

Nigerians look to government, private sector, developed countries for action to limit climate change

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 709 | Sunday Joseph Duntoye, Chukwudebe Nwanze, and Raphael Mbaegbu

Summary

After devastating floods last year killed more than 600 Nigerians and displaced hundreds of thousands, scientists made headlines with their finding that the disaster was made “80 times more likely” by climate change (Kabukuru, 2022; VoA, 2022; BBC, 2022). And while such a precise estimate may be open to debate, few scientists doubt that climate change will continue to put Nigerians’ livelihoods and lives at ever-increasing risk.

Frequent flooding joins drought, increasing temperatures, and rising sea levels among the climate-change threats the country faces, with cascading consequences that include diminished crop yields, reduced livestock production, food shortages, income loss, infrastructure damage, and a mounting burden of disease, such as an upsurge in malaria cases (Daily Trust, 2022; World Bank, 2021; Guardian, 2021).

The Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (2022) ranking of Nigeria in 154th place out of 185 countries reflects high vulnerability to climate change and extremely low readiness – 14th-worst in the world – to confront the threat.

In addition to committing to regional and global agreements such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the government has outlined strategies and plans to strengthen the country’s climate resilience in its National Climate Change Policy for Nigeria 2021-2030 (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2021). Another milestone was former President Muhammadu Buhari’s signing of the Climate Change Act in 2021, providing a legal framework for the country’s climate objectives (PwC Nigeria, 2022; Cable, 2021).

This dispatch reports on a special survey module included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 questionnaire to explore Nigerians’ experiences and perceptions of climate change.

Findings show that a majority of Nigerians remain unfamiliar with the concept of climate change. Among those who are aware, most say it is making life worse. While citizens believe they can play a role in limiting climate change, most say the government must take the lead, with support from the private sector and more developed countries.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Nine rounds of surveys have been completed in up to 42 countries since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2023) cover 39 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent’s choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Nigeria, led by NOIPolls, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,600 adult Nigerians in March 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2.5 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous standard surveys were conducted in Nigeria in 2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2015, 2017, and 2020.

Key findings

- More than half of Nigerians say droughts (51%) and floods (56%) have become less severe over the past 10 years.
- Only three in 10 adults (30%) have heard of climate change. Among those who are aware of climate change:
 - Two-thirds (66%) say it is making life in Nigeria worse.
 - Seven in 10 (69%) believe that ordinary citizens can help curb climate change.
 - Similarly, 71% want the government to take immediate action to limit climate change, even if it is expensive, causes job losses, or takes a toll on the economy.
 - Most Nigerians (76%) assign primary responsibility for addressing climate change to their government.
 - Large majorities say the fight against climate change requires “a lot more” effort from the government (85%), business and industry (75%), developed countries (73%), and citizens (58%).
- Six in 10 citizens (61%) say the government is doing a poor job of addressing climate change.

Severity of extreme weather conditions

Before asking about climate change, Afrobarometer asked about respondents' experiences with extreme weather conditions in the area where they live. Half (51%) of Nigerians say droughts have become “somewhat less severe” or “much less severe” over the past 10 years. A quarter (25%) say droughts have become more severe, and 19% report no change (Figure 1).

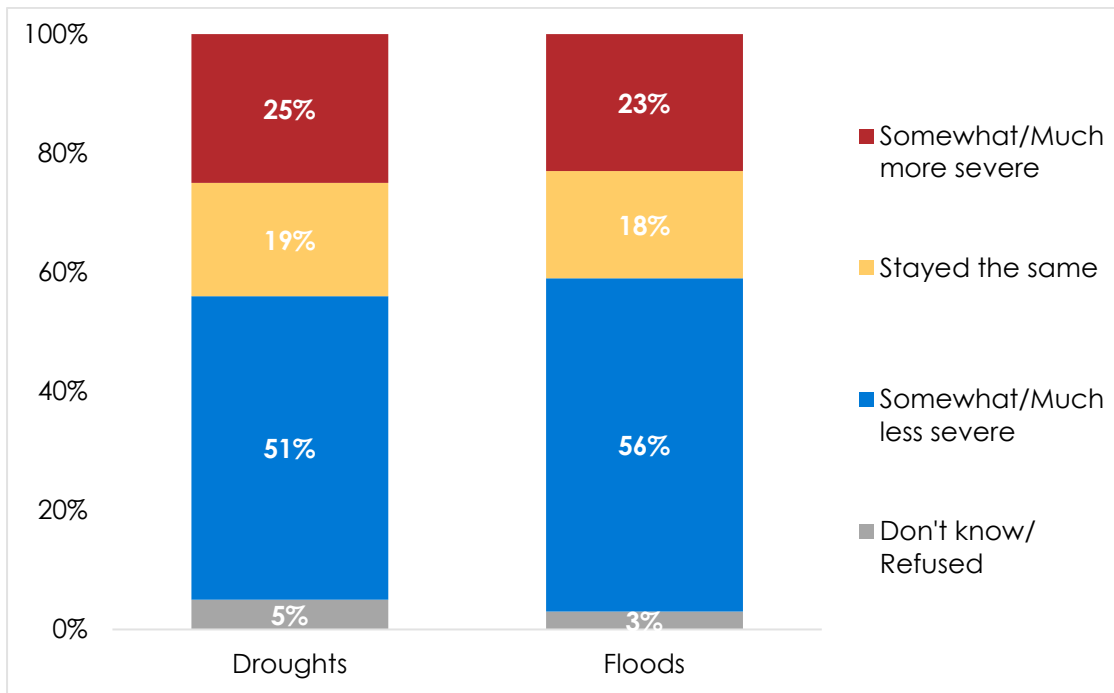
Similarly, a majority of citizens (56%) say floods have decreased in severity, while 23% say they have gotten worse.

