



Dispatch No. 811 | 7 June 2024

## Basotho say government is doing a poor job of providing a reliable electricity supply

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**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 811 | Asafika Mpako and Stephen Ndoma**

### Summary

Despite progress in expanding access to electricity (Maebe, 2023), Lesotho has one of the lowest electrification rates on the continent, mainly due to limited rural penetration, especially in the country's mountainous areas (Smith, 2022; ISS African Futures, 2023; Sebusi, 2022; Mpholo, et al., 2021; OnePower Lesotho, 2022).

More than 70% of the country's people live in rural areas (United Nations Lesotho, 2019), which makes extending electricity access to rural households and ensuring energy security a development imperative (Reporter Lesotho, 2022). Lesotho's Energy Policy (2015-2025) seeks to make energy supply "universally accessible and affordable in a sustainable manner, with minimal negative impact on the environment" (Kingdom of Lesotho, 2015).

The country's state-owned power utility, the Lesotho Electricity Co., meets more than half of its energy needs during periods of peak demand through imports from South Africa's Eskom and Mozambique's Electricidade de Moçambique, largely generated from coal (United Nations Development Programme, 2020; Energy Catalyst, 2020; World Bank, 2020). In 2021, electricity was the fifth-most imported product in Lesotho (OEC World, 2023).

At the same time, Lesotho has immense potential to diversify its energy mix through increased investments in wind, solar, and hydropower generation (International Trade Administration, 2024). In line with national goals to transition away from an over-reliance on fossil fuels, the government has called for more private-sector investment in renewable technologies (African Development Bank, 2023).

A recent Afrobarometer survey provides an on-the-ground look at electricity access in Lesotho. Findings show that while about two-thirds of Basotho live in zones served by the national electric grid, just four in 10 enjoy a reliable supply of electricity, including only one-fifth of rural residents.

Electricity ranks fifth on the list of problems that Basotho want their government to address. Three-quarters of citizens say the government is performing poorly on this priority.

### Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Nine survey rounds in up to 42 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2023) cover 39 countries. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct 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

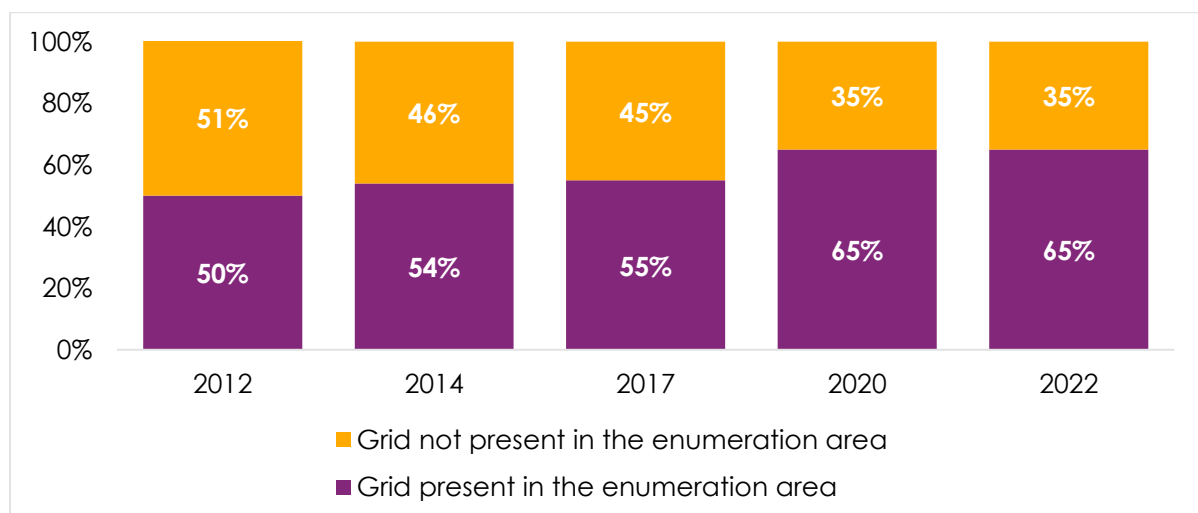
- About two-thirds (65%) of Basotho live in zones served by the national electric grid, up 15 percentage points since 2012 (50%).
  - But only 36% of rural residents are within reach of the grid, compared to 96% of urbanites. More educated and economically better-off citizens are also far more likely to live in zones served by the electric grid than those with less schooling and lower economic status.
- Slightly more than half (52%) of Basotho live in households that are connected to the national power grid.
- Among those who are connected to the grid, 78% say their electricity works “most of the time” or “all of the time.”
- Combining connection and reliability rates shows that 40% of all Basotho enjoy a reliable supply of electricity, including just 22% of rural residents and 29% of citizens experiencing high lived poverty.
- Electricity ranks fifth among the most important problems that Basotho want their government to address.
- About three-quarters (74%) of citizens say the government is doing a poor job of providing a reliable supply of electricity. This assessment is particularly widespread among older respondents (75%-76%), the less educated (76%), and the poor (78%).

