



## Zimbabweans want open and honest elections, fear political intimidation and violence

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**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 150 | Stephen Ndoma and Richman Kokera**

### Summary

Elections are a critical mechanism through which citizens choose their representatives and hold them to account. Since attaining independence in 1980, Zimbabwe has unfailingly conducted regular elections – a total of eight parliamentary and five presidential elections, most recently two “harmonized” (i.e. concurrent presidential, parliamentary, and local government) elections.

With few exceptions, the country’s elections have been fraught with controversy and opposition-party allegations of politically motivated violence and intimidation perpetrated by the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). These allegations have been particularly common in elections held since 2000, most notably the June 2008 presidential run-offs. As a result of alleged electoral irregularities, the outcomes of virtually all previous elections have been contested.

Afrobarometer Round 7 survey findings in Zimbabwe show overwhelming popular desire for regular, open, and honest elections, but this is accompanied by widespread fears of political intimidation and violence during campaigns as well as a strong perception that citizens need to exercise caution when casting their ballots.

### 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 2016, and Round 7 surveys are being conducted in 2016/2017. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent’s choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Zimbabwe, led by Mass Public Opinion Institute, interviewed 1,200 adult Zimbabweans in January and February 2017. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Zimbabwe in 1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2012, and 2014.

### Key findings

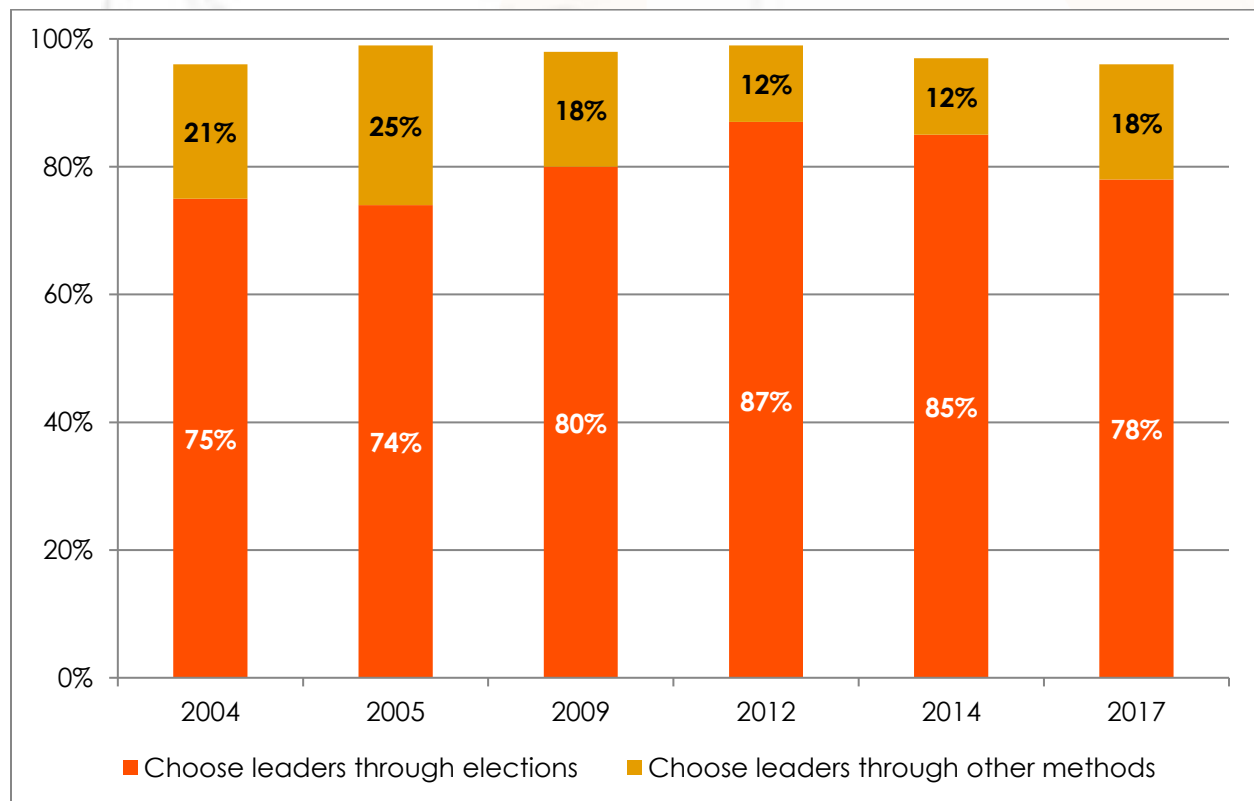
- Almost four-fifths (78%) of Zimbabweans say the country should choose its leaders through regular, open, and honest elections, while 18% prefer other methods because elections “sometimes produce bad results.”

