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Despite mixed assessments of living conditions, Tanzanians say country is on the right path

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 931 | Mgeni Msafiri and Lucas Katera

Summary

The Tanzanian economy has shown signs of post-pandemic recovery as economic growth reached 4.7% in 2022 and 5.1% in 2023, thanks in part to substantial investments in transportation infrastructure, energy, water, health, education, and private-sector development (URT, 2024). While the country's economic growth contributes to poverty reduction through job creation (Kinyondo & Pelizzo, 2018), poverty declines more slowly than the economy grows. For instance, Tanzania has recorded an impressive economic growth rate of more than 6% on average since 2000, but the decline in the poverty rate has been less rapid, from 34.4% in 2007 to 28.2% in 2011/2012 and to 26.4% in 2017/2018 (UNDP, 2015; World Bank, 2019).Greater poverty reduction would require even faster economic growth.

How has Tanzania's economic growth translated to the daily lives of ordinary Tanzanians?

A new Afrobarometer survey finds that Tanzanians offer mixed assessments of their personal living conditions and their country's economy despite some improvement on both counts compared to 2022. In substantial numbers, citizens still experience shortages of basic life necessities.

Nevertheless, most Tanzanians believe the country is moving "in the right direction." A large majority approve of the government's performance in handling the economy, though fewer say the same about its efforts to create jobs, reduce inequality, and control inflation.

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 10 surveys were launched in January 2024. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Tanzania, led by REPOA, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 2,400 adult Tanzanians in August-September 2024. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Tanzania in 2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2021, and 2022.

Key findings

- Tanzanians offer mixed assessments of their personal living conditions: 38% describe them as "fairly bad" or "very bad," while a majority say they are good (31%) or "neither good nor bad" (31%).

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- Substantial proportions of the population went without basic life necessities at least once during the previous year, including a cash income (84%), sufficient clean water (48%), medical care or medicines (47%), and enough food (38%).

- Citizens are evenly divided in their evaluations of the country's economic condition: 39% describe it as good, while 38% say it is bad.
  - More than four in 10 citizens (43%) are optimistic that the country's economic condition will improve in the next 12 months.

- Seven in 10 citizens (70%) say the country is going "in the right direction."

- The delivery of public services such as health, water, infrastructure/roads, electricity, and education outrank economic issues as citizens' top priorities requiring government attention.

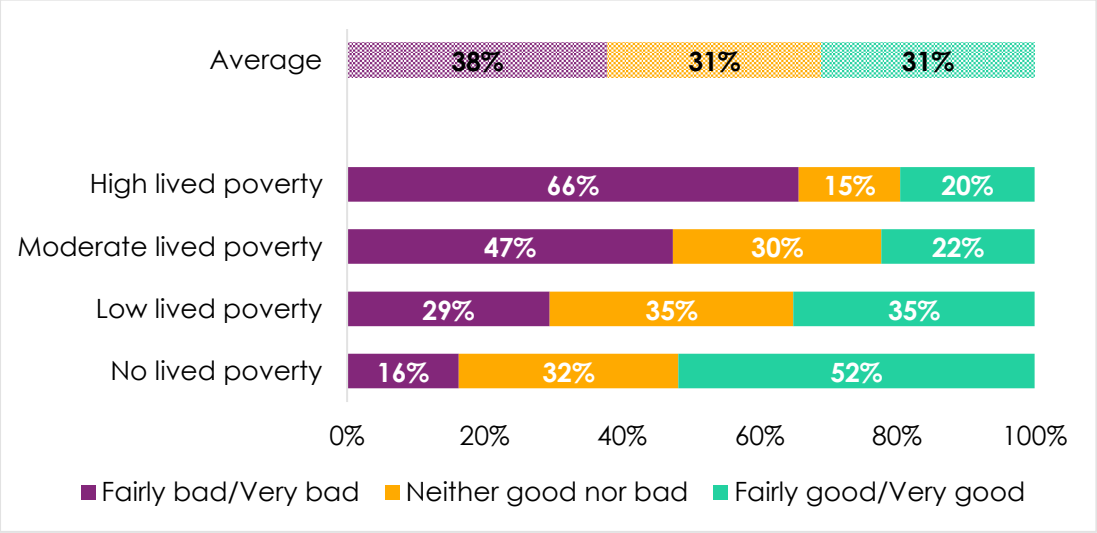
- Two-thirds (67%) of citizens give the government a passing grade on economic management, but fewer approve of the government's performance on creating jobs (45%), reducing gaps between rich and poor (42%), and keeping prices stable (42%).

