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Mozambicans approach election with critical outlook on their parliamentarians

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 867 | Asafika Mpako and Stephen Ndoma

Summary

For a parliament to be responsive to citizens' needs, it needs to be transparent, accessible, and accountable to the people it is meant to serve (People's Assembly, 2021). Other critical aspects include conducting the public's business with integrity, ensuring that the public interest is front and centre, and creating meaningful opportunities for citizens to participate in policy- and decision-making. Finally, a parliament should be inclusive and effective.

On paper, Mozambique operates on the principle of the separation of powers, with distinct and independent roles assigned to the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. In practice, some observers argue that the picture looks very different. For example, President Filipe Nyusi caused a public row when he took a unilateral decision to grant amnesty to young men accused of inciting terrorist attacks, a power that is supposed to belong to Parliament. Worse still, the judiciary was yet to hand down the young men's sentences (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024).

There are also concerns about Parliament's failure to safeguard essential freedoms, including freedom of expression and of the media. In 2023, legislators passed a law criminalising the spread of false information about terrorism, while other bills, still in draft form, propose to ban the rebroadcasting of foreign political shows and limit the number of foreign correspondents stationed in Mozambique (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

With presidential and legislative elections coming up in October, how do Mozambicans perceive their members of Parliament (MPs)?

The most recent Afrobarometer survey shows fairly weak public insistence on basic parliamentary functions: Only half of citizens think it's Parliament's job – rather than the president's – to make laws, and even fewer say MPs should hold the president accountable for how his administration spends taxpayers' money.

A majority of Mozambicans want elected officials to prioritise voter demands rather than their own ideas, but only a minority believe that MPs actually listen to them. One in five respondents say they contacted an MP in the past year about some important problem or to give them their views.

Significantly, half of those surveyed say that in practice, the country's elections do not enable voters to remove non-performing leaders from office.

Most citizens see at least "some" MPs as corrupt, and trust in parliamentarians is at its lowest point in two decades. But despite a concomitant decline in approval ratings, half of respondents rate the performance of their MP positively.

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 10 surveys were launched in January 2024. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Mozambique, led by Ipsos, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,120 adult Mozambicans in October, November, and 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 Mozambique in 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2015, 2018, and 2021.

Key findings

- Six in 10 Mozambicans (60%) say elected officials should prioritise voters' demands rather than their own ideas.
- Only one-fifth (20%) of citizens say MPs "often" or "always" try their best to listen to what ordinary people have to say.
- About two in 10 respondents (22%) report contacting an MP in the past year to give them their views or discuss a problem.
- Mozambicans are divided as to who should make laws: 50% say it's Parliament, while 41% say it's the president.
- A majority (57%) of citizens say their elections work well to ensure that Parliament reflects voters' views, but fewer than half (43%) see elections as an effective tool for removing leaders who don't do what the people want.
- Only 44% of respondents say the president should explain to Parliament how his government spends taxpayers' money.
- Nearly four in 10 respondents (38%) say that "most" or "all" MPs are involved in corruption. Another 38% say that "some" are corrupt.
- Only 42% of Mozambicans say they trust their MP "somewhat" or "a lot," while 51% say they trust them "just a little" or "not at all."
- Half (51%) of citizens "approve" or "strongly approve" of the way their MPs have performed their job over the past 12 months, while 35% express disapproval.

Should elected officials follow voters' demands or their own ideas?

