

Sudanese see pollution as a serious problem requiring greater government attention

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 779 | Elmogiera Elawad and Simon Templer Kodiaga

Summary

In Sudan, where desert makes up more than half the land, desertification is a perennial environmental concern, heightened by the impacts of climate change (Desertification Facts, 2022). But there are others, ranging from air pollution and plastics to toxic waste (United Nations Environment Programme, 2020; France24, 2022).

While siltation from land erosion threatens the country's limited waters, desertification is picking up speed amid increasing droughts, fuelling competition for resources and political instability (Afit, 2023; Walender, 2023). Waste from gold mining and sugar plants damages residents' health; one report estimated that 450,000 tons of mercury-filled gold-mining waste have been deposited in Nile River State (France24, 2022; Othman, 2016).

The government has also cited plastic waste as a top contributor to environmental pollution and launched a campaign in 2018 to raise awareness of its health effects and promote alternatives (Xinhua, 2018).

This dispatch reports on a special survey module included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 questionnaire to explore citizens' views and experiences regarding pollution, environmental governance, and resource extraction.

Findings show that most Sudanese consider pollution to be a major problem in their neighbourhoods, citing pollution of water sources, human waste management, and air pollution as the most important local environmental issues.

A majority of citizens say the government needs to do more to limit pollution and protect the environment, including more stringent regulation of the natural resource extraction industry in order to lessen its negative environmental effects.

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 Sudan, led by the Sudan Polling Statistics Center (SPSC), interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,200 adults in November-December 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 Sudan in 2013, 2015, 2018, and 2021.

Key findings

On pollution and environmental governance

- Most Sudanese (88%) say pollution is a serious problem in their communities, including 67% who consider it a “very serious problem.”
- Respondents cite pollution of water sources, human waste management, and air pollution as the most important environmental issues in their communities.
- More than three-fourths (79%) of citizens say plastic bags are a major source of pollution in Sudan.
- Citizens assign the primary responsibility for reducing pollution and keeping communities clean to local government (33%), national government (28%), and ordinary citizens (27%).
- Most respondents give the government poor marks on reducing pollution and protecting the environment (86%) and say it needs to increase its efforts (74%).
- If environmental-protection policies threaten jobs and incomes, more than half (55%) of Sudanese would still want the government to prioritise the environment rather than jobs.

On natural resource extraction

- About half (49%) of Sudanese say the benefits of natural resource extraction, such as jobs and revenue, outweigh negative impacts such as pollution.
- Three-fourths (76%) of citizens say the government should regulate the natural resource extraction industry more tightly in order to reduce its negative impacts on the environment

Pollution: The scope of the problem

Almost nine out of 10 Sudanese (88%) consider pollution in their communities a “somewhat serious” (21%) or “very serious” (67%) problem (Figure 1).

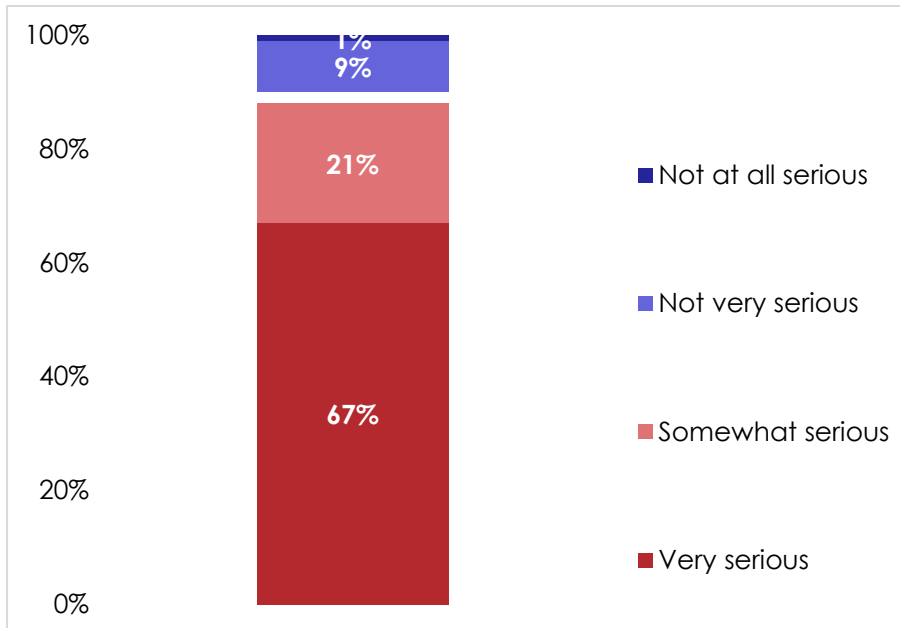
Men and women, urban and rural residents, and the most and least educated citizens express about equal levels of concern about pollution (Figure 2).

