

Environmental protection: Nigerians want regulation and greater effort

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 735 | Sunday Joseph Duntoye, Chukwudebe Nwanze, and Raphael Mbaegbu

Summary

In 2022, Nigeria's oil and gas sector led the country's imports and exports in volume and value, accounting for about 88% of all exported goods and 30% of imports. The mining and quarrying sector, which includes oil and gas, coal, and metal ore in addition to quarrying, made up about 7% of the country's gross domestic product (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

While they contribute significantly to Nigeria's economy, these sectors also help make environmental pollution a major challenge in the country through greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation and loss of habitat, soil erosion, and negative impacts on the health of citizens (Pona, Xiaoil, Ayantobo, & Tetteh, 2021; Guardian, 2023; Sam-Otuonye & Okoronkwo, 2022).

Government efforts to address environmental pollution have included the establishment of regulatory bodies such as the Federal Ministry of Environment, the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency, the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency, and the National Emergency Management Agency. In November 2021, then-President Muhammadu Buhari committed Nigeria to reaching net-zero carbon emissions by 2060, joining more than 135 other countries working toward the same goal (Fasan, 2021).

Meanwhile, the buildup of trash in neighbourhoods and marketplaces has become a recurrent problem. Regulations require dumpsites to be situated away from communities and watercourses to minimise contamination, but these rules are often ignored (Nation, 2018; Aderoju, Salman, Anjoye, & Nwadike, 2014).

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

Survey findings show that a majority of Nigerians consider pollution a serious problem in their communities, citing trash disposal and sanitation as the most important local environmental issues. While ordinary citizens say they share responsibility for limiting pollution, they also want the government to increase its efforts to protect the environment. However, fewer than half would prioritise environmental protection over jobs and incomes.

Regarding natural resource extraction, Nigerians are divided as to whether its economic benefits outweigh its environmental costs. A strong majority favour tighter government regulation of the industry to reduce its environmental impact.

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 NOI Polls, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,600 adult Nigerians between 5 and 31 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

On pollution and environmental governance:

- More than half (53%) of Nigerians say pollution is a “somewhat serious” or “very serious” problem in their communities.
 - Citizens say trash and plastic disposal (cited by 27%) and human waste management (26%) are the most important environmental issues in their communities.
 - More than six in 10 respondents (63%) say plastic bags are a major source of pollution in Nigeria.
- About one-third (32%) of Nigerians say the primary responsibility for reducing pollution and keeping communities clean rests with ordinary citizens. About the same proportion (31%) would assign that responsibility to the national government, while 26% would look first to their local government.
- Almost two-thirds (63%) of Nigerians say the government should be doing more to limit pollution and protect the environment, including 48% who say it needs to do “much more.”
- But only 37% would prioritise environmental protection over economic development, while 52% say the government should focus on creating jobs and increasing incomes, even if that leads to greater pollution or other environmental damage.

On natural resource extraction:

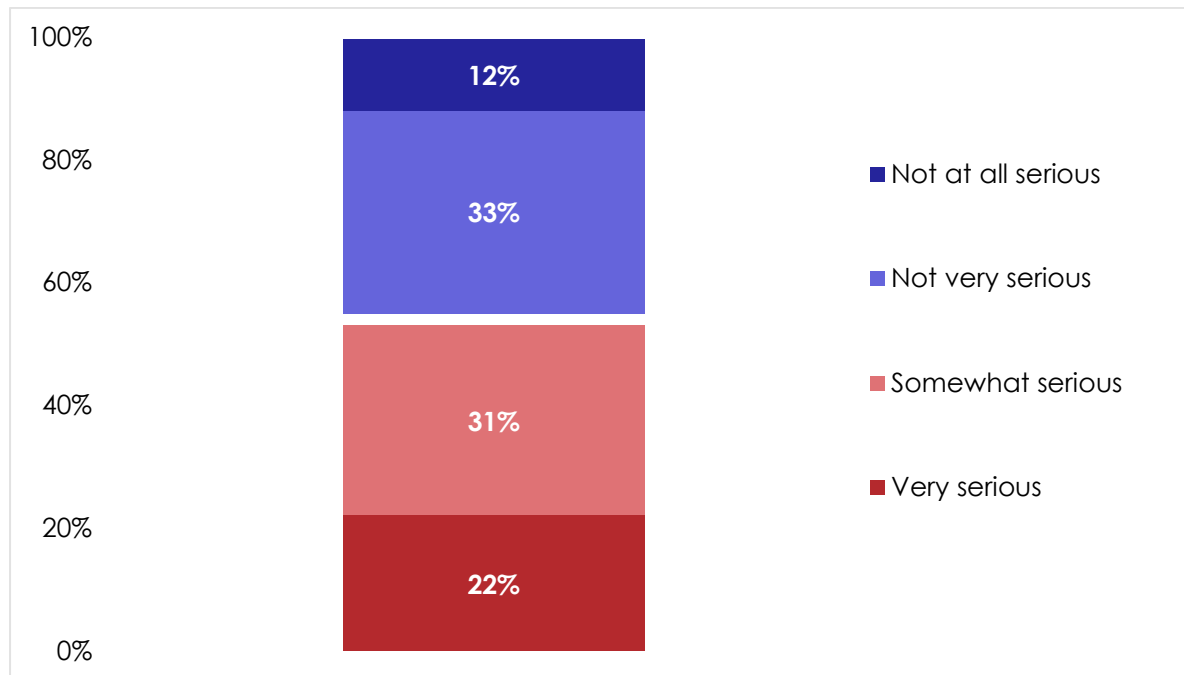
- More than four in 10 Nigerians (43%) say the benefits of natural resource extraction outweigh its negative impacts, such as pollution, while 37% believe the opposite.
- Seven in 10 citizens (71%) want the government to regulate natural resource extraction more tightly in order to reduce its negative impact on the environment.
- Half (50%) of Nigerians say local communities receive a fair share of revenues from natural resource extraction and have a voice in decisions about extraction activities, while 31% think they do not.