These findings are almost identical to those reported in 2017 (Figure 2).

Rural residents are more likely than urbanites to report increasingly severe droughts (30% vs. 18%) and worsening floods (26% vs. 19%), perhaps reflecting a greater awareness of the effects of weather in more agricultural areas (Figure 3). Economically well-off respondents (those experiencing low or no “lived poverty”¹) are less likely to report increasingly severe droughts or floods, conceivably because they are more sheltered than their poorer counterparts.

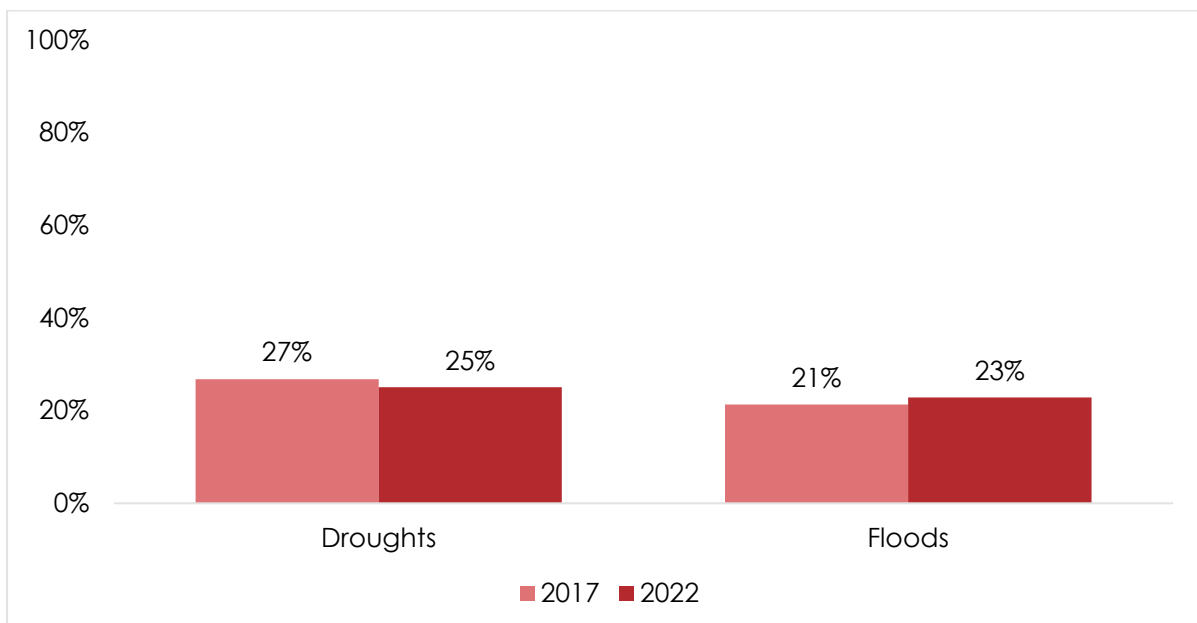
¹ Afrobarometer’s Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents’ levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty,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

Figure 1: Severity of droughts and floods | Nigeria | 2022



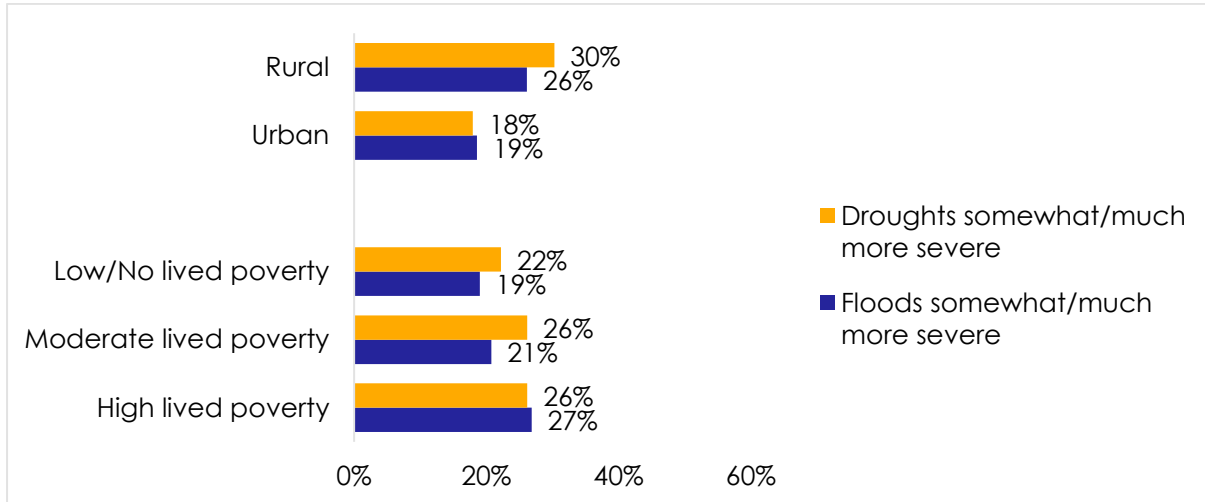
Respondents were asked: In your experience, over the past 10 years, has there been any change in the severity of the following events in the area where you live? Have they become more severe, less severe, or stayed about the same?

