



Dispatch No. 791 | 28 March 2024

# Rising perceptions of corruption, weak trust, and low approval ratings mark Botswana assessments of their president

**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 791 | Batlang Seabo and Wilford Molefe**

## Summary

Botswana continues to fare relatively well in prominent corruption and good-governance indices. The latest Corruption Perceptions Index places Botswana in third position in Africa, 39<sup>th</sup> in the world (Transparency International, 2023). In terms of overall governance, Botswana ranks fifth in the Ibrahim Index of Good Governance (Mo Ibrahim Foundation, 2022).

But since President Mokgweetsi Masisi assumed office in 2018, critics have voiced concerns about corruption in his government, including allegations of nepotism involving the awarding of large tenders to a company owned by the president's sister (Pheage, 2022; Africa Press, 2022). The president has also been accused of neglecting Parliament (Motlhoka, 2024) and of compromising judicial independence by interfering in a tribal land dispute, a charge he has denied (Mathala, 2023; Mlilo, 2022).

The latest Afrobarometer survey shows that a growing share of Botswana see officials in the president's office as corrupt. Most citizens say the president must be accountable to Parliament and obey the country's laws and courts, even if he thinks they are wrong.

Ahead of presidential elections in 2024, strong majorities express little or no trust in the incumbent and disapprove of the way he has performed his job.

## 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. Nine rounds of surveys have been completed in up to 42 countries since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2023) cover 39 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Botswana, led by Star Awards, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,200 adult Botswana in July-August 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 surveys in Botswana were conducted in 1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2019.

## Key findings

- About eight in 10 Botswana (79%) say at least "some" officials in the president's office are involved in corruption, including 50% who say "most" or "all" of them are corrupt.

- The proportion of citizens who perceive most/all officials in the Presidency as corrupt has almost quadrupled over the past decade.
- Three-quarters (76%) of citizens say the president should be accountable to Parliament, and more than eight in 10 (84%) want their president to be bound by laws and decisions of the courts, even if he thinks they are wrong.
  - In practice, slim majorities say the president “rarely” or “never” ignores Parliament (55%) and the courts (56%), but about three in 10 citizens disagree.
- About seven in 10 Batswana (69%) say they trust the president “just a little” or “not at all,” and an equal proportion (69%) disapprove of the president’s job performance over the previous 12 months.
  - Poor citizens are particularly likely to distrust the president and disapprove of the way he has done his job.

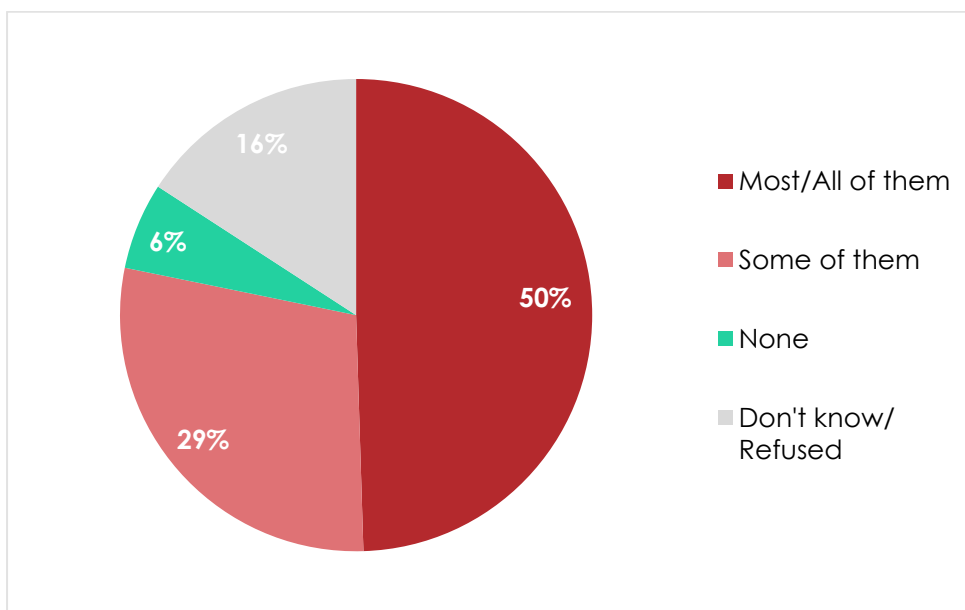
### Perceived corruption in the Presidency

Nearly eight in 10 Batswana (79%) think that at least “some” officials in the president’s office are corrupt, including fully half (50%) who say that “most of them” or “all of them” are involved in corruption (Figure 1). Only 6% of citizens perceive no corruption in the Presidency, while 16% say they “don’t know” or declined to offer an opinion.

The share of Batswana who see most/all officials in the Presidency as corrupt has almost quadrupled over the past decade, from 13% in 2012 to 50% in 2022 (Figure 2).

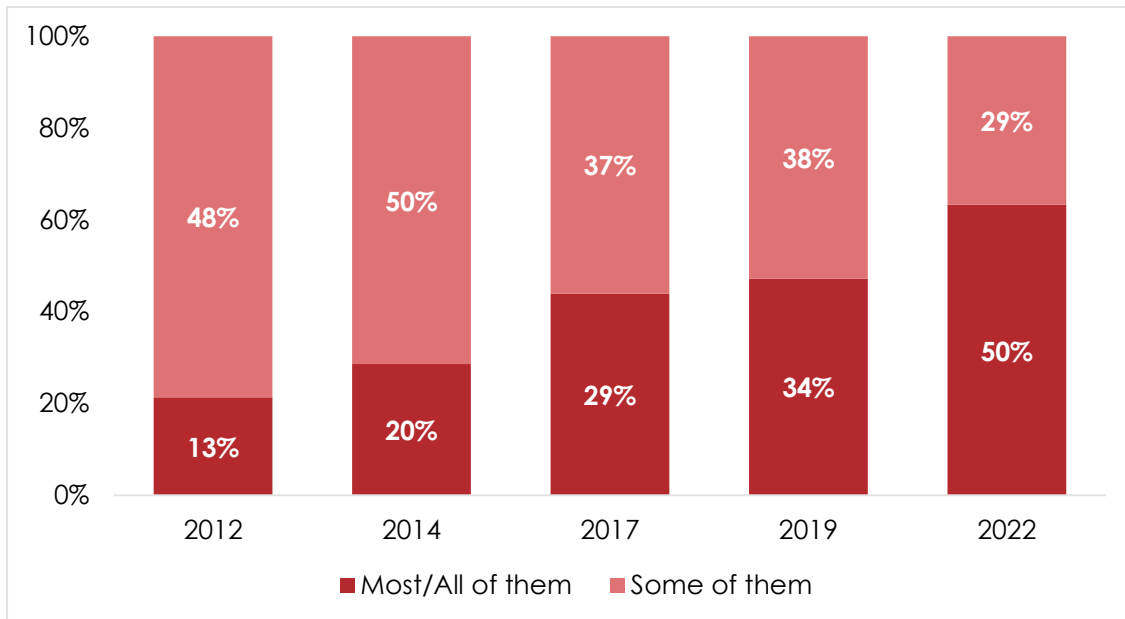
Perceptions that at least “some” officials in the Presidency are corrupt are particularly high among younger citizens (82%-86%), those with secondary (82%) or post-secondary (89%) education, men (84%) and urban residents (83%) (Figure 3).

