

Majority of Mauritians say living conditions are good, but many question country's direction

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 191 | Louis Amedee Darga

Summary

In a stable political environment since independence in 1968, Mauritius transformed itself from a low-income country dependent on sugar into an upper-middle-income country with growing wealth creation from financial services, tourism, and other service sectors (World Bank, 2017). But consistently strong economic growth in the 1990s and 2000s has slowed in recent years, reflected in a drop in gross domestic product growth from almost 8% in 2000 to 3.8% in 2016, fueling intense debate about whether Mauritius is caught in the “middle-income trap” (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015; Financial Times, 2016).

Results of the latest Afrobarometer survey show a very mixed public outlook on life in Mauritius. Although more citizens than in 2014 describe their living conditions and their country's economy as good, substantial proportions see the country as “going in the wrong direction” and economic conditions as bad and likely to get worse.

While economic issues dominate the list of Mauritians' foremost concerns, they also see crime as a priority problem. Survey findings suggest that citizens feel somewhat less safe in their homes and neighbourhoods than they did in 2014, but that experience of crime remains low.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in African countries. Six rounds of surveys were conducted in up to 37 countries between 1999 and 2015, and Round 7 surveys are being conducted in 2016/2018. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Mauritius, led by StraConsult Ltd, interviewed 1,200 adult Mauritians in October 2017. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Mauritius in 2012 and 2014.

Key findings

- Mauritians are more likely to see their country as going in the wrong direction (50%) than in the right direction (44%).
- Economic issues and crime/security are the most important problems that Mauritians want their government to address.
- Mauritians are divided in their assessments of the country's economic condition, 43% good vs. 38% bad, a slight improvement from perceptions in 2014.

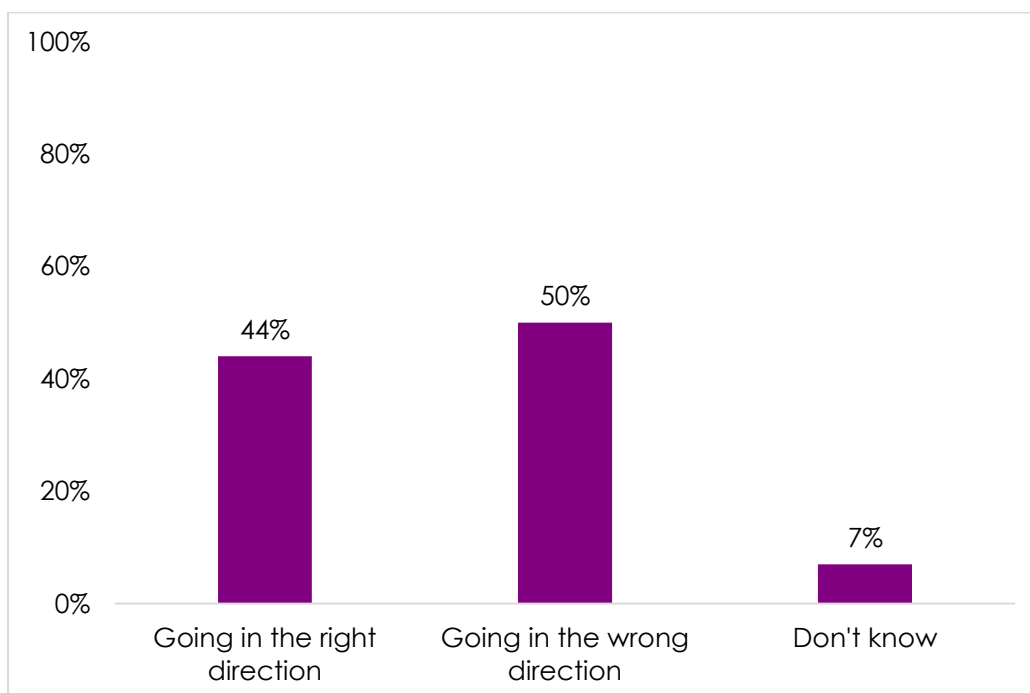
- A majority (56%) of citizens describe their personal living conditions as “fairly good” or “very good,” while 23% say they are fairly/very bad. Views on the country's and their personal economic conditions are somewhat more positive among rural residents and among the best- and least-educated.
- A majority of Mauritians expect the country's economy to get better (23%) or at least hold steady (35%) over the coming year, but one in three (35%) think things will get “worse” or “much worse.”
- While most Mauritians feel safe, these perceptions have deteriorated somewhat since the 2014 survey.

