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Zimbabweans wouldn't spare pupils the rod, endorse letting pregnant girls stay in school

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 607 | Stephen Ndoma and Simangele Moyo-Nyede

Summary

Zimbabwe's Education Amendment Act of 2020 was a major step forward for the country's education system, at least on paper. Among its many provisions, it made education compulsory and free, outlawed degrading punishment of pupils and the expulsion of pregnant girls, and required schools to accommodate children with disabilities and to provide menstrual wear, water, and sanitation (Fambasayi, 2020; Mavhinga, 2020).

The law fits into a series of measures intended to strengthen the schools, including a national curriculum review process launched in 2014, the introduction of a continuous assessment and learning activity (CALA) component, and the banning of parental incentive payments to teachers (Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, 2014, 2018; Share, 2014; Marisa, 2022). In 2020, as schools remained closed for almost half the year because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government introduced online learning, which many schools continue to use, both in place of and to complement in-person teaching.

Amid these substantial changes, how do Zimbabweans see their evolving education system?

Findings from the most recent Afrobarometer survey show that Zimbabweans are not satisfied with the government's efforts and rank education among their country's most important problems. On specific policy questions, a majority say that pupils who become pregnant should be allowed to continue their education and that corporal punishment should not be banned in schools. Views are more divided regarding teacher incentives and CALA projects, while a slim majority voice opposition to online learning programmes.

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 are being completed in early 2023. 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 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 surveys were conducted in Zimbabwe in 1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2021.

Key findings

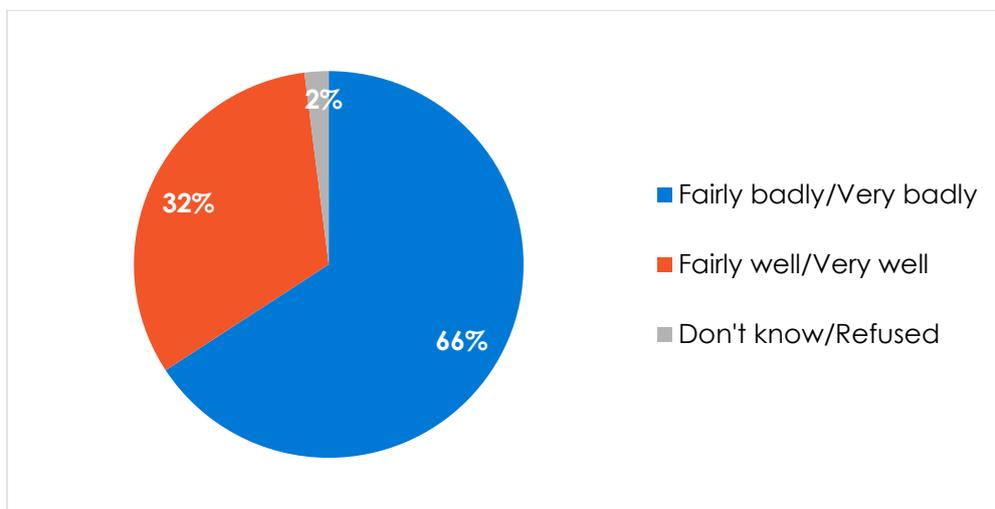
- Two-thirds (66%) of Zimbabweans say the government is doing a poor job of addressing the country's educational needs.

- Education ranks fifth among the most important problems that citizens want their government to address.
- Seven in 10 citizens (69%) say pregnant pupils should be allowed to continue their education.
- But fully two-thirds (66%) of Zimbabweans disagree with a ban on corporal punishment in schools.
- Citizens are divided on whether to ban the payment of monetary and non-monetary incentives to teachers for extra lessons (51% for such a ban, 46% against).
- They are also divided regarding the introduction of CALA projects: 41% are for the projects, while 36% oppose them.
- A majority (54%) of Zimbabweans oppose implementation of online lessons, while 38% favour it.

