

‘Paradise is getting rocky’: Mauritians see climate change as threat to quality of life

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 214 | Thomas Isbell and Sadhiska Bhoojedhur

Summary

For Mauritius, the small island nation that Mark Twain referred to as the model for heaven, rising temperatures and rising sea levels can mean a host of threats, from more severe cyclones and floods to deterioration of coral reefs and beach erosion – an already-occurring phenomenon that the environment minister summed up this way: “Paradise is getting rocky” (Financial Times, 2017).

The government has been vocal about climate change and its potential consequences for the island's all-important tourism industry, plant life, even physical safety (Commonwealth, 2017; Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity, and Environment and Sustainable Development, 2018; Mauritius Meteorological Services, 2018). Mauritius was one of the first countries to ratify the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change and has worked to incorporate climate-change policies into its development strategies (Republic of Mauritius, 2016).

How do ordinary Mauritians see climate change? According to the latest Afrobarometer survey, a majority of Mauritians have heard of climate change and think it is making life worse in Mauritius. A majority attribute climate change to human activity and think ordinary Mauritians can help fight it.

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 divided as to whether climate conditions for agricultural production have gotten worse (37%) or remained the same (42%) over the past decade. A majority (55%) say flooding has become “somewhat” or “much” more severe, while 44% say the same about drought.
- More than eight in 10 Mauritians (83%) have heard of climate change. Lack of awareness of climate change is more common among older, less educated, and

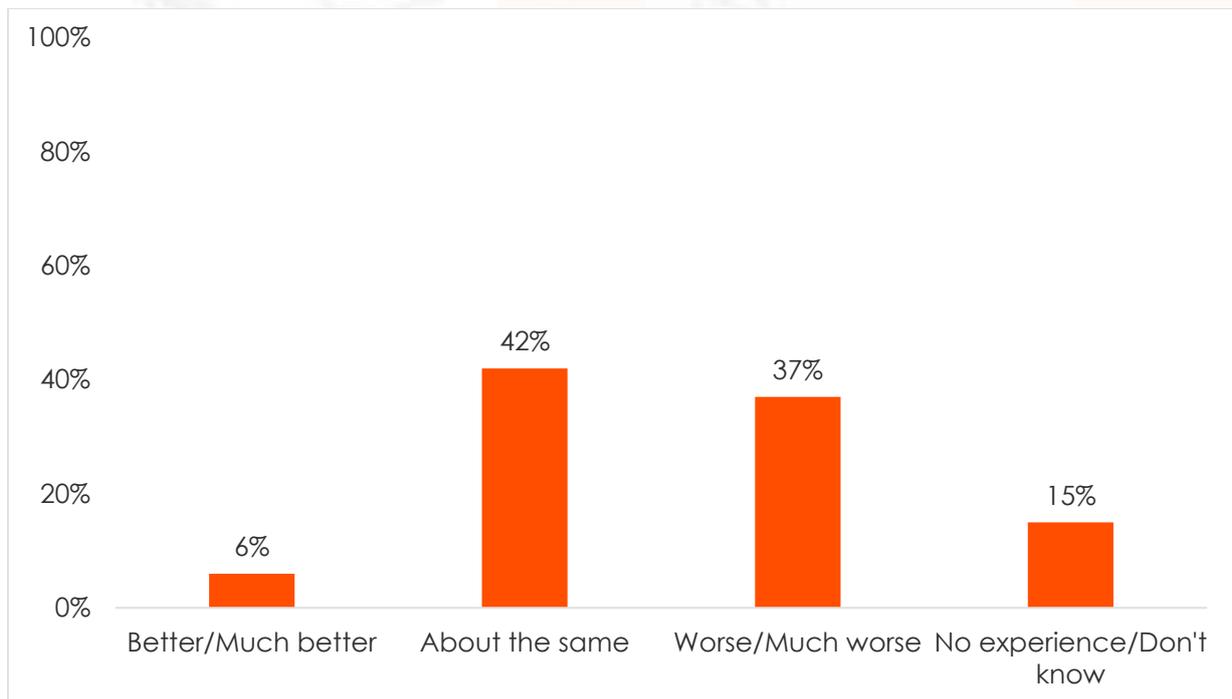
poor Mauritians, as well as among residents of the Black River, Moka, Savanne, and Port Louis regions.

