

With lived poverty on the rise, Nigerians rate government performance as poor

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 395 | Sunday Joseph Duntoye

Summary

Sixty years after claiming its sovereign rights from the British, Nigeria is classified as a middle-income mixed economy and emerging market, with expanding manufacturing, financial, service, communications, technology, and entertainment sectors. Touted as Africa's largest economy, it ranks as the 27th-largest economy in the world in terms of nominal gross domestic product and the 24th-largest in terms of purchasing power parity (World Bank, 2020a). Nigeria's re-emergent manufacturing sector became the largest on the continent in 2013 and produces a large proportion of goods and services for the West African subcontinent (KPMG, 2015).

Yet Nigeria's economy has struggled as the collapse of global oil prices between 2014 and 2016, combined with lower domestic oil production, put the brakes on the country's economic activity. Hit by the COVID-19 pandemic while still recovering from the 2016 recession, Nigeria's economy is projected to contract by 3.2% this year, its worst recession in four decades (Business Day, 2020; World Bank, 2020b).

Findings from the most recent Afrobarometer survey in Nigeria, conducted in early 2020, show that even before the coronavirus pandemic, a majority of citizens said the country's economy and their personal living conditions were bad, at times forcing them to go without basic necessities such as medical care and sufficient food. Most disapproved of the government's handling of economic issues.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey 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 Nigeria, led by NOIPolls, interviewed 1,599 adult citizens in January-February 2020. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2.5 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Nigeria in 1999, 2002, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2017.

Key findings

- As of early 2020, only one-third (33%) of Nigerians said the country's economic conditions were "fairly good" or "very good."
 - Only four in 10 (39%) said their personal living conditions were good.
- Even so, two-thirds (65%) of Nigerians were optimistic that things would improve in the next 12 months.

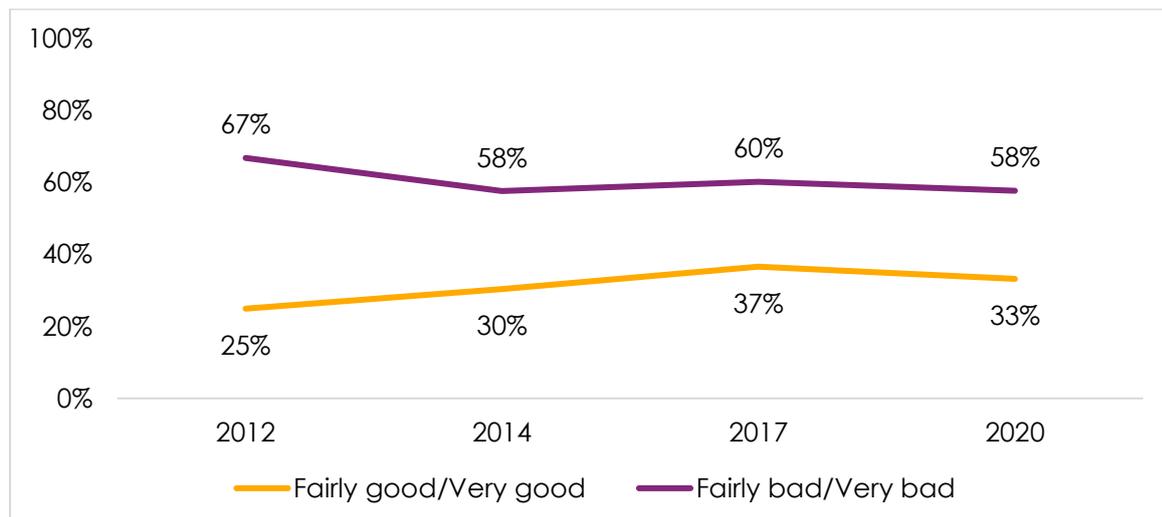
- More than eight in 10 respondents (82%) said they or a family member went without a cash income at least once during the year preceding the survey.
 - Two-thirds (65%) went without enough food and without medical care at least once, while more than half went without enough water (57%) and without cooking fuel (51%).
- Close to six in 10 Nigerians (56%) experienced moderate or high levels of lived poverty, an 18-percentage-point increase compared to 2017.
- Only a quarter of Nigerians said the government was doing “fairly well” or “very well” in managing the economy (27%) and improving living standards of the poor (25%).
 - Even fewer rated the government positively for its performance in keeping prices stable (21%), creating jobs (18%), and narrowing income gaps between rich and poor (17%).

