

Batswana say citizens and government must act to protect the environment

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 669 | Marcelline Amouzou

Summary

Botswana's abundant wildlife, unique landscapes – from deserts to one of the world's largest deltas, the Okavango – and low crime rate have made it one of Africa's most popular tourist destinations. Tourism contributed an estimated 8% of gross domestic product in 2021 (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2022).

But the country's economic cornerstone is still diamond mining, which makes up about 85% of the country's foreign earnings (International Trade Administration, 2022). Along with copper, cobalt, silver, and other minerals, diamonds have played a critical role in enabling Botswana to climb from poor to high-middle-income status as mining revenues funded infrastructure and stabilised the country's economy (International Monetary Fund, 2022).

Building wealth, mining has also fuelled urbanisation and development that contribute to Botswana's environmental challenges, including the management of scarce water resources; the collection and disposal of household and hazardous waste; and air pollution, especially in urban and mining areas (Government of Botswana, 2022; Wiston, 2017; United Nations Development Programme, 2023).

This dispatch reports on a special survey module included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 questionnaire that explores citizens' experiences and perceptions of pollution, environmental governance, and natural resource extraction.

In Botswana, a majority of citizens consider pollution a serious problem in their community and cite trash disposal as their most important environmental issue. Most see it as the responsibility of ordinary citizens to reduce pollution, but they also expect much greater effort by the government to protect the environment – though not at the cost of jobs and incomes.

While their perceptions of natural resource extraction are more positive than negative, Batswana overwhelmingly favour tighter government regulation of the industry to reduce its damaging impacts on 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. Nine survey rounds in up to 42 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2023) cover 39 countries. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Botswana, led by Star Awards, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,200 adult Batswana in July-August 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 Afrobarometer surveys were conducted in 1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2019. Surveys are conducted in English and Setswana.

Key findings

On pollution and environmental governance:

- More than half (56%) of Batswana consider pollution a “somewhat serious” or “very serious” problem in their community.
 - Two-thirds of Batswana (67%) say that trash disposal is the most important environmental issue in their community.
 - Almost nine in 10 citizens (87%) say plastic bags are a major source of pollution in Botswana.
- Three-fourths (76%) of Batswana say ordinary citizens bear primary responsibility for reducing pollution and keeping their communities clean. Far fewer assign this task primarily to the national (13%) or local (3%) government.
- While 56% of respondents think the government is doing a good job of protecting the environment, a far larger majority (87%) say it should be doing more on this issue.
- However, if environmental protection conflicts with economic development, a majority (57%) of Batswana say the government should prioritise creating jobs and increasing incomes.

On natural resource extraction:

- By a nearly 2-to-1 margin, Batswana say the benefits of natural resource extraction outweigh its environmental costs.
- However, most (88%) say the government should regulate the industry more tightly to reduce its damaging impacts on the environment.

Pollution and environmental governance

Pollution: The scope of the problem

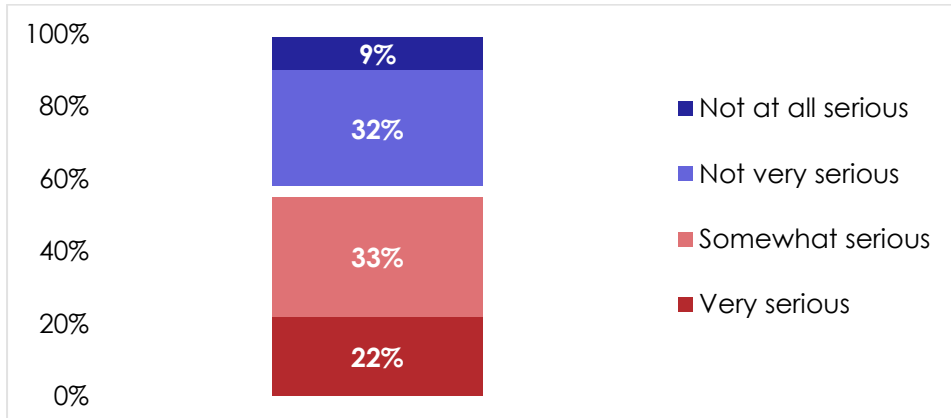
More than half (56%) of the people of Botswana consider pollution in their communities a “somewhat serious” (33%) or “very serious” (22%) problem (Figure 1).¹ About four in 10 believe pollution is “not very serious (32%)” or “not at all serious” (9%).