Pollution and environmental governance

Pollution: The scope of the problem

More than half (53%) of Nigerians consider pollution a “somewhat serious” or “very serious” problem in their community (Figure 1).

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

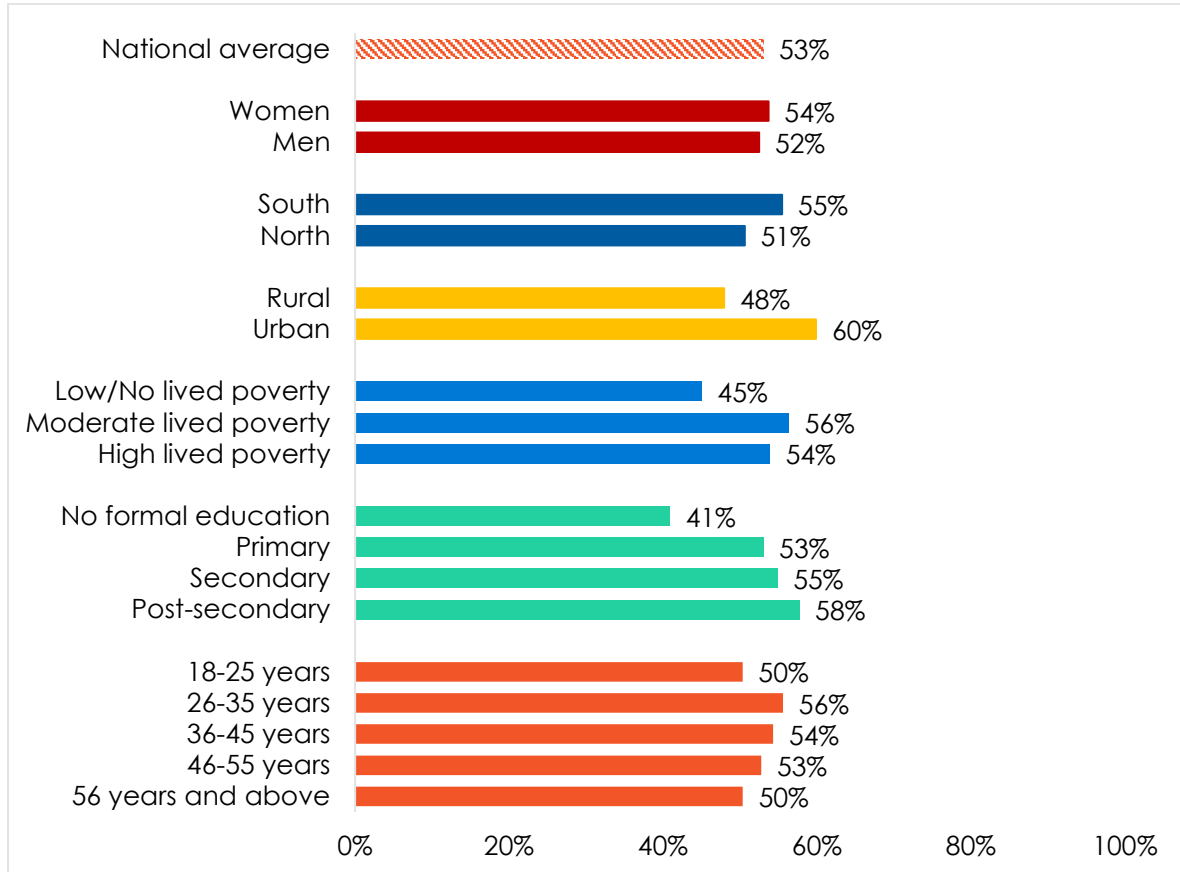
Urban residents are more concerned about pollution than rural residents (60% vs. 48%) (Figure 2). Concerns about pollution also increase with citizens' educational level, ranging from 41% among those with no formal schooling to 58% of those with post-secondary qualifications. Economically better-off citizens (45%) are less likely to see pollution as a serious problem in their communities than those experiencing moderate or high levels of lived poverty¹ (54%-56%).