Economic conditions

As of January-February 2020, only one-third (33%) of Nigerians described the country’s economic conditions as “fairly good” or “very good,” a 4-percentage-point decrease since 2017 but an 8-point increase compared to 2012 (25%) (Figure 1). The proportion of citizens who described economic conditions as “fairly bad” or “very bad” decreased by a similar margin, from 67% in 2012 to 58%.

Citizens experiencing high lived poverty¹ were twice as likely as those with no lived poverty to say the country’s economic conditions were bad (77% vs. 35%) (Figure 2). Negative views about economic conditions were also more common among residents of southern Nigeria (77%), older citizens (69%), the highly educated (66%), and urbanites (65%).

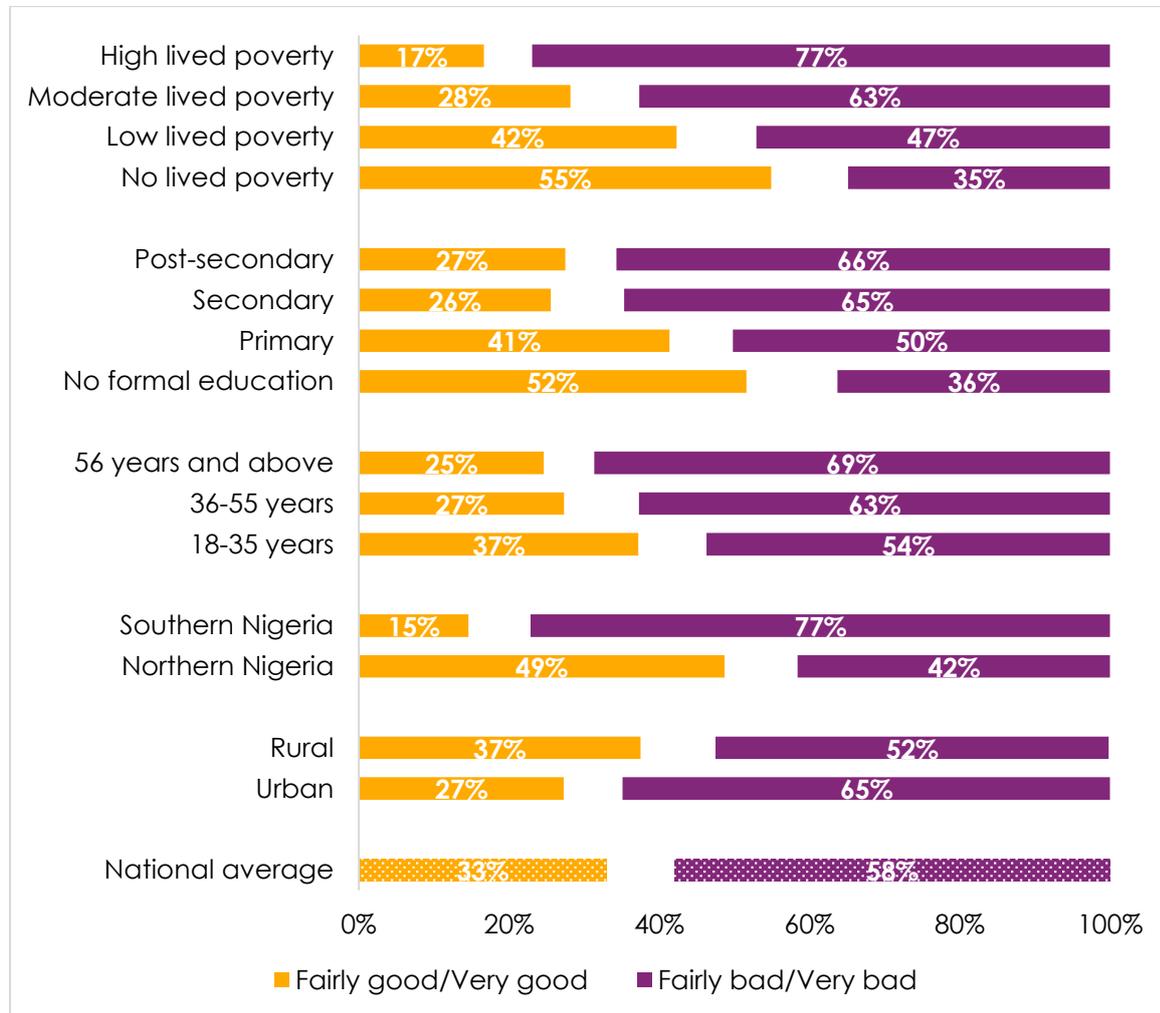
Figure 1: Country’s economic conditions | Nigeria | 2012-2020