Urban residents are more troubled by pollution than rural residents (69% vs. 49%) (Figure 2). Concern increases with respondents’ economic status, ranging from 50% among those experiencing high lived poverty² to 62% among the best-off respondents. Similarly, citizens with no formal schooling (50%) are less likely to consider pollution a serious problem than their more educated counterparts (56%-59%). And pollution is a greater concern among the youngest respondents (63% of 18- to 25-year-olds) than among their elders (51%-57%).

¹ Due to rounding, percentages for combined categories reported in the text may differ slightly from the sum of sub-categories shown in figures (e.g. 22% “very serious” and 33% “somewhat serious” sum to 56%).

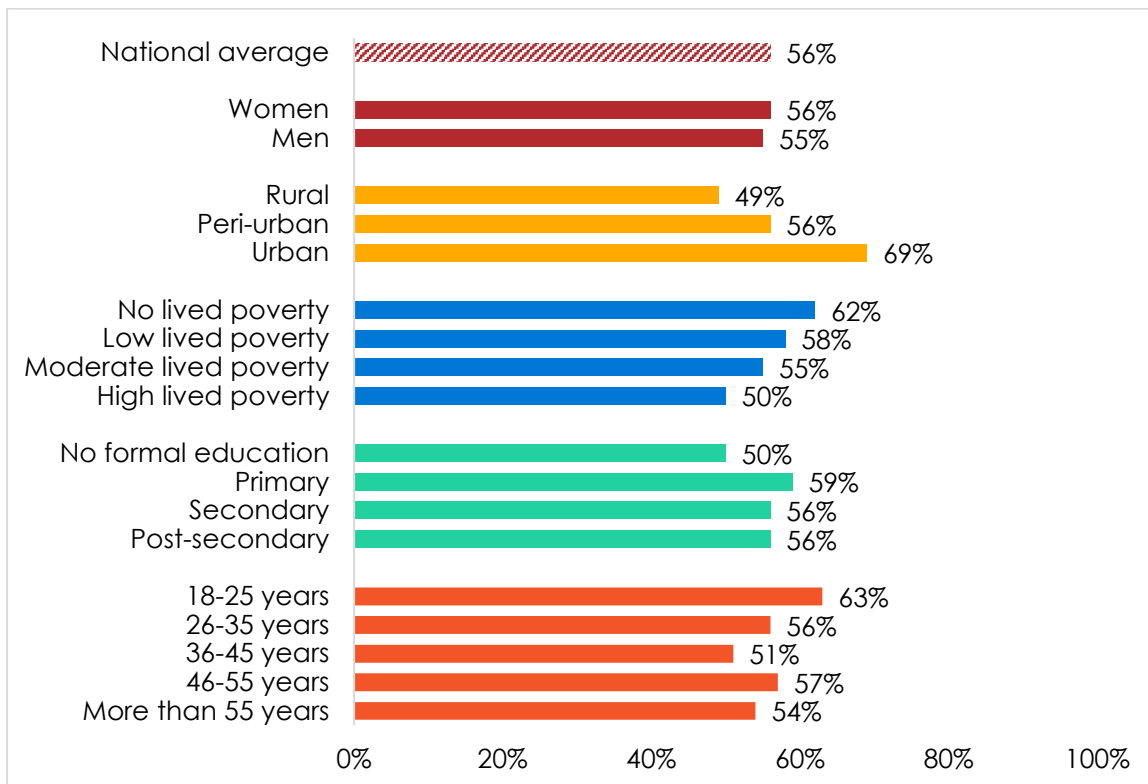
² Afrobarometer’s Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents’ levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes and Patel (2022).

