



Zimbabwe seen headed in the wrong direction, but president's leadership approval steady

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 40 | Eldred V. Masunungure

Summary

Most Zimbabweans express discontent with the overall direction of their country, deteriorating economic conditions, rising corruption, and the performance of their elected leaders – except for President Robert Mugabe.

According to the latest Afrobarometer survey, popular assessments of the country's direction and of how members of Parliament (MPs) and local government councillors are doing their jobs are considerably more negative than in 2012, but a majority of Zimbabweans continue to approve of the president's performance.

Overall, the public mood is no longer as positive as during the Government of National Unity (GNU) in 2009-2012, and MPs and local councillors – who are seen as “never” or “only sometimes” listening to what the people have to say – will clearly have to “pull their socks up” if they hope to endear themselves to their constituents in time for the 2018 elections.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is an African-led, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. Five rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and Round 6 surveys are currently under way (2014-2015). Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of between 1,200 and 2,400 respondents.

The Afrobarometer team in Zimbabwe, led by the 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 have been conducted in Zimbabwe in 1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2010, and 2012.

Key findings

- Almost two-thirds (63%) of Zimbabweans say the country is heading in the wrong direction, a dramatic increase from 41% recorded in 2012. Less than one-third (31%) now say the country is on the right path.
- Half (51%) of survey respondents say economic conditions in Zimbabwe have grown worse in the previous 12 months, including 19% who say they are “much worse.” Further, more than two-thirds (68%) of adult Zimbabweans say the level of corruption has increased over the past year, including 48% who say it has increased “a lot.”
- Popular approval of MP job performance has plunged from 52% in 2012 to 39%, though this is still higher than the 31% approval recorded at the beginning of the GNU in 2009.

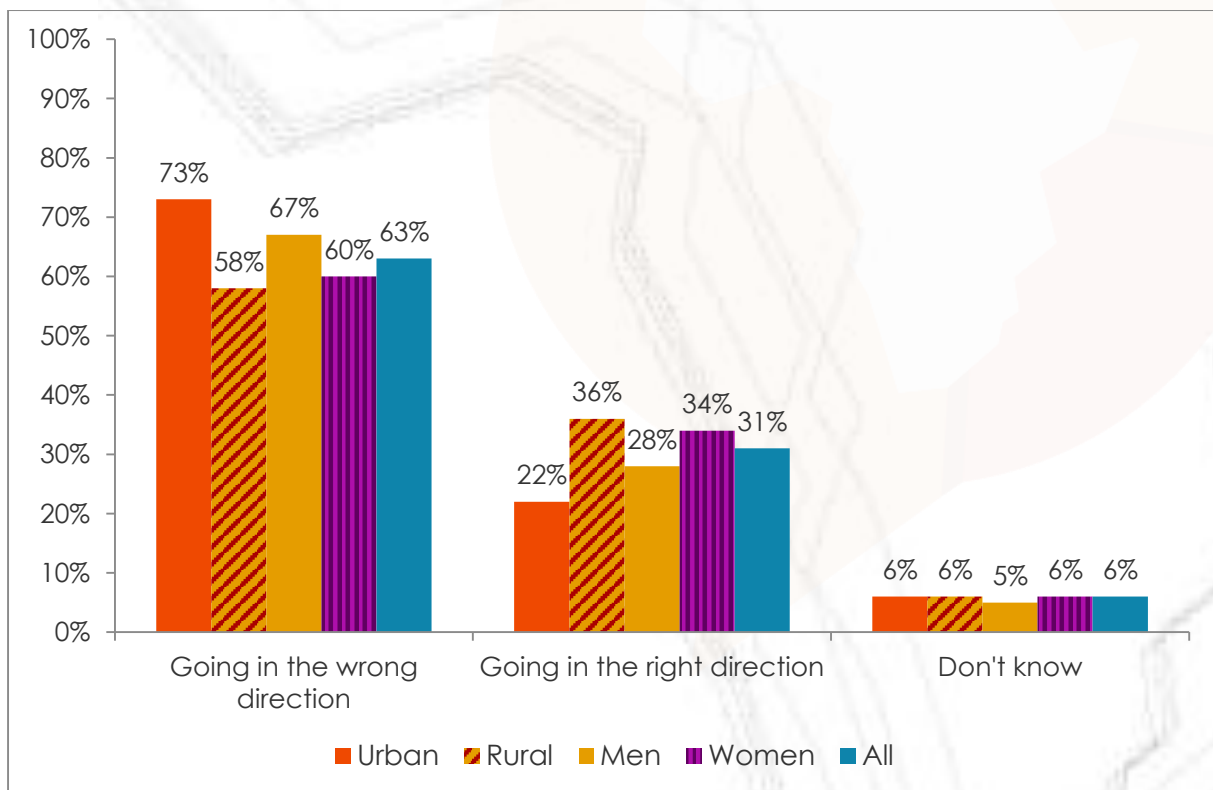
- Only 48% of respondents are satisfied with the job performance of elected local government councillors, 9 percentage points less than during the GNU era two years earlier.
- The president's leadership performance rating is substantially higher than those of MPs and local government councillors. Close to six in 10 Zimbabweans (57%) "approve" or "strongly approve" of Mugabe's job performance, only 2 percentage points lower than in 2012 and 33 percentage points higher than at the beginning of the GNU in 2009.