- More than half (52%) of Zimbabweans say they personally fear becoming victims of political intimidation or violence during election campaigns.
- Assessments of government performance in preventing political violence reflect Zimbabwe's stark partisan divide: Four-fifths (79%) of opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC-T) supporters say it is doing badly, while almost as many ZANU-PF adherents (70%) say it is doing well.
- Nearly two-thirds (64%) of respondents say that people "often" or "always" have to be careful about how they vote.

### Support for regular, open, and honest elections

More than three-fourths (78%) of Zimbabweans "agree" or "agree very strongly" that the country should choose its leaders through regular, open, and honest elections, while 18% prefer other methods because elections "sometimes produce bad results." Support for elections as the best way to choose leaders is somewhat lower than in 2012 (87%) and 2014 (85%) (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Support for regular, open, and honest elections | Zimbabwe | 2004-2017**



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

Statement 1: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open, and honest elections.

Statement 2: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country's leaders.

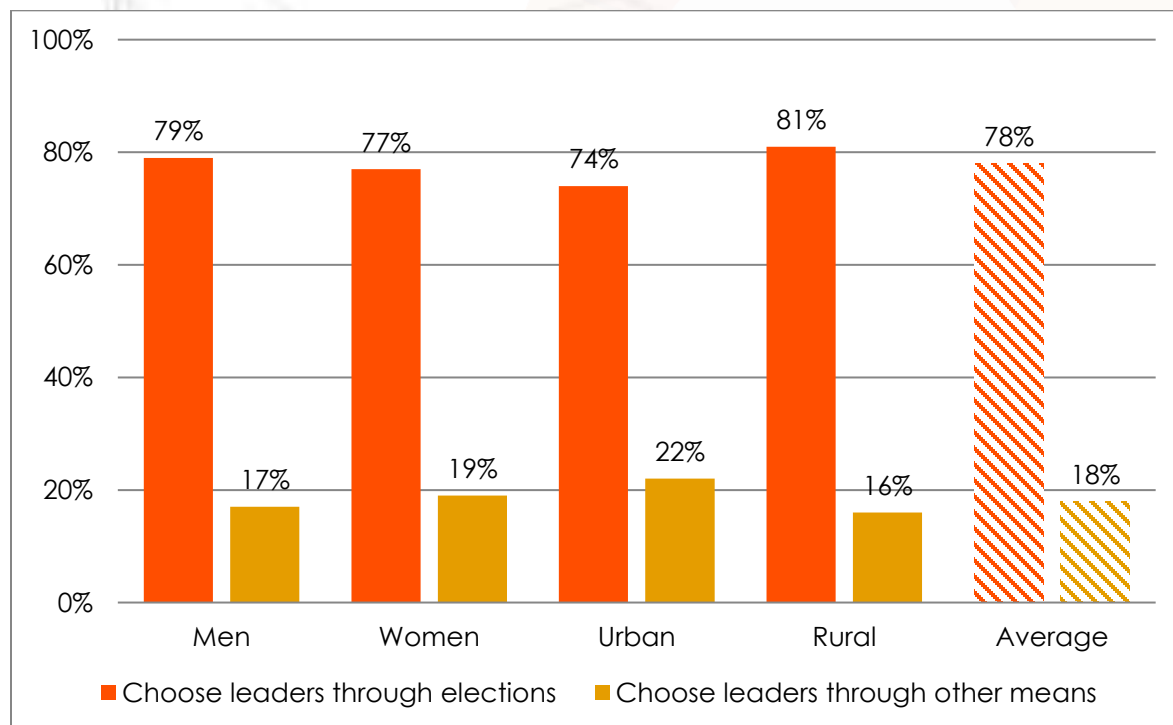
(% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

Rural residents are more likely than urbanites to favour elections (81% vs. 74%), while no significant differences exist between men and women on this issue (Figure 2).

Older citizens are somewhat more supportive of elections (81% among those aged 56 and above) than their younger counterparts (77%), but education level is not a consistent predictor of preferences on this question (Figure 3). Support for choosing leaders via regular, open, and honest elections is widespread among both main political parties in the country, though MDC-T supporters are almost twice as likely as ZANU-PF adherents to favour methods other than elections (19% vs. 10%).<sup>1</sup>

Support for choosing leaders through elections is the majority view in all of the country's 10 administrative provinces. But it is considerably weaker in Matabeleland North (53%), Bulawayo (65%), and Harare (70%) than in Matabeleland South (92%) and Mashonaland Central (86%) (Figure 4).

