

Advison Lesotho



Dispatch No. 535 | 27 July 2022

## Basotho approach election with grim outlook on economy and democracy

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**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 535 | Libuseng Malephane**

### Summary

Lesotho is headed for a general election in October 2022, the eighth since the country's return to democratic rule in 1993. As of mid-July, 60 parties – some of them launched within the past few months – were registered with the Independent Electoral Commission (2022).

After the 1998 elections, which were violently contested (Pherudi & Barnard, 1998), Lesotho changed its electoral system from “first past the post” to a mixed member proportional system. In line with the literature on electoral systems (Norris, 2003; Curini & Martelli, 2009), this change has seen the number of parties entering the political arena and contesting elections increase steadily, from 11 in 1998 to 27 in 2017 (Independent Electoral Commission, 2022), while voter turnout has steadily decreased, from 72% in 1998 to 46% in 2017 (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2021). Since 2012, no political party in Lesotho has won the majority of parliamentary seats required to form a government.

A new Afrobarometer survey in Lesotho indicates that Basotho are approaching the election in a grim frame of mind. Most citizens say the country is going in the wrong direction, citing poor economic conditions and increasing corruption.

Majorities do not trust their political leaders and are critical of the performance of the current prime minister, members of Parliament (MPs), and community/urban councillors. More broadly, support for democracy, elections, and multiparty competition is weak, as more than seven in 10 citizens are dissatisfied with the way their democracy is working.

Only about half say they are likely to vote in the upcoming election. Among those willing to disclose a voting preference in a hypothetical election, the Democratic Congress (DC) has a substantial lead but falls short of a majority.

### 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. Eight rounds of surveys have been completed in up to 39 countries since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2022) are currently underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Lesotho, led by Advison Lesotho, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,200 citizens in February-March 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous standard surveys were conducted in Lesotho in 2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2020.

## Key findings

### ■ State of the country:

- Almost nine in 10 Basotho (86%) say the country is going in the wrong direction.
- Three-quarters of citizens (75%) rate both the country's economic condition and their personal living conditions as bad.
- Almost nine in 10 respondents (86%) say they went without a cash income at least once during the previous year, while more than two-thirds (68%) went without enough food, 60% without enough cooking fuel, 50% without medicines or medical treatment, and 49% without enough water.
- Eight in 10 Basotho (81%) say the level of corruption in the country increased during the past year.

### ■ Leadership concerns:

- While majorities say they trust the King (63%) and traditional leaders (53%) "somewhat" or "a lot," only about one in five citizens say the same for the prime minister (20%) and Parliament (18%).
- Majorities disapprove of the performance of the prime minister (76%), their MPs (76%), and their community/urban councillors (65%).

### ■ Attitudes toward democracy:

- Only half (49%) of Basotho say democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.
- Seven in 10 (69%) approve of a government ruled by the King, and 55% endorse one-party rule.
- More than half (54%) of Basotho prefer methods other than elections for choosing their leaders. Only 34% endorse multiparty competition.
- Only one-quarter (26%) of Basotho say they are "fairly satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their democracy.

### ■ 2022 general election:

- Half (49%) of respondents say they will "probably" or "definitely vote."
- Only 39% believe that the election will be "completely free and fair" or "free and fair with minor problems."
- Trust in the Independent Electoral Commission has declined over the past 10 years, from 53% in 2012 to 37% in 2022.
- Among respondents willing to declare a voting preference in a hypothetical election, the Democratic Congress (DC) leads the field with 42%. Nine parties get more than 0.5% of the vote.

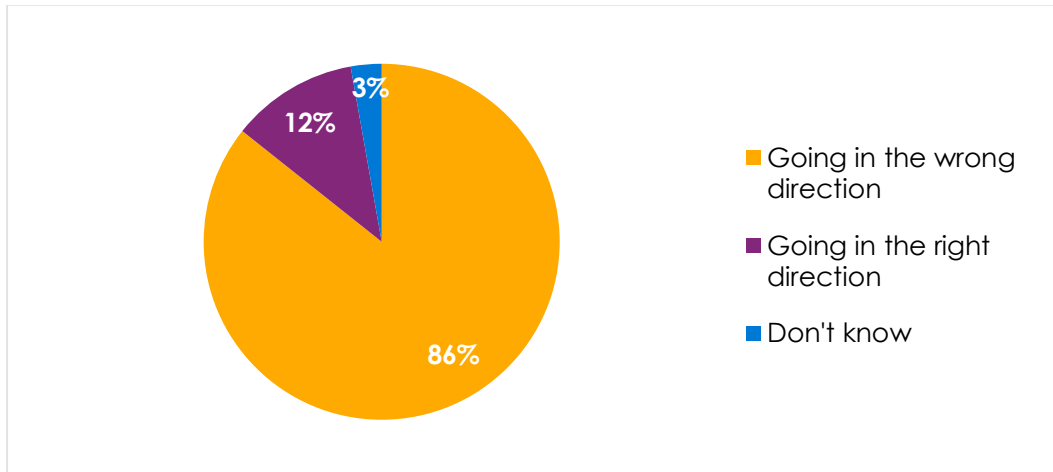
## The current state of affairs

### *Overall direction of the country*

Nearly nine in 10 Basotho (86%) say the country is going "in the wrong direction," while only 12% see it as going "in the right direction" (Figure 1).

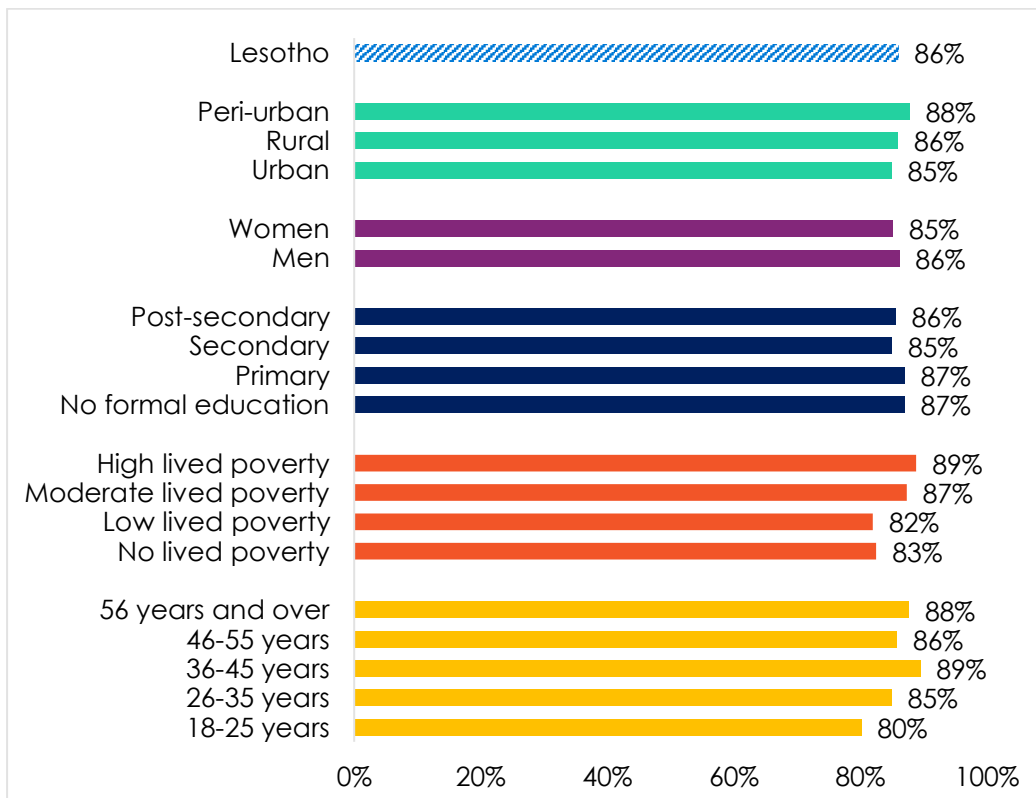
The view that the country is heading in the wrong direction is particularly common among poor citizens (87%-89% of those experiencing moderate to high lived poverty), and those aged 36 years and above (86%-89%) compared to their younger counterparts (Figure 2).

**Figure 1: Overall direction of the country | Lesotho | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:** Let's start with your general view about the current direction of our country. Some people might think the country is going in the wrong direction. Others may feel it is going in the right direction. So, let me ask you about the overall direction of the country: Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction?