Government performance in addressing educational needs

Two-thirds (66%) of Zimbabweans say the government is doing “fairly badly” or “very badly” in its efforts to address the country’s educational needs (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Government performance on addressing educational needs | Zimbabwe | 2022

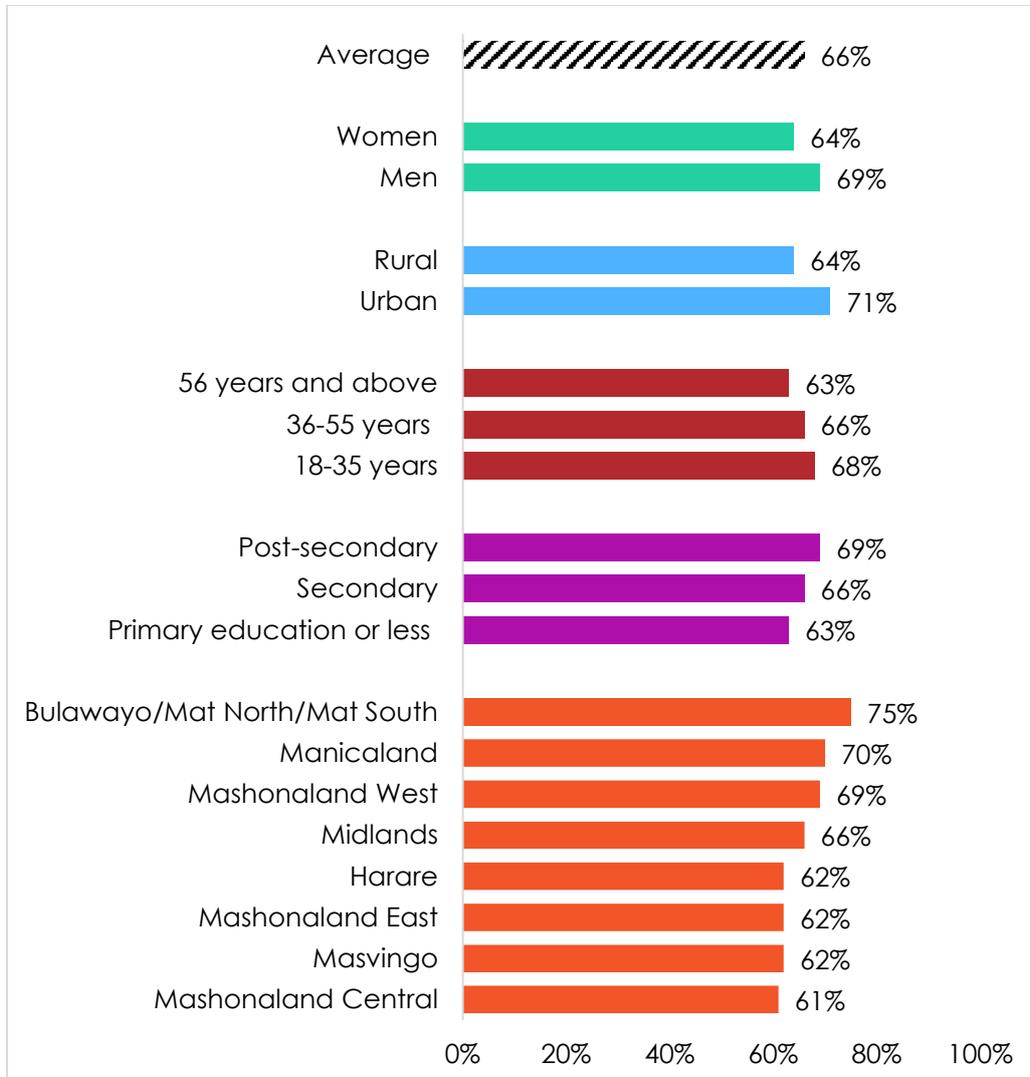


Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Addressing educational needs?

Negative assessments of the government's performance on education are more widespread among men (69%) than women (64%) and in cities (71%) compared to rural areas (64%) (Figure 2).

Young respondents are particularly critical of the government's efforts (68%), as are the most educated citizens (69%). The sentiment that the government is faring badly in addressing educational needs is the majority view across all provinces, led by 75% of residents in Bulawayo/Mat South/Mat North provinces.

Figure 2: Government performing badly on education | by demographic group
 | Zimbabwe | 2022