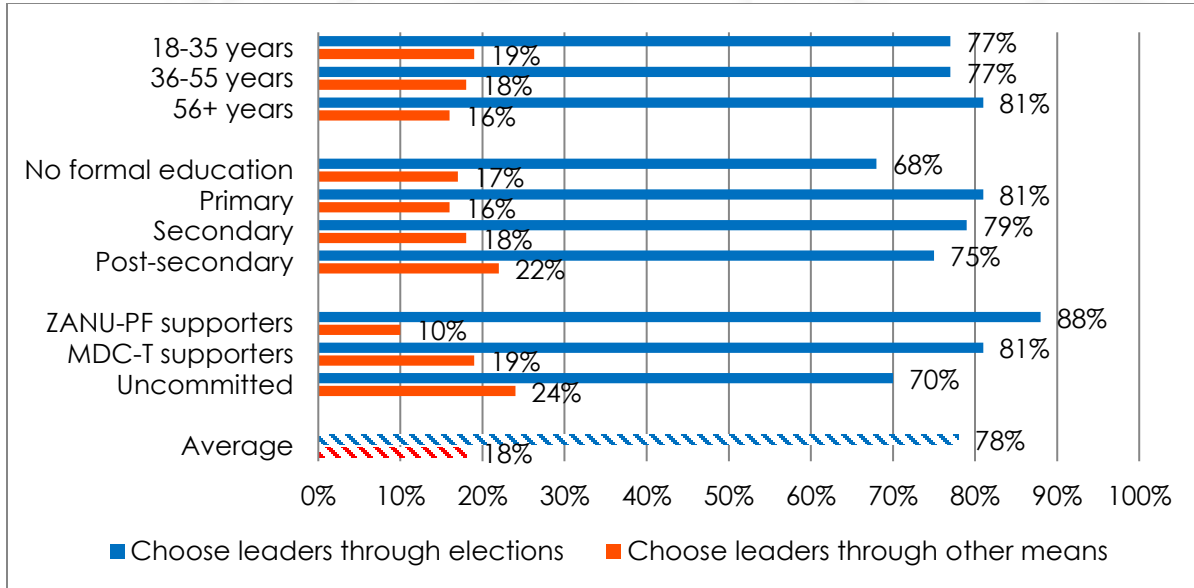
**Figure 2: Support for regular, open, and honest elections** | by gender and urban-rural residence | Zimbabwe | 2017



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open, and honest elections.  
 Statement 2: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country's leaders.  
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

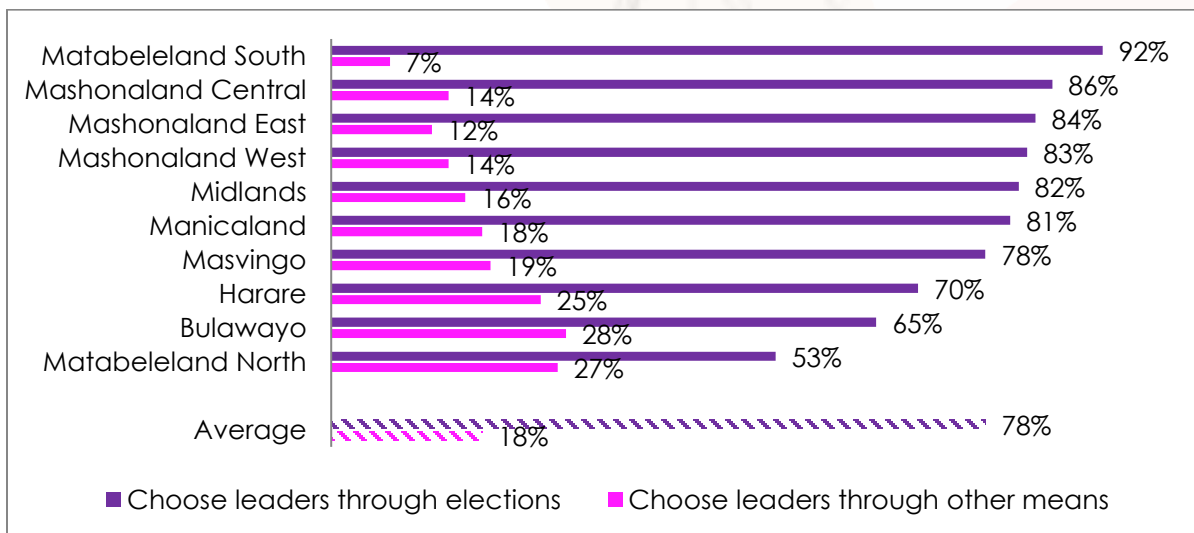
<sup>1</sup> Party affiliation was determined by responses to the questions, "Do you feel close to any particular political party? [If yes:] Which party is that?"

**Figure 3: Support for regular, open, and honest elections** | by age, education, and political party affiliation | Zimbabwe | 2017



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open, and honest elections.  
 Statement 2: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country's leaders. (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

