

Angolans look to government, one another for action on the environment

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 592 | Kelechi Amakoh and Carlos Pacatolo

Summary

Angola is blessed with abundant natural resources, including oil, diamonds, and vast amounts of arable – though largely unused – land. Last year the country passed Nigeria to become Africa's largest oil producer (Leao & Shetty, 2022).

At the same time, Angola confronts a troubling array of environmental challenges, among them deforestation, soil erosion, poor water quality, pollution from mining and oil production, and the impacts of climate change (World Bank, 2021; Paca, Santos, Pires, Leitão, & Boaventura, 2019; allAfrica.com, 2022; Neto & Maclean, 2021; World Rainforest Movement, 1999).

In a presidential order in December, João Lourenço created a multidisciplinary working group to draw up a National Plan to Ban Plastics to “address environmental degradation,” regulate the production and use of these products, and comply with commitments under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and other international agreements on environmental protection. Coordinated by the minister of state and chief of staff of the president of the Republic, the group includes ministers as well as civil society representatives, among them noted environmentalist Fernanda Renée Samuel (Jornal de Angola, 2023).

In Angola, as in most countries, environmental governance raises wide-ranging 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 a special survey module included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 questionnaire to explore Angolans' experiences and perceptions of pollution, environmental governance, and natural resource extraction.

Findings show that Angolans see environmental pollution, including trash and plastics, as a major problem in their communities, especially in urban areas. Most want the government to do more to address pollution and protect the environment, though not at the cost of jobs.

Few Angolans think that local communities are getting a fair shake from the natural resource extraction industry, and support for tighter government regulations far exceeds opposition.

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 Angola, led by Ovilongwa – Estudos de Opinião Pública, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,200 adult Angolans between 9 February

and 8 March 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. A previous survey was conducted in Angola in 2019.

Key findings

On pollution and environmental governance:

- Three-fourths (75%) of Angolans say pollution is a serious problem in their community, including 53% who say it is “very serious.”
 - Citizens say trash disposal (30%), water pollution (24%), and air pollution (18%) are the most important environmental issues in their community.
 - More than six in 10 Angolans (62%) say plastic bags are a major source of pollution in their country.
- More than half (51%) of respondents say the primary responsibility for reducing pollution and keeping communities clean lies with ordinary citizens. About one-third (34%) see this as the national government’s job.
- Three-fourths (75%) of citizens say the government should be doing more to limit pollution and protect the environment, including 64% who want the government to do “much more.”
- But if environmental-protection policies threaten jobs or incomes, more Angolans would opt to prioritise economic considerations (45%) than environmental ones (37%).

On natural resource extraction:

- Few Angolans think that the benefits of natural resource extraction outweigh the costs (22%), that ordinary people have a voice in decisions about natural resource extraction that takes place near their communities (24%), or that local communities receive a fair share of the revenues from natural resource extraction (18%).
- By a 2-to-1 margin (48% vs. 22%), citizens say the government should regulate the industry more tightly to reduce its negative impacts on the environment.

Pollution and environmental governance

Pollution: The scope of the problem

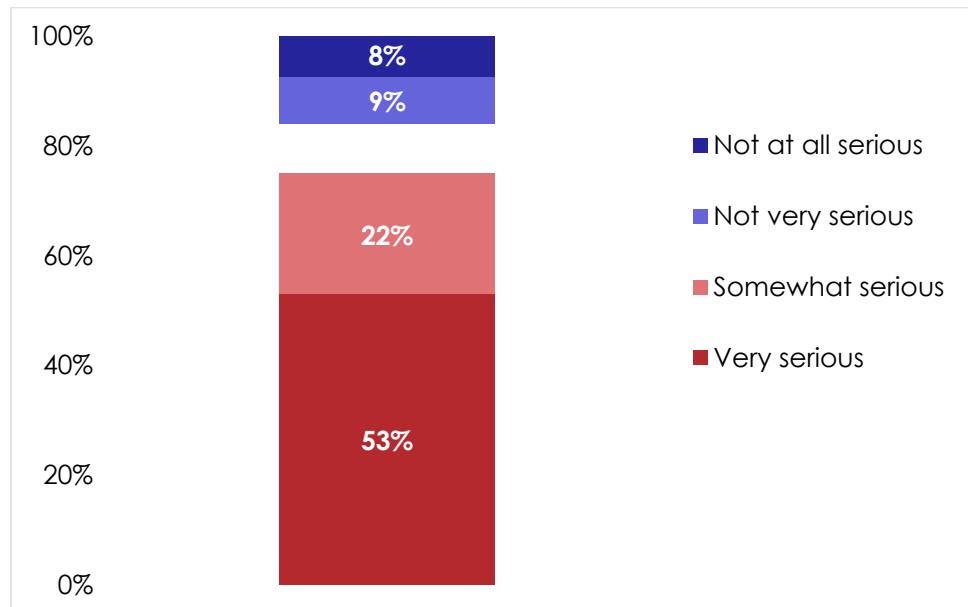
Three-fourths (75%) of Angolans consider pollution in their communities a serious problem, including more than half (53%) who say it is “very serious” (Figure 1).

