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In Zimbabwe, citizens call for free cross-border movement and open trade

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 472 | Stephen Ndoma

Summary

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state” as well as “the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country” (United Nations, 1948).

And the African Continental Free Trade Area aims to create a single market with free movement of goods and services between countries (World Economic Forum, 2021).

People and goods already move extensively across Southern Africa. According to the International Organization for Migration (2019), the region had more than 7 million migrants in 2017, including 1.3 million Zimbabweans in South Africa. Trade between South Africa and its neighbours totaled about US \$19 billion in 2020 (Cross Border Road Transport Agency, 2021). In July, Zimbabwe became the first country to exempt all member states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) from visa requirements (Xinhua, 2021).

Yet 16 years after its adoption, the SADC Protocol on the Facilitation of Free Movement of Persons is yet to be ratified by a majority of member states (Okunade, 2021), and crossing international borders for work or trade remains challenging due to incoherent migration policies, curtailed opportunities for permanent settlement, and xenophobia (African Centre for Migration & Society, 2018).

What are the views of ordinary Zimbabweans on movement across international borders, free trade vs. protectionism, and relations with foreign investors and donors?

A recent Afrobarometer survey in Zimbabwe shows that a majority of citizens favour free movement across international borders, but most report that in practice crossing borders is difficult. Majorities endorse free trade with the rest of the world and want the government to continue to permit foreigners and foreign corporations to set up retail shops in the country.

With regard to development funding, most Zimbabweans want the country to finance its development with internal resources rather than external loans. In cases where Zimbabwe receives external loans or development assistance, views are divided on whether strict requirements should govern how such funding is used and should link it to the promotion of democracy and human rights.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Seven rounds of surveys were conducted in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018. Round 8 surveys (2019/2021) cover 34 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Zimbabwe, led by the Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI), interviewed 1,200 adult citizens of Zimbabwe in April 2021. A sample of this size yields country-

level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous standard Afrobarometer surveys were conducted in Zimbabwe in 1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2014, and 2017.

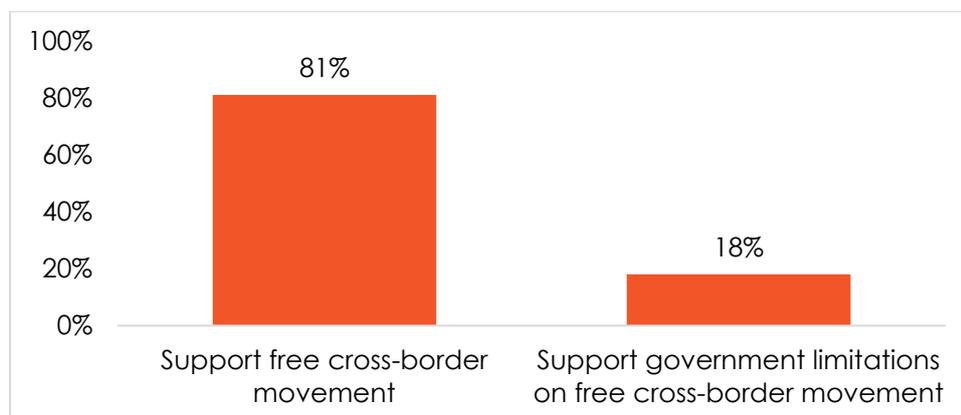
Key findings

- More than four out of five Zimbabweans (81%) say people living in Southern Africa should be able to move freely across international bodies to trade or work in other countries.
 - But more than half (53%) say that in practice, it is difficult for people in the region to cross international borders.
- Almost seven out of 10 citizens (69%) believe the country's borders should be open to trade with the rest of the world.
 - Even more (78%) say the government should continue to permit foreigners and foreign corporations to set up retail shops in Zimbabwe to ensure a wide choice of low-cost consumer goods.
- About three-fourths (74%) say Zimbabwe should finance its development from its own resources rather than external loans, even if this results in higher taxes.
- Views are divided on whether external loans and development assistance to Zimbabwe should come with strict requirements on how the funds are used.
 - A slim majority (55%) say such loans and assistance should require that the government promote democracy and respect human rights.