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

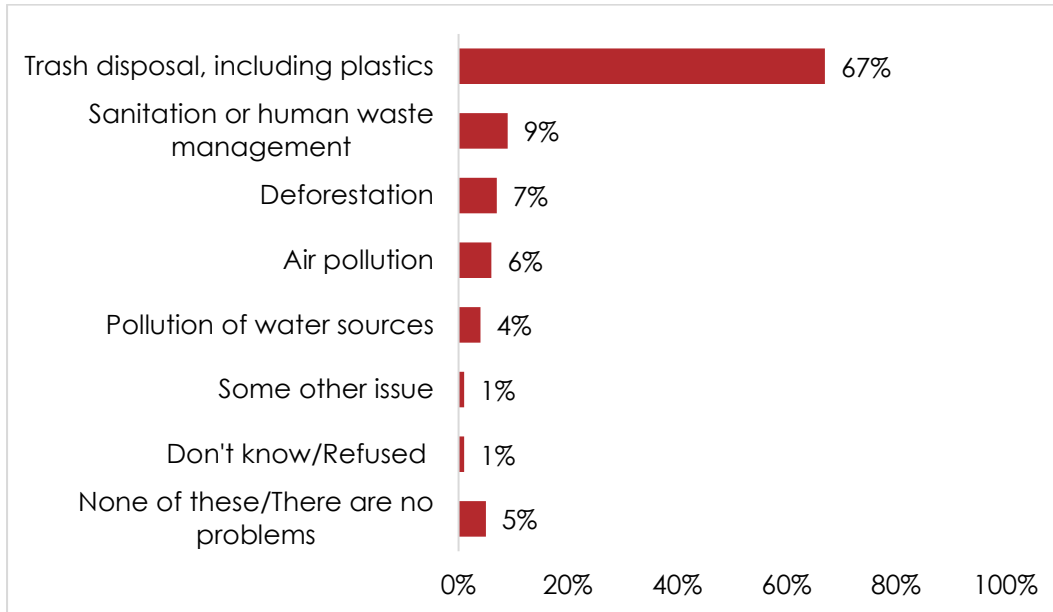


Respondents were asked: How serious a problem is pollution, such as the accumulation of trash or garbage, or damage to the quality of the air, the water, or the land, in your community? (% who say "somewhat serious" or "very serious")

Batswana rank trash disposal as the most important environmental issue in their community (67%), while fewer than one in 10 cite human waste management (9%), deforestation (7%), air pollution (6%), and water pollution (4%) as their top priority (Figure 3).

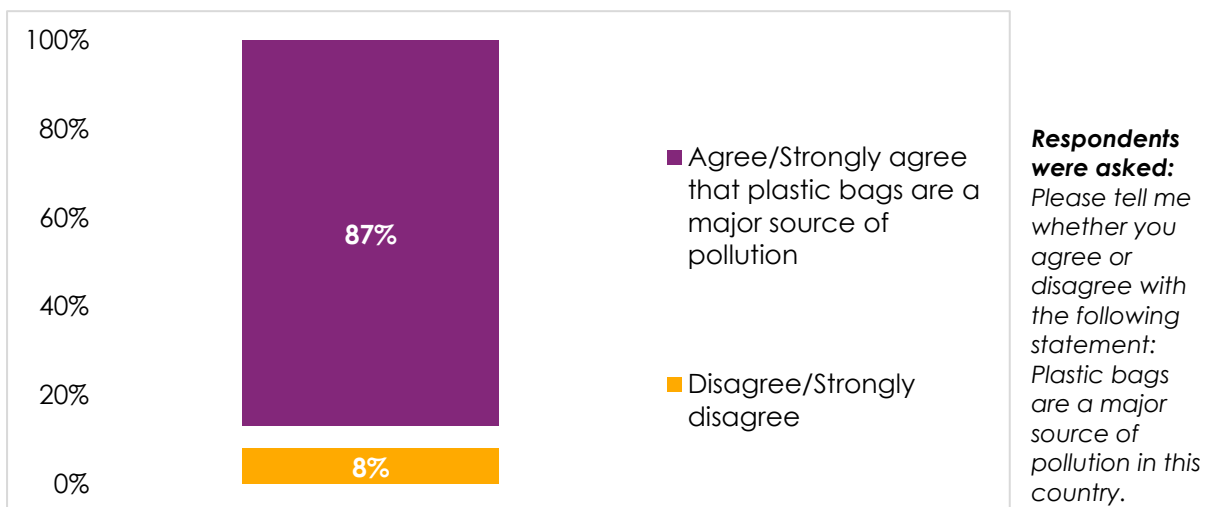
Almost nine out of 10 citizens (87%) say that plastic bags are a major source of pollution in Botswana (Figure 4).

