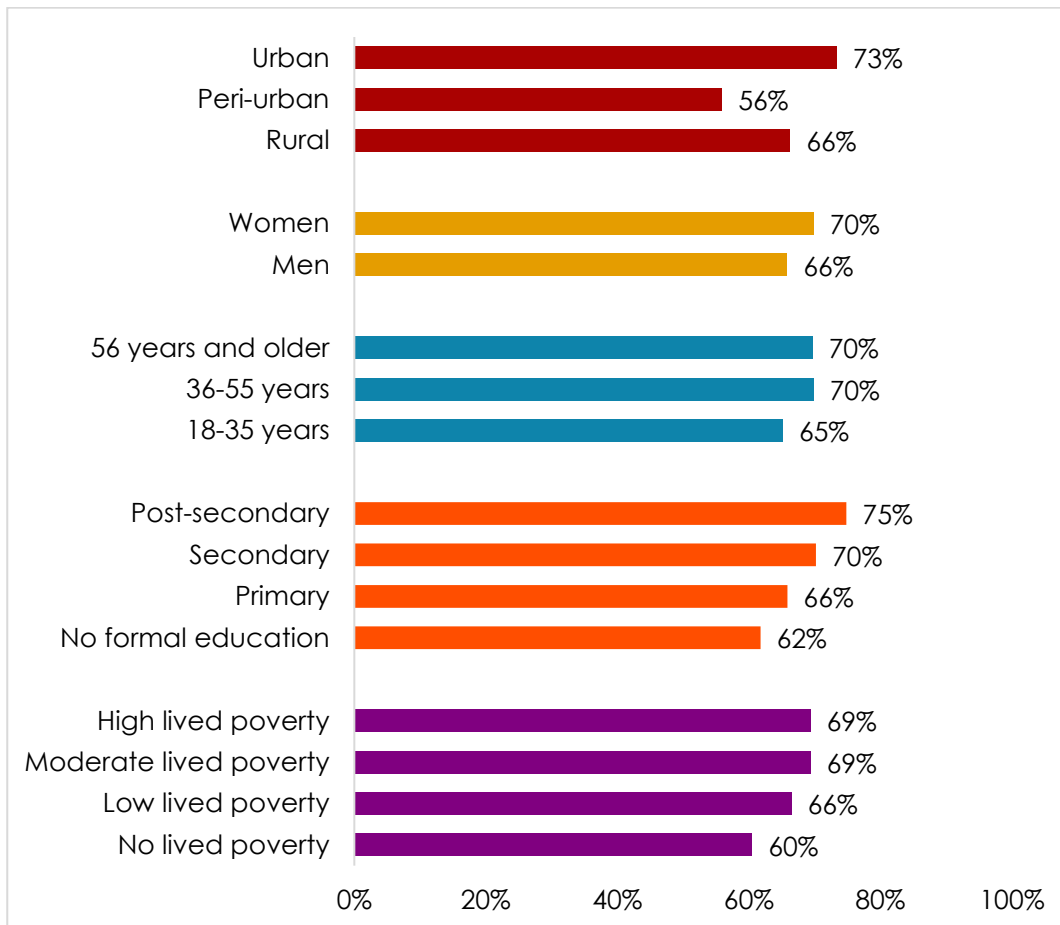
Figure 17: Can people report corruption without fear? | Lesotho | 2017



Respondents were asked: In this country, can ordinary people report incidents of corruption without fear, or do they risk retaliation or other negative consequences if they speak out?

The view that people who report corruption risk retaliation is especially common among urban residents (73%), older Basotho (70% of those over age 35), those with higher levels of education, and respondents who suffer from higher levels of lived poverty (Figure 18).

Figure 18: People risk retaliation if they report corruption | by socio-demographic group | Lesotho | 2017



Respondents were asked: *In this country, can ordinary people report incidents of corruption without fear, or do they risk retaliation or other negative consequences if they speak out?*

Anti-corruption and police oversight institutions

Two entities with important roles to play in ensuring the integrity of Lesotho's public sector are the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO), which receives and investigates complaints alleging corruption in any public body, and the Police Complaints Authority (PCA), which is tasked with monitoring the work of the police (Police Act 1998).