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

¹ Afrobarometer’s Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents’ levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes (2020).

Figure 2: Country's economic conditions | by socio-demographic group | Nigeria
 | 2020



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

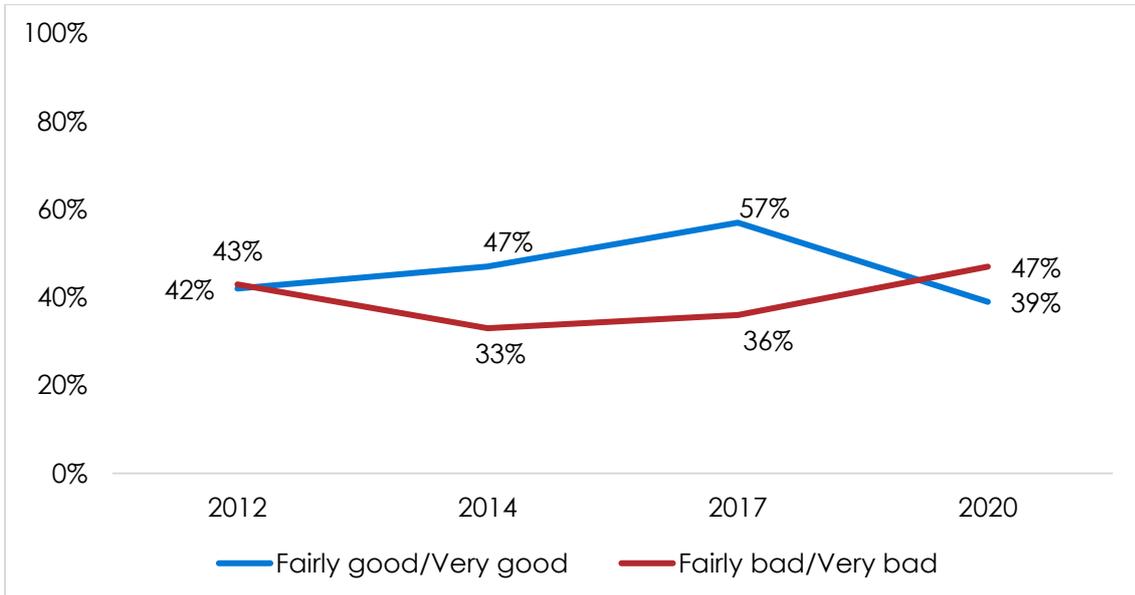
Only four in 10 Nigerians (39%) said their personal living conditions were “fairly good” or “very good,” an 18-percentage-point decline compared to 2017 (57%) after a significant

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improvement over the five preceding years (Figure 3). Dissatisfaction with their personal living conditions was more than twice as high among citizens experiencing high lived poverty (69%) as it was among those with no lived poverty (26%) (Figure 4). It also increased with respondents’ level of education (37% among those with no formal education vs. 52% among those with post-secondary education) and age (43% among those aged 18-35 years vs. 57% among those aged 56 and above).