Nigerians rank trash disposal (27%) and sanitation or human waste management (26%) as the most important environmental issues in their communities, followed by pollution of water sources (15%), air pollution (10%), and deforestation (6%) (Figure 3).

Almost two-thirds (63%) of citizens “agree” or “strongly agree” that plastic bags are a major source of pollution in Nigeria, while 23% disagree (Figure 4).

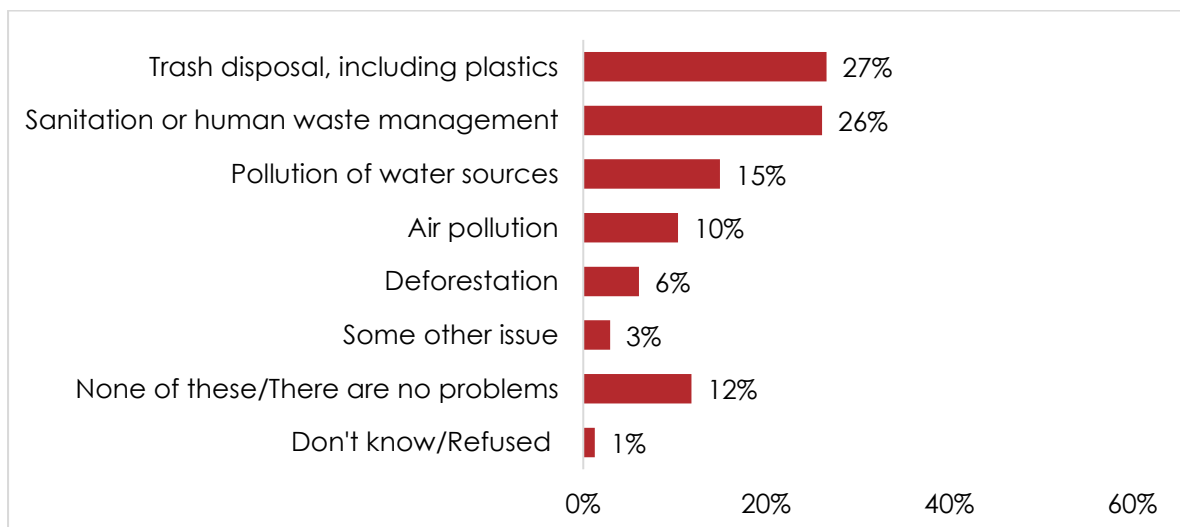
¹ Afrobarometer’s Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents’ levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty,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

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



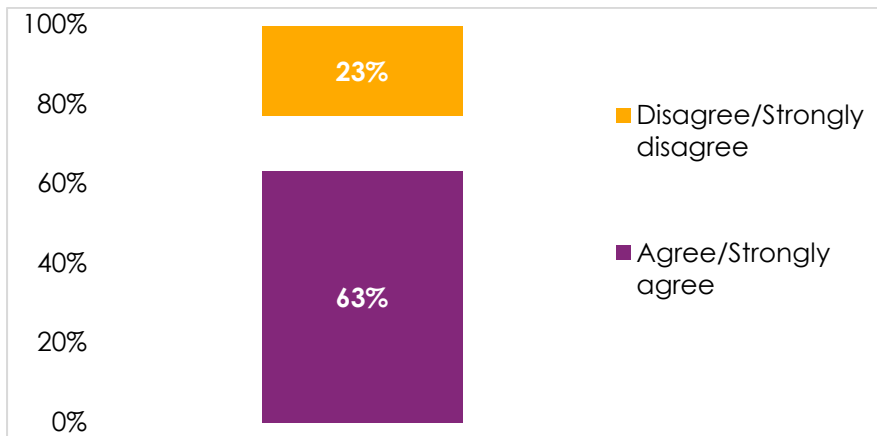
Respondents were asked: How serious a problem is pollution, such as the accumulation of trash or garbage, or damage to the quality of the air, the water, or the land, in your community? (% who say "somewhat serious" or "very serious")