Sudanese cite pollution of water sources (37%) as the most important environmental issue in their community, followed by human waste management (23%), air pollution (22%), trash and plastic disposal (13%), and deforestation (3%) (Figure 3).

Even though the government declared a campaign against the use of plastic bags during a World Environment Day commemoration in 2018 (Xinhua, 2018), more than three-fourths (79%) of respondents say plastic bags are a major source of pollution in Sudan (Figure 4).

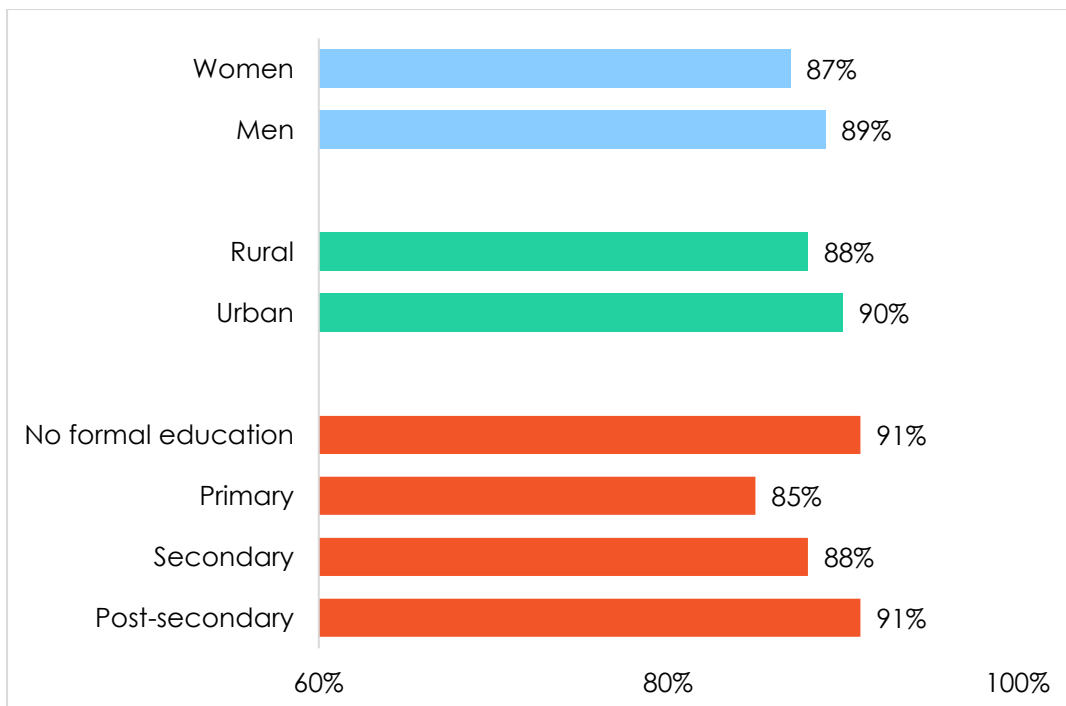
Women are somewhat more likely than men to see plastic bags as a major source of pollution (82% vs. 77%). Concern is particularly strong among the most educated respondents (87%) and senior citizens (91%).