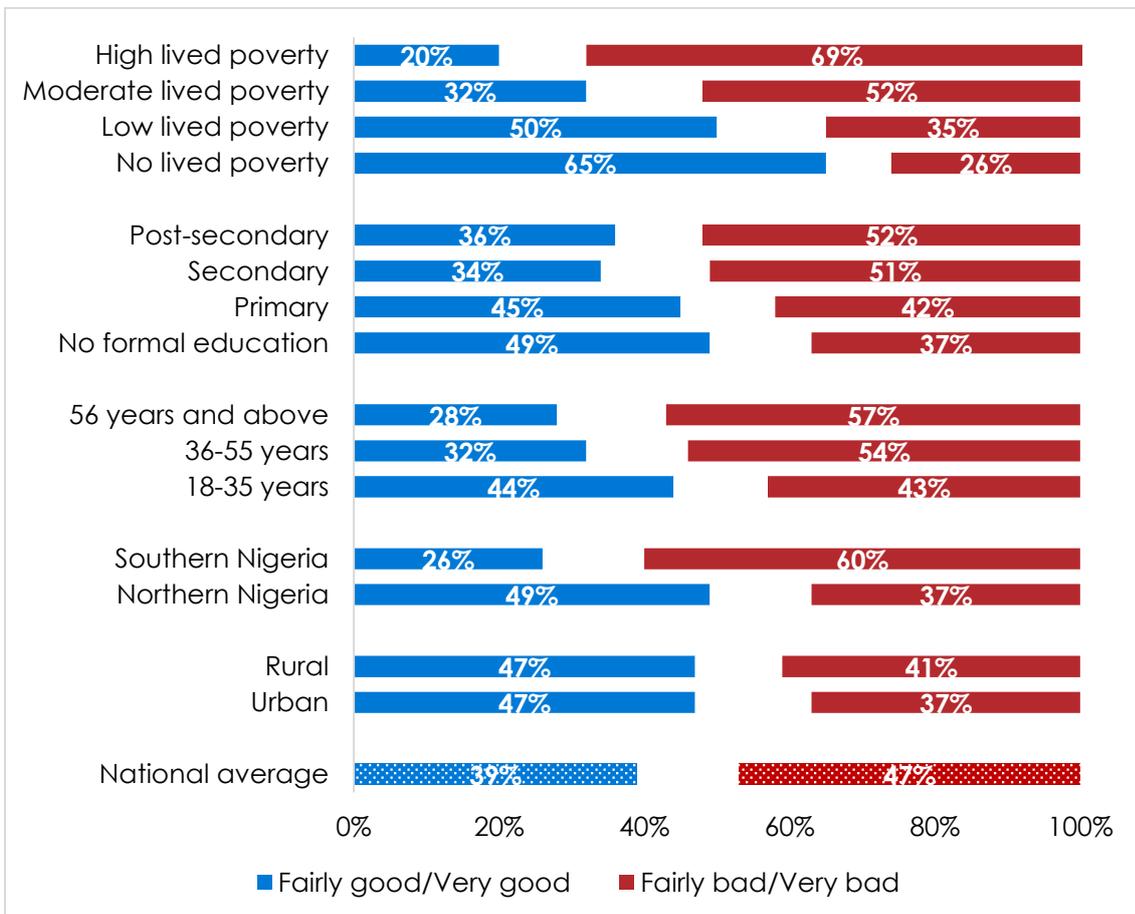
Southern citizens were twice as likely as their counterparts in the North to hold negative views about their living conditions (60% vs. 37%).