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



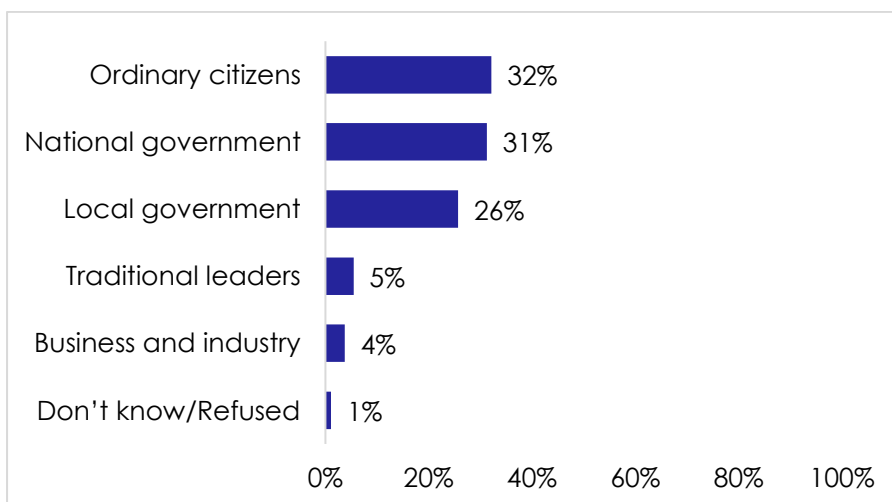
Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: Plastic bags are a major source of pollution in this country.

Protecting the environment

Pollution reduction can be achieved through a variety of actions, from small individual changes to large-scale reforms.

For Nigerians, protecting the environment starts with ordinary citizens and the national government: Three in 10 respondents (32%) say citizens have the primary responsibility for reducing pollution and keeping their communities clean, while about the same proportion (31%) assign this task to the national government (Figure 5). In addition, 26% place primary responsibility on their local government.

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

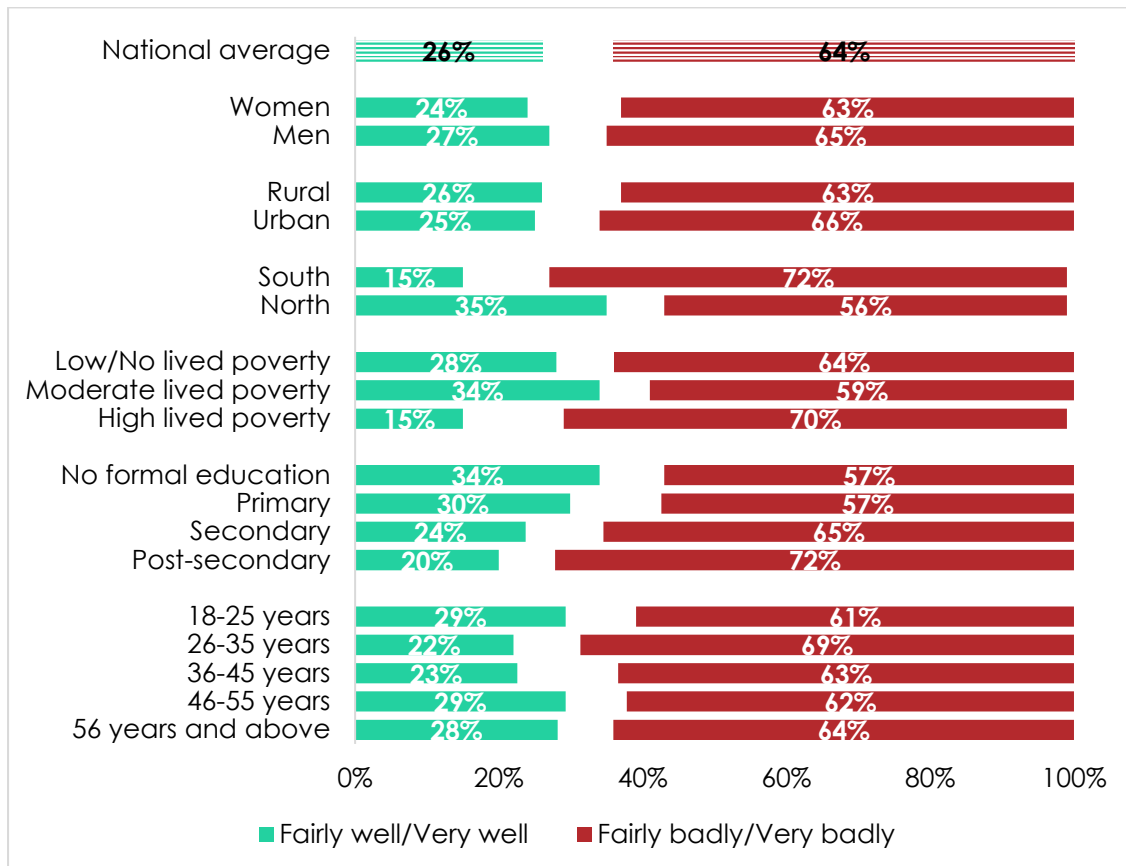


Respondents were asked: Who do you think should have primary responsibility for reducing pollution and keeping your community clean?