## Access to the electric grid

For most households, having access to an electricity grid will remain a prerequisite for obtaining power until alternative energy resources become more widely available.

According to Afrobarometer’s 2022 survey in Lesotho, about two-thirds (65%) of citizens live in areas served by an electricity grid, a 15-percentage-point increase compared to the 2012 survey (50%) (Figure 1).

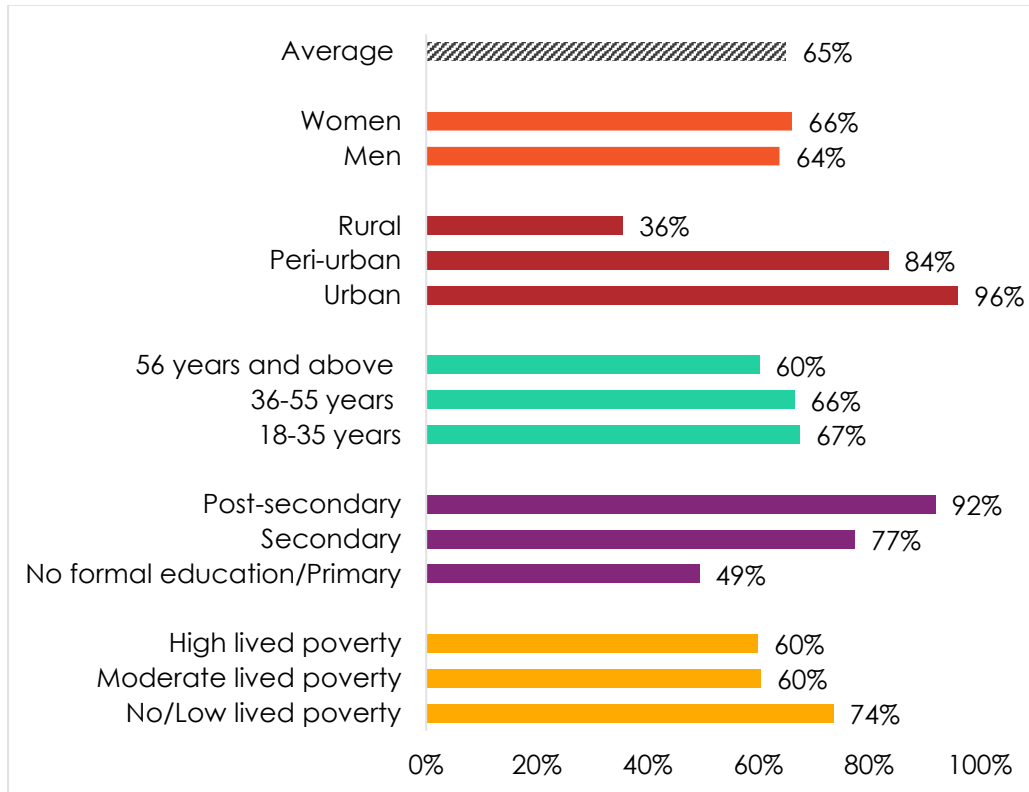
**Figure 1: Presence of electricity grid | Lesotho | 2012-2022**



**Survey enumerators were asked to record:** Are the following services present in the primary sampling unit/enumeration area: Electricity grid that most houses can access?

But the presence of the electric grid is far more limited in rural areas: Only 36% of rural residents live within reach of the grid. In contrast, 96% of residents in urban areas live in zones served by the electric grid (Figure 2). Citizens who are economically well off<sup>1</sup> (74%) and those who have post-secondary educational qualifications (92%) are more likely to live in zones served by an electricity grid than poorer (60%) and less educated citizens (49%).

