



Dispatch No. 507 | 9 February 2022

# Local government councillors and MPs falling short of Zimbabweans' expectations

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**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 507 | Stephen Ndoma**

## Summary

Local government councillors and members of Parliament (MPs) are vital cogs in a representative democracy, acting as conveyor belts between citizens and government.

As the lowest tier of government in Zimbabwe, urban and rural local authorities are constitutionally mandated to help manage and represent the affairs of the people in their areas, ensuring functions such as social care, housing, planning, waste collection, and licensing. Local authorities supply goods and services and are expected to establish specific local public needs and how to meet them (constituteproject.org, 2021).

At the level of Parliament, the Constitution of Zimbabwe gives members the power to amend the Constitution and to make laws for the peace, order, and good governance of the country.

For both local authorities and MPs, representing the needs and preferences of the constituents who elected them is at the heart of the democratic ideal. How well are they performing this function in Zimbabwe?

Findings from the most recent Afrobarometer survey show considerable public dissatisfaction with the performance of these elected officials, along with widespread perceptions that they are corrupt, are untrustworthy, and don't try to listen to their constituents. Most citizens say they had no contact with their local government councillors or MPs during the previous year. MPs fare worse than local government councillors on most of these indicators.

## 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. Eight rounds of surveys have conducted in up to 39 countries since 1999. 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

- A majority (61%) of Zimbabweans disapprove of the performance of their MP, while ratings for local government councillors are evenly split between positive (48%) and negative (47%).

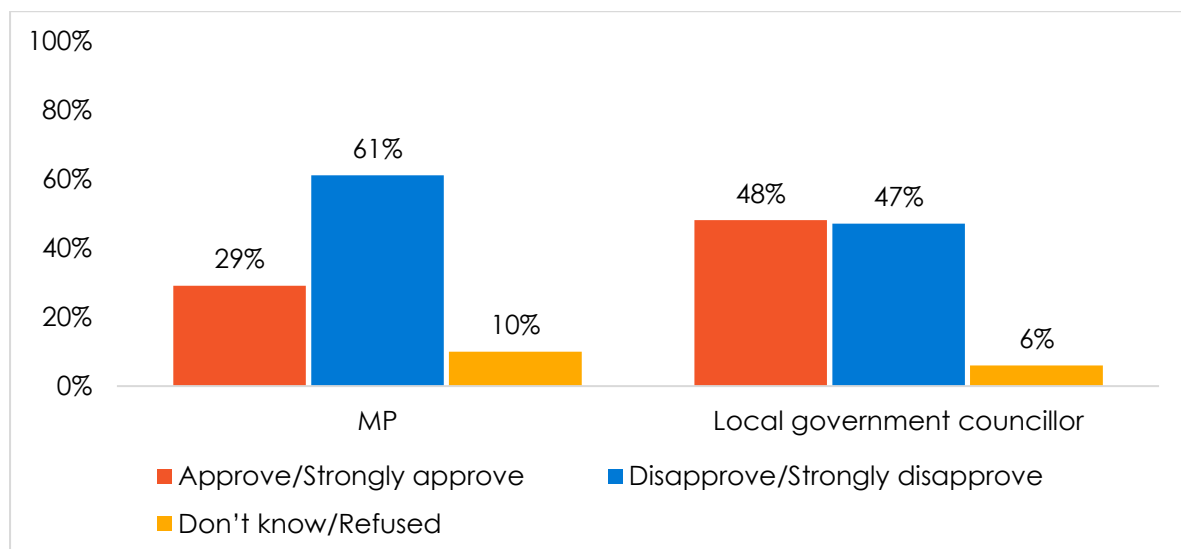
- About four out of 10 citizens think that “most” or “all” MPs (40%) and local government councillors (37%) are involved in corruption.
- Only half (51%) of Zimbabweans say they trust their local government councils “somewhat” or “a lot,” but that exceeds public trust in Parliament (44%).
- A slim majority (52%) of citizens say MPs “never” try to listen to ordinary people, and 37% say the same about local government councillors.
- Most Zimbabweans say they had no contact with their local government councillor (70%) or their MP (91%) during the year preceding the survey.

### Performance ratings for MPs and local government councillors

Six out of 10 survey respondents (61%) “disapprove” or “strongly disapprove” of the performance of their MP, while only 29% approve (Figure 1).

Citizens are divided regarding the performance of their elected local government councillor, with 48% giving them a thumbs up and 47% disapproving of their performance.