Urban residents are more concerned about pollution than their rural counterparts (82% vs. 61%) (Figure 2). Concerns about pollution also increase with respondents’ education level, ranging from 57% among those with no formal schooling to 89% among those with post-secondary education. Older citizens (66%) and those experiencing high lived poverty¹ (71%)

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).

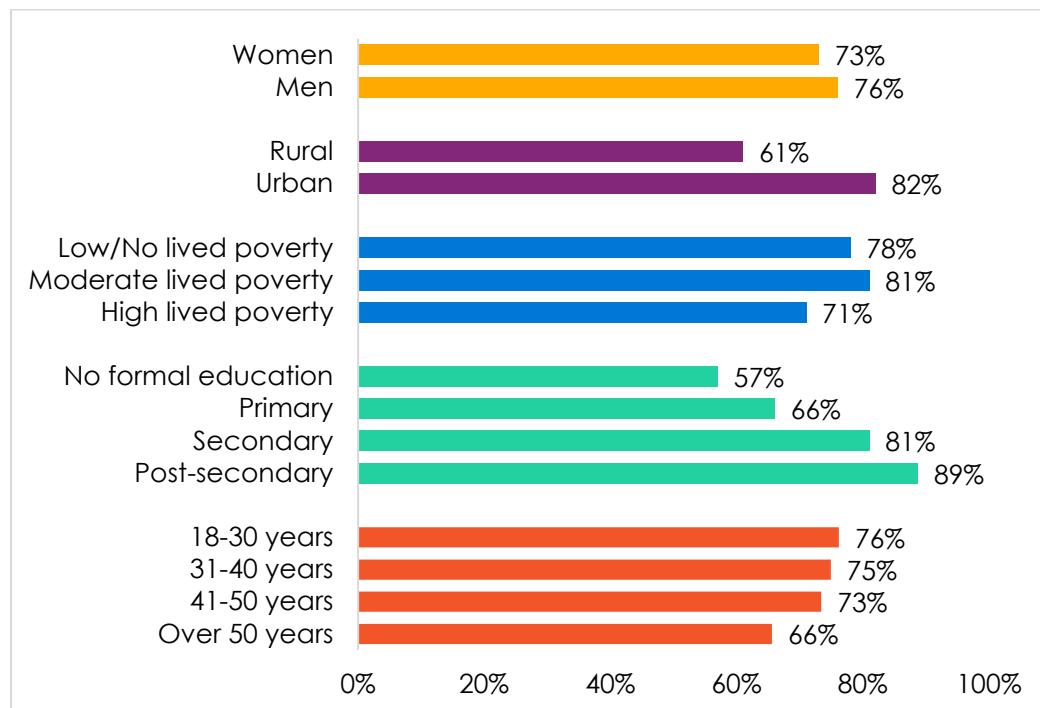
are less likely to see pollution as a major problem than their younger and better-off counterparts.

Figure 1: Extent of pollution in the community | Angola | 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?