Personal living conditions and lived poverty

Almost four in 10 Tanzanians (38%) describe their personal living conditions as "fairly bad" or "very bad," while slightly smaller proportions say they are good (31%) or "neither good nor bad" (31%) (Figure 1).

Assessments of personal living conditions worsen sharply as respondents' experience of lived poverty[1] increases. While only 16% of well-off citizens say their living conditions are bad, fully two-thirds (66%) of those experiencing high lived poverty consider their living conditions unacceptable.

Figure 1: Personal living conditions | by lived poverty | Tanzania | 2024



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

[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 past year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes and Patel (2022).

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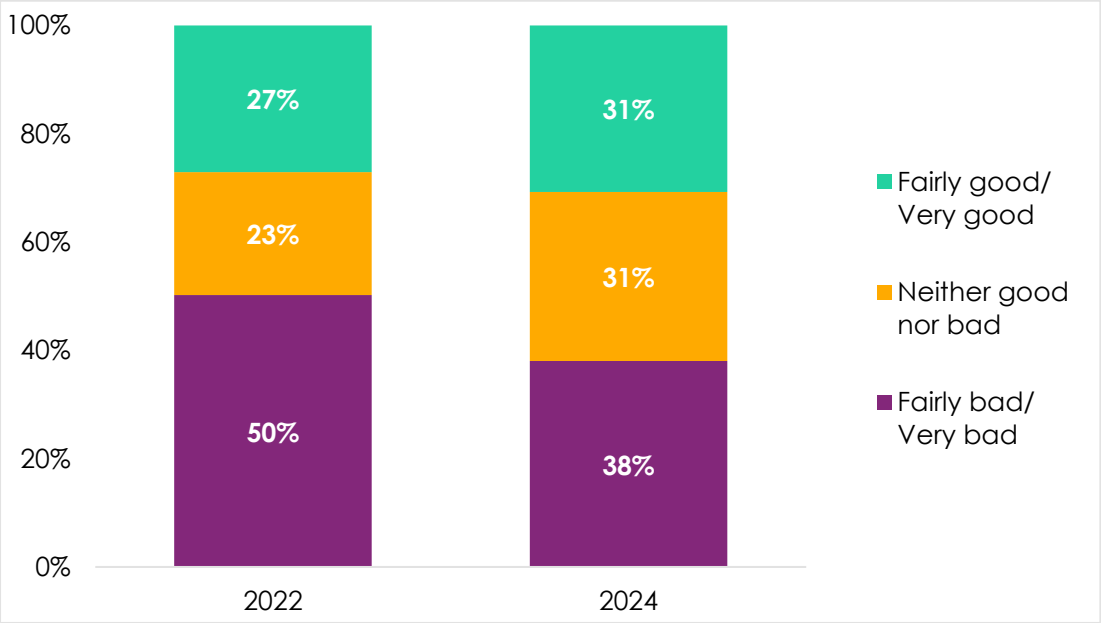
Compared to Afrobarometer's survey in 2022, the proportion of citizens who see their living conditions as bad has decreased by 12 percentage points, from 50% to 38%, while favourable assessments increased by 4 points (Figure 2). These numbers suggest a modest recovery from the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical tensions experienced in 2022.

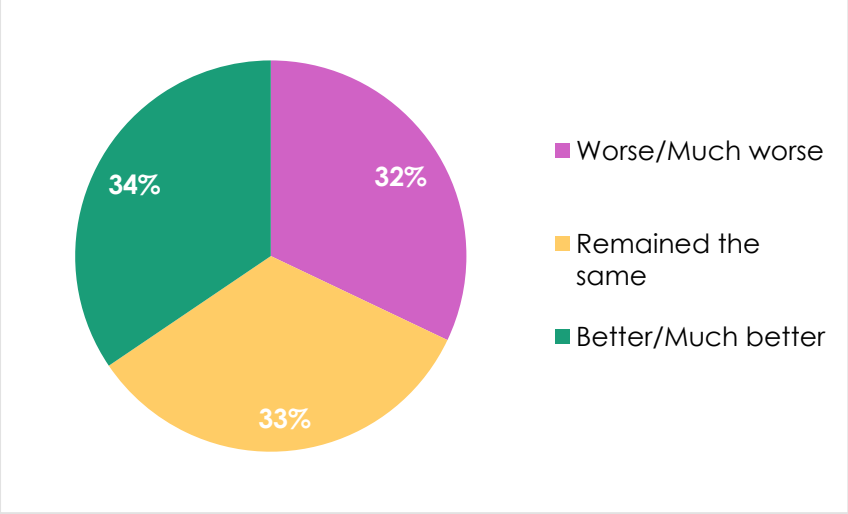
Figure 2: Personal living conditions | Tanzania | 2022 vs. 2024