**Figure 1: Performance of MPs and local government councillors | Zimbabwe | 2021**



**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?

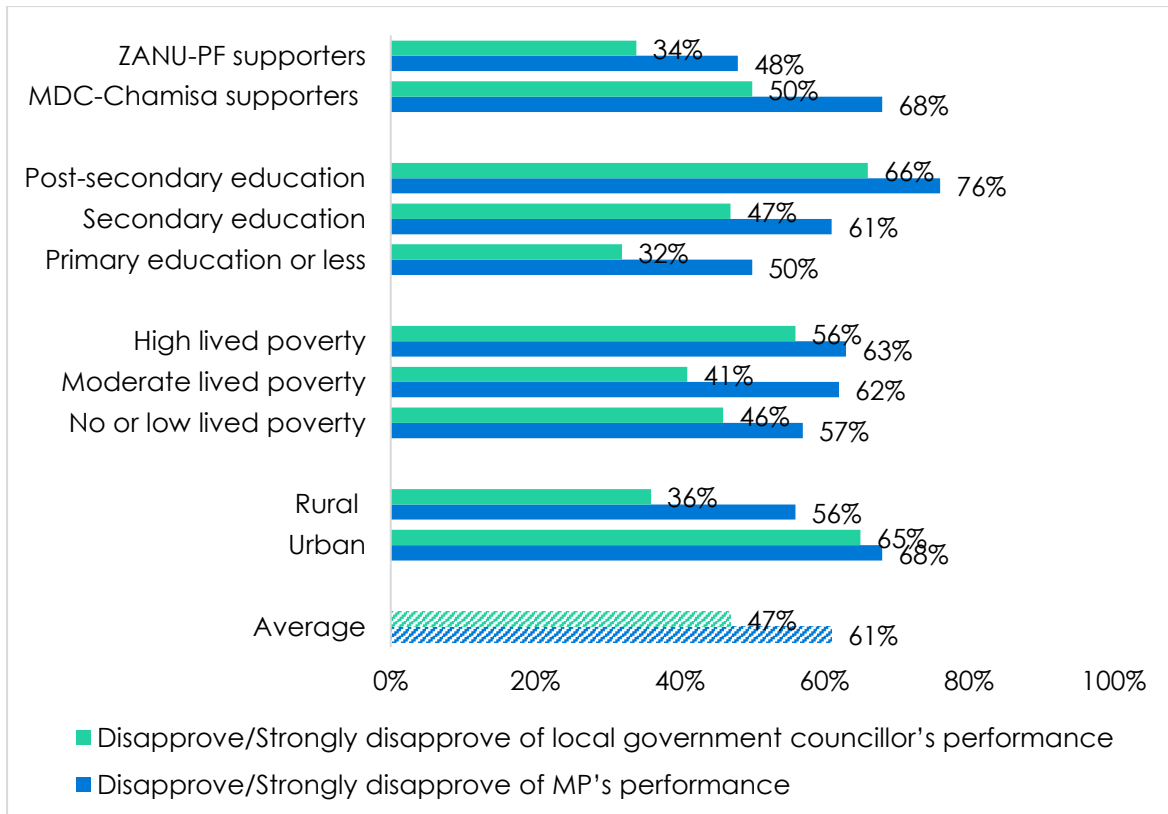
Supporters of the opposition MDC-Chamisa party express greater dissatisfaction than adherents of the ruling ZANU-PF with the performance of both local government councillors (50% vs. 34%) and MPs (68% vs. 48%) (Figure 2).

Disapproval increases with respondents' education level. With regard to local government councillors, for example, citizens with post-secondary qualifications are twice as likely as those with primary or no formal schooling to give negative evaluations (66% vs. 32%).

Urban residents are more critical than rural residents of both local councillors and MPs, as are the poorest citizens compared to their better-off counterparts.

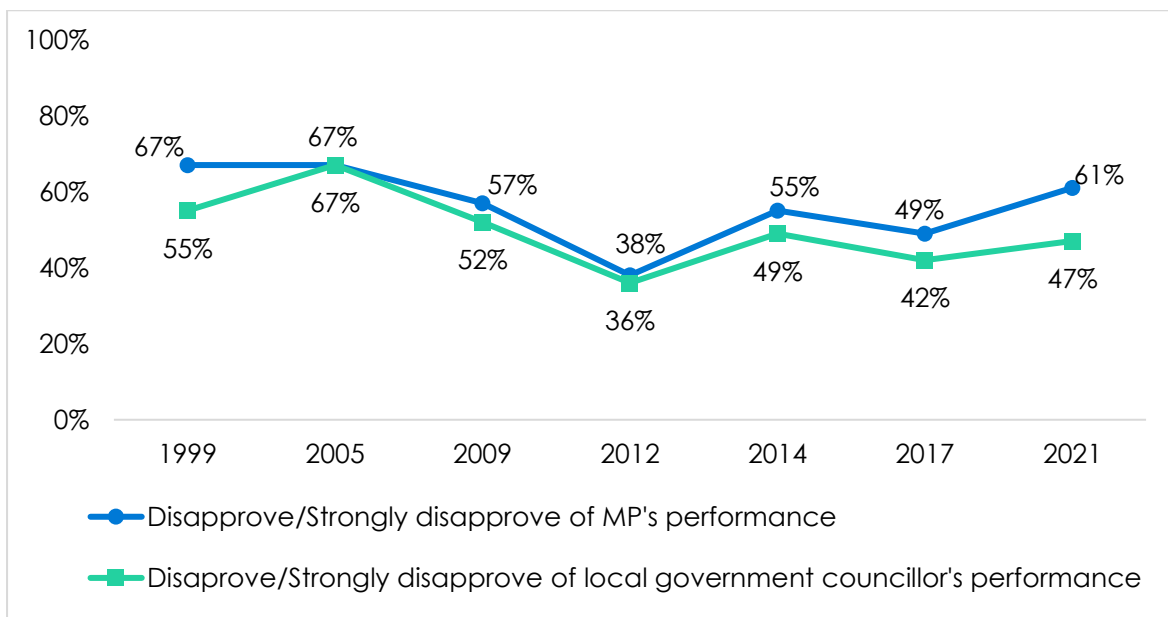
A trend analysis shows that except in 2005 and 2012, citizens have been more critical of MPs than of local government councillors. For both, disapproval was at its highest levels in 1999 and 2005, dropping to its lowest levels in 2012 (38% for MPs, 36% for local government councillors) (Figure 3).