**Figure 1: Perceived corruption in the Presidency | Botswana | 2022**



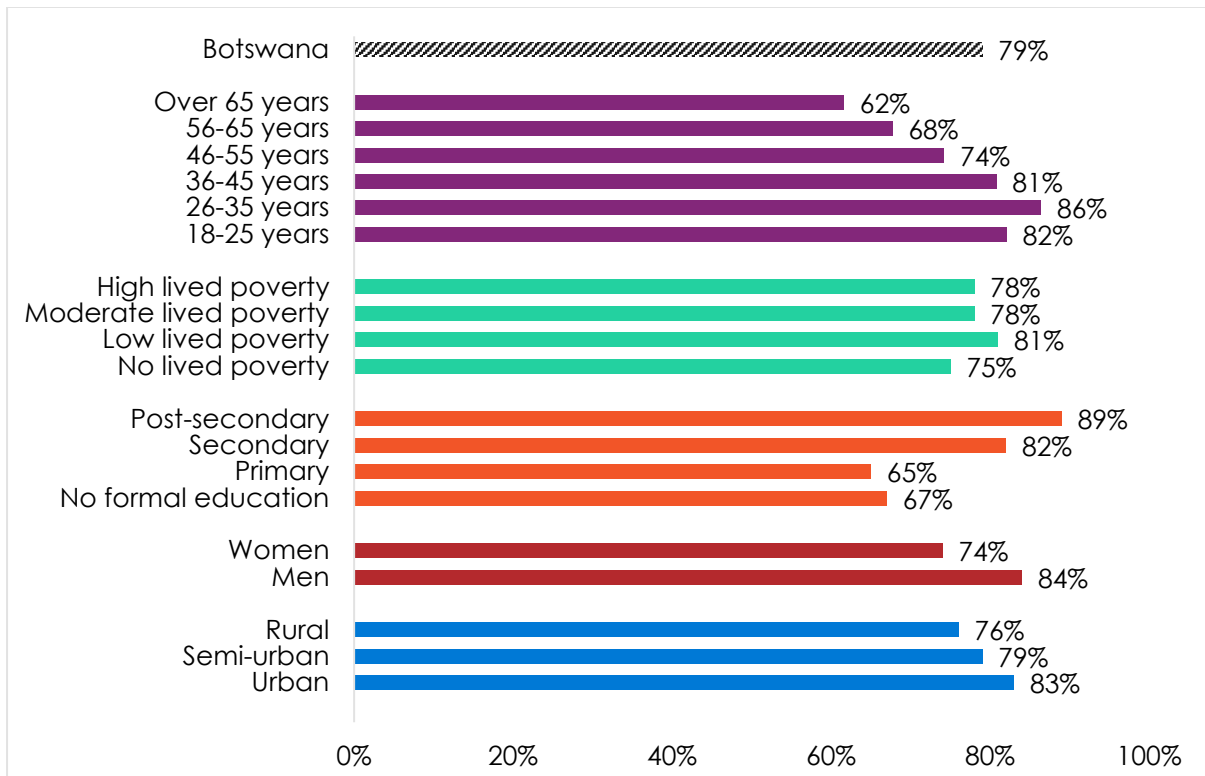
**Respondents were asked:** How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The president and officials in his office?

**Figure 2: Perceived corruption in the Presidency | Botswana | 2012-2022**



**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 president and officials in his office?

**Figure 3: Perceived corruption in the Presidency | by demographic group | Botswana | 2022**



**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 president and officials in his office? (% who say "some of them," "most of them," or "all of them")

## Accountability

Most Botswana want their president to be accountable to Parliament and to respect the country's laws and courts.

Three-quarters (76%) of respondents say the president should give a regular accounting to Parliament of how his government spends taxpayers' money. Only 22% believe that the president need not waste his time justifying his actions (Figure 4).

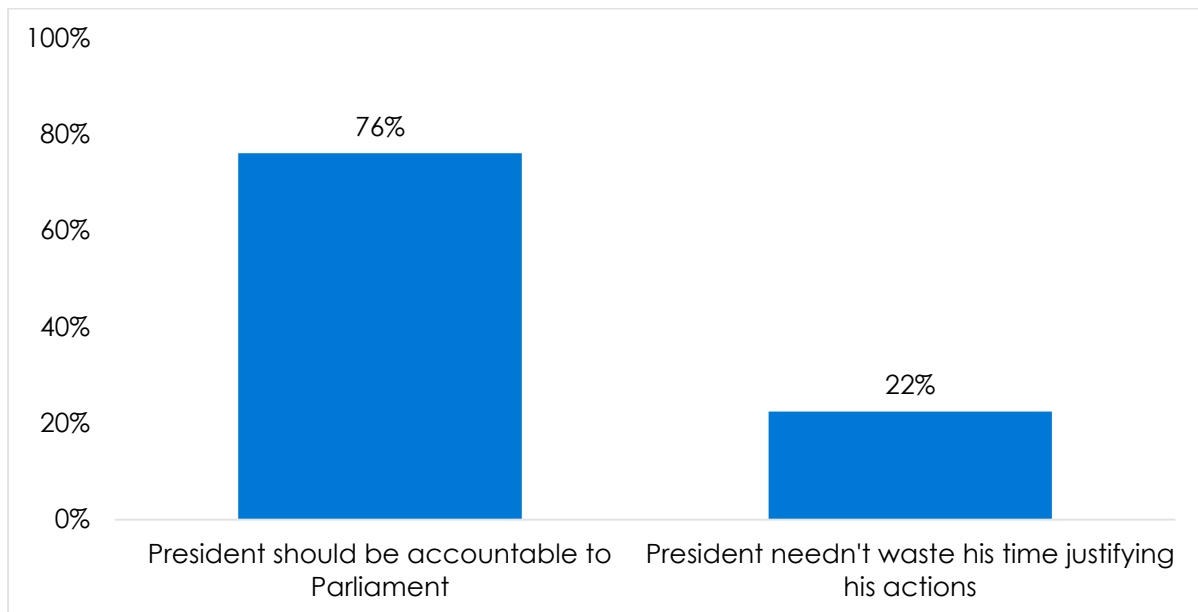
Young citizens (70% of those aged 18-25 years) and respondents with no formal education (70%) are least likely to demand accountability from the president (Figure 5).