**Figure 2: Country going in the wrong direction | by demographic group | Lesotho | 2022**



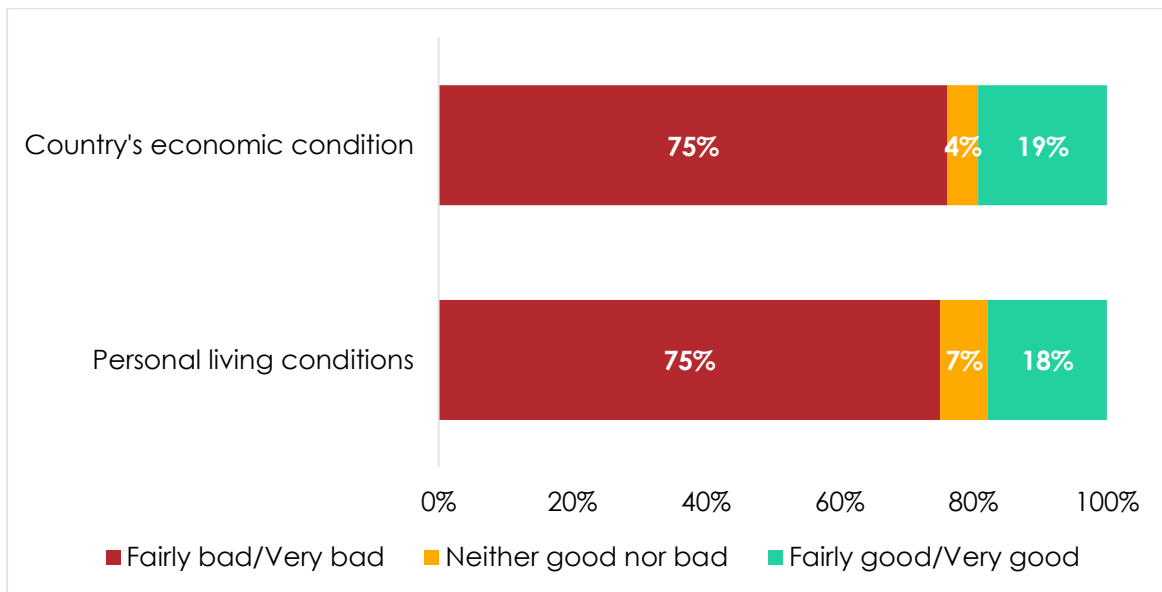
**Respondents were asked:** Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction? (% who say "going in the wrong direction").

*The state of the economy*

Three-quarters of respondents (75%) describe both the country's economic condition and their own personal living conditions as "fairly bad" or "very bad" (Figure 3).

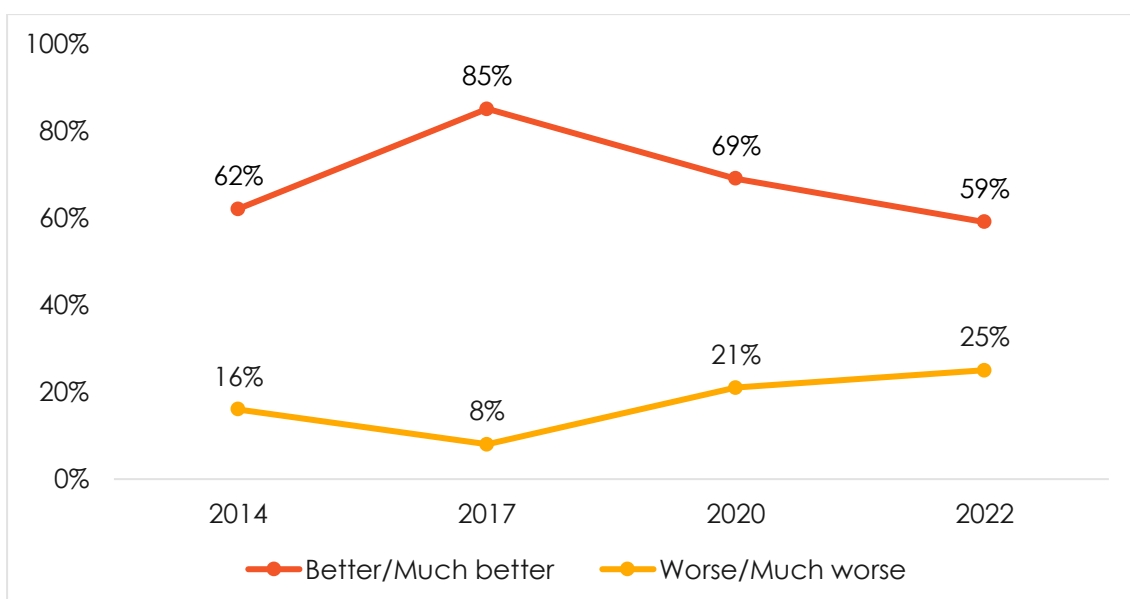
But six in 10 (59%) expect things to get better during the next year, although optimism is waning; in 2017, more than eight in 10 (85%) believed that the country's economic situation would soon get better (Figure 4).

**Figure 3: Country's economic condition and personal living conditions | Lesotho | 2022**



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

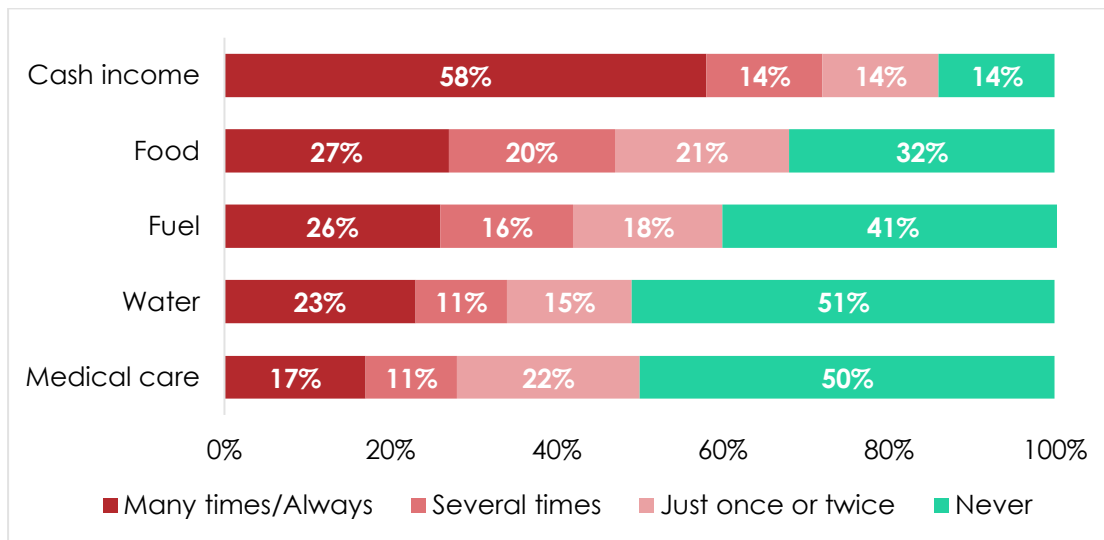
**Figure 4: Country's economic condition in 12 months' time | Lesotho | 2014-2022**



**Respondents were asked:** Looking ahead, do you expect economic conditions in this country to be better or worse in 12 months' time?

Citizens' economic assessments mirror their lived experience. Nearly nine in 10 respondents (86%) say they went without a cash income at least once during the previous year, including 58% who lacked an income "many times" or "always." More than two-thirds (68%) went without enough food at least once, while many suffered shortages of cooking fuel (60%), medicines or medical treatment (50%), and water (49%) (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Lived poverty | Lesotho | 2022**

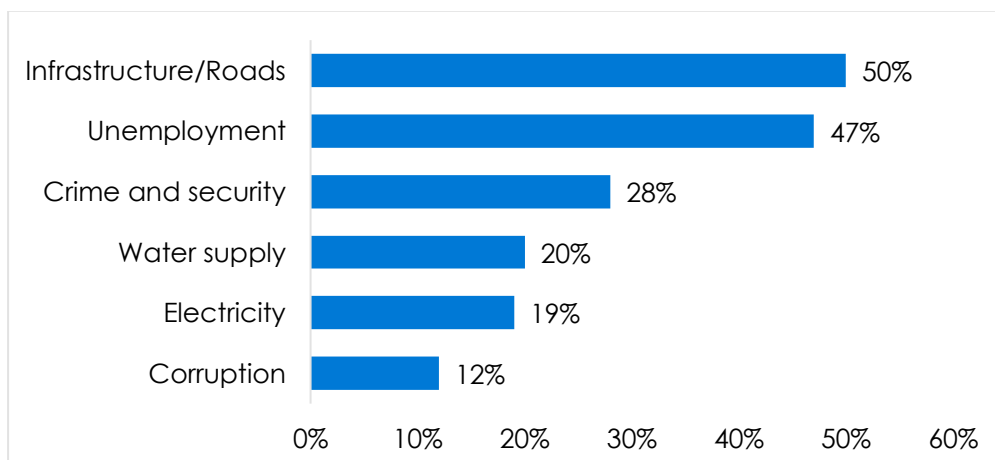


**Respondents were asked:** Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: Enough food to eat? Enough clean water for home use? Medicines and medical treatment? Enough fuel to cook your food? A cash income?