Support for free movement across borders

A large majority (81%) of Zimbabweans say that people living in Southern Africa should be able to move freely across international bodies to trade or work in other countries. Only about two in 10 (18%) prefer that governments limit the cross-border movement of people and goods in order to protect their own citizens (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Support for free movement across Southern Africa borders | Zimbabwe | 2021



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

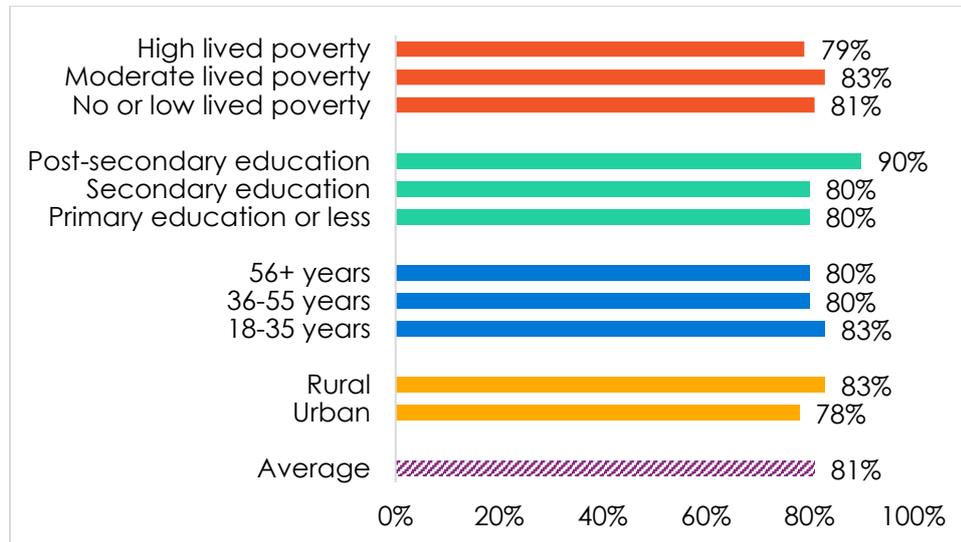
Statement 1: People living in Southern Africa should be able to move freely across international borders in order to trade or work in other countries.

Statement 2: In order to protect their own citizens, governments should limit the cross-border movement of people and goods.

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

Support for free cross-border movement is somewhat stronger in rural areas (83% vs. 78% in cities) and among more educated citizens (90% of those with post-secondary qualifications vs. 80% of others) (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Support for free movement across Southern Africa borders | by socio-demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2021

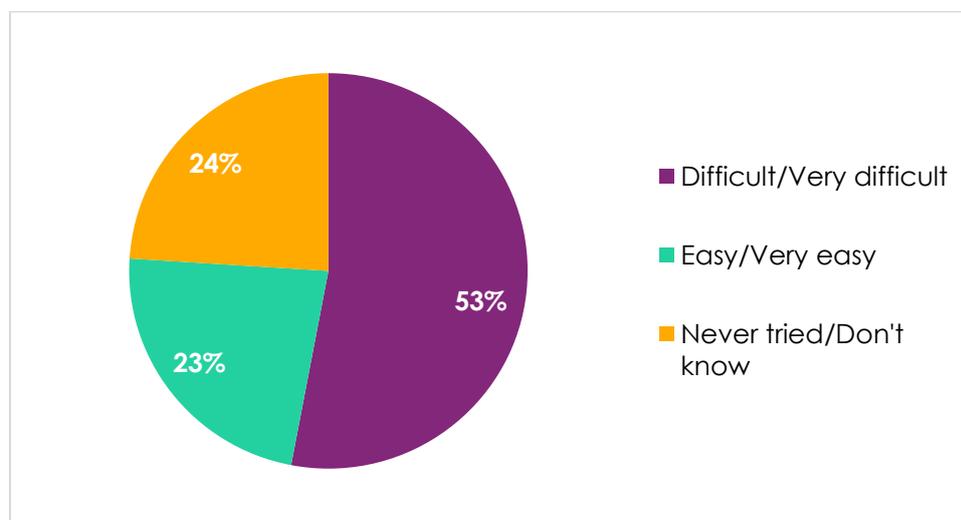


(% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” that people living in Southern Africa should be able to move freely across international borders in order to trade or work in other countries)

Difficulty of crossing borders in Southern Africa

More than half (53%) of Zimbabweans say that in practice, it is “difficult” or “very difficult” for people in Southern Africa to cross international borders in order to work or trade. Only a quarter (23%) describe it as easy, while a similar proportion (24%) say they've never tried to cross the border or they “don't know” (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Difficulty of crossing international borders in Southern Africa | Zimbabwe | 2021