Figure 3: Personal living conditions | Nigeria | 2012-2020



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

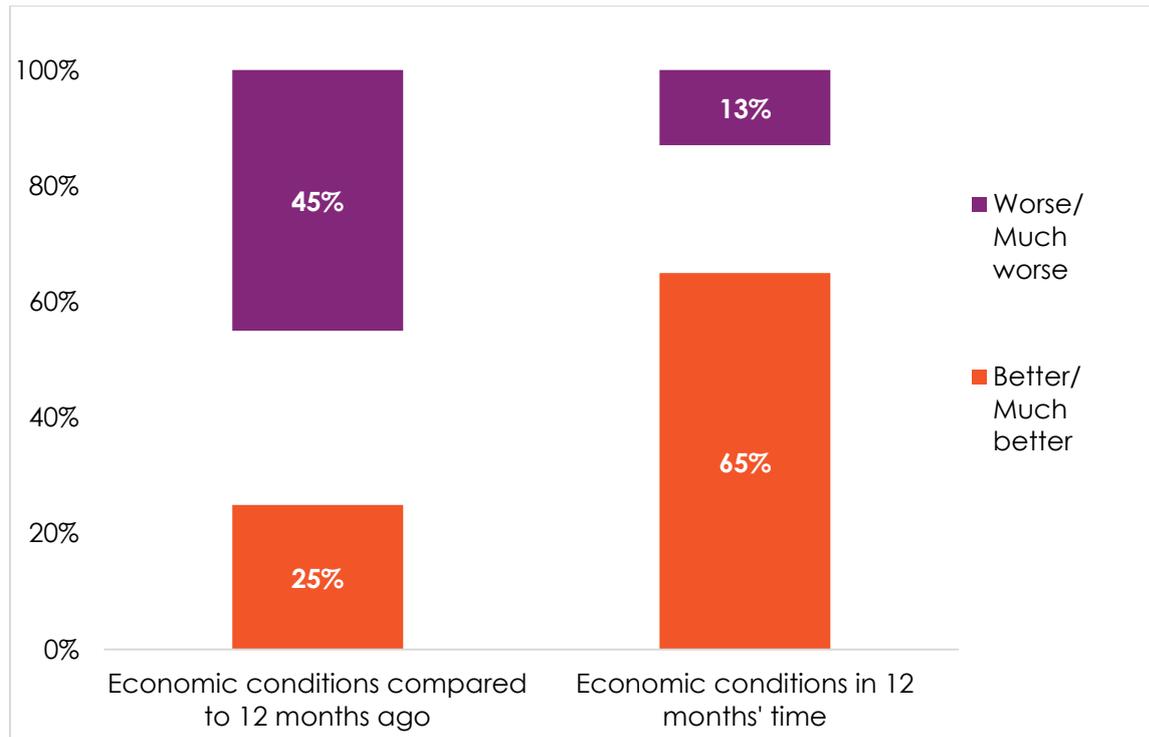
Figure 4: Personal living conditions | by socio-demographic group | Nigeria | 2020



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

While assessments of the economic situation were gloomy, respondents were more hopeful about future economic prospects. Although only a quarter (25%) said economic conditions had improved during the previous year, two-thirds (65%) expected things to get better over the next 12 months (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Retrospective and prospective assessments of national economic conditions | Nigeria | 2020



Respondents were asked:

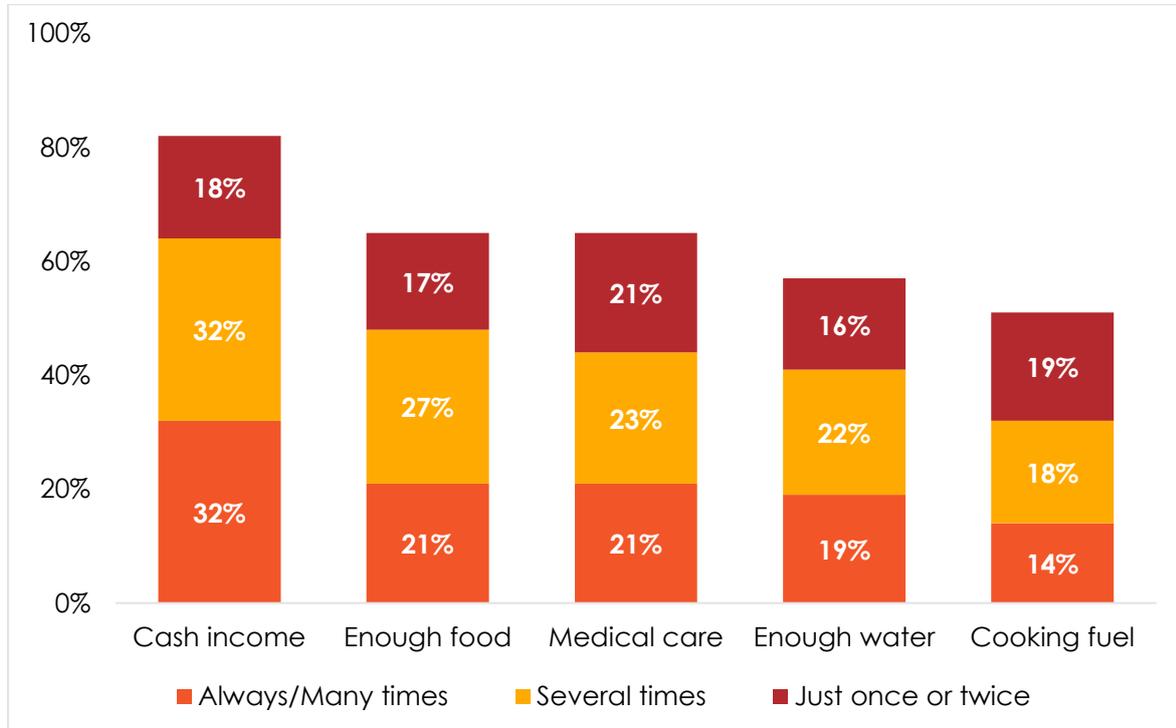
*Looking back, how do you rate economic conditions in this country compared to 12 months ago?
 Looking ahead, do you expect economic conditions in this country to be better or worse in 12 months' time?*