- Among respondents who have heard of climate change, three-fourths (77%) associate it with negative changes in the weather, and 61% attribute it mainly to human activity.
- Six in 10 citizens (61%) say climate change is making life in Mauritius “somewhat” or “much” worse.
- A majority of respondents believe that ordinary Mauritians can do “a little bit (43%) or “a lot” (19%) to stop climate change.

Perceived climate changes

Before mentioning “climate change,” Afrobarometer asked respondents whether they think climate conditions for agricultural production have gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed the same over the past 10 years. Almost four in 10 Mauritians (37%) say they have gotten “worse” or “much worse,” but more (42%) say they have remained about the same. Only 6% say they’ve gotten better (Figure 1).

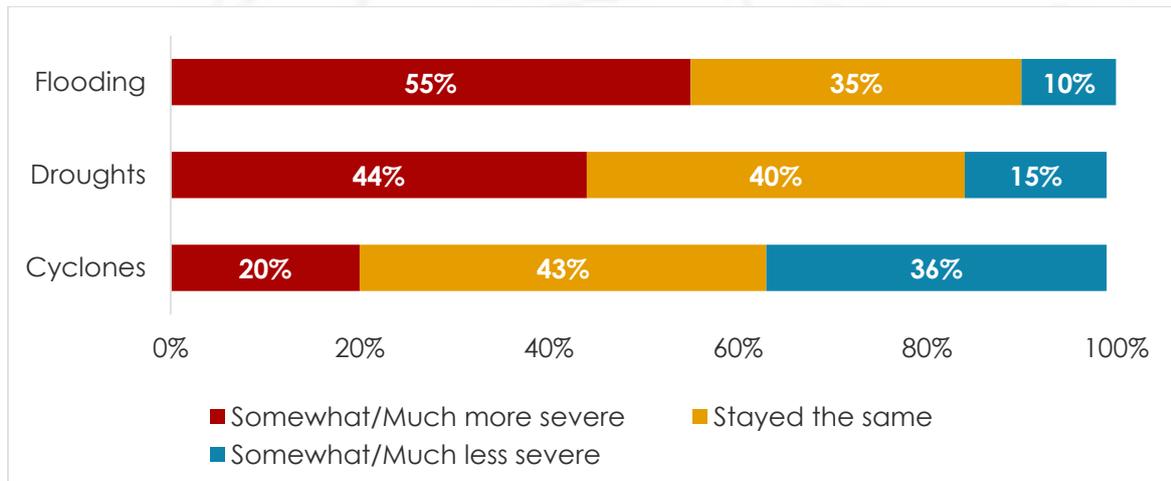
Figure 1: Climate conditions for agricultural production compared to 10 years ago
 | Mauritius | 2017



Respondents were asked: *In your experience, would you say climate conditions for agricultural production in your area have gotten better, gotten worse, or stayed about the same over the last 10 years, or haven't you heard enough to say?*

In particular, many Mauritians say that flooding (55%) and droughts (44%) have become “somewhat more” or “much more” severe in the past 10 years. With regard to cyclones, on the other hand, a majority of Mauritians say the severity has stayed the same (43%) or decreased (36%) (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Change in severity of flooding, droughts, and cyclones | Mauritius | 2017



