



Zimbabweans demand accountability in governance, doubt efficacy of elections

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 130 | Stephen Ndoma

Summary

Accountability is often described as a cornerstone of good governance, but a more accurate image might be a whole wheelbarrow of building blocks – the president, government agencies, Parliament, the judiciary, opposition parties, the media, and voters all holding one another accountable to form a foundation for democracy.

According to the World Bank, accountability requires both answerability and enforcement (World Bank). Answerability refers to the obligation of public officials to provide information about their actions and to justify them to the public and to those institutions of accountability tasked with providing oversight. Enforcement suggests that the public or the institution responsible for accountability can sanction the offending party or remedy the contravening behaviour. Different institutions of accountability might be responsible for either or both of these aspects of accountability.

How do Zimbabweans perceive their institutions of accountability? Afrobarometer survey data suggest that accountability is firmly anchored as an essential tenet in governance, even if its implementation might sometimes slow governmental action. Majorities of citizens endorse checks on government power by other government branches and the media. However, most Zimbabweans say that in practice, the country's elections do not enable voters to remove non-performing leaders from office.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. After five rounds of surveys between 1999 and 2013, results of Round 6 surveys (2014/2015) are currently being published. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of 1,200 or 2,400 respondents.

The Afrobarometer team in Zimbabwe, led by Mass Public Opinion Institute, interviewed 2,400 adult Zimbabweans in November 2014. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Zimbabwe in 1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2010, and 2012.

Key findings

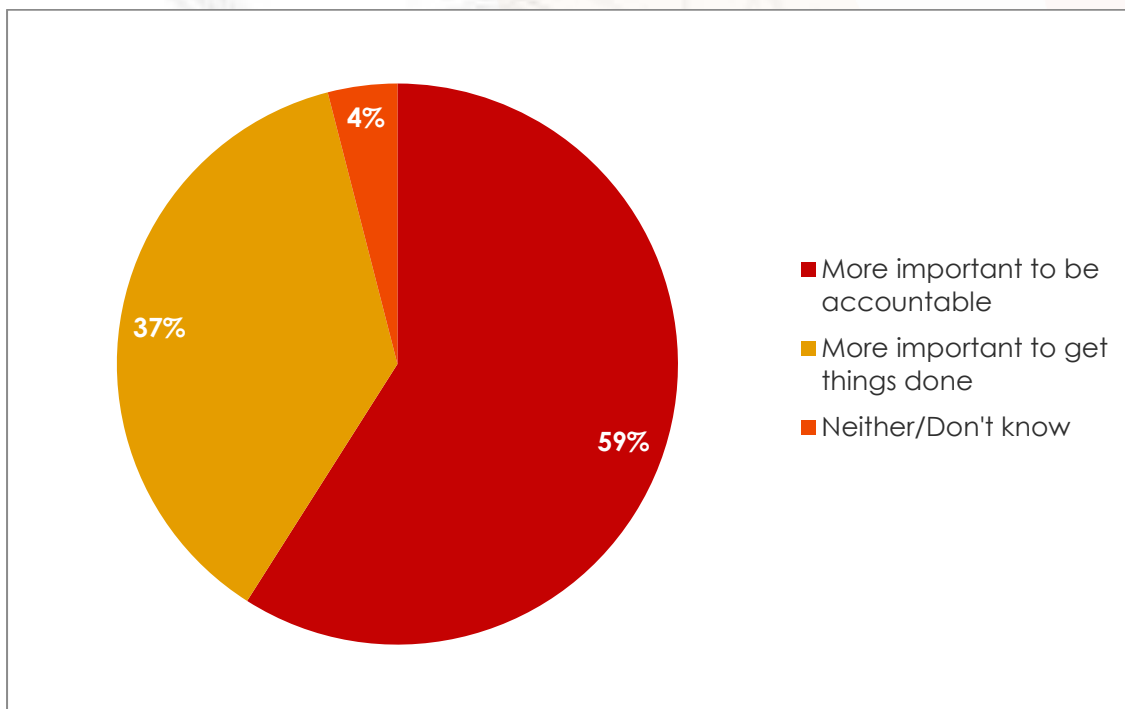
- More than half of Zimbabweans (59%) say the government must be accountable to its citizens, even if this slows official decision-making processes.
- Pluralities say that voters should be responsible for making sure that the president, members of Parliament (MPs), and local government councillors do their jobs.

- Almost two-thirds (65%) say that MPs should make laws even if the president does not agree with them.
- Seven of 10 Zimbabweans (71%) say the president must always obey the country's laws and courts even if he or she thinks they are wrong.
- A majority (58%) believe that Parliament should ensure that the president explains to it on a regular basis how the government spends taxpayers' money.
- Six of 10 Zimbabweans (61%) believe that the media should constantly investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption.
- Only a minority (38%) of citizens think the country's elections work well to enable voters to remove non-performing leaders from office.

Support for accountability in governance

A majority (59%) of Zimbabweans “agree” or “agree very strongly” that citizens must be able to hold their government accountable, even if this slows the pace of official decision-making. But a substantial minority (37%) of citizens do not place much emphasis on answerability, instead preferring a government that can “get things done,” even if the electorate has no influence on what it does (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Support for accountability in governance | Zimbabwe | 2014



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

Statement 1: It is more important to have a government that can get things done, even if we have no influence over what it does.

Statement 2: It is more important for citizens to be able to hold government accountable, even if that means it makes decisions more slowly.

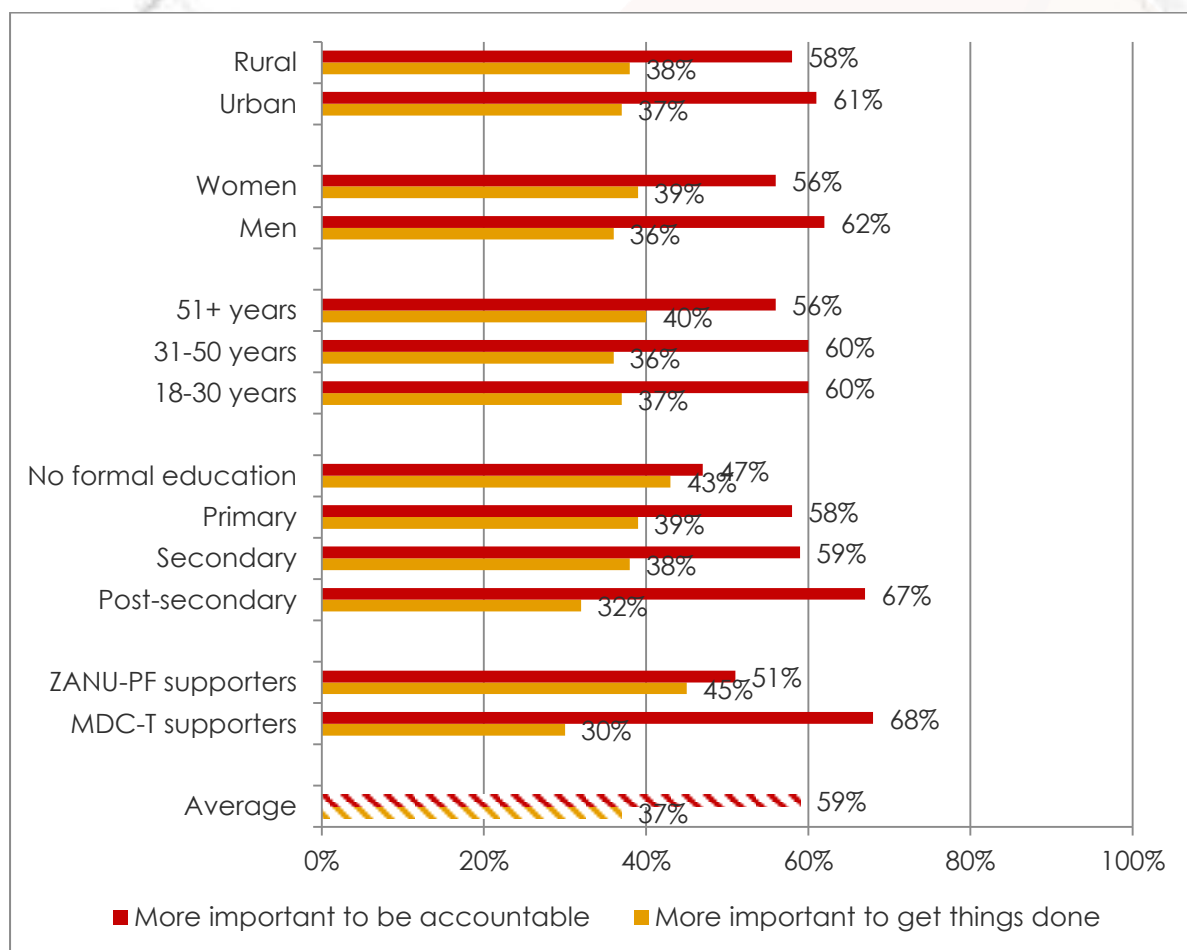
(% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with each statement)

Support for answerability varies only modestly by gender and urban-rural residence: Urbanites (61%) and men (62%) are slightly more likely to value accountability in governance than rural residents (58%) and women (56%) (Figure 2).