Figure 2: More severe droughts and floods | Nigeria | 2017-2022



Respondents were asked: In your experience, over the past 10 years, has there been any change in the severity of the following events in the area where you live? Drought? Flood? (% who say "somewhat more severe" or "much more severe")

Figure 3: More severe droughts and floods | by urban-rural residence and lived poverty | Nigeria | 2022



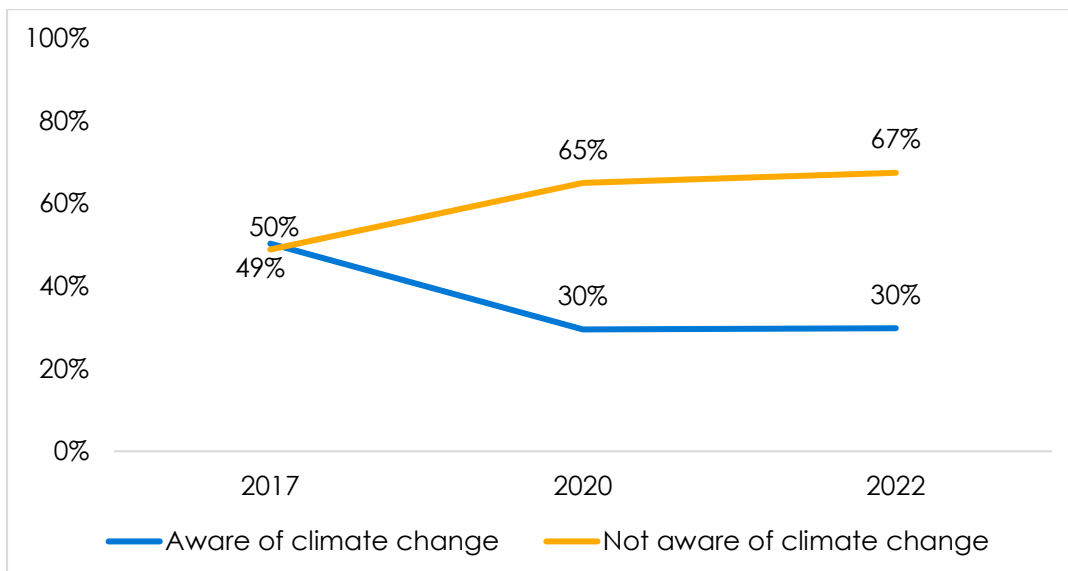
Respondents were asked: In your experience, over the past 10 years, has there been any change in the severity of the following events in the area where you live? (% who say “somewhat more severe” or “much more severe”)

Climate change

Awareness of climate change

Lack of awareness can be a major obstacle to climate-change adaptation in developing countries (Shahid & Piracha, 2016). In Nigeria, only three in 10 adults (30%) say they have heard of climate change. This is the same level of awareness reported in 2020 but 20 percentage points lower than in 2017 (50%), when public awareness of a lack of rain may have been unusually high (Figure 4).

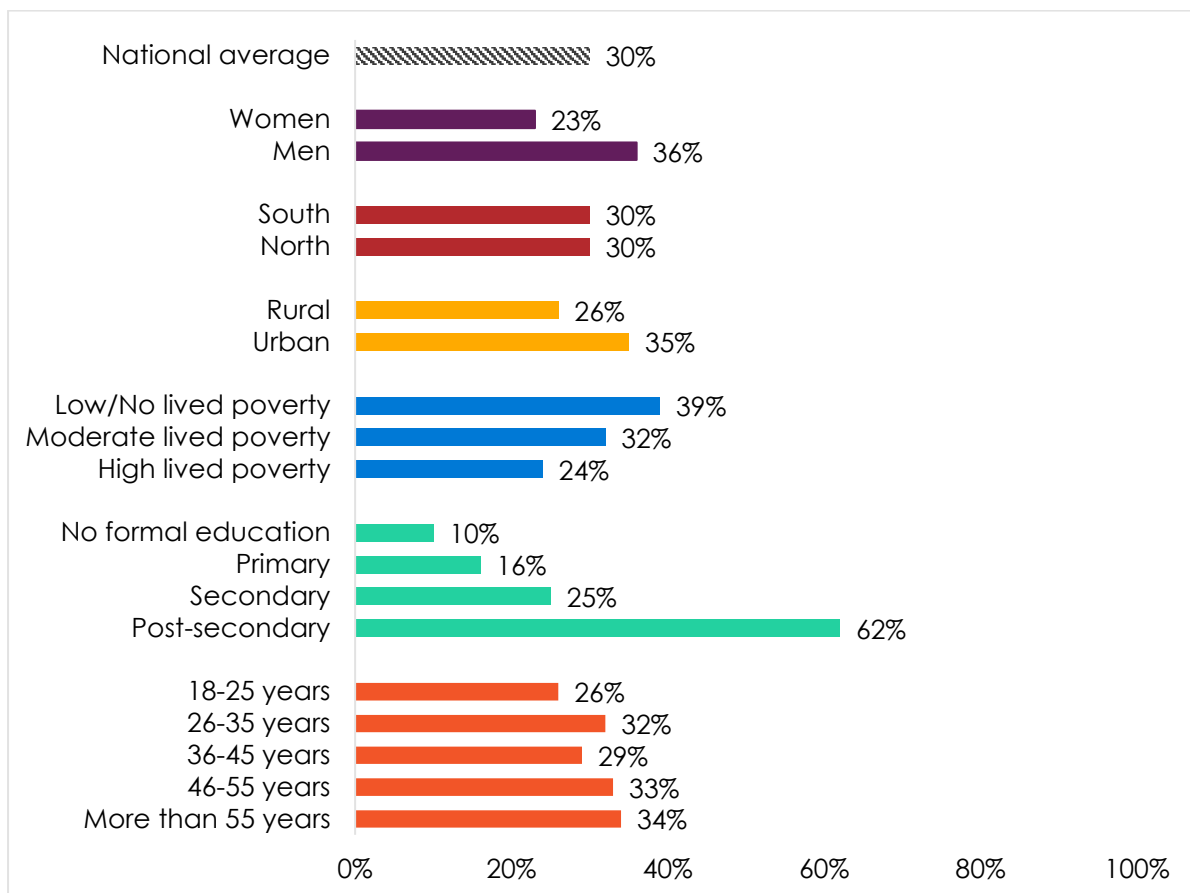
Figure 4: Awareness of climate change | Nigeria | 2017-2022



