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## **Support for Democracy and Democratic Institutions in Zimbabwe**

Zimbabweans exhibit solid support for democracy but never seem to get enough of it. This is according to survey results from Afrobarometer Round 3.

A perennial set of questions in the Afrobarometer series relates to democracy, the demand for it, its supply, and support for democratic institutions. Round 3 of the survey repeated this set of issues and, given the existence now of three observations over time (1999, 2004 and 2005), trends and patterns are beginning to emerge.

The Round 3 Afrobarometer survey was conducted from 9 to 26 October 2005 and covered both urban and rural segments of all ten administrative provinces in Zimbabwe. It was based on a double sample: a nationally representative random main sample of 1096 respondents and a purposeful sub-sample of 104 respondents comprising victims of the Government's Operation Murambatsvina/Restore Order. In both cases, respondents were Zimbabwean men and women of voting age. Because of disruptions to fieldwork by some unruly political elements, the survey was aborted shortly before its end: 1048 interviews in the main sample and 64 in the sub-sample were completed totalling 1112 interviews. The Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI), a Zimbabwean non-governmental research organisation, conducted all fieldwork.

Four teams of Enumerators were deployed in the country's ten provinces. Face-to-face interviews were conducted using an 88-item survey instrument translated into the country's three main languages, i.e. English, Sindebele and Chishona. Data entry and analysis was done in the Institute's Computer Laboratory using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 13.

### **Demand for Democracy**

In the October 2005 survey, support for democracy is unambiguous among adult Zimbabweans who had a decided opinion. Exactly two thirds stated, "democracy is preferable to any other kind of government." This figure represents substantial increase from the 48% of the citizens who preferred this form of government in mid-2004. However, the 2005 figure is still 5 percentage points down compared to the 1999 proportion of 71% who preferred democracy to any other type of government. As such, there has been a dramatic 'rebirth' in faith for democracy when

compared. A worrying statistic is that more than a quarter (27%) of the respondents, 3 percentage points higher than the 2004 figure (itself a whopping 19 percentage points higher than in 1999 when only 5% of respondents professed ignorance on the matter), said they do not have an opinion on the desirability of democracy.

**Table 1: Demand for Democracy (1999-2005)**

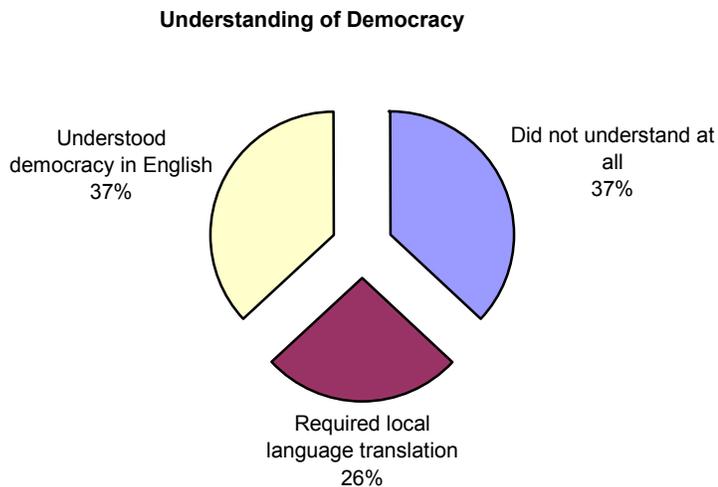
	1999	2004	2005
Prefer Democracy	71	48	66
Permit Non- Democracy	11	11	2
Doesn't Matter	13	18	4
Don't Know	5	24	27

*Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?*

- A: *Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.*
- B: *In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.*
- C: *For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.*

Several propositions spring to mind. The first concerns conceptual illiteracy. In the 2005 survey, more than a third (37%) did not understand the term 'democracy' even after a local language translation (see Figure 1). This represents a big jump from the 19% who in 1999 gave a "don't know/can't explain" answer when asked about the meaning of democracy. Why conceptual illiteracy should have doubled in six years is difficult to explain. Whatever the case, the reality is that if people cannot understand the concept of democracy, they obviously cannot associate themselves with something they do not understand.