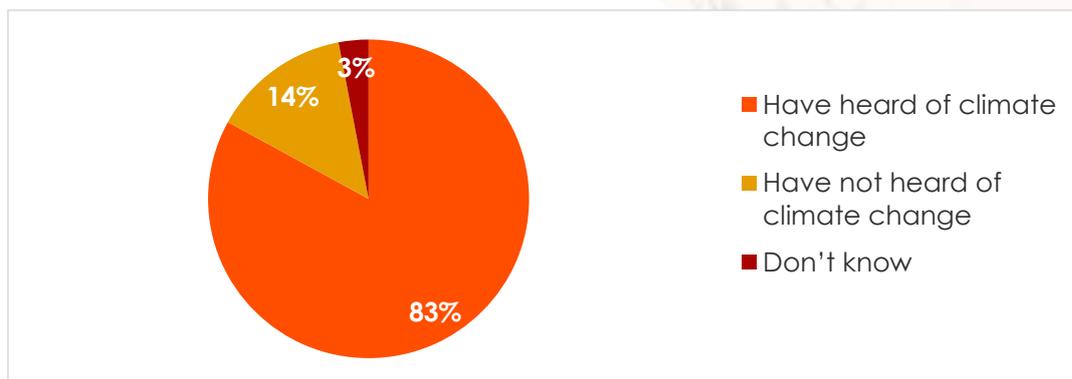
Respondents were asked: *In your experience, over the past 10 years, has there been any change in the severity of the following events in the area where you live? Have they become more severe, less severe, or stayed about the same?*

Climate change awareness

Apart from personal observations of climate conditions in their area, eight in 10 Mauritians (83%) say they have heard of climate change (Figure 3). As might be expected, less educated and poor citizens are far less likely to know about climate change than their better-educated and wealthier counterparts (Figure 4). About one-third of respondents who experienced high or moderate lived poverty¹ are unaware of climate change, as are about one-fourth of those with only a primary-school education (24%) or no formal education (29%). Women (17%) and respondents over age 55 (19%) are less familiar with climate change than men (12%) and younger respondents.

Mauritians from the regions of Black River (29%), Moka (22%), Savanne (21%), and Port Louis (21%) are more likely to be unaware of climate change than residents of other regions.

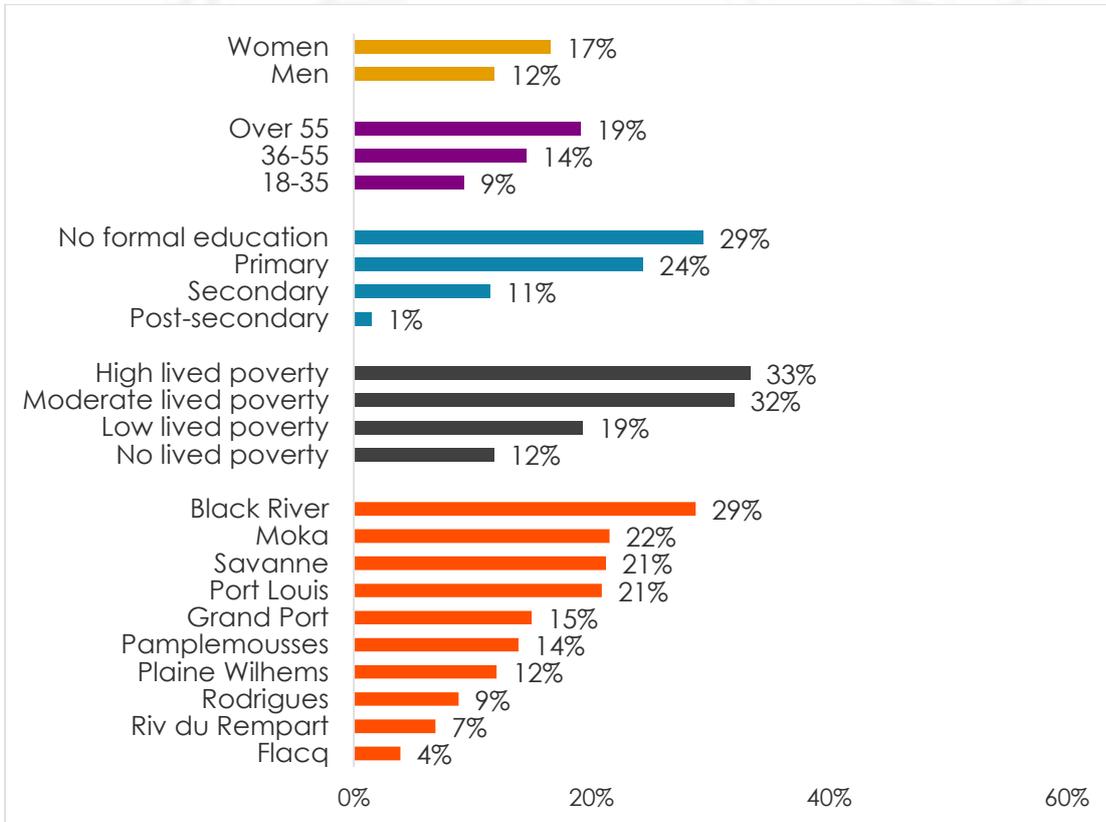
Figure 3: Heard of climate change | Mauritius | 2017