Over the past decade, support for the view that the president should account to Parliament has fluctuated, dipping to 65% in 2014 and climbing to a peak of 86% in 2019 before dropping back to 76% (Figure 6).

In practice, a slim majority (55%) of respondents say the president "rarely" or "never" ignores Parliament and does as he pleases, while one-third (33%) say he "often" or "always" does so (Figure 7).

The perception that the president "often" or "always" ignores Parliament is particularly common among the poorest respondents<sup>1</sup> (46%) (Figure 8).

**Figure 4: Should the president be accountable to Parliament? | Botswana | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

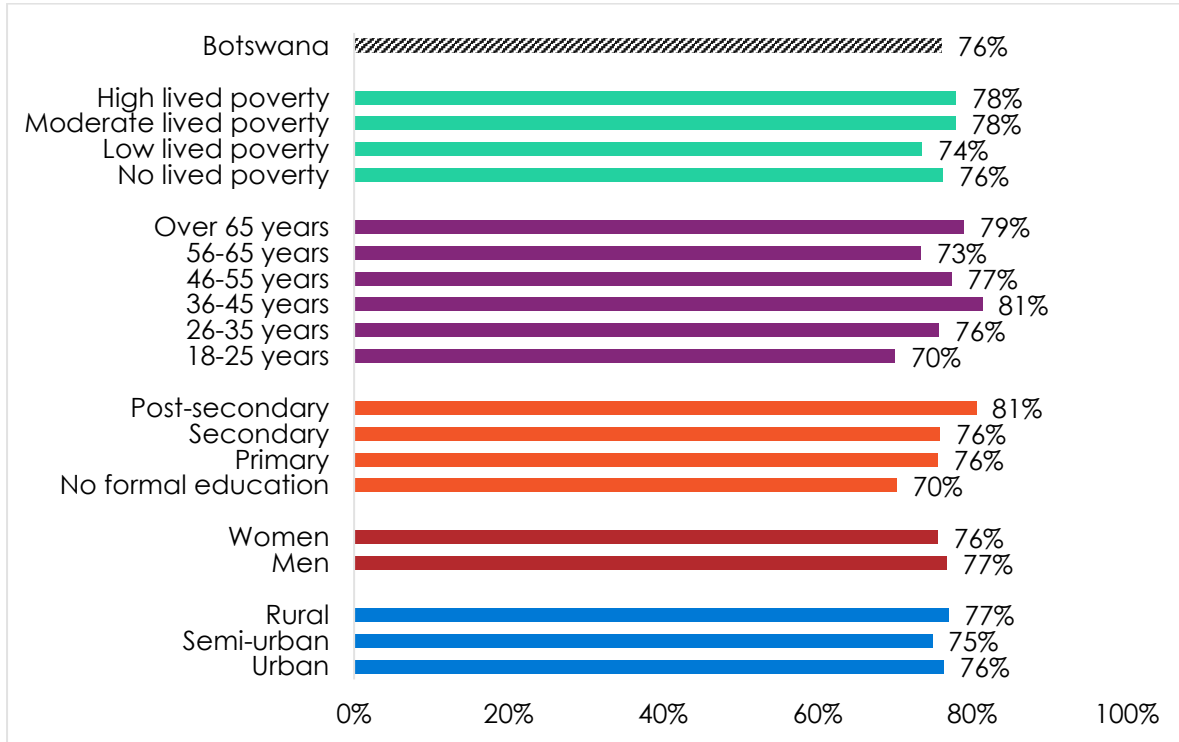
Statement 1: Parliament should ensure that the president explains to it on a regular basis how his government spends taxpayers' money.

Statement 2: The president should be able to devote his full attention to developing the country rather than wasting time justifying his actions.

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

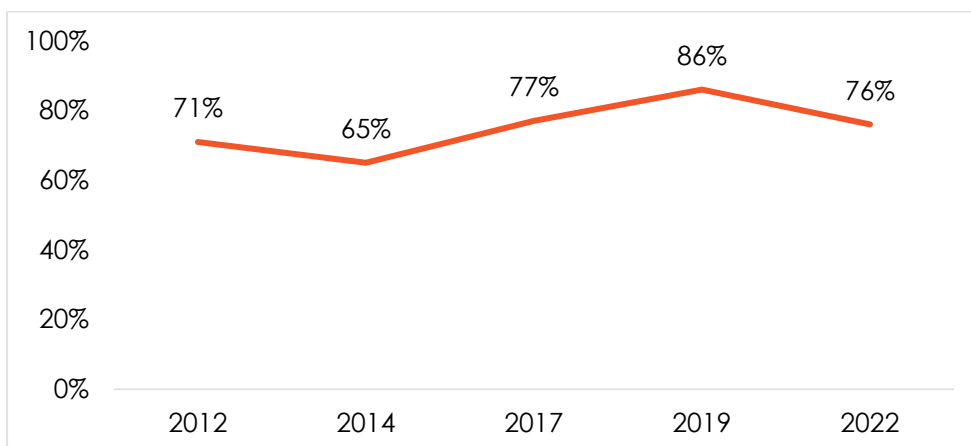
<sup>1</sup> Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes and Patel (2022).