Almost two-thirds (64%) of citizens say the government is doing “fairly badly” or “very badly” at reducing pollution and protecting the environment, while only 26% think it is doing a good job (Figure 6).

Negative ratings are more common among Southerners than Northerners (72% vs. 56%) and increase with respondents' level of education, ranging from 57% among those with no formal schooling to 72% of those with post-secondary qualifications. Citizens with high lived poverty are more likely to rate the government poorly (70%) than their better-off counterparts (59%-64%).

Figure 6: Government performance in reducing pollution and protecting the environment | 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: Reducing pollution and protecting the environment?

Similarly, 63% of Nigerians say the government should be doing more to limit pollution and protect the environment, including 48% who want the government to do "much more" (Figure 7). About a quarter (24%) want the government to keep doing what it is currently doing, while only 11% say it should do less to protect the environment.

However, if environmental-protection policies threaten jobs or incomes, a slim majority (52%) of Nigerians say the government should pay more attention to creating jobs and increasing incomes, even if it leads to further environmental damage (Figure 8). Fewer than four in 10 (37%) would prioritise environmental protection if it meant fewer jobs or other disruptions to daily life, while 12% don't express a preference on the question.

The view that environmental protection should take precedence over job creation is more widespread among citizens with no formal education (52%), those with high lived poverty (42%), Northerners (43%), and rural residents (41%) than among more educated citizens (34%), better-off respondents (31%), Southerners (29%), and urban residents (31%).

Figure 7: Should government do more to protect the environment? | Nigeria | 2022

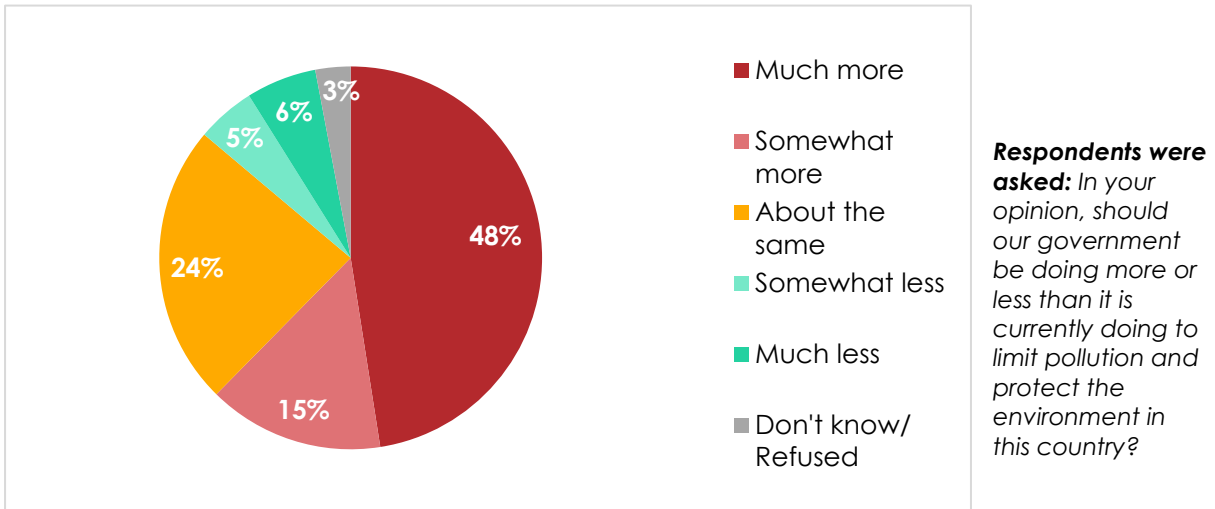
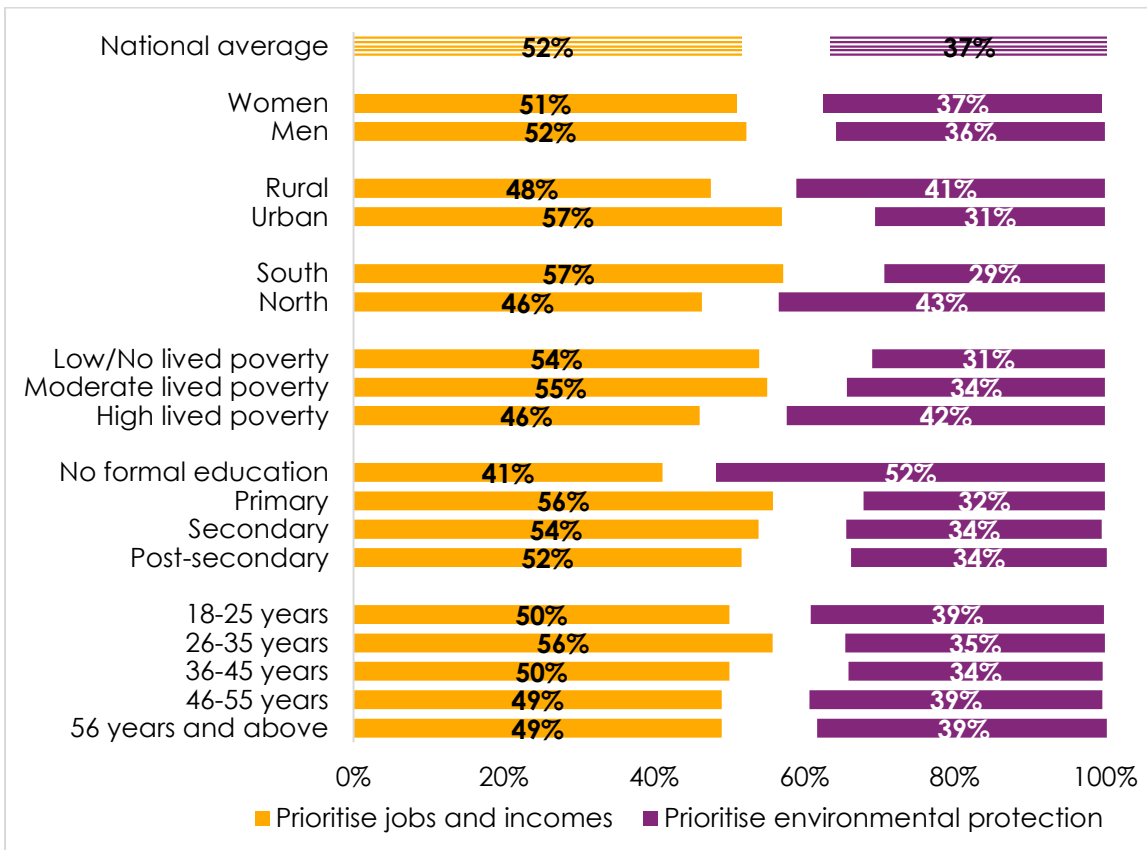