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

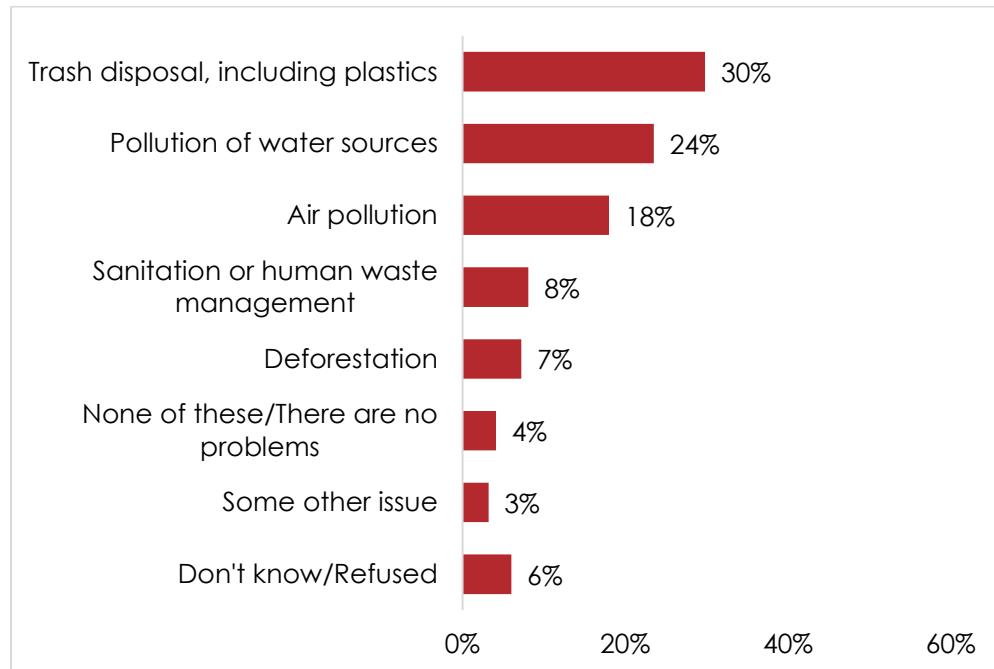


Respondents were asked: How serious a problem is pollution, such as the accumulation of trash or garbage, or damage to the quality of the air, the water, or the land in your community? (% who say "somewhat serious" or "very serious")

Angolans rank disposal of trash, including plastics, as the most important environmental issue in their community (30%), followed by pollution of water resources (24%), air pollution (18%), human waste management (8%), and deforestation (7%) (Figure 3).

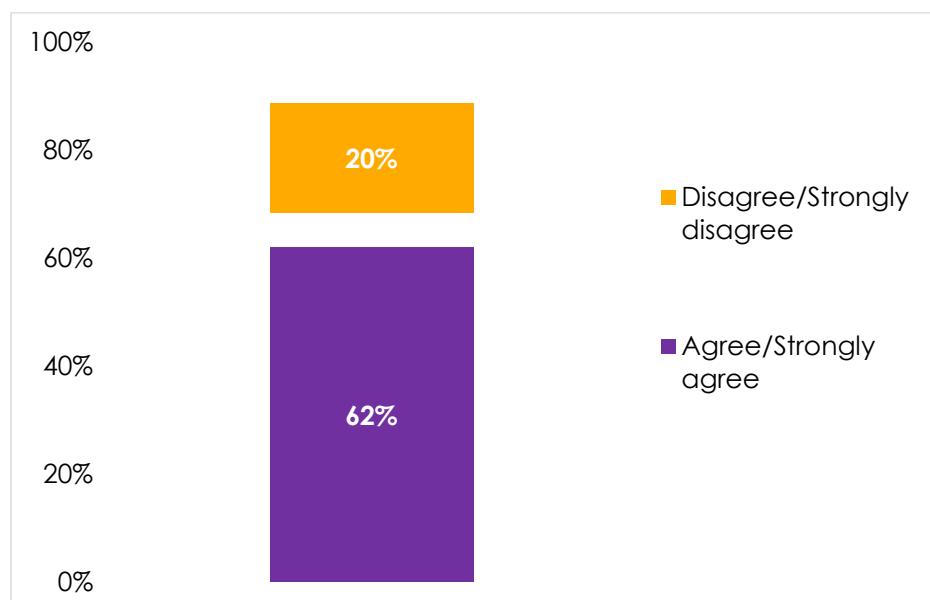
More than six in 10 (62%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that plastic bags are a major source of pollution in Angola (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Most important environmental issue in the community | Angola | 2022



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

Figure 4: Are plastic bags a major source of pollution? | Angola | 2022



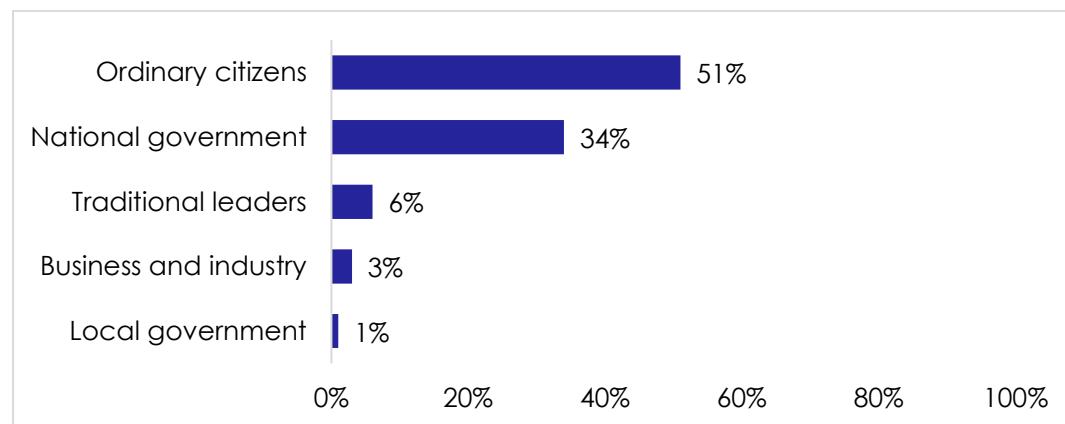
Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement:
Plastic bags are a major source of pollution in this country.