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

When asked directly whether they are better off than a year earlier, citizens are equally divided: One-third (34%) say their living conditions are now "better" or "much better" than 12 months ago, while similar shares say they are worse (32%) or have not changed (33%) (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Personal living conditions compared to 12 months ago | Tanzania | 2024



Respondents were asked: *Looking back, how do you rate the following compared to 12 months ago: Your living conditions?*

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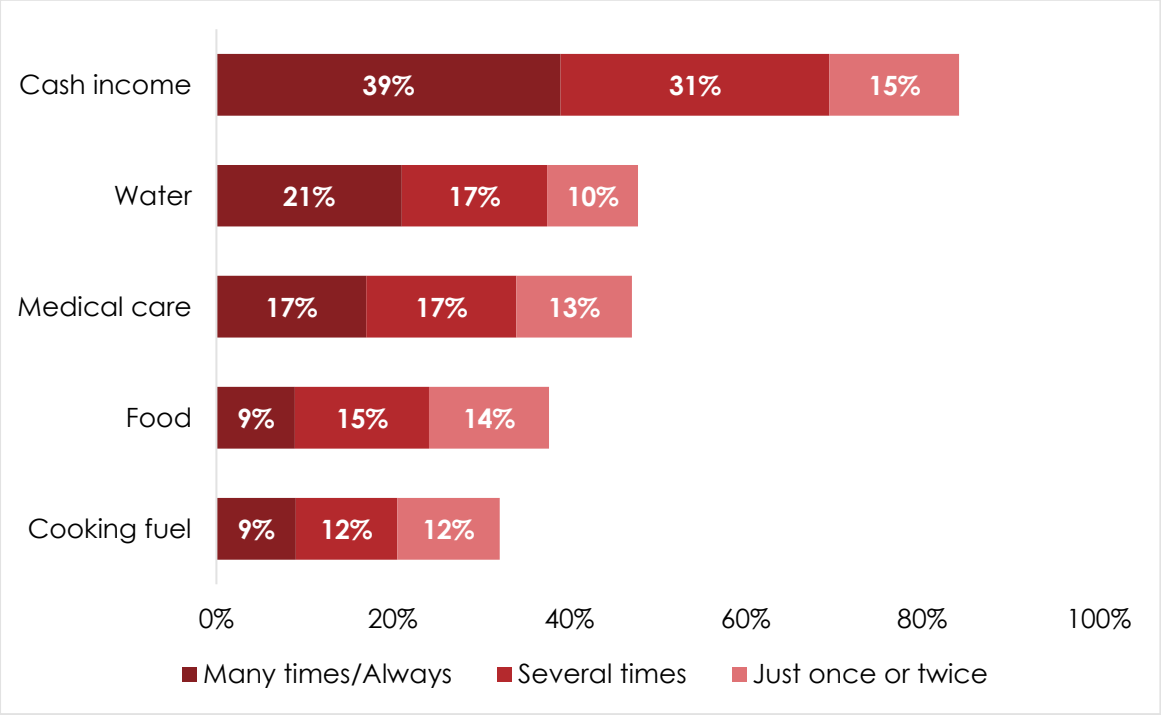
Negative assessments of personal living conditions are mirrored in Tanzanians' experiences of "lived poverty," or the deprivation of basic life necessities (Figure 4). More than eight in 10 respondents (84%) say they or a family member went without a cash income at least once during the previous year, including 39% who did so "many times" or "always."

Almost half (48%) suffered shortages of clean water at least once, with 21% who report that this happened frequently, and about the same number lacked medical care or medicines (47% at least once, 17% frequently). Shortages of food (38%) and cooking fuel (32%) were also not uncommon.

Figure 4: Frequency of going without basic life necessities | Tanzania | 2024



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?*

Country's economic condition

Like their assessments of their personal living conditions, Tanzanians' evaluations of the country's economic condition are divided. Four in 10 citizens (39%) say the economy is in "fairly good" or "very good" shape, while about the same proportion (38%) describe it as "fairly bad" or "very bad" (Figure 5).

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The poorest Tanzanians are three times as likely as their well-off counterparts to describe the country's economic condition as bad (65% vs. 22%).

