



Dispatch No. 545 | 24 August 2022

Zimbabweans want government to prioritise environmental protection, tighten regulation

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 545 | Stephen Ndoma

Summary

Zimbabwe is famous for its picturesque landscapes and varied wildlife, boasting a variety of national parks and one of the “wonders of the world,” the mighty Victoria Falls on the Zambezi River.

Despite the country’s environmental wealth, it faces an enormous challenge in the form of plastic waste. The Environmental Management Agency reports that the country generates about 300,000 tons of plastic waste per year (Moyo, 2021), much of it dumped onto the streets and in open spaces. The government tried to ban the use of plastic carrier bags in 2010 but was met with resistance by consumers (Moyo, 2021). Nevertheless, the government says it intends to phase out carrier bags by December 2022 (Bwanya, 2021).

Zimbabwe’s extractive sector is an important part of the economy, fueled by diverse mineral deposits including coal, gold, diamonds, and iron ore. The centrality of the extractive sector in Zimbabwe was particularly evident during the COVID-19 lockdown in April 2020, when President Emmerson Mnangagwa prioritised the resumption of mining operations (Netsianda, 2020).

In Zimbabwe, as in most countries, environmental governance raises fundamental questions for human health and economic well-being. Understanding popular perspectives and priorities can help strengthen efforts to prevent or mitigate negative outcomes, whether through policy advocacy or direct action.

This dispatch reports on special survey modules included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 questionnaire to explore Zimbabweans’ experiences and perceptions of pollution, environmental governance, and natural resource extraction.

A majority of Zimbabweans want more action from the government and their co-citizens to limit pollution and protect the environment. They rate trash disposal as the most important environmental issue in their community and describe plastic bags as a major source of pollution. And even if environmental-protection policies threaten jobs and incomes, citizens want the environment to be prioritised.

Zimbabweans cast a critical eye at natural resource extraction, with a plurality seeing its costs as outweighing its benefits. Only minorities think local communities have a voice in decisions about natural resource extraction and receive a fair share of the revenues, and most want the government to regulate the industry more tightly to protect the environment.

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 survey rounds in up to 39 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 9 surveys

(2021/2022) are currently underway. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct 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 between 28 March 2022 and 10 April 2022. 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 surveys were conducted in Zimbabwe in 1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2021.

Key findings

On pollution and environmental governance:

- Nearly half (47%) of Zimbabweans say pollution is a “somewhat serious” (19%) or “very serious” (28%) problem in their community.
- Citizens say trash and plastic disposal (cited by 30%), deforestation (23%), pollution of water resources (16%), and human waste management (10%) are the most important environmental issues in their communities.
- Almost half (46%) agree that plastic bags are a major source of pollution in Zimbabwe, while 40% disagree.
- A similar proportion (45%) say the primary responsibility for reducing pollution and keeping communities clean rests with national and local government, while 34% would assign that responsibility to their fellow citizens (34%). Far fewer look to traditional leaders (9%) and business and industry (5%).
- Almost three-fourths (74%) of Zimbabweans say the government should be doing more to limit pollution and protect the environment, including 51% who want the government to do “much more.”
- Even if environmental-protection policies threaten jobs and incomes, more citizens would still want the government to prioritise the environment (47%) rather than jobs (39%).

On natural resource extraction:

- Only one-third (33%) of Zimbabweans say the benefits of natural resource extraction outweigh its negative impacts, such as pollution, while 43% see the costs as being higher than the gains.
- About eight in 10 citizens (79%) want the government to regulate natural resource extraction more tightly in order to reduce its negative impact on the environment.
- A slim majority (53%) say that communities do not receive a fair share of resource extraction revenue, while a plurality (43%) say that ordinary citizens do not have a voice in decisions about natural resource extraction.

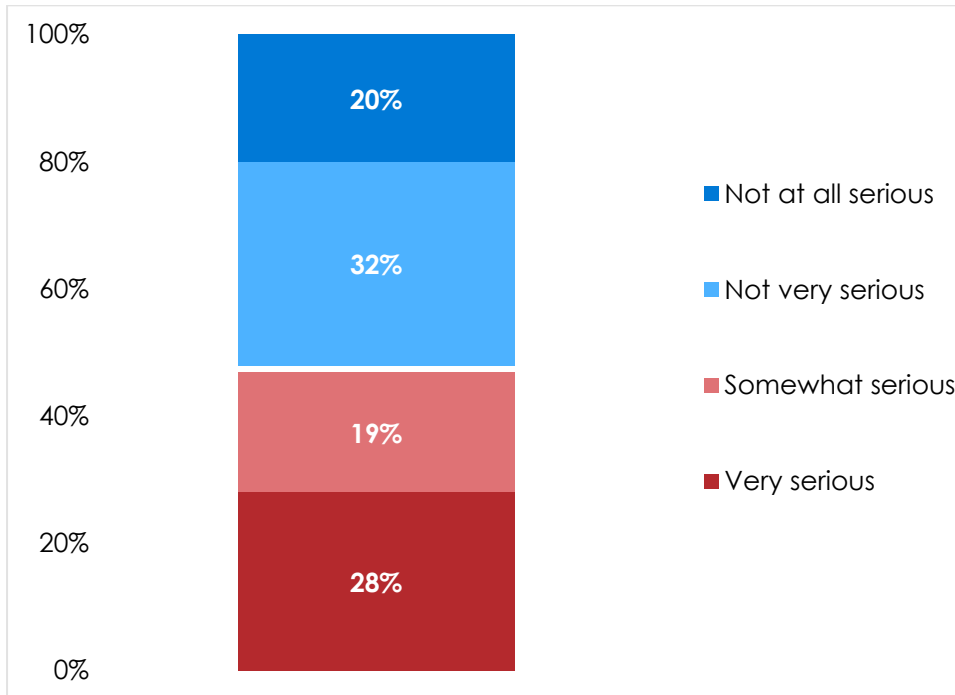
Pollution and environmental governance

Pollution: The scope of the problem

Close to half of Zimbabweans (47%) consider pollution in their communities, such as accumulation of trash or damage to the quality of the air, the water, or the land, to be a

“somewhat serious” (19%) or “very serious” (28%) problem. The other half (52%) see it as “not very serious” (32%) or “not at all serious” (20%) (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Extent of pollution in the community | Zimbabwe | 2022



Respondents were asked: How serious a problem is pollution, such as the accumulation of trash or garbage, or damage to the quality of the air, the water, or the land in your community?

Urban residents are far more concerned about pollution than rural residents (70% vs. 33%) (Figure 2). Concerns about pollution also increase with one’s experience of poverty, ranging from 35% among those with no or low lived poverty¹ to 53% among those with high lived poverty. Geographically, Bulawayo/Mat North/Mat South provinces have the highest proportion of residents (75%) who report that pollution is a serious problem in their communities, followed closely by Harare (71%).