Overall direction of the country

Only four in 10 Mauritians (44%) believe the country is going in the right direction, while fully half (50%) say it is headed in the wrong direction (Figure 1). These perceptions have not changed significantly since the 2014 survey (45% right, 52% wrong).

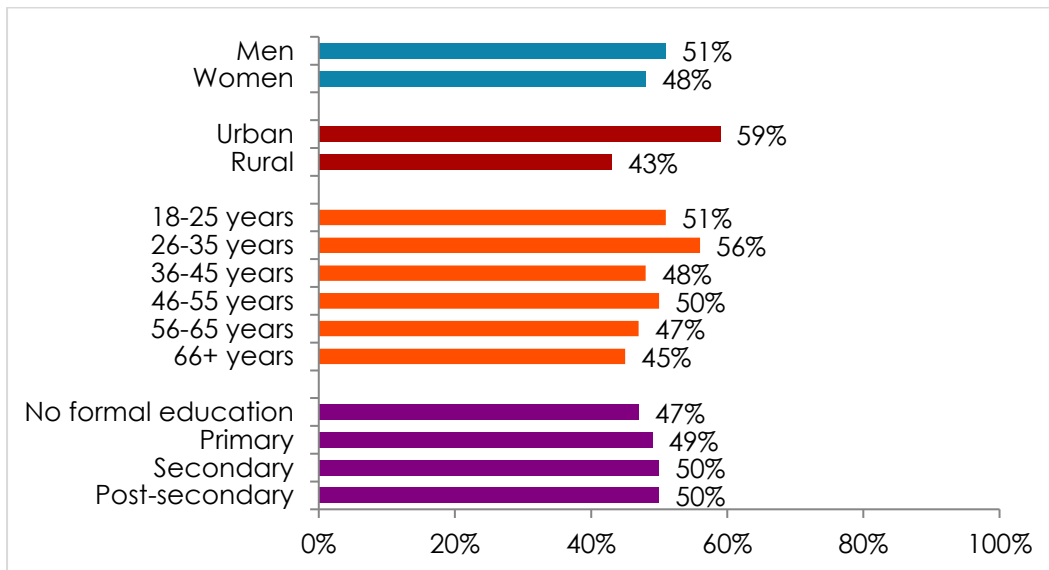
The belief that the country is going in the wrong direction is stronger among urban than rural residents (59% vs. 43%) and is somewhat stronger among 26- to 35-year-olds (56%) than in other age brackets (Figure 2). It is shared almost equally across all educational levels.

Figure 1: Overall direction of the country | Mauritius | 2017



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 | Mauritius | 2017

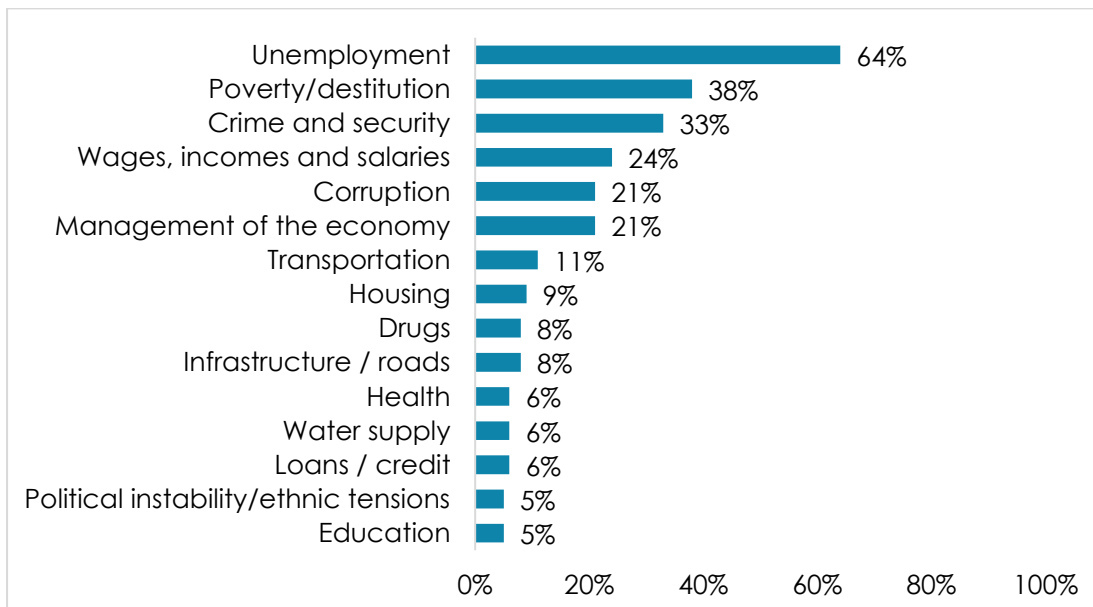


Respondents were asked: Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction? (% who say "going in the wrong direction")