Respondents were asked: Have you heard about climate change, or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet?

Although the experience of increasingly severe weather is more common in rural areas, awareness of climate change is lower among rural residents than urbanites (26% vs. 35%) (Figure 5). Poorer citizens are less familiar with the term “climate change” (24% among those with high lived poverty vs. 39% among better-off citizens). Awareness of climate change gathers strength as respondents’ education level rises: The most educated respondents are six times as likely to be familiar with the concept as the uneducated (62% vs.10%). More men (36%) than women (23%) are aware of climate change, and older respondents are more likely than the youngest to know about the phenomenon (34% vs. 26%).

Figure 5: Awareness of climate change | by demographic group | Nigeria | 2022

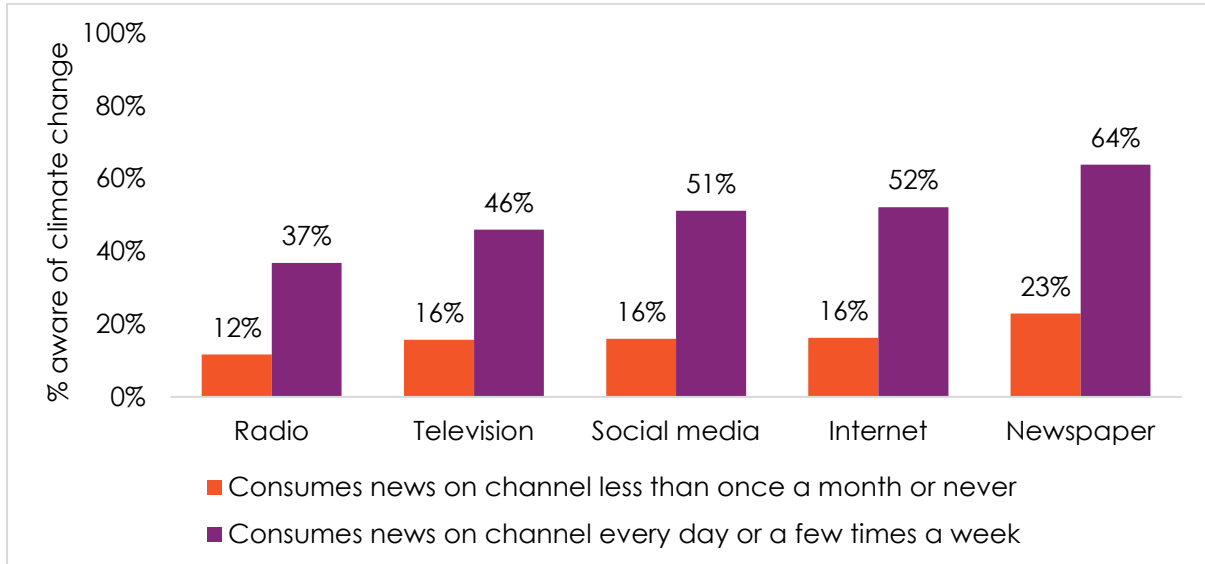


Respondents were asked: Have you heard about climate change, or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet? (% who say "yes")

Awareness of climate change increases with respondents' consumption of news via most media platforms. Among those who never or seldom (less than once a month) get news from the radio, television, social media, the Internet, or newspapers, only 12%-23% have heard of climate change (Figure 6). But awareness of climate change is significantly higher among respondents who get news "every day" or "a few times a week" from newspapers (64%), the Internet (52%), social media (51%), television (46%), and radio (37%).