### Most important problems

When asked what they consider the most important problems that their government should address, Basotho most frequently point to infrastructure/roads (cited by 50% of respondents as one of their top three priorities) and unemployment (47%). Crime and security (28%), water supply (20%), electricity (19%), and corruption (12%) come next on citizens' list of priorities for government action (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Most important problems | Lesotho | 2022**

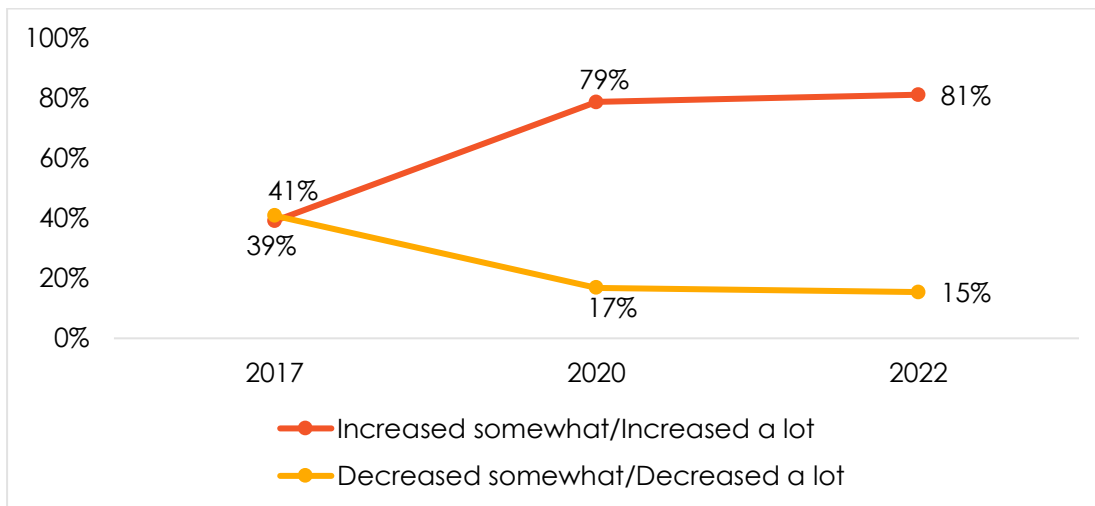


**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Respondents could give up to three answers. Figure shows % citing each problem among their three priorities.)

### Level of corruption

Basotho are not persuaded that the level of corruption in the country is decreasing, despite political leaders' promises during the last election campaign to deal with the problem. Between 2017 and 2022, the proportion of citizens who say the level of corruption "increased somewhat" or "increased a lot" during the previous year has risen by 40 percentage points, from 41% to 81% (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Has corruption increased or decreased? | Lesotho | 2017–2022**



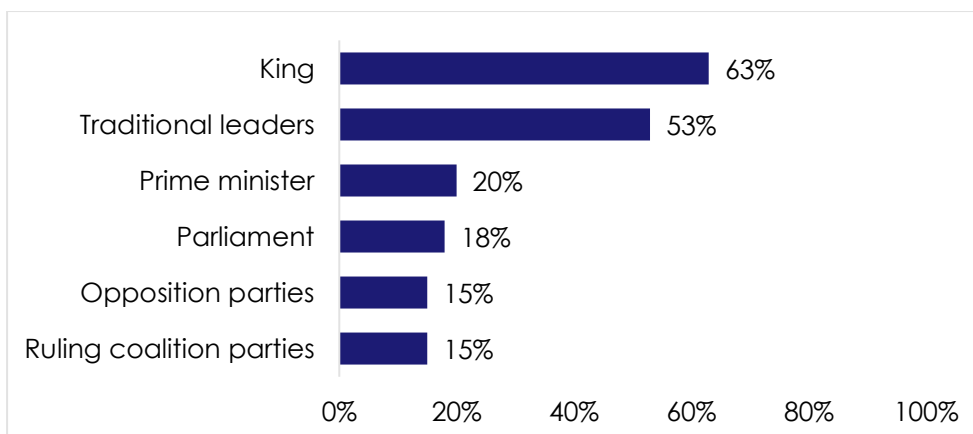
**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, over the past year, has the level of corruption in this country increased, decreased, or stayed the same?

### Leadership issues

In addition to concerns about the economy and corruption, Basotho express little trust in the political leadership, a factor that may contribute to declining voter turnouts.

Only the King (63%) and traditional leaders (53%) enjoy the trust of a majority of Basotho. A mere two in 10 say they trust the prime minister (20%) and Parliament (18%) "somewhat" or "a lot," and even fewer trust ruling coalition parties (15%) and opposition parties (15%) (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Trust in leadership structures | Lesotho | 2022**

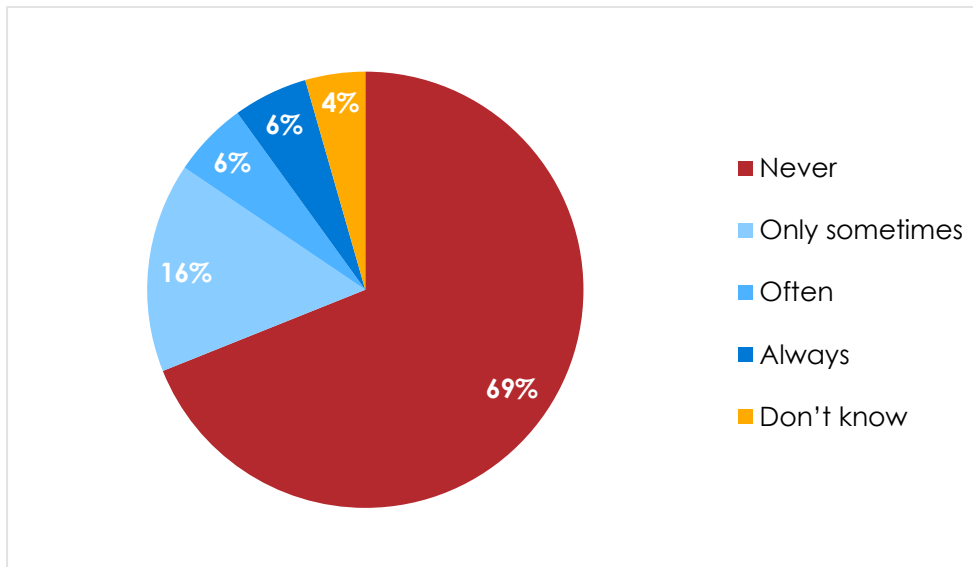


**Respondents were asked:** How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

Moreover, most citizens doubt that their elected representatives are listening to their concerns. Seven in 10 respondents (69%) say that members of Parliament “never” try to listen to what people have to say, while only 28% believe that they “sometimes” (16%), “often” (6%) or “always” (6%) listen (Figure 9).

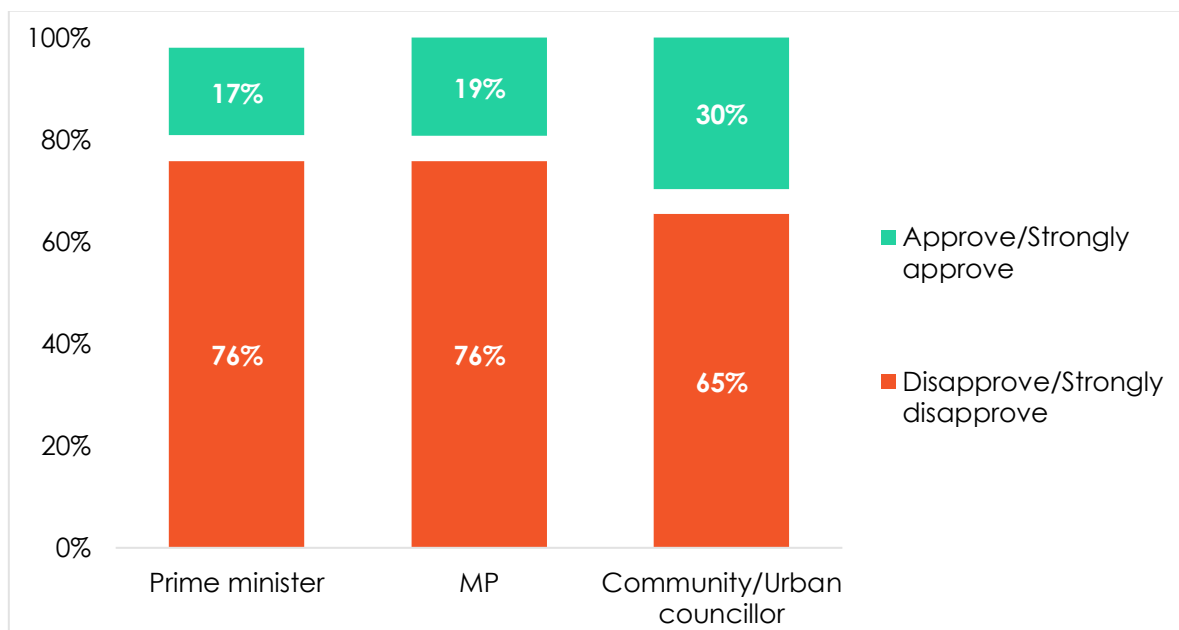
And strong majorities “disapprove” or “strongly disapprove” of the performance of the prime minister (76%), their members of Parliament (76%), and their community/urban councillors (65%) (Figure 10).