Education shows larger differences, with prioritization of accountability ranging from 47% among those with no formal education to 67% of citizens with post-secondary qualifications. MDC-T supporters¹ (68%) are more likely than ZANU-PF supporters (51%) to insist on government accountability.

Views also vary by province: Popular demand for accountability is strongest in Bulawayo province (69%) and weakest in Manicaland (48%) (Table 1).

Figure 2: Support for accountability in governance | by demographic characteristics | Zimbabwe | 2014



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

Statement 1: It is more important to have a government that can get things done, even if we have no influence over what it does.

Statement 2: It is more important for citizens to be able to hold government accountable, even if that means it makes decisions more slowly.

(% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with each statement)

¹ Political-party affiliation is determined by responses to the questions “Do you feel close to any particular political party?” and, if yes, “Which party is that?”

Table 1: Views on accountability | by province | Zimbabwe | 2014

	More important to be accountable than to get things done	MPs should make laws even if president disagrees	President must always obey laws and courts	President should justify spending to Parliament	Opposition parties should hold government accountable
Bulawayo	69%	75%	75%	61%	12%
Mashonaland West	67%	64%	70%	60%	18%
Mashonaland Central	66%	74%	81%	60%	24%
Midlands	63%	59%	72%	43%	30%
Matabeleland North	62%	43%	60%	43%	10%
Matabeleland South	61%	53%	70%	48%	31%
Harare	61%	77%	78%	68%	29%
Mashonaland East	53%	56%	62%	56%	27%
Masvingo	49%	79%	74%	77%	40%
Manicaland	48%	56%	64%	50%	28%
TOTAL	59%	65%	71%	58%	26%

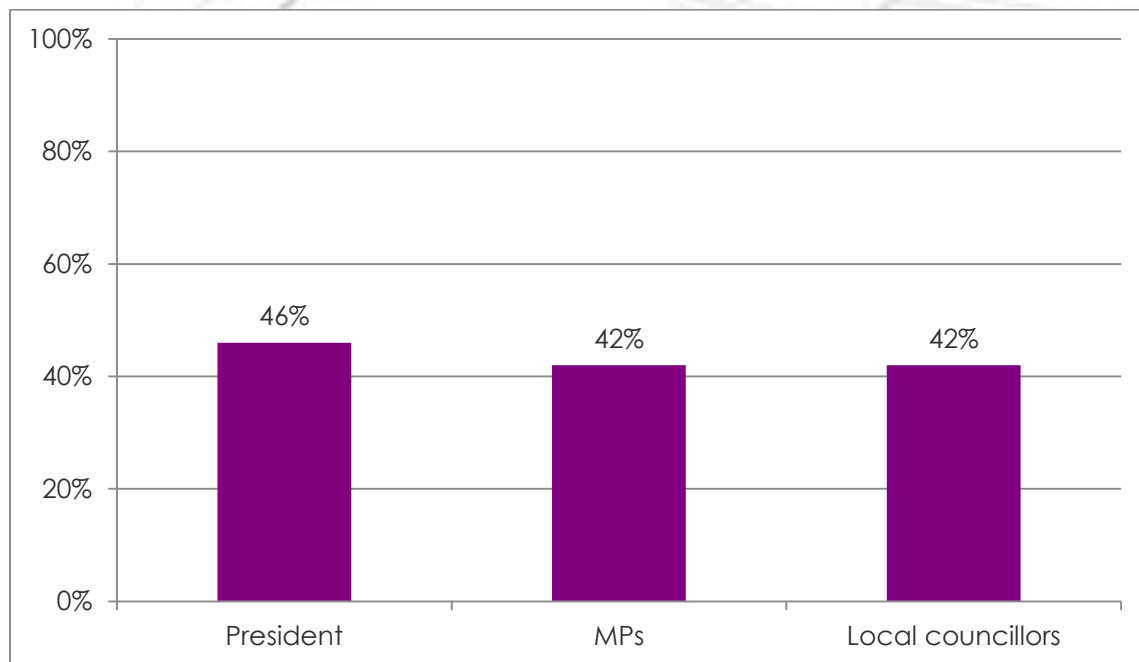
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

- Statement 1: It is more important to have a government that can get things done, even if we have no influence over what it does. Statement 2: It is more important for citizens to be able to hold government accountable, even if that means it makes decisions more slowly. (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with Statement 2)
- Statement 1: Members of Parliament represent the people; therefore they should make laws for this country, even if the president does not agree. Statement 2: Since the president represents all of us, he should pass laws without worrying about what Parliament thinks. (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with Statement 1)
- Statement 1: Since the president was elected to lead the country, he should not be bound by laws or court decisions that he thinks are wrong. Statement 2: The president must always obey the laws and the courts, even if he thinks they are wrong. (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with Statement 2)
- Statement 1: Parliament should ensure that the president explains to it on a regular basis how his government spends taxpayer's money. Statement 2: The president should be able to devote his full attention to developing the country rather than wasting time justifying his actions. (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with Statement 1)
- Statement 1: After losing an election, opposition parties should monitor and criticize the government in order to hold it accountable. Statement 2: Once an election is over, opposition parties and politicians should accept defeat and cooperate with government to help it develop the country. (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with Statement 1)

Public perceptions of oversight roles

When Zimbabweans are asked who should be responsible for holding elected officials accountable, the most frequent response is “the voters.” Still, the proportion of respondents who assign this responsibility to voters falls short of a majority: 46% in the case of the president and 42% for MPs and local government councillors (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Voters responsible for holding officials accountable | Zimbabwe | 2014



Respondents were asked: Who should be responsible for making sure that, once elected:

- The president does his job?
- Members of Parliament do their jobs?
- Local government councillors do their job?

About one in four respondents instead assign this oversight responsibility to the president/executive, Parliament, or local councils. About one in 10 say that elected officials' political parties should hold them accountable.

Better-educated respondents are consistently and substantially (by 9 to 21 percentage points) more likely than their less-educated counterparts to assign voters the task of holding the president, MPs, and local councillors accountable. Similarly, MDC-T supporters are more likely (by 6 to 10 percentage points) than ZANU-PF adherents to say voters should hold these elected officials accountable. (For a detailed breakdown of responses by demographic groups, see Appendix tables A.1, A.2, and A.3.)

Looking at trends over time, the idea that voters must hold the president accountable was the majority view (55%) in 2009 but dropped to 39% in 2012, then regained 7 percentage points in 2014. Views on voters' role in holding MPs and local councillors accountable reflect a similar dip in 2012.

Who should make laws?

Almost two-thirds (65%) of Zimbabweans “agree” or “agree very strongly” that MPs should make the country's laws even if the president does not agree with them, while about one in

five (22%) say the president should make laws “without worrying about what Parliament thinks” (Figure 4). The belief that Parliament should make laws for this country even if the president does not agree has been the majority view in the last five rounds of Afrobarometer surveys in Zimbabwe, though it has weakened from a high of 77% in 2005.

Views on the balance of law-making powers vary considerably by demographic group. Urbanites (74%) and men (69%) are more likely to insist on Parliament’s law-making role than rural residents (60%) and women (62%) (Figure 5).