Figure 8: Should government prioritise jobs or the environment? | by demographic group | Nigeria | 2022



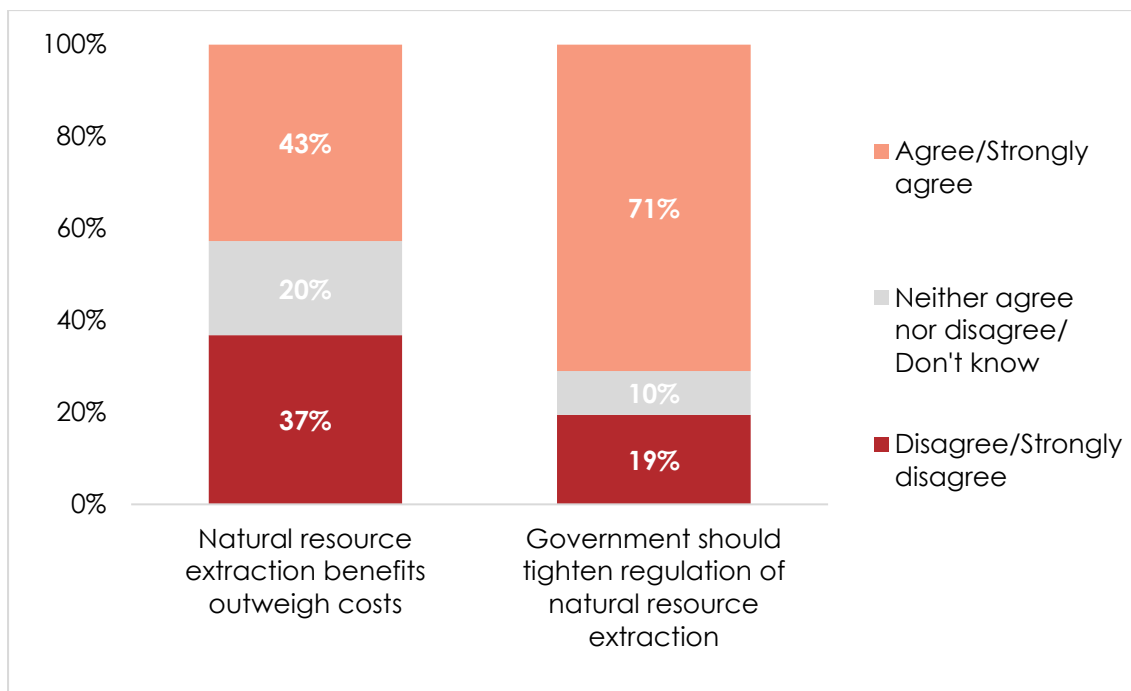
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: The government should focus on creating jobs and increasing incomes, even if that means increasing pollution or other environmental damage.
 Statement 2: The government should focus more on preventing pollution 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