**Figure 2: Disapproval of performance of MPs and local government councillors**  
| by socio-demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2021



**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?

**Figure 3: Disapproval of elected officials' performance** | Zimbabwe | 1999-2021



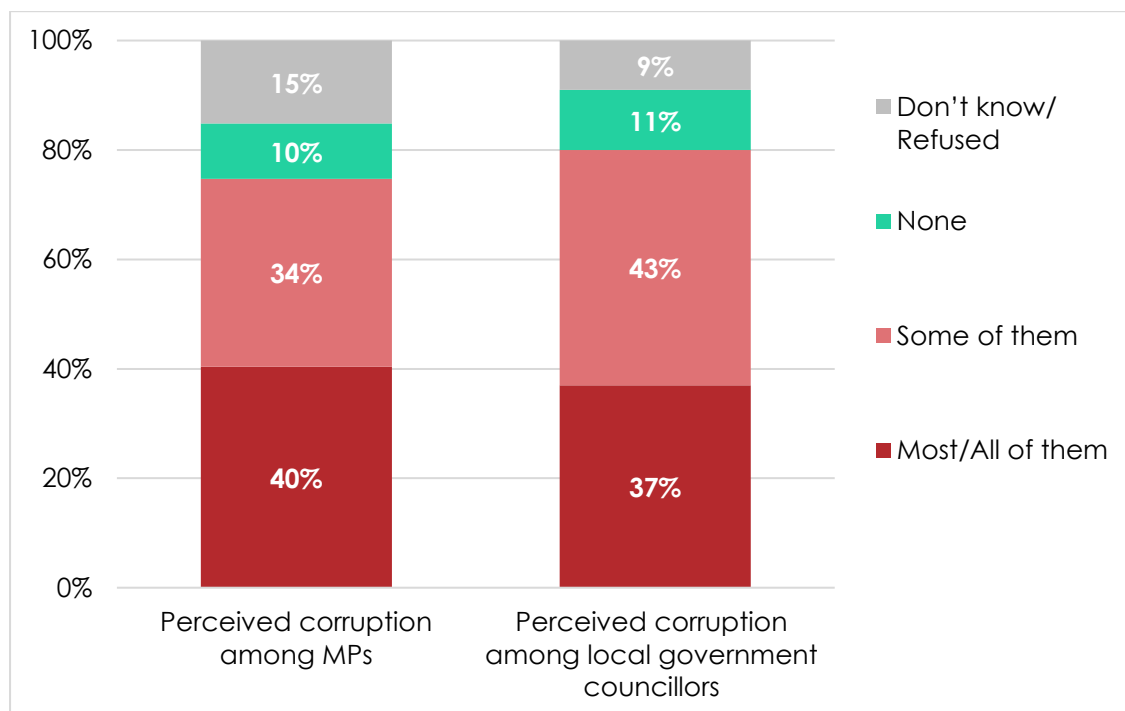
**Respondents were asked:** Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past 12 months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

### Perceptions of corruption among MPs and local government councillors

Four in 10 Zimbabweans (40%) believe that “most” or “all” MPs are involved in corruption, in addition to 34% who say “some of them” are corrupt (Figure 4). Local government councillors fare no better, with eight in 10 citizens seeing most/all (37%) or some (43%) as corrupt.

For both groups, only one in 10 respondents think that “none” are corrupt.

**Figure 4: Perceptions of corruption among MPs and local government councillors**  
 | Zimbabwe | 2021



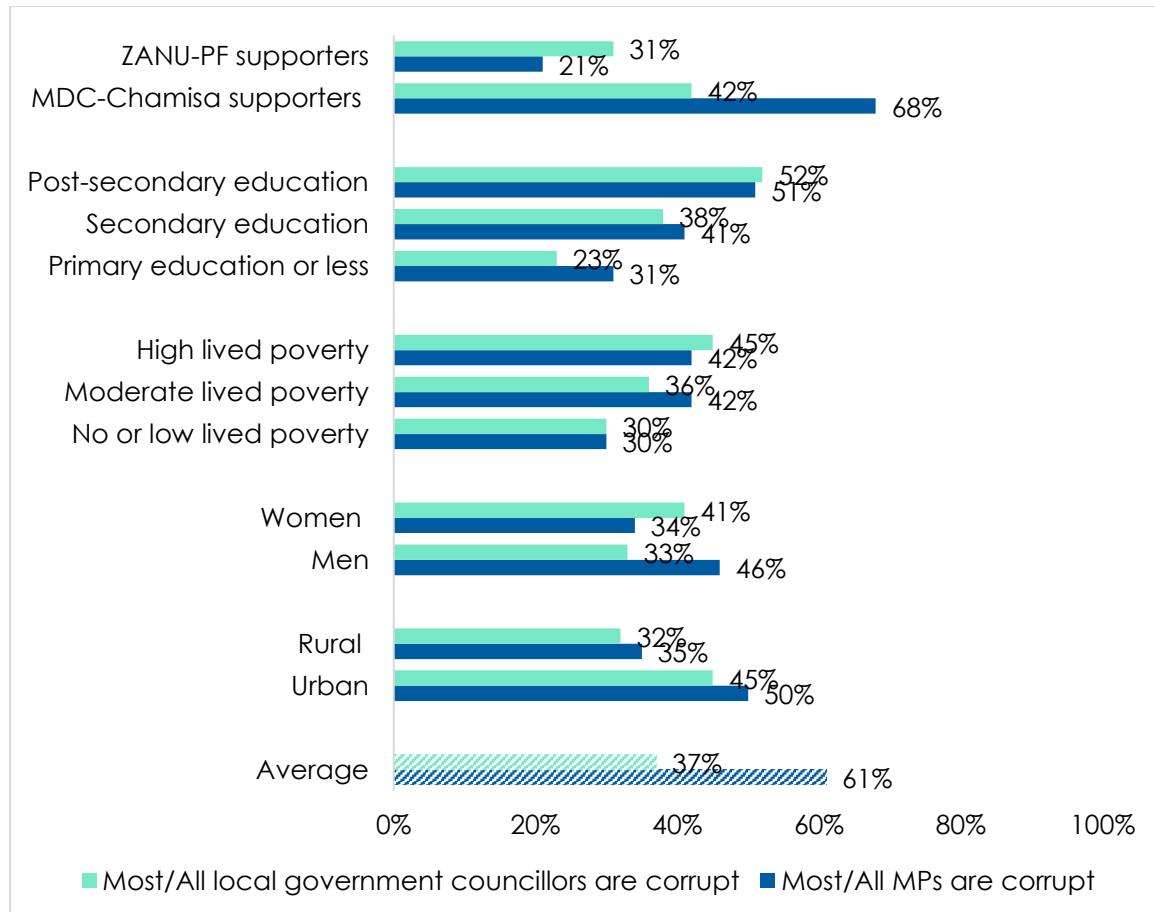
**Respondents were asked:** How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