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



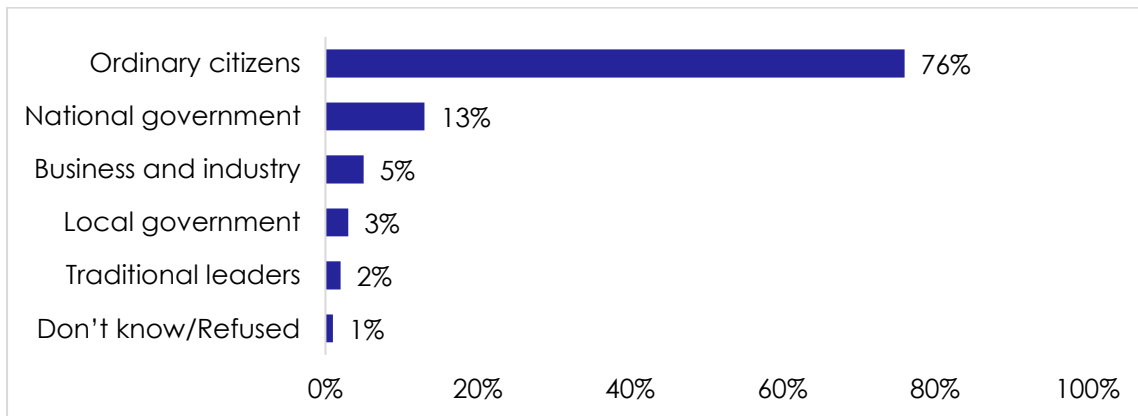
Protecting the environment

For most Botswana, protecting the environment starts at home: Three-fourths (76%) say ordinary citizens should bear primary responsibility for reducing pollution and keeping their communities clean (Figure 5). Far fewer assign this task primarily to the national government (13%), business and industry (5%), local government (3%), or traditional leaders (2%).

Overall, more than half (56%) of citizens say the government is doing "fairly well" or "very well" on reducing pollution and protecting the environment, while 34% are not impressed with the government's performance (Figure 6).

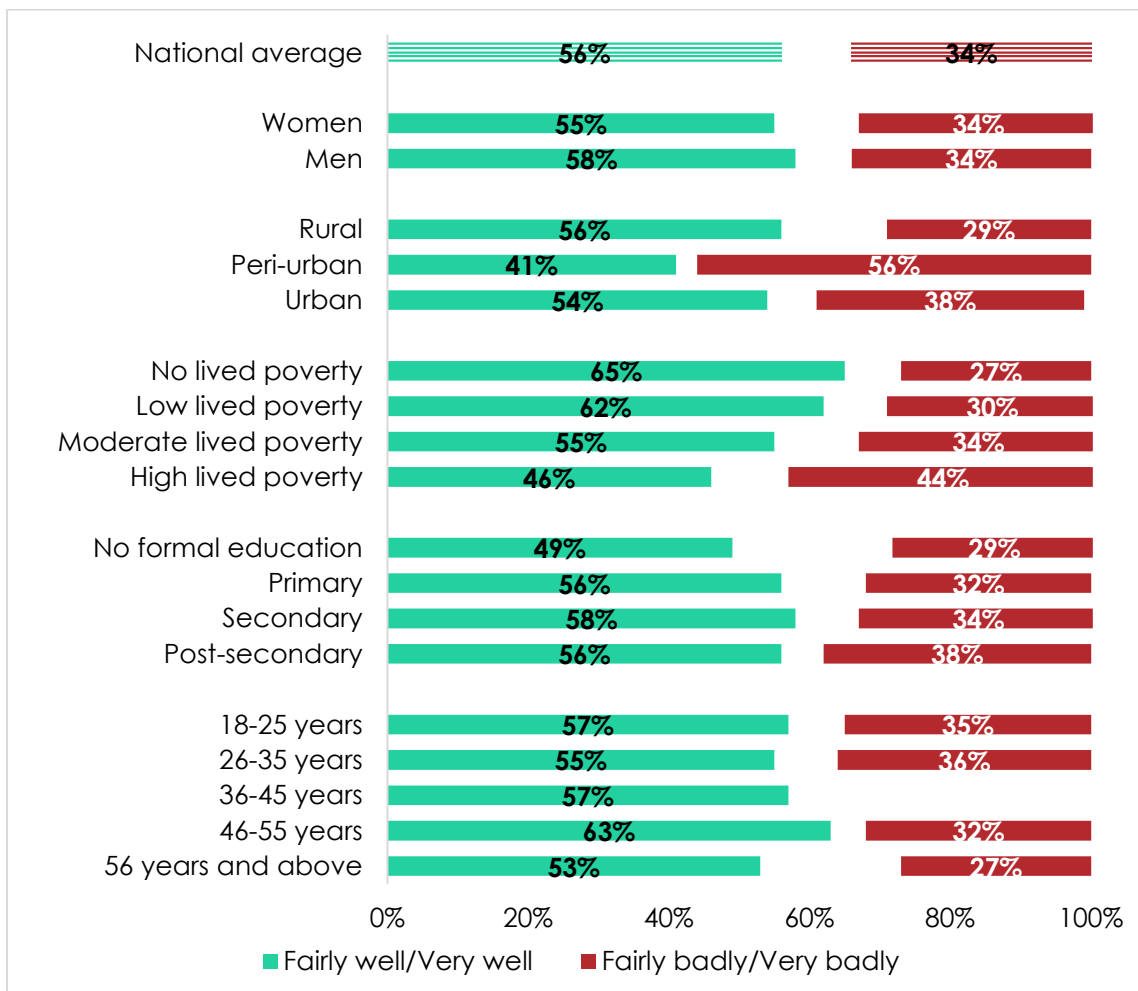
Approval of the government's efforts is least common among the poorest respondents (46%), those with no formal education (49%), and residents in peri-urban areas (41%).