Nigerians are divided in their assessments of how the benefits of resource extraction activities such as mining and quarrying, including jobs and revenue, balance out against the costs, such as pollution: 43% say the benefits outweigh the costs, while 37% disagree and 20% don't take a position (Figure 9).

In order to reduce the negative impact of natural resource extraction on the environment, a large majority (71%) of citizens want the government to regulate the industry more tightly. Only 19% oppose stricter regulation.

Figure 9: Natural resource extraction: Costs vs. benefits and support for tighter regulation | Nigeria | 2022



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

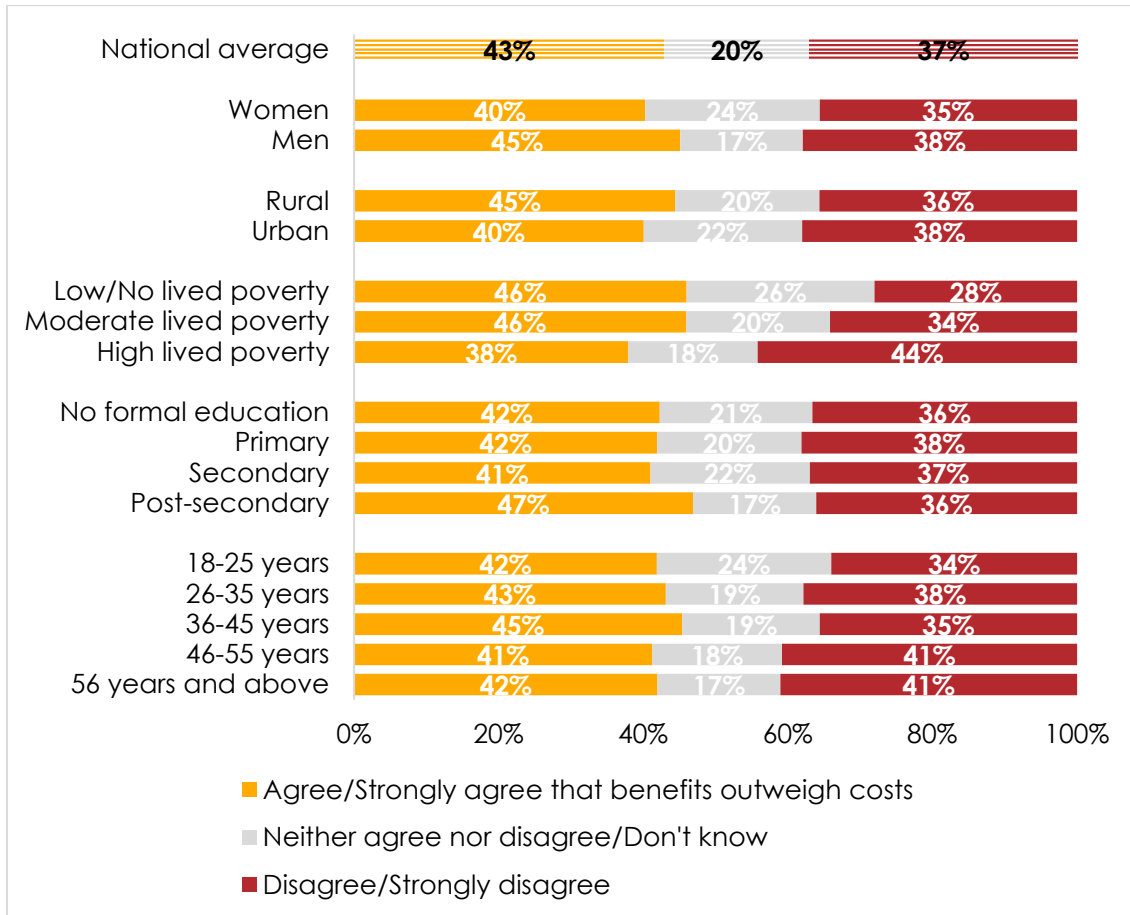
In general, the benefits of resource extraction activities to local communities, such as jobs and revenue, outweigh the costs, such as pollution.