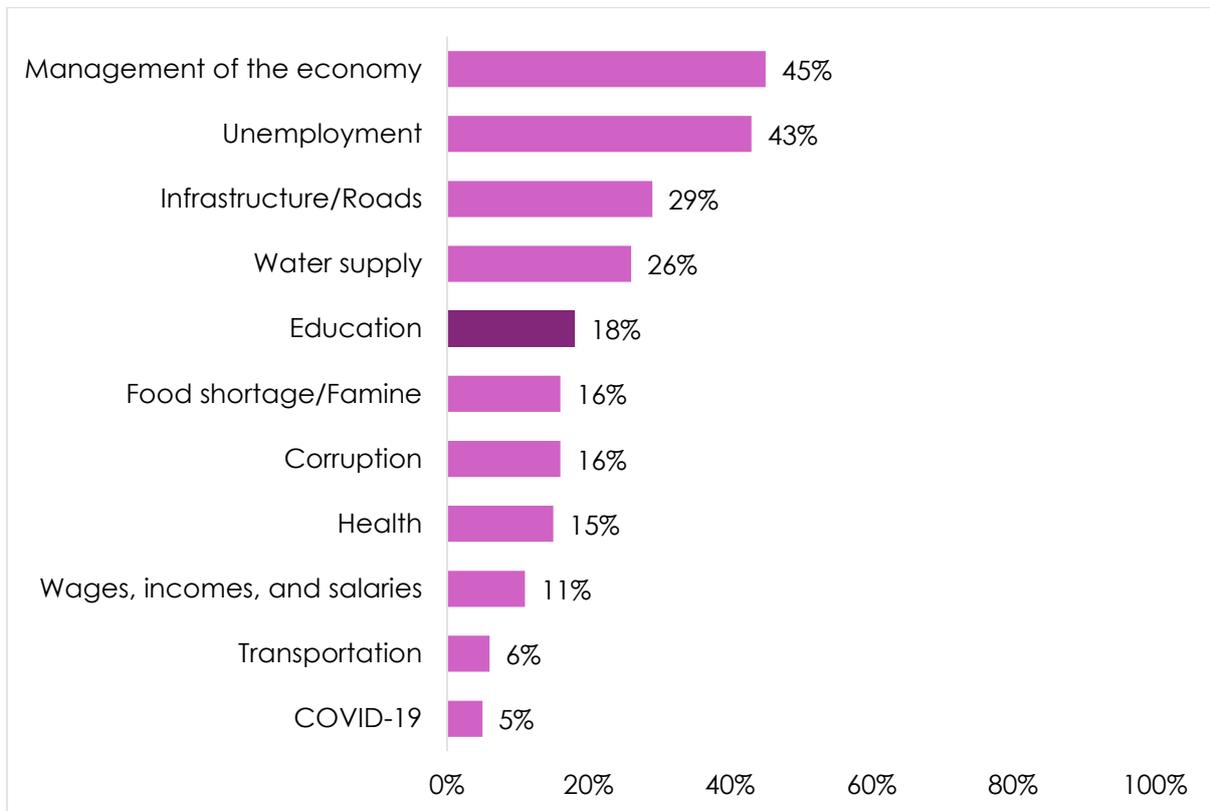


Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "fairly badly" or "very badly")

Education high on people's development agenda

When Zimbabweans are asked what they consider the most important problems that the government must address, education ranks fifth (cited by 18% of respondents as one of their top three priorities), trailing management of the economy (45%), unemployment (43%), infrastructure/roads (29%), and water supply (26%) (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Most important problems | Zimbabwe | 2022

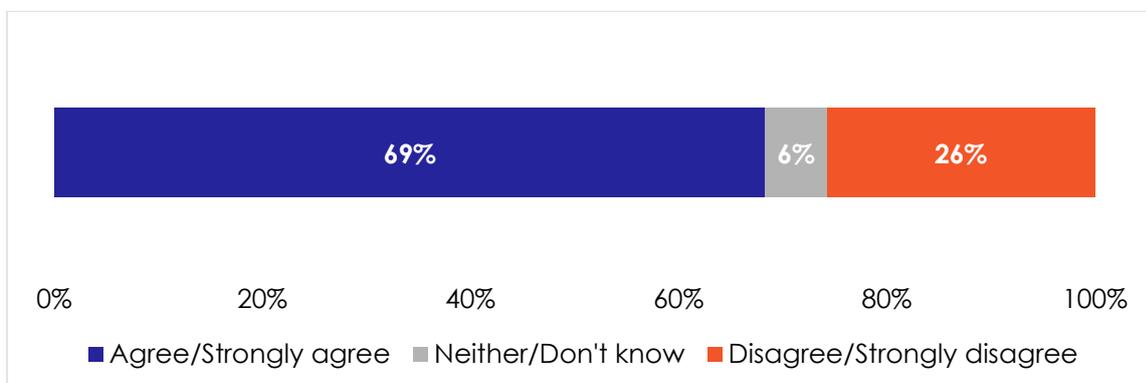


Respondents were asked: In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that government should address? (Up to three responses per person; figure shows % of respondents who cite each problem among their three priorities.)