Perceptions of the country's condition and direction

The proportion of citizens who see the country as headed in the wrong direction is dramatically higher than in 2012, 63% vs. 41% (Figure 1). Only 31% say the country is on the right path.

Urban residents are more likely than rural residents to be critical of the country's direction, 73% vs. 58%, and men are somewhat more negative in their assessments than women, 67% vs. 60%.

Figure 1: Views on overall direction of the country | by location and gender
 | Zimbabwe | 2014



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?

Perceptions of the country's economic situation are similarly negative. Half (51%) of survey respondents say economic conditions in Zimbabwe deteriorated in the 12 months preceding the survey, including 19% who say they are "much worse." Only 17% describe economic

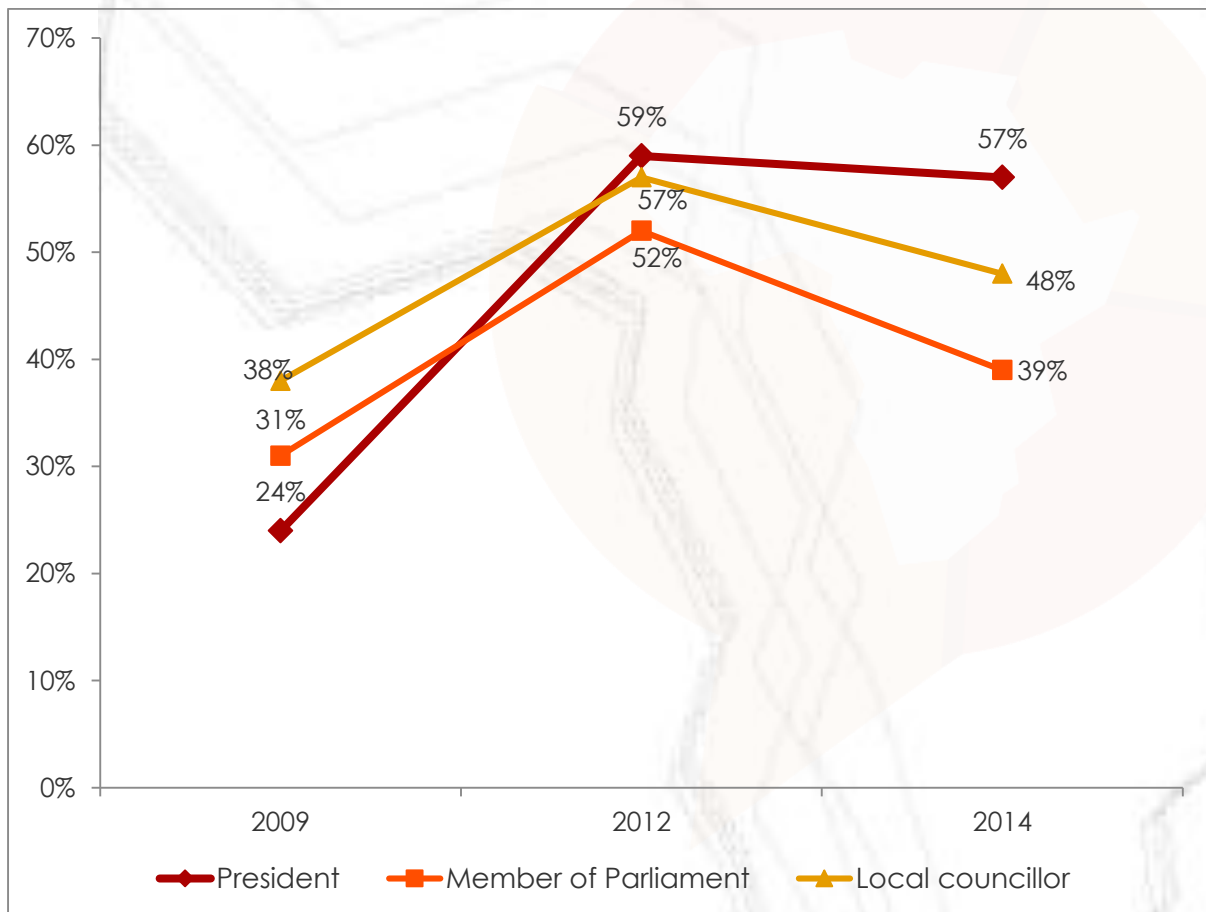
conditions as better. Looking ahead, more than four in 10 (42%) foresee a worsening economic trajectory, while one-quarter expect improvement.