Economic issues, crime as most important problems

When asked what they see as the country's most important problems that the government should address, Mauritians overwhelmingly cite economic issues: 64% list unemployment among their top three concerns, with poverty (38%), wages (24%), and management of the economy (21%) also among the top six (Figure 3). But crime/security (33%) also ranks high, at No. 3, with the related issue of drugs (8%) coming in at No. 9.

Figure 3: Most important problems | Mauritius | 2017



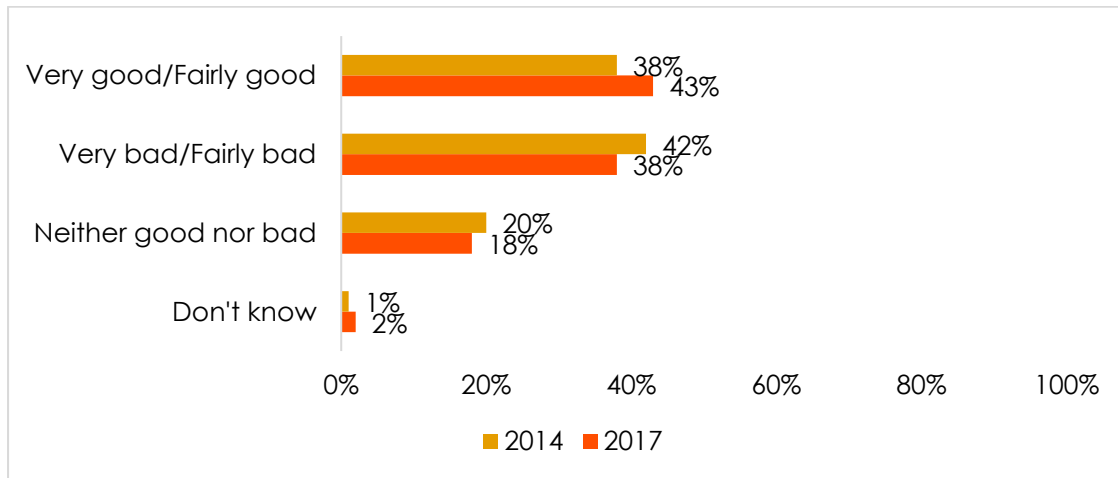
Respondents were asked: In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Note: Respondents were allowed up to three responses. Figure shows % who cite each issue among their top three concerns.)

Economic condition of the country

Mauritians are divided in their assessment of the country's current economic condition: 43% say it "fairly good" or "very good," while 38% describe it as "fairly bad" or "very bad" (Figure 4). This is a modest improvement from 2014, when only 38% saw economic conditions as good.

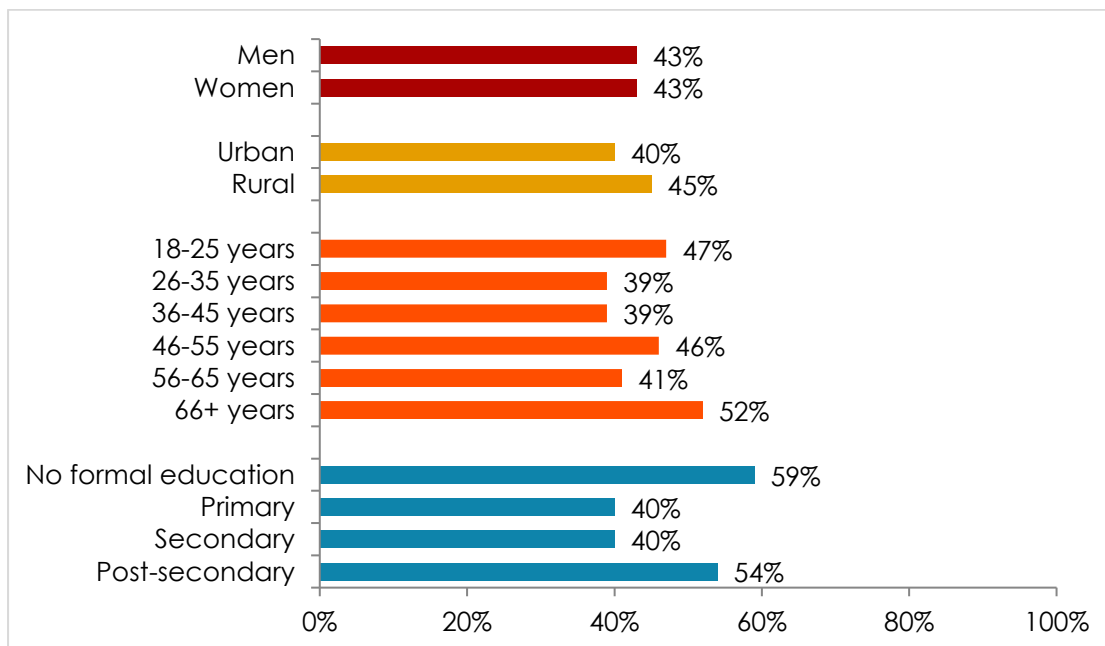
Positive assessments of economic conditions are most common among rural residents (45% vs. 40% of urban residents), the oldest and youngest respondents, and those with no formal education (59%) or post-secondary education (54%) (Figure 5).