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 shopping bags to dismantling a coal-burning industry.

For Angolans, protecting the environment starts at home: More than half (51%) of respondents say ordinary citizens have the primary responsibility for reducing pollution and keeping their communities clean (Figure 5). About one-third (34%) say it is the responsibility of the national government (34%), while 6% see it primarily as the duty of traditional leaders.

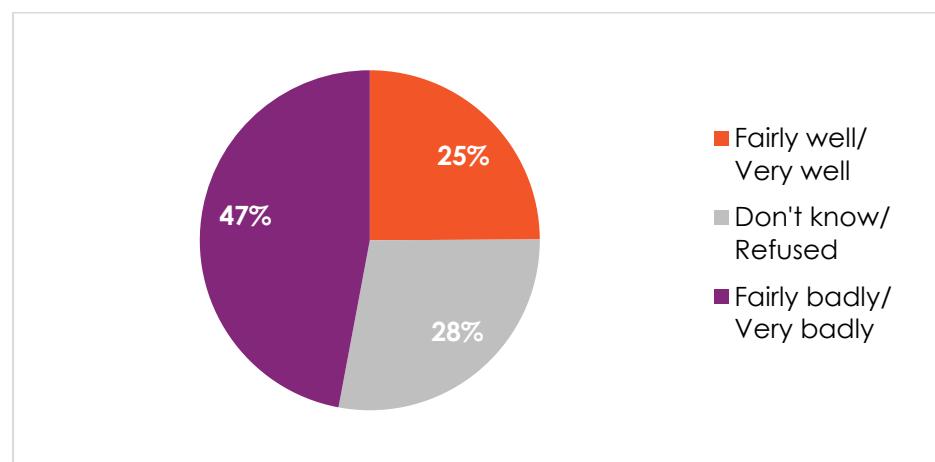
Figure 5: Who should be responsible for reducing pollution? | Angola | 2022



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

Almost half (47%) of Angolans say their government has done a “fairly bad” or “very bad” job of reducing pollution and protecting the environment. Only a quarter (25%) of respondents offer a positive assessment of the government’s efforts, while 28% say they “don’t know” or refused to answer the question (Figure 6).

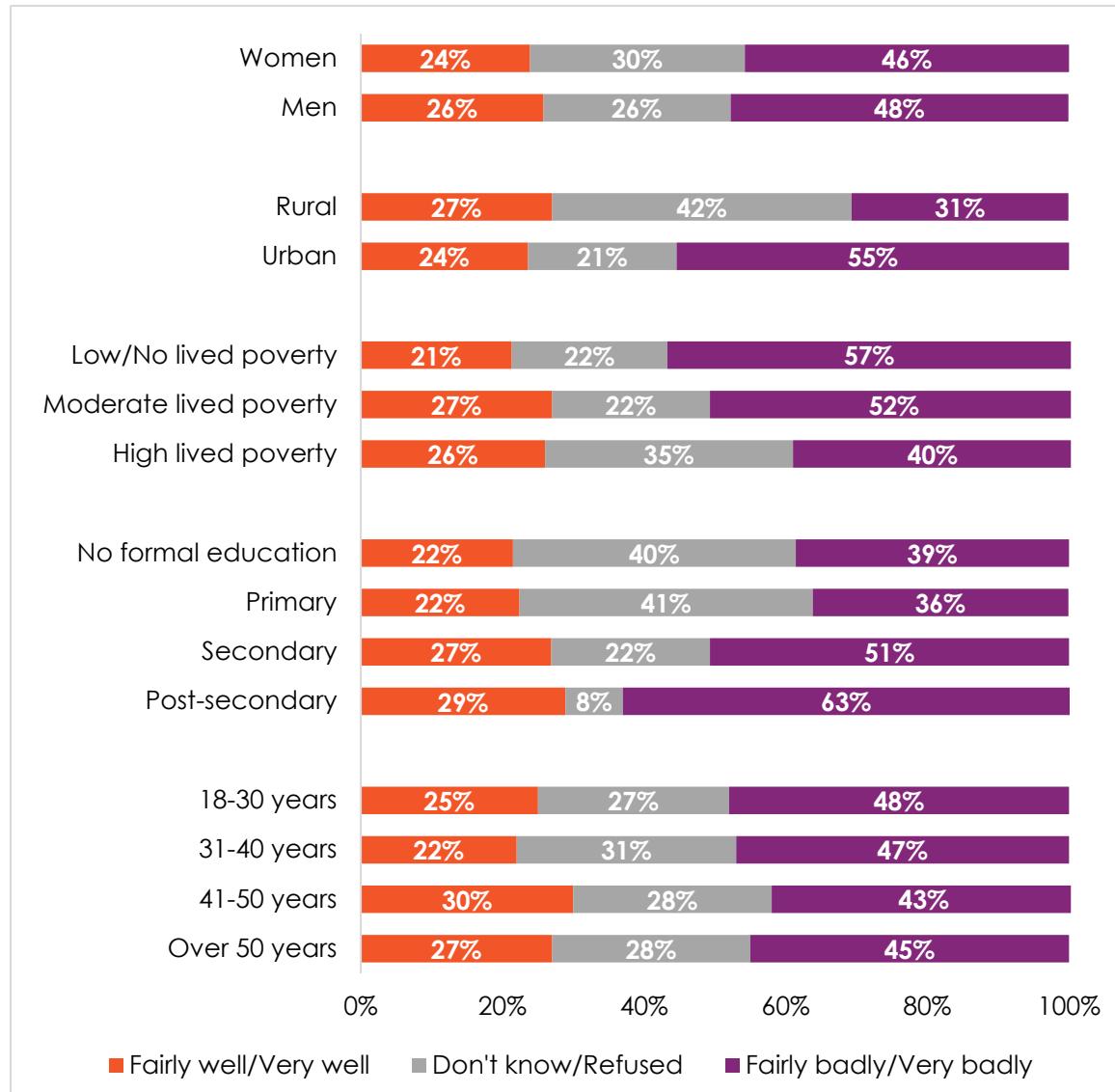
Figure 6: Government performance in reducing pollution and protecting the environment | Angola | 2022