Deprivation of basic necessities

Citizens' negative views of the country's economy and their personal living conditions were reflected in their reported experience of having to do without five basic necessities (enough food and clean water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income). Lack of a cash income was the form of deprivation most commonly experienced by Nigerians: More than eight in 10 (82%) said they or someone in their family went without a cash income at least once during the previous 12 months, including 32% who did so "often" or "always" (Figure 6). Two-thirds (65%) of respondents experienced a shortage of food and medical care at least once, including 21% who did so often/always, while more than half went without enough water (57%) and without cooking fuel (51%) at least once.

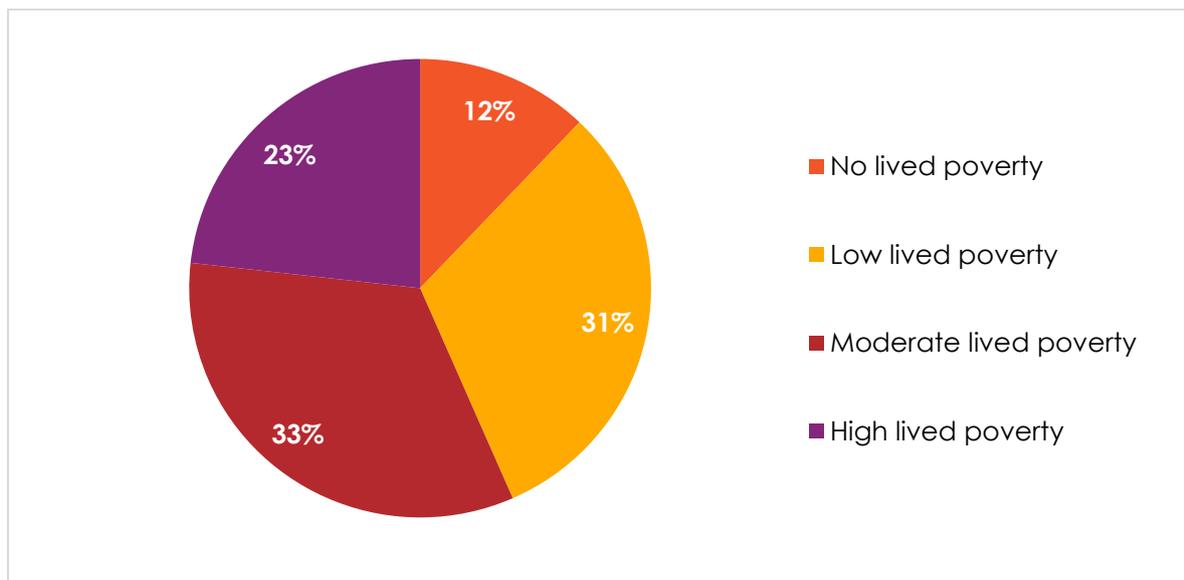
Calculated based on the frequency of the lack of basic necessities that respondents reported, Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index shows that close to six in 10 Nigerians (56%) experienced moderate or high lived poverty during the previous year, while about four in 10 (43%) experienced low or no lived poverty (Figure 7). Compared to 2017, the proportion of citizens experiencing moderate or high levels of lived poverty increased by 18 percentage points, while the share of those experiencing low or no lived poverty decreased by the same margin (Figure 8).