Figure 4: Economic condition of the country | Mauritius | 2014-2017



Respondents were asked: In general, how would you describe the present economic condition of this country?

Figure 5: Economic condition of the country is good | by demographic group | Mauritius | 2017



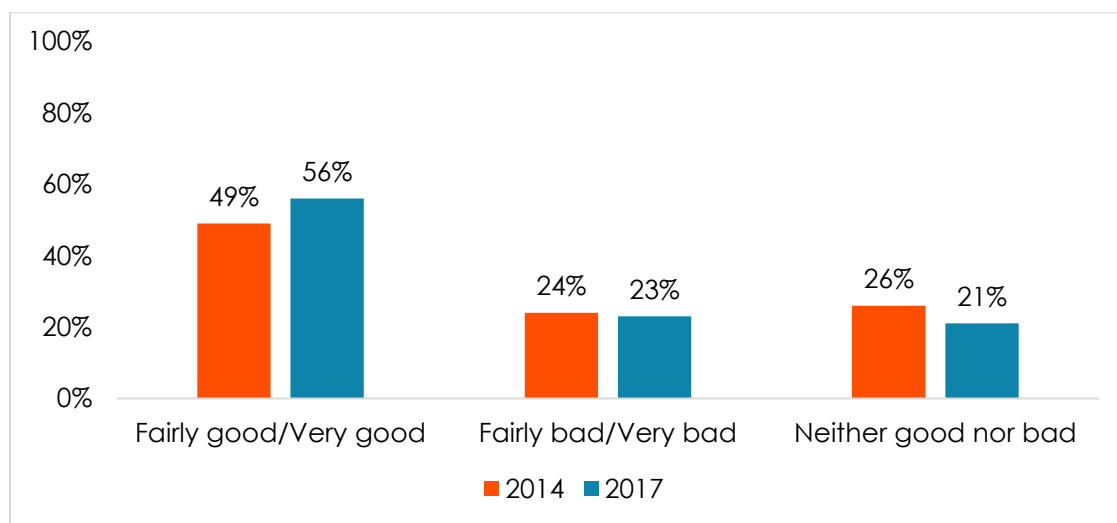
Respondents were asked: In general, how would you describe the present economic condition of this country? (% who say "fairly good" or "very good")

Personal living conditions

A majority (56%) of Mauritians say their present living conditions are “fairly good” or “very good” – again a modest improvement from 49% in 2014. One in four (23%) see their living conditions as “fairly bad” or “very bad” (23%), while 21% describe them as “neither good nor bad” (Figure 6).