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



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

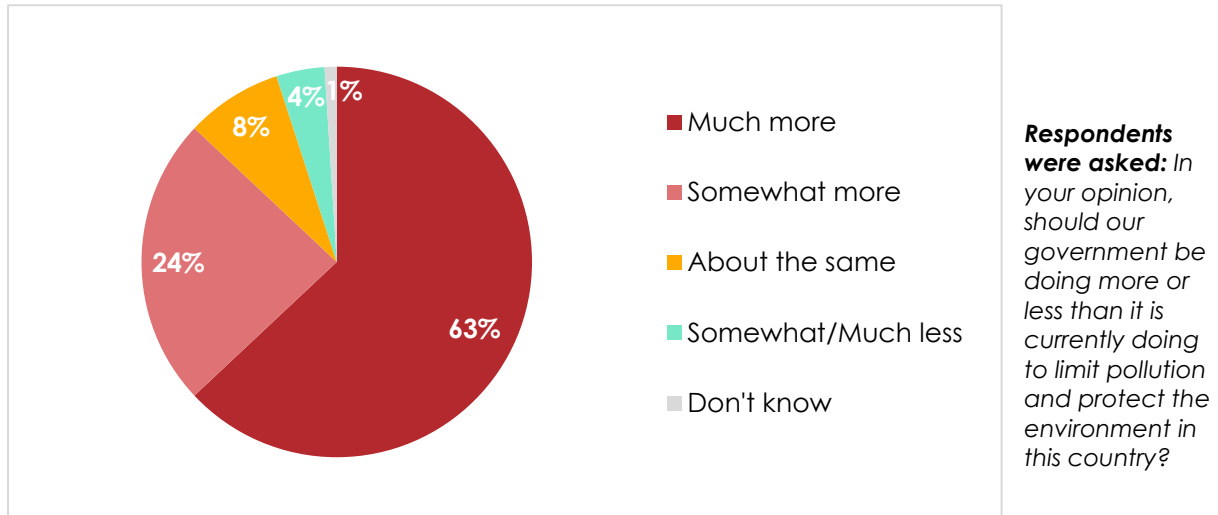
Figure 6: Government performance on reducing pollution and protecting the environment | by demographic group | Botswana | 2022



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?

But despite majority approval of the government's performance, most citizens (87%) say it should be doing more to limit pollution and protect the environment, including 63% who want it to do "much more" (Figure 7).