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Figure 6: Awareness of climate change | by news media consumption | Nigeria | 2022



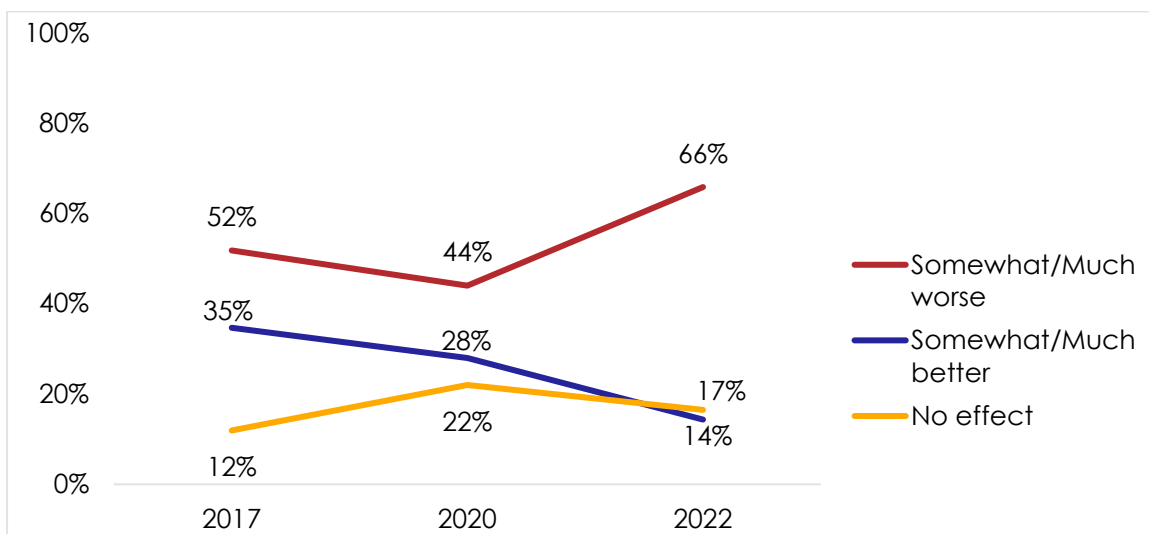
Respondents were asked:

*How often do you get news from the following sources?
 Have you heard about climate change, or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet?
 (% who say "yes")*

Effects of climate change

Among citizens who are aware of climate change, two-thirds (66%) say it is making life in Nigeria "somewhat worse" (40%) or "much worse" (26%). Only about three in 10 say it is making life better (14%) or has had no effect on their lives (17%) (Figure 7). Perceptions of the adverse effect of climate change have increased sharply from 2020 (44%) after decreasing from 2017 (52%).

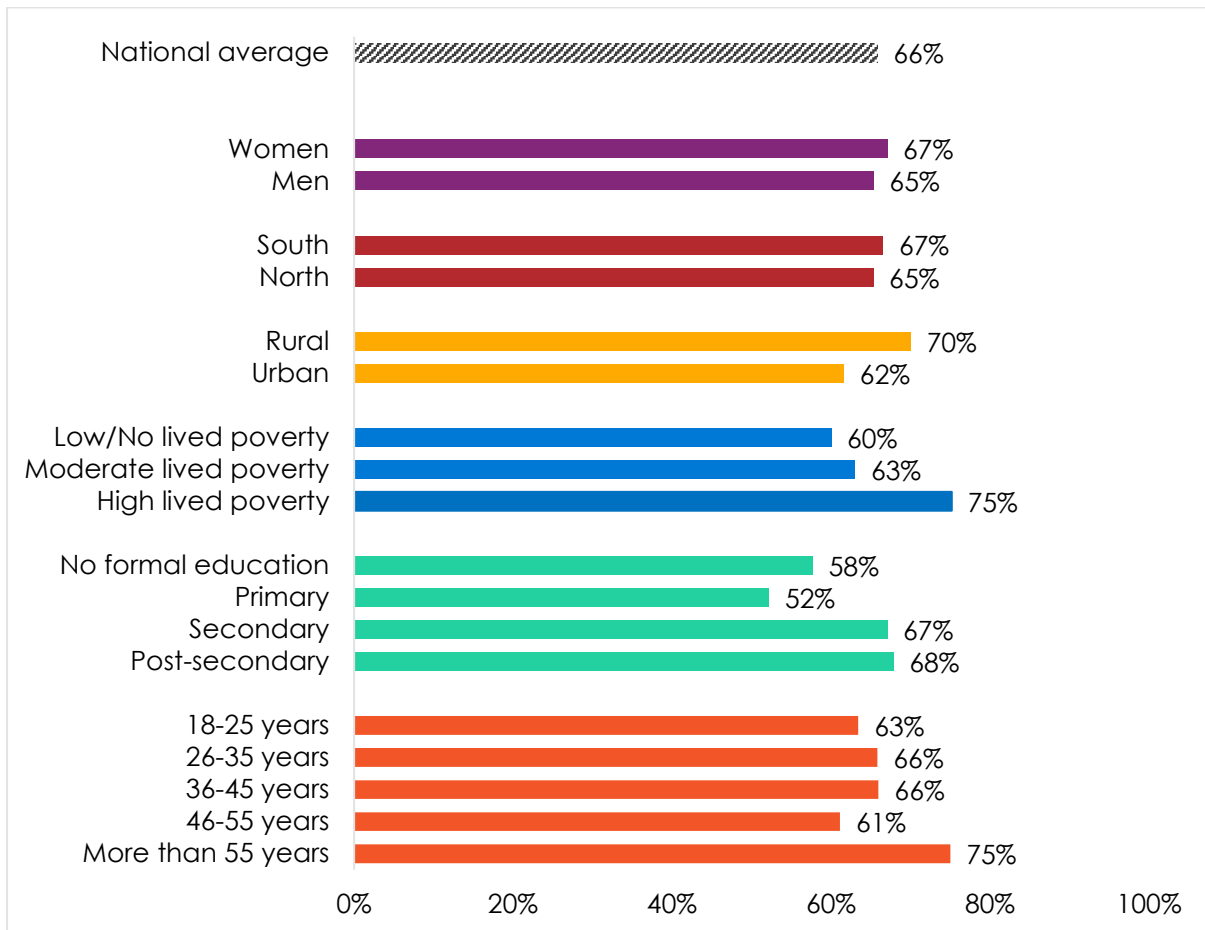
Figure 7: Effect of climate change | Nigeria | 2017-2022



Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked: *Do you think climate change is making life in Nigeria better or worse, or haven't you heard enough to say? (Respondents who are not aware of climate change are excluded.)*

The negative impact of climate change is felt more widely in rural areas than in cities (70% vs. 62%) (Figure 8). Citizens who are 56 or older (75%) and those experiencing high lived poverty (75%) are also more likely to report negative effects than their younger and better-off counterparts, as are respondents with secondary or post-secondary education (67%-68%) compared to those with primary schooling or less (52%-58%).

Figure 8: Climate change is making life worse | by demographic group | Nigeria | 2022



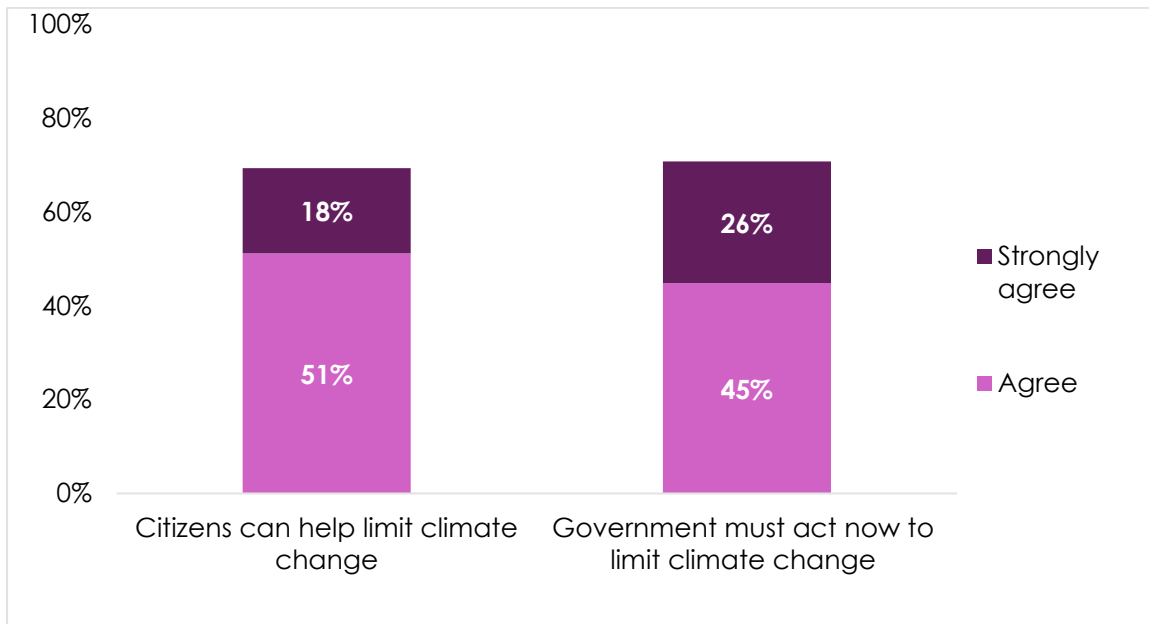
Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked: Do you think climate change is making life in Nigeria better or worse, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who say "somewhat worse" or "much worse") (Respondents who are not aware of climate change are excluded.)

Fighting climate change

Large majorities of Nigerians believe that both ordinary citizens and the government have a role to play in limiting climate change. About seven in 10 respondents (69%) who are aware of climate change "agree" or "strongly agree" that citizens can help curb climate change (Figure 9). A similar proportion (71%) want their government to take steps now to limit climate change, even if it is expensive, causes job losses, or takes a toll on the economy.

However, when it comes to who holds the primary responsibility for fighting climate change and reducing its impact, three-quarters (76%) of respondents point to the government (Figure 10). Far fewer assign lead responsibility to ordinary citizens (14%), developed countries (3%), and business and industry (2%).