Respondents were asked: *Have you heard about climate change, or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet?*

¹ Afrobarometer assesses lived poverty based on responses to the following questions: "Over the past year, how often, if ever, have you or anyone in your family gone without: Enough food to eat? Enough clean water for home use? Medicines or medical treatment? Enough fuel to cook your food? A cash income?"

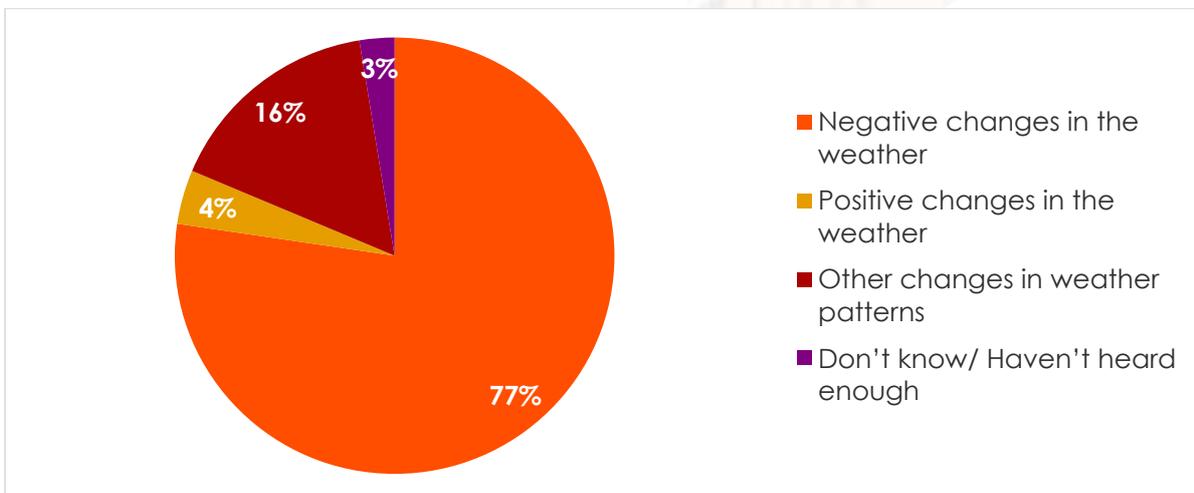
Figure 4: Have not heard of climate change | by socio-demographic group
 | Mauritius | 2017



Respondents were asked: *Have you heard about climate change or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet? (% who said 'no')*

Afrobarometer asked respondents who had heard of climate change what the concept means to them. Three-fourths (77%) say it means negative changes in the weather, while two in 10 say it refers to positive or other changes in weather patterns (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Meaning of 'climate change' | Mauritius | 2017