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



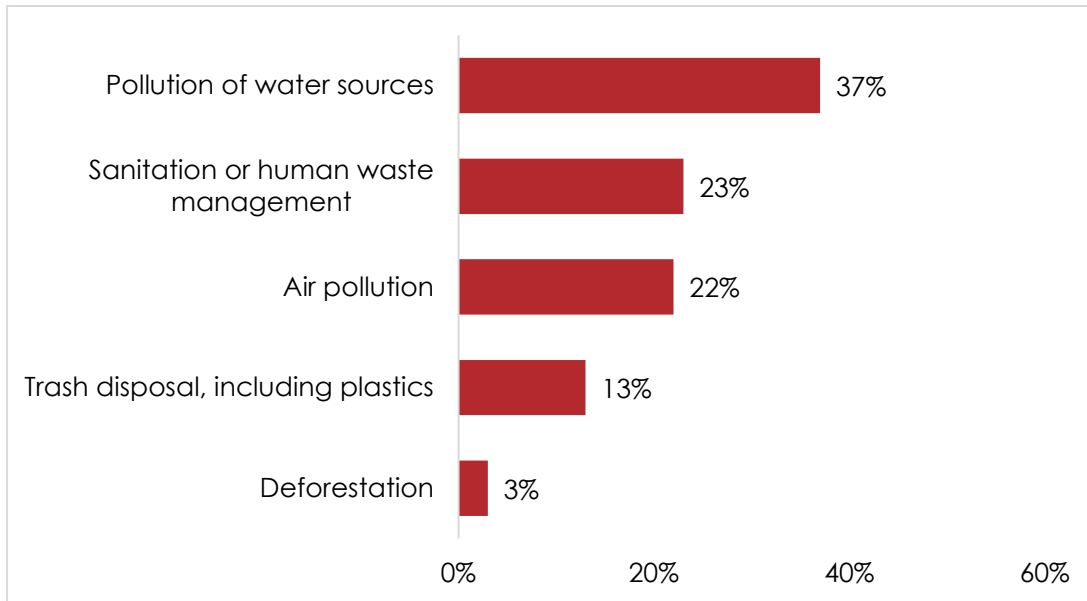
Respondents were asked: How serious a problem is pollution, such as the accumulation of trash or garbage, or damage to the quality of the air, the water, or the land in your community?