**Figure 4: Support for regular, open, and honest elections** | by province | Zimbabwe | 2017

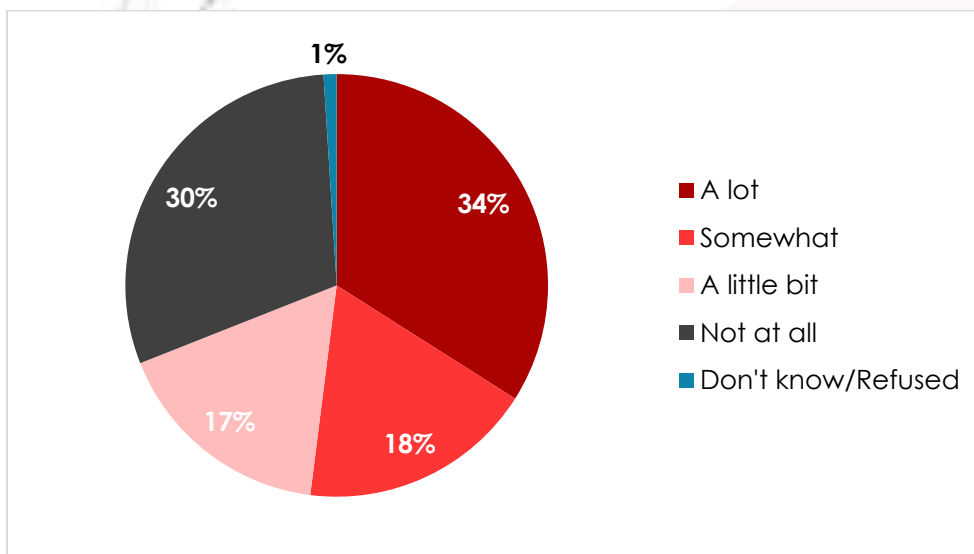


**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open, and honest elections.  
 Statement 2: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country's leaders. (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

## Fear of political intimidation or violence during election campaigns

While Zimbabwe has conducted regular elections as and when they are legally due, considerable public debate has focused on how open and honest these elections have been, and the MDC-T has challenged the outcomes of all post-2000 elections. Survey data show that fear during election campaigns is a cause for significant concern: More than half (52%) of Zimbabweans say they fear political intimidation or violence "somewhat" (18%) or "a lot" (34%). Only 30% say they have no fear "at all" of election-related intimidation or violence (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Fear of political intimidation or violence during election campaigns**  
 | Zimbabwe | 2017



**Respondents were asked:** During election campaigns in this country, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence?

Far more urbanites (64%) than rural residents (46%) say they fear political intimidation or violence during election campaigns "somewhat" or "a lot," and women (58%) are more likely than men (47%) to express such fear (Figure 6).

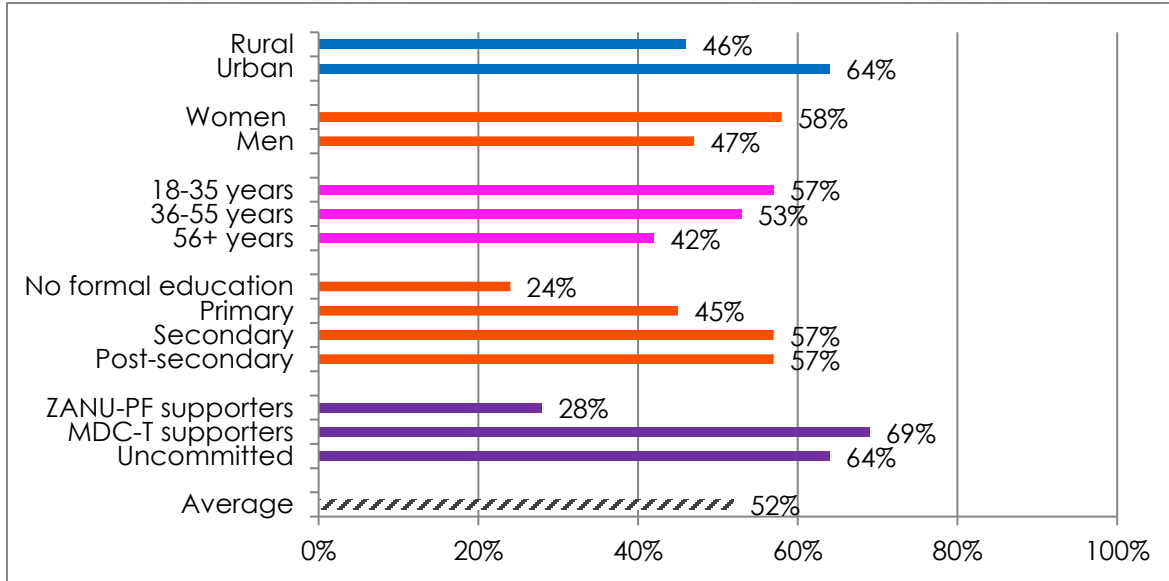
Fear of political intimidation and violence during election time decreases with age (ranging from 57% of youth aged 18-35 to 42% of elders aged 56 and older) and increases with respondents' education level, from 24% of those with no formal education to 57% of those with secondary or post-secondary qualifications.

A huge partisan divide exists on this question: MDC-T supporters (69%) and uncommitted respondents (64%) are more than twice as likely as ZANU-PF adherents (28%) to fear becoming victims of political intimidation or violence during election campaigns.