Figure 9: Limiting climate change | Nigeria | 2022



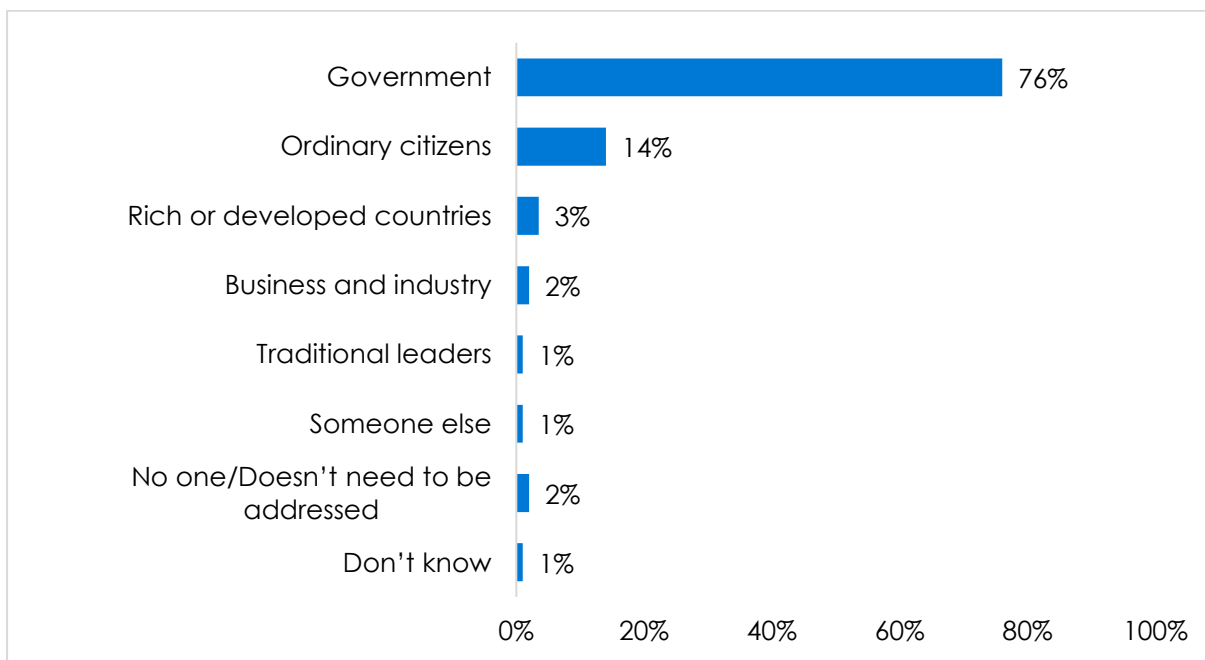
Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree:

Ordinary Nigerians can play a role in limiting climate change.

It is important for our government to take steps now to limit climate change in the future, even if it is expensive or causes some job losses or other harm to our economy.

(Respondents who are not aware of climate change are excluded.)

Figure 10: Who has primary responsibility for limiting climate change? | Nigeria | 2022