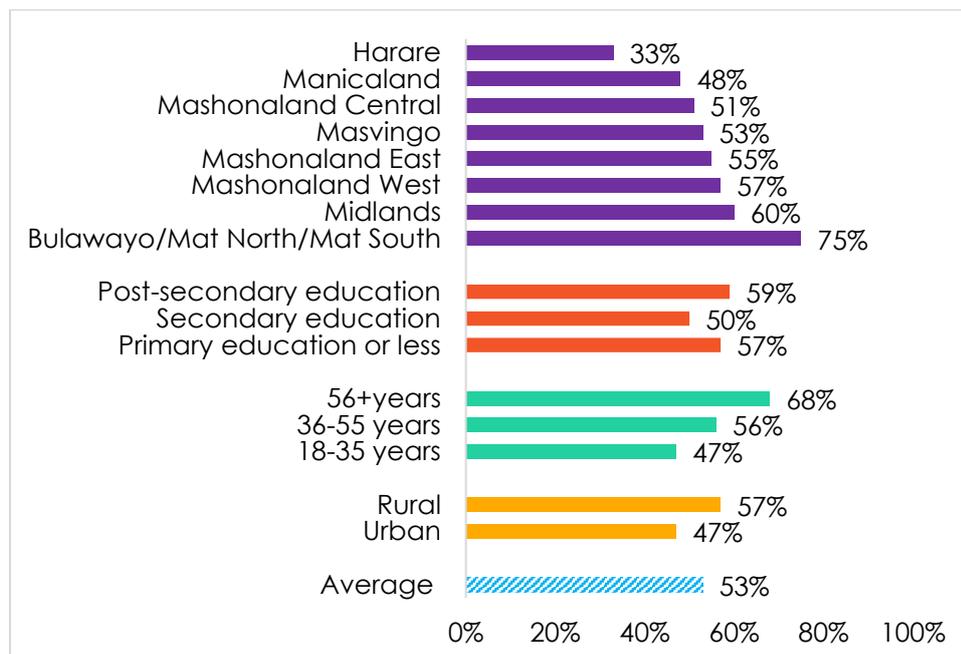


Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how easy or difficult is it for people in Southern Africa to cross international borders in order to work or trade in other countries, or haven't you heard enough to say?

More rural residents (57%) than urbanites (47%) say it is difficult for people to cross international borders (Figure 4). This view also finds more takers among older citizens (68%) than either the middle-aged (56%) or the youth (47%).

Citizens based in Bulawayo/Matabeleland North/Matabeleland South provinces (75%) are the most likely to report difficulty in crossing international borders, more than twice the proportion recorded in Harare (33%).

Figure 4: Difficulty of crossing international borders in Southern Africa | by socio-demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2021



(% who say “difficult” or “very difficult” for people in Southern Africa to cross international borders in order to work or trade in other countries)

Free trade vs. protection for domestic producers

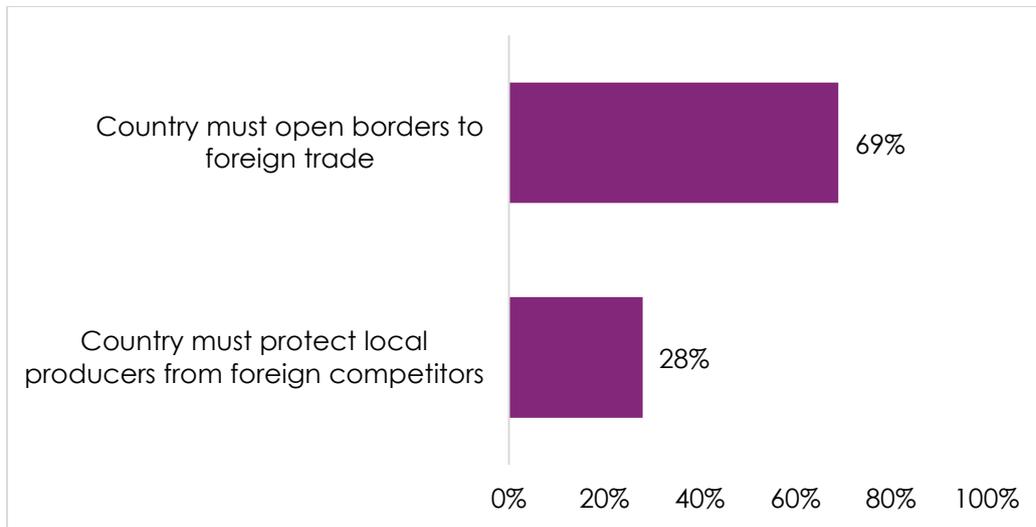
Seven out of 10 citizens (69%) say that in order to develop, the country must rely on trade with the rest of the world, including by opening its borders to foreign imports. Fewer than three out of 10 (28%) instead argue that the country must rely on local production and protect local producers from foreign competition (Figure 5).