Views by socio-demographic group show a similar pattern as the performance reviews discussed above. MDC-Chamisa supporters are more likely than ZANU-PF adherents to think that “most” or “all” of these elected officials are corrupt. The gap is particularly striking (68% vs. 21%) with regard to MPs (Figure 5).

Perceptions of corruption are higher among more educated citizens but also among poorer respondents, as well as among urban residents. Women and men split the difference: Women are more likely to see local government councillors as corrupt, while men are harder on MPs.

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**Figure 5: Perceptions of corruption among MPs and local government councillors**  
 | by socio-demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2021



**Respondents were asked:** How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

### Trust in Parliament and local government council

While questions about job performance and corruption focused on respondents' MPs and local government councillors, Afrobarometer asked about trust in the institutions these elected officials participate in.

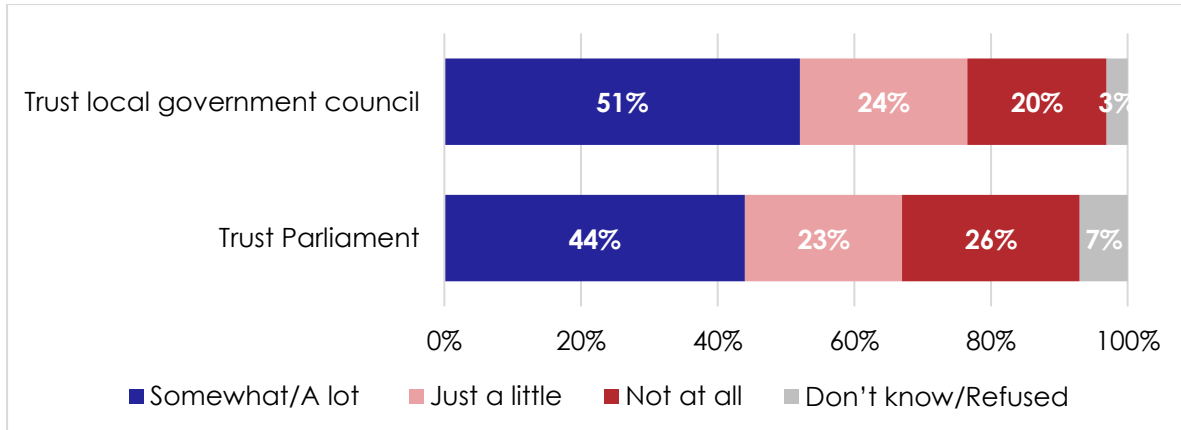
Findings show that local government councils command somewhat greater public trust than the legislature, although still only the slimmest majority (51%) of respondents say they trust their council "somewhat" or "a lot." Another one in four (24%) say they trust it "just a little," while 20% don't trust it at all (Figure 6).

For Parliament, fewer than half (44%) of citizens express some or a lot of trust, while one in four (26%) say they don't trust the institution at all.

As might be expected, ZANU-PF supporters are more likely than MDC-Chamisa adherents to express at least some faith in both institutions, and trust is more widespread in rural areas than in cities (Figure 7).