More than two-thirds (68%) of adult Zimbabweans say the level of corruption has increased over the past year, including 48% who say it has increased "a lot." Furthermore, the government gets poor marks for its handling of the corruption scourge: 80% of respondents say the government is doing "badly" or "very badly" in fighting corruption.

Evaluation of the president's performance

Despite their serious concerns about the country's condition and future, Zimbabweans do not seem to blame their president, whose popularity remained stable between 2012 and 2014. A majority (57%) of citizens approve of Mugabe's job performance in 2014 (Figure 2), including 26% who "strongly approve." (Figure 2). Even among those who say the country is headed in the wrong direction, almost half (45%) approve of the president's performance.

Figure 2: Evaluation of performance of elected leaders | Zimbabwe | 2009-2014



Respondents were asked: Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past 12 months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? (% who "approve" or "strongly approve")

The president's relatively high approval rating varies according to:

- Respondents' place of residence: Among rural dwellers, two-thirds (65%) approve of the president's performance, which is 21 percentage points higher than the figure for urban residents (44%) (Figure 3).

- Education: Approval of presidential performance declines with increasing levels of education, from two-thirds approval among respondents with no education or some primary education to one-third approval among those with post-secondary education (Figure 4).
- Province: Approval ratings vary widely by province, from predictable highs in the ZANU-PF heartlands of Mashonaland Central (78%) and Mashonaland West (75%) to a low of 34% in urban Bulawayo, an opposition stronghold since the turn of the century (Figure 5).
- Partisan affiliation: While nearly nine in 10 ZANU-PF partisans (86%) “approve” or “strongly approve” of the president’s job performance, just one in eight MDC-T supporters (13%) do so.

Figure 3: Evaluation of the president’s performance | by respondent location and gender | Zimbabwe | 2014

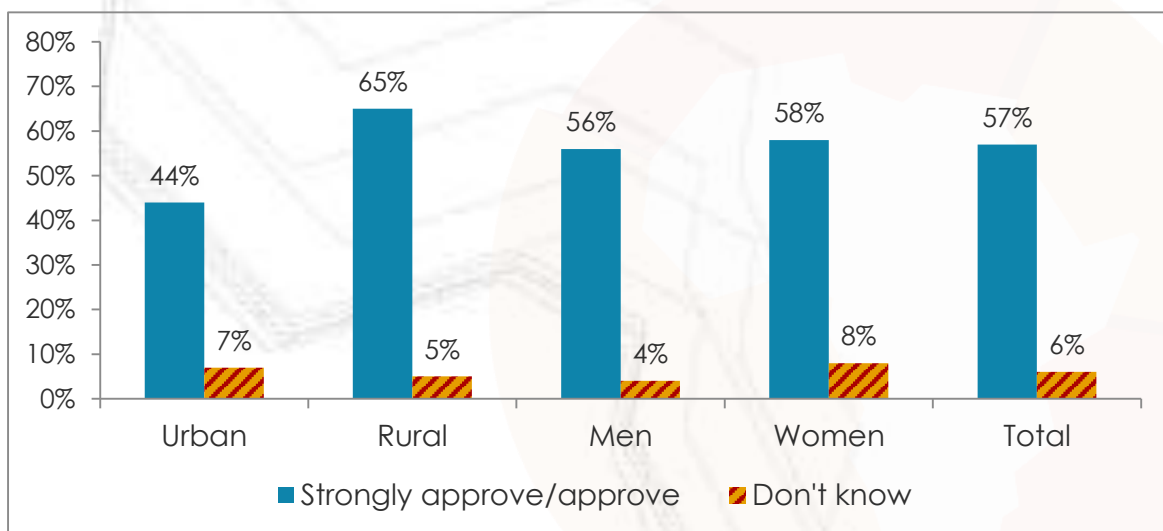


Figure 4: Evaluation of the president’s performance | by respondent’s education level | Zimbabwe | 2014