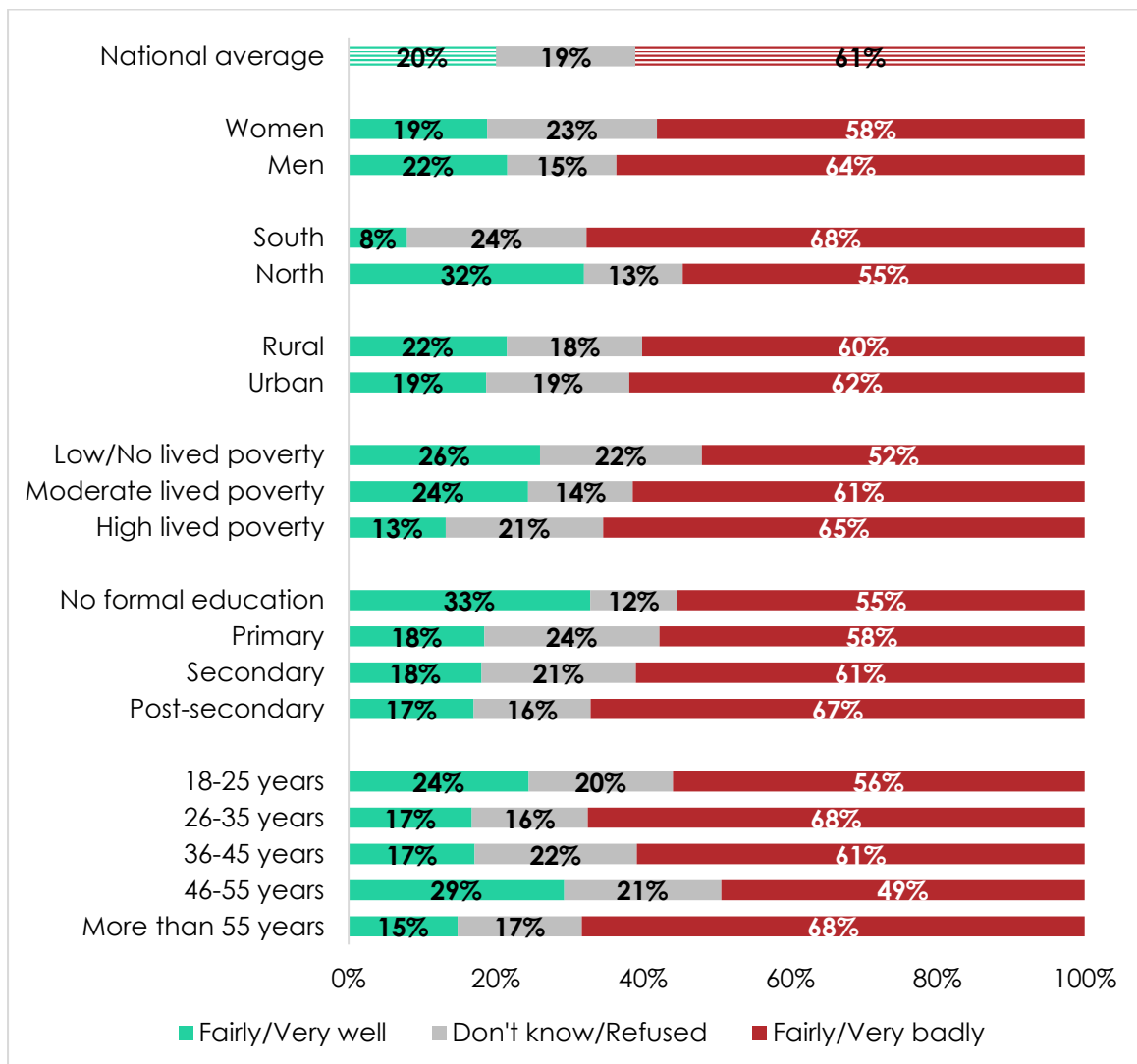


Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked: Who do you think should have primary responsibility for trying to limit climate change and reduce its impact? *(Respondents who are not aware of climate change are excluded.)*

When asked to assess how well the government is addressing the problem of climate change, only two in 10 survey respondents (20%) describe the government's performance as "fairly" or "very" good, while 61% rate the government poorly on this issue (Figure 11).

Southerners are particularly critical of the government's handling of climate-change issues: Only 8% approve, while 68% disapprove. Negative assessments are also more common among poor and more educated citizens.

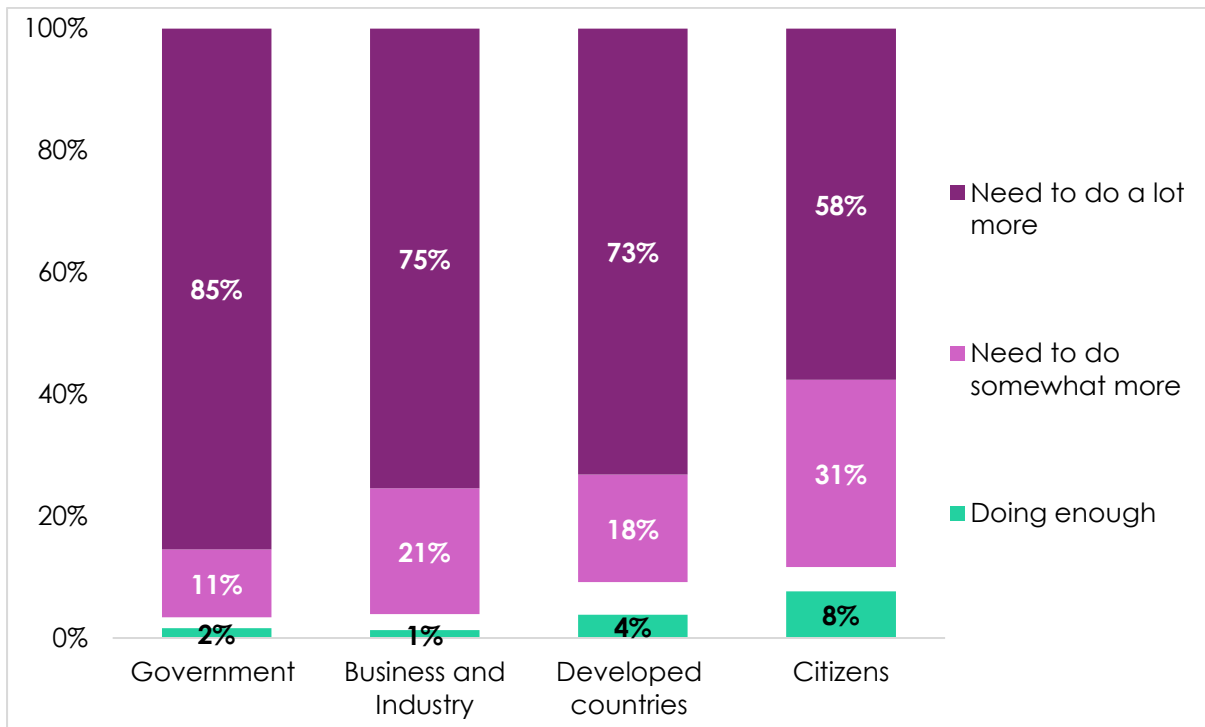
Figure 11: Government performance in handling climate change | by demographic group | Nigeria | 2022



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 the problem of climate change?

Even if they assign primary responsibility for fighting climate change to the government, Nigerians expect other stakeholders to pitch in – and to a greater extent than they've done so far. Only very small minorities say business and industry (1%), developed countries (4%), and citizens (8%) are making enough of an effort to fight climate change (Figure 12). Large majorities believe more needs to be done, including 85% who say the government needs to do "a lot more."

Figure 12: Are stakeholders doing enough to limit climate change? | Nigeria | 2022



Respondents who are aware of climate change were asked: Do you think each of the following are doing enough to limit climate change, or do they need to do more, or haven't you heard enough to say? (Respondents who are not aware of climate change are excluded.)

Conclusion

Survey findings reflect relatively low awareness of climate change among Nigerians, especially among rural residents, poor citizens, and those with little education and infrequent access to news – factors that suggest opportunities to create greater awareness and popular support for climate action.

Among those who are familiar with climate change, majorities say it is making life worse and requires immediate government action, even if such policies and programmes are expensive or take a toll on the economy. Similarly, large majorities are dissatisfied with efforts by other stakeholders, including business and industry, more developed countries, and ordinary citizens, and demand that they do more to help curb the negative effects of climate change.

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