**Figure 5: President should be accountable to Parliament | by demographic group | Botswana | 2022**



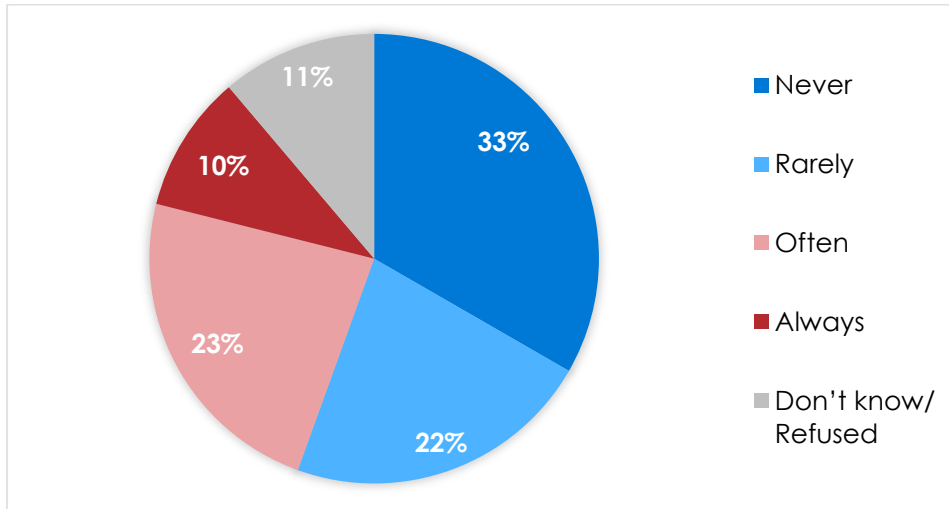
**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: Parliament should ensure that the president explains to it on a regular basis how his government spends taxpayers' money.  
 Statement 2: The president should be able to devote his full attention to developing the country rather than wasting time justifying his actions.  
 (% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with Statement 1)

**Figure 6: President should be accountable to Parliament | Botswana | 2012-2022**



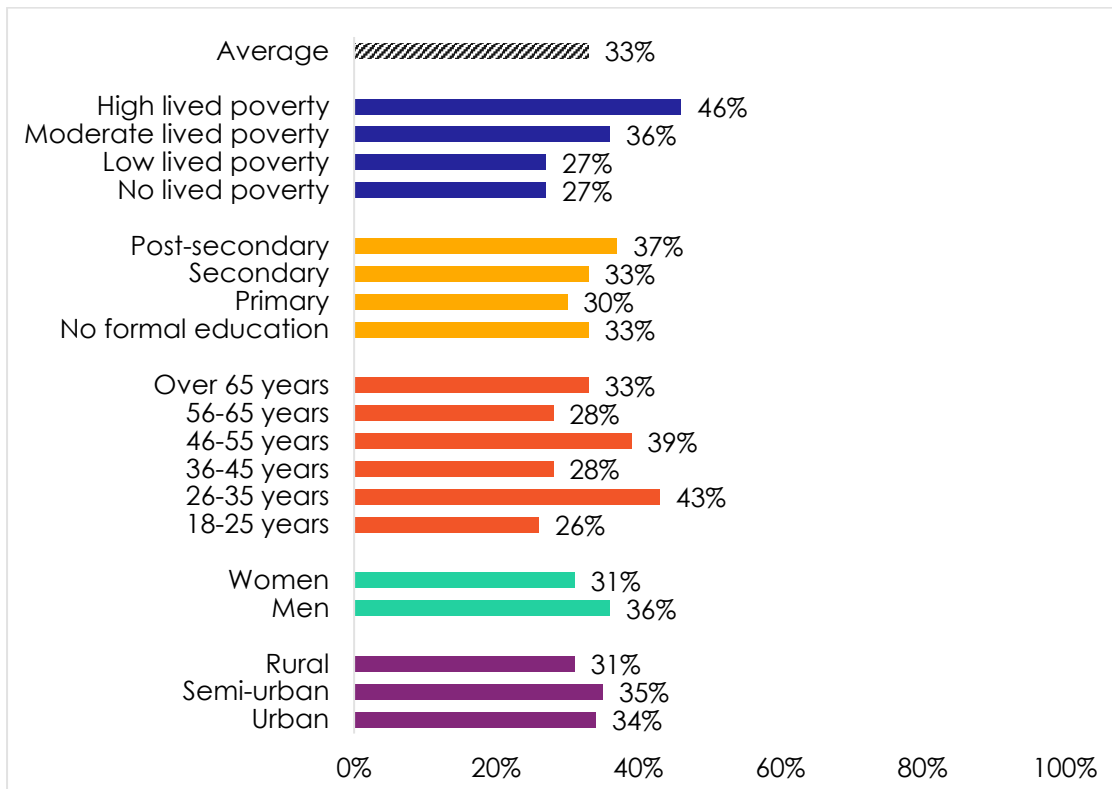
**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: Parliament should ensure that the president explains to it on a regular basis how his government spends taxpayers' money.  
 Statement 2: The president should be able to devote his full attention to developing the country rather than wasting time justifying his actions.  
 (% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with Statement 1)

**Figure 7: How often does the president ignore Parliament? | Botswana | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, how often, in this country does the president ignore Parliament and just do what he wants?

**Figure 8: President often/always ignores Parliament | by demographic group | Botswana | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, how often, in this country does the president ignore Parliament and just do what he wants? (% who say "rarely" or "never")

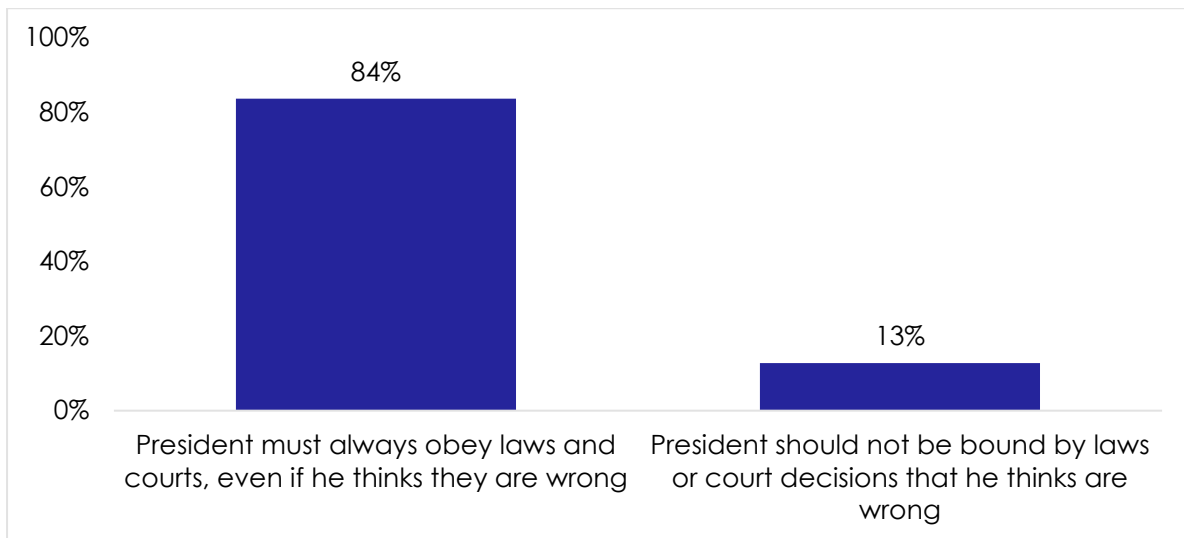
Similarly, Botswana overwhelmingly (84%) support the view that the president should be bound by laws and court decisions even if he thinks they are wrong (Figure 9).