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?

Highly educated citizens (63% fairly/very bad), urban residents (55%), and the economically well off (57%) are most critical of the government's performance in fighting pollution and protecting the environment (Figure 7).

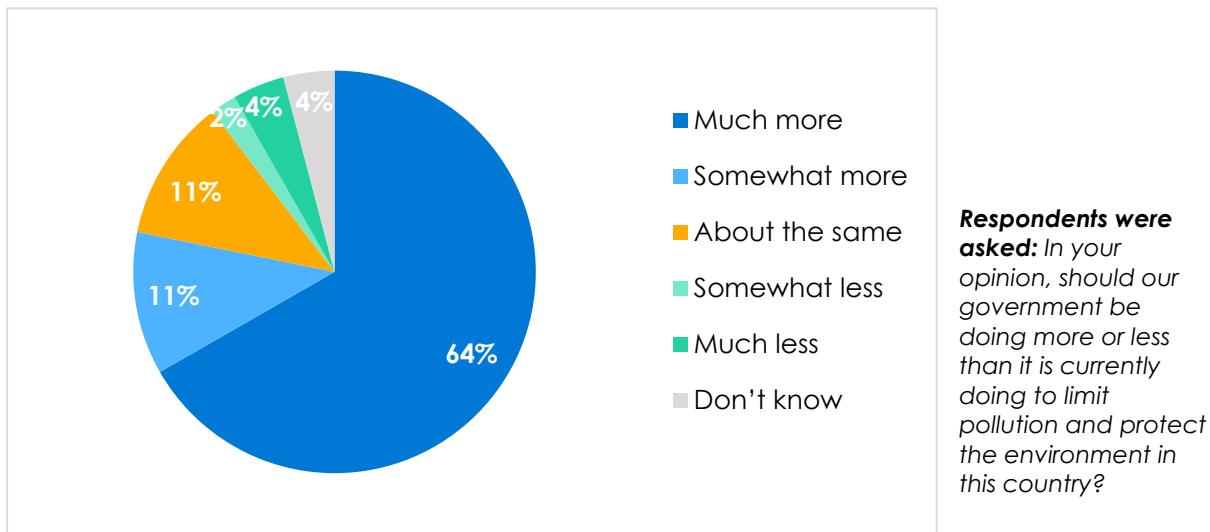
Figure 7: Government performance in reducing pollution and protecting the environment | by demographic group | Angola | 2022



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?