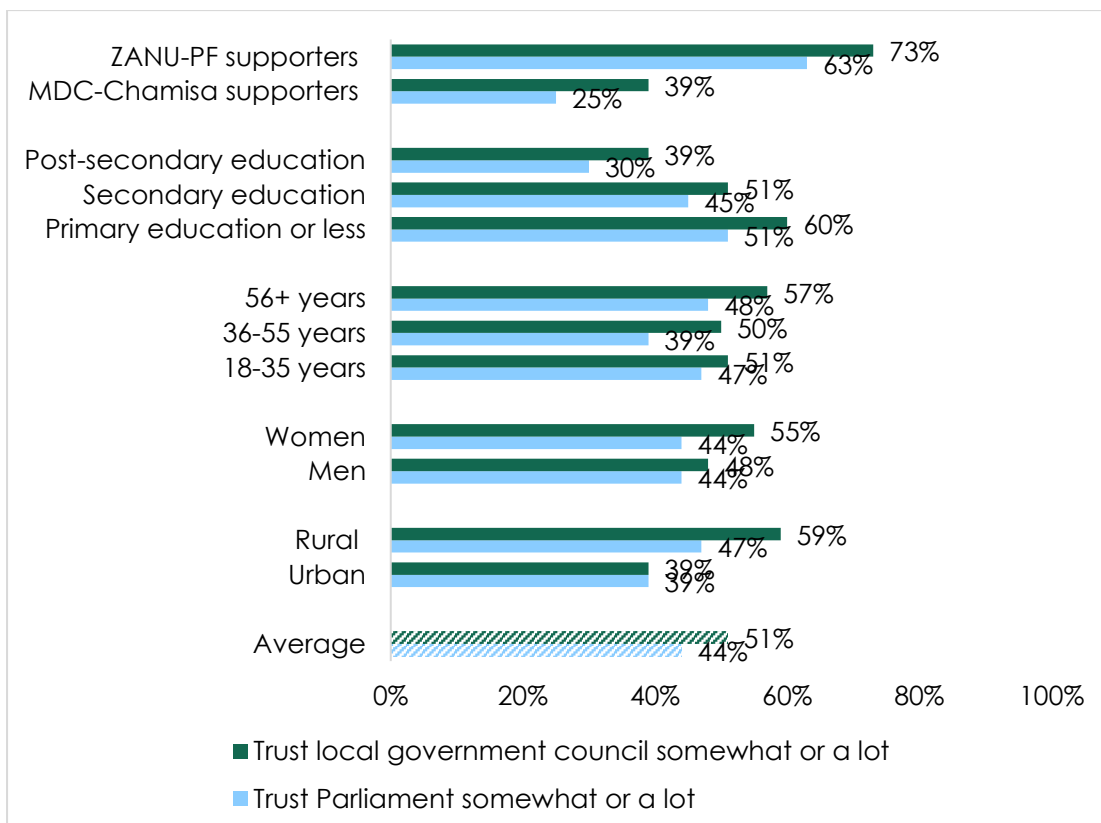
Less educated respondents express greater trust in local government councils and Parliament than those with secondary or post-secondary education, as do older citizens compared to their younger counterparts. More women than men trust local government councils (55% vs. 48%), but the two are identical when it comes to Parliament.

**Figure 6: Trust in Parliament and elected local government council | Zimbabwe | 2021**



**Respondents were asked:** How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

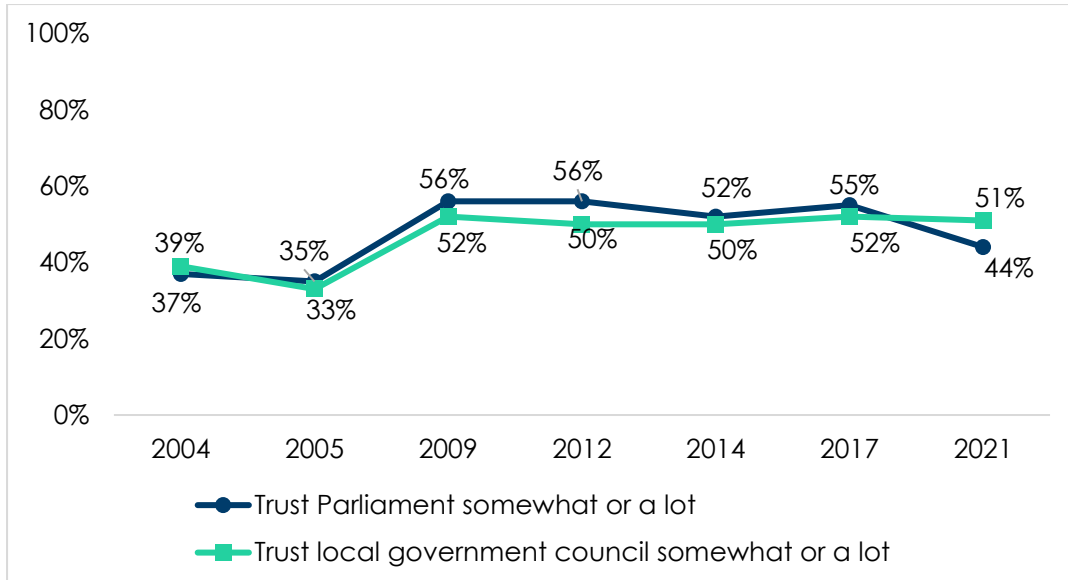
**Figure 7: Trust in Parliament and elected local government council | by socio-demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2021**



**Respondents were asked:** How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

Over the years, trust levels in Parliament and local councils have been similar, but an 11-percentage-point drop since 2017 places trust in the legislature at a 7-point disadvantage (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Trust in Parliament and elected local government council** | Zimbabwe  
 | 2004-2021