Figure 6: Went without basic necessities in the past year | Nigeria | 2020



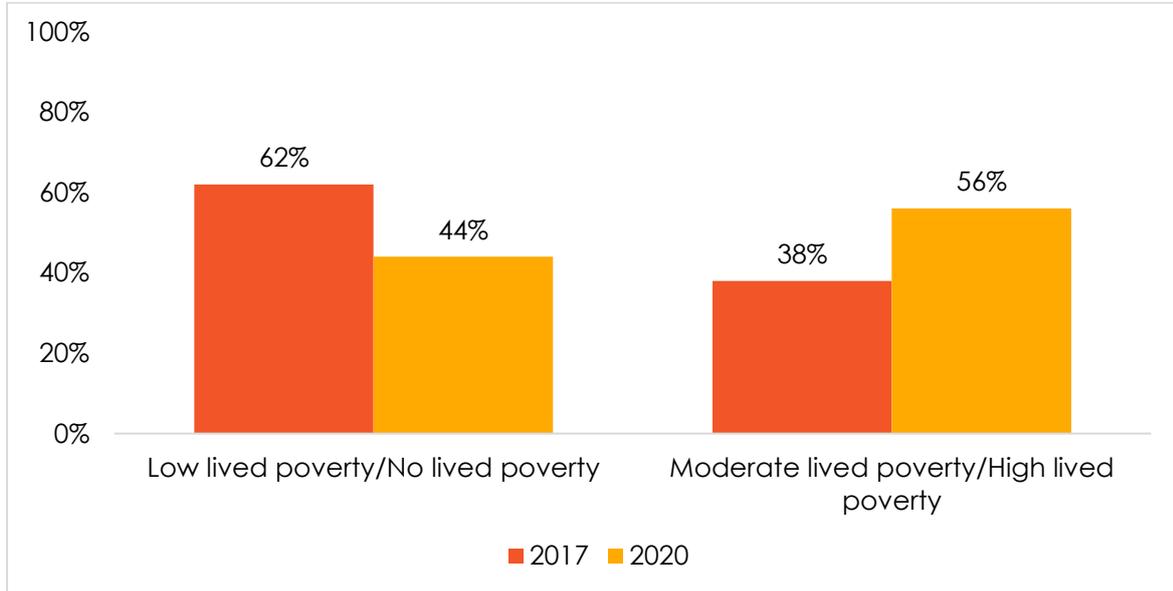
Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: Enough food to eat? Enough clean water for home use? Medicines or medical treatment? Enough fuel to cook your food? A cash income?

Figure 7: Lived Poverty Index | Nigeria | 2020



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?

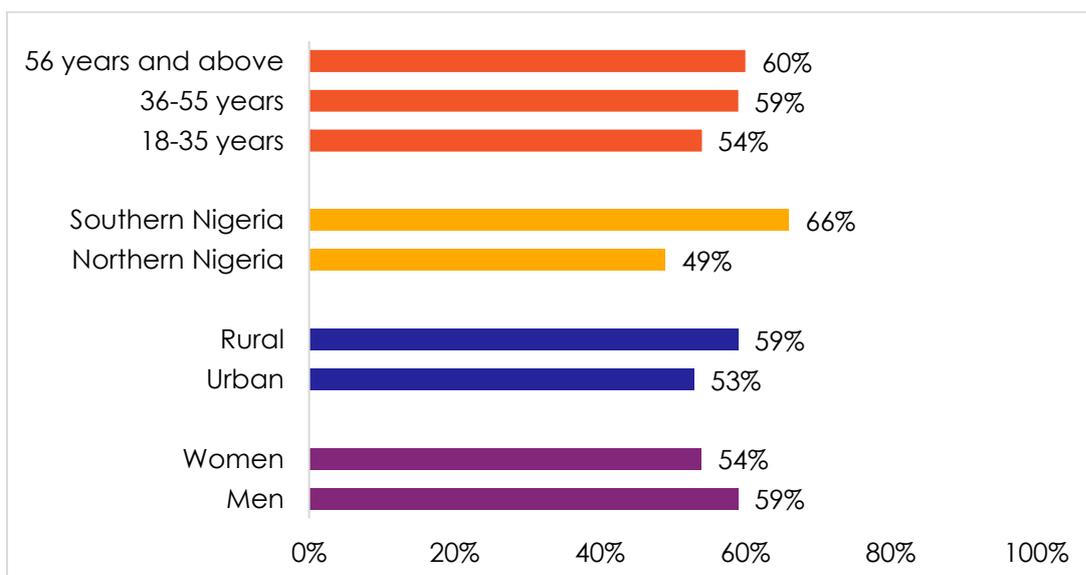
Figure 8: Lived Poverty Index | Nigeria | 2017-2020



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?