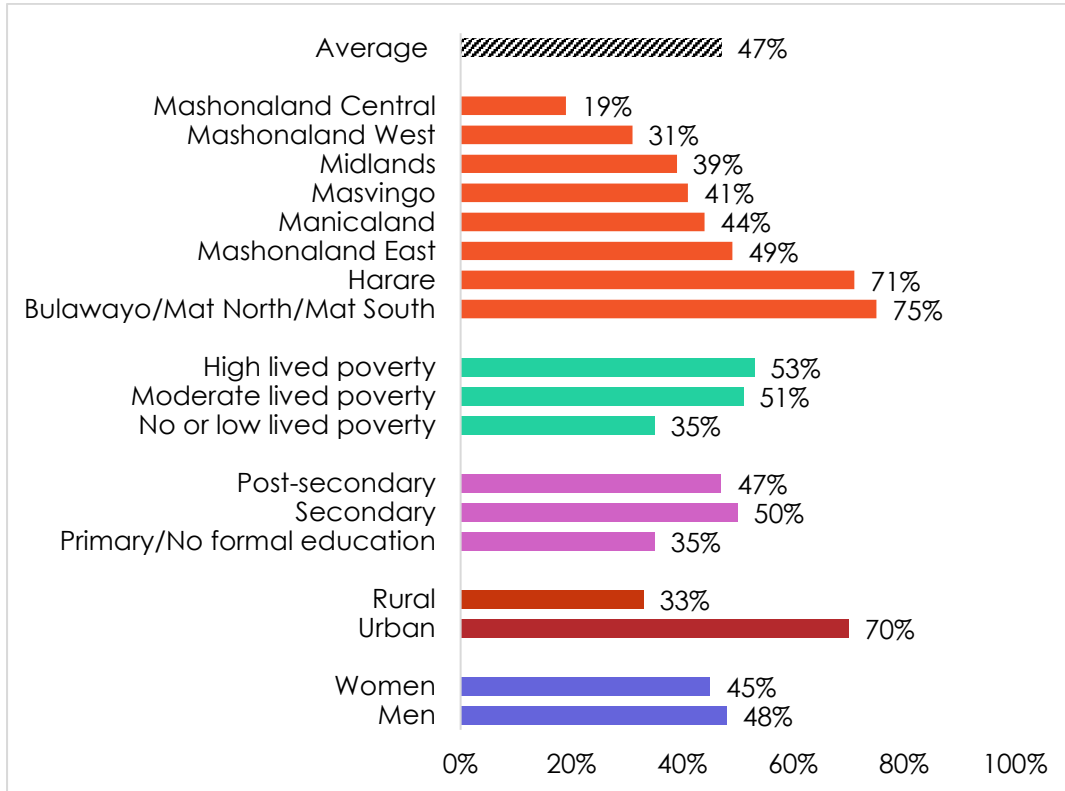
Zimbabweans rank trash disposal as the most important environmental issue in their communities (30%), followed by deforestation (23%), pollution of water sources (16%), and human waste management (10%). Only 2% of respondents cite air pollution (Figure 3).

Here again, urban residents are far more concerned about trash disposal than their rural counterparts (58% vs. 14%), and Harare ranks at the top (58%) among provinces (Figure 4). Concerns about trash disposal also increase with respondents’ education level, ranging from 13% among those with no or primary schooling to 43% among those with post-secondary qualifications.

Close to half (46%) of citizens “agree” or “strongly agree” that plastic bags are a major source of pollution in Zimbabwe, while 40% “disagree” or “strongly disagree” (Figure 5).

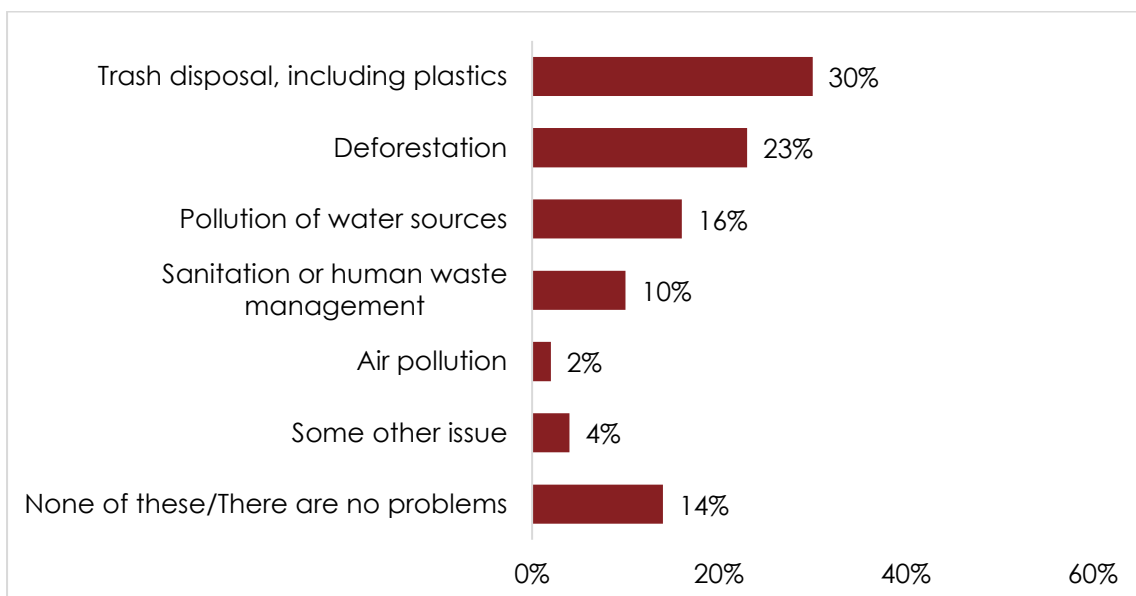
¹ Afrobarometer’s Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents’ levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes (2020).

Figure 2: Pollution is a serious problem in the community | by demographic group
 | Zimbabwe | 2022