Pregnant girls should continue with education

Most citizens support the amendment prohibiting schools from expelling pregnant pupils. About seven in 10 survey respondents (69%) say pregnant girls should be allowed to continue their education, including 34% who “strongly agree” with this position (Figure 4).

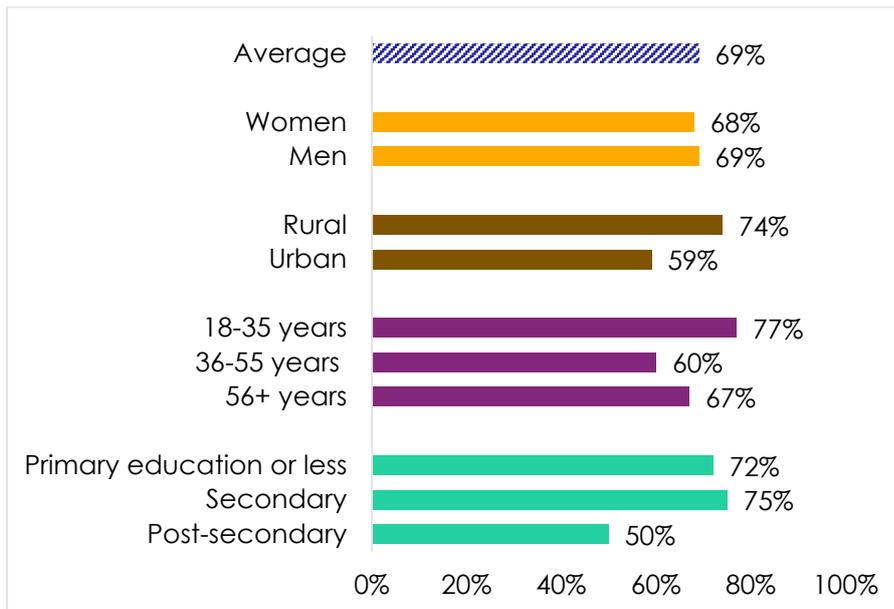
Figure 4: Should pregnant pupils be allowed to continue their education?
 | Zimbabwe | 2022



Respondents were asked: For each of the following policies, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: Allowing pregnant girls to continue with their education?

Perhaps surprisingly, the most educated respondents are least likely to support allowing pregnant pupils to continue their education (50%, compared to 72%-75% of their counterparts with less schooling) (Figure 5). Rural residents are more likely to favour this policy than urbanites (74% vs. 59%), which is also more popular among young respondents (77%) than among their elders (60%-67%).

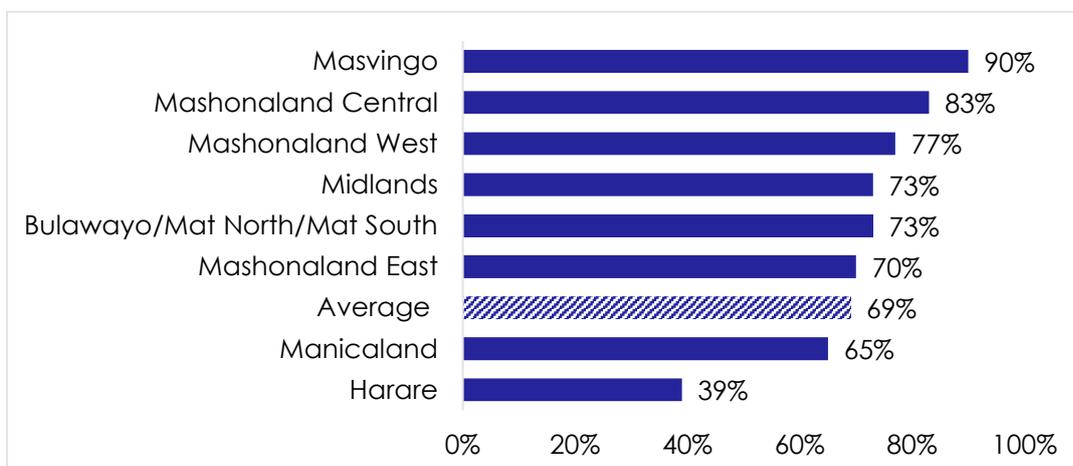
Figure 5: A pregnant girl should be allowed to continue her education | by demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2022



Respondents were asked: For each of the following policies, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: Allowing pregnant girls to continue with their education? (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

In Harare, only 39% of respondents express support for this policy, but in all other provinces, large majorities do so, led by 90% in Masvingo (Figure 6).