**Figure 1: Understanding of Democracy**

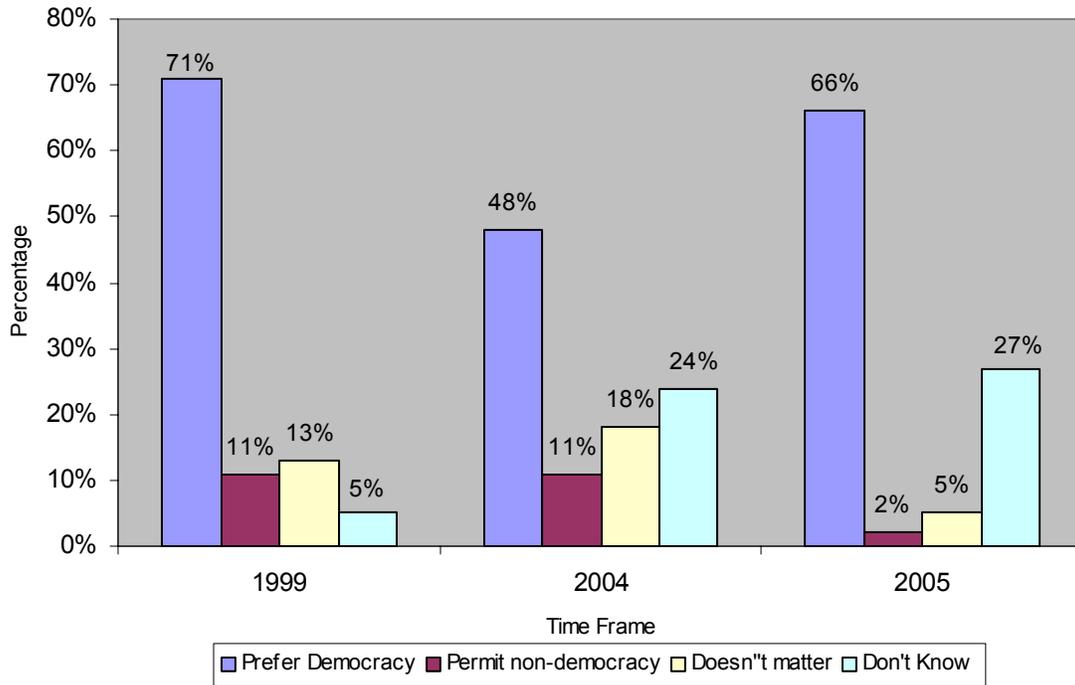


Another possible explanation of the increasing "don't know" response is that some people are becoming disillusioned with something they had hoped for but which has so far not been delivered. They therefore cannot commit themselves to supporting something that has been elusive over the years.

The proportion of Zimbabweans who are indifferent to all political regimes has also dropped sharply from 18% in 2004 (having increased from 13% in 1999). Only 4% in 2005 were unconcerned about democracy and its rivals.