The share of Botswana who say the president must always obey the country's laws and courts has increased by 15 percentage points over the past decade, from 69% in 2012 to 84% in 2022 (Figure 10).

Urban residents (92%) and citizens with post-secondary education (91%) are most likely to support the view that the president should be bound by laws and court decisions (Figure 11).

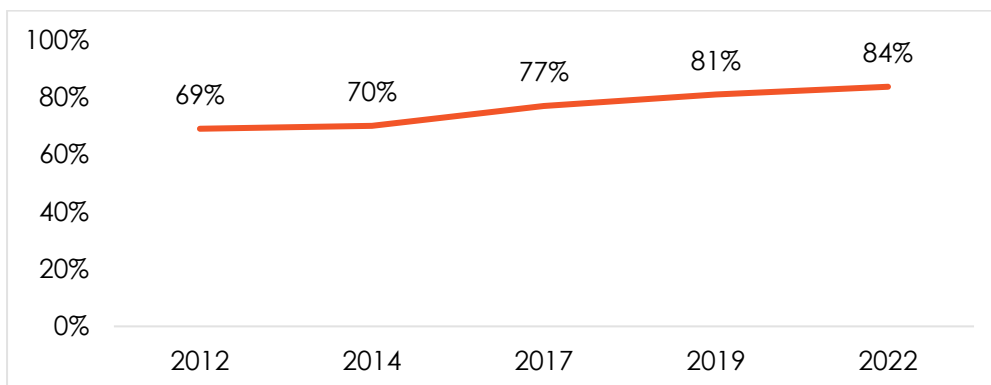
As for whether the president actually respects the courts and laws, more than half (56%) of Botswana say he "rarely" or "never" ignores them, while 30% say he does so "often" or "always" (Figure 12).

**Figure 9: Should the president be bound by laws and court decisions? | Botswana | 2022**



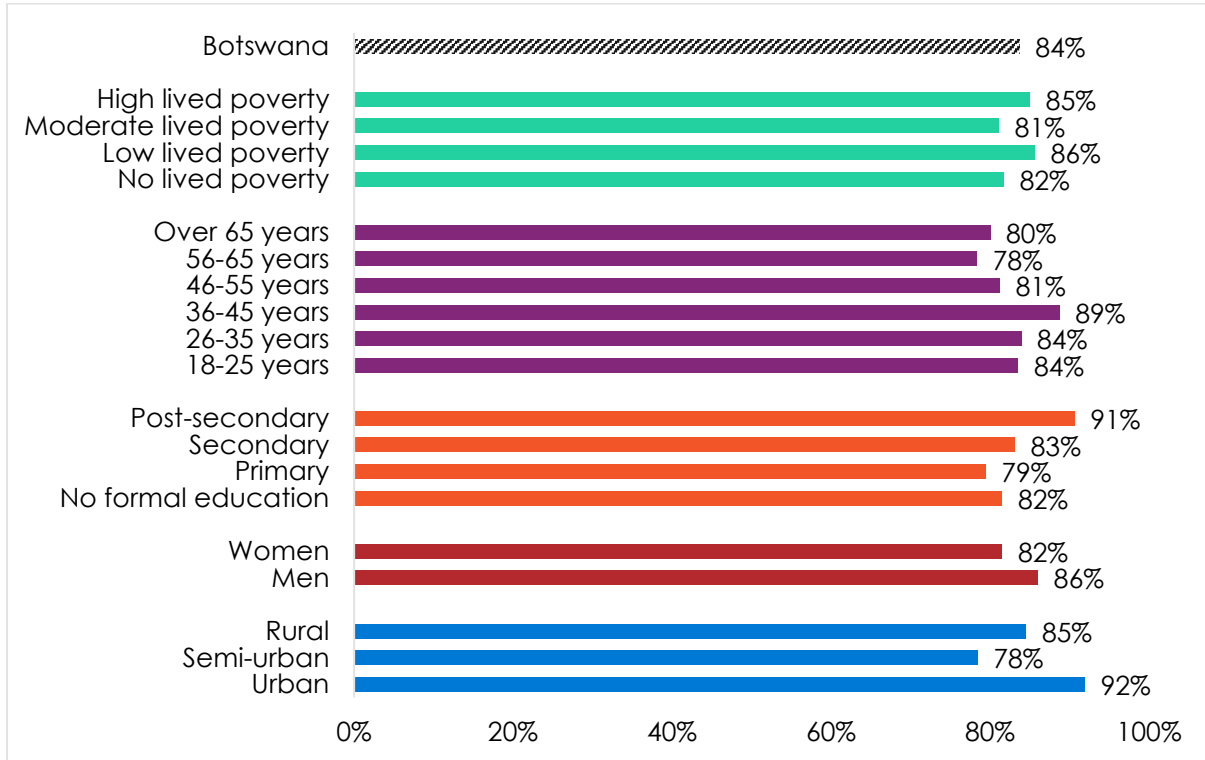
**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: Since the president was elected to lead the country, he should not be bound by laws or court decisions that he thinks are wrong.  
 Statement 2: The president must always obey the laws and the courts, even if he thinks they are wrong.  
 (% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)

**Figure 10: President should be bound by laws and court decisions | Botswana | 2012-2022**



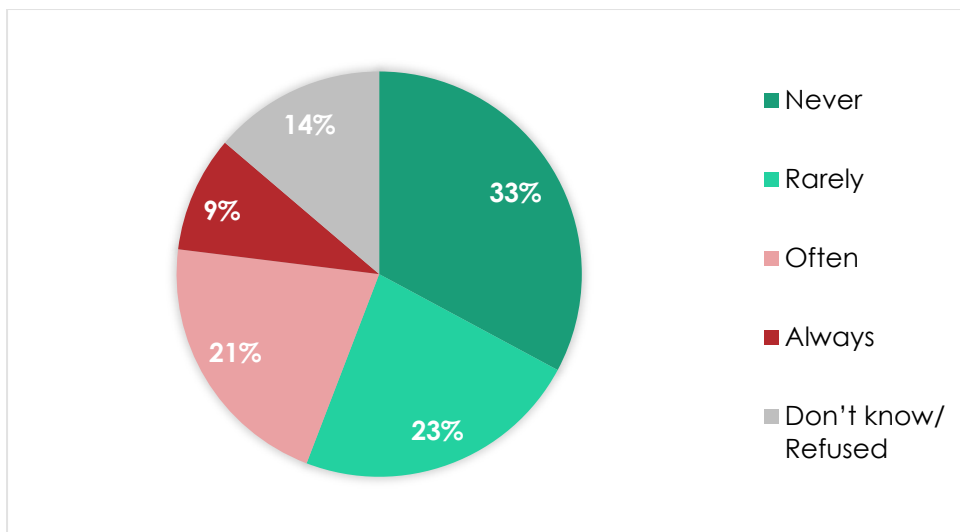
**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: Since the president was elected to lead the country, he should not be bound by laws or court decisions that he thinks are wrong.  
 Statement 2: The president must always obey the laws and the courts, even if he thinks they are wrong.  
 (% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with Statement 2)