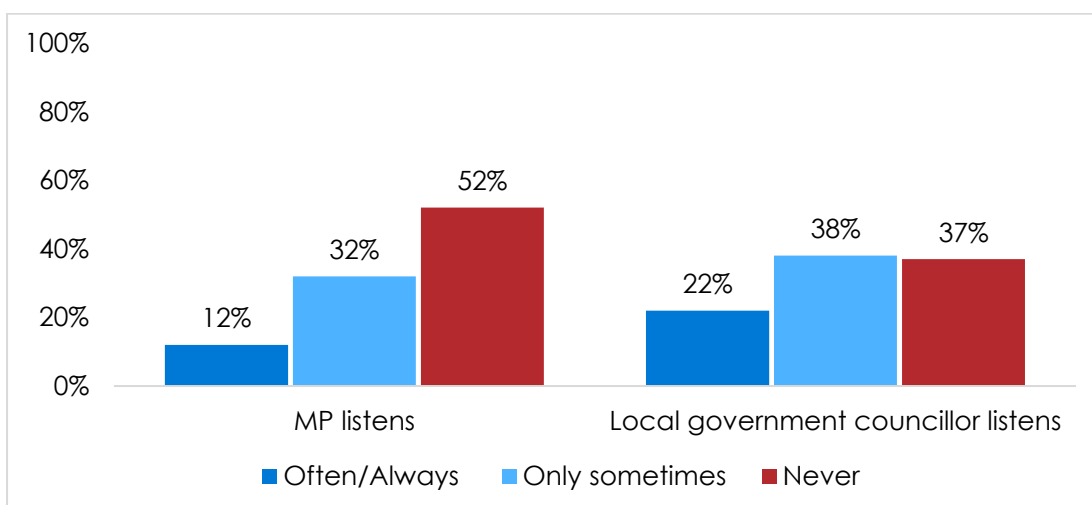
**Respondents were asked:** How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

### Responsiveness of MPs and local government councillors

One reason for negative performance evaluations may be that people think their representatives don't listen to their needs and preferences. Only one in eight respondents (12%) think their MPs "often" or "always" do their best to listen to them, while a majority (52%) say they never do (Figure 9).

Local government councillors do a bit better, but still only about one in five citizens (22%) "often" or "always" feel listened to, while 38% say this happens "sometimes."