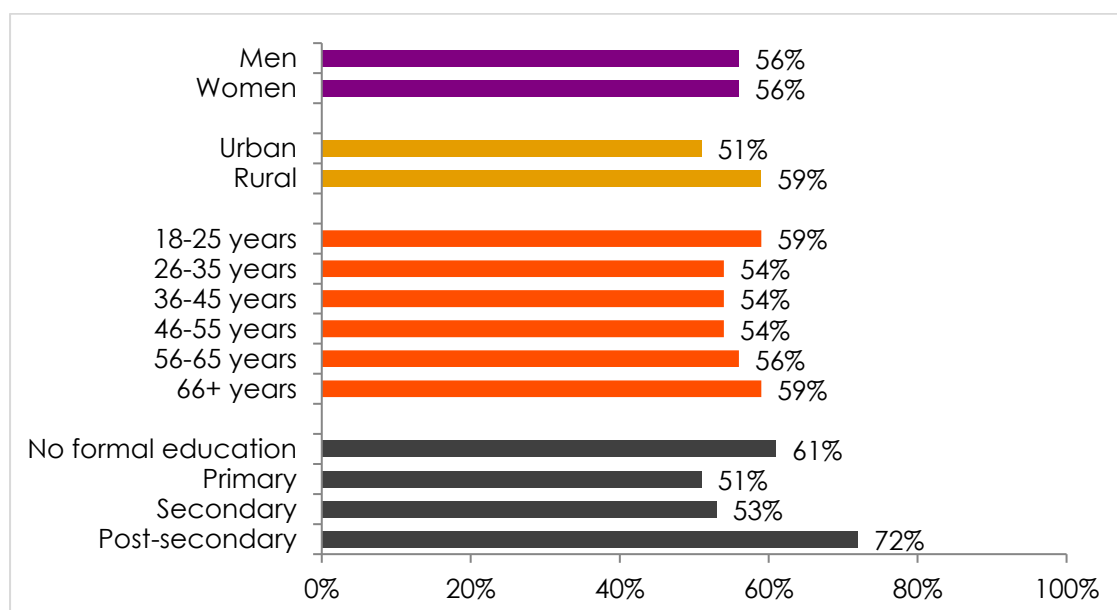
As with the country’s overall direction and current economic situation, rural residents feel better than urbanites about their own living conditions (59% vs. 51% who say fairly/very good) (Figure 7). Almost three-fourths (72%) of respondents with a post-secondary education say their living conditions are “fairly good” or “very good,” while those with a primary (51%) or secondary (53%) education are least likely to feel good about their living conditions.

Figure 6: Personal living conditions | Mauritius | 2014-2017



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

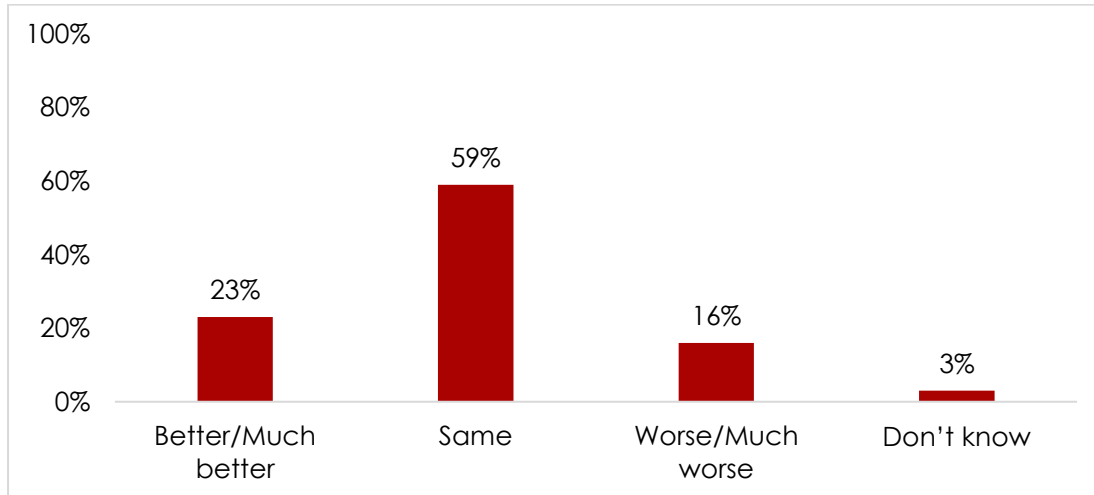
Figure 7: Personal living conditions | by demographic group | Mauritius | 2017



Respondents were asked: In general, how would you describe your own present living condition? (% who say “fairly good” or “very good”)

When asked to compare their living conditions to those of other Mauritians, most respondents (59%) say they're about the same. Roughly one in five think they are better off (23%) or worse off (16%) than other Mauritians (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Personal living conditions compared to others | Mauritius | 2017