**Figure 9: Do members of Parliament listen to the people?** | Lesotho | 2022



**Respondents were asked:** How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what ordinary people have to say: Members of Parliament?

**Figure 10: Leadership performance** | Lesotho | 2022



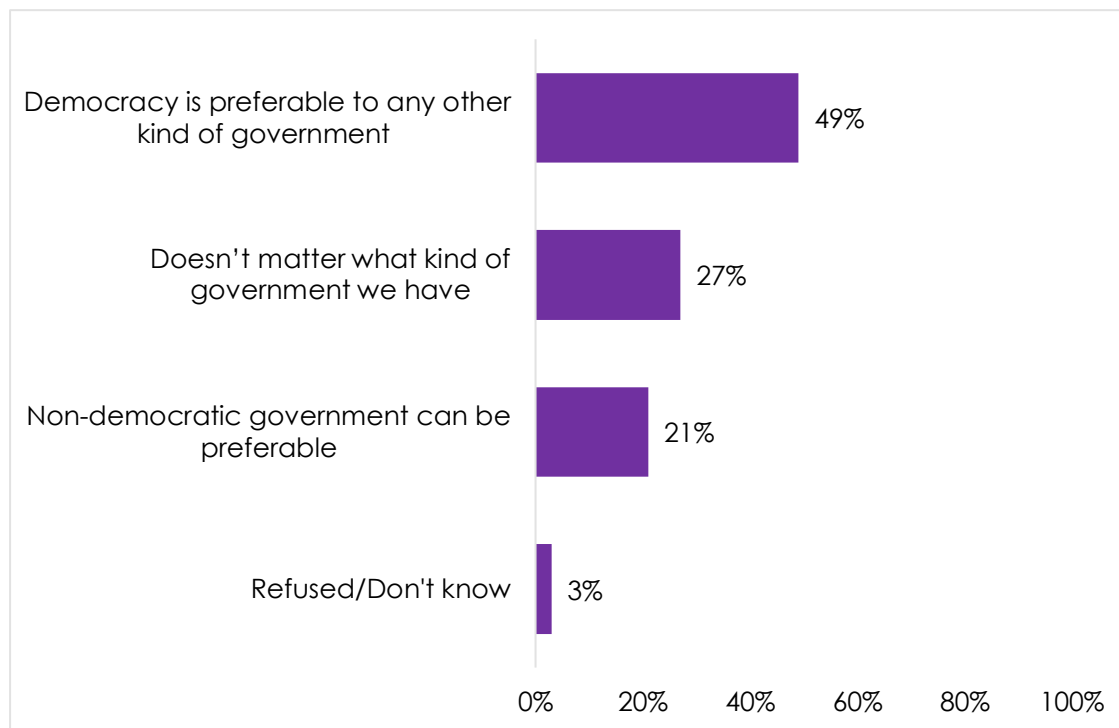
**Respondents were asked:** Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past 12 months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Prime Minister Moeketsi Majoro? Your member of Parliament? Your community or urban councillor?

## Attitudes toward democracy and politics

### Support for democracy

While Lesotho has a multiparty parliamentary democratic system within a constitutional monarchy, only half (49%) of Basotho say democracy is preferable to any other kind of government. One in five (21%) say that in some circumstances, a non-democratic government would be preferable, while 27% say it does not matter what kind of government they have (Figure 11).

**Figure 11: Support for democracy** | Lesotho | 2022



**Respondents were asked:** Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?

Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.

Statement 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.

Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.

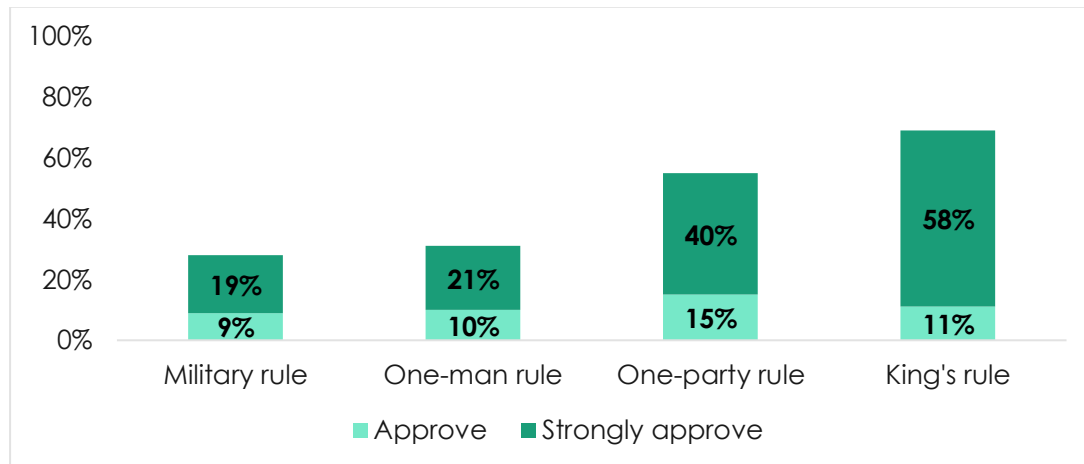
Some non-democratic forms of government enjoy considerable support in Lesotho (Figure 12): About seven in 10 citizens (69%) approve of a government ruled by the King, including 58% who "strongly approve" of this idea.

A majority (55%) also endorse rule by a single political party, while support for one-man rule (31%) and military rule (28%) is somewhat weaker.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Due to rounding, percentages for combined categories may differ by 1 percentage point from the sum of sub-categories (e.g. for one-man rule, 21% "strongly approve" and 10% "approve" sum to 32%).



**Figure 11: Approval of non-democratic forms of government | Lesotho | 2022**



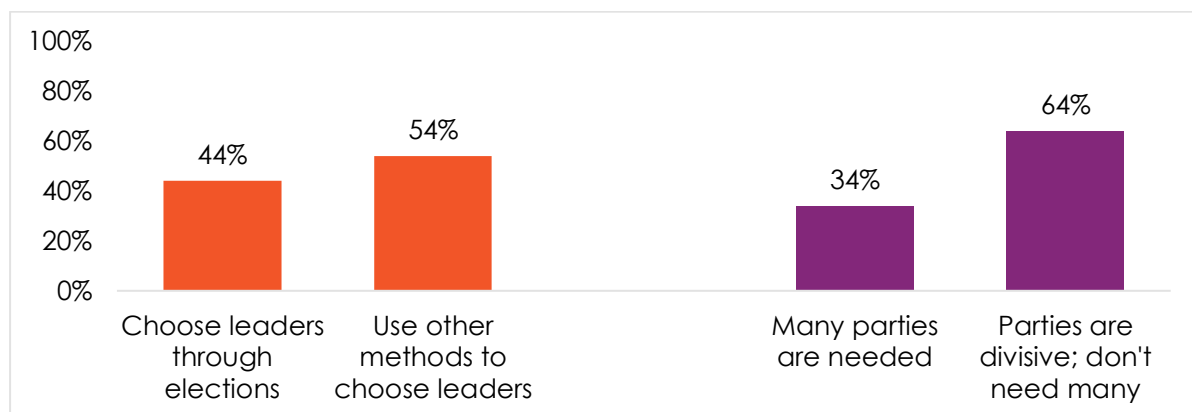
**Respondents were asked:** There are many ways to govern a country. Would you disapprove or approve of the following alternatives:

- Only one political party is allowed to stand for election and hold office?
- The army comes in to govern the country?
- Elections and Parliament are abolished so that the prime minister can decide everything?
- Elections and Parliament are abolished so that the King can govern the country?

In line with these reservations about democracy, only 44% of Basotho think elections are the best way to choose their leaders, while 54% would prefer other methods (Figure 13).

