Dispatch No. 814 | 20 June 2024

Nigerians lack reliable electricity, leaving most discontent with government's efforts

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 814 | Maame Akua Amoah Twum and Eric Otu Beecham

Summary

Given its vast and growing population and growing economy, Nigeria has an increasing demand for electricity. The country's energy sector has long failed to meet this demand due to inadequate infrastructure, lack of investment, and inefficiencies in the generation, transmission, and distribution of power, among other factors (Awosope, 2014). The World Bank (2021) reports that 85 million Nigerians don't have access to electricity from the national grid and that a lack of reliable power costs the country about 2% of its gross domestic product.

Government efforts to address the country's energy crisis have included the establishment of the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission in 2005 and the privatisation of power generation and distribution companies beginning in 2013, but critics say these measures have done little to alleviate shortfalls throughout the sector (Nnodim, 2023).

The government's current Energy Transition Plan aims to "bring modern energy services to the full population" by 2060 (Government of Nigeria, 2022). The World Bank's (2023) Distributed Access through Renewable Energy Scale-up (DARES) project is intended to enhance electricity access for more than 17.5 million Nigerians via renewable energy solutions.

Findings from the latest Afrobarometer survey show that while a majority of Nigerians are connected to the national electric grid, only a small minority enjoy a reliable supply of electricity, especially in rural areas and poor communities. Unsurprisingly, an overwhelming majority of respondents give negative ratings to the government's efforts to provide electricity.

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 Nigeria, led by NOIPolls, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,600 adult Nigerians in March 2022. 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 standard surveys were conducted in Nigeria in 2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2015, 2017, and 2020.

Key findings

- Three-fourths (75%) of Nigerians live in households that are connected to the national power grid.

- Rural residents (60%), poor citizens (72%), and those with no formal schooling (37%) are far less likely to be connected to the national grid than urbanites (96%), economically well-off citizens (86%), and those with secondary or post-secondary education (84%-91%).

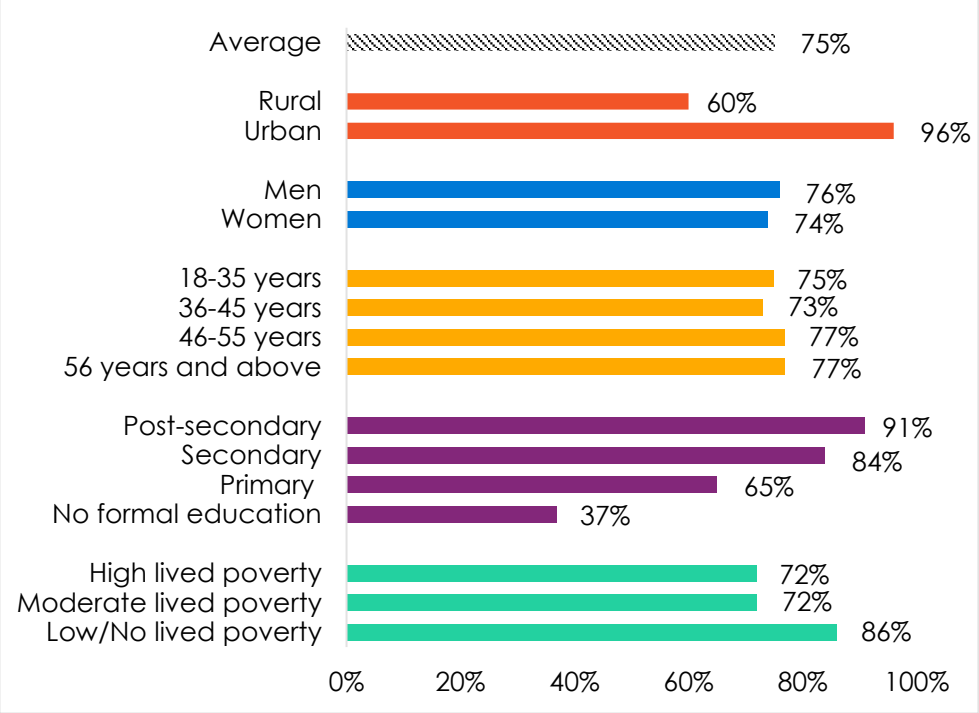
- Among those who are connected to the grid, only 18% say their electricity works "most of the time" or "all of the time."
- Combining connection and reliability rates, we see that only 13% of all Nigerians enjoy a reliable supply of electricity from the national grid, down by 5 percentage points compared to 2017. Only 11% of rural residents and 9% of citizens experiencing high lived poverty report a reliable electricity supply.
- Eight in 10 citizens (80%) say the government is doing a poor job of providing a reliable supply of electricity, up by 6 percentage points from 2020. This assessment is particularly widespread among the poorest respondents (87%).