As with personal living conditions, the proportion of respondents offering negative assessments of the country's economic condition has dropped by 16 percentage points since 2022, while the share of citizens who describe the economy in favourable terms has grown by 9 points (Figure 6).

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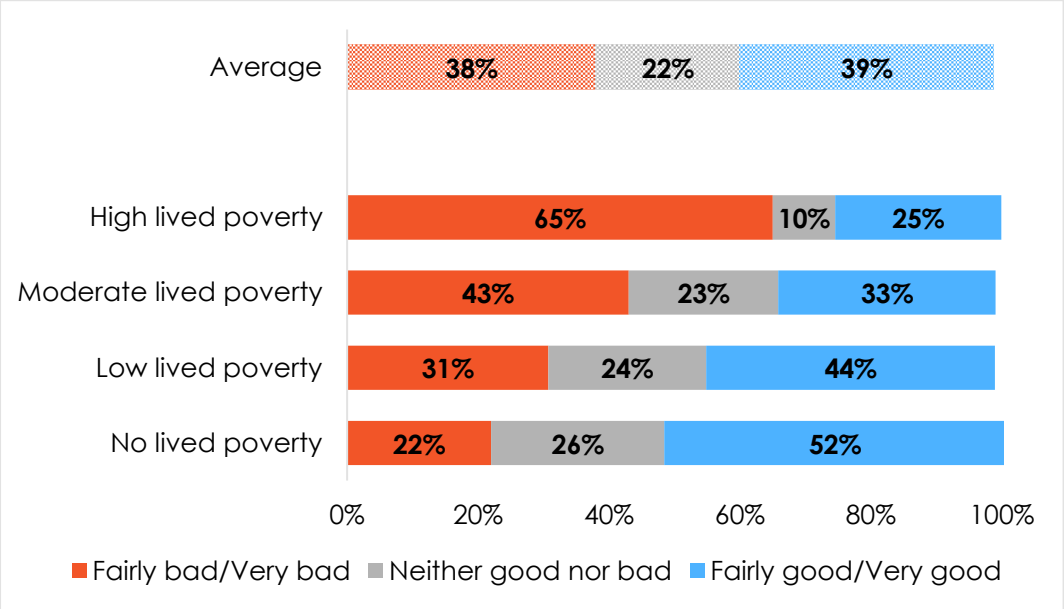
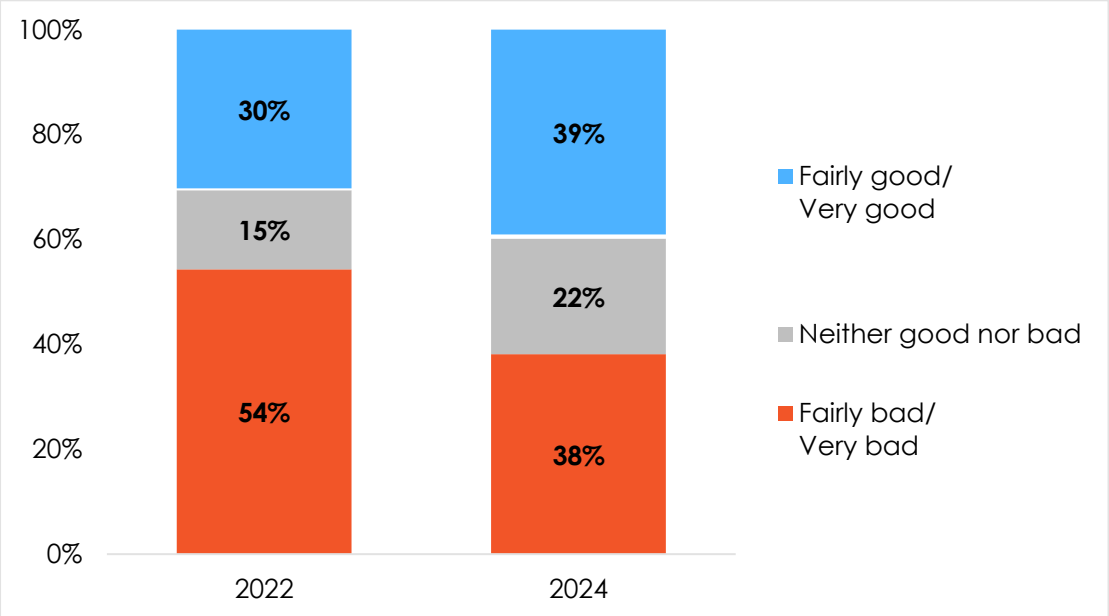
Figure 5: Country's economic condition | by lived poverty | Tanzania | 2024



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

Figure 6: Country's economic condition | Tanzania | 2022 vs. 2024



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

But when asked about the evolution of the country's economic situation over the past year, only about a third (35%) of respondents say it is "better" or "much better," while just as many (35%) say it has worsened and 30% see no change (Figure 7).