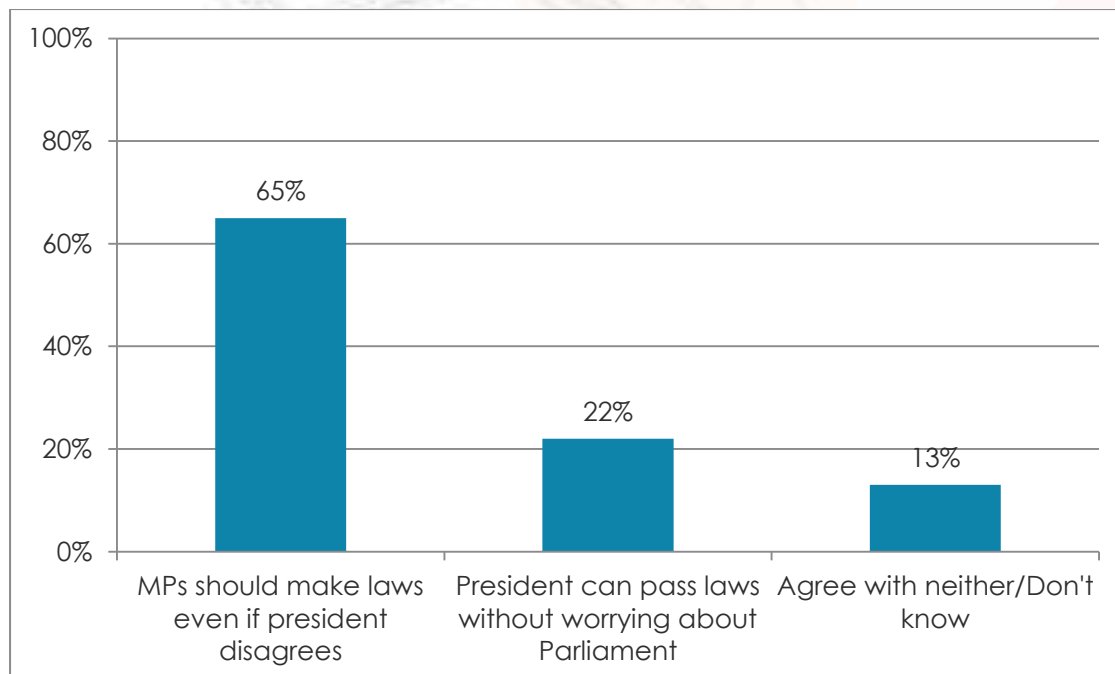
While the belief that Parliament holds the power to make laws is the majority view across all age groups, the conviction is most widespread among youth (69%) and least common among those aged 51 and above (61%).

Support for Parliament’s legislative function increases dramatically with education, ranging from 48% among those with no formal education to 78% among post-secondary graduates. Among those with no formal education, almost one-fifth (18%) say they don’t know.

Analysis by political party affiliation reveals that more MDC-T supporters (79%) than ZANU-PF supporters (56%) believe that Parliament should make laws even if the president disagrees. One-third (32%) of ZANU-PF adherents say the president can pass laws without worrying about the legislature.

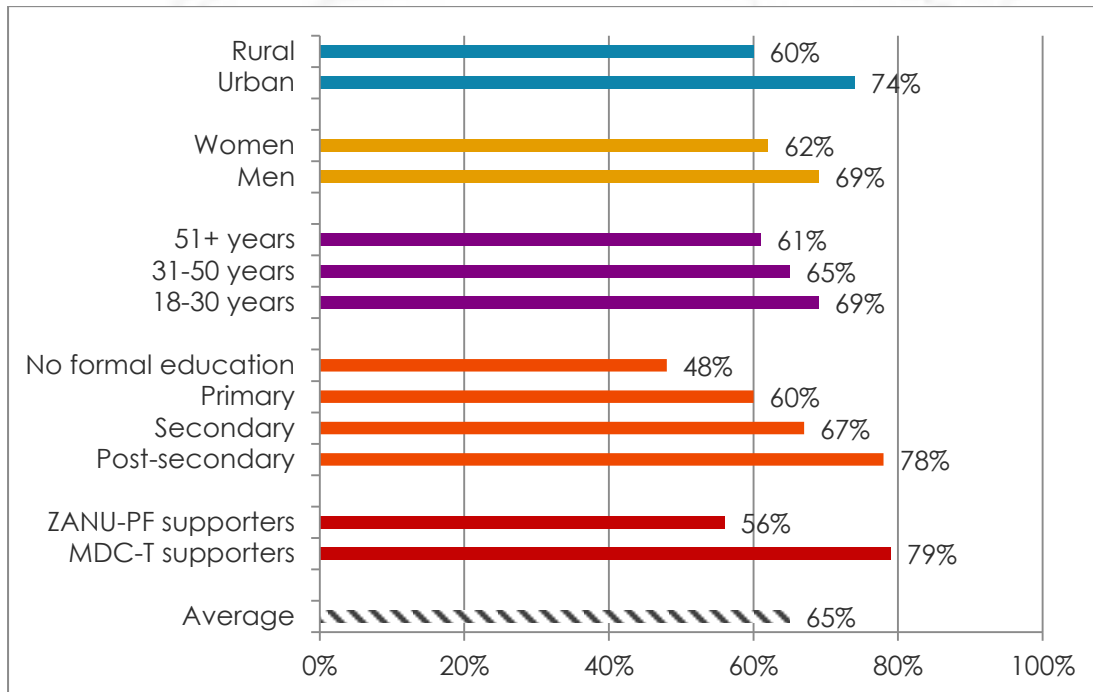
Support for Parliament’s law-making power is the majority view in all but one administrative province (Matabeleland North, where only 43% agree), reaching 79% in Masvingo (see Table 1 above). Matabeleland North stands out in terms of the proportion of citizens (27%) who profess ignorance on the matter.

Figure 4: Who should make laws? | Zimbabwe | 2014



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Members of Parliament represent the people; therefore they should make laws for this country, even if the president does not agree.
 Statement 2: Since the president represents all of us, he should pass laws without worrying about what Parliament thinks.
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with each statement)

Figure 5: Who should make laws? | by demographic characteristics | Zimbabwe
 | 2014



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Members of Parliament represent the people; therefore they should make laws for this country, even if the president does not agree.
 Statement 2: Since the president represents all of us, he should pass laws without worrying about what Parliament thinks.
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with Statement 1)

Judicial constraints on the president

Seven out of 10 Zimbabweans (71%) “agree” or “agree very strongly” that the president must always obey the country’s laws and courts even if he or she thinks they are wrong (Figure 6). One-fifth (20%) of citizens disagree, saying the president should not be bound by laws or court decisions that s/he thinks are wrong.

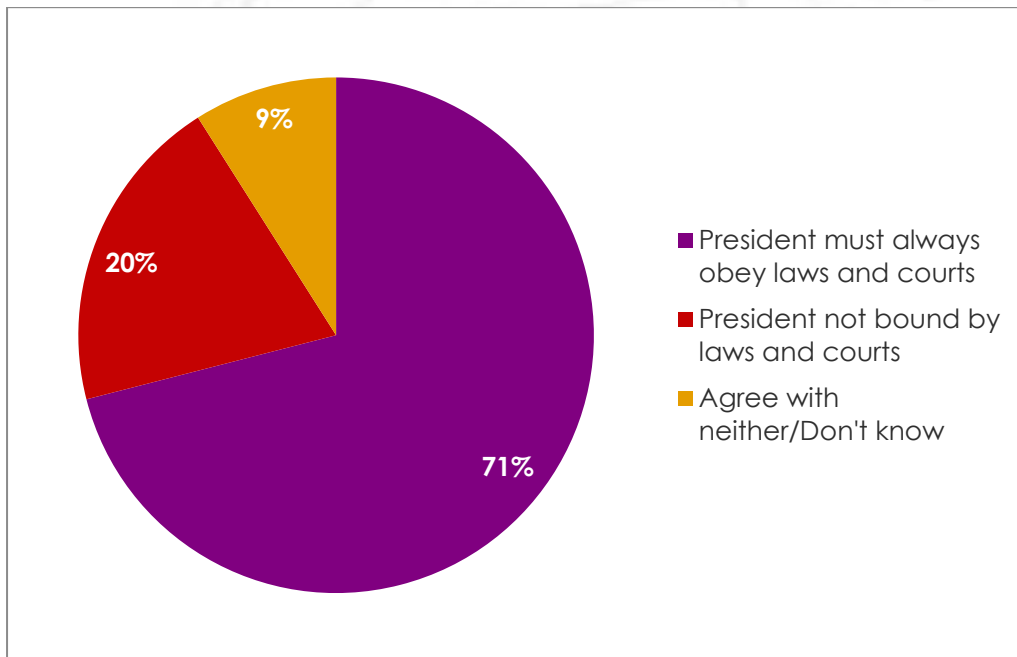
Over the past decade, the proportion saying the president must always obey the laws and courts has declined steadily, from 82% in 2005 to 71% in 2014 (Figure 7).