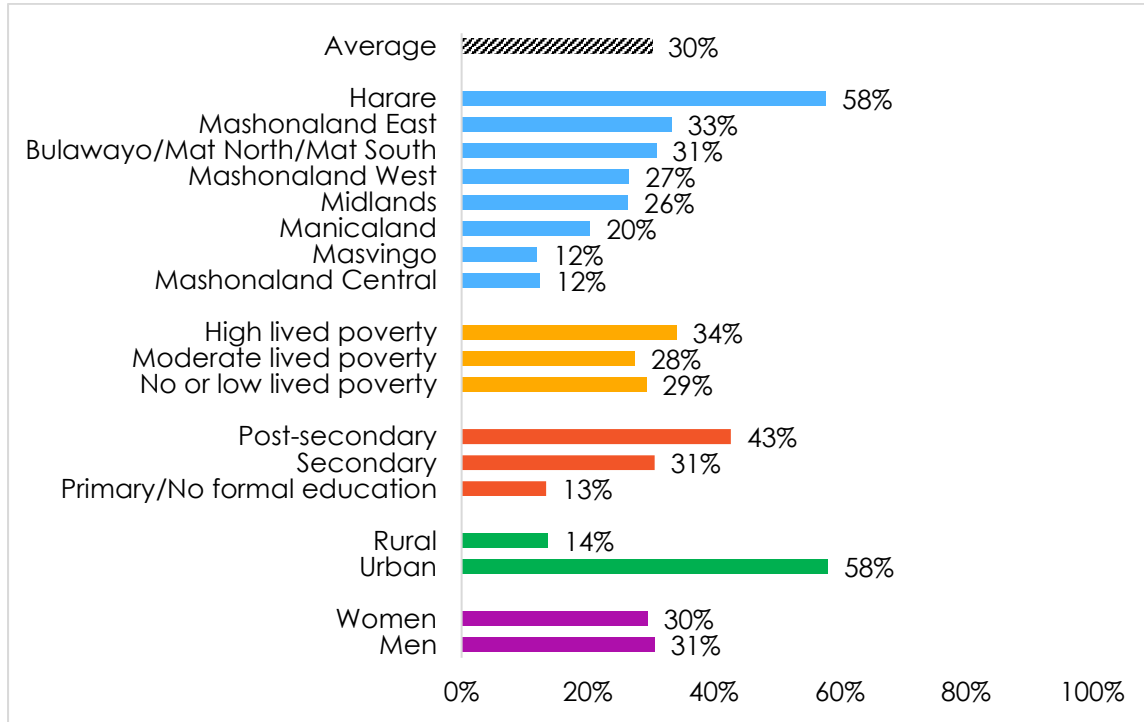
Respondents were asked: How serious a problem is pollution, such as the accumulation of trash or garbage, or damage to the quality of the air, the water, or the land in your community? (% who say "somewhat serious" or "very serious")

Figure 3: Most important environmental issue in communities | Zimbabwe | 2022



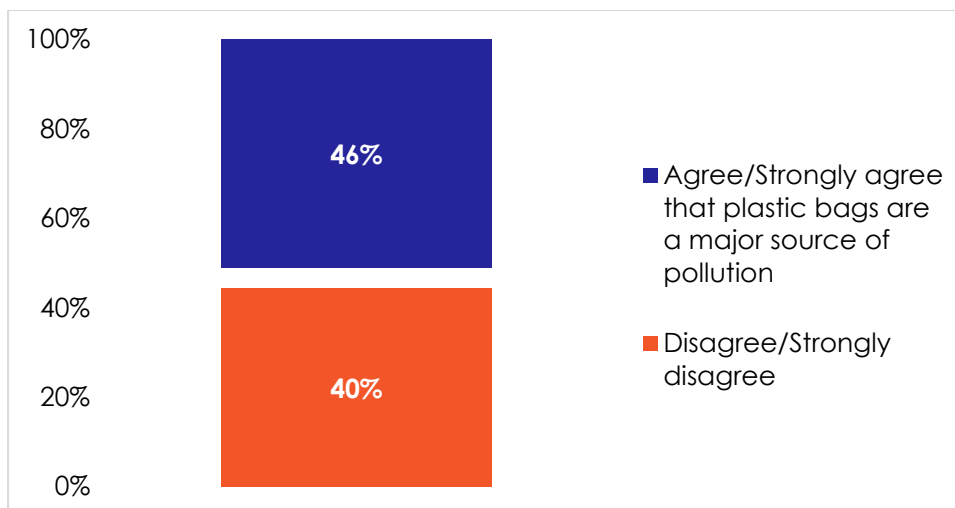
Respondents were asked: Which of the following is the most important environmental issue in your community today?

Figure 4: Trash disposal as most important environmental issue in communities | by demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2022



Respondents were asked: Which of the following is the most important environmental issue in your community today? (% who cite trash disposal)

Figure 5: Are plastic bags a major source of pollution? | Zimbabwe | 2022



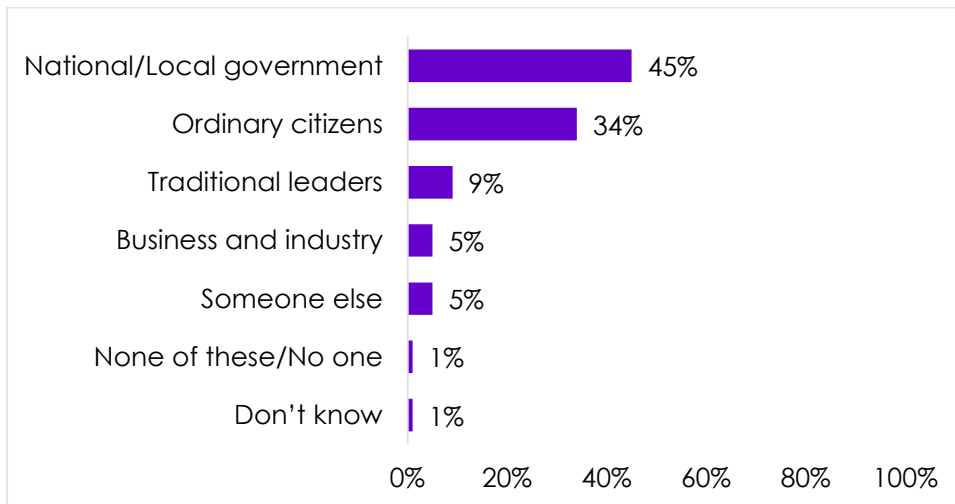
Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: Plastic bags are a major source of pollution in this country?

Protecting the environment

Actions to reduce pollution can range from making small everyday adjustments to once-in-a-generation game-changers – from shifting (back) to reusable bags to dismantling a coal-burning industry.

For Zimbabweans, protecting the environment starts with the government: Nearly half (45%) of respondents say local (25%) and national (20%) governments have the primary responsibility for reducing pollution and keeping their communities clean (Figure 6). One-third (34%) would instead place that responsibility on their fellow citizens. Relatively few look to traditional leaders (9%) and business and industry (5%) to take the lead on pollution.

Figure 6: Who should be responsible for reducing environmental pollution?
 | Zimbabwe | 2022

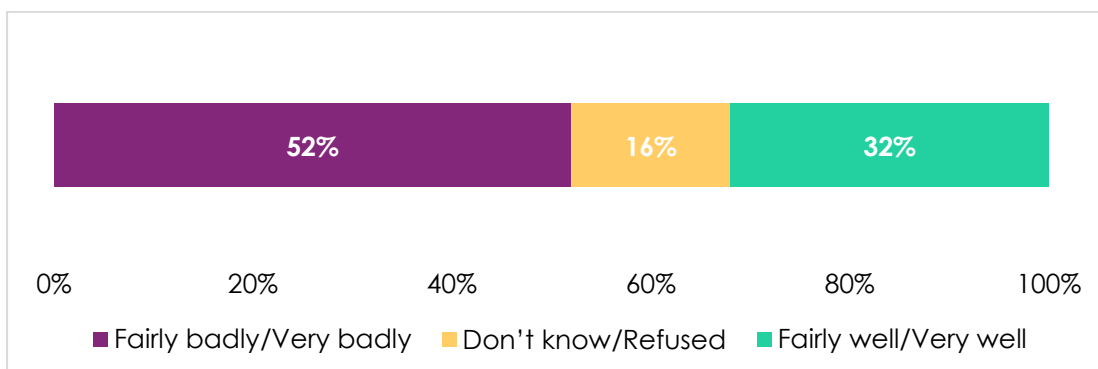


Respondents were asked: Who do you think should have primary responsibility for reducing pollution and keeping your community clean?