**Figure 11: President should be bound by laws and court decisions | by demographic group | Botswana**



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: Since the president was elected to lead the country, he should not be bound by laws or court decisions that he thinks are wrong.  
 Statement 2: The president must always obey the laws and the courts, even if he thinks they are wrong.  
 (% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with Statement 2)

**Figure 12: How often does the president ignore the courts and laws? | Botswana | 2022**



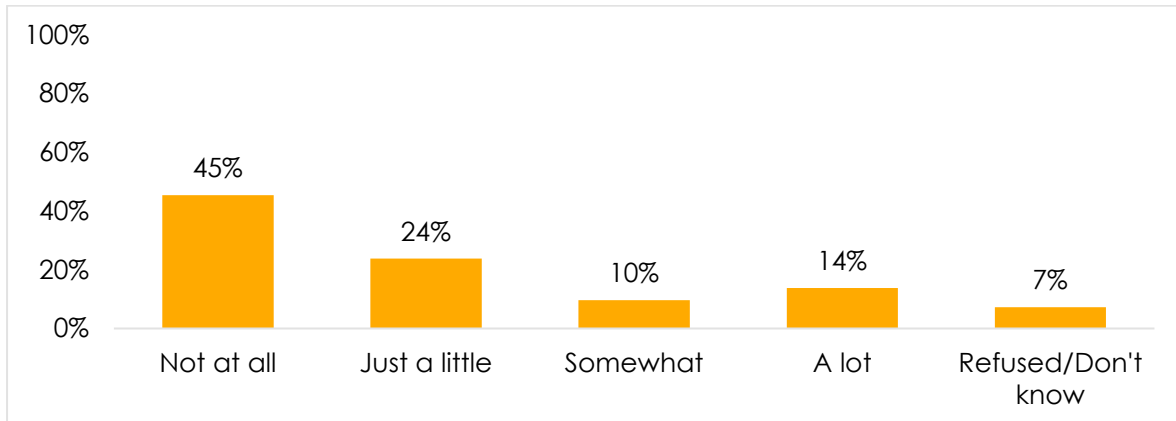
**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, how often, in this country does the president ignore the courts and laws of this country?



### Trust in the president

Even though slim majorities believe that he usually respects Parliament and the courts, the president suffers from a striking deficit in public trust: Only one in four citizens (24%) say they trust him “somewhat” or “a lot,” while almost half (45%) say they don’t trust him “at all,” in addition to 24% who express “just a little” trust (Figure 13).

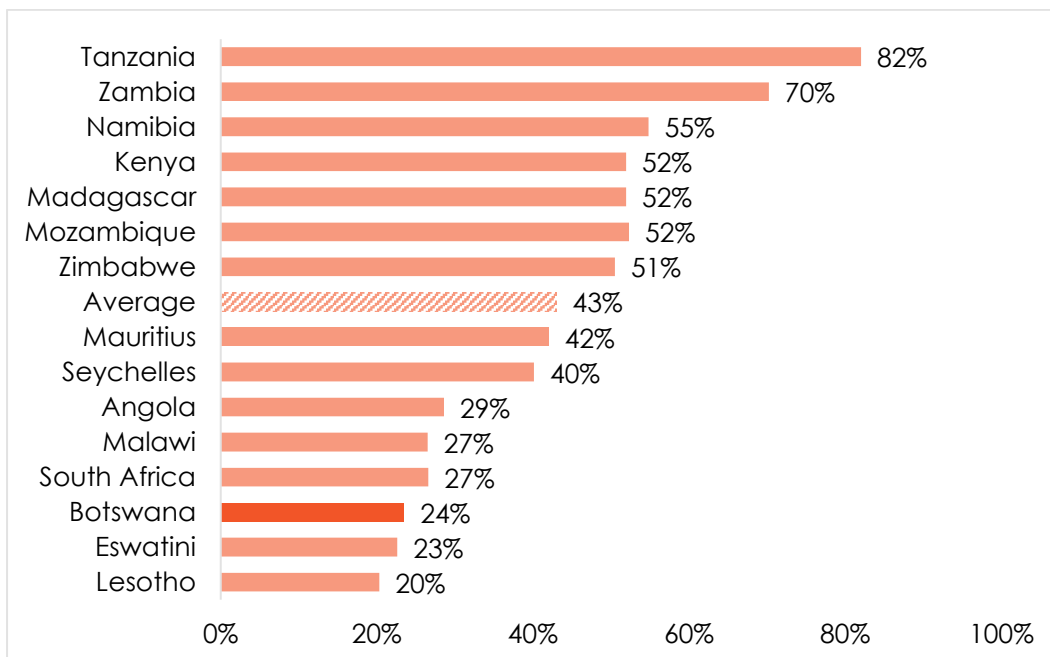
**Figure 13: Public trust in the president | Botswana | 2022**



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

Among Southern African countries, Botswana is one of the least trusting in their president, well below the 15-country average of 43% who express some or a lot of trust. Only Lesotho (20%) and Eswatini (23%) record lower levels of public trust (Figure 14).