Connection to the national grid

In its 2020 survey, Afrobarometer found that 39% of Nigerians reported receiving electricity from both the national grid and alternative sources (31%) or exclusively from alternative sources (8%) (Lee, Kim, Han, & Kang, 2022). But for a majority of households, having access to an electrical grid will remain a prerequisite for obtaining power until alternative energy resources become more widely available.

According to the most recent survey (2022), three-fourths (75%) of Nigerians live in households that are connected to the national electric grid (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Connection to the national electric grid | by demographic group | Nigeria | 2022



Respondents were asked: *Do you have an electric connection to your home from the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN)? (% "yes")*

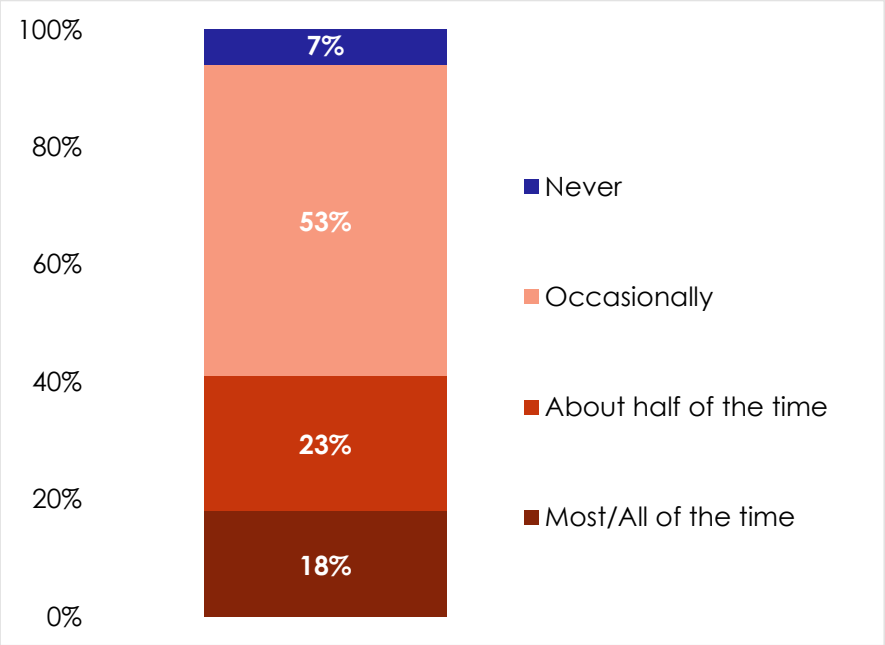
As might be expected, urbanities (96%) are far more likely to be connected to the power grid than rural residents (60%), as are citizens who are economically well off (86%) and those with post-secondary qualifications (91%) compared to poor respondents (72%) and those with no formal schooling (37%).[1]

Reliable supply of electricity

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

Among citizens who report being connected to the power grid, fewer than two in 10 (18%) say that their electricity works "most of the time" or "all of the time" (Figure 2). A large majority say that power is available only "about half of the time" (23%), "occasionally (53%), or "never" (7%)

Figure 2: How often is electricity available (for households connected to the grid)? | Nigeria | 2022