But more than half (52%) of citizens say the government is doing “fairly badly” or “very badly” at reducing pollution and protecting the environment, while just 32% think it is doing a good job (Figure 7).

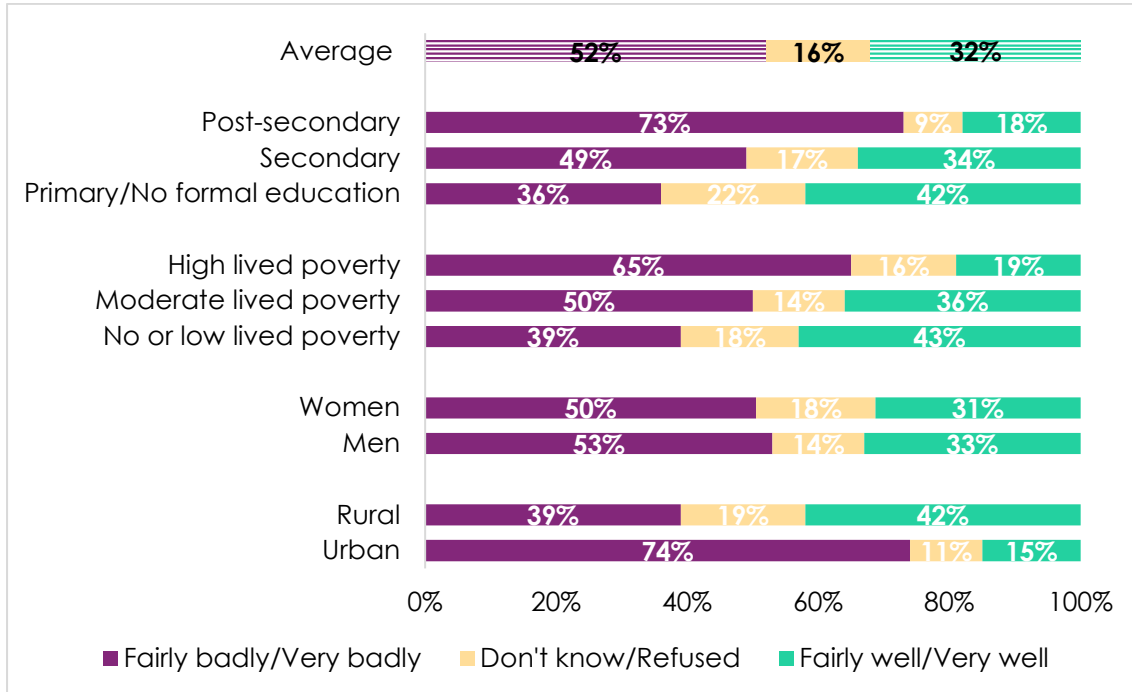
Negative ratings are more common among urban than rural residents (74% vs. 39%) and increase with respondents' level of education, ranging from 36% among those with primary schooling or no formal education to 73% among those with post-secondary qualifications. But they increase with respondents' experience of poverty, ranging from 39% among those with no or low lived poverty to 65% among those with high lived poverty (Figure 8).

Figure 7: Government performance in reducing pollution and protecting the environment | Zimbabwe | 2022



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Reducing pollution and protecting the environment?

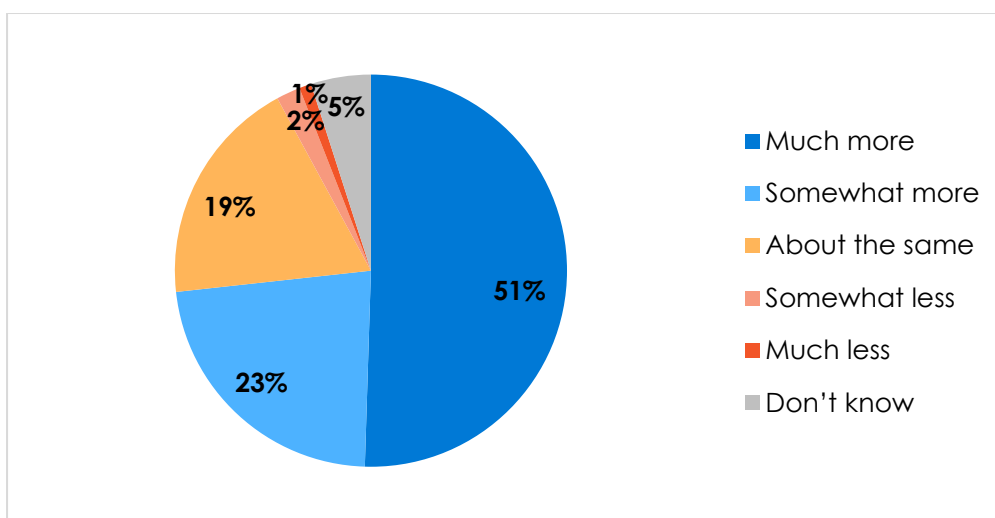
Figure 8: Government performance in reducing pollution and protecting the environment | by demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2022



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Reducing pollution and protecting the environment?

Almost three-fourths (74%) of Zimbabweans say the government should be doing more to limit pollution and protect the environment, including 51% who want the government to do “much more” (Figure 9). One-fifth (19%) want the government to keep doing what it is currently doing, while only 3% think it should do less to protect the environment.