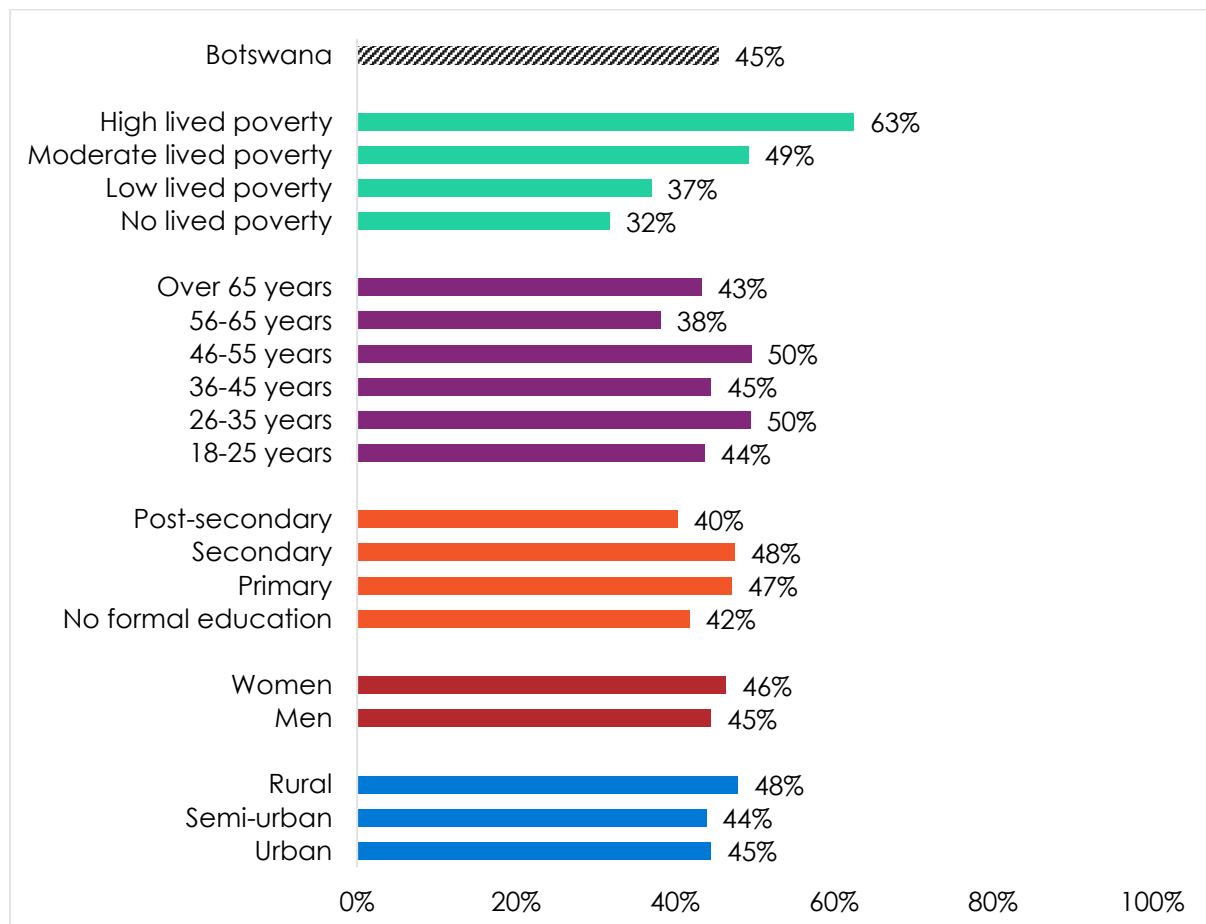
**Figure 14: Trust the president somewhat/a lot | 15 Southern African countries | 2021/2022**



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

Distrust in the president shows no clear pattern across most key demographic groups (Figure 15). The exception is citizens' economic status: The share of respondents who say they don't trust the president "at all" increases sharply with their level of lived poverty, ranging from 32% among the well-off to 63% among the poorest.

**Figure 15: Don't trust the president 'at all' | by demographic group | Botswana | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:** How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: The president? (% who say "not at all")

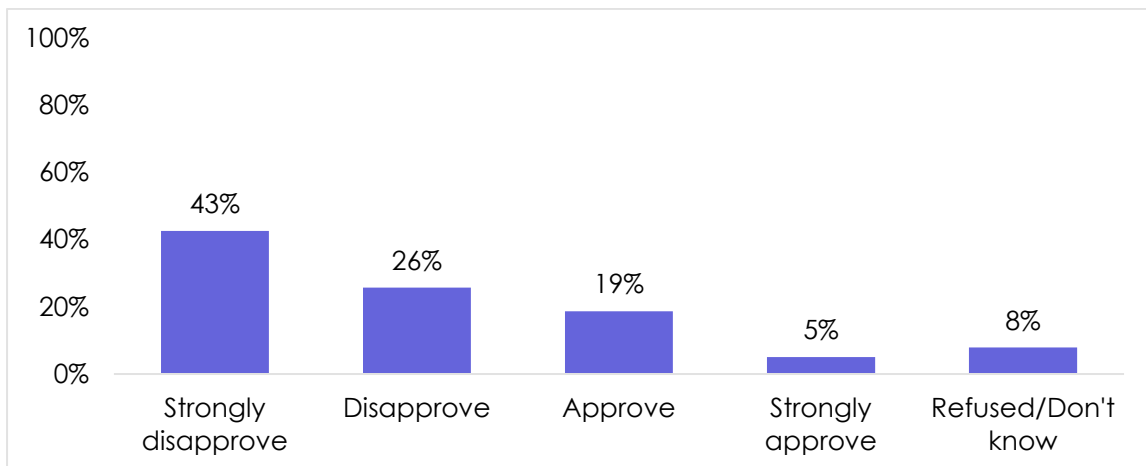
### President's job performance

Citizens' weak trust in the president may reflect their disappointment with his performance. Nearly seven in 10 Botswana (69%) disapprove of the president's job performance, including 43% who "strongly disapprove," while only 24% give him good marks on his job performance (Figure 16).

When compared with other countries in the region, Botswana records one of the lowest presidential approval ratings, ahead only of Lesotho (17%) and about half the 15-country average of 47% (Figure 17).