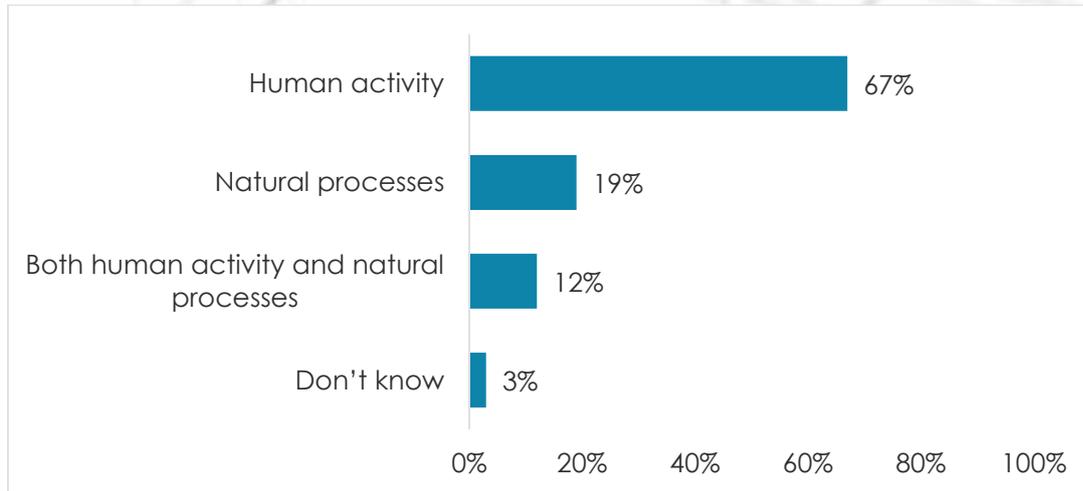


Respondents who had heard of climate change were asked: *What does the phrase "climate change" mean to you?*

Causes and effects of climate change

Among Mauritians who have heard of climate change, two-thirds (67%) say it is primarily caused by human activity (Figure 6). About two in 10 (19%) believe that climate change occurs as a result of natural processes, while 12% attribute it to a combination of human activity and natural processes.

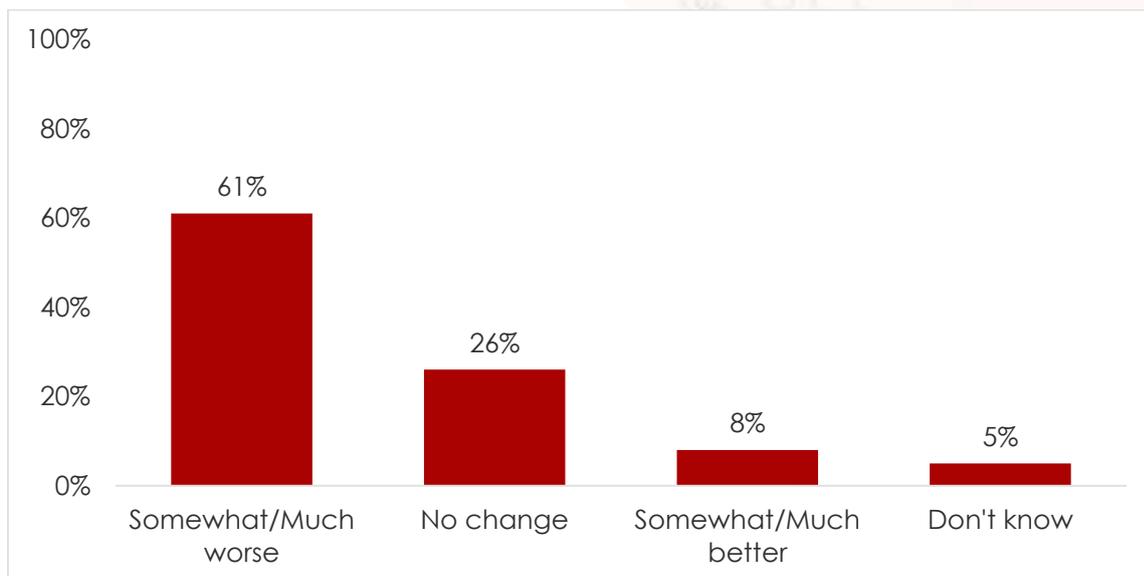
Figure 6: Main cause of climate change | Mauritius | 2017



Respondents who had heard of climate change were asked: People have different ideas about what causes climate change. What about you? Which of the following do you think is the main cause of climate change, or haven't you heard enough to say?