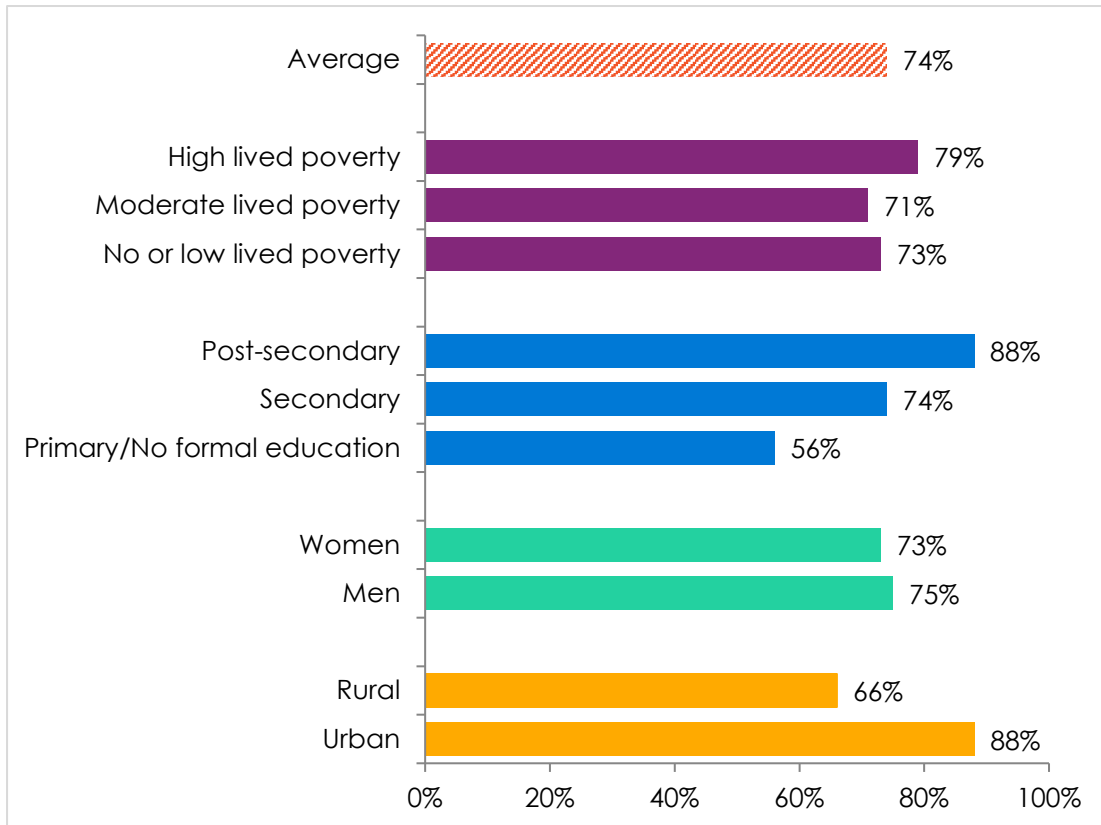
Figure 9: Should government do more to limit pollution? | Zimbabwe | 2022



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, should our government be doing more or less than it is currently doing to limit pollution and protect the environment in this country?

The view that the government should be doing more to limit pollution is most pronounced among urban residents (88%), the most educated citizens (88%), and the poorest respondents (79%) (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Government should do more to limit pollution | by demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2022

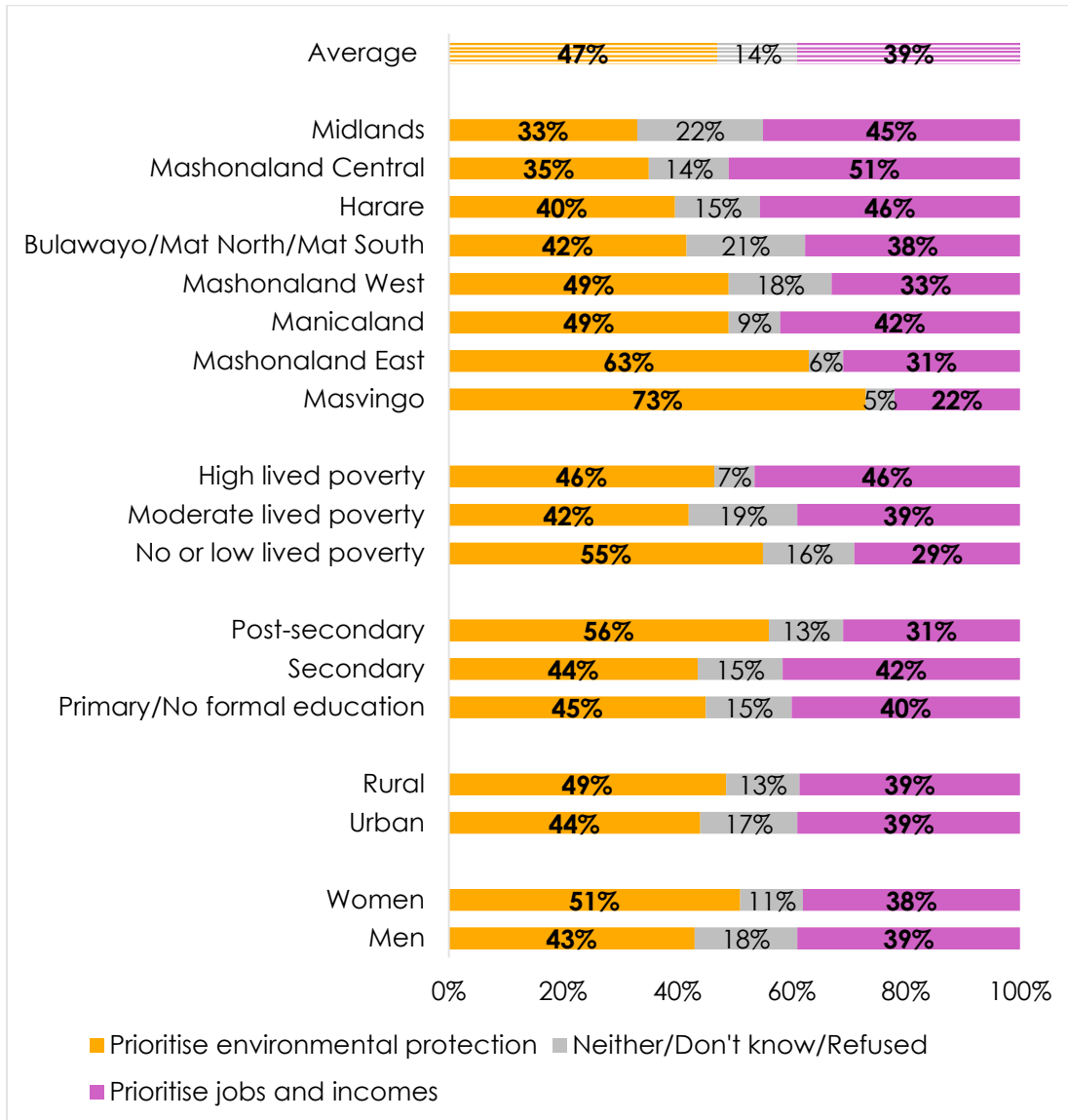


Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, should our government be doing more or less than it is currently doing to limit pollution and protect the environment in this country? (% who say "somewhat more" or "much more")*

Almost half (47%) of Zimbabweans want the government to focus more on environmental protection even if it means there will be fewer jobs or other disruptions to daily life. On the other hand, about four in 10 (39%) say the government should pay more attention to creating jobs and increasing incomes, even if it leads to environmental damage (Figure 11).

Women (51%) and rural residents (49%) are more likely than men (43%) and urbanites (44%) to prioritise environmental protection over job creation. Citizens experiencing high lived poverty are more likely to prioritise jobs and incomes (46%) than their economically better-off counterparts (29%-39%). Geographically, the call for emphasizing environmental protection is most pronounced in Masvingo (73%) and Mashonaland East (63%).

Figure 11: Should government prioritise jobs or the environment? | by demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2022



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

Statement 1: The government should focus on creating jobs and increasing incomes, even if that means increasing pollution or other environmental damage.

Statement 2: The government should focus more on preventing pollution and protecting the environment, even if this means there will be fewer jobs or there will be other disruptions to our daily lives.