Citizens experiencing high (44%) or moderate (42%) levels of lived poverty are twice as likely as well-off respondents (21%) to say the county's economic situation has worsened.

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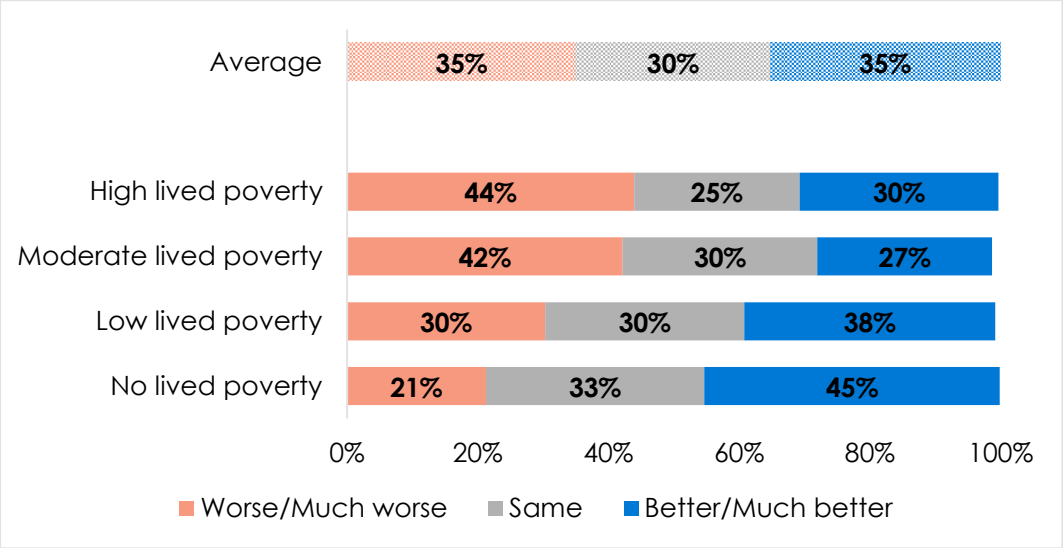
Figure 7: Country's economic condition compared to 12 months ago | by lived poverty | Tanzania | 2024

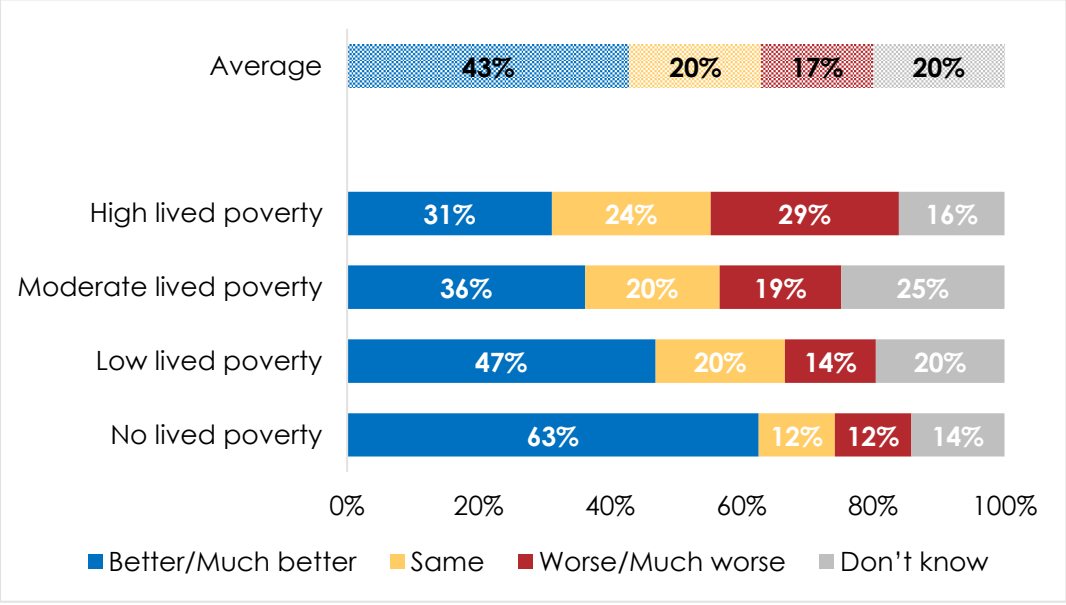


Respondents were asked: *Looking back, how do you rate the following compared to 12 months ago: Economic condition of this country?*

More than four in 10 Tanzanians (43%) are optimistic, saying they expect the country's economic condition to improve over the coming year (Figure 8). Even so, a majority predict that things will stay the same (20%) or get worse (17%) or say they "don't know" (20%).