An even larger majority (78%) say the government should continue to permit foreigners and foreign corporations to set up retail shops in the country to ensure that Zimbabweans have a wide selection of low-cost consumer goods. Only one-fifth (21%) disagree, arguing that only Zimbabwean citizens and companies should be allowed to trade in consumer goods, even if it means fewer goods on the shelves or higher prices (Figure 6).

Advocates of permits for foreigners and foreign corporations to set up retail shops are in the majority across all provinces, ranging from 69% in Mashonaland East to 84% in Mashonaland Central (Figure 7).

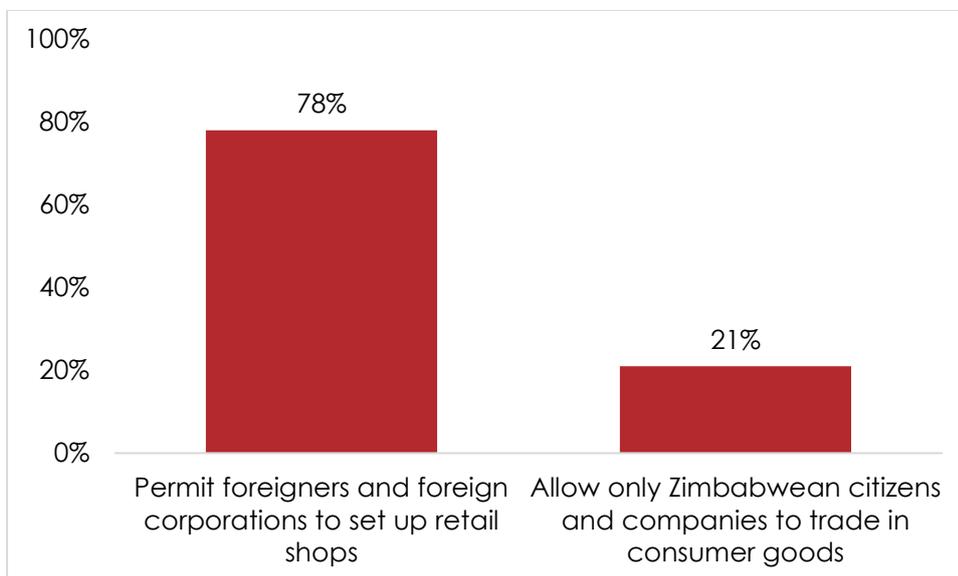
Men and women are about equally likely to support this approach, as are urban and rural residents. Respondents with post-secondary educational qualifications are most likely to hold this view (80%), which is also somewhat more popular among MDC-Chamisa supporters (82%) than among those who feel close to the ruling ZANU-PF (74%), a party known for endorsing pro-indigenization policies.