Six in 10 Mauritians (61%) who have heard of climate change say it has made life in their country "somewhat worse" or "much worse" (Figure 7). One in four (26%) believe climate change has had no effect on life in Mauritius, while 8% believe it has made life "somewhat" or "much" better.

Figure 7: Effect of climate change on life in Mauritius | Mauritius | 2017



Respondents who had heard of climate change were asked: Do you think climate change is making life in Mauritius better or worse, or haven't you heard enough to say?

Role of ordinary Mauritians in fighting climate change

Among Mauritians who have heard of climate change, more than eight in 10 (83%) say climate change needs to be stopped, and about two-thirds believe that ordinary Mauritians can play a part in mitigating or preventing the negative effects of climate change. Four in 10 (43%) say ordinary people can do "a little bit" to stop climate change, while two in 10 (19%)

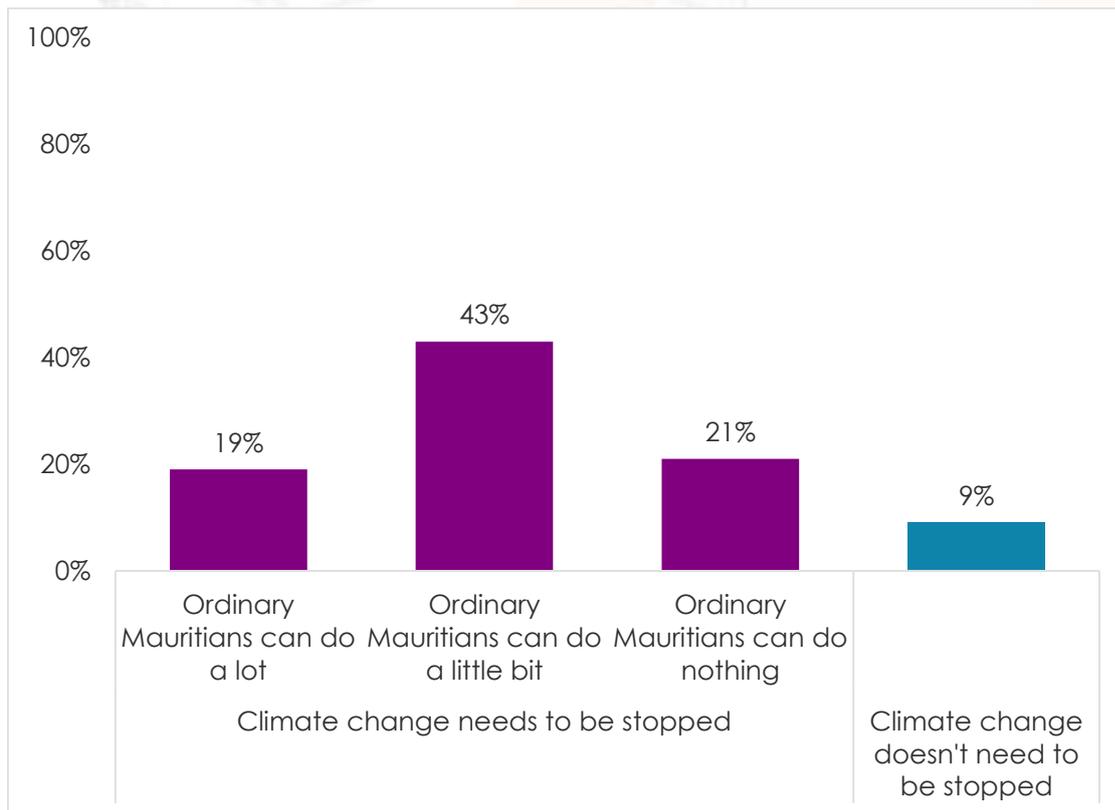
To further explore this data, please visit Afrobarometer's online data analysis facility at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

believe they can do "a lot" (Figure 8). A similar proportion (21%) say that while climate change needs to be stopped, there is nothing that ordinary Mauritians can contribute to this effort. Only 9% say there is no need to stop climate change.