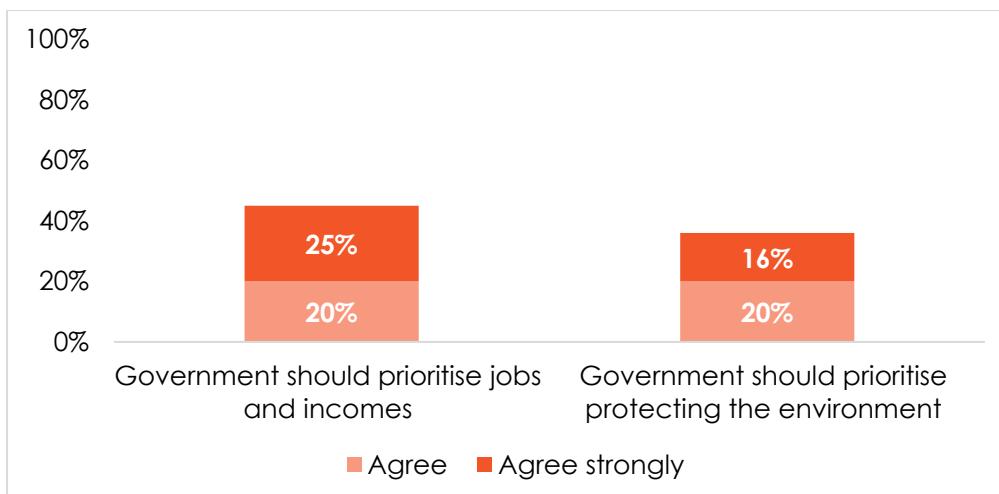
Even more clearly, three-fourths (75%) of citizens say the government should be doing more to limit pollution and protect the environment, including 64% who want the government to do "much more" (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Should government do more to limit pollution? | Angola | 2022



However, if environmental-protection policies threaten jobs or incomes, more Angolans would opt to prioritise economic rather than environmental considerations. Almost half (45%) of respondents say reducing pollution or other environmental damage must take a back seat to job and income creation, while 37%² would prioritise protecting the environment, "even if this means there will be fewer jobs or there will be other disruptions to our daily lives" (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Should government prioritise jobs or the environment? | Angola | 2022



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

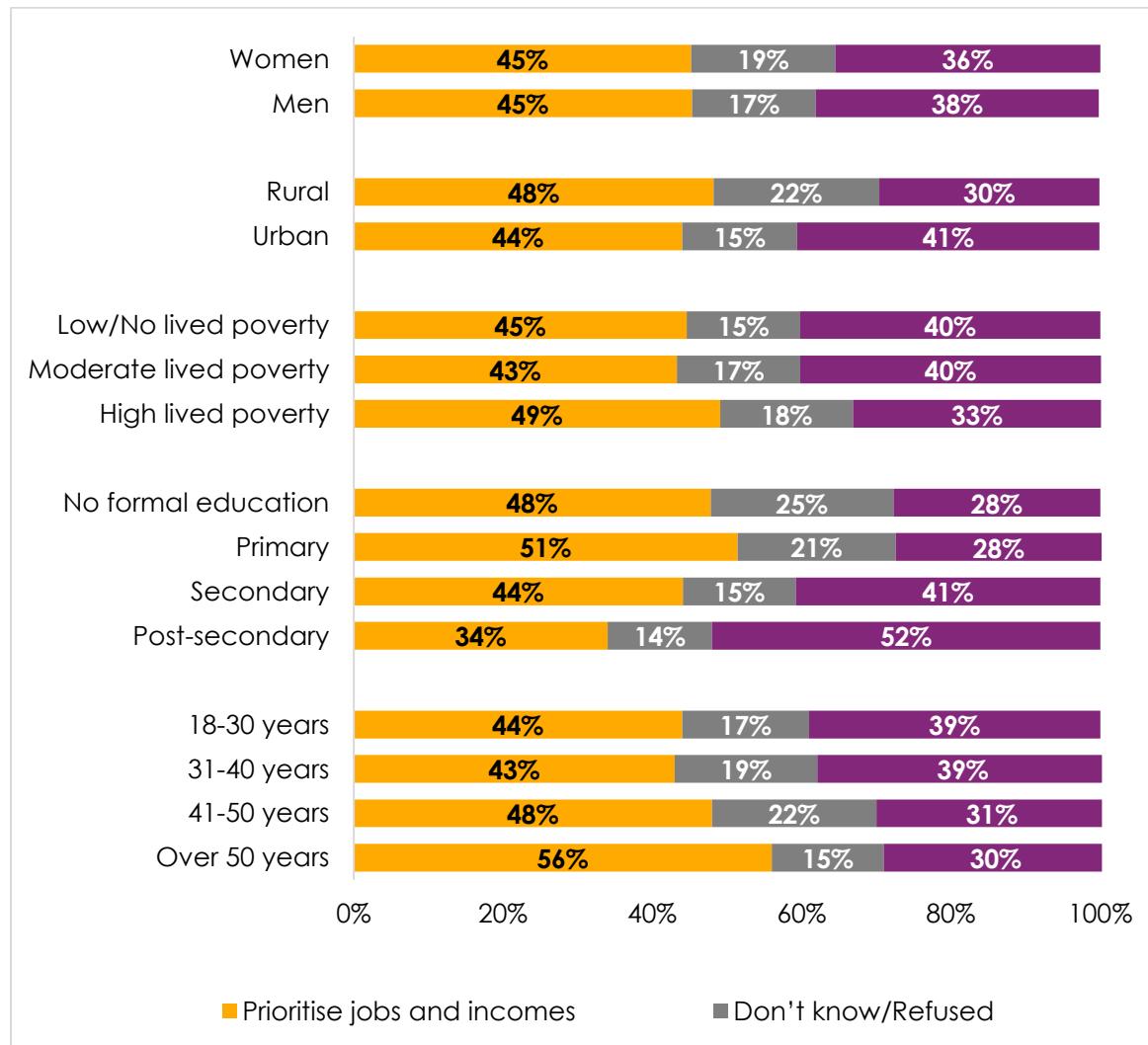
Statement 2: The government should focus more on preventing pollution and protecting the environment, even if this means there will be fewer jobs or there will be other disruptions to our daily lives.