As with support for accountability and law-making powers, urbanites (77%) and men (73%) are more likely to say that the president must always obey the laws than rural residents (68%) and women (69%) (Figure 8).

Although majorities across all education levels think the president should be bound by laws, this view is more common among those with post-secondary qualifications (84%) than among respondents with secondary (73%), primary (62%), or no formal education (61%).

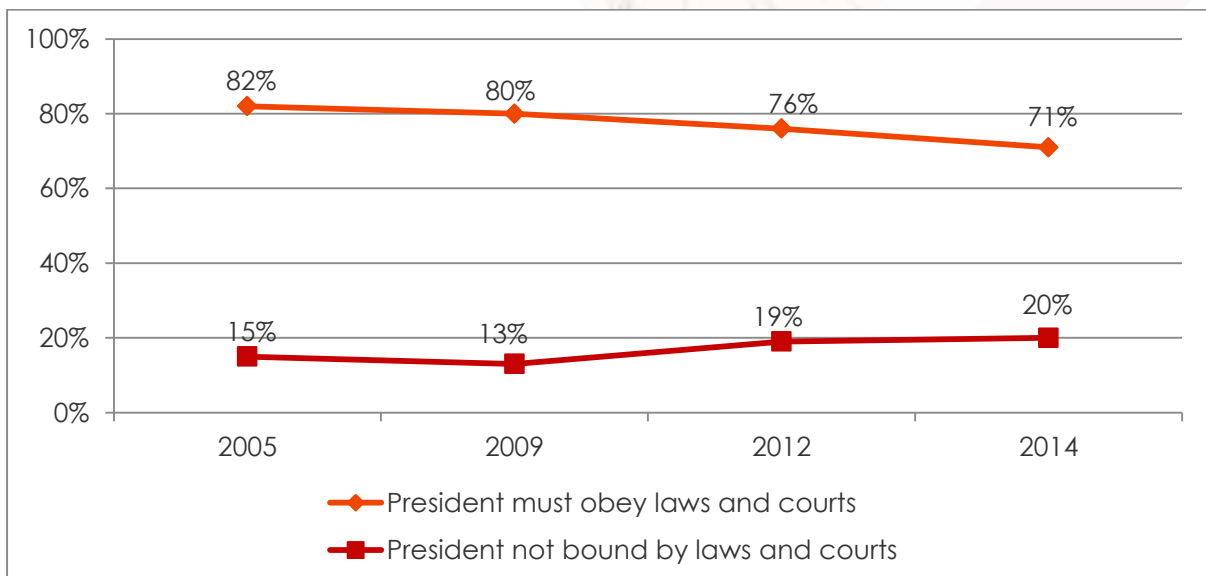
A generational analysis shows that youth (75%) are more inclined than adults (72%) and older respondents (64%) to say that the president should always obey the law and courts even if s/he thinks they are wrong. Again, MDC-T supporters (82%) are more likely than ZANU-PF supporters (62%) to share this view. It is the majority view in all 10 provinces, ranging from 60% in Matabeleland North to 81% in Mashonaland Central (see Table 1 above).

Figure 6: Must president obey laws and courts? | Zimbabwe | 2014



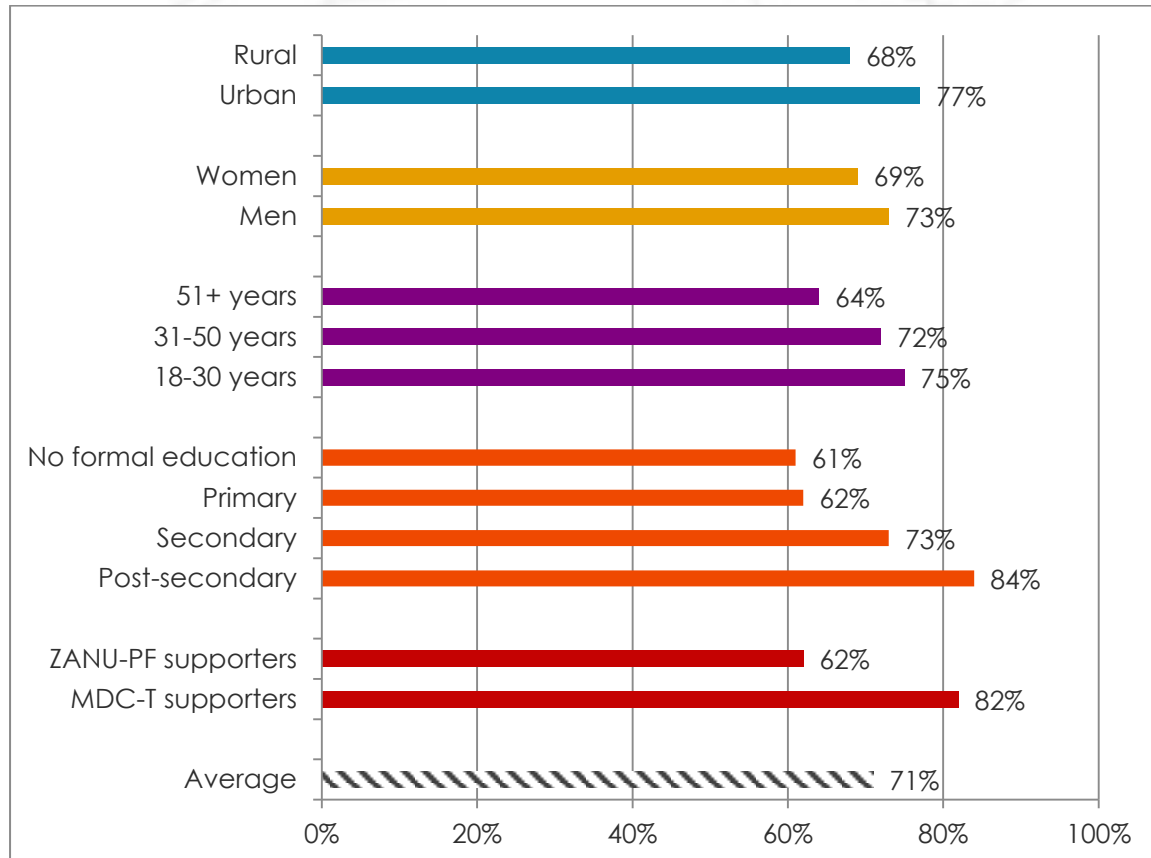
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Since the president was elected to lead the country, he should not be bound by laws or court decisions that he thinks are wrong.
 Statement 2: The president must always obey the laws and the courts, even if he thinks they are wrong.
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with each statement)

Figure 7: Must president obey laws and courts? | Zimbabwe | 2005-2014



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Since the president was elected to lead the country, he should not be bound by laws or court decisions that he thinks are wrong.
 Statement 2: The president must always obey the laws and the courts, even if he thinks they are wrong.
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with each statement)

Figure 8: Must president obey laws and courts? | by demographic characteristics
 | Zimbabwe | 2014