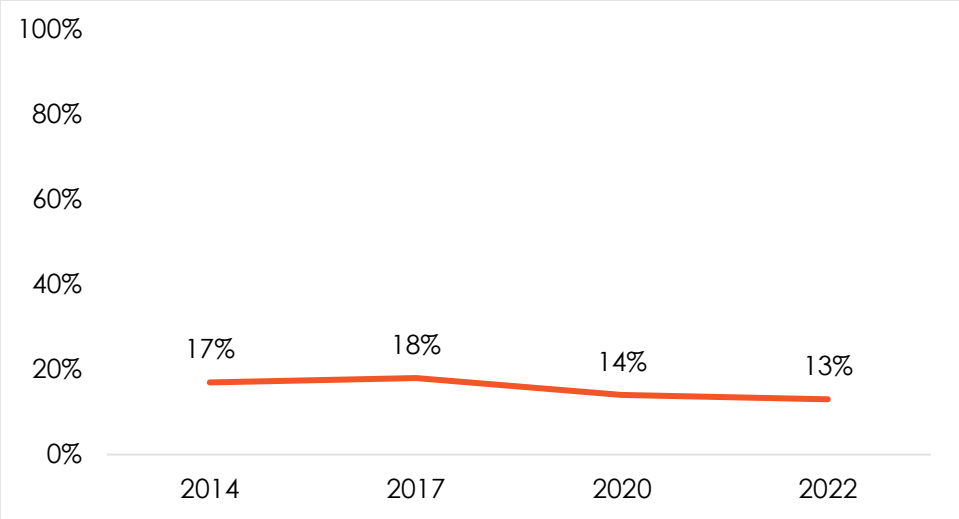


Respondents who said they have a connection to the national electric grid were asked: *How often is electricity actually available from this connection? (Respondents without a connection to the national grid are excluded.)*

Looking at the entire population (rather than only those who are connected to the grid), we see that only about one in eight Nigerians (13%) report having electricity from the national grid that works "most" or "all" of the time. The share of households with reliable electricity has declined by 5 percentage points since 2017 (Figure 3).

[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, cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes and Patel (2022).

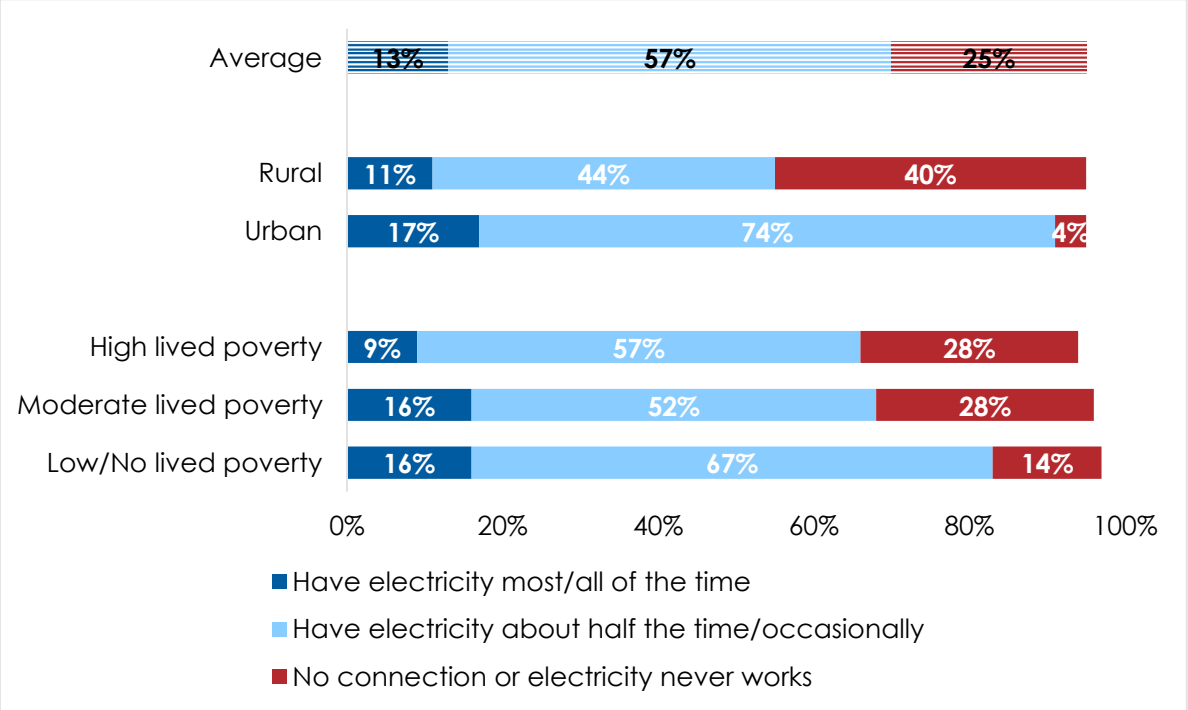
Figure 3: How many citizens have reliable electricity? | Nigeria | 2014-2022