Figure 6: A pregnant girl should be allowed to continue her education | by regional group | Zimbabwe | 2022

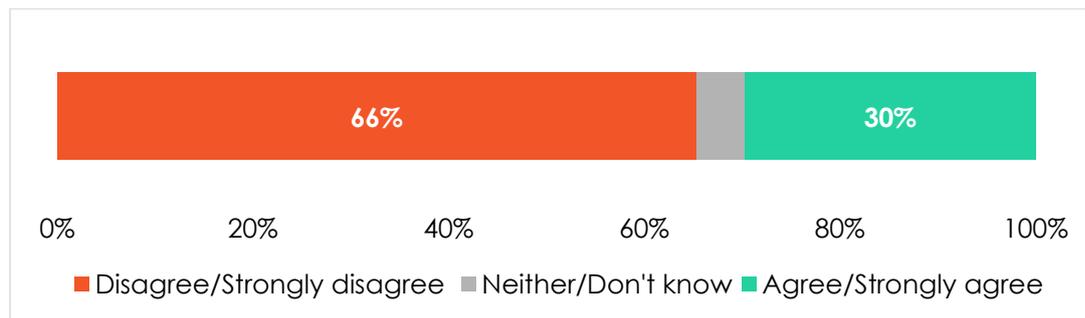


Respondents were asked: For each of the following policies, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: Allowing pregnant girls to continue with their education? (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

Ban on corporal punishment in schools

The Education Amendment Act forbids any type of cruel, inhumane, or degrading discipline in schools (Fambasayi, 2020; Mavhinga, 2020), and is widely taken to constitute a ban on corporal punishment. The High Court in 2017 also banned corporal punishment, not just at school but at home as well (Obera, 2017). But such a ban is not popular among Zimbabweans: Two-thirds (66%) of citizens “disagree” or “strongly disagree” with outlawing corporal punishment in schools (Figure 7).

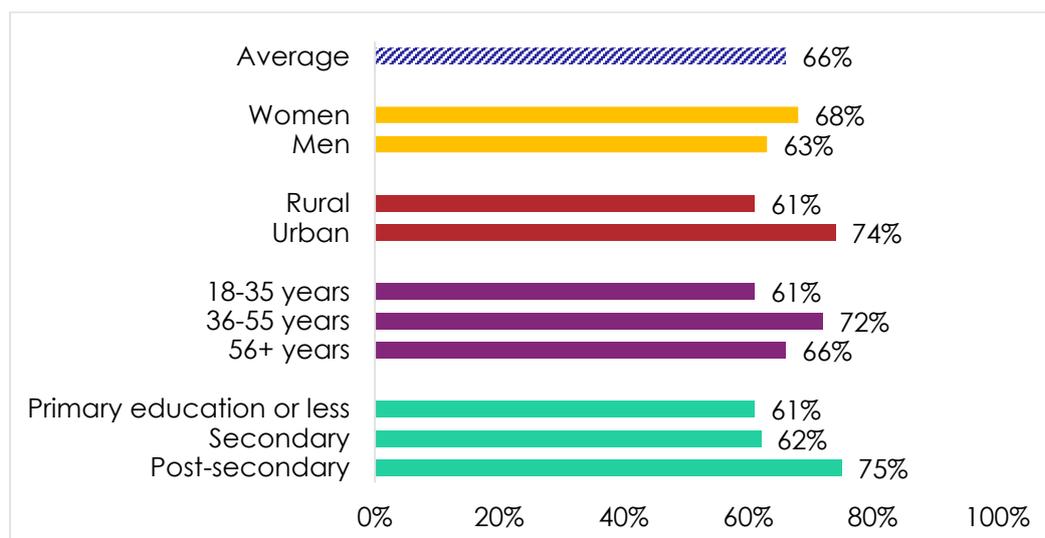
Figure 7: Ban on corporal punishment in schools | Zimbabwe | 2022



Respondents were asked: For each of the following policies, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: Banning corporal punishment in schools?