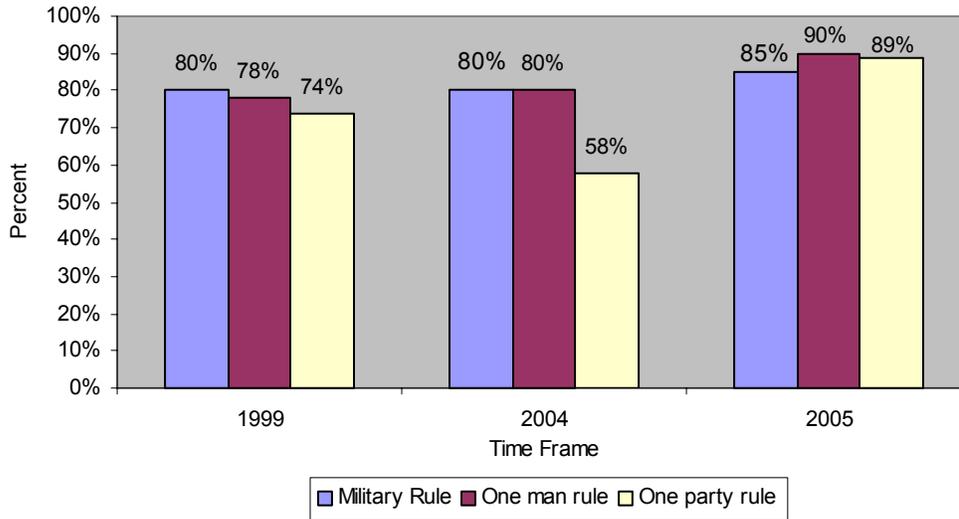
The turbulence in mass public opinion with regard to support for democracy needs to be particularly noted. Figure 2 illustrates the volatile trend graphically. The sharp drop in support for democracy in 2004 from 71% in 1999 to only 48% is quite baffling even when this did not coincide with increased readiness to experiment with non-democratic forms of governance. In other words, democracy's loss was not autocracy's or authoritarianism's gain.

**Figure 2: Support for Democracy (1999-2005)**



The resurgence of support for democracy in 2005 suggests, at least tentatively, that the decline in support for democracy in 2004 was an aberration and that the more enduring trend or pattern is of high support for democracy. This 'aberration' thesis gains support from the firm, explicit, enduring and, in fact, increasing rejection of authoritarian forms of rule. Whether it is military rule, one-man rule or one-party rule, authoritarian governance has few takers in Zimbabwe. Figure 3 below demonstrates this convincingly.

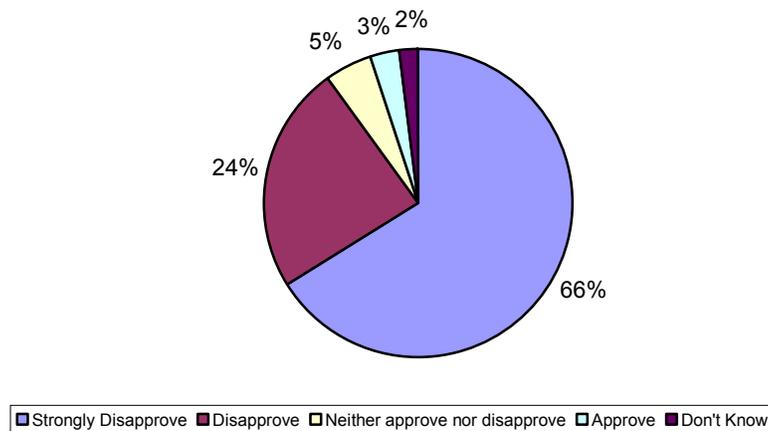
**Figure 3: Rejecting Authoritarian rule**



Rejection of military rule is steady at 80% in 1999 and 2004 and rose to 85% in 2005. The military-style Operation Murambatsvina/Restore Order may have contributed to the public's increased distaste for military rule. It is vital to note that Zimbabweans are not anti-military per se. They are able to separate the military as a legitimate institution regarding with a constitutional role in the defence and security of the country on one hand from the military as a political organ of rule on the other. Zimbabweans accept and even appreciate the military's constitutional role but do not encourage military role expansion or its excursion into the political arena as a ruler. This explains why the military as an institution still attracts considerable public trust compared to other state institutions. Thus, exactly half of adult Zimbabweans said they trust the military (compared to 47% in 1999) against 39% who trust the police. In short, as soon as the military leave their barracks for State House, public support for this role expansion withers away. This confirms the assertion that the militarization of civilian state institutions has little purchase with the public.