Respondents were asked: *Do you have an electric connection to your home from the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN)? (If "yes":) How often is electricity actually available from this connection? (% who say "most of the time" or "all of the time")*

Among the poorest respondents, only 9% say they have reliable electricity, compared to 16% of those experiencing moderate, low, or no lived poverty (Figure 4). And in rural areas, one in 10 citizens (11%) enjoy a reliable supply of electricity, compared to 17% of urban residents.

Figure 4: How many citizens have reliable electricity? | by urban-rural location and lived poverty | Nigeria | 2022

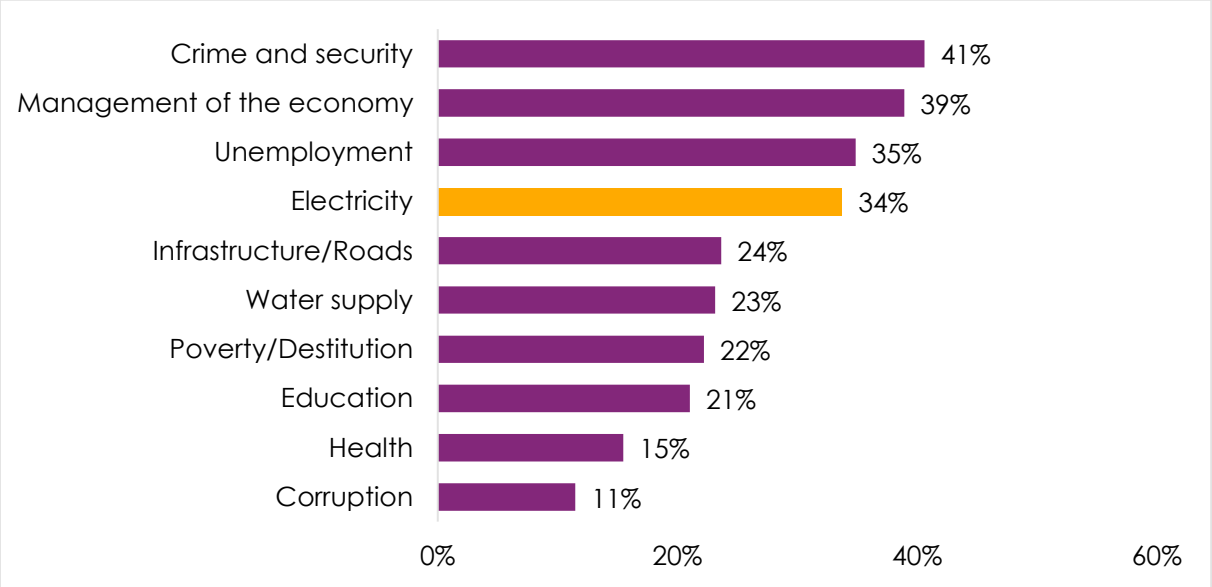


Respondents were asked: *Do you have an electric connection to your home from the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN)? (If "yes":) How often is electricity actually available from this connection?*

Priorities and government performance on energy provision

Among the most important problems that Nigerians want their government to address, the provision of electricity ranks fourth, cited by 34% of respondents as one of up to three priorities for government action. Electricity trails crime and security, management of the economy, and unemployment on the citizens' agenda, but ranks ahead of infrastructure/roads, water supply, poverty, education, and health (Figure 5).