Opposition to banning corporal punishment is especially strong among the most educated citizens (75%) and in urban areas (74%) (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Oppose ban on corporal punishment in schools | by demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2022



Respondents were asked: For each of the following policies, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: Banning corporal punishment in schools? (% who “disagree” or “strongly disagree”)

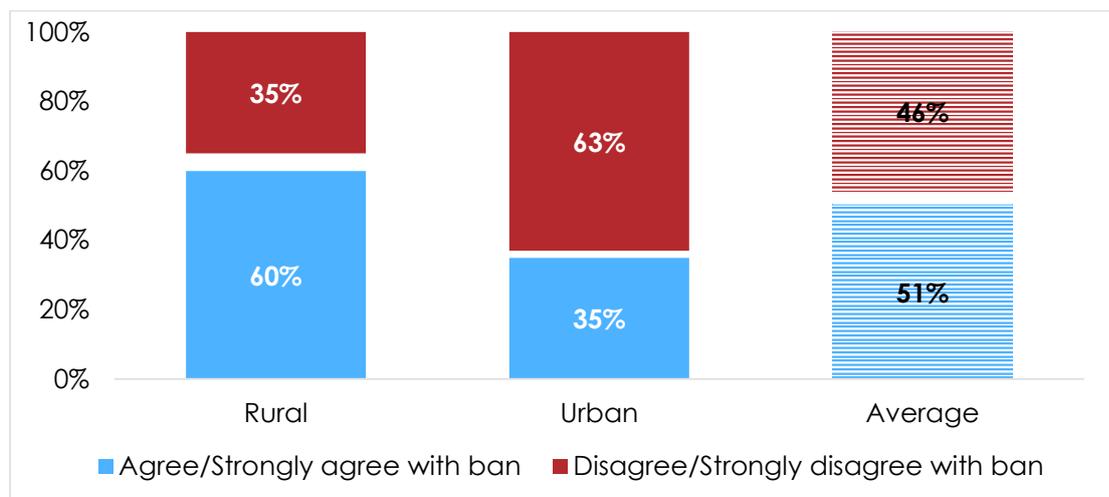
To ban or not to ban incentives to teachers?

Over the past five years or so, many parents have started paying incentives to teachers, both to supplement the teachers' small salaries and to obtain extra lessons to help their children

catch up in their work. This practice gained ground during the COVID-19 pandemic as learning was disrupted due to the closure of schools for nearly half a year and erratic school calendars.

The new law makes it illegal for parents and guardians to give teachers incentives in cash or kind in exchange for extra lessons, but Zimbabweans are divided on this question: 51% favour the ban on such incentives, while 46% oppose it (Figure 9). Views differ sharply in cities and rural areas: 60% of rural respondents support the ban, compared to just 35% of their urban counterparts.

Figure 9: To ban or not to ban teacher incentives | Zimbabwe | 2022

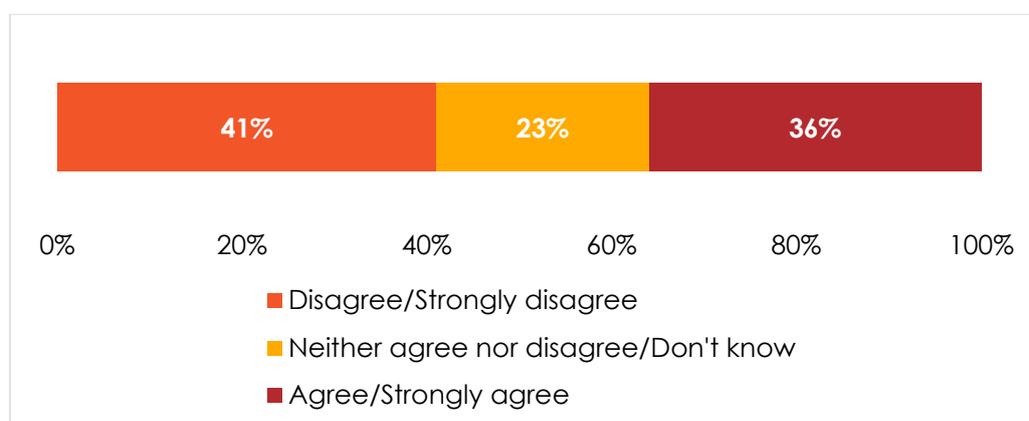


Respondents were asked: For each of the following policies, please tell me whether you agree or disagree: Banning payment of both monetary and non-monetary incentives to teachers for extra lessons?

Citizens divided over CALA projects

Zimbabweans are also divided when it comes to continuous assessment and learning activities (CALA), which are required for examination classes and make up almost one-third of the pupils' marks. Slightly more than a third (36%) of survey respondents support these activities, while 41% are against them, and 23% don't know or don't take a stand (Figure 10).