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



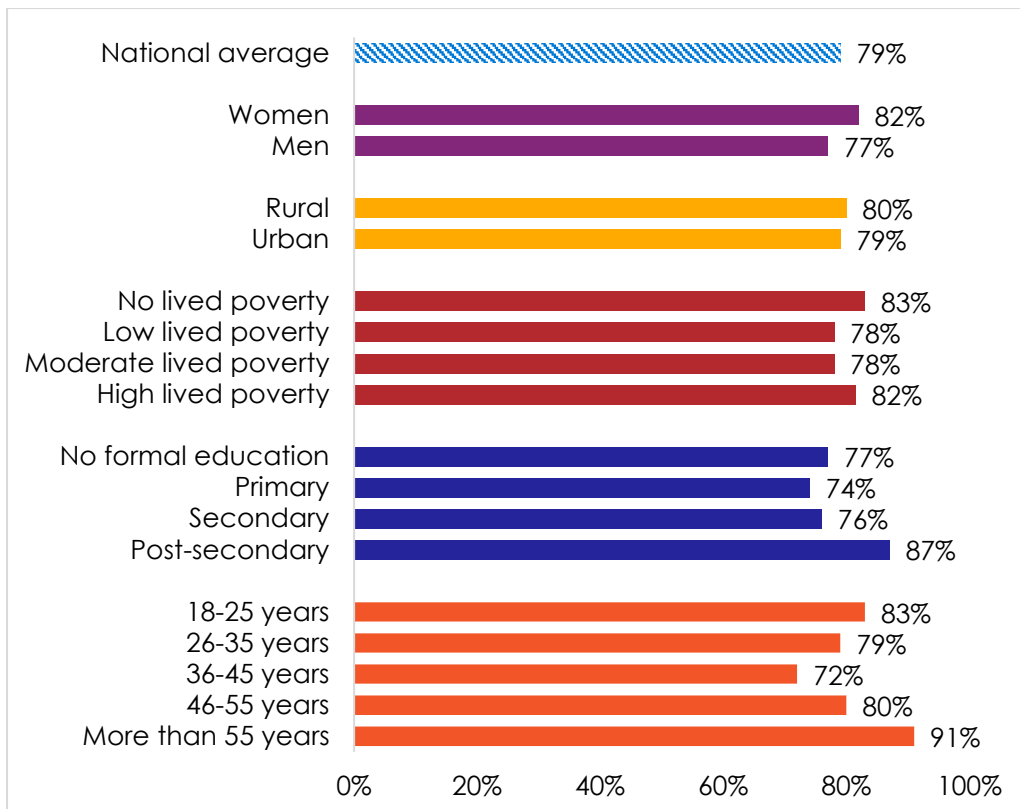
Respondents were asked: How serious a problem is pollution, such as the accumulation of trash or garbage, or damage to the quality of the air, the water, or the land in your community? (% who say "somewhat serious" or "very serious")

Figure 3: Most important environmental issue in the community | Sudan | 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? | by demographic group | Sudan | 2022

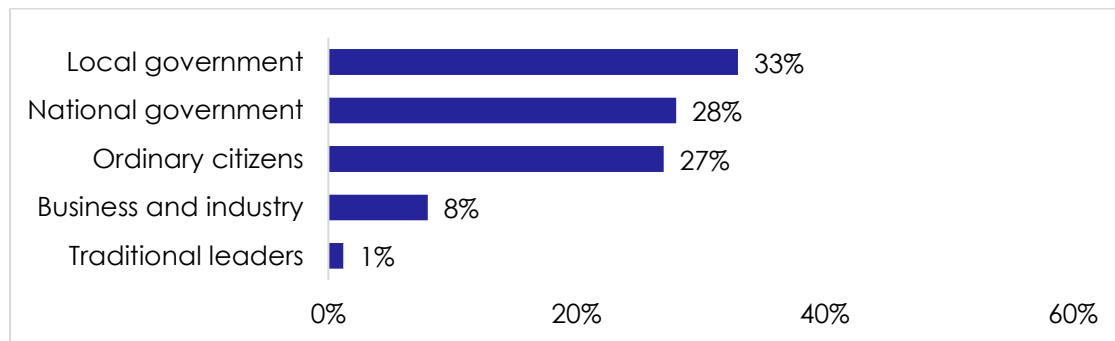


Respondents were asked: Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statement: Plastic bags are a major source of pollution in this country.

Protecting the environment

For Sudanese, protecting the environment starts with the government: Six in 10 respondents say local government (33%) and national government (28%) have the primary responsibility for reducing pollution and keeping communities clean (Figure 5). More than one-fourth (27%) consider this the role of ordinary citizens, while far fewer would look to business and industry (8%) and traditional leaders (1%).