**Figure 2: Presence of electricity grid | by demographic group | Lesotho | 2022**



**Survey enumerators were asked to record:** Are the following services present in the primary sampling unit/enumeration area: Electricity grid that most houses can access? (% "yes")

### Connection to the electric grid

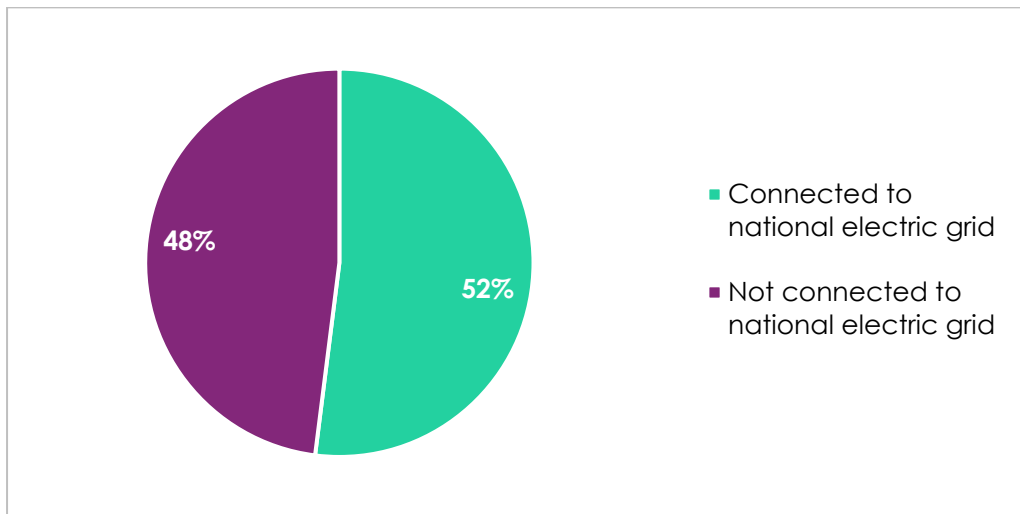
Living in a zone served by an electricity grid does not, of course, guarantee a supply of electricity. Costs associated with service from the power grid – including fees for inspection, house wiring, and connection – may present prohibitive hurdles for many citizens.

How many Basotho are actually connected to the national grid?

A slim majority of citizens (52%) live in households that are connected to the electric grid (Figure 3). As might be expected, urbanities (77%) are far more likely to be connected to the power grid than rural residents (28%), as are the economically well off (65%) and the educated (91%) compared to the poorest (39%) and those with primary schooling or less (36%) (Figure 4). Older citizens are less likely to be connected (45% of those over age 55) than younger cohorts (53%-56% of those aged 18-55 years).

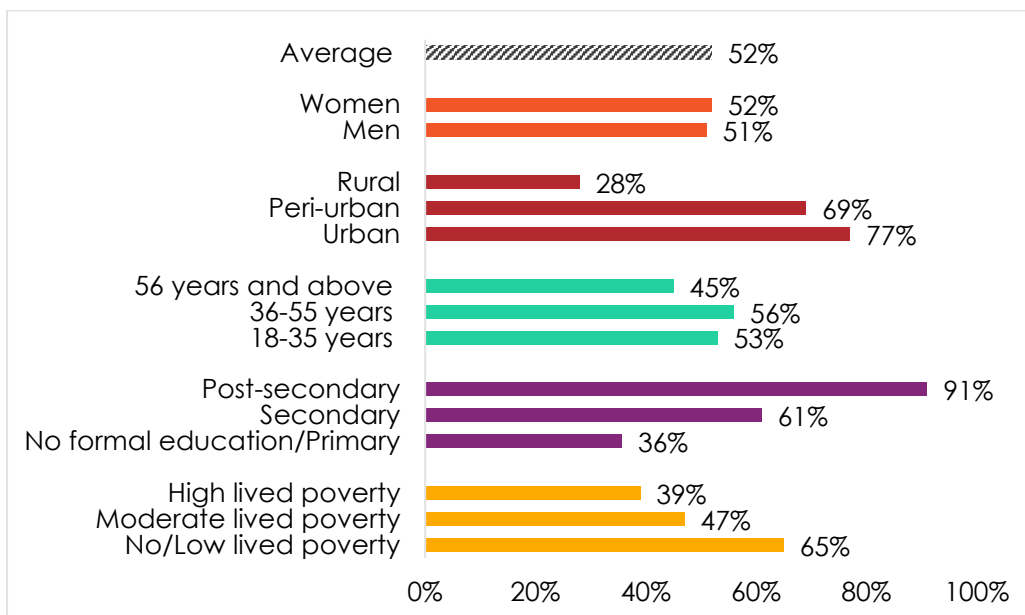
<sup>1</sup> Afrobarometer’s Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents’ levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on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

**Figure 3: Connected to the national electric grid | Lesotho | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:** Do you have an electric connection to your home from the Lesotho Electricity Company?