Figure 5: Opening borders vs. protecting local producers | Zimbabwe | 2021



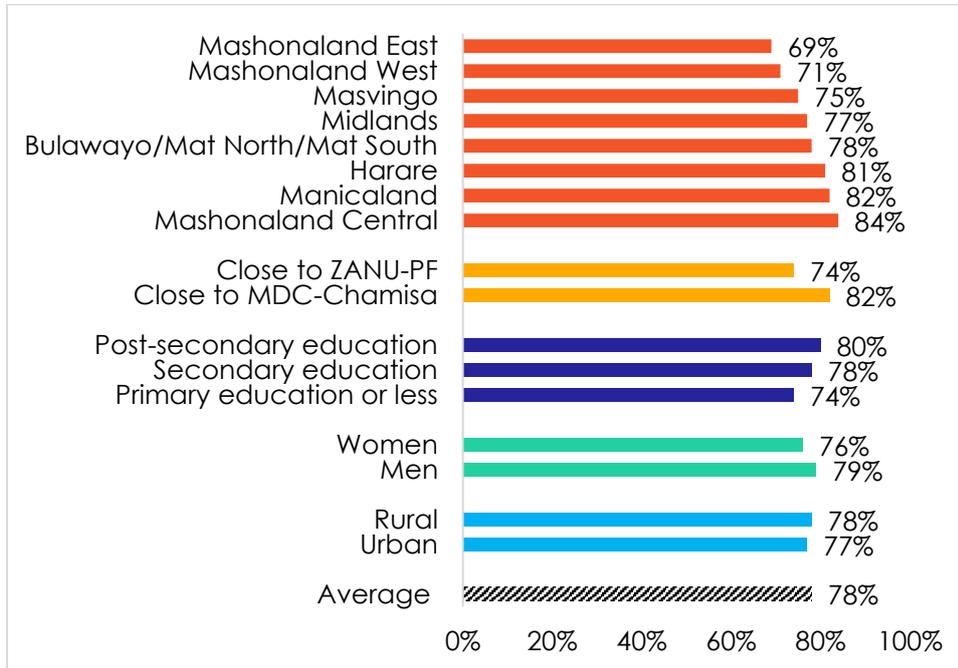
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: In order to develop, our country must rely on trade with the rest of the world, including by opening our borders to foreign imports.
 Statement 2: In order to develop, our country must rely on local production and protect local producers from foreign competition.
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with each statement)

Figure 6: Only nationals trade vs. allow foreigners to trade | Zimbabwe | 2021



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: The government should only allow citizens and companies of our own country to trade in consumer goods, even if this means we will have fewer goods or higher prices.
 Statement 2: The government should continue to permit foreigners and foreign corporations to set up retail shops in this country to ensure we have a wide choice of low-cost consumer goods.
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with each statement)

Figure 7: Government should allow foreigners to trade | by socio-demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2021

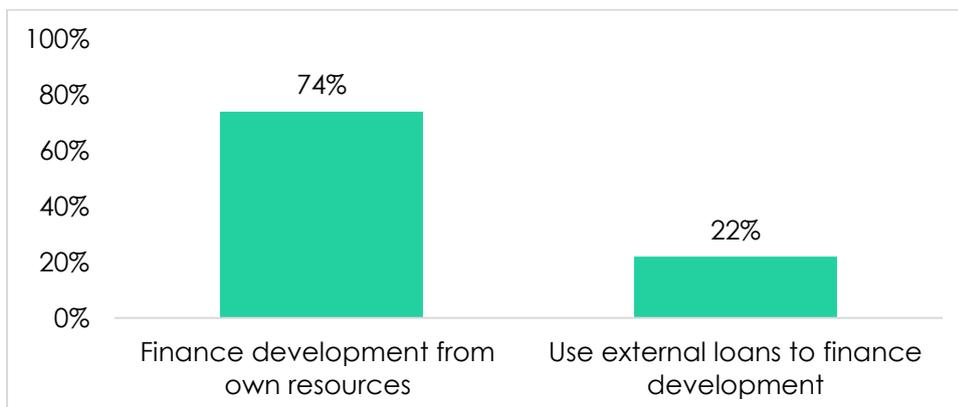


(% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” that the government should only allow citizens and companies of our own country to trade in consumer goods)

Views on development assistance

Three-quarters (74%) of citizens say that as an independent nation, Zimbabwe should finance its development from its own resources, even if this results in higher taxes. Only about one-fifth (22%) say the country should use external loans for development, even if this increases the country’s indebtedness to foreign countries and institutions (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Should country finance development itself or use external loans? | Zimbabwe | 2021