Support for multiparty competition is even weaker: Only one-third (34%) of citizens believe that many political parties are needed to make sure that voters have real choices, while 64% see political parties as divisive and think Lesotho doesn't need many of them.

**Figure 13: Elections and political parties for choosing leaders | Lesotho | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:**

Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open, and honest elections.  
 Statement 2: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country's leaders.

Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: Political parties create division and confusion; it is therefore unnecessary to have many political parties in Lesotho.

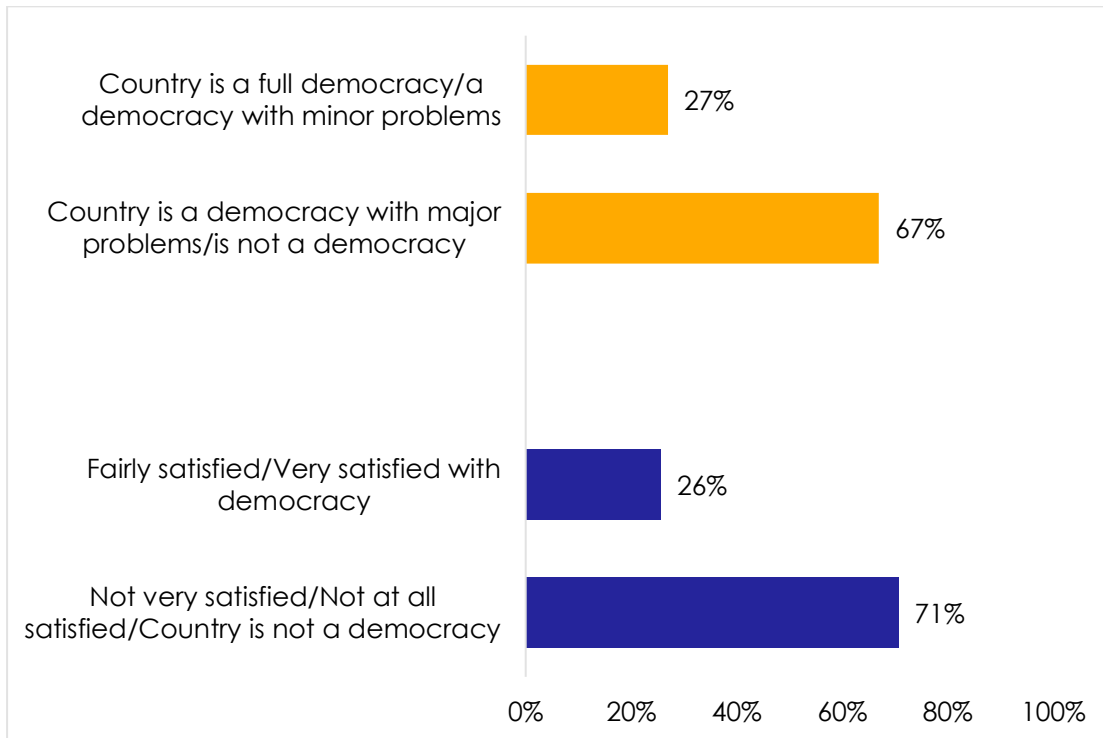
Statement 2: Many political parties are needed to make sure that Basotho have real choices in who governs them.

(% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)

*Perceived supply of democracy*

Relatively weak support for democracy and elections goes hand in hand with citizens' assessments of their country's democracy: Only about one-quarter (26%) of respondents consider Lesotho "a full democracy" or "a democracy with minor problems," and the same proportion say they are "fairly satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the way democracy works in their country (Figure 14).

**Figure 14: Extent of and satisfaction with democracy | Lesotho | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:** *In your opinion, how much of a democracy is Lesotho today? Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Lesotho?*

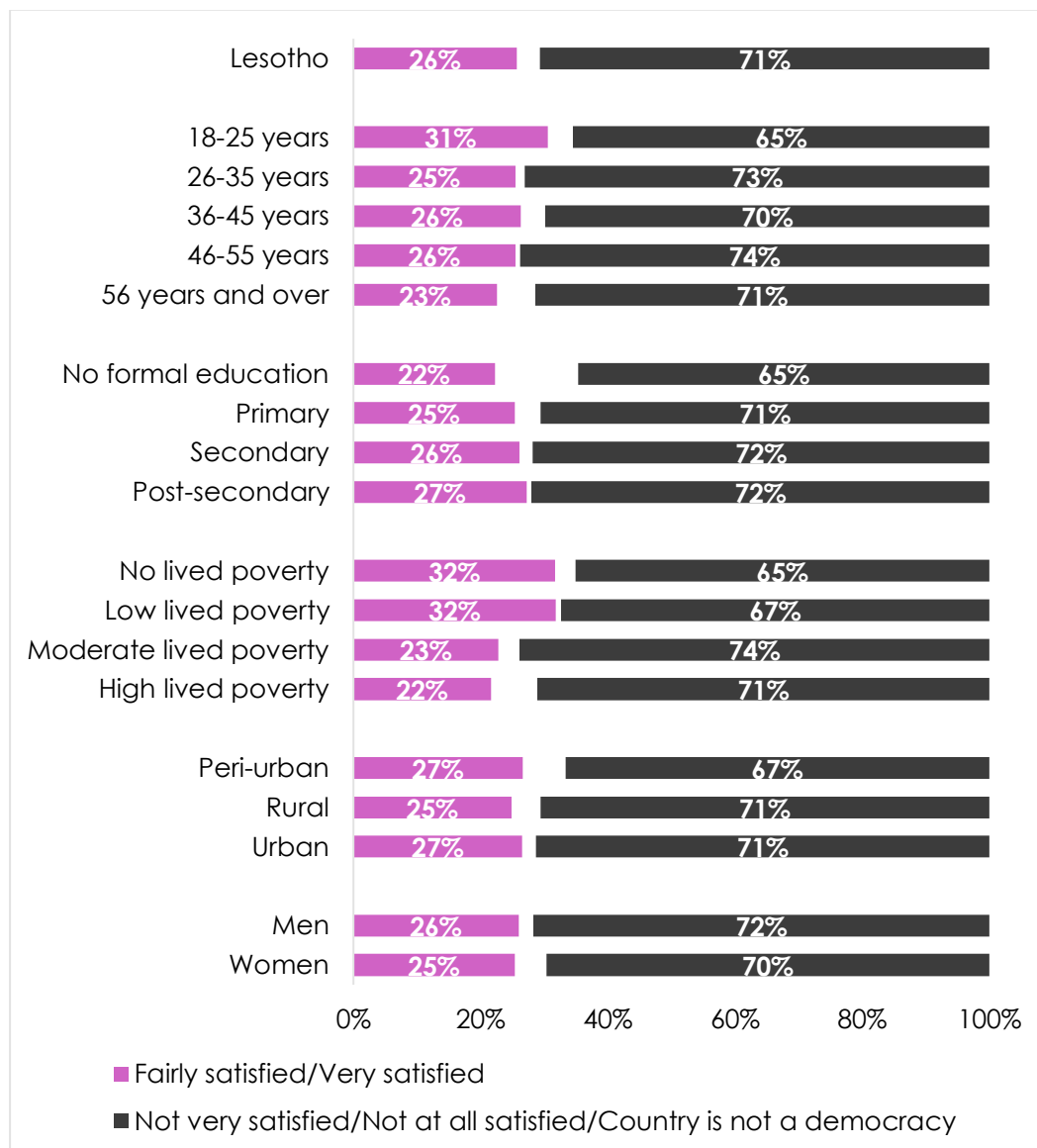
Dissatisfaction with the country's democracy runs high across key demographic groups, with slightly less negative assessments offered by 18- to 25-year-olds (65%), citizens with no formal education (65%), and those experiencing no or low lived poverty (65%-67%) (Figure 15).