**Figure 9: Do MPs and local government councillors listen to their constituents?**  
 | Zimbabwe | 2021

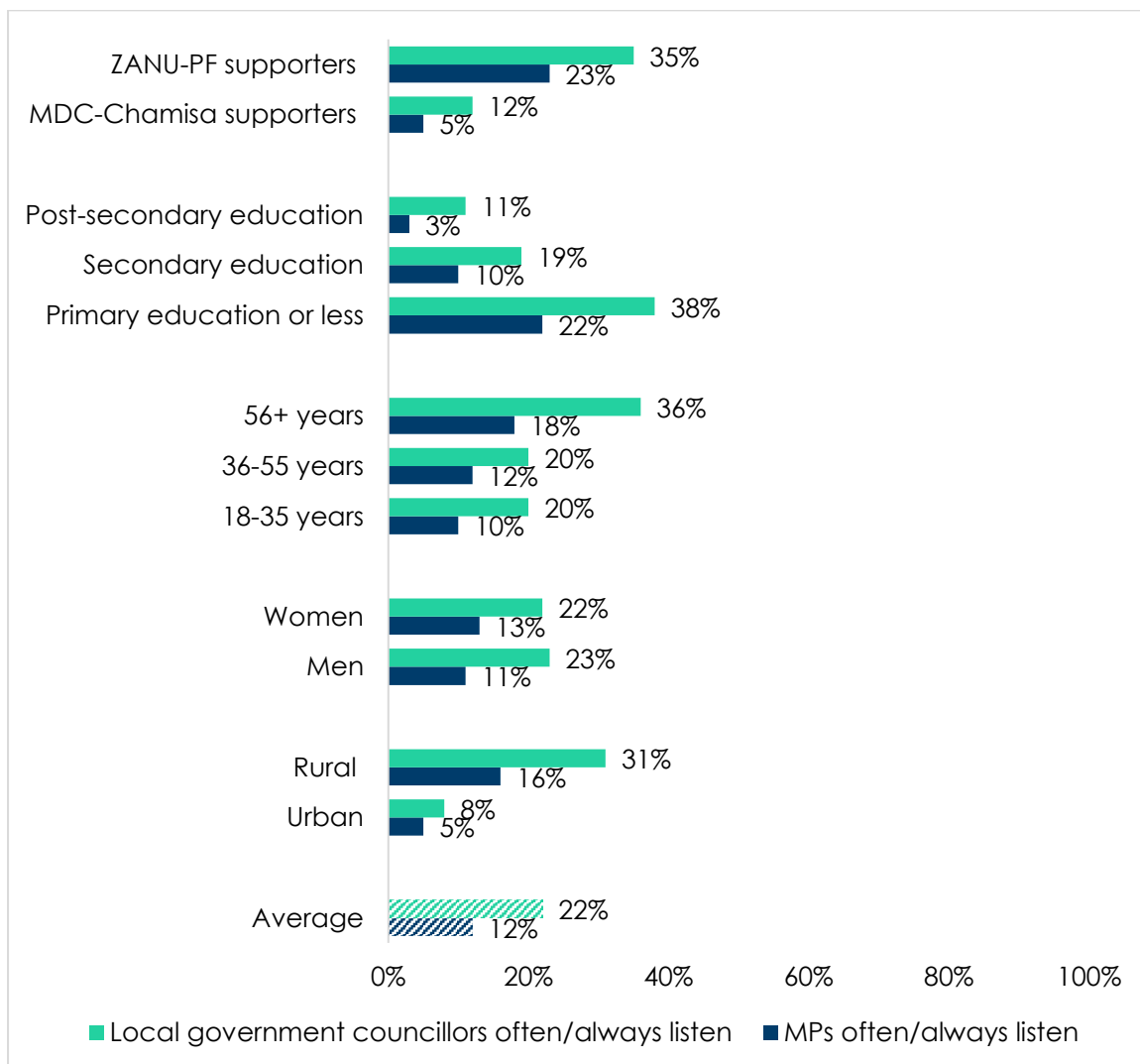


**Respondents were asked:** How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what people like you have to say?

Here again, citizens who identify with the ruling ZANU-PF are more likely than MDC-Chamisa supporters to report that local government councillors (35% vs. 12%) and MPs (23% vs. 5%) “often” or “always” listen (Figure 10).

Citizens with primary schooling or less are the most likely to say that elected officials listen: 38% for local government councillors and 22% for MPs. Senior citizens and rural residents are also more likely to feel listened to than are younger people and urban residents.

**Figure 10: MPs and local government councillors often/always listen to their constituents** | by socio-demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2021

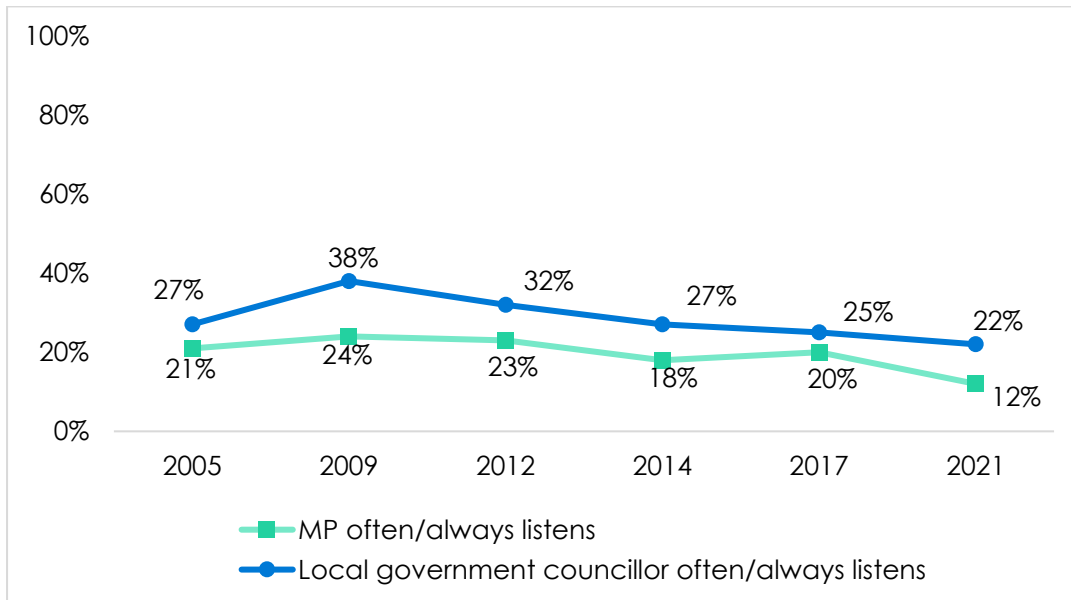


**Respondents were asked:** How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what people like you have to say?

Over the years, MPs have consistently performed worse on this indicator of responsiveness than local government councillors, but ratings for both have declined by roughly half since their high point in 2009 (Figure 11).



**Figure 11: MPs and local government councillors often/always listen to their constituents** | Zimbabwe | 2005-2021



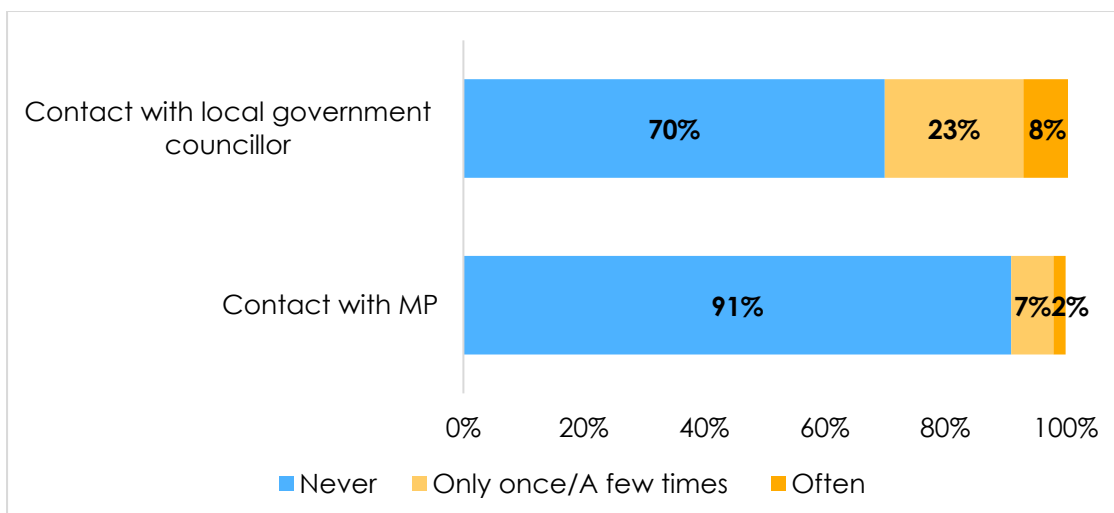
**Respondents were asked:** How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what people like you have to say?