Rejection of one-man rule has also steadily increased over the last six years such that in 2005, as many as nine in ten Zimbabweans reject this form of autocratic regime. In fact, exactly two thirds of the total sample "strongly disapprove" of one-man rule, thus registering a strong abhorrence with this type of governance (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Rejection of one man rule**



In the trilogy of authoritarian governance styles, rejection of one-party rule is rather unstable dropping 16 percentage points from 74% in 1999 to 58% in 2004 before shooting up as much as 30 percentage point to 89% in 2005. There therefore appears some ambivalence about this type of rule among Zimbabweans. However, after four years of violent inter-party conflict between 2000 and 2004, it is understandable that some Zimbabweans were toying with the idea that one-party rule could deliver them from political mayhem. Those who were willing to experiment with one-party rule can be considered to have ‘voted’ for peace, in as much as most people voted for Patriotic Front parties in 1980 in order “to stop the war.” Yet the rejection of one-party rule is now ‘universal’ in the Zimbabwe political cosmos (see Table 2) but is at its strongest in the three Matabeleland provinces where up to 98% in Matabeleland South disapprove of one-party rule, closely followed by Bulawayo at 94% and 91% in Matabeleland North. These three provinces have also been the heartland of the opposition MDC support and were the theatre of the early 1980s Gukurahundi “moment of madness.”

**Table 2: Attitudes to one-party rule, by province (2005)**

Province	Strongly disapprove	Disapprove	Neither approve nor disapprove	Approve	Strongly approve	Don't Know
Harare	68	24	4	2	1	1
Bulawayo	83	11	4	1	1	<1
Midlands	74	19	2	1	2	2
Masvingo	57	39	2	2	0	0
Mashonaland East	52	30	8	7	1	2
Mashonaland West	62	23	10	4	<1	1
Mashonaland Central	65	16	8	5	<1	6
Matabeleland South	87	11	<1	<1	2	<1
Matabeleland North	81	10	3	3	3	<1
Manicaland	55	34	4	2	1	4

The revival of popular antipathy to one-party rule is given credence by strong preferences for multiple parties. As shown below, more than three quarters of respondents said many political

parties gave them a basis for a real choice of who governs them while only felt political parties generate unnecessary division and social conflict. So, support for a monolithic political landscape is thin on the ground in Zimbabwe, while the preference for political pluralism is strong.

### **Support for Democratic Institutions**

It is one thing to express support for an intangible ‘good’ like democracy but an entirely different matter to express support for specific democratic political institutions like elections, political parties and the legislature. The survey sought to gauge respondents’ attachments to these institutions.

**Table 3: Support for Democratic Institutions - Elections**

	2004	2005
Agree/Agree very strongly with A	75	74
Agree/Agree very strongly with B	21	25
Agree with neither	1	<1
DK	2	<1

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

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

Despite the now legendary scepticism of Zimbabweans about electoral outcomes, they still invest a lot of faith in elections as democratic institutions. Three quarters of the populace said they want to “choose our leaders through regular, open and honest elections” while a minority of one in four are inclined to try “other methods” of choosing political leaders because “elections sometimes produce bad results.” Support for elections has also held steady in the past two Rounds as Table 3 clearly shows.

Support for democratic institutions also comes out clearly with respect to the legislature. As Table 4 shows, 77% subscribe to the statement about the supremacy of Parliament over the executive in the crafting of laws for the country. Zimbabwe has a strong executive presidency but only 13% prefer to see the President passing laws “without worrying about what Parliament thinks.” A presidential monarchy has few followers in Zimbabwe.

**Table 4: Support for Democratic Institutions - Parliament**

	2004	2005
Agree/Agree very strongly with A	61	77
Agree/Agree very strongly with B	23	13
Agree with neither	10	8
DK	7	2

*Statement A: The Members of Parliament represent the people; therefore they should make laws for this country, even if the President does not agree.*

*Statement B: Since the President represents all of us, he should pass laws without worrying about what Parliament thinks.*

Table 4 also shows that support for the institution of parliament has increased quite sharply from 61% in mid-2004 to 76% in late 2005. Conversely, support for presidential decrees has significantly shrunk by 10 percentage points in the period between Round 2 and Round 3.