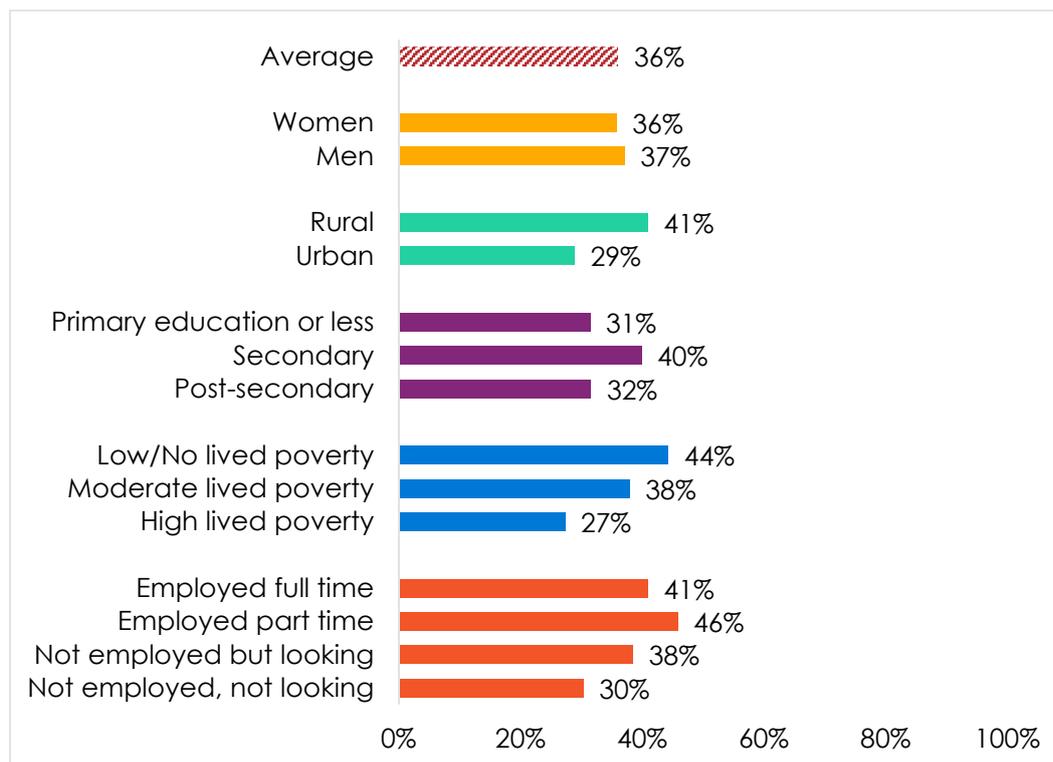
Figure 10: Should schools use CALA? | Zimbabwe | 2022



Respondents were asked: For each of the following policies, please tell me whether you agree or disagree: Introducing continuous assessment and learning activities or CALA projects by students?

Here, too, urban and rural residents hold sharply different views. In rural areas, 41% support CALA projects, compared to only 29% in cities. CALA projects are more popular among economically better-off citizens (44%) than among those experiencing high lived poverty¹ (27%) (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Support for CALA projects | by demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2022



Respondents were asked: For each of the following policies, please tell me whether you agree or disagree: Introducing continuous assessment and learning activities or CALA projects by students? (% who “agree” or “strongly agree”)