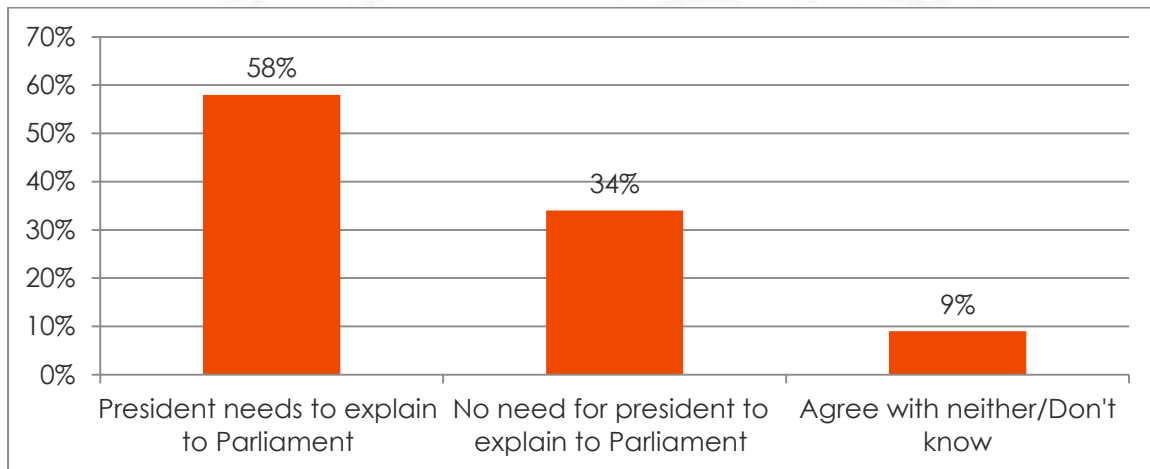
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Since the president was elected to lead the country, he should not be bound by laws or court decisions that he thinks are wrong.
 Statement 2: The president must always obey the laws and the courts, even if he thinks they are wrong.
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” that the president must always obey the laws and courts)

Executive accountability

A majority (58%) of Zimbabweans believe that Parliament should ensure that the president explains to it on a regular basis how the government spends taxpayers' money. One-third (34%) disagree, espousing the view that the president “should be able to devote his full attention to developing the country rather than wasting time justifying his actions” (Figure 9). These proportions have varied little since the question was first asked in 2009.

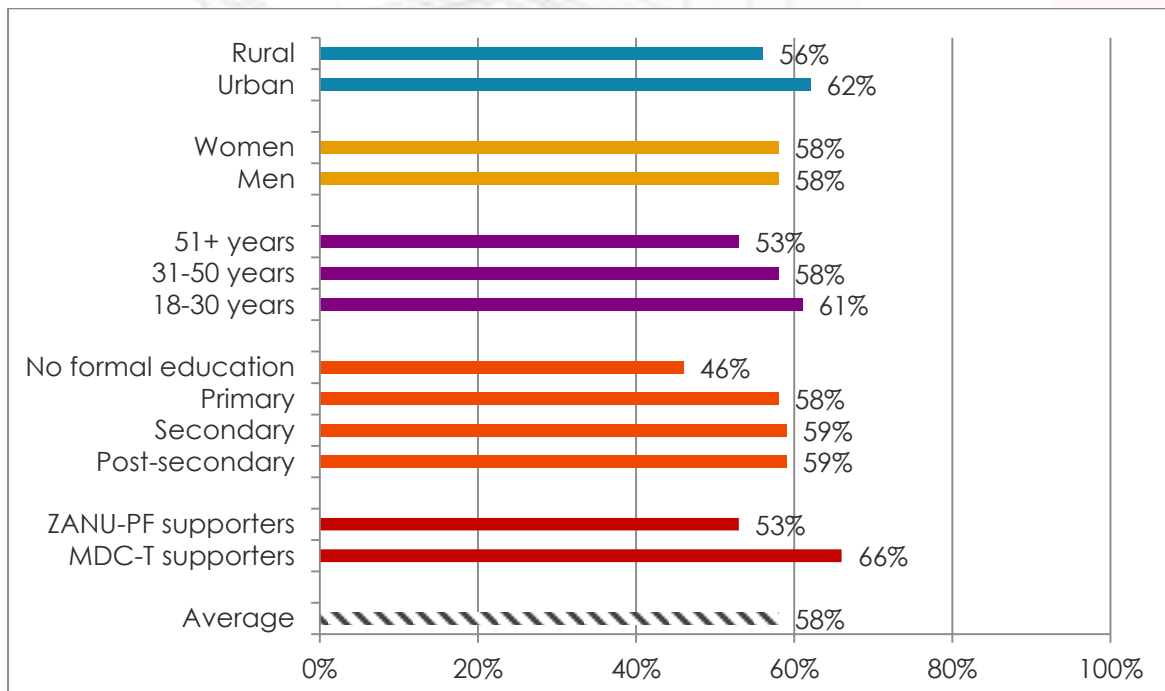
Demand for executive accountability is greater among urban and young residents than among rural residents and adult respondents (Figure 10). In three provinces, fewer than half of respondents agree that Parliament should insist that the president justify the government's expenditures: Matabeleland South (48%), Matabeleland North (43%), and Midlands (43%) (see Table 1 above).

Figure 9: President should justify spending to Parliament | Zimbabwe | 2014



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Parliament should ensure that the president explains to it on a regular basis how his government spends taxpayer's money.
 Statement 2: The president should be able to devote his full attention to developing the country rather than wasting time justifying his actions.
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

Figure 10: President should justify spending to Parliament | by demographic characteristics | Zimbabwe | 2014



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Parliament should ensure that the president explains to it on a regular basis how his government spends taxpayer's money.
 Statement 2: The president should be able to devote his full attention to developing the country rather than wasting time justifying his actions.
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with Statement 1)

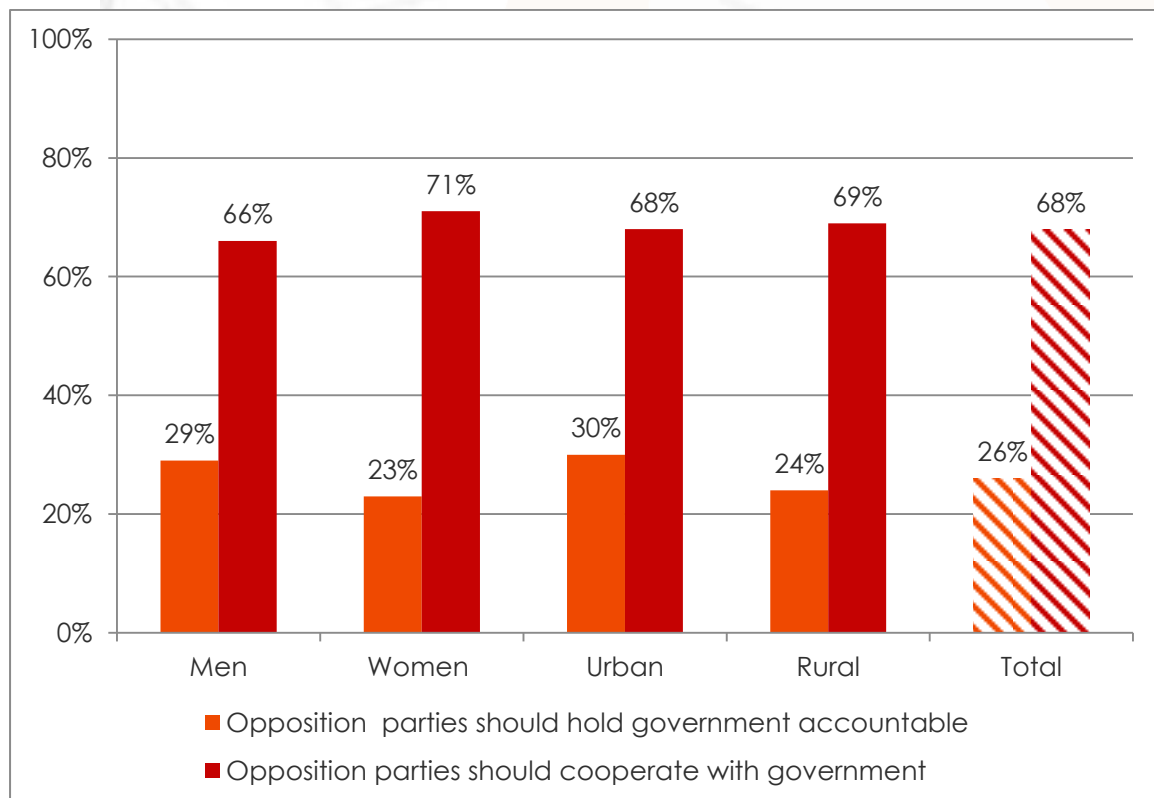
Should opposition parties hold government accountable?