Support for concrete democratic institutions is also manifested in a preference for a multiparty system to articulate and aggregate the demands and interests of the populace. This is reflected in Table 5 where 76% of adult Zimbabweans agreed that, “many political parties are needed to make

sure that people have real choices in who governs them.” Less than a quarter (22%) accuses political parties of fomenting division and confusion and that, “it is therefore unnecessary to have many political parties in this country.” It is indeed remarkable that such a large proportion of Zimbabweans still celebrate party competition after almost five years of violent inter-party politics.

**Table 5: Support for Democratic Institutions - Political Parties**

	2004	2005
Agree/Agree very strongly with A	40	23
Agree/Agree very strongly with B	35	76
Agree with neither	2	1
DK	4	<1

*Statement A: Political parties create division and confusion; it is therefore unnecessary to have many political parties in Zimbabwe.*

*Statement B: Many political parties are needed to make sure that Zimbabweans have real choices in who governs them.*

Even more encouraging for lovers of multi-party politics is that the flirtation with single-party notions depicted in 2004 has clearly subsided while attachment to a multi-party system has spectacularly more than doubled in-between the two Afrobarometer Rounds from 35% in 2004 to 76% in 2005.

### Supply of Democracy

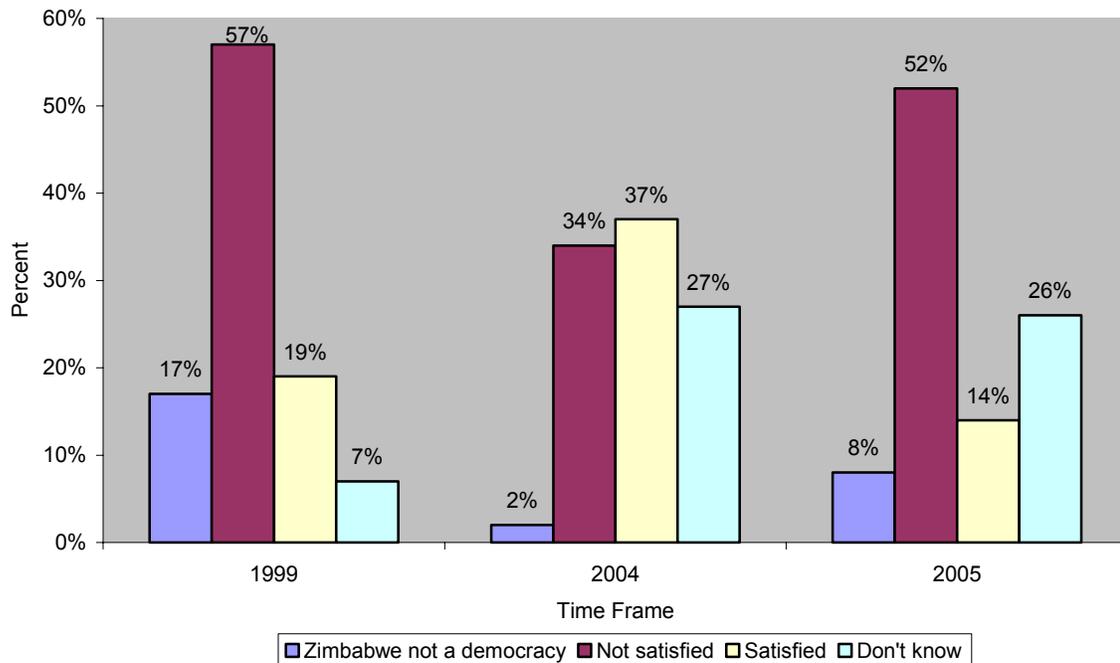
Zimbabweans unambiguously prefer democracy notwithstanding their disappointment with the actual state of democracy in the country. Popular dissatisfaction with how democracy works in Zimbabwe has deepened in the eighteen months between Afrobarometer Rounds 2 and 3: whereas in mid-2004, 37% registered their satisfaction with democracy, by October 2005 only 14% had such a positive judgment. In fact, the proportion of those who declared Zimbabwe “not a democracy” more than doubled from 15% in 2004 to 35% in 2005.