Optimism about future economic conditions increases with respondents' economic status, ranging from just 31% among the poorest to 63% among the well-off.

Figure 8: Country's economic condition in 12 months' time | by lived poverty | Tanzania | 2024



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

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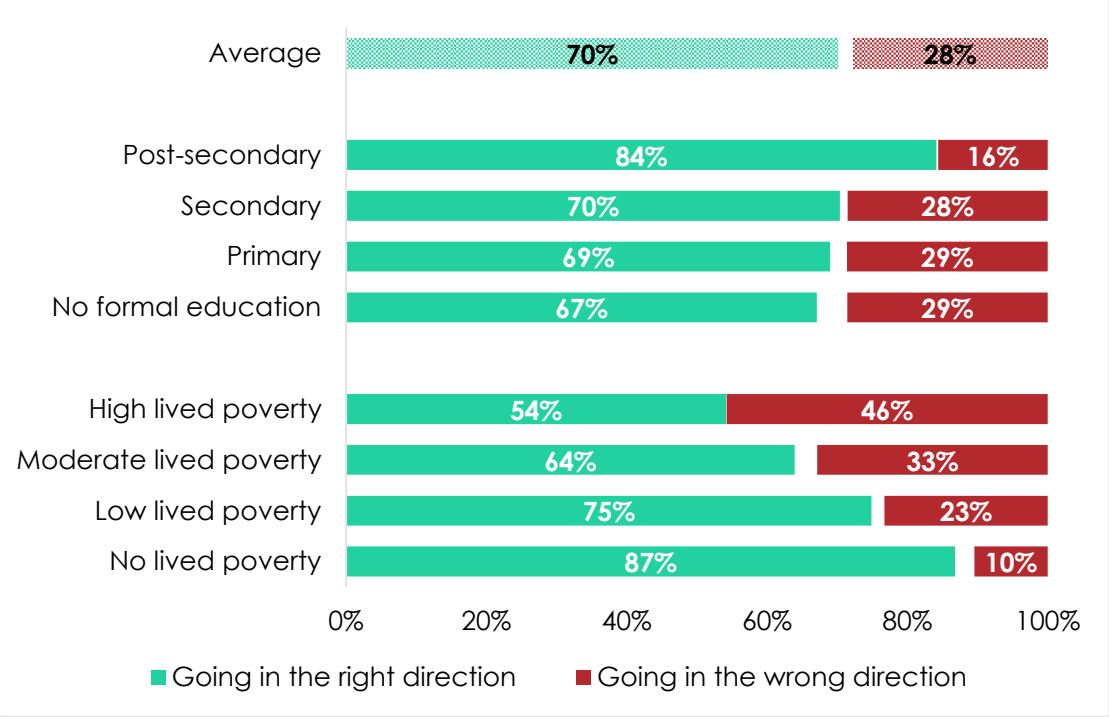
Overall direction of the country

Despite widespread experiences of lived poverty and mixed appraisals of economic and living conditions, the country's impressive macro-economic performance and post-pandemic recovery may be factors in Tanzanians' perceptions of the country's overall direction: Seven in 10 (70%) say the country is going "in the right direction," while only 28% think it is on the wrong path (Figure 9).

Approval of the country's direction increases with citizens' level of education and wealth. More than eight in 10 respondents see the country as moving in the right direction among those with post-secondary education (84%) and those experiencing no lived poverty (87%), while respondents with no formal education (67%) and high lived poverty (54%) are far less likely to agree.

Figure 9: Overall direction of the country | by education and lived poverty | Tanzania | 2024



Respondents were asked: *Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction?*

Priorities and government performance

Economic issues make up four of the top 11 issues that Tanzanians consider the most important problems that their government must address: unemployment (cited by 13% of respondents as one of their three top priorities), the increasing cost of living (12%), management of the economy (6%), and poverty (6%) (Figure 10). But they are far outpaced on citizens' agenda by the delivery of public services: Health ranks at No. 1 (45%), followed by water supply (36%), infrastructure/roads (34%), electricity (21%), and education (18%).