Looking at the groups who most frequently feel pessimistic about the ability of ordinary Mauritians to affect climate change, it

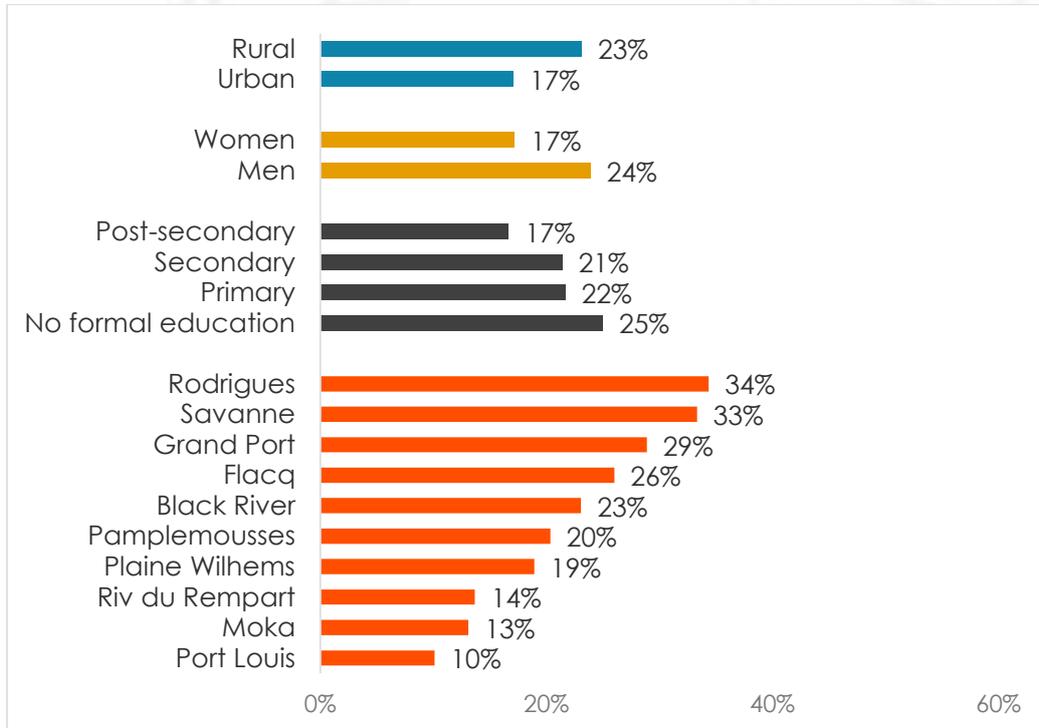
appears that people from rural regions (23%), men (24%), respondents with no formal education (25%), and respondents from Rodrigues (34%) and Savanne (33%) are most likely to feel that ordinary Mauritians can do nothing at all (Figure 9).

Figure 8: Can ordinary people help stop climate change? | Mauritius | 2017



Respondents who had heard of climate change were asked: Do you think that climate change needs to be stopped? [If yes:] How much do you think that ordinary Mauritians can do to stop climate change?

Figure 9: Ordinary Mauritians can do ‘nothing at all’ to stop climate change | by socio-demographic group | Mauritius | 2017



Respondents who had heard of climate change were asked: Do you think that climate change needs to be stopped? [If yes:] How much do you think that ordinary Mauritians can do to stop climate change? (% who say “ordinary Mauritians can do nothing at all”)

Conclusion

A majority of Mauritians are aware of climate change, attribute it to human activity, and say it is making life worse. A majority also believe that ordinary citizens can do at least “a little bit” to help stop climate change. These attitudes provide a solid base for the government’s efforts to fight climate change, but they also point to areas where more public information and advocacy about climate change may be useful, especially among less educated, rural, female, and older citizens.

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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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