Most Zimbabweans do not see it as the role of opposition political parties to hold the government accountable. Two-thirds (68%) of respondents say that once an election is over, the losing parties should accept defeat and cooperate with the government to help it develop the country, while only one-fourth (26%) think they should monitor and criticize the government in order to hold it accountable (Figure 11).

Responses by demographic group follow the same pattern as on other accountability questions discussed above: Support for the idea that the opposition should hold government accountable, though a minority view across the board, is somewhat higher among male, urban, younger, and more educated respondents, as well as among MDC-T supporters (Figure 12).

Among provinces, Masvingo has the highest proportion of citizens (40%) who say opposition parties should hold the government accountable (see Table 1 above).

Figure 11: Role of opposition parties: Accountability or cooperation? | by gender and rural-urban residence | Zimbabwe | 2014



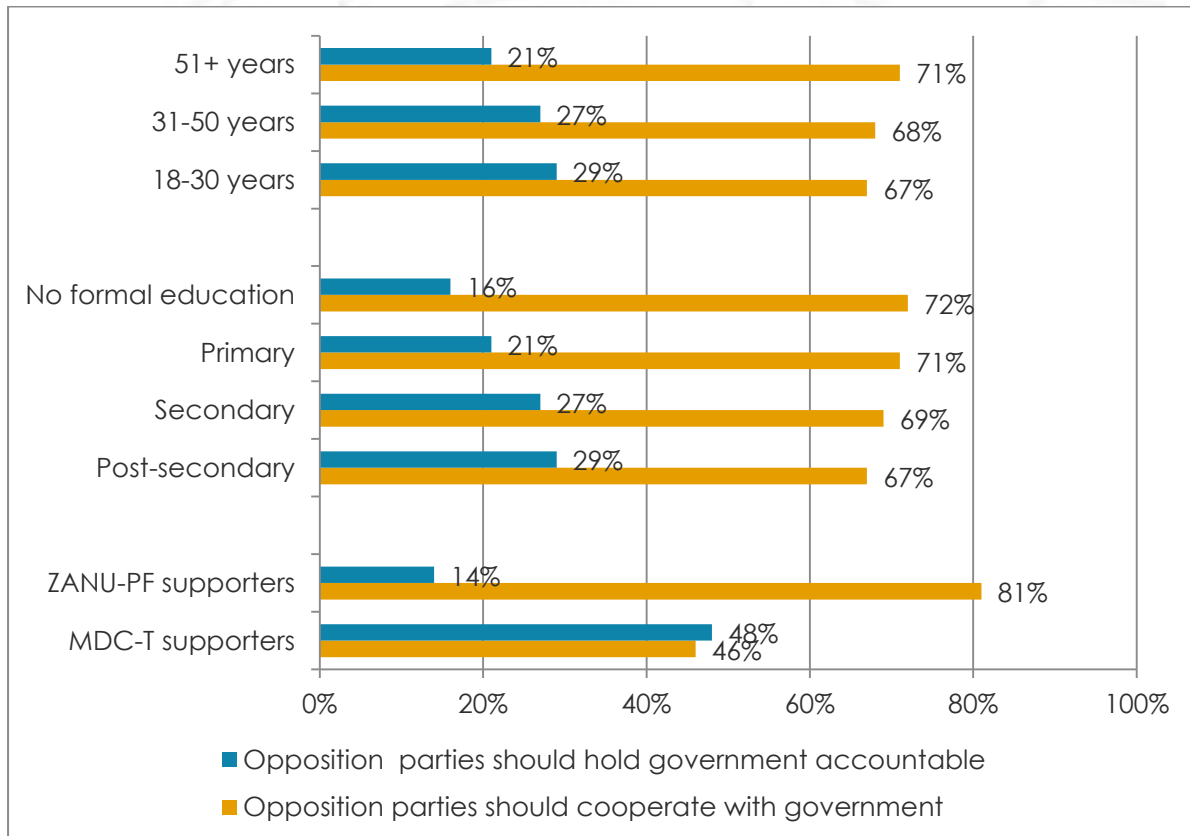
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: After losing an election, opposition parties should monitor and criticize the government in order to hold it accountable.

Statement 2: Once an election is over, opposition parties and politicians should accept defeat and cooperate with government to help it develop the country.

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

Figure 12: Role of opposition parties: Accountability or cooperation? | by age, education, and party affiliation | Zimbabwe | 2014



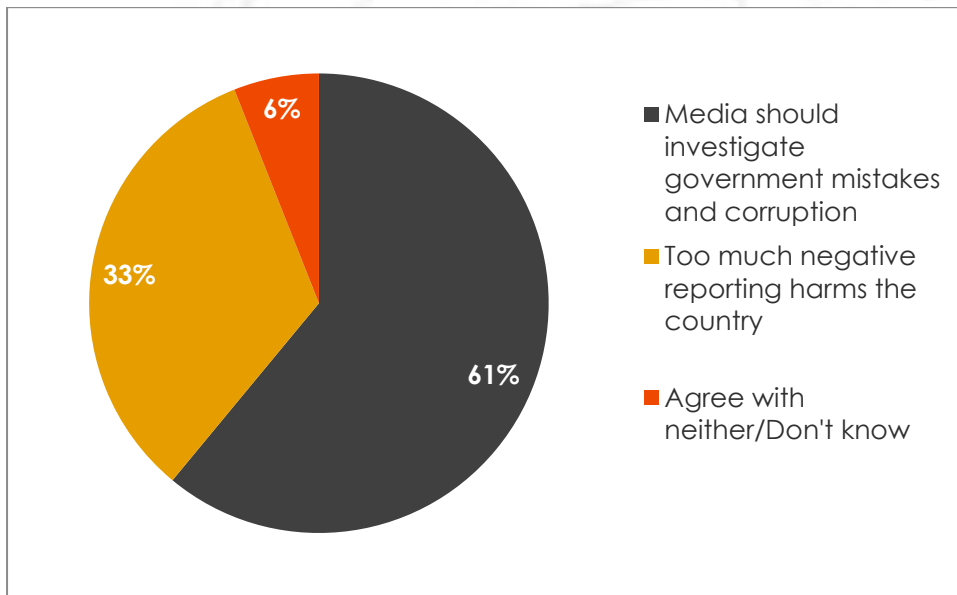
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: After losing an election, opposition parties should monitor and criticize the government in order to hold it accountable.
 Statement 2: Once an election is over, opposition parties and politicians should accept defeat and cooperate with government to help it develop the country.
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with each statement)

Media checks on government

Six in 10 Zimbabweans (61%) endorse the media’s “watchdog” role over government, saying it should “constantly investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption.” One-third (33%) of respondents disagree, arguing that “too much reporting on negative events, like government mistakes and corruption, only harms the country” (Figure 13). Support for media checks on government dropped by 30 percentage points between 2009 and 2012, from 88% to 58% (Figure 14).