### Contact between citizens and local elected officials

While representing constituents' views would seem to require finding out what those views are, most Zimbabweans say they had no contact with their local government councillor (70%) or their MP (91%) during the previous year (Figure 12).

About three in 10 respondents (31%) say they contacted their local government councillors at least once to discuss an important problem or share their views, while only one in 10 (9%) report contacting their MPs.

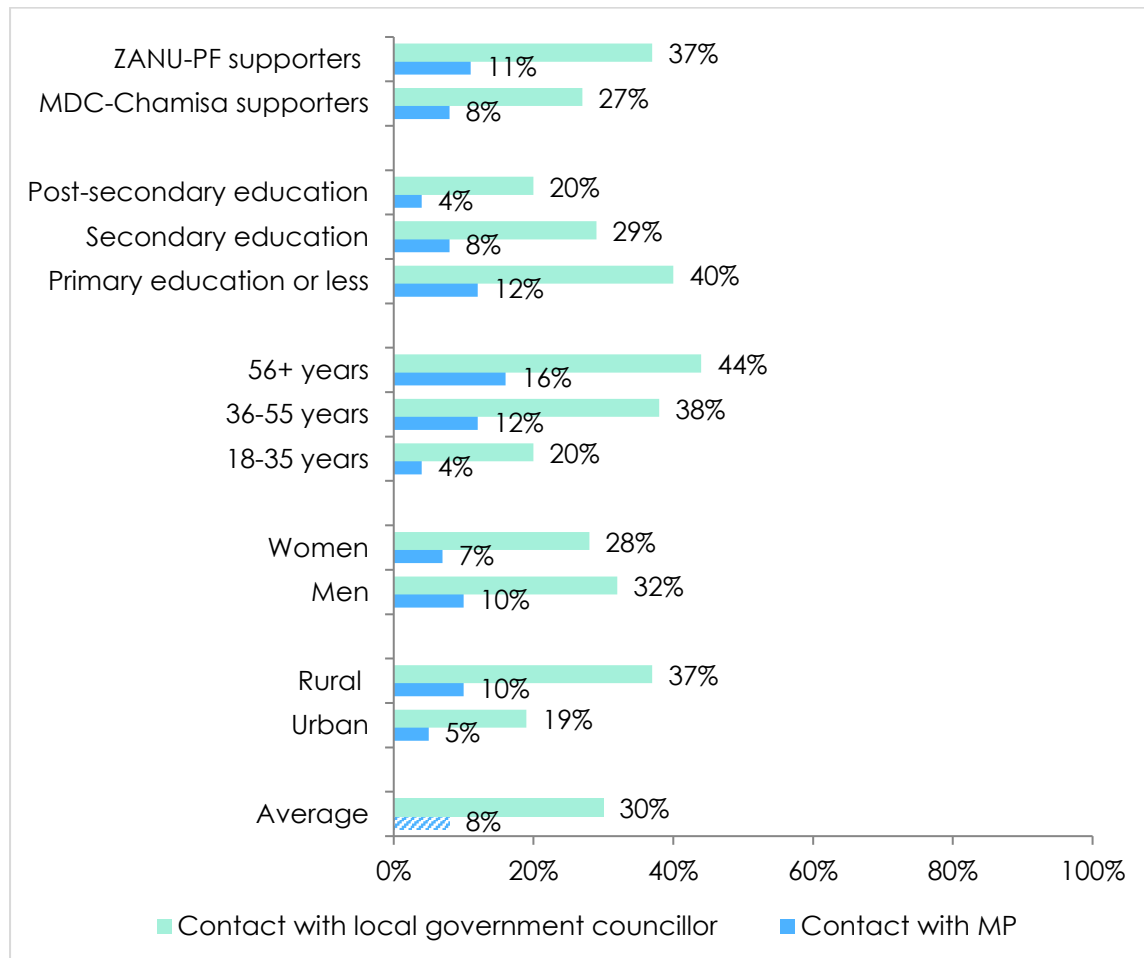
**Figure 12: Citizen contact with MPs and local government councillors** | Zimbabwe | 2021



**Respondents were asked:** During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views?

Contact with elected officials was more common among ZANU-PF supporters than MDC-Chamisa supporters. Citizens with primary schooling or less are two to three times as likely as the most educated to report having contacted their elected representatives. And older and rural respondents contacted both MPs and local councillors more frequently than did younger and urban respondents (Figure 13).

**Figure 13: Contacted MPs and local government councillors at least once | by socio-demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2021**



**Respondents were asked:** During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views? (% who say "at least once")

## Conclusion

Survey findings show that neither MPs nor local government councillors are living up to their constituents' expectations. Citizens are particularly critical of MPs, with majorities saying they are performing poorly and never try to listen to what ordinary people have to say. Sizeable proportions of the population see widespread corruption and lack trust in both groups.

Whether through the fault of citizens or of their elected officials, contact between the two is infrequent, limiting their ability to represent the needs and preferences of the people.

## References

Constituteproject.org. (2021). Zimbabwe's Constitution of 2013.

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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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