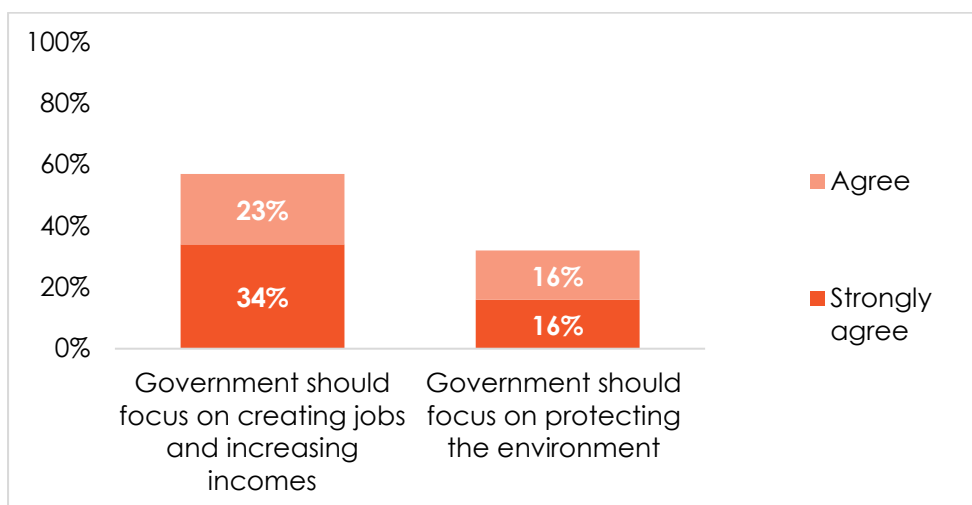
Figure 7: Should the government do more to limit pollution? | Botswana | 2022



However, if environmental-protection policies come into conflict with economic development, a majority (57%) of Botswana say the government should focus on creating jobs and increasing incomes, even at the cost of increasing environmental damage. Only 32% would prioritise environmental protection over job creation (Figure 8).

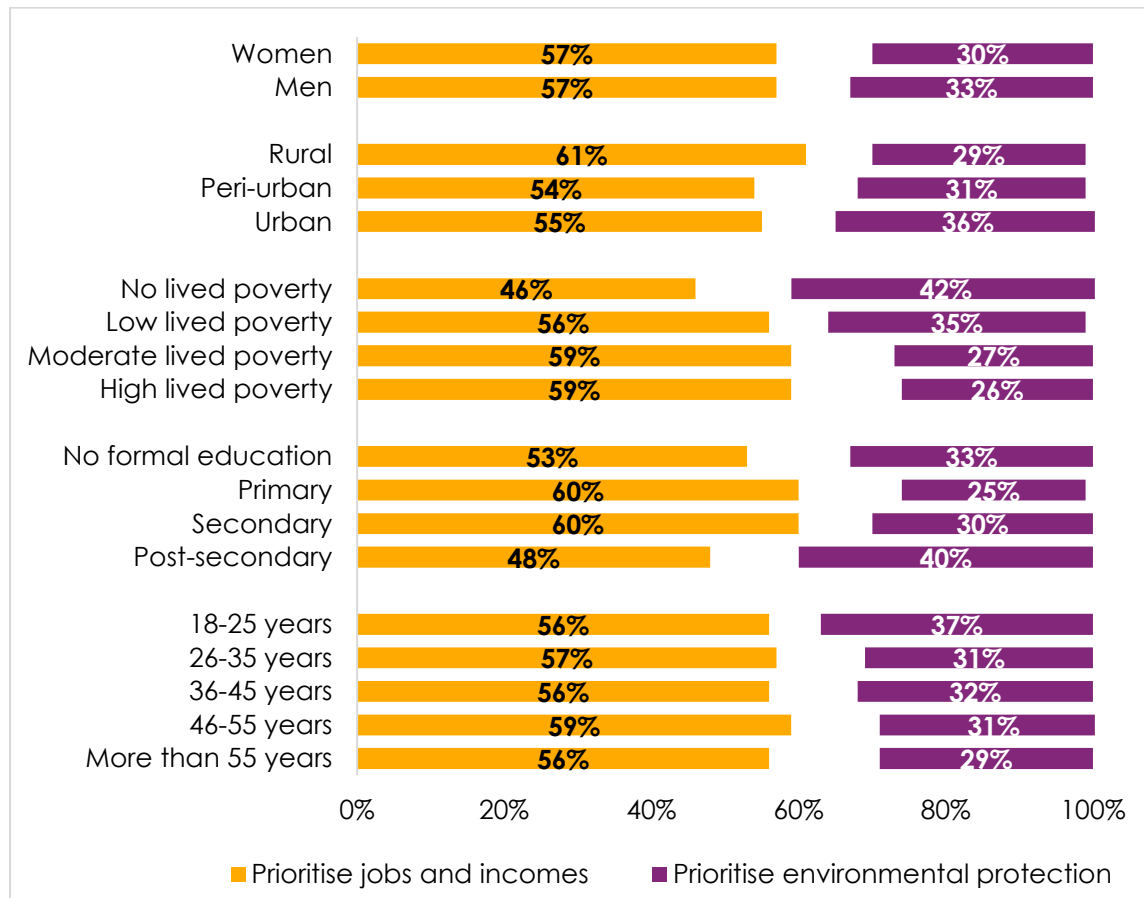
Emphasis on jobs and incomes rather than the environment is particularly strong among rural residents (61%) and respondents experiencing moderate or high lived poverty (59%) (Figure 9). The wealthy (42%) and those with post-secondary education (40%) are most likely to prioritise environmental protection.