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

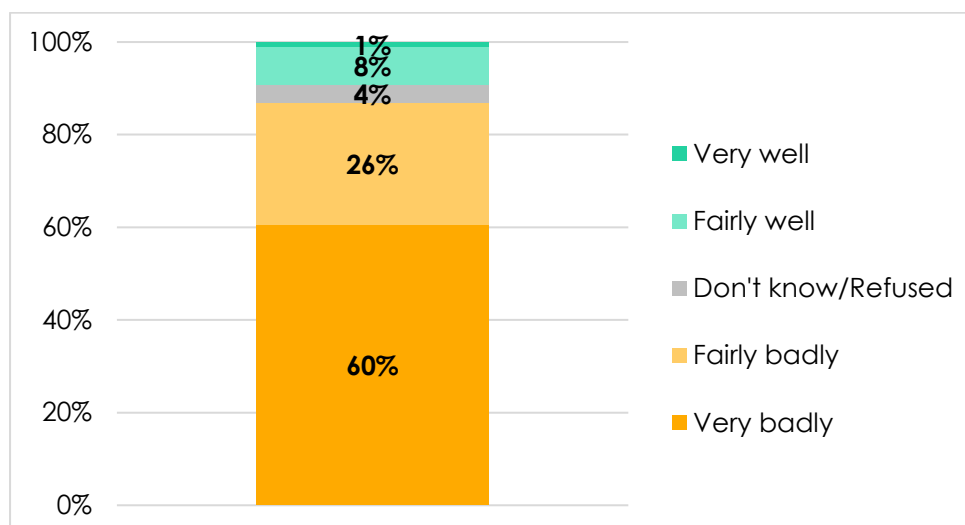


Respondents were asked: Who do you think should have primary responsibility for reducing pollution and keeping your community clean?

Almost nine out of 10 citizens (86%) give the government poor marks on reducing pollution and protecting the environment, including 60% who describe its performance as “very bad” (Figure 6).

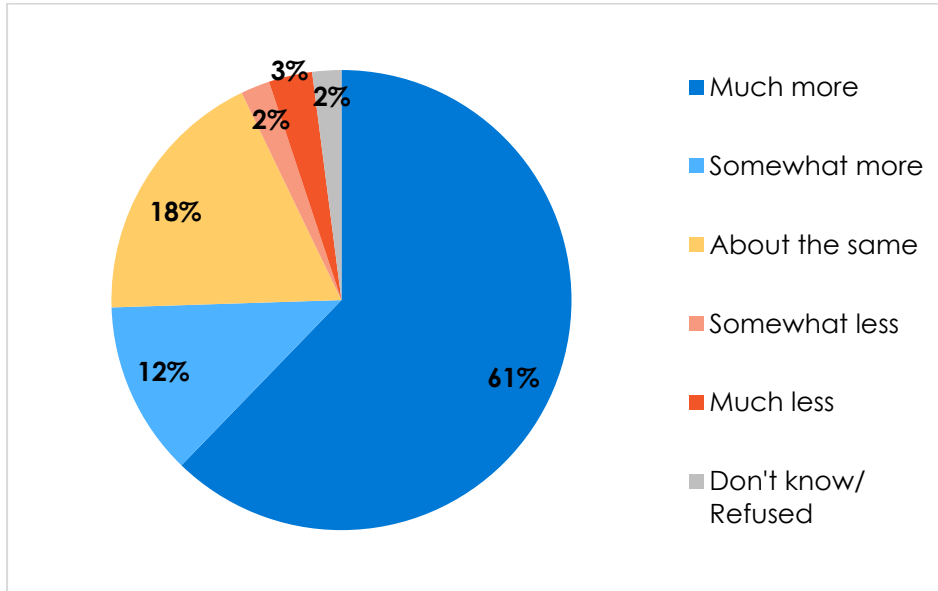
And almost three-fourths say the government needs to do “much more” (61%) or “somewhat more” (12%) on this score (Figure 7).

Figure 6: Performance of the government in reducing pollution and protecting the environment | by demographic group | Sudan | 2022



Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current transitional government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Reducing pollution and protecting the environment?