**Figure 4: Connected to the national electric grid | by demographic group | Lesotho | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:** Do you have an electric connection to your home from the Lesotho Electricity Company (% "yes")

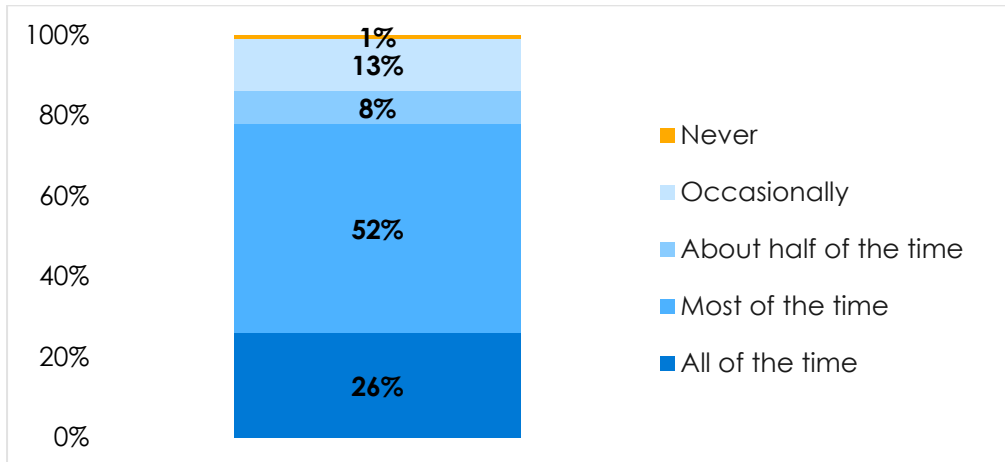
### Reliable supply of electricity

Even if houses are connected to an electric grid, the reliability of their power supply may be poor. How many Basotho actually have reliable electricity?

Among citizens who report being connected to the power grid, nearly eight in 10 (78%) say that their electricity works "most of the time" (52%) or "all of the time" (26%) (Figure 5). About one-fifth (22%) say that power is available only "about half of the time" or less.

**Figure 5: How often is electricity available (for households connected to the grid)?**

| Lesotho | 2022



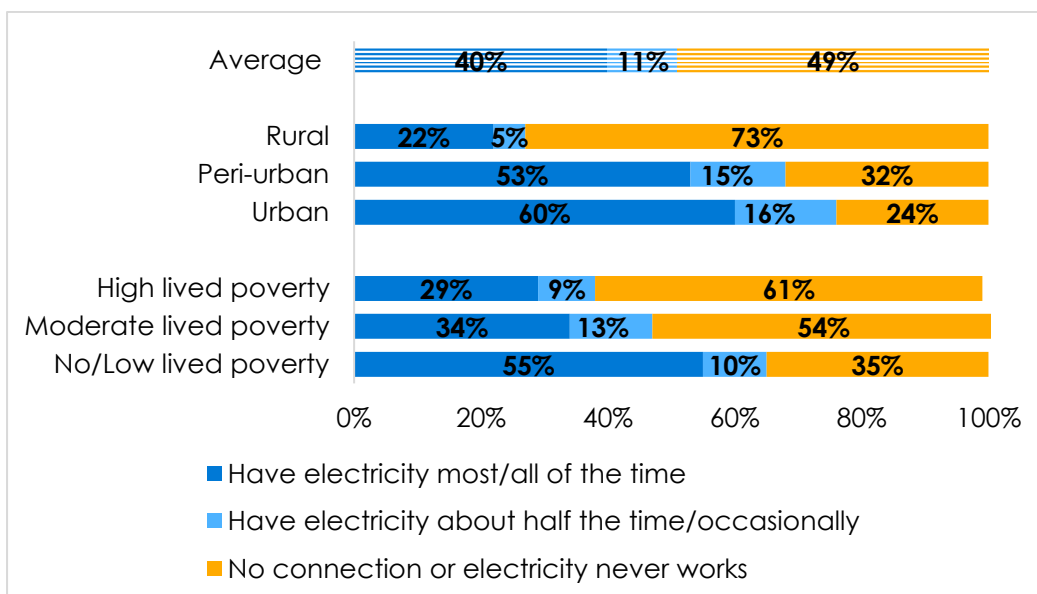
**Respondents who said they have a connection to the national electric grid were asked:** How often is electricity actually available from this connection? (Respondents without a connection to the national grid are excluded.)