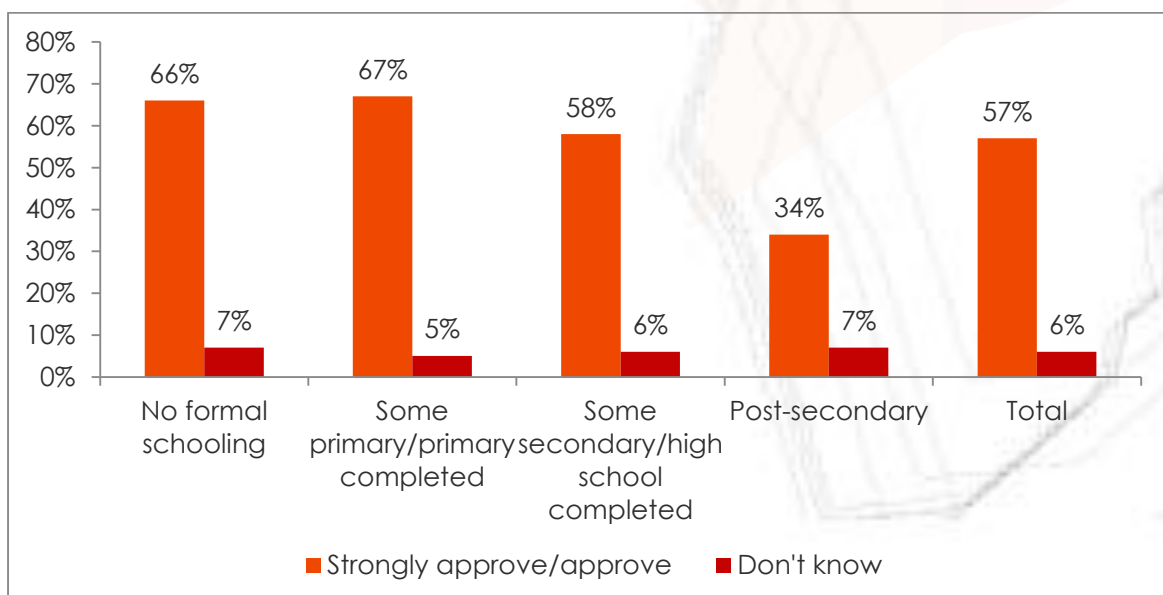
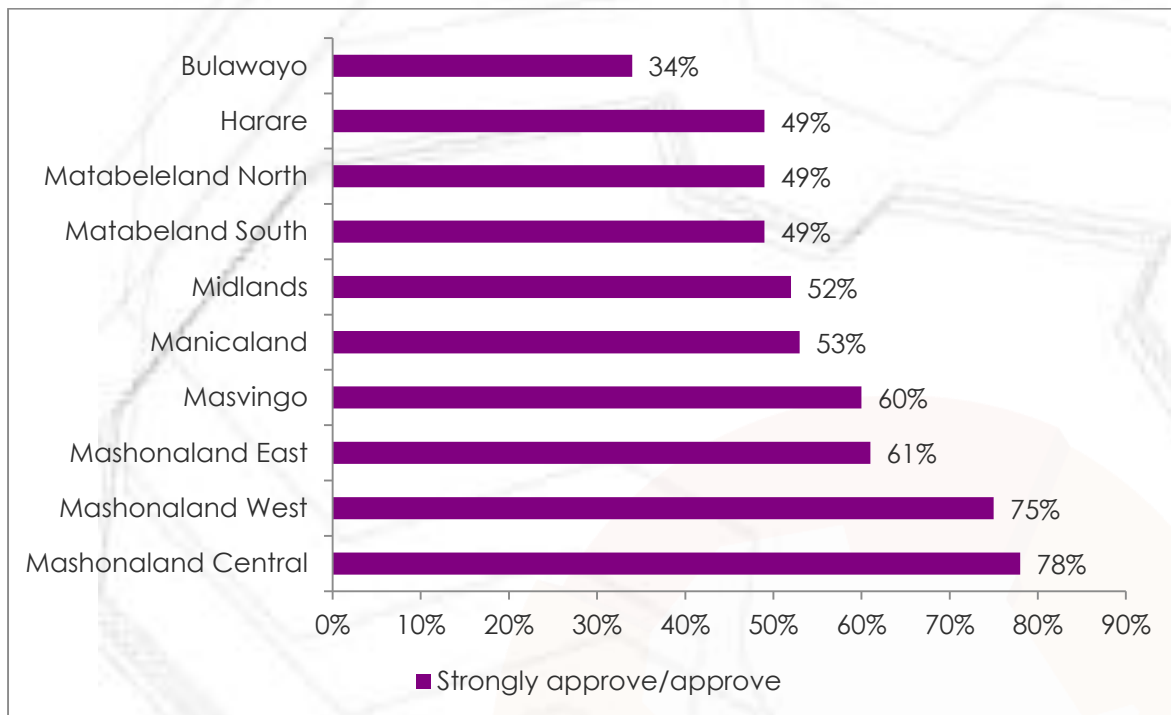