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**Figure 15: Satisfaction with democracy** | by demographic group | Lesotho | 2022



**Respondents were asked:** Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Lesotho?

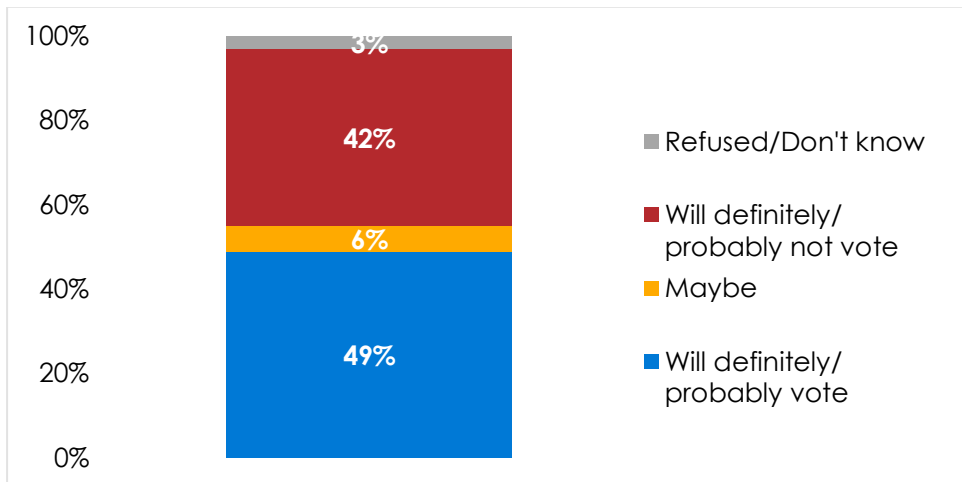
## General election 2022

### Who is going to vote?

Basotho are about evenly split as to whether they will vote in the upcoming general election: 49% say they will “probably” or “definitely” vote, while 42% say they will “probably” or “definitely” not go to the polls (Figure 16).

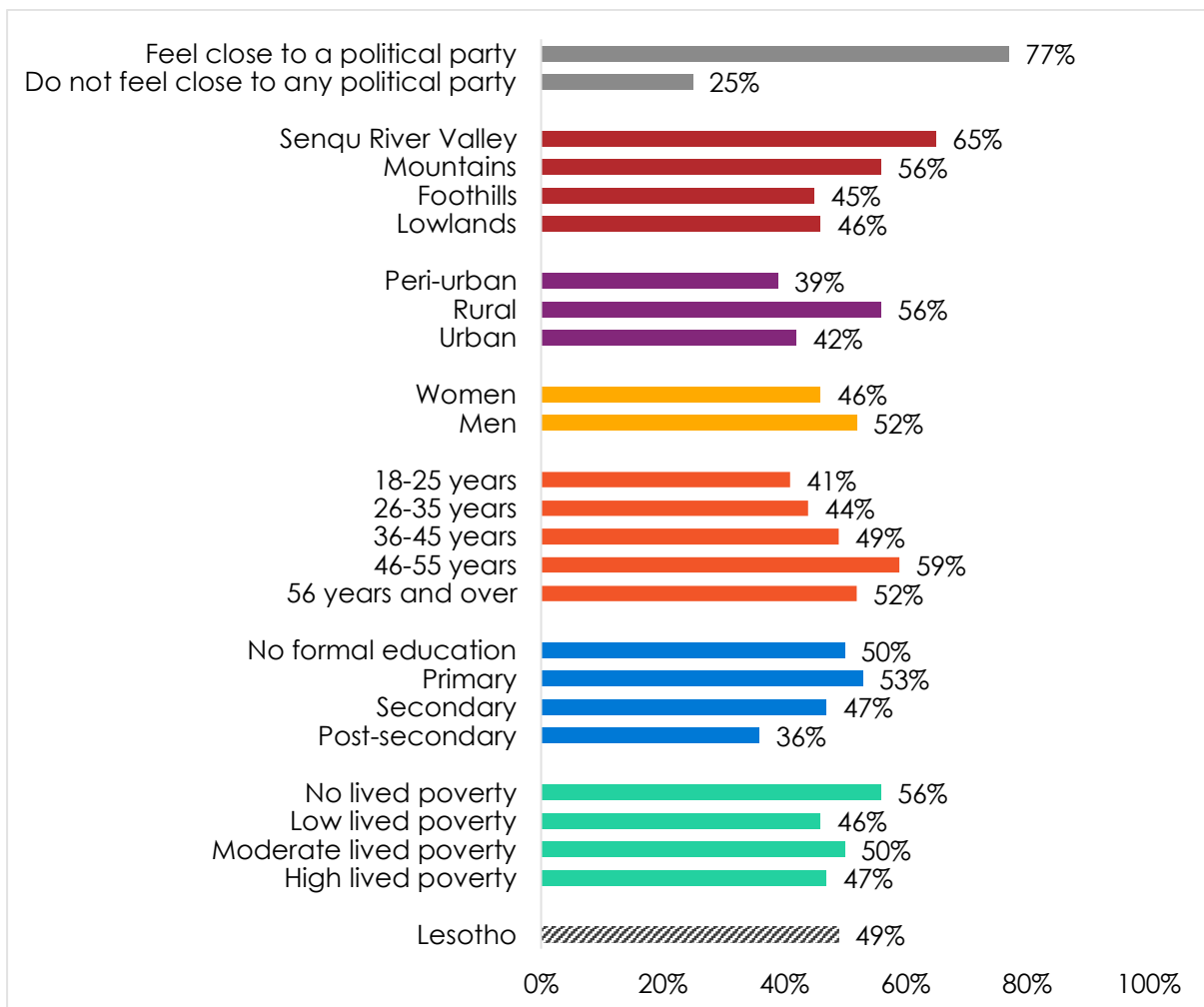
Intentions regarding whether to vote vary widely by socio-demographic characteristics (Figure 17). The share of respondents who say they are likely to vote is relatively high among those who “feel close to” a political party (77%), citizens residing in the Senqu River Valley (65%) and the mountains (56%), rural residents (56%), men (52%), those who have a primary education or less (50%-53%), and the economically better off (56%).

**Figure 16: Likelihood of voting in the upcoming general election | Lesotho | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:** How likely are you to vote in the forthcoming general elections in 2022?

**Figure 17: Likelihood of voting in the upcoming general election | by demographic group | Lesotho | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:** How likely are you to vote in the forthcoming general elections in 2022? (% who say they "will probably vote" or "will definitely vote")

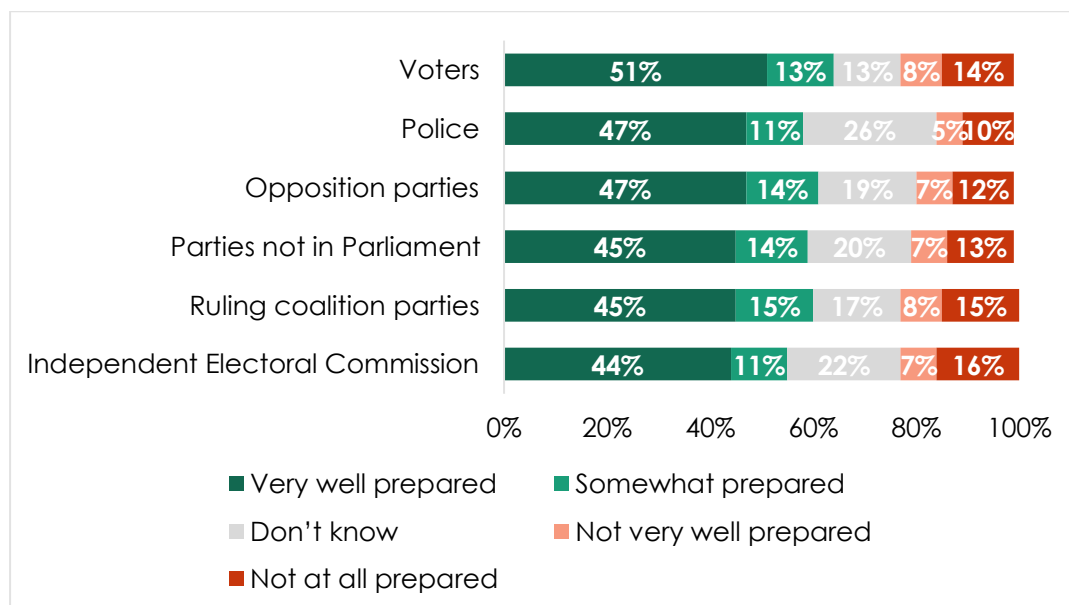
*How prepared is Lesotho for the 2022 general election?*

Considering the careful preparations required to produce a credible election result that all parties will accept, how ready is Lesotho for the 2022 general election?

Almost two-thirds (64%) of respondents think the voters are well prepared, including 51% who consider them “very well prepared” (Figure 18). Majorities also say the police and political parties are at least “somewhat prepared.” The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) gets the lowest preparedness rating (55%) among election actors that the survey asked about.