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

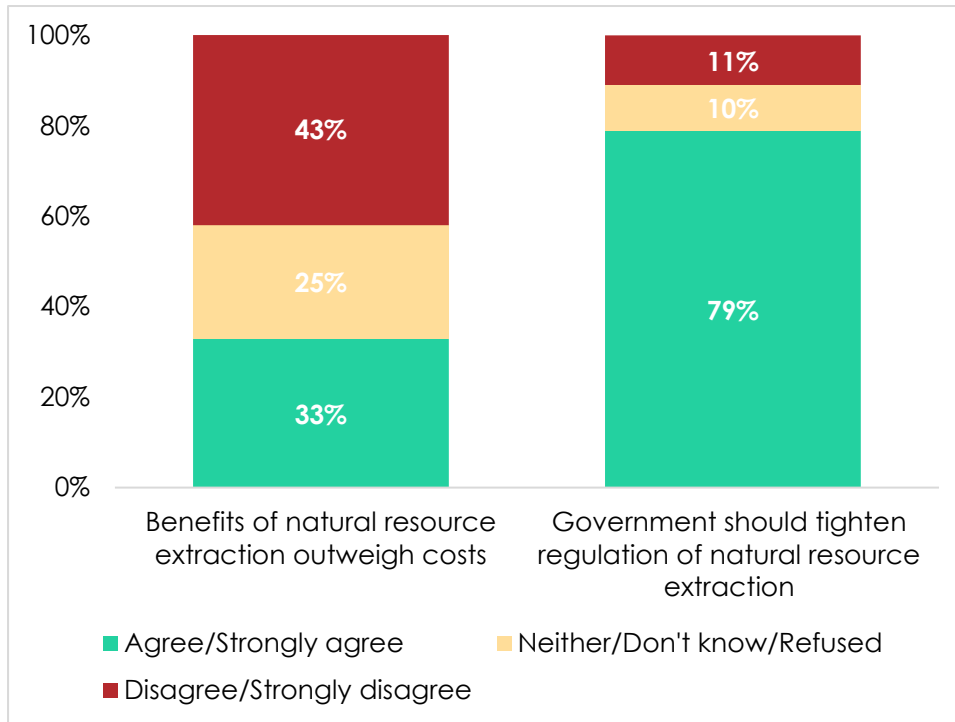
Natural resource extraction

The mining industry contributes 16% of Zimbabwe's gross domestic product and at least 60% of its foreign exchange earnings (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2021). But resource extraction can also be a major source of local-level environmental damage.

In Zimbabwe, a plurality (43%) of citizens see the costs of natural resource extraction, such as pollution, as outweighing such benefits as jobs and revenue. Only one-third (33%) think the benefits outweigh the costs (Figure 12).

Furthermore, in order to reduce the negative impact of natural resource extraction on the environment, a large majority (79%) of citizens want the government to regulate the industry more tightly. Only 11% oppose stricter regulation.

Figure 12: Natural resource extraction: Costs vs. benefits and support for tighter regulation | Zimbabwe | 2022



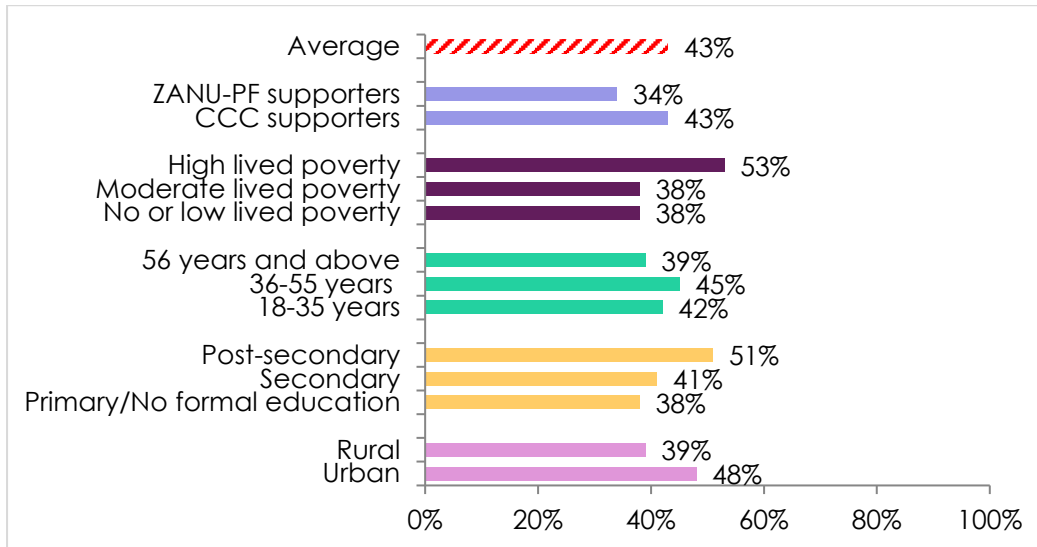
Respondents were asked: Natural resource extraction such as mining, oil drilling, or wood harvesting can have benefits, such as jobs and revenue. But it can also pose problems for nearby communities, such as pollution or deforestation. Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

- In general, the benefits of resource extraction activities to local communities, such as jobs and revenue, outweigh the costs, such as pollution.*
- In this country, natural resource extraction should be more tightly regulated by government to reduce the negative impacts on the environment.*

The view that the costs of natural resource extraction outweigh its benefits is more prevalent among opposition CCC supporters (43%) than among adherents of the ruling ZANU-PF (34%) and among urban residents (48%) compared to their rural counterparts (39%). Citizens with post-secondary education (51%) and those experiencing high lived poverty (53%) are more likely to see the costs as outweighing the benefits than less educated respondents and those who are economically better off (Figure 13).