A majority of residents in four provinces say they are at least "somewhat" fearful of election-related intimidation or violence: Harare (71%), Manicaland (70%), Bulawayo (57%), and Mashonaland East (53%). (Figure 7). By contrast, a majority of citizens in Midlands (52%) and Matabeleland South (51%) say they do "not at all" fear political intimidation or violence during election time.

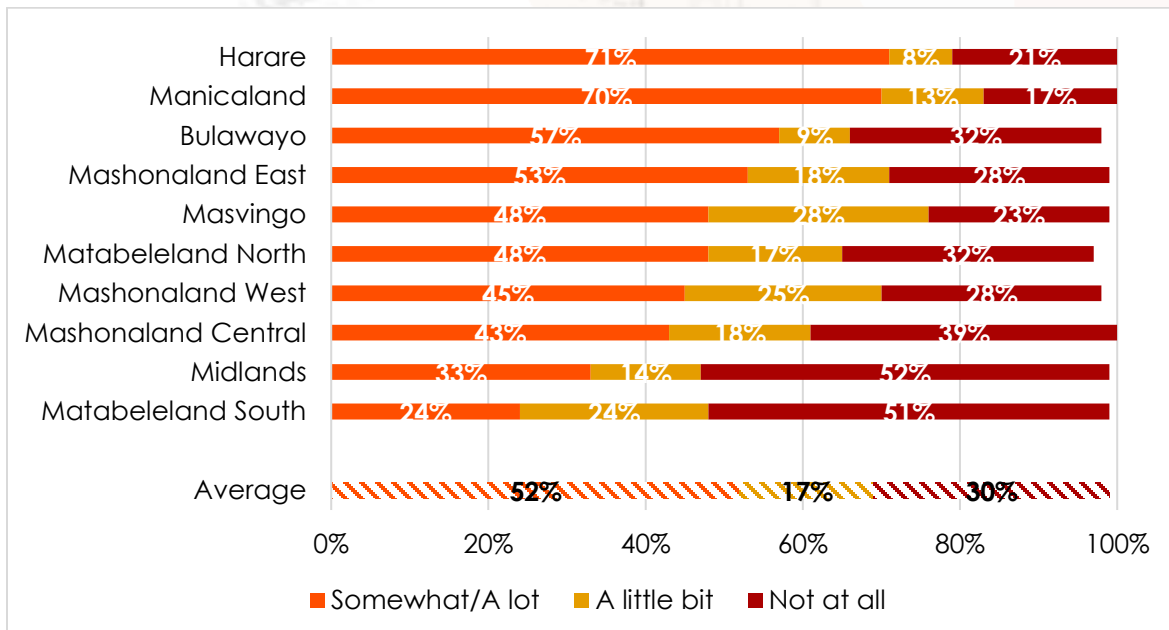


**Figure 6: Fear of political intimidation or violence during election campaigns**  
 | by urban-rural location, gender, age, education level, and political party affiliation  
 | Zimbabwe | 2017



**Respondents were asked:** During election campaigns in this country, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

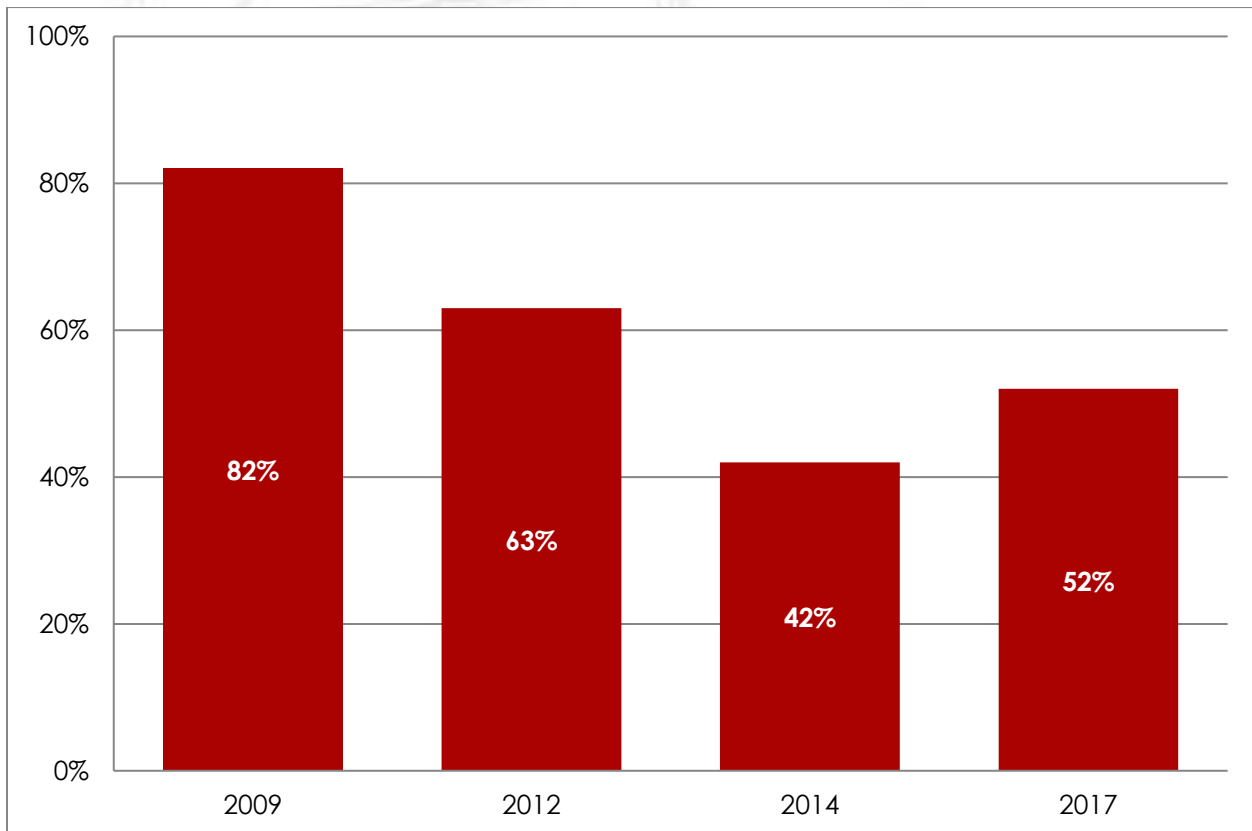
**Figure 7: Fear of political intimidation or violence during election campaigns** | by province | Zimbabwe | 2017