Figure 8: Should the government prioritise jobs or the environment? | Botswana | 2022



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 The government should focus on creating jobs and increasing incomes, even if that means increasing pollution or other environmental damage.
 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.

Figure 9: Should government prioritise jobs or the environment? | by demographic group | Botswana | 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

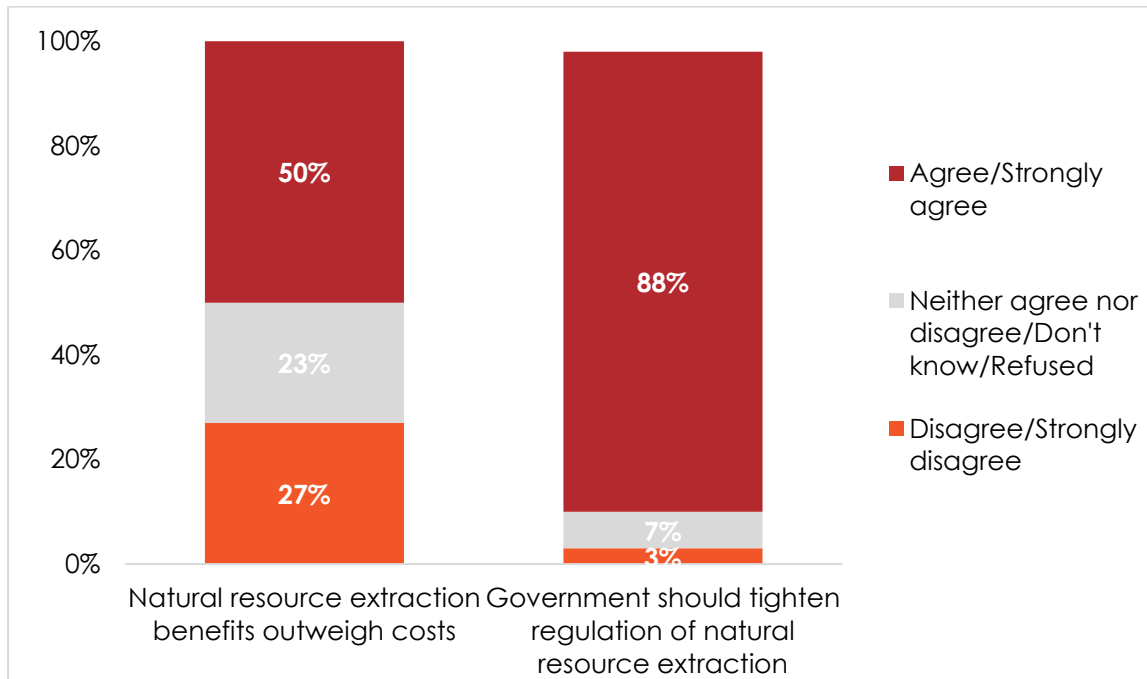
While the mining sector plays a major role in Botswana's economic development, it also helps drive some of its environmental challenges.

By a 50%-to-27% margin, Botswana says that the benefits of natural resource extraction outweigh its costs, including pollution (Figure 10). Almost one-fourth (23%) of respondents maintain a neutral stance or say they “don't know” how the benefits and costs associated with natural resource extraction balance out.

However, they overwhelmingly (88%) agree that the government should regulate the industry more tightly to reduce its damaging impacts on the environment.