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

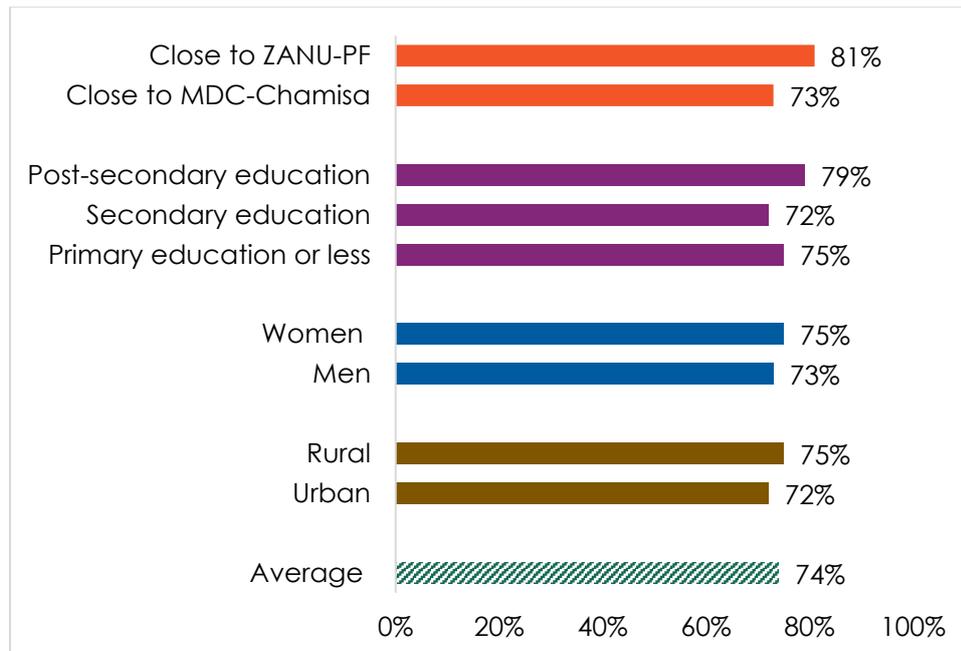
Statement 1: It is important that as an independent nation, we finance development from our own resources, even if it means paying more taxes.

Statement 2: We should use external loans for the development of the country, even if it increases our indebtedness to foreign countries and institutions.

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

Support for financing development from internal resources is more common among ZANU-PF adherents (81%) than among those who feel close to the MDC-Chamisa (73%), as well as among those with post-secondary qualifications (79%) compared to those with less education (72%-75%) (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Country should finance development from own resources | by socio-demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2021



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: It is important that as an independent nation, we finance development from our own resources, even if it means paying more taxes.
 Statement 2: We should use external loans for the development of the country, even if it increases our indebtedness to foreign countries and institutions.
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with Statement 1)

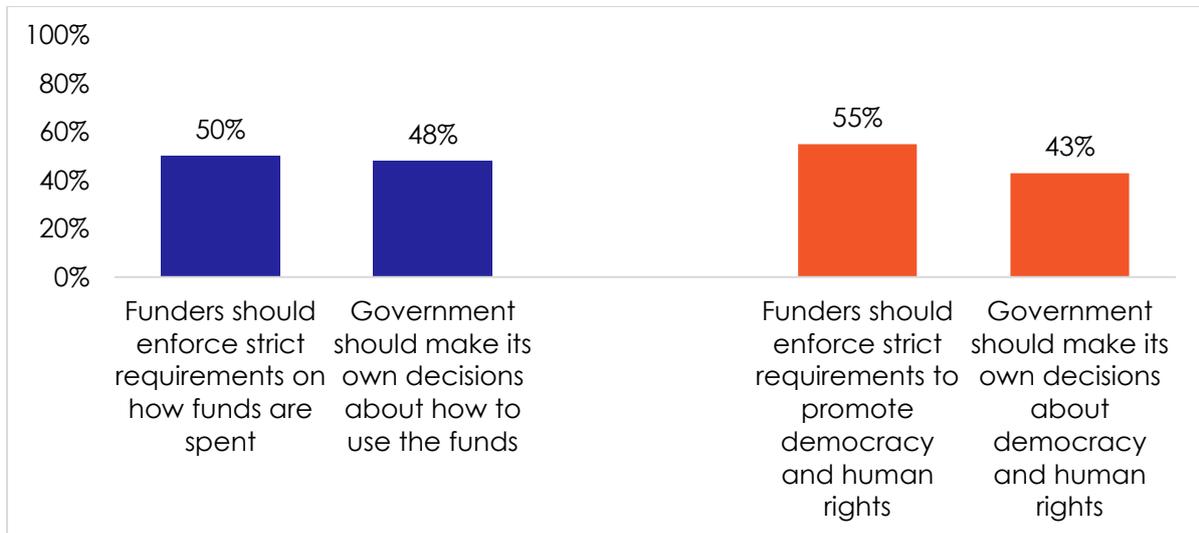
In cases where the country receives loans or development assistance from external sources, Zimbabweans are divided in their views on conditionalities attached to such funds. Half (50%) say those providing the funds should enforce strict requirements on how the funds are spent, while about the same proportion (48%) say the government should be able to make its own decisions about how to use the resources (Figure 10).

Similarly, while a slim majority (55%) believe that external funders should enforce strict requirements to make sure the government promotes democracy and respects human rights, a substantial minority (43%) want the government to be free to make its own decisions about democracy and human rights.