**Respondents were asked:** During election campaigns in this country, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence?

Levels of election-related fear in Zimbabwe, while consistently high, have varied dramatically, dropping from a high of 82% in 2009 – one year after the violent June 2008 elections – to 42% in 2014 before climbing back up by 10 percentage points in the most recent survey (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Trend in fear of political intimidation or violence during election campaigns**  
 | Zimbabwe | 2009-2017



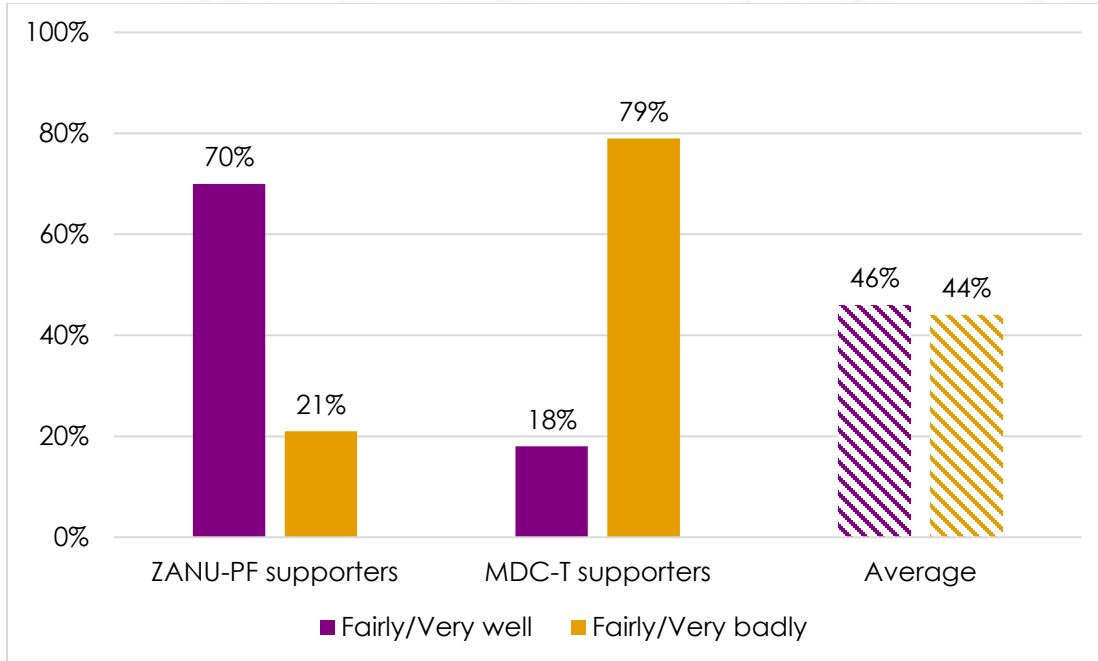
**Respondents were asked:** During election campaigns in this country, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence? (% who say “somewhat” or “a lot”)

### Government efforts to prevent political violence

Overall, Zimbabweans are almost evenly divided in their assessments of the government's performance in preventing political violence: 46% say the government is doing “fairly well” or “very well,” while 44% say it is doing “fairly badly” or “very badly.” But responses to this question reflect Zimbabwe's stark partisan divide: Four-fifths (79%) of MDC-T supporters say the government is performing badly, while almost as many ZANU-PF adherents (70%) say it is doing well (Figure 9). Among respondents who don't identify themselves as supporters of a certain party, 38% approve and 50% disapprove of the government's performance in preventing political violence.