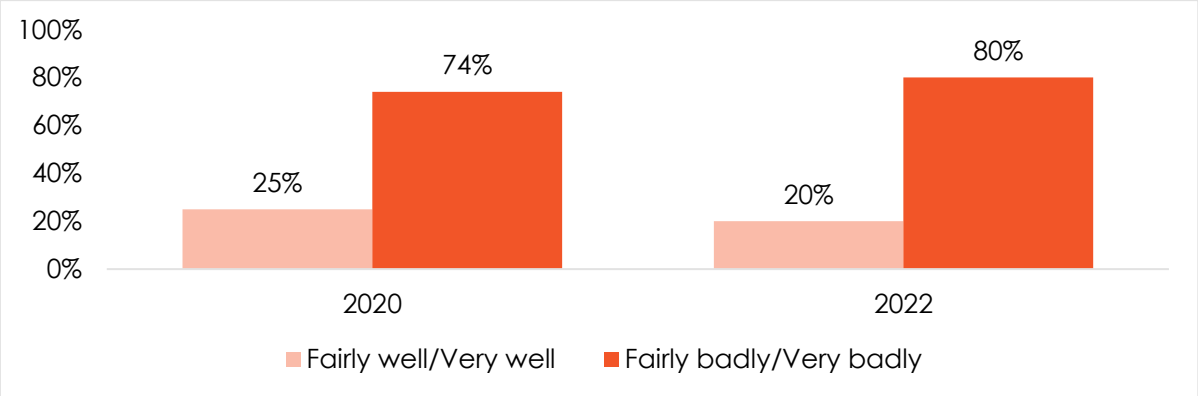
Figure 5: Most important problems | Nigeria | 2022



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.)*

Fully eight in 10 Nigerians (80%) say the government is doing a poor job of providing a reliable electricity supply, worse by 6 percentage points than the assessments recorded in the previous Afrobarometer survey in 2020 (Figure 6).

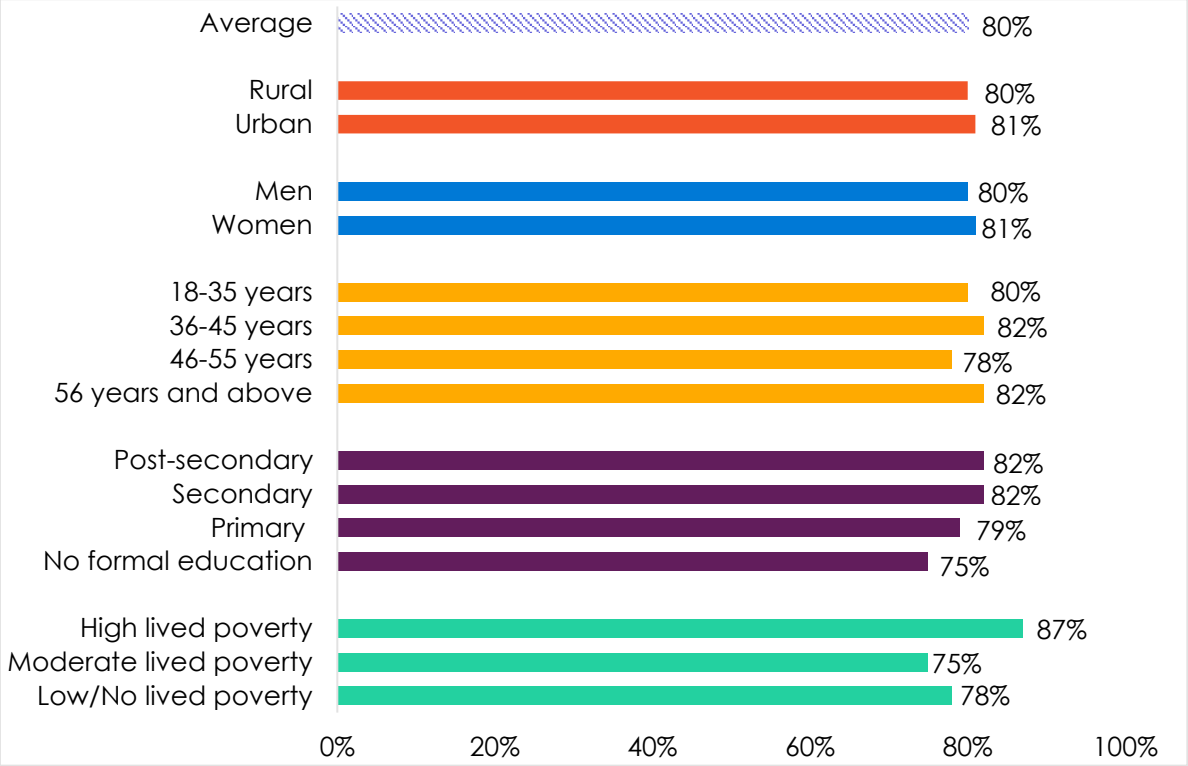
Figure 6: Government performance on provision of reliable electricity supply | Nigeria | 2020-2022