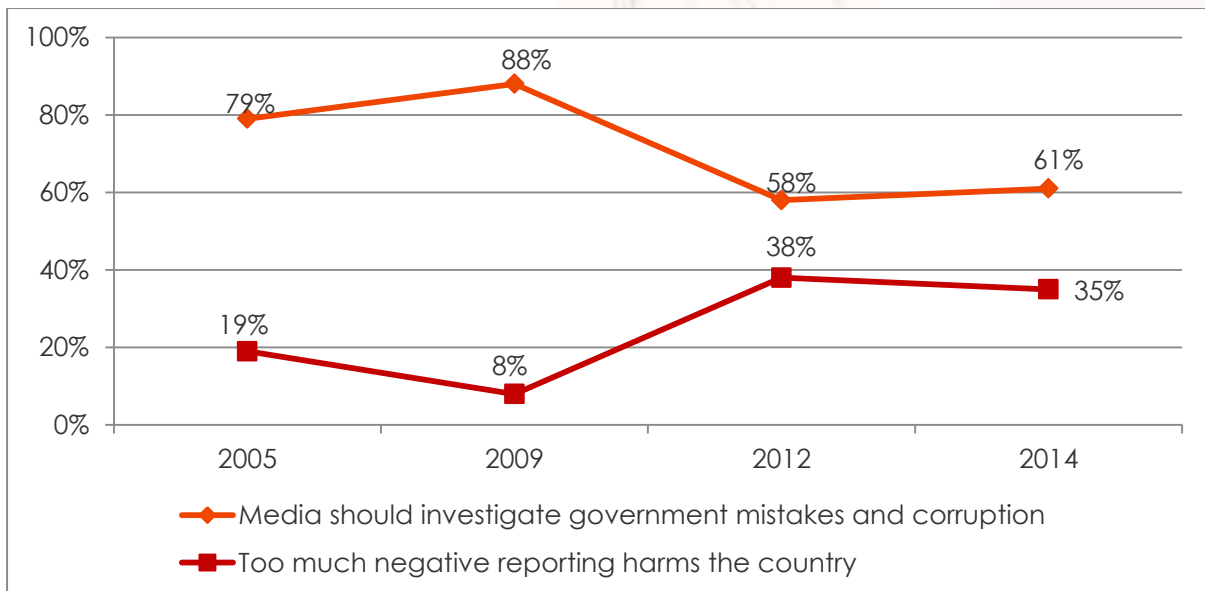
Here again, differences by demographic group follow the same pattern (Figure 15). Differences by education level and party affiliation are particularly pronounced. Three-fourths (75%) of those with post-secondary qualifications support media checks on government, compared to only 43% of those with no formal education. And more than eight in 10 MDC-T supporters (85%) want the media to investigate government mistakes and corruption, vs. only 47% of ZANU-PF adherents. Support for the media’s watchdog role is the majority view in all provinces except Matabeleland North (43%).

Figure 13: Media checks on government | Zimbabwe | 2014



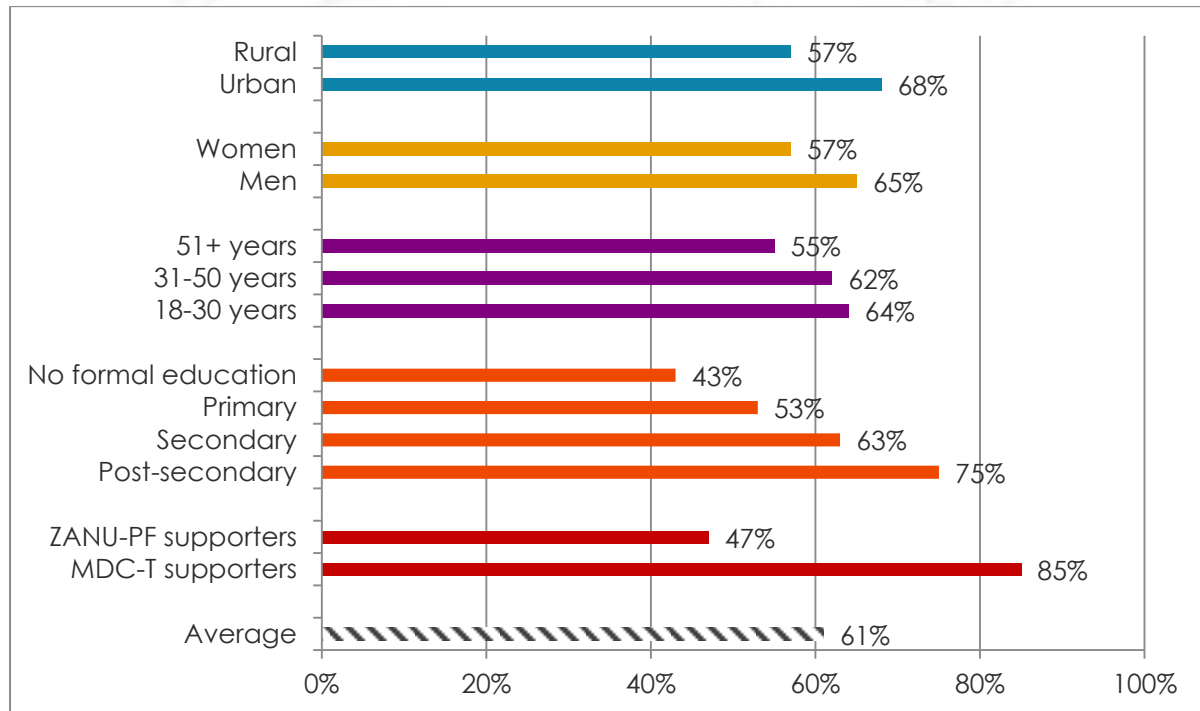
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: The news media should constantly investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption.
 Statement 2: Too much reporting on negative events, like government mistakes and corruption, only harms the country.
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

Figure 14: Media checks on government | Zimbabwe | 2005-2014



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: The news media should constantly investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption.
 Statement 2: Too much reporting on negative events, like government mistakes and corruption, only harms the country.
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

Figure 15: Media checks on government | by demographic characteristics
 | Zimbabwe | 2014



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: The news media should constantly investigate and report on government mistakes and corruption.
 Statement 2: Too much reporting on negative events, like government mistakes and corruption, only harms the country.
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with Statement 1)

Elections as a tool for accountability

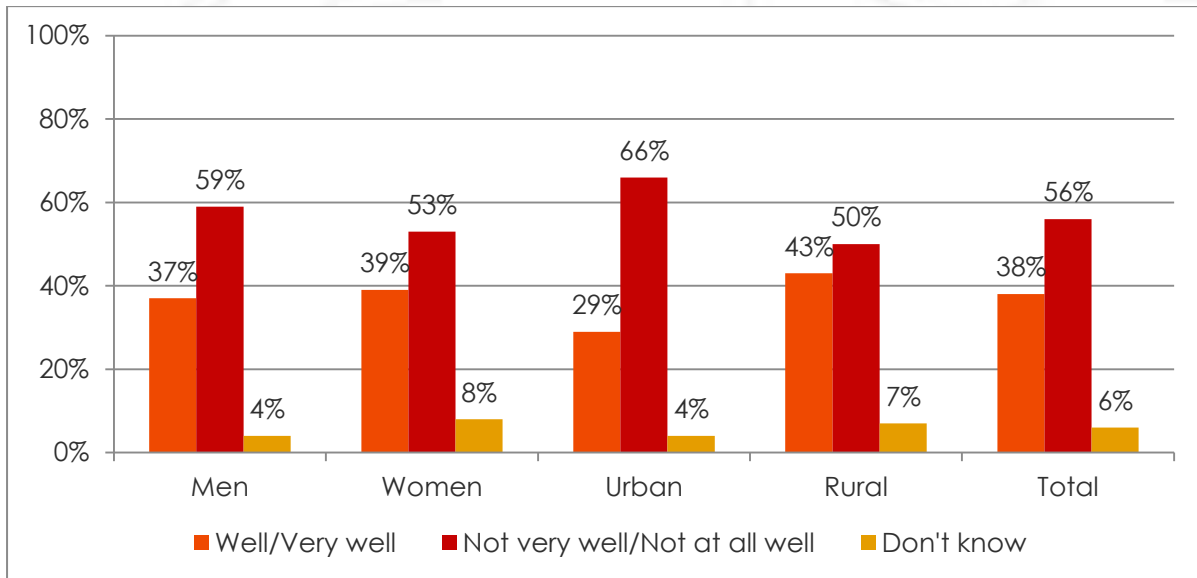
Elections may be considered the ultimate tool for accountability, allowing voters to remove from office leaders who go against the people’s will. But how well do elections fulfill this function in practice?

Fewer than four in 10 Zimbabweans (38%) say their elections work “well” or “very well” to enable voters to remove non-performing leaders, while a majority (56%) say they perform “not very well” or “not at all well” (Figure 16). The sentiment that elections fulfill this accountability role well/very well increased by 5 percentage points between 2005 and 2014.

Urban residents are particularly skeptical about the ability of elections to serve this accountability function (66% say “not very well” or “not at all well,” compared to 50% of rural residents). Better-educated respondents are far less likely to say elections work well than those with less than a secondary education (Figure 17). Only 14% of MDC-T supporters see Zimbabwe’s elections as functioning well/very well to remove non-performing leaders, compared to a majority (56%) of ZANU-PF supporters.