Figure 5: Approval of the president's performance | by province | Zimbabwe | 2014

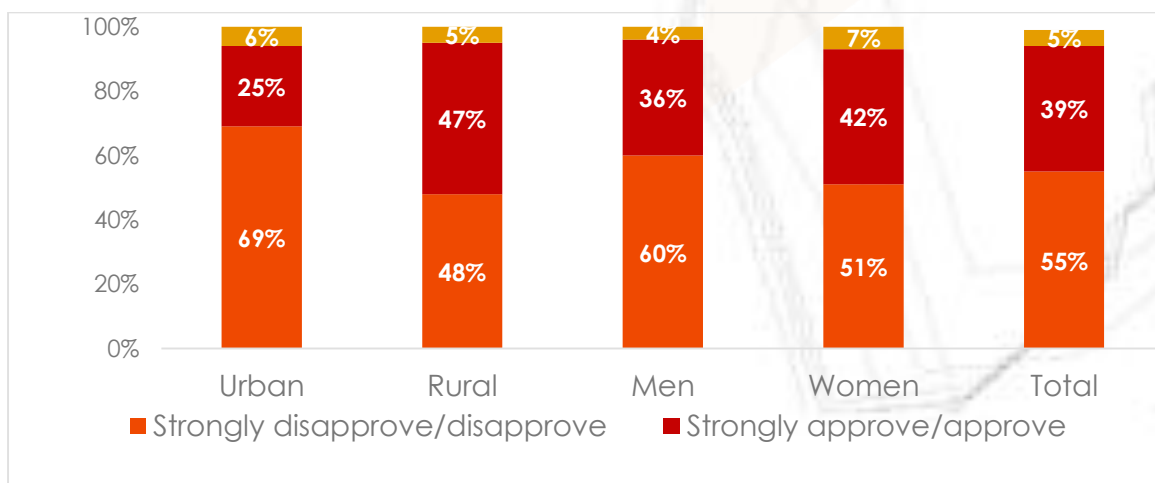


Evaluation of MP performance

While the president appears to escape unscathed by citizens' critical perceptions, MPs do not. The proportion of Zimbabweans who approve of the way that MPs have performed in the previous year (39%) is 13 percentage points down from 2012 (see Figure 2 above). Further, more than three-quarters (78%) of respondents say MPs "never" or "only sometimes" listen to what people have to say. An overwhelming majority (86%) of citizens say they "never" contacted their MP in the previous year to air their views. Clearly, there is a wide disconnect between citizens and their elected national leaders.

Both men (36% approval) and women (42% approval) are less than satisfied with their elected representatives. Urban residents (25% approval) are harsher than rural dwellers, who are almost evenly split between 47% approval and 48% disapproval (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Evaluation of MP performance | by location and gender | Zimbabwe | 2014