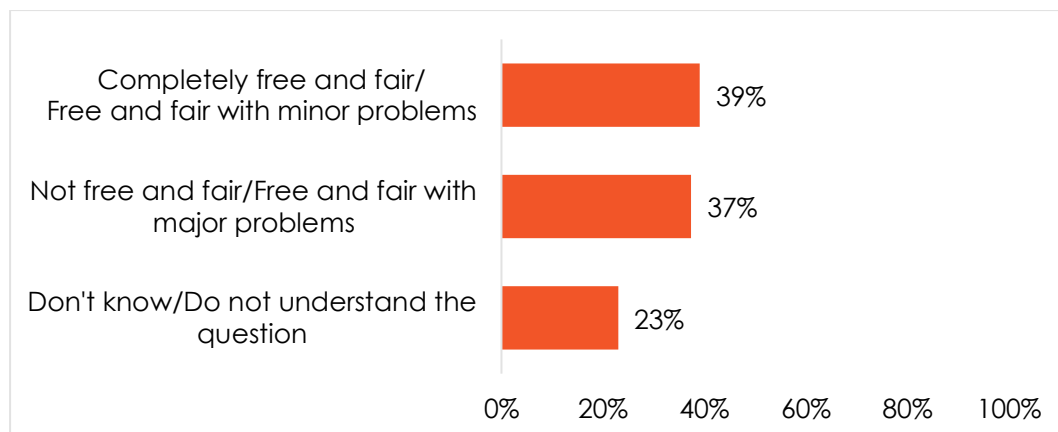
In any case, expectations regarding the quality of the election are not overly high: Only four in 10 respondents (39%) expect the election to be “completely free and fair” or “free and fair with minor problems.” About the same proportion (37%) think it will be “free and fair but with major problems” or “not free and fair” (Figure 19).

**Figure 18: How prepared is Lesotho for the election? | Lesotho | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:** *In your opinion, how prepared are the following institutions for the forthcoming general elections in 2022?*

**Figure 19: Will the election be free and fair? | Lesotho | 2022**



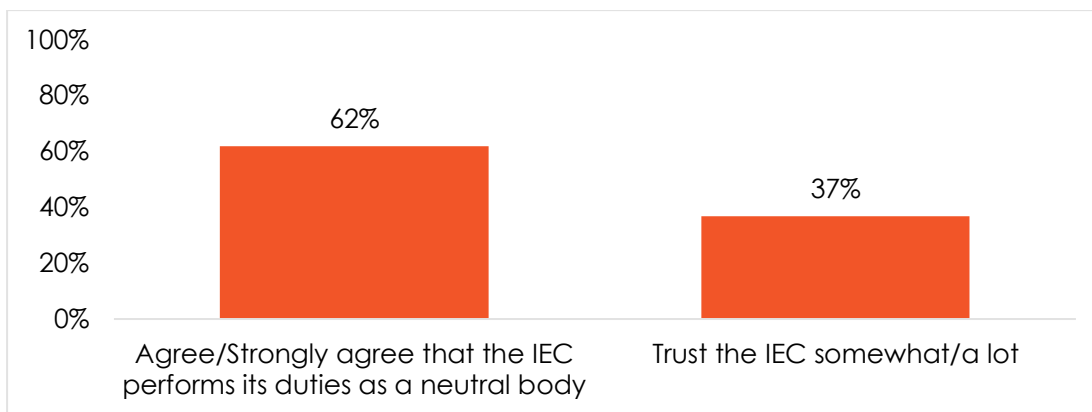
**Respondents were asked:** *On the whole, do you think the forthcoming general elections in 2022 will be free and fair?*

### Perceptions of the IEC

Given the critical role of the IEC in the election, how do Basotho see their chief election management body?

More than six in 10 respondents (62%) say the IEC performs its duties as a neutral body rather than with favouritism. However, only 37% trust it “somewhat” or “a lot” (Figure 20). Popular trust in the IEC has eroded over the past decade, dropping from 53% in 2012 and 56% in 2014 to its current level of 37% (Figure 21).

**Figure 20: Perceptions of the IEC | Lesotho | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:**

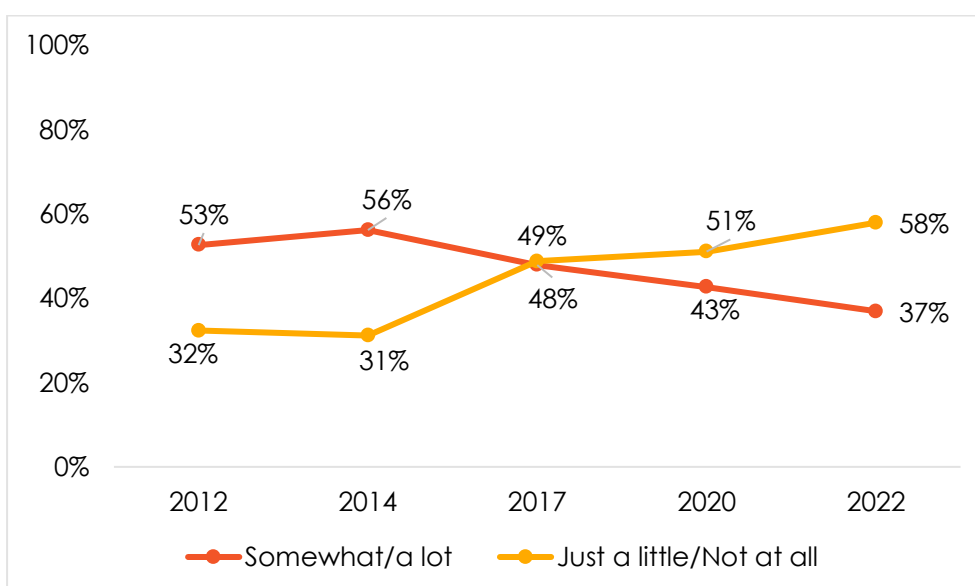
Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: The Independent Electoral Commission or IEC performs its duties as a neutral body guided only by law.

Statement 2: The Independent Electoral Commission or IEC makes decisions that favour particular people, parties, or interests.

How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The Independent Electoral Commission or IEC? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

**Figure 21: Trust in the IEC | Lesotho | 2012-2022**



**Respondents were asked:** How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The Independent Electoral Commission or IEC?

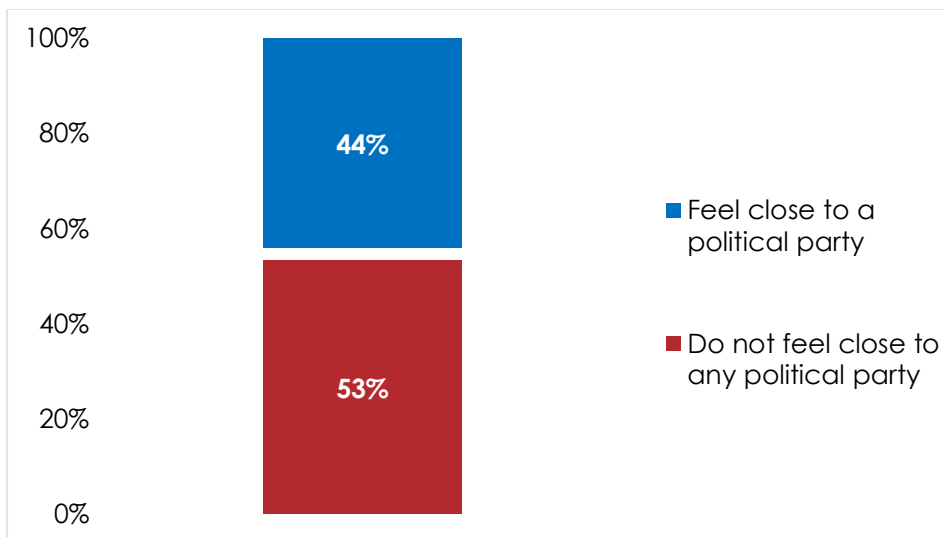
*Performance of political parties*

When it comes to identification with political parties, more than half (53%) of Basotho say they do not “feel close to” any party, while 44% say they do (Figure 22).

Out of all respondents, 16% say they feel close to the Democratic Congress (DC) and 7% to the All Basotho Convention (ABC) (Figure 23). These two parties are currently in the coalition government.