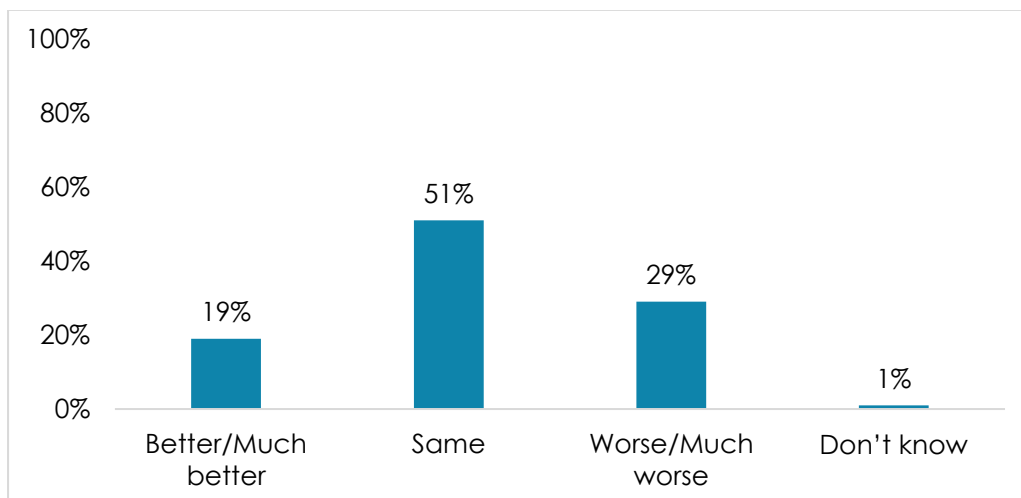
Respondents were asked: In general, how do you rate your living conditions compared to those of other Mauritians?

Country's economic condition getting better or worse?

Half (51%) of respondents say the country's economic condition has not changed over the previous year, while 29% believe it has worsened and 19% say it's gotten better (Figure 9).

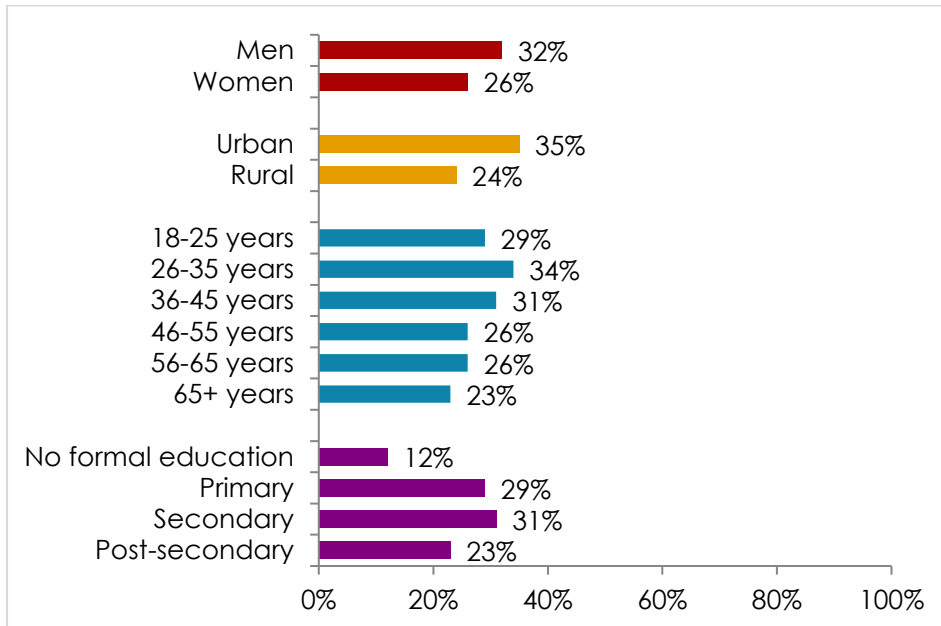
Men are slightly more negative than women in their perception of economic trends: 32% say the economy has gotten "worse" or "much worse," vs. 26% of women (Figure 10). Again more urban residents (35%) than rural dwellers (24%) see things as having deteriorated, as do respondents with primary (29%) or secondary (31%) schooling compared to their counterparts with more or less education.

Figure 9: Country's economic condition compared to 12 months ago | Mauritius | 2017



Respondents were asked: Looking back, how do you rate economic conditions in this country compared to 12 months ago?