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

The view that the benefits of natural resource extraction outweigh the costs is more prevalent among better-off citizens (46%) and those with post-secondary education (47%) than among the poor (38%) and less educated respondents (41%-42%) (Figure 10).

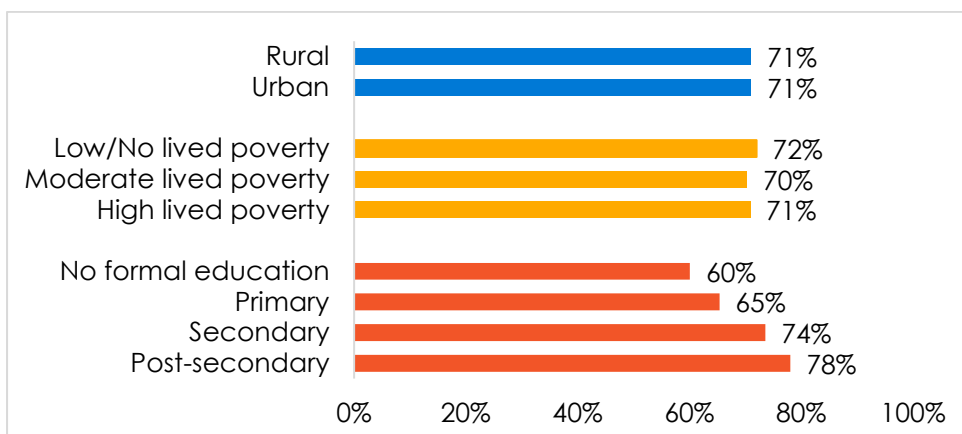
Support for tighter government regulation increases with respondents' education level, ranging from 60% of those with no formal schooling to 78% of those with post-secondary qualifications (Figure 11).

Figure 10: Benefits of natural resource extraction outweigh costs | by demographic group | Nigeria | 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.

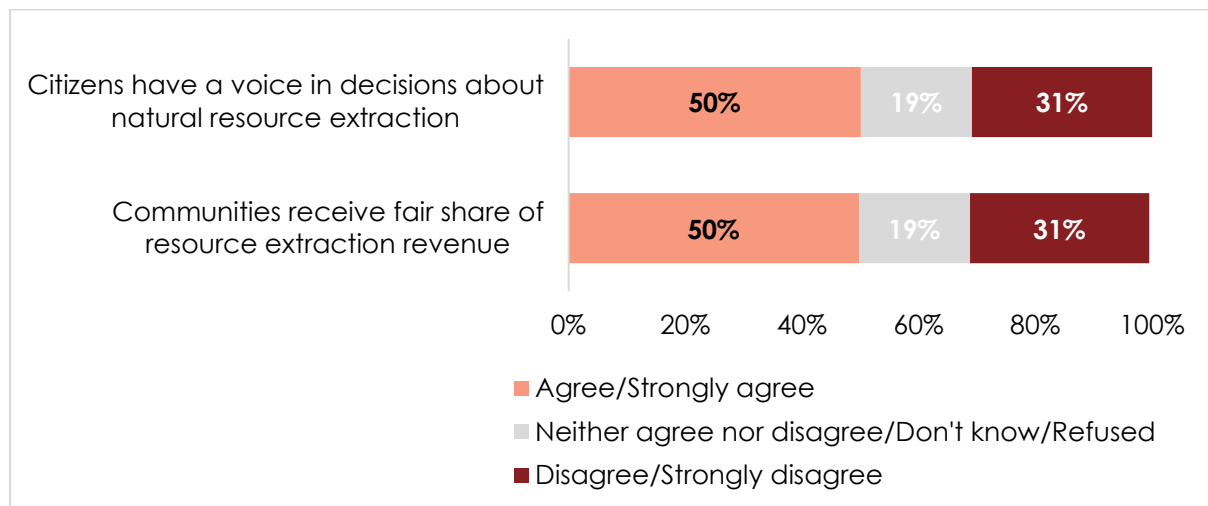
Figure 11: Government should tighten regulation of natural resource extraction | by demographic group | Nigeria | 2022



Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: In this country, natural resource extraction should be more tightly regulated by government to reduce the negative impacts on the environment. (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

As for the role of local communities, half (50%) of those surveyed say that people have a voice in decisions about natural resource extraction that takes place near their communities, while 31% disagree (Figure 12). Views divide the same way on whether local communities receive a fair share of revenues from nearby natural resource extraction, with 50% saying that they do and 31% that they don't.

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



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

Ordinary Nigerians 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 Nigerians consider pollution a serious problem and assign themselves and their government the responsibility of addressing it. While they are not ready to prioritise environmental protection over jobs and incomes, they say the government needs to do more to safeguard the environment, including putting stricter regulations in place to ensure natural resource extraction is done in an environmentally responsible manner.

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.

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