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

² Due to rounding, percentages for combined categories reported in the text may differ slightly from the sum of sub-categories shown in figures.

Across key demographic groups, citizens with post-secondary education are the only group in which a majority would prioritise environmental protection over job creation (52% vs. 34%). Preference for jobs over environmental protection is particularly common among the oldest respondents (56%), the poorest (49%), and rural residents (48%) (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Should government prioritise jobs or the environment? | by demographic group | Angola | 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)

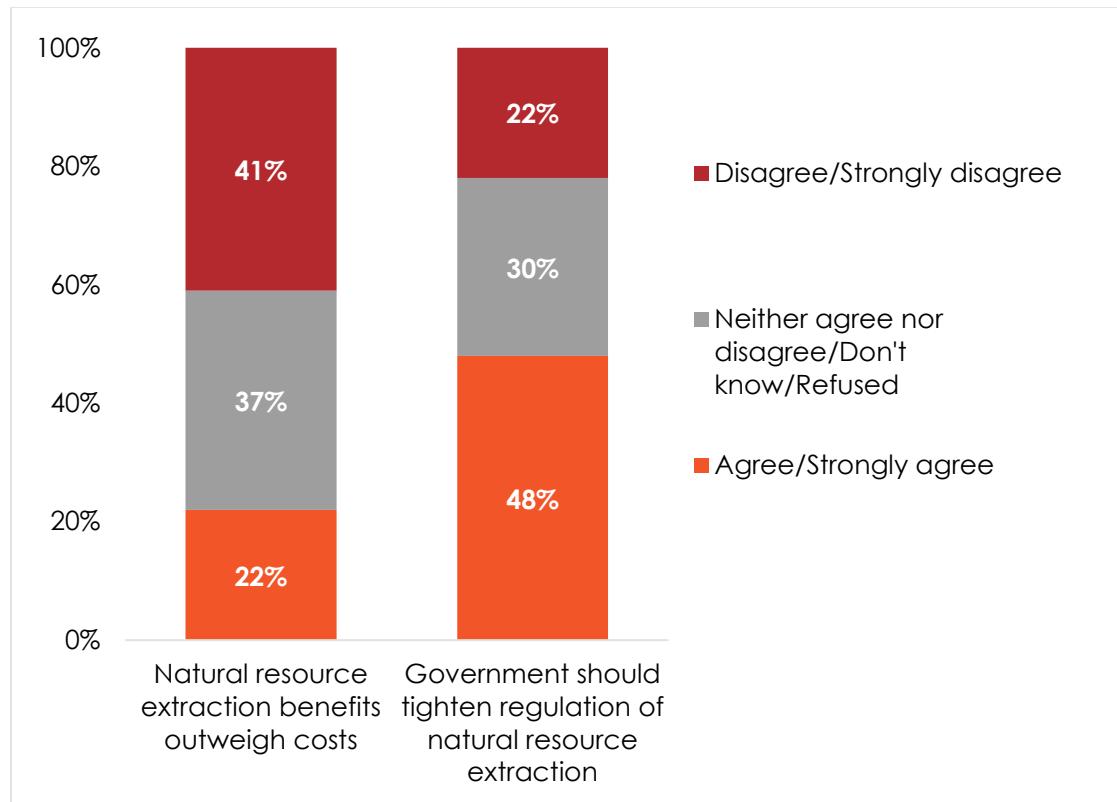
Natural resource extraction

In Angola, the extraction of natural resources – including oil and gas, diamonds, uranium, and zinc – provides the bulk of government revenue (International Trade Administration, 2022). But resource extraction can also be a major source of local-level environmental damage.