Figure 10: Country's economic condition worse than 12 months ago | by demographic group | Mauritius | 2017

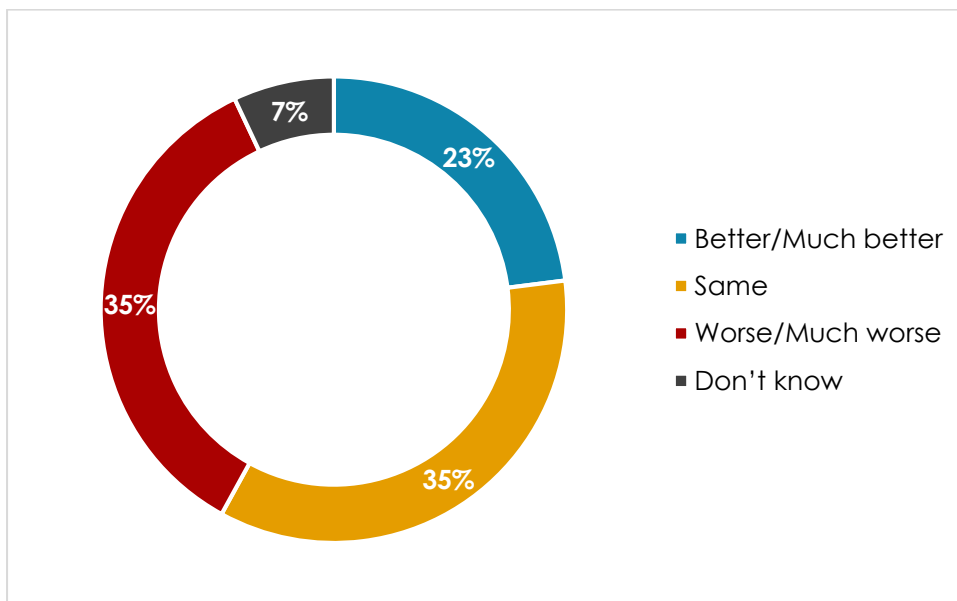


Respondents were asked: Looking back, how do you rate economic conditions in this country compared to 12 months ago? (% who say "worse" or "much worse")

About one-third (35%) of Mauritians expect the country's economic conditions to be "worse" or "much worse" in 12 months' time, while only 23% expect improvement and 35% they will stay the same over the coming year (Figure 11).

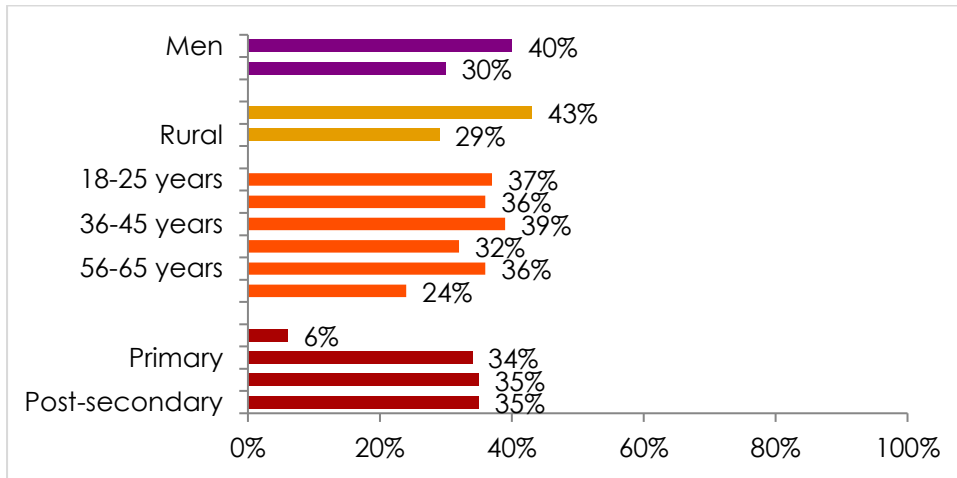
Pessimism about the economy is below average among women (30%), rural residents (29%), the elderly (24%), and respondents with no formal education (6%) (Figure 12).

Figure 11: Country's economic condition in 12 months | Mauritius | 2017



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

Figure 12: Country's economic condition worse in 12 months | by demographic group | Mauritius | 2017