More than three-fourths (77%) of Botswana says that ordinary citizens have a voice in decisions concerning natural resource extraction that takes place near their communities (Figure 11). But only 36% think communities receive their fair share of revenues from resource extraction, while a plurality (44%) say they don't and 20% say they “don't know” or don't take a position.

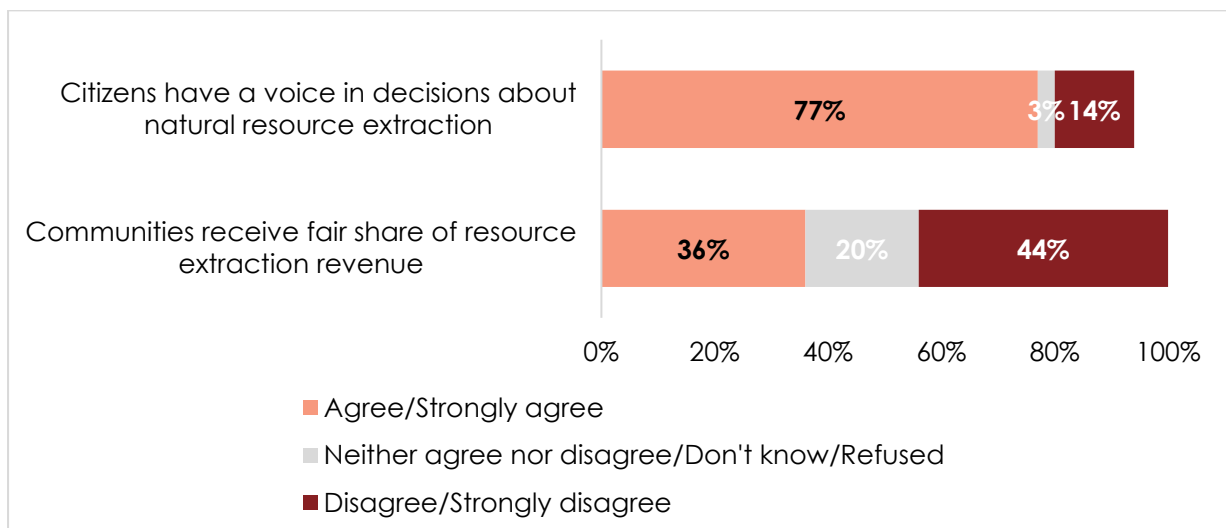
Figure 10: Natural resource extraction: Costs vs. benefits | Botswana | 2022



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.

Figure 11: Natural resource extraction: Citizens' voice and benefit | Botswana | 2022



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

Ordinary Botswana 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

A majority of Batswana see pollution as a serious problem in their community, and inadequate trash disposal as the most serious offender. They believe that ordinary citizens must assume primary responsibility for reducing pollution and keeping their communities clean, but they also expect “much more” from the government to protect the environment – including tighter regulation of natural resource extraction.

Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It’s easy and free at www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

References

- Government of Botswana. (2022). Botswana state of environment and outlook report 2022.
- International Monetary Fund. (2018). Botswana: Mining a new growth model.
- International Trade Administration. (2022). Botswana-country commercial guide: Mining & minerals.
- Mattes, R., & Patel, J. (2022). Lived poverty resurgent. Afrobarometer Policy Paper 84.
- United Nations Development Programme. (2023). Botswana: Environment and climate change.
- Wiston, M. (2017). Status of air pollution in Botswana and significance to air quality and human health. *Journal of Health and Pollution*, 7(15), 8-17.
- World Travel and Tourism Council. (2022). Botswana: 2022 annual research: Key highlights.

Marcelline Amouzou is a PhD student in political science at the University of Florida. Email: m.amouzou@ufl.edu.

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.

Financial support for Afrobarometer is provided by Sweden via the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) via the U.S. Institute of Peace, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Open Society Foundations - Africa, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the European Union, the National Endowment for Democracy, the Mastercard Foundation, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the University of California San Diego, the Global Centre for Pluralism, the World Bank Group, Freedom House, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda, GIZ, and Humanity United.

Donations help Afrobarometer give voice to African citizens. Please consider making a contribution (at www.afrobarometer.org) or contact Felix Biga (felixbiga@afrobarometer.org) or Runyararo Munetsi (runyararo@afrobarometer.org) to discuss institutional funding.

Follow our releases on #VoicesAfrica.



Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 669 | 12 July 2023