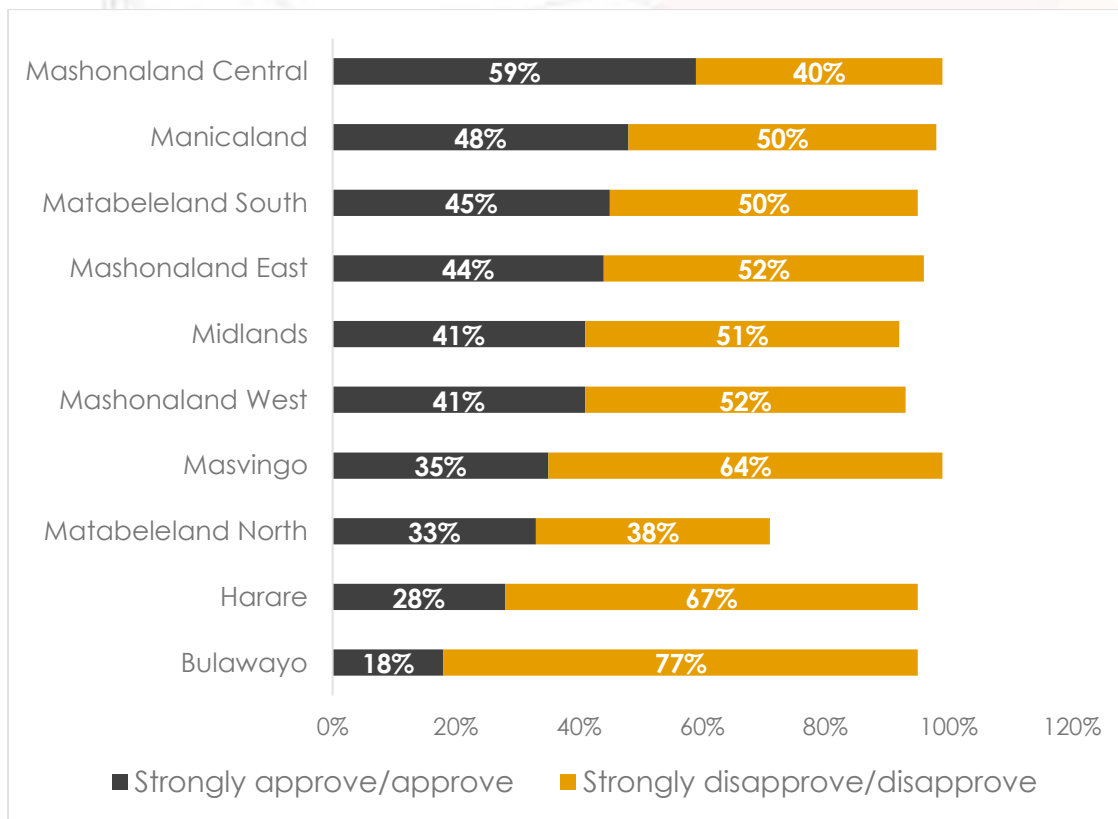
MPs are awarded failing marks in all the country's provinces except in Mashonaland Central, where 59% of survey respondents “approve” or “strongly approve” of their representatives' performance (Figure 7). In the remaining nine provinces, the representatives of the people in the National Assembly get approval ratings ranging from 48% in Manicaland and 45% in Matabeleland South to lows of 18% in Bulawayo and 28% in Harare.

Approval ratings improve slightly with respondents' ages: 36% among the youth (ages 18-35), 38% for those ages 36-50 years, and 49% for the older generation of 51 years or more.

The survey findings show glaring disparities in performance evaluations along partisan lines. ZANU-PF partisans are seven times more likely to approve of the performance of their parliamentary representatives than their MDC-T counterparts, 63% vs. 9%.

More than seven in 10 Zimbabweans (71%) say that MPs mainly serve their own interests, compared to just 21% who think they serve the interests of the people.

Figure 7: Evaluation of MP performance | by province | Zimbabwe | 2014



Evaluation of local councillor performance

To a somewhat lesser degree than their national counterparts, local government councillors are viewed as poor performers; only 48% of respondents “approve” or “strongly approve” of how they do their jobs. Rural dwellers are more likely to approve of their performance than urban residents, 58% vs. 31% (Figure 8).

Unlike MPs, whose job performance receives majority disapproval in nine out of 10 provinces, local councillors get majority failing grades in only four provinces. The least positive ratings are in Harare (26% approval) and Bulawayo (42%), while the most positive ratings are from residents of Mashonaland Central (67% approval) and Matabeleland North (58% approval) (Figure 9).

As in the case of MPs, approval ratings for councillors increase with respondents' age, from 43% approval among the "born-frees" (18-35 years old) to 62% among the elders (those 61 years and above). Partisans of ZANU-PF, which captured 76% of the local government wards countrywide in the 2013 harmonised elections, are more than three times as likely as MDC-T supporters to approve of their local councillors' performance, 67% vs. 20%.

Figure 8: Assessment of local councillor performance | by location and gender | Zimbabwe | 2014