Only 22% of Angolans “agree” or “strongly agree” that overall, the benefits that natural resource extraction brings to communities, such as jobs and revenue, outweigh negative impacts such as pollution. Almost twice as many (41%) disagree with this assessment, while 37% don’t offer an opinion (Figure 11).

And by a 2-to-1 margin (48% vs. 22%), citizens say the government should regulate the natural resource extraction industry more tightly to reduce its negative impacts on the environment.

Figure 11: Natural resource extraction: Costs vs. benefits | Angola | 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:

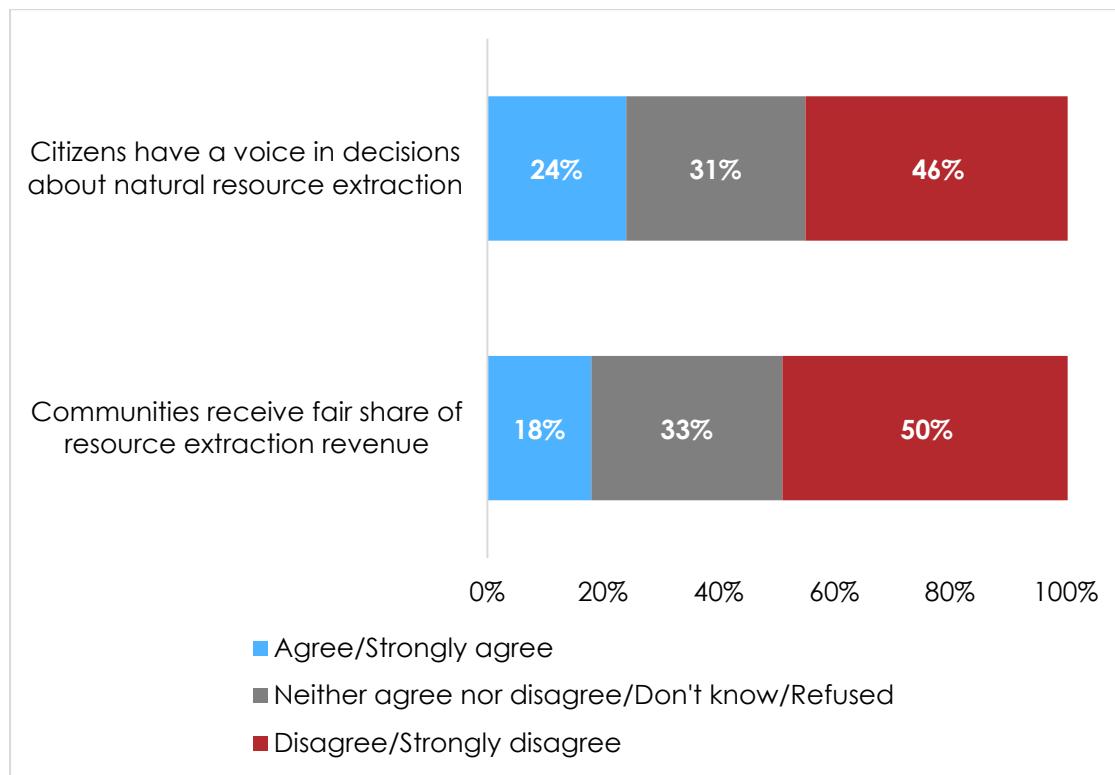
In general, the benefits of resource extraction activities to local communities, such as jobs and revenue, outweigh the costs, such as pollution.

In this country, natural resource extraction should be more tightly regulated by government to reduce the negative impacts on the environment.

Negative assessments outweigh positive ones when it comes to the stake of ordinary citizens in natural resource extraction (Figure 12). Only one-fourth (24%) of respondents think ordinary people have a voice in decisions about natural resource extraction that takes place near their communities, while 46% say they don’t.

Even fewer (18%) think local communities receive a fair share of the revenues from natural resource extraction, while almost three times as many (50%) disagree.

Figure 12: Natural resource extraction: Citizens' voice and benefit | Angola | 2022



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

Ordinary Angolans 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.

Conclusion

Survey findings highlight Angolans' concern about pollution – especially trash and water and air pollution – as a major problem in their communities. While a majority see ordinary citizens as primarily responsible for reducing pollution and keeping their communities clean, most also want their government to do "much more" to protect the environment.

Angolans also hold critical views of the natural resource extraction industry and its environmental impacts. Few think local communities have a voice in decisions or receive a fair share of revenues, and support for tighter regulation far exceeds opposition.

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