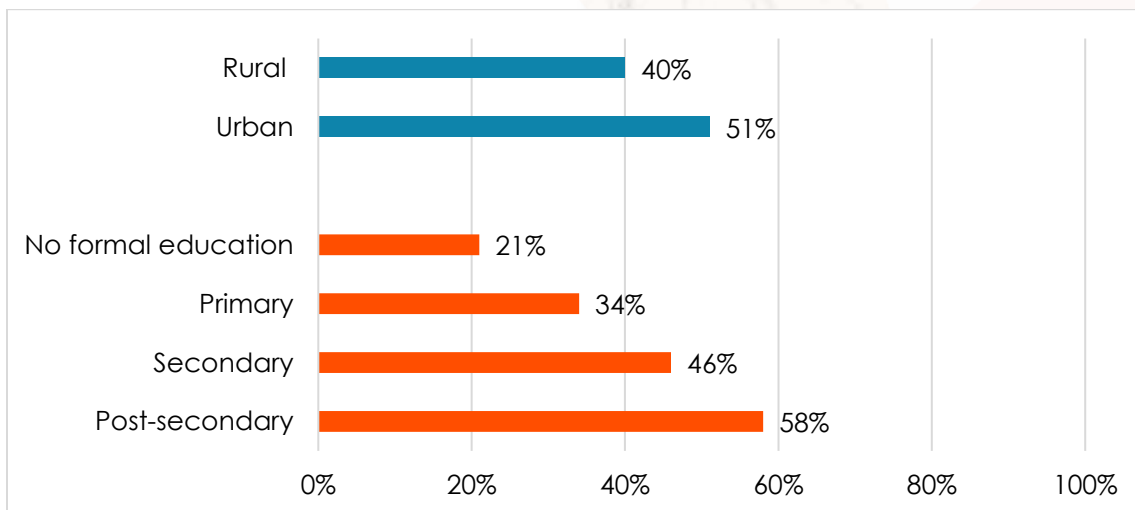
More urbanites (51%) than rural residents (40%) disapprove of the government's performance on this issue, and negative assessments increase sharply with respondents' education level, ranging from 21% of those with no formal education to 58% of post-secondary graduates (Figure 10).

**Figure 9: Government performance in preventing political violence during election campaigns** | by political party affiliation | Zimbabwe | 2017



**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: Preventing political violence during election campaigns?

**Figure 10: Government performing badly in preventing political violence during election campaigns** | urban-rural residence and education level | Zimbabwe | 2017



**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: Preventing political violence during election campaigns? (% who say "fairly badly" or "very badly")



### Being careful when voting

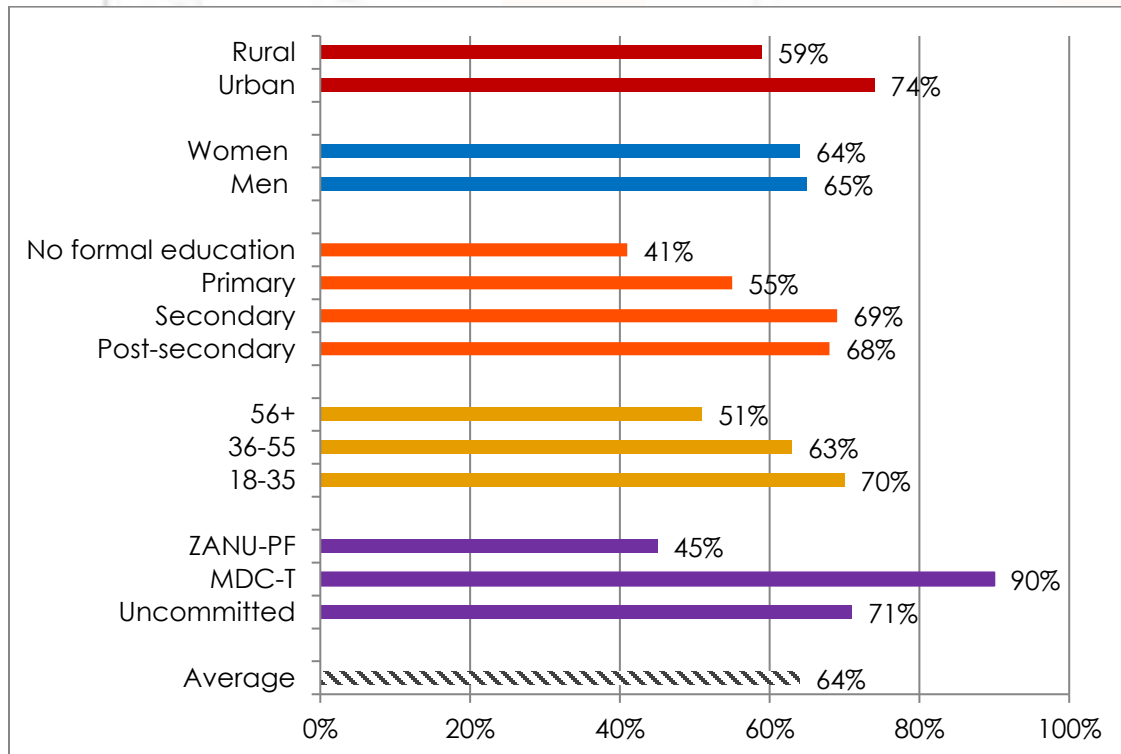
Another aspect of election-related fear is the perceived need to exercise caution when casting one's ballot. Almost two-thirds (64%) of Zimbabweans say people "often" or "always" have to be "careful about how they vote" (Figure 11).