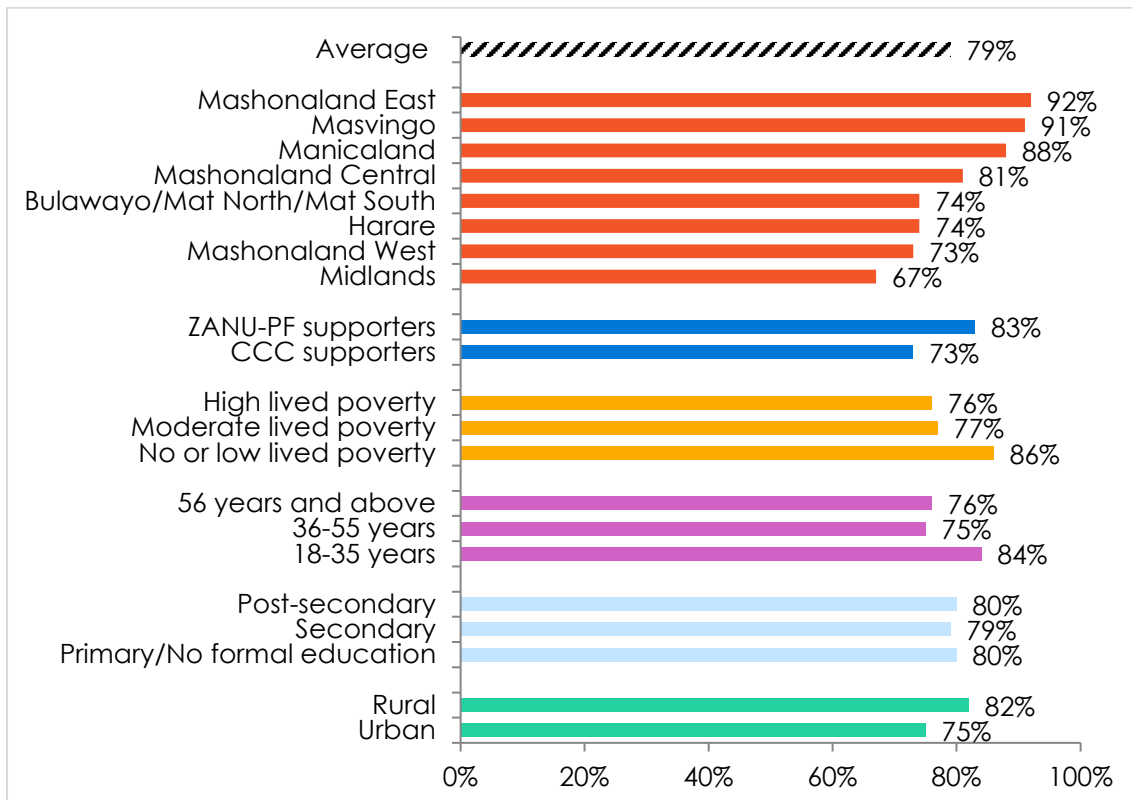
Support for tighter government regulation is strongest in rural communities (82%), among younger citizens (84% of those aged 18-35 years), the affluent (86%), and ZANU-PF supporters (83%). Geographically, this view is more widespread in Mashonaland East (92%), Masvingo (91%), and Manicaland (88%) than in other provinces (Figure 14).

Figure 13: Costs of natural resource extraction outweigh benefits | by demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2022



Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: In general, the benefits of resource extraction activities to local communities, such as jobs and revenue, outweigh the costs, such as pollution. (% who "disagree" or "strongly disagree")

Figure 14: Government should tighten regulation of natural resource extraction | by demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2022

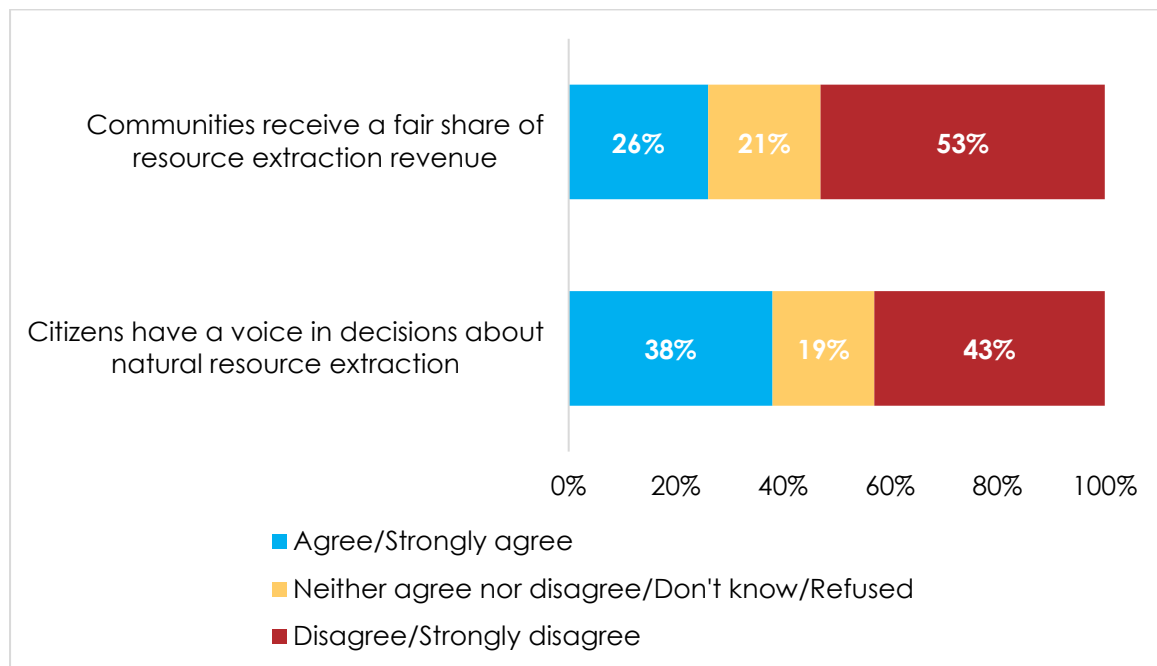


Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: In general, the benefits of resource extraction activities to local communities, such as jobs and revenue, outweigh the costs, such as pollution. (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

Natural resource extraction: Citizens' voice and benefit

Negative assessments exceed positive ones when it comes to the stake of ordinary citizens in natural resource extraction (Figure 15). A majority (53%) of respondents say that communities do not receive a fair share of the revenue from natural resource extraction, while only half as many (26%) think they do. And by 43% to 38%, respondents say communities do not have a voice in decisions about natural resource extraction.

Figure 15: Natural resource extraction: Citizens' voice and benefit | Zimbabwe
 | 2022



Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

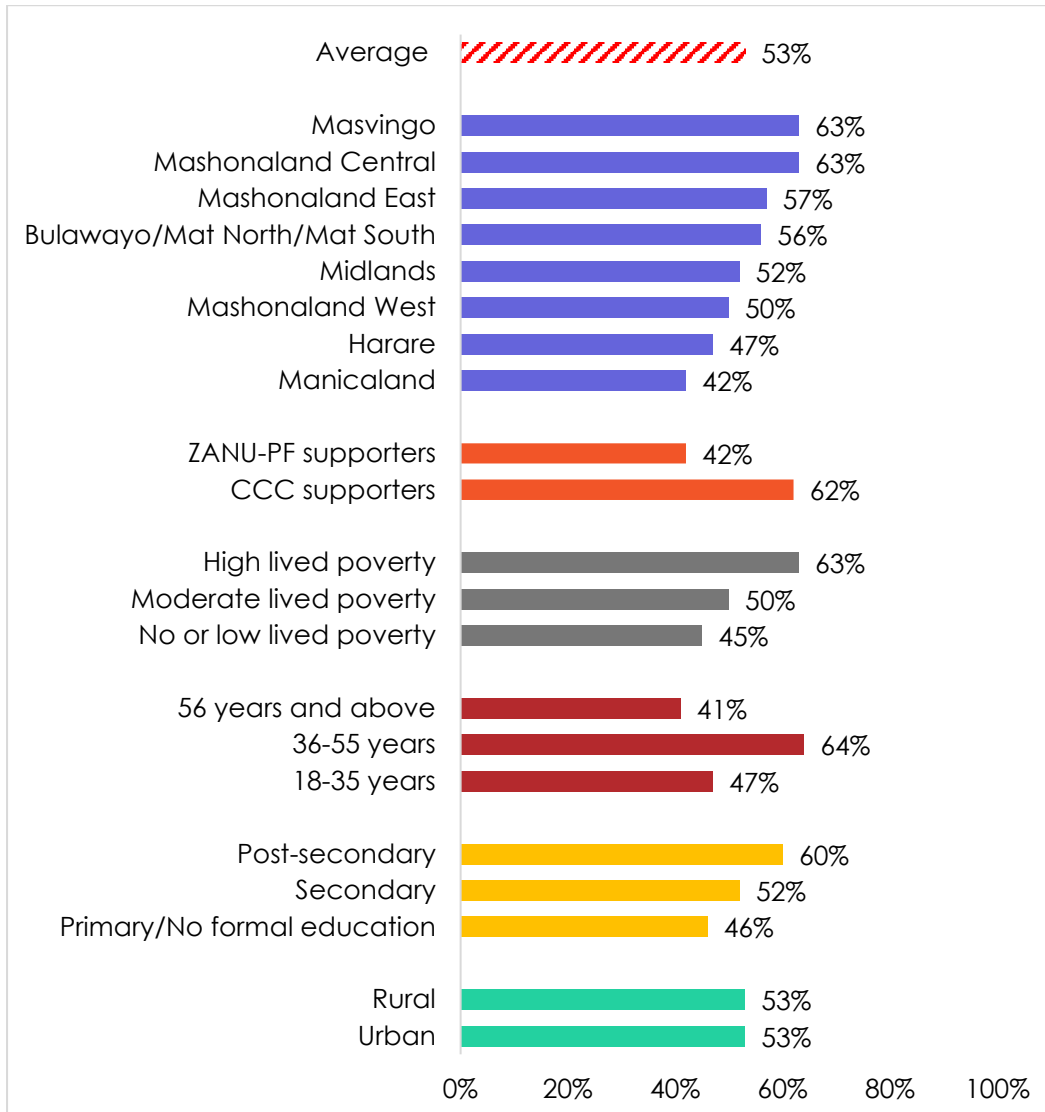
Ordinary Zimbabweans currently have a voice in decisions about natural resource extraction that takes place near their communities?

Local communities currently receive a fair share of the revenues from natural resource extraction that takes place near their communities?

The view that communities do not enjoy a fair share of resource extraction revenue is particularly common among the most educated (60%), the middle-aged (64% of those aged 36-55 years), citizens experiencing high lived poverty (63%), and CCC supporters (62%). Geographically, Masvingo and Mashonaland Central provinces have the largest proportion (63%) of residents who share this perspective (Figure 16).

The pattern is similar when it comes to whether ordinary citizens have a voice in decisions about natural resource extraction, with negative responses more common among the most educated (54%), the middle-aged (51%), the poor (50%), and CCC supporters (48%). Urbanites are more likely than rural residents to share this view (46% vs. 41%), as are residents of Bulawayo/Matabeleland North/Matabeleland South (50%) and Masvingo (50%) compared to their counterparts in other provinces (Figure 17).

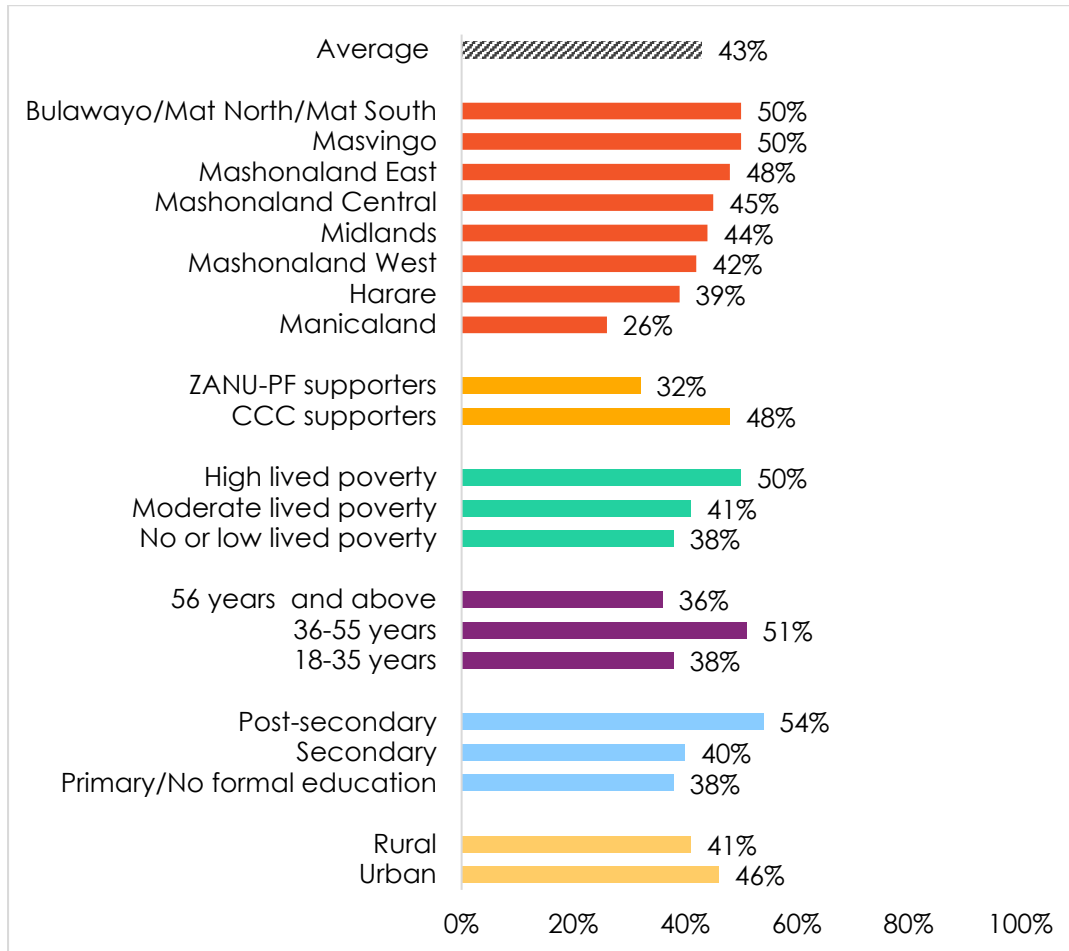
Figure 16: Communities do not receive a fair share of resource extraction revenue
 | by demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2022



Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: Local communities currently receive a fair share of the revenues from natural resource extraction that takes place near their communities? (% who "disagree" or "strongly disagree")

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Figure 17: Ordinary citizens do not have a voice in decisions about natural resource extraction | by demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2022



Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: Ordinary Zimbabweans currently have a voice in decisions about natural resource extraction that takes place near their communities? (% who “disagree” or “strongly disagree”)

Conclusion

Zimbabweans want the government and citizens themselves to do more to combat pollution and protect the environment. Despite high levels of poverty and unemployment, citizens are prepared to sacrifice jobs and incomes in favour of preserving the integrity of the environment.

They also want the government to put regulations in place to ensure that natural resource extraction is done in an environmentally responsible manner and that it prioritises the inclusion of citizen voices, including making sure that communities receive a fair share of revenues.

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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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