Figure 7: Should the government do more or less to protect the environment?
 | Sudan | 2022

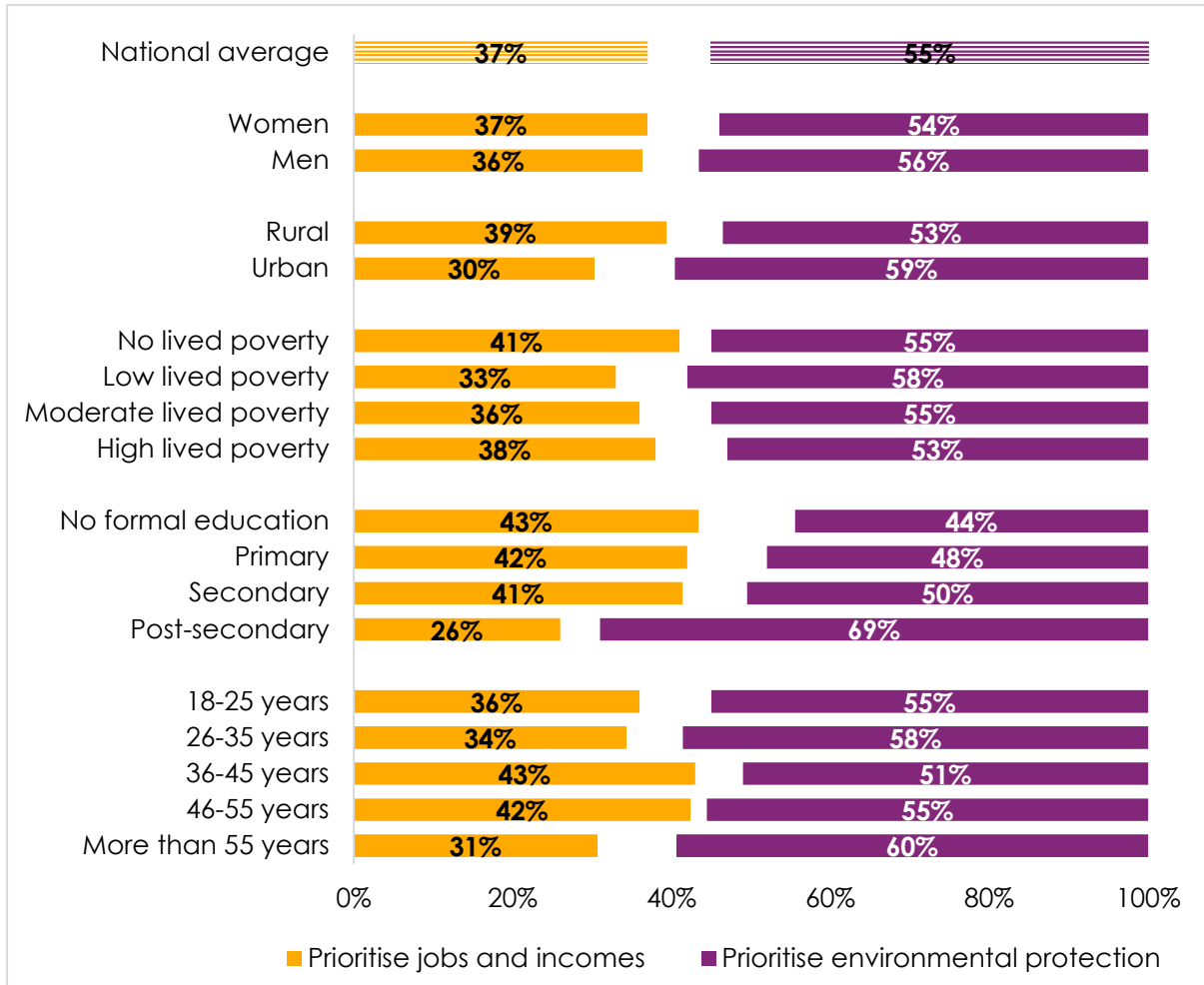


Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, should our government be doing more or less than it is currently doing to limit pollution and protect the environment in this country?*

Even if environmental-protection policies threaten jobs and incomes, a majority (55%) of Sudanese say the government should give priority to protecting the environment, while 37% think it should instead focus on economic considerations (Figure 8). Support for prioritising the environment is particularly strong among citizens with post-secondary education (69%, vs. 44%-50% of those with less schooling) and is stronger among urban than residents (59% vs. 53%).