Support for strict democracy conditions attached to external loans and development assistance is most evident among supporters of the opposition MDC-Chamisa (82%, vs. 32% of ZANU-PF adherents) and in Harare metropolitan province (74%), an opposition stronghold (Figure 11).

In general, urban residents favour such conditions more than their rural counterparts (70% vs. 46%), and more men (63%) than women (47%) support this as well. Less educated respondents are less likely to endorse such conditions (38%) than those with secondary (60%) or post-secondary (62%) qualifications.

Figure 10: Strict conditions on loans vs. government decides | Zimbabwe | 2021



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view? (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with each statement)

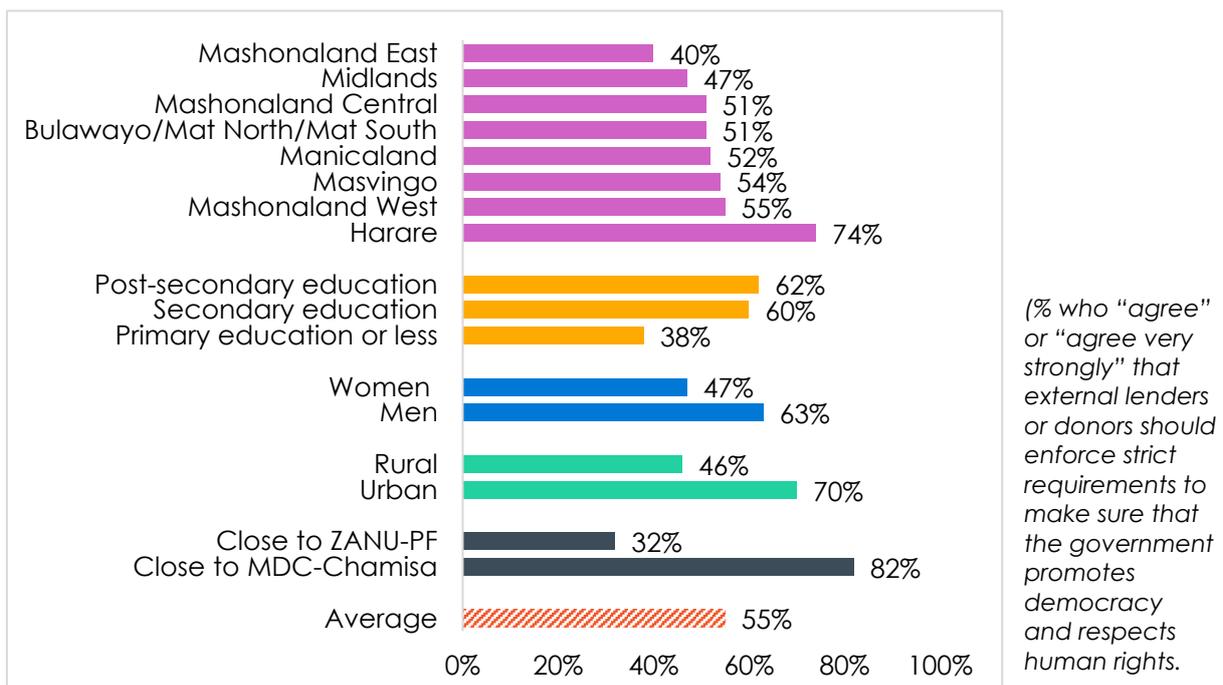
Statement 1: When other countries give loans or development assistance to Zimbabwe, they should enforce strict requirements on how the funds are spent.

Statement 2: When other countries give Zimbabwe loans or development assistance, they should allow our government to make its own decisions about how to use the resources.

Statement 1: When other countries give loans or development assistance to Zimbabwe, they should enforce strict requirements to make sure our government promotes democracy and respects human rights.

Statement 2: Even if other countries give Zimbabwe loans or development assistance, our government should make its own decisions about democracy and human rights.

Figure 11: Support for strict democracy conditions on external loans | by socio-demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2021



Conclusion

Most Zimbabweans are in favour of free movement across international borders and free international trade, including the right of foreigners to set up shop in Zimbabwe.

But when it comes to the country's development, more citizens look for national control: Most prefer financing development with Zimbabwe's own resources, and almost half reject strict conditionalities on external loans and aid, even in the name of promoting democracy and human rights.

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Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, non-partisan research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 35 countries is provided by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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