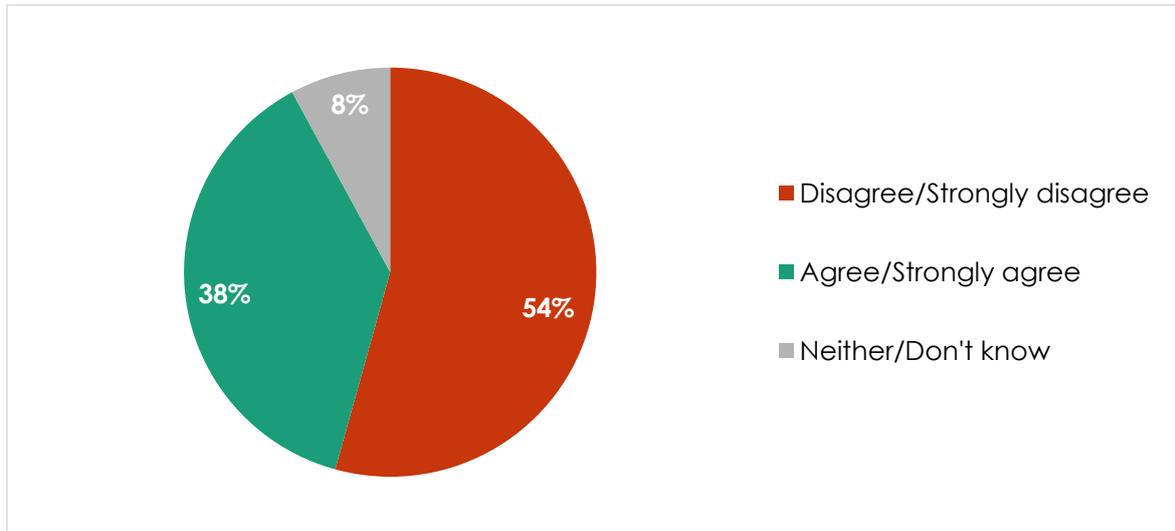
Online lessons not that popular

When students could not have in-person lessons because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government introduced online lessons. At the peak of the pandemic, this was the only method used. As the pandemic lessened, most schools – especially tertiary institutions and private schools – retained this learning method to complement in-person learning. But online lessons are not overwhelmingly popular with the public: More than half (54%) of respondents dislike them, while only 38% favour the implementation of online lessons (Figure 12).

Opposition to online lessons is higher among women than men (59% vs. 50%). It increases with respondents’ experience of poverty, ranging from 48% of those with low or no lived poverty to 60% of those with high lived poverty, who may often lack the connectivity necessary to benefit from online learning (Figure 13).

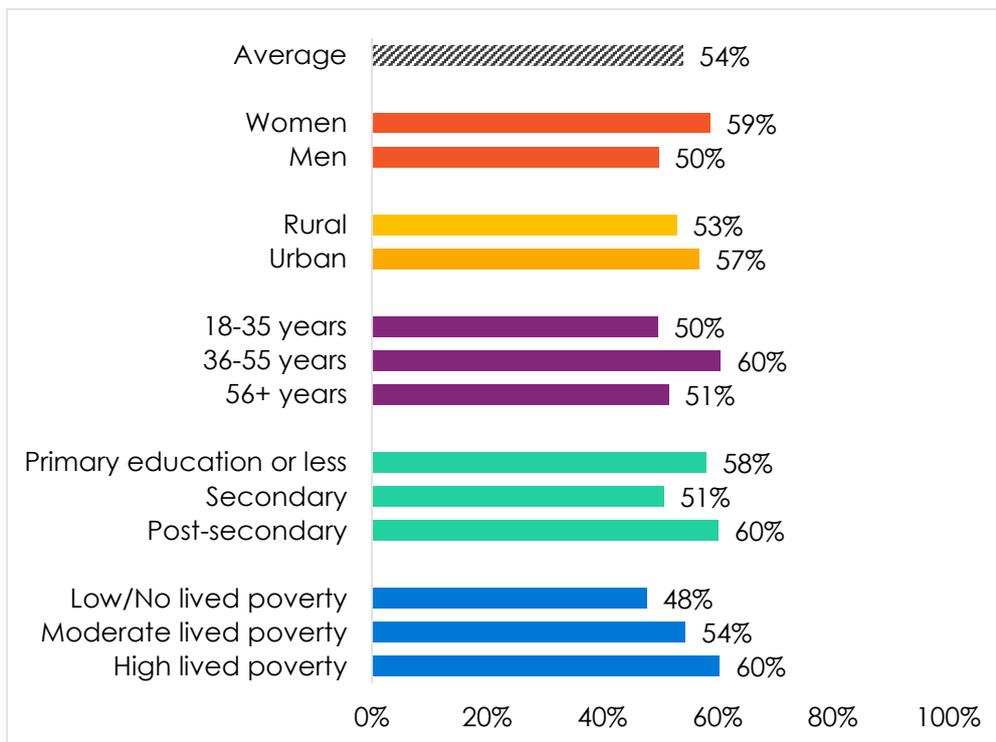
¹ Afrobarometer’s Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents’ levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes & Patel (2022).

Figure 12: Views on online lessons | Zimbabwe | 2022



Respondents were asked: For each of the following policies, please tell me whether you agree or disagree: Implementation of online lessons?

Figure 13: Opposition to online lessons | by demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2022



Respondents were asked: For each of the following policies, please tell me whether you agree or disagree: Implementation of online lessons? (% who “disagree” or “strongly disagree”)

Conclusion

Recent measures intended to strengthen Zimbabwe's schools draw mixed reviews from citizens. They strongly endorse allowing pregnant girls to continue their education, but they

strongly reject a ban on corporal punishment in schools. They are divided on the value of the CALA activities and the feasibility of online learning.

Despite these reforms, they are still fairly united – with a two-thirds majority – in seeing the government's efforts on education as inadequate, and they place education among their top priorities for needed action.

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