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.

Figure 8: Should the government prioritise jobs or the environment? | by demographic group | Sudan | 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)

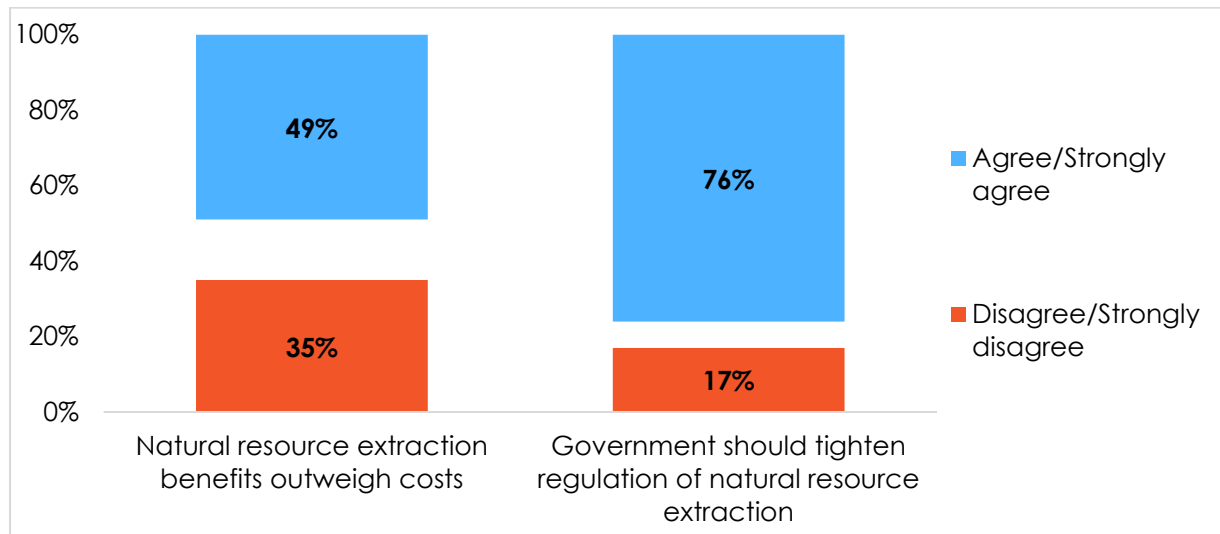
Natural resource extraction

Extraction of natural resources, including gold and timber, is economically important in Sudan, contributing to the country's revenue and employment opportunities. However, it often comes with significant environmental damage.

About half (49%) of Sudanese say that overall, the benefits that natural resource extraction brings to communities, such as jobs and revenue, outweigh negative impacts such as pollution. Only one-third (35%) disagree with this assessment, while 16% don't take a position (Figure 9).

Nevertheless, three-fourths (76%) of citizens say the government should regulate the natural resource extraction industry more tightly in order to reduce its negative impacts on the environment.