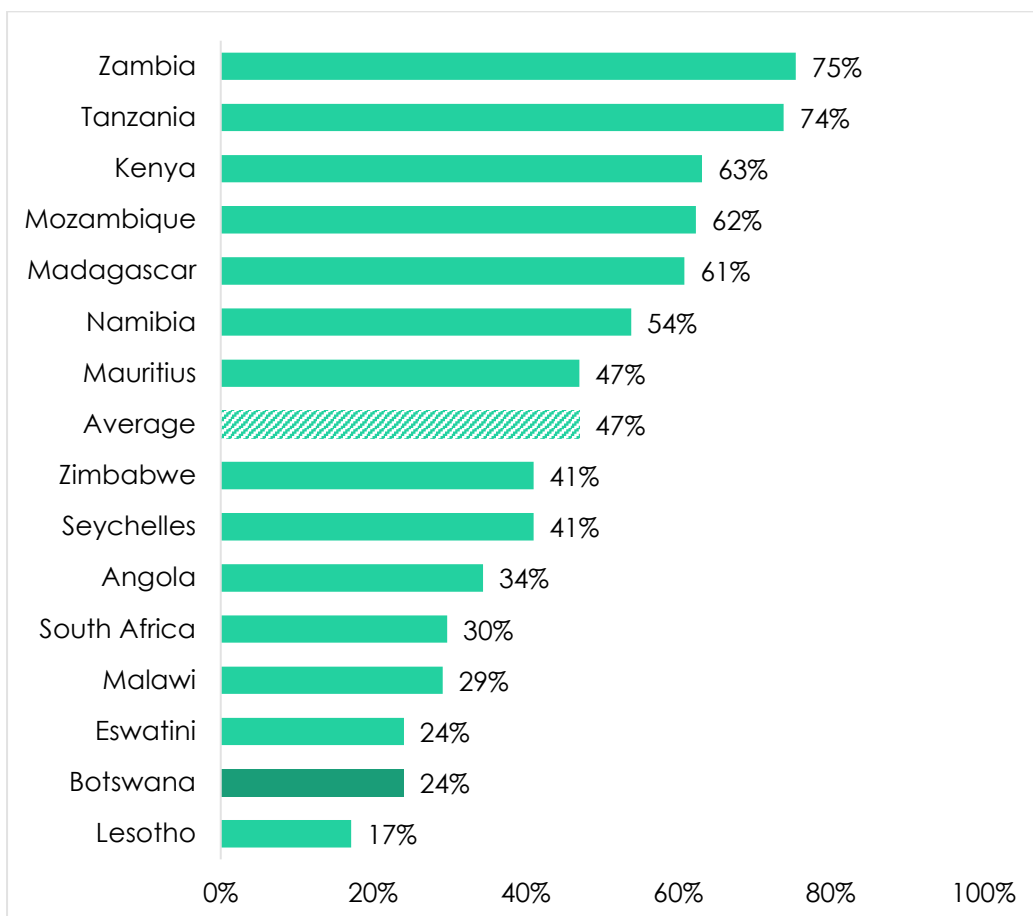
Approval of the president's performance is especially uncommon among the poorest citizens (14%) (Figure 18).

**Figure 16: Job performance of the president | Botswana | 2022**



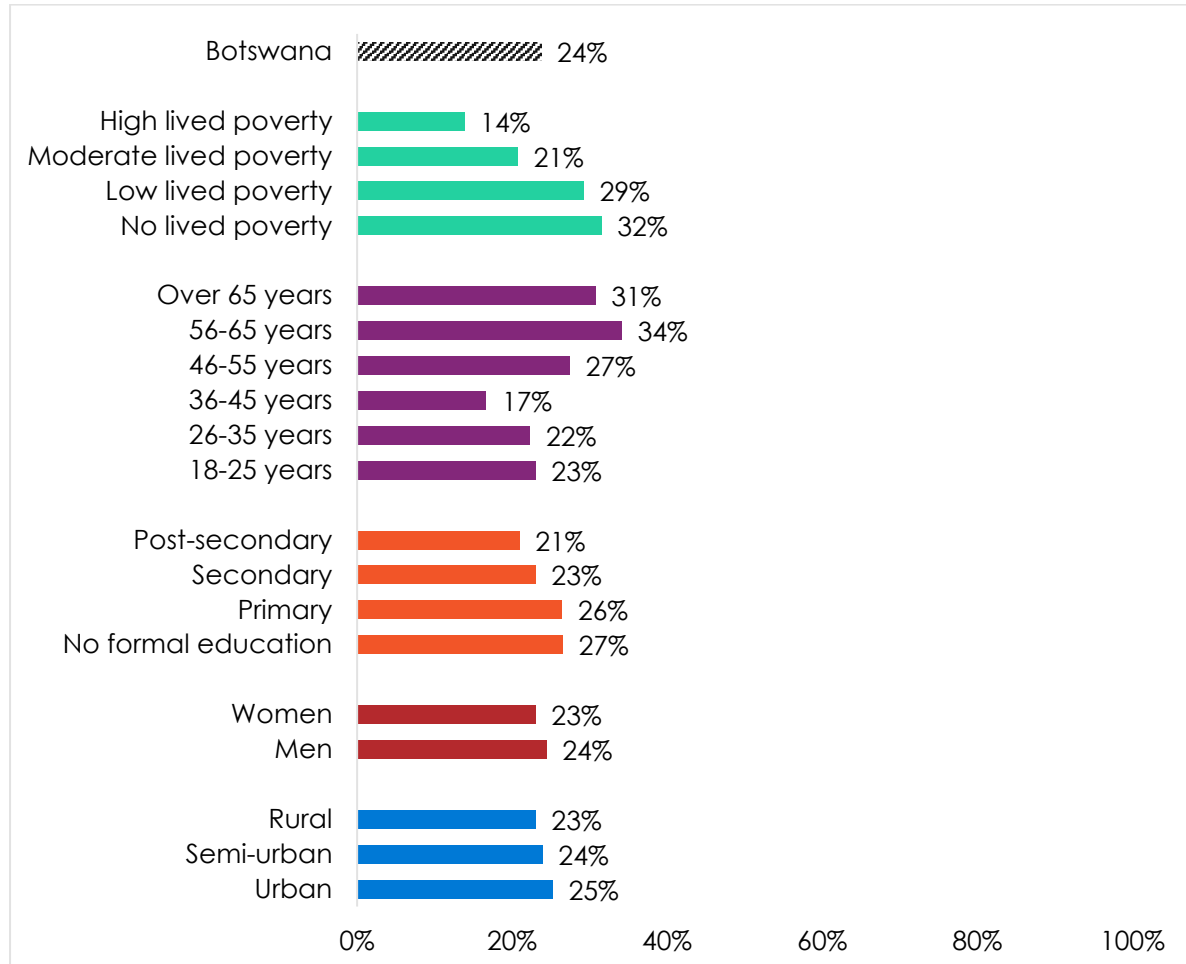
**Respondents were asked:** Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past 12 months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: President Mokgweetsi Masisi?

**Figure 17: Approval of president's job performance | 15 Southern African countries | 2021/2022**



**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: President [Name]? (% who "approve" or "strongly approve")

**Figure 18: Approval of president's job performance** | by demographic group  
 | Botswana | 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: President Mokgweetsi Masisi? (% who "approve" or "strongly approve")

### Conclusion

Ahead of Botswana's 2024 elections, in which President Masisi is expected to seek a second term, Afrobarometer survey findings paint a gloomy picture of public assessments of his administration, including rising perceptions of corruption, weak trust, and low approval ratings.

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Afrobarometer, a non-profit 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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