Rural residents are significantly more likely than urbanites to cite these service-delivery issues as top priorities for government action, while unemployment and the increasing cost of living are greater concerns among urban residents.

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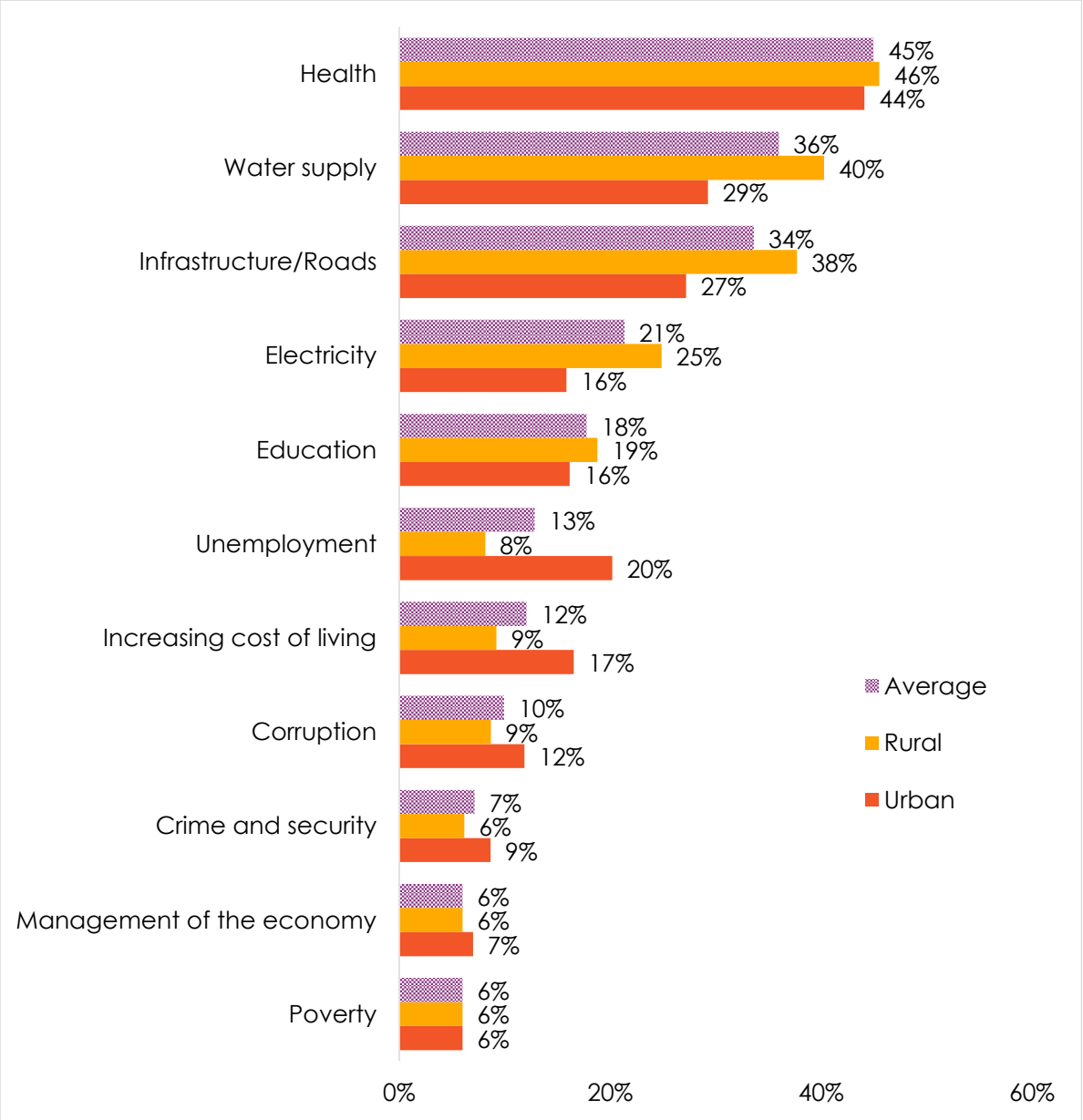
Figure 10: Most important problems | by urban-rural location | Tanzania | 2024



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

Amid generally positive public assessments of the government's performance (Figure 11), two-thirds (67%) of Tanzanians say the government is doing "fairly well" or "very well" on managing the economy. That's significantly fewer than approve of the government's performance on education (81%), preventing or resolving violent conflict (81%), and reducing crime (77%).