Figure 9: Natural resource extraction: Costs vs. benefits | Sudan | 2022



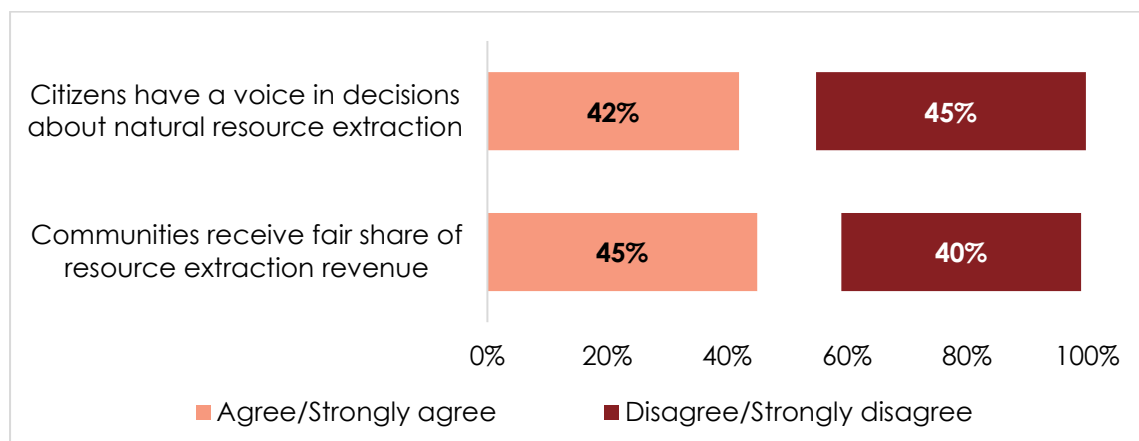
Respondents were asked: Natural resource extraction such as mining, oil drilling, or wood harvesting can have benefits, such as jobs and revenue. But it can also pose problems for nearby communities, such as pollution or deforestation. Please tell me whether you agree or disagree with each of the following 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.

Views are divided when it comes to the stake of ordinary citizens in natural resource extraction (Figure 10). Almost half (45%) of respondents say that people do not have a voice in decisions about natural resource extraction that takes place near their communities, while 42% think they do.

Figure 10: Natural resource extraction: Citizens' voice and benefit | Sudan | 2022



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

Ordinary Sudanese 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.

And while 45% of respondents think that local communities receive a fair share of the revenues from natural resource extraction, 40% disagree, while 15% say they “don’t know” or don’t take a position.

Conclusion

A majority of Sudanese consider pollution in their communities a serious problem, citing pollution of water sources, human waste management, and air pollution as their most important environmental issues. While a plurality think the benefits of natural resource extraction outweigh its costs, a large majority favour tighter regulation of the natural resource extraction industry to reduce damage to the environment.

Respondents assign the primary responsibility for reducing pollution and keeping communities clean to local government, national government, and ordinary citizens. Far fewer look to business and industry to reduce pollution.

Citizens overwhelmingly say the government needs to increase its efforts to protect the environment. This could include working with corporations, civil society, and foreign partners to enact more stringent environmental laws, fund the development of pollution-controlling technology, encourage the use of renewable energy sources, and spread knowledge about the value of environmental preservation.

References

- Atit, M. (2023). Climate change exacerbating Sudan's instability, experts say. VoA. 28 September.
- Desertification Facts. (2022). Desertification in Sudan.
- France24. (2022). Sudan's gold rush wreaks havoc on health. 18 July.
- International Trade Administration. (2022). Sudan – country commercial guide.
- Othman, T. al-D. (2016). Environmental pollution from the sugar industry in White Nile State. *Scientific Journal of Imam Mahdi University*, 7(1), 1-36.
- Pan African Resources. (2022). Mining in Sudan.
- United Nations Environment Programme. (2020). Sudan first state of environment and outlook report 2020.
- Walender, A. (2023). Sudan: Where conflict and climate change combine with deadly results when left un-checked. Practical Action. 5 May.
- Xinhua. (2018). Spotlight: Sudan launches campaign against plastic pollution on World Environment Day. 6 June.

Elmogiera Elawad is the director of the Sudan Polling Statistics Center. Email: info@sudanpolling.

Simon Templer Kodiaga is a communication and advocacy officer at the African Population and Health Research Center. Email: simonkodiaga@gmail.com.

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, Luminare, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Mastercard Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the European Union Commission, the World Bank Group, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda, the Embassy of Sweden in Zimbabwe, the Global Centre for Pluralism, and GIZ.

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. 779 | 5 March 2024