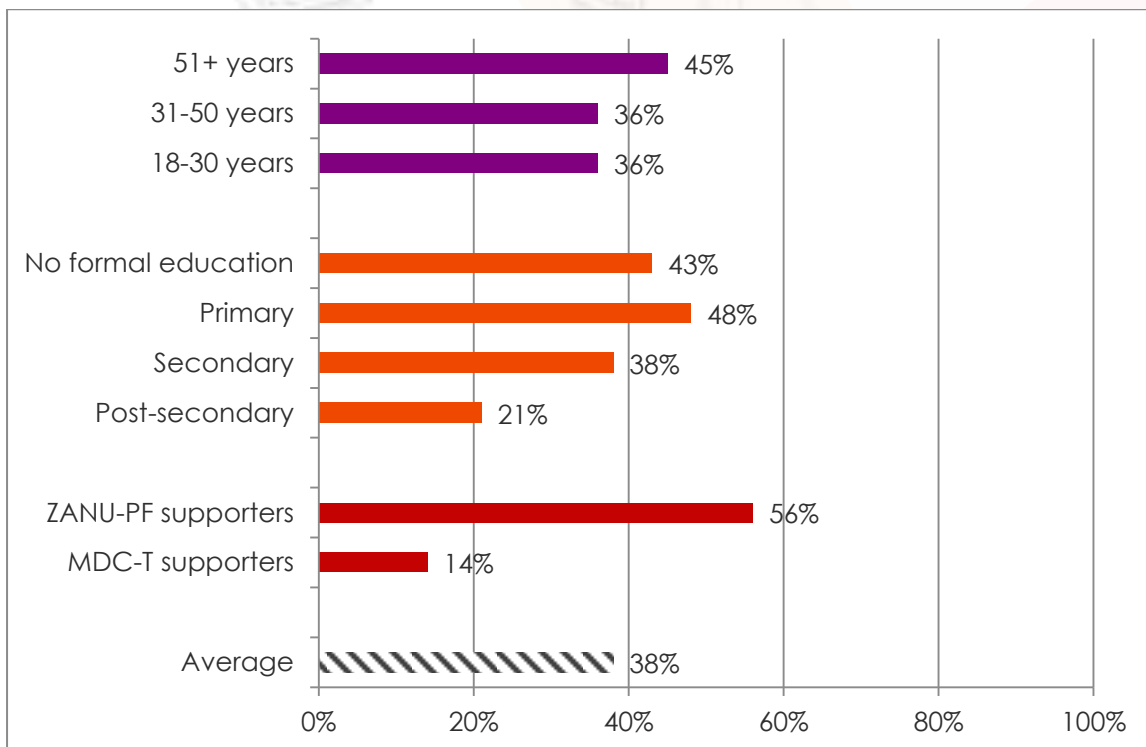
Mashonaland West, a ZANU-PF stronghold, is the only province where a majority (53%) of respondents say that elections serve “well” or “very well” to enable the electorate to remove non-performing leaders from office (Table 2). In Bulawayo, Harare, and Manicaland, fewer than one-third of citizens agree.

Figure 16: How well do elections enable voters to remove leaders from office?
 | by gender and rural-urban residence | Zimbabwe | 2014



Respondents were asked: Think about how elections work in practice in this country. How well do elections enable voters to remove from office leaders who do not do what the people want?

Figure 17: Perception that elections work well to enable voters to remove leaders from office
 | by age, education level, and party affiliation | Zimbabwe | 2014



Respondents were asked: Think about how elections work in practice in this country. How well do elections enable voters to remove from office leaders who do not do what the people want? (% who say "well" or "very well")

Table 2: How well do elections enable voters to remove non-performing leaders from office? | by province | Zimbabwe | 2014

	Well/Very well	Not very well/ Not at all well
Mashonaland West	53%	35%
Mashonaland Central	45%	50%
Midlands	41%	54%
Masvingo	40%	59%
Matabeleland South	40%	49%
Mashonaland East	38%	57%
Matabeleland North	37%	47%
Bulawayo	32%	67%
Harare	31%	66%
Manicaland	30%	62%
TOTAL	38%	56%

Respondents were asked: *Think about how elections work in practice in this country. How well do elections enable voters to remove from office leaders who do not do what the people want?*

Conclusion

Demand for accountability in governance is solid among Zimbabweans, even if ensuring accountability requires slower government processes. Citizens clearly assign Parliament responsibility for making laws and for holding the president accountable for how taxpayer money is spent. Citizens also task the judiciary and the news media with holding the government accountable. Only pluralities assign responsibility for holding public officials accountable to the voters, and most Zimbabweans do not believe that their country's elections are performing well as a mechanism for removing non-performing leaders from office.

To further explore this data, please visit Afrobarometer's online data analysis facility at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

References

World Bank Group. Accountability in governance.
<https://siteresources.worldbank.org/PUBLICSECTORANDGOVERNANCE/Resources/AccountabilityGovernance.pdf>. Accessed 16 December 2016.

Appendix

Table A.1: Who should be responsible for holding the president accountable?

| by demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2014

	President / Executive	Parliament/ Local council	Their political party	Voters	No one	Don't know
Urban	12%	25%	7%	50%	2%	4%
Rural	16%	21%	12%	43%	2%	5%
Men	13%	24%	11%	47%	2%	4%
Women	16%	21%	10%	45%	2%	6%
18-30 years	16%	23%	9%	45%	2%	6%
31-50 years	13%	24%	10%	49%	2%	3%
51+ years	17%	21%	12%	42%	2%	6%
No formal education	17%	20%	13%	34%	2%	15%
Primary	19%	19%	10%	47%	2%	4%
Secondary	15%	24%	10%	45%	1%	5%
Post- secondary	7%	24%	9%	55%	4%	1%
MDC-T supporters	9%	25%	10%	52%	2%	1%
ZANU-PF supporters	18%	21%	13%	42%	2%	4%
Total	15%	23%	10%	46%	2%	5%

Respondents were asked: Who should be responsible for: making sure that, once elected, the president does his job?

Table A.2: Who should be responsible for holding MPs accountable?

| by demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2014

	President/ Executive	Parliament/ Local council	Their political party	Voters	No one	Don't know
Urban	24%	24%	8%	42%	1%	2%
Rural	28%	18%	9%	42%	1%	4%
Men	25%	19%	9%	44%	1%	2%
Women	28%	20%	7%	40%	1%	5%
18-30 years	26%	19%	9%	42%	1%	4%
31-50 years	25%	22%	8%	43%	1%	2%
51+ years	30%	17%	7%	40%	1%	5%

No formal education	24%	21%	10%	32%	1%	13%
Primary	31%	17%	6%	42%	1%	3%
Secondary	26%	20%	9%	42%	1%	3%
Post- secondary	23%	23%	7%	44%	1%	1%
MDC-T supporters	20%	25%	8%	45%	1%	1%
ZANU-PF supporters	31%	18%	10%	39%	1%	2%
TOTAL	26%	20%	8%	42%	1%	3%

Respondents were asked: Who should be responsible for: making sure that, once elected, Members of Parliament do their jobs?

Table A.3: Who should be responsible for holding local government councillors accountable? | by demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2014

	President/ Executive	Parliament/ Local council	Their political party	Voters	No one	Don't know
Urban	13%	33%	8%	42%	1%	3%
Rural	18%	24%	11%	43%	1%	4%
Men	16%	28%	11%	44%	1%	2%
Women	17%	27%	9%	41%	1%	5%
18-30 years	17%	26%	11%	42%	1%	4%
31-50 years	15%	29%	10%	44%	1%	2%
51+ years	19%	26%	8%	41%	1%	5%
No formal education	17%	23%	14%	34%	1%	12%
Primary	22%	23%	9%	42%	0%	3%
Secondary	16%	27%	10%	44%	1%	3%
Post- secondary	8%	36%	10%	43%	1%	1%
MDC-T supporters	10%	32%	9%	46%	1%	1%
ZANU-PF supporters	20%	25%	12%	40%	0%	2%
TOTAL	16%	27%	10%	42%	1%	3%

Respondents were asked: Who should be responsible for: making sure that, once elected, local government councillors do their jobs?

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