Southern residents were 17 percentage points more likely than northern citizens to experience moderate or high lived poverty (66% vs. 49%). Moderate or high lived poverty was slightly more common among older citizens (60% among those aged 56 and above), in rural areas (59%), and among men (59%) than among young adults (54% among those aged 18-35), urban residents (53%), and women (54%) (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Moderate/high lived poverty | by socio-demographic group | Nigeria | 2020

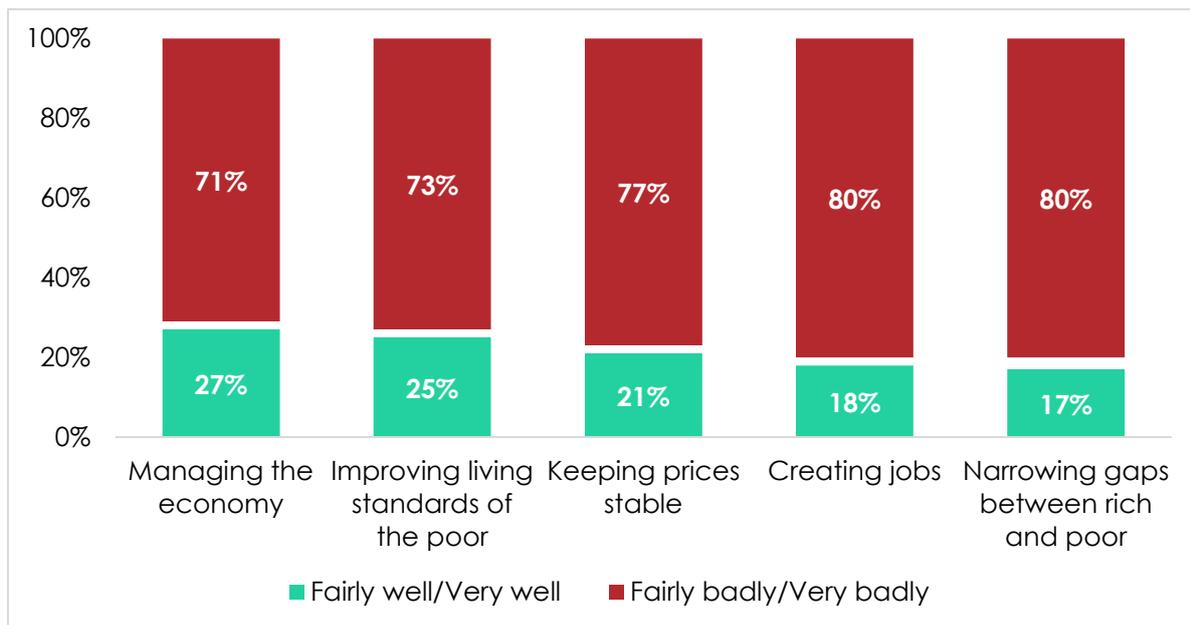


Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: Enough food to eat? Enough clean water for home use? Medicines or medical treatment? Enough fuel to cook your food? A cash income?

Government performance on economic issues

Most Nigerians gave the government low marks on its performance on economic indicators. Only a quarter of respondents said the government was doing “fairly well” or “very well” in managing the economy (27%) and improving living standards of the poor (25%) (Figure 10). About one-fifth rated the government positively on keeping prices stable (21%), creating jobs (18%), and narrowing income gaps between rich and poor (17%).

Figure 10: Evaluation of government performance on economic issues | Nigeria
 | 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

Recent Afrobarometer findings show that even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Nigerians were deeply concerned about the country's economy and their personal living conditions. Negative assessments were especially prevalent among residents in southern Nigeria, the highly educated, and the poor. Citizens gave the government low marks on managing the economy, creating jobs, and other indicators of economic performance.

COVID-19 and the subsequent collapse of international oil prices are further destabilizing Nigeria's macroeconomic balances, while pandemic-associated lockdown measures have affected the supply of basic services, with both direct and indirect costs for Nigerian households. School closures are likely to reduce the food intake of some 7 million children who live in poverty and are enrolled in the national school feeding program (World Bank, 2020b).

These realities make it more difficult, and at the same time more urgent, for the government to find economic strategies that will revive Nigerians' hopes for security and prosperity.

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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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