**Table 6: Supply of Democracy - Satisfaction with Democracy in Zimbabwe (2005)**

Overall, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Zimbabwe?	Percentage
Zimbabwe is not a democracy	8
Not at all satisfied	29
Not very satisfied	22
Fairly satisfied	11
Very satisfied	3
DK	27

Table 6 above shows the supply of democracy as judged by adult Zimbabweans in October 2005 while Figure 5 below shows the comparative trend overtime since 1999. Public opinion on the supply of democracy was at its harshest in 1999 when 17% of the citizens dismissed the polity as being “not a democracy” whilst another 58% registered their dissatisfaction with how democracy works in the country. From 2000 to the end of 2004, the political situation in Zimbabwe was nasty and brutish and yet Zimbabweans gave their rosiest judgment of how democracy works with only 2% declaring the country “not a democracy”. Another 34% saying they were not satisfied with how democracy works in the country. Further, 37% of respondents in mid-2004, compared to only 18% in 1999, said they were satisfied with democratic workings in Zimbabwe.

**Figure 5: Satisfaction with supply of democracy**



Public opinion on democratic performance in 2005 lies in between the harsh assessment rendered in 1999 and the rather rosy judgment given in 2004. Now, 8% of Zimbabweans declare their country undemocratic. In 2005, just above half (51%) were dissatisfied with how democracy works while only 14% are satisfied. A big block (27%, same as in 2004) expressed or feigned ignorance on the issue. A general observation is that, perhaps due to the unpredictable and threatening political environment in Zimbabwe, many people since then seem to prefer evasive responses like “I don’t know” (7%, 27% and 27% in 1999, 2004 and 2005 respectively) to sensitive political questions, thus safeguarding themselves from perceived victimization after the interview.

The irony of it all is that the prevailing political ambience in 1999, when compared to later years, could be described as a golden period. Why people are harsh about their polity in good times and rosy in harsh times is a mystery that Afrobarometer explained in 2004 in terms of “the power of propaganda.” Could the resurgence of dissatisfaction with the way democracy works in Zimbabwe be because of the collapse of the propaganda effect or could it be that Zimbabweans have developed a ‘thick skin’ against propagandistic messages since mid-2004. It may also be noted that the chief architect of the propaganda campaign, former Information and Publicity Minister Jonathan Moyo, was dismissed from Government eight months before the Round 3 survey.

**Table 7: Supply of Democracy - Assessment of State of Democracy in Zimbabwe**

In your opinion, how much of a democracy is Zimbabwe	2005	2004	1999
Not a democracy	35	15	38
A democracy with major problems	21	22	17
A democracy with minor problems	10	27	18
A full democracy	4	9	9
Don't know/Don't understand question	30	28	17

The Afrobarometer survey always asks: “In your opinion, how much of a democracy is Zimbabwe?” Table 7 above portrays the results over time. In 2005, nearly six in ten Zimbabweans condemn their country as either “not a democracy” (35%) or at best “a democracy with major problems” (21%). Only 14% of Zimbabweans see the country as either “a full democracy” (4%) or “a democracy with minor problems” (10%). As with most other sensitive political questions, up to 30% of respondents felt they were incompetent to answer the question, compared to 28% in 2004 and only 17% in 1999. Trend analysis also reveals that the “not a democracy” opinion in 2005 has reverted to the 1999 proportion when it registered 38%. Moreover, the proportion that views Zimbabwe as “a full democracy” has dwindled from 9% in 1999 and 2004 to a continental low of 4% in late 2005. In the 13 African countries for which Round 3 data was available at the time of writing, citizens always thought that they had attained more democracy than in Zimbabwe.