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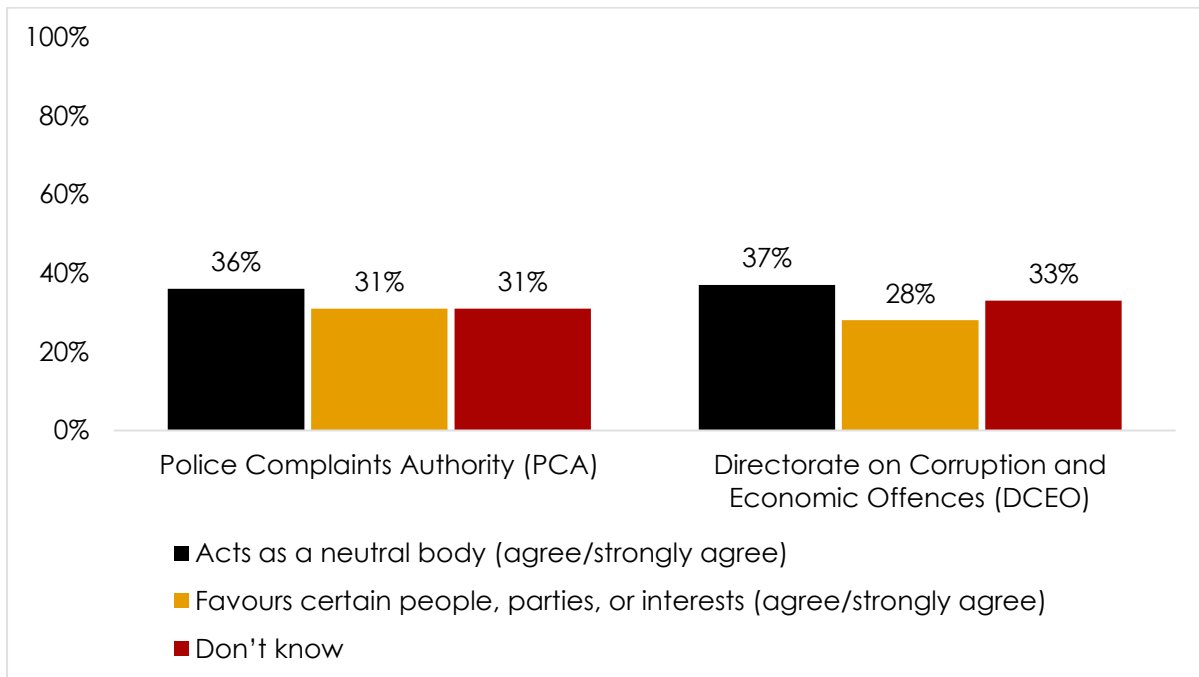
When asked whether they think these authorities act as neutral bodies, guided by the law, or whether they make decisions that "favour certain people, parties, or interests," Basotho offer mixed appraisals, and many

say they don't know enough about them to render judgment (Figure 19).

More than one-third (36%) of respondents see the DCEO as neutral, while somewhat fewer (28%) say it favours certain interests and one-third (33%) say they "don't know."

Similarly, Basotho most frequently say the PCA acts as a neutral body (36%), but three in 10 (31%) see it as biased and the same proportion (31%) say they "don't know."

Figure 19: Perceptions of the DCEO and PCA | Lesotho | 2017



Respondents were asked: For each of the following institutions, please tell me whether you think the institution performs as a neutral body guided by law, or whether it instead makes decisions that favour certain people, parties, or interests, or haven't you heard enough to say:

- The Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences (DCEO)?
- The Police Complaints Authority (PCA)?

Conclusion

Some Basotho appear to see progress in the fight against corruption, and a majority applaud the government's efforts in this area. Most also see a role for themselves in this fight and are optimistic that the authorities will take action if corruption is reported. But they fear retaliation should they report incidents of corruption. In this regard, the Directorate on Corruption and Economic Offences should do more to increase its visibility and build popular confidence. And the Police Complaints Authority is key in strengthening the integrity of what is still perceived as the most corrupt public institution in Lesotho.

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