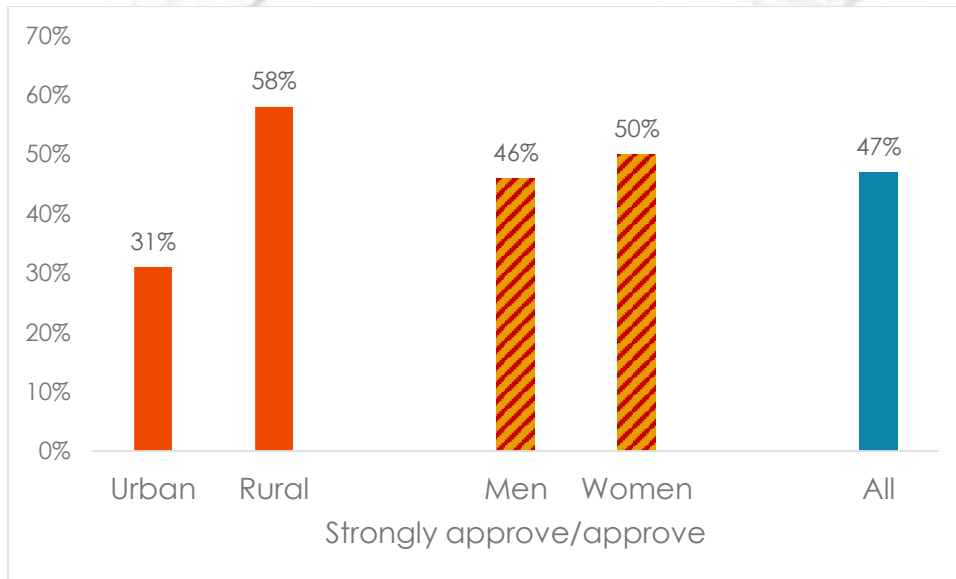
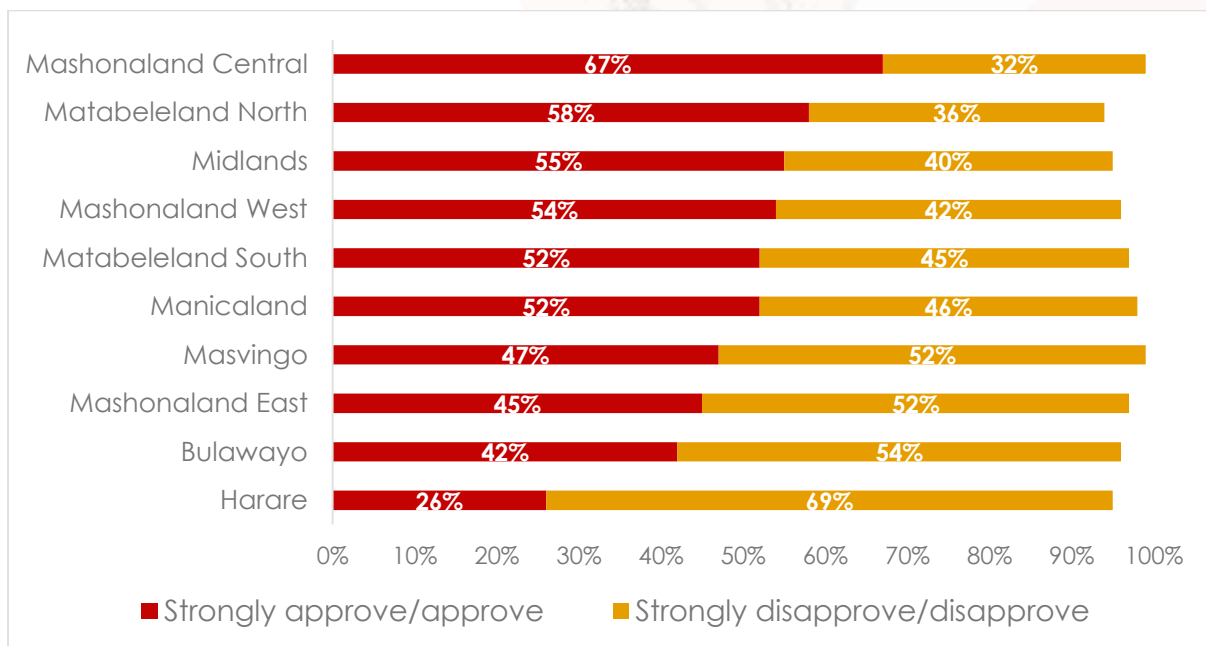


Figure 9: Assessment of local councillor performance | by province | Zimbabwe | 2014