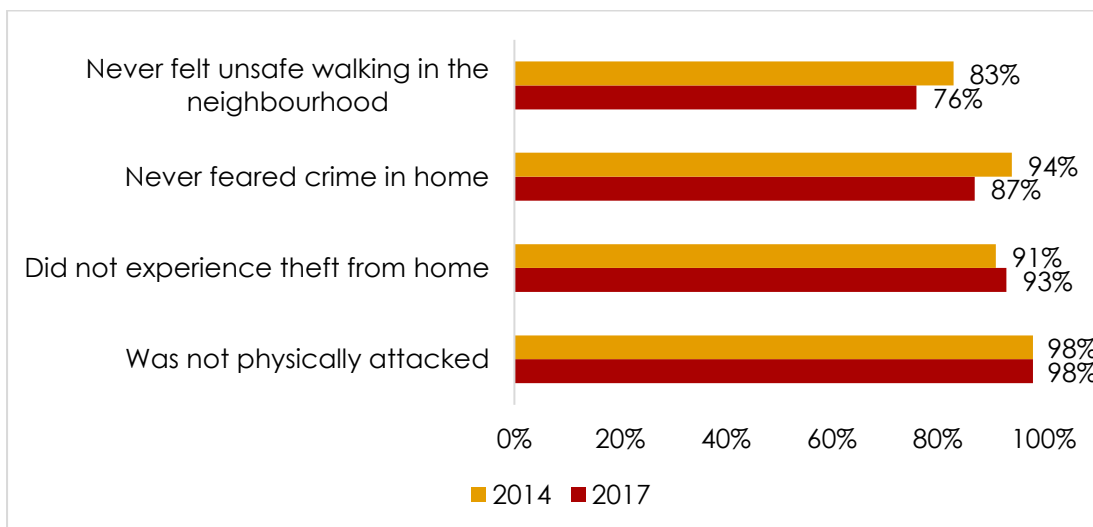
Respondents were asked: Looking ahead, do you expect economic conditions in this country to be better or worse in 12 months' time? (% who say "worse" or "much worse")

Crime and personal safety

Mauritians' perceptions of crime and personal safety – No. 3 among their "most important problems" – have worsened slightly since the 2014 survey (Figure 13). Three-fourths (76%) of Mauritians say in 2017 that they never felt unsafe walking in their neighbourhood during the previous year, a decline from 83% in 2014. Similarly, while 87% say they never feared crime in their home, that's a decrease from 94% in 2014.

But reported experiences of crime held steady, with more than nine out of 10 respondents saying they did not experience theft from their homes (93%) or a physical attack (98%) during the previous 12 months.

Figure 13: Personal safety: Perceptions and experiences | Mauritius | 2014-2017

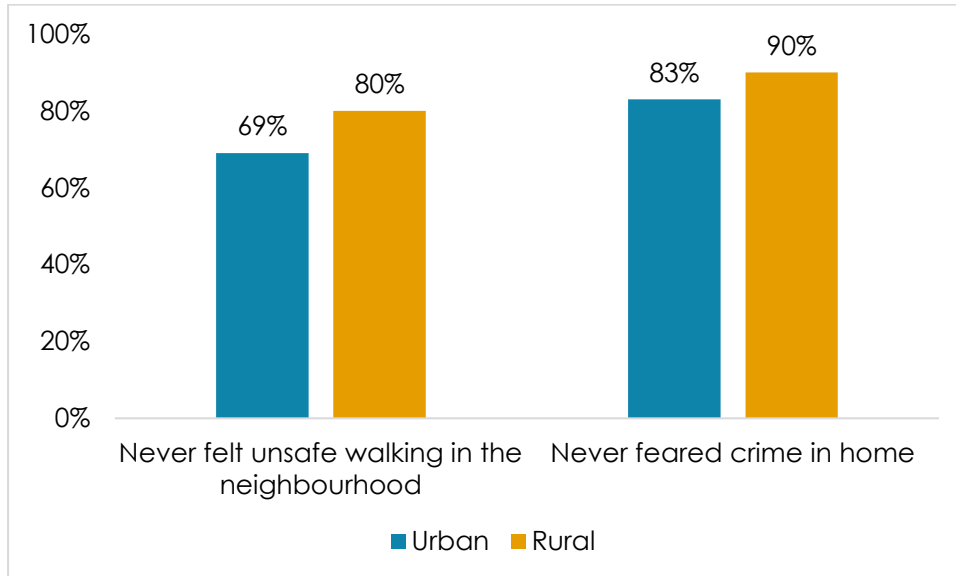


Respondents were asked:

- Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Felt unsafe walking in your neighbourhood? Feared crime in your own home?
- During the past year, have you or anyone in your family: Had something stolen from your house? Been physically attacked?

Rural residents generally feel safer than their urban counterparts, with gaps of 11 and 7 percentage points, respectively, in the proportions who never felt unsafe and never feared crime (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Perceptions of insecurity | urban vs. rural | Mauritius | 2017



Respondents were asked: Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family: Felt unsafe walking in your neighbourhood? Feared crime in your own home?

Conclusion

Although Mauritians feel slightly better about their country's economy and their personal living conditions than they did a few years ago, substantial skepticism remains about the country's overall direction and short-term prospects for economic gains. Moreover, Mauritians feel somewhat less safe than they did in 2014, although experience of crime or violence did not increase.

Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It's easy and free at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

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Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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