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?*

Rural and urban residents are about equally negative in their assessments, while citizens experiencing high lived poverty (87%) are significantly more likely than better-off respondents (75%-78%) to disapprove of the government's performance on electricity (Figure 7). And despite higher rates of connection to the national grid, respondents with secondary or post-secondary education are more critical (82%) of the government's efforts than their counterparts with no formal schooling (75%).

Figure 7: Government is performing badly in the provision of reliable electricity supply | Nigeria | 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

While a solid majority of Nigerians are connected to the national electrical grid, only a small minority report having access to a consistent electricity supply, highlighting serious reliability issues in the government's service delivery. Disparities in both connection rates and reliable service persist between rural and urban areas as well as between poor and better-off households.

Given this mismatch between expectations and reality, it is little wonder that public dissatisfaction with government efforts to provide reliable electricity is high and rising. A massive scale-up of energy provision will be required if Nigerian households and businesses are to overcome this barrier to development.

References

Awosope, C. (2014). Nigeria industry: Issues, challenges, and solutions. Covenant University Press.

Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2015). National renewable energy and energy efficiency policy. Ministry of Power.

Government of Nigeria. (2022). Nigeria energy transition plan.

Lee, H. E., Kim, W. Y., Han, K., & Kang, H. (2022). Still lacking reliable electricity from the grid, many Africans turn to other sources. Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 514.

Mattes, R., & Patel, J. (2022). Lived poverty resurgent. Afrobarometer Policy Paper 84.

Nnodim, O. (2023). Nigerians groan in darkness despite power sector privatisation, N7tn investments. Punch. 29 December.

World Bank. (2021). Nigeria to improve electricity access and services to citizens. News release. 5 February.

World Bank. (2023). Nigeria to expand access to clean energy for 17.5 million people. 14 December.

Maame Akua Amoah Twum is Afrobarometer communications coordinator for anglophone West Africa and North Africa. Email: maameakua@afrobarometer.org.

Eric Otu Beecham is a monitoring, evaluation, and learning assistant for Afrobarometer. Email: ebeecham@afrobarometer.org.

Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, nonpartisan 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 Ethiopia. Michigan State University, the University of Cape Town, and the University of Malawi provide technical support to the network.

Financial support for Afrobarometer is provided by Sweden via the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) via the U.S. Institute of Peace, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation via the World Bank Think Africa Project, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Open Society Foundations - Africa, Luminate, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Mastercard Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the European Union Commission, the World Bank Group, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda, the Embassy of Sweden in Zimbabwe, the Global Centre for Pluralism, and GIZ.

Donations help Afrobarometer give voice to African citizens. Please consider making a donation to Afrobarometer. To make an online donation, kindly follow this link or this link. To discuss institutional funding, contact Felix Biga (felixbiga@afrobarometer.org) or Runyararo Munetsi (runyararo@afrobarometer.org).

For more information, please visit www.afrobarometer.org.

Follow our releases on #VoicesAfrica.

/Afrobarometer @Afrobarometer @Afrobarometer

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 814 | 20 June 2024