While these numbers suggest that existing connections are fairly reliable, looking at the entire population (rather than only those who are connected to the grid) shows that four in 10 (40%) of all Basotho report having electricity that works “most” or “all” of the time, with stark differences by economic status and urban-rural location (Figure 6).

Among respondents experiencing high lived poverty, only 29% say they have reliable electricity, compared to 55% of those experiencing no or low lived poverty.

And in rural areas, only about one in five residents (22%) enjoy a reliable supply of electricity, vs. three in five urban residents (60%).

**Figure 6: How many citizens have reliable electricity? | by lived poverty and urban-rural location | Lesotho | 2022**

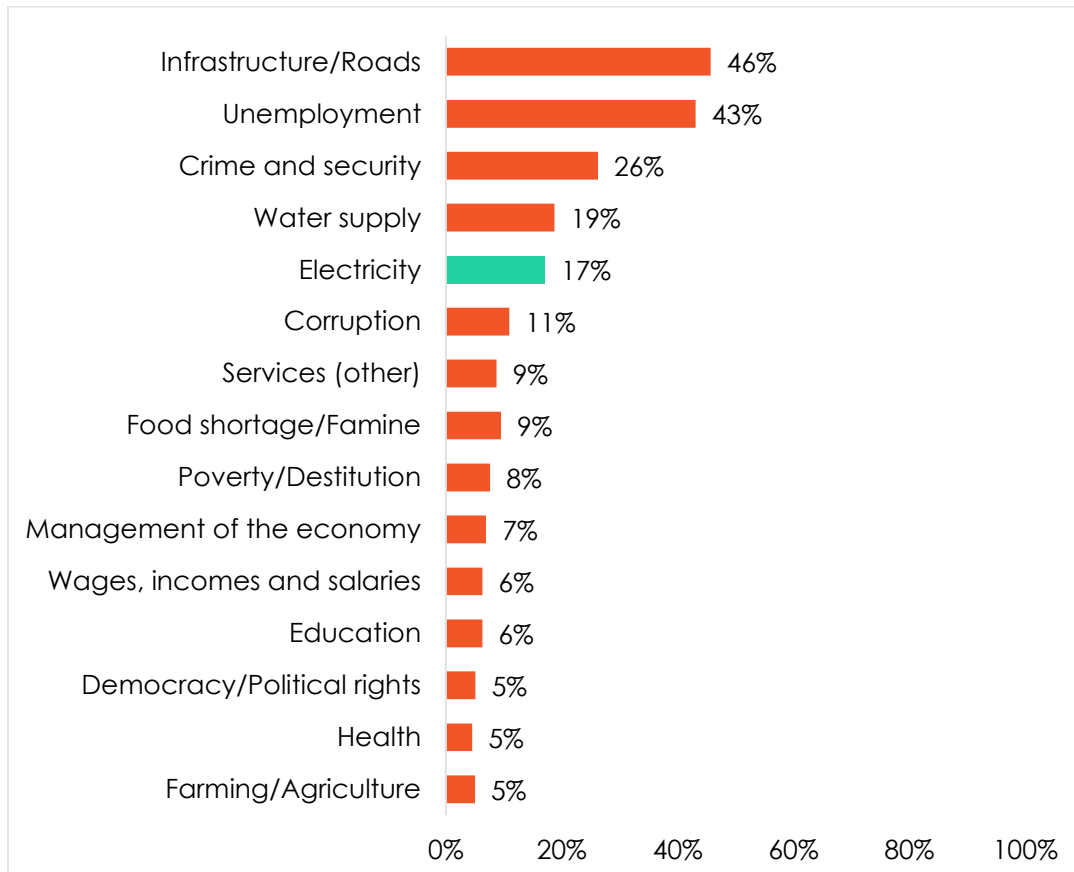


**Respondents were asked:** Do you have an electric connection to your home from the Lesotho Electricity Company? (If “yes”:) How often is electricity actually available from this connection?

## Priorities and government performance

The provision of electricity ranks fifth among the most important problems that Basotho want their government to address, cited by 17% of respondents as one of their three priorities (Figure 7). Infrastructure/roads, unemployment, crime/security, and water supply outrank electricity on citizens' agenda for government action.