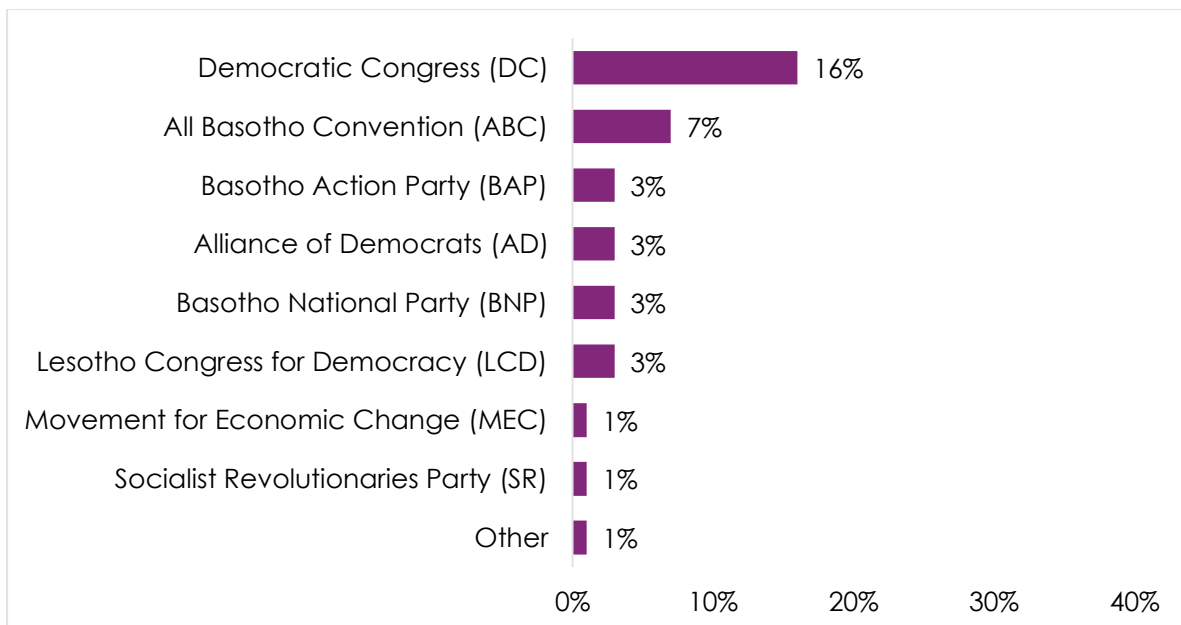
The Basotho Action Party (BAP), Alliance of Democrats (AD), Basotho National Party (BNP), and Lesotho Congress for Democracy (LCD) each draw 3%.

**Figure 22: Feel close to a political party? | Lesotho | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:** Do you feel close to any particular political party?

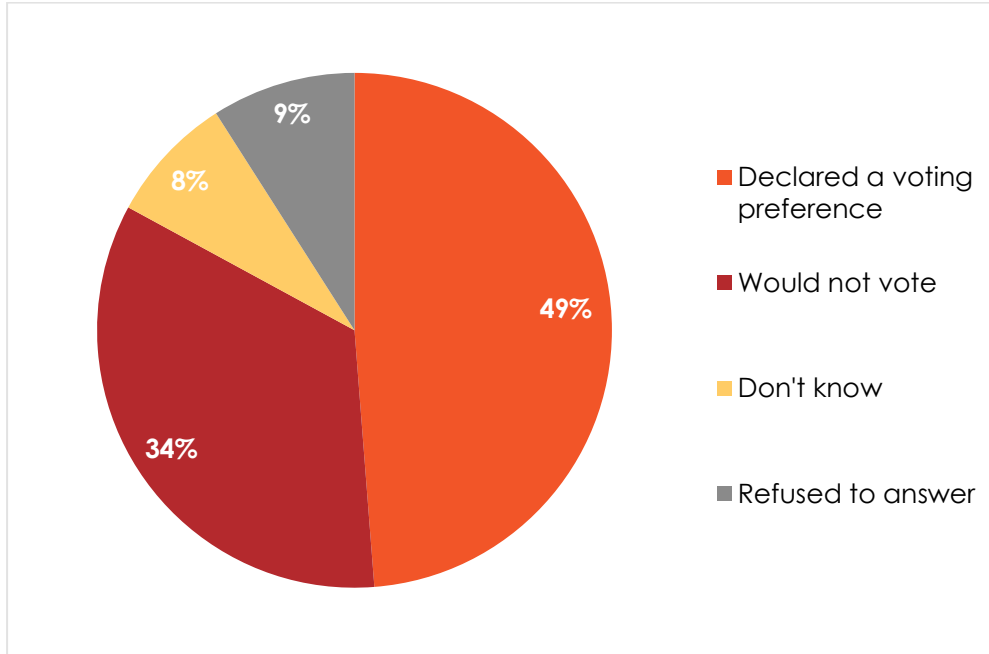
**Figure 23: Feel close to which political party? | Lesotho | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:** Do you feel close to any particular political party? [If yes:] Which party is that? (Figure shows % of all respondents identifying with each party.)

Afrobarometer also asked respondents, “If general elections were held tomorrow, which party would you vote for?” Half (49%) of respondents declared a voting preference, while 34% said they would not vote, 8% said they didn't know which party they would vote for, and 9% refused to answer the question (Figure 24).

**Figure 24: Would you vote if elections were held tomorrow? | Lesotho | 2022**



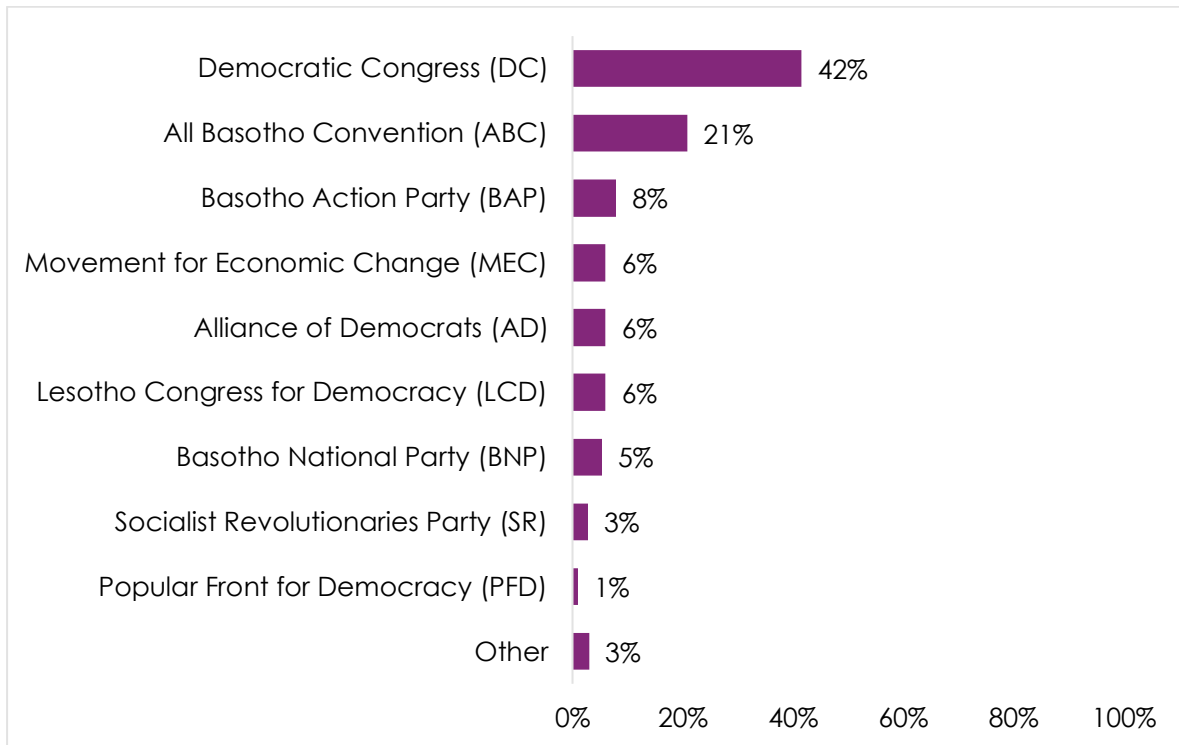
**Respondents were asked:** *If general elections were held tomorrow, which party would you vote for?*

Considering only those respondents who declared a voting preference in a hypothetical election – 49% of all respondents – the DC came out on top with 42%, followed by the ABC (21%), and the BAP (8%) (Figure 25). Nine parties were selected by more than 0.5% of the sample, which in an election would meet the threshold for allocation of proportional seats set by the National Reforms Authority’s 11<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution Bill, 2022. The National Assembly Electoral (Amendment) Bill recently presented to Parliament proposes a threshold of 0.4% (Sebusi, 2022).

In a real election, these results would again lead to a coalition government. But given the large proportion of undeclared potential voters and non-voters, as well as the evolving political landscape, these findings do not form the basis for a projection regarding the October election.



**Figure 25: Which party would you vote for in a hypothetical election?** | respondents who declared a voting preference | Lesotho | 2022



**Respondents were asked:** *If general elections were held tomorrow, which party would you vote for? (Note: Respondents who say they “would not vote” or “don’t know,” or who refused to answer the question, are excluded.)*

### Conclusion

Basotho are not happy about the current state of affairs – both economically and politically – in their country. While the upcoming election could be a chance to bring about change, many citizens appear to be giving up hope of improving their lives through the ballot box.

Political parties preparing their election manifestos would do well to take note of citizens’ concerns. It will require credible, sustained, and responsive political leadership to restore the citizenry’s confidence in democracy.

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