Urban residents are particularly concerned about having to exercise caution (74%, vs. 59% of rural residents). Analysis by education level shows that those without formal schooling are least concerned about the need to exercise care when voting (41%), while those with secondary (69%) and post-secondary qualifications (68%) are far more likely to say people often/always have to be careful about how they vote.

Youth are the most cautious when it comes to casting ballots: 70% say people often/always have to be careful, compared to 65% of middle-aged and 53% of older respondents.

An overwhelming majority of MDC-T supporters (90%) and non-partisan respondents (71%) say voters must often/always be careful, compared to 45% of ZANU-PF adherents.

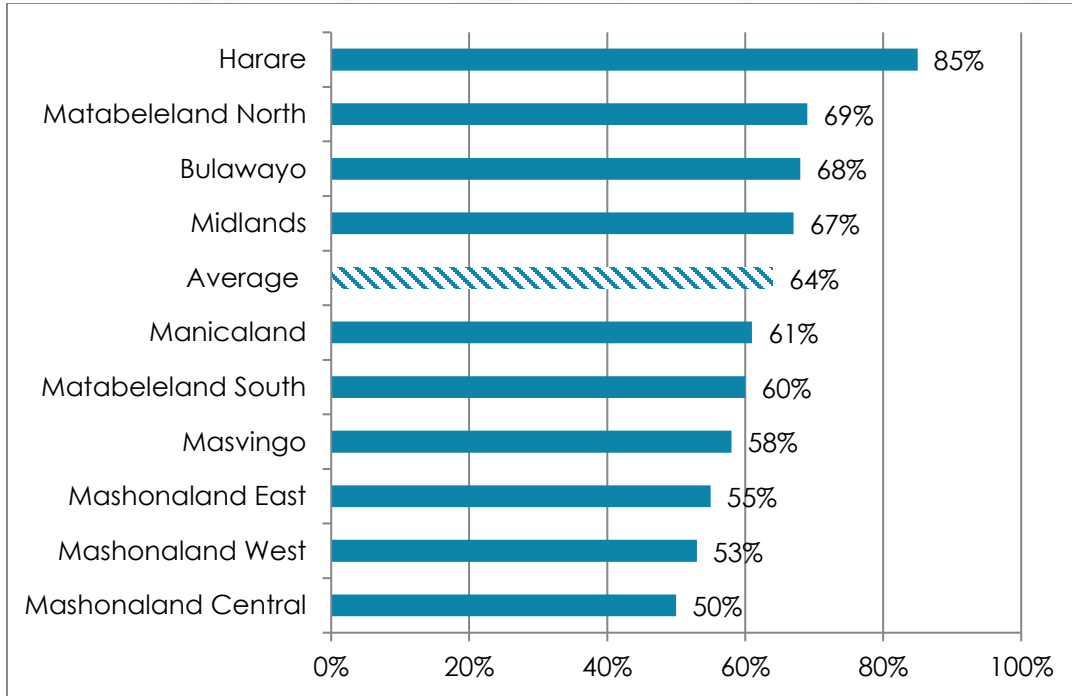
**Figure 11: How often people have to be careful about how they vote** | by urban-rural location, gender, age, education, and political party affiliation | Zimbabwe | 2017



**Respondents were asked:** In your opinion, how often, in this country, do people have to be careful about how they vote in an election? (% who say often or always)

By province, Harare residents are by far the most likely to say voters have to be careful (85%), while Mashonaland Central (50%), West (53%), and East (55%) are least concerned about this issue (Figure 12).

**Figure 12: How often people have to be careful about how they vote | by province**  
 | Zimbabwe | 2017



**Respondents were asked:** *In your opinion how often in this country do people have to be careful of how they vote in an election? (% of those who say often or always)*

### Conclusion

Meaningful elections must be open and honest as well as regular. Zimbabweans clearly want democratic elections but also express widespread fear of intimidation or violence during campaigns, as well as caution about how they vote. Opposition supporters overwhelmingly decry the government's performance in preventing political violence. This suggests a need for government, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), and other stakeholders to work to create an enabling environment in which all citizens can cast their votes without fear.

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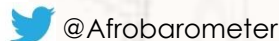
Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the 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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