**Figure 7: Most important problems** | Lesotho | 2022



**Respondents were asked:** *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Up to three responses per person; figure shows percentage of respondents who cite each problem as one of up to three priorities.)*

About three-quarters (74%) of Basotho say the government is doing a poor job of providing a reliable electricity supply, worse by 11 percentage points than recorded in the previous

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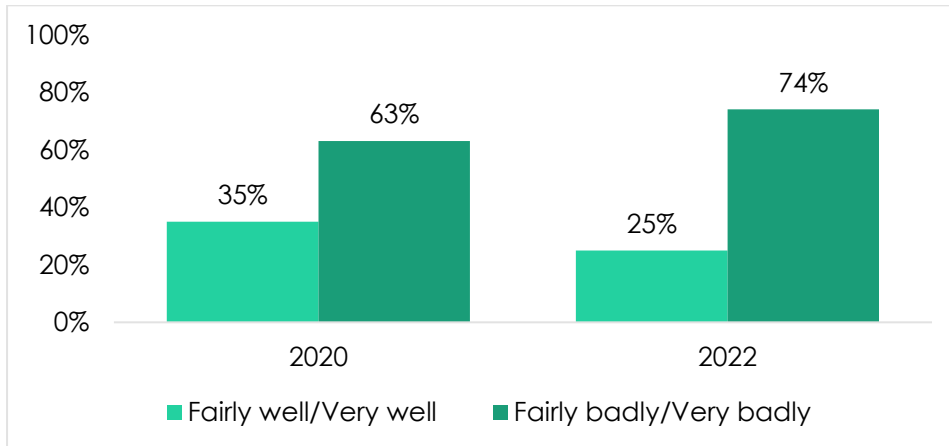
Afrobarometer survey in 2020. One-quarter (25%) consider its performance "fairly" or "very" good (Figure 8).

Disapproval of the government's efforts on electricity is more widespread among older respondents (75%-76% of those aged 36 years and above) than among the youth (71%). Negative ratings are also higher

among citizens with primary education or less (76%) and the poorest respondents (78%) than among their more educated and better-off counterparts (Figure 9).

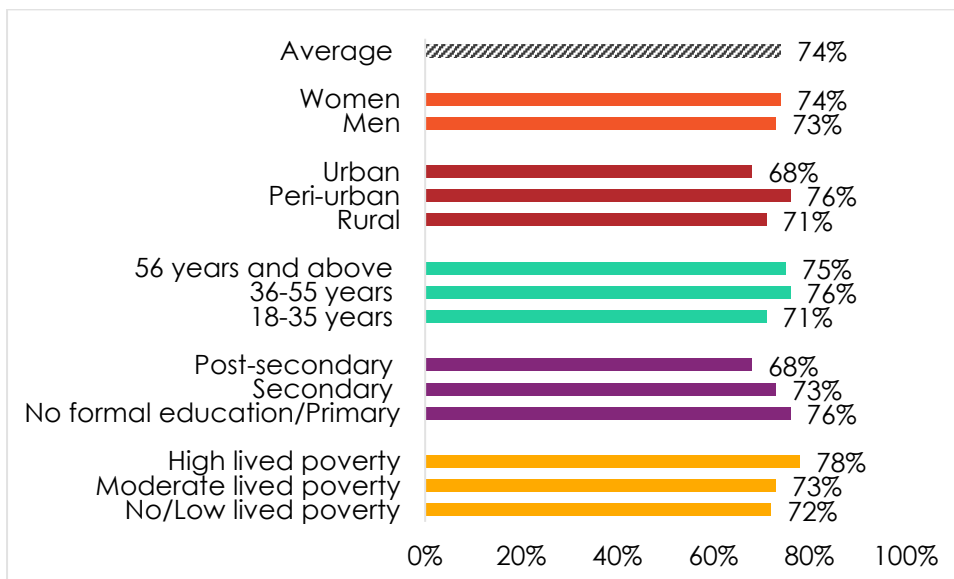
**Figure 8: Government performance in provision of reliable electricity supply**

| Lesotho | 2020-2022



**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: Providing a reliable supply of electricity?

**Figure 9: Government is performing badly in the provision of reliable electricity supply**  
 | Lesotho | 2022



**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: Providing a reliable supply of electricity? (% who say "fairly badly" or "very badly")

## Conclusion

Many Basotho still lack access and connection to the national power grid, and only four in 10 enjoy a reliable supply of electricity. Rural residents, less educated citizens, and the poor are particularly disadvantaged, and this is reflected in their dismal ratings of the government's performance on providing reliable electricity.

These findings point to the need to address the challenges of vulnerable communities by accelerating the pace of gains in access to electricity, most urgently by bridging the urban-rural and economic divides.

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