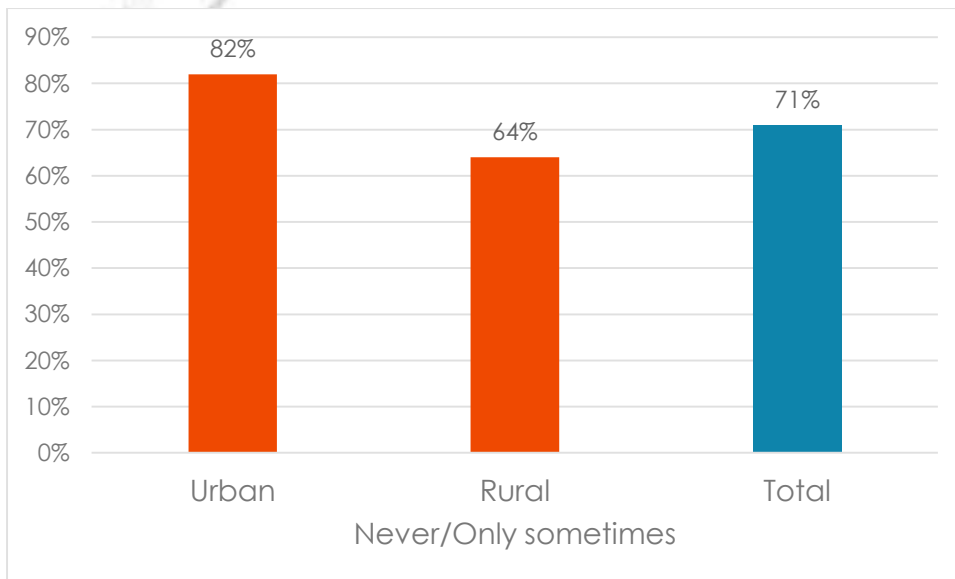


Like MPs, local councillors are viewed as not being open to constituent input: More than seven in 10 respondents (71%) say their councillors "never" or "only sometimes" listen to what people have to say (Figure 10). This feeling is particularly strong among urban residents. A

solid two-thirds (67%) of Zimbabweans say they “never” had any contact with their local representative in the previous 12 months.

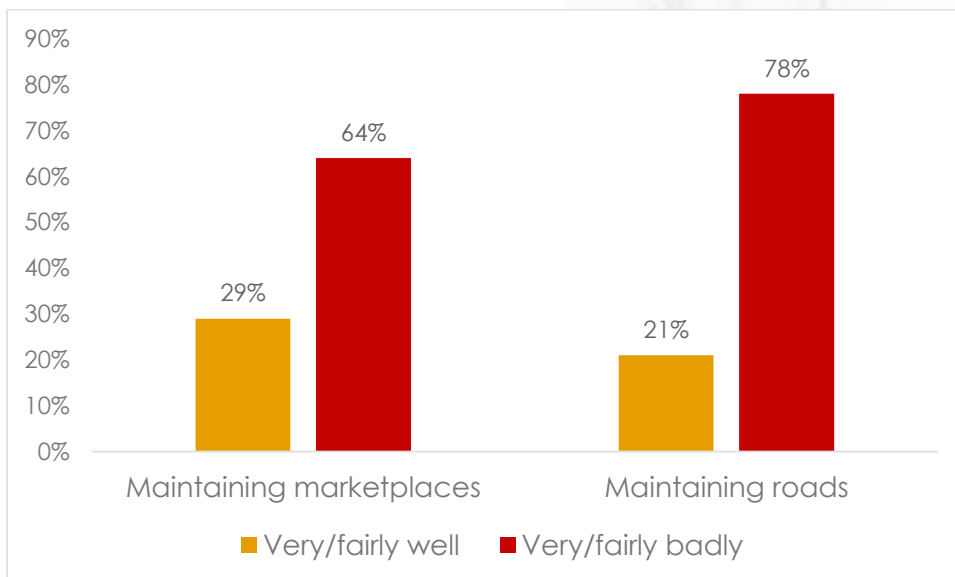
In addition, residents complain about service delivery from their local government councils: 78% say the councils are doing badly (47% say “very badly”) in maintaining local roads, and nearly two-thirds (64%) say councils are doing badly (34% say “very badly”) in maintaining local marketplaces (Figure 11).

Figure 10: Perceptions of councillors’ willingness to listen to citizens | by location | Zimbabwe | 2014



Respondents were asked: How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what people like you have to say: Your elected local government councillor?

Figure 11: Assessments of service delivery by local government | Zimbabwe | 2014



Respondents were asked: What about local government? I do not mean the national government. I mean your municipal or local government council. How well or badly would you say your local government is handling the following matters, or haven’t you heard enough about them to say?

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

Eldred V. Masunungure is the director of the Mass Public Opinion Institute and the Afrobarometer national investigator, based in Harare, Zimbabwe.
Email: director@mpoi.org.zw

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.

Core support for Afrobarometer Rounds 5 and 6 has been provided by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank.

For more information, please visit www.afrobarometer.org.

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 40 | 21 May 2015