Performance ratings on other economic issues are more mixed: A slim majority (53%) approve of government efforts on improving living standards of the poor, but fewer than half say the same about creating jobs (45%), reducing gaps between rich and poor (42%), and keeping prices stable (42%).

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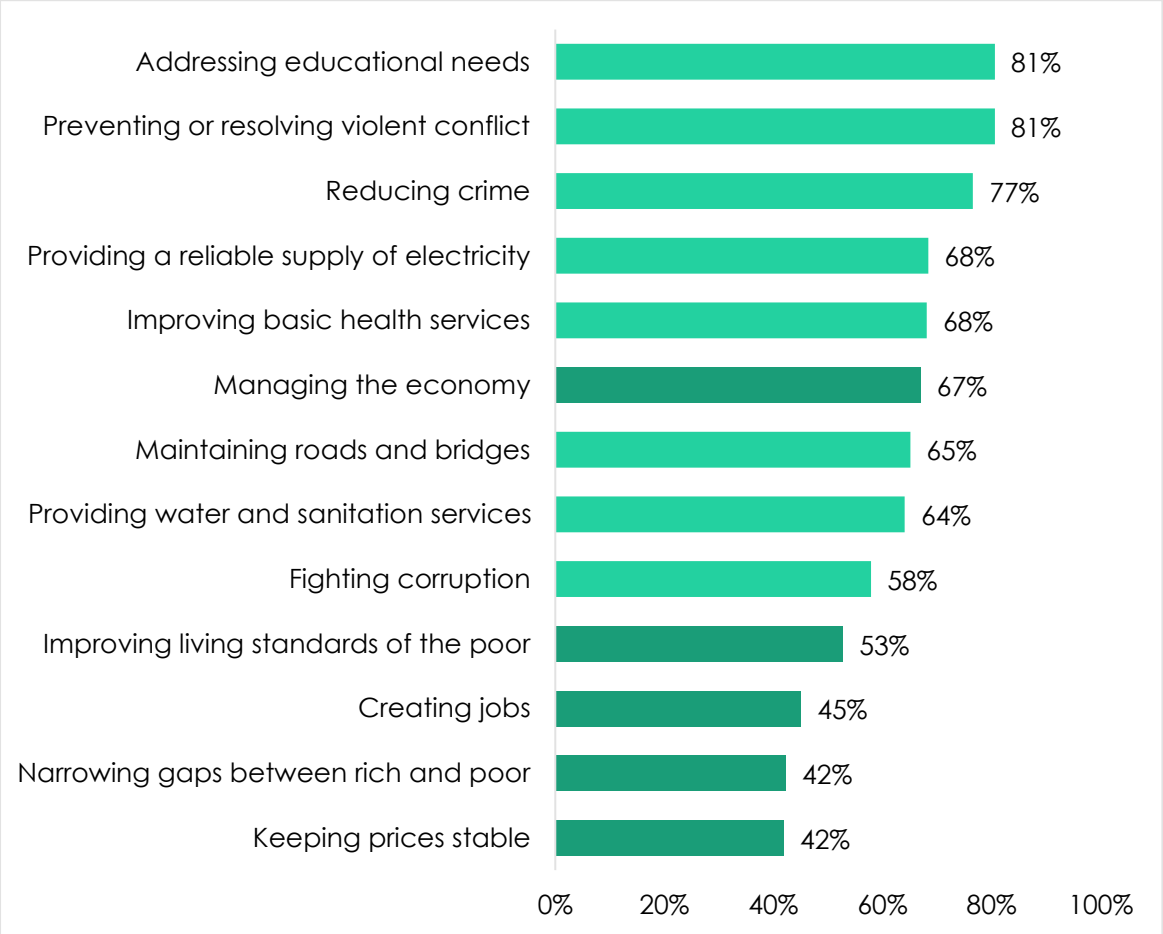
Figure 11: Government performance on key issues | Tanzania | 2024



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? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")*

Conclusion

Afrobarometer survey data show that poverty remains a problem for Tanzanians, many of whom continue to experience shortages of basic life necessities. While assessments of personal living conditions and the country's economy have improved compared to 2022, they remain mixed at best.

Even so, most citizens see the country as moving "in the right direction" and express satisfaction with the government's provision of public services such as education, electricity, and health care. A majority also say the government is doing a good job of managing the economy, though performance ratings on other key economic issues are less positive.

These findings suggest a need to continue with investments aimed at improving physical infrastructure and social services to enhance the country's productive capacity and boost employment in productive sectors, thus increasing incomes and reducing poverty and inequalities.

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