The long and short of it is that Zimbabweans are unhappy with the status of democracy in their country. The demand for democracy continues to far outstrip the supply of democracy. Citizens of Zimbabwe continue to be democratic aspirants, i.e. they aspire to democracy but never really get enough of it.

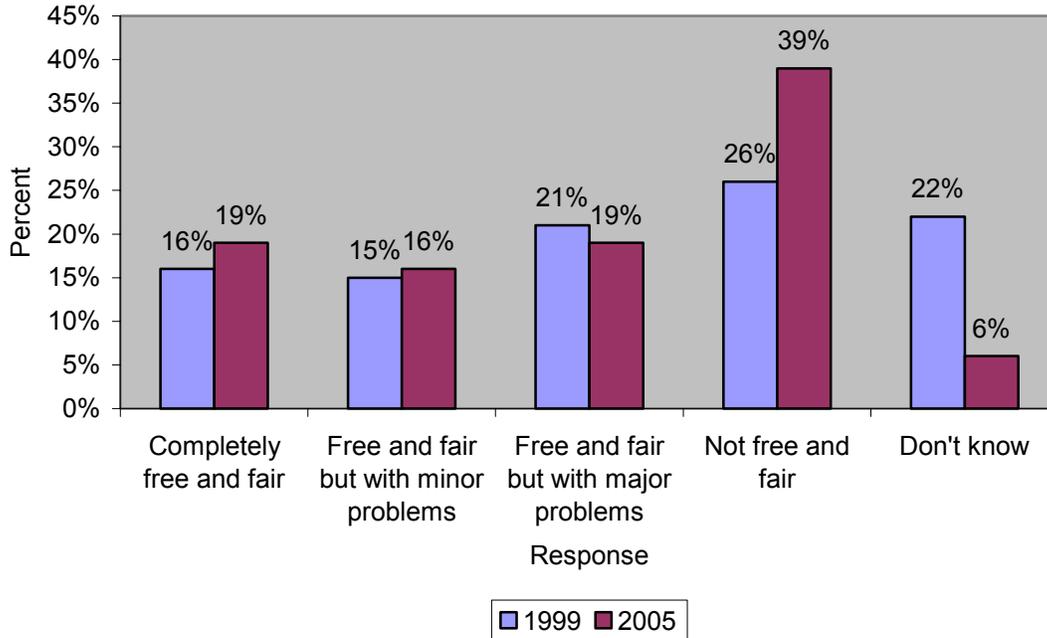
Dissatisfaction with the supply of democracy is also reflected in the negative assessment of the honesty of electoral processes and institutions. The freeness and fairness of elections is a good barometer of the state of democracy in any country. But in Zimbabwe, citizens only have slender faith in elections and their outcomes. Asked whether the last national elections (for parliament in March 2005) were free and fair, only 35% returned a positive assessment compared to well over half (58%) who felt the elections were “not free and fair” (39%) or at best “free and fair, but with major problems” (19%). The institution that had the constitutional mandate to run and supervise elections since independence, the Electoral Supervisory Commission (ESC), also received a thumbs down from the electorate with only three in ten (29%) Zimbabweans saying they trust it compared with nearly seven in ten (66%) who do not trust the ESC. It remains to be seen if the ESC’s successor, the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) will win the trust of Zimbabweans in running national elections.

**Table 8: Freeness and fairness of (March 2005) elections**

	Percentage
Completely free and fair	19
Free and fair with minor problems	16
Free and fair with major problems	19
Not free and fair	39
Don’t understand question	1
DK	6

As already noted, there is a pattern of dissatisfaction with how elections are run in Zimbabwe and the outcome they generate. This is reflected in Figure 6 below. In 1999, only 31% felt that the elections were either “completely free and fair” (16%) or “free and fair but with minor problems” (15%) compared to 35% who felt this way in 2005. In fact, the lack of faith in elections has deepened such that while as in 1999, 47% condemned the elections as not free and fair, by 2005 this figure had jumped to 58%.

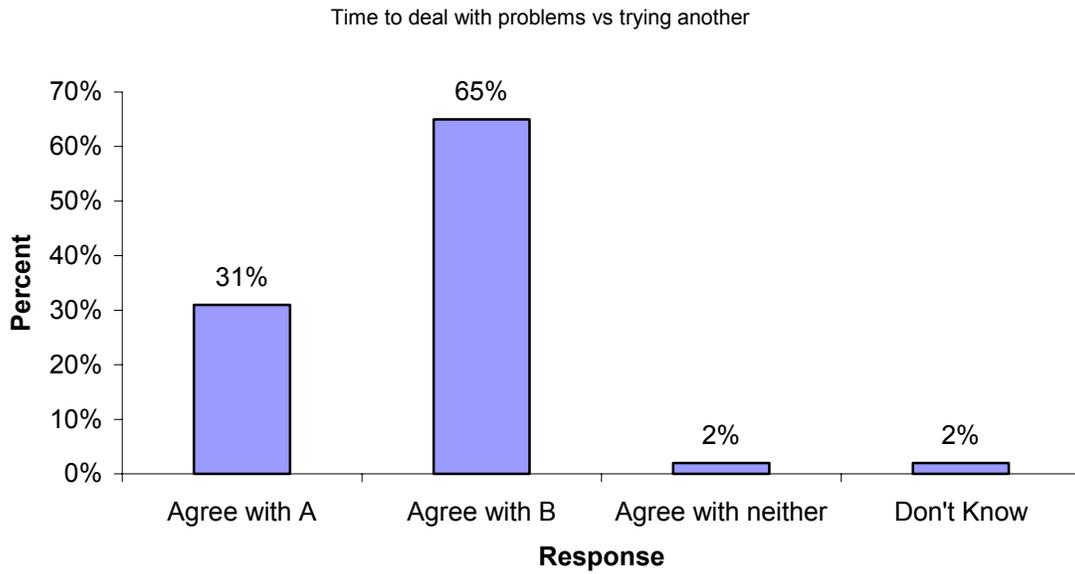
**Figure 6: Freeness and Fairness of Elections (1999 & 2005)**



Lastly, the survey sought to enquire whether Zimbabweans are willing to stick with democracy, “in rain or shine.” This item provides indication of political patience. Respondents were asked to choose whether “our present system of government should be given more time to deal with inherited problems” or whether, “if our present system cannot produce results soon, we should try another form of government.” From Figure 7 below, it is clear that the dissatisfaction with the supply of democracy noted above is beginning to take its heavy toll. Almost seven in ten adult Zimbabweans are prepared to experiment with another form of government, whilst only 31% choose to be patient and give the government more time to deal with inherited problems.

Given that Zimbabweans soundly rejected all three authoritarian rivals to democratic forms of government, the preference for another form of government most likely refers to a government *other than Zanu-PF*. The danger in this is that if the avenues for producing a government other than the incumbent one are closed and yet people are yearning for “another form of government”, this impatience with the present system may translate into some form of mass political action. In short, the political impatience loudly expressed in the results does not necessarily mean a weakening of intrinsic support for democracy as of now. However, should the political crisis and undersupply of democracy continue, this may well signal such a weakening.

**Figure 7: Political patience amongst Zimbabweans**



*A. Our present system of government should be given time to deal with inherited problems*

*B. If our present system cannot produce results soon, we should try another form of government.*

In conclusion, Zimbabweans express a firm moral preference for democracy notwithstanding the public opinion volatility on this matter in the last six years. Despite this preference for democracy and the deeply embedded rejection of democracy's rivals, citizens of Zimbabwe are unhappy with the state of democracy in their country. There is a big chasm between the demand for and supply of democracy. They are democratic aspirants.

This Briefing Paper was prepared by Eldred Masunungure, Anyway Ndapwadza and Noma Sibanda of the Mass Public Opinion Institute, [www.mpoi.org](http://www.mpoi.org).

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