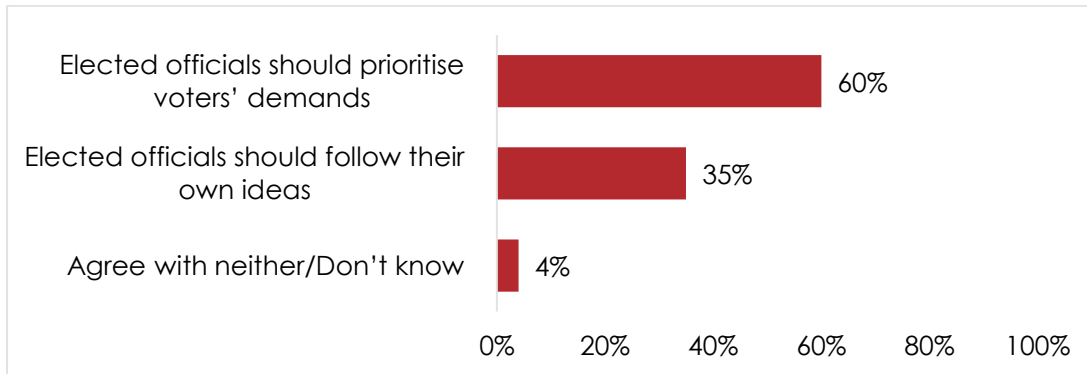
In a democracy, elected officials are expected to lead as well as to represent their constituents. When it comes to making difficult policy choices, should they follow their own instincts or the will of the people?

Six in 10 Mozambicans (60%) say their elected officials should prioritise voters' demands rather than their own ideas (Figure 1). But more than one-third (35%) think elected officials should be guided primarily by their own ideas.

Support for the view that elected officials should prioritise voters' demands increases with respondents' level of education, ranging from 47% among those with no formal schooling to 66% among those with secondary or post-secondary qualifications (Figure 2).

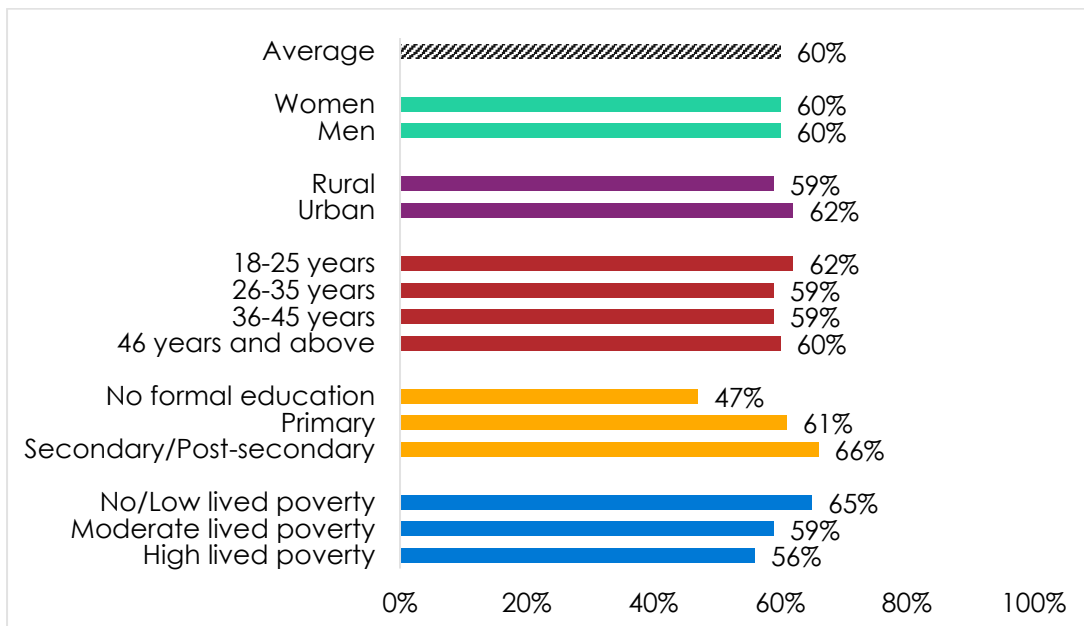
Economically better-off citizens are 9 percentage points more likely than the poorest respondents to say that elected officials should follow voter demands (65% of those experiencing no or low lived poverty vs. 56% of those experiencing high lived poverty).¹

Figure 1: Should elected officials prioritise voters' demands or their own ideas?
 | Mozambique | 2022



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Our elected officials should listen to voters' views and do what they demand.
 Statement 2: Our elected leaders should follow their own ideas in deciding what is best for the country.
 (% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)

Figure 2: Elected officials should prioritise voter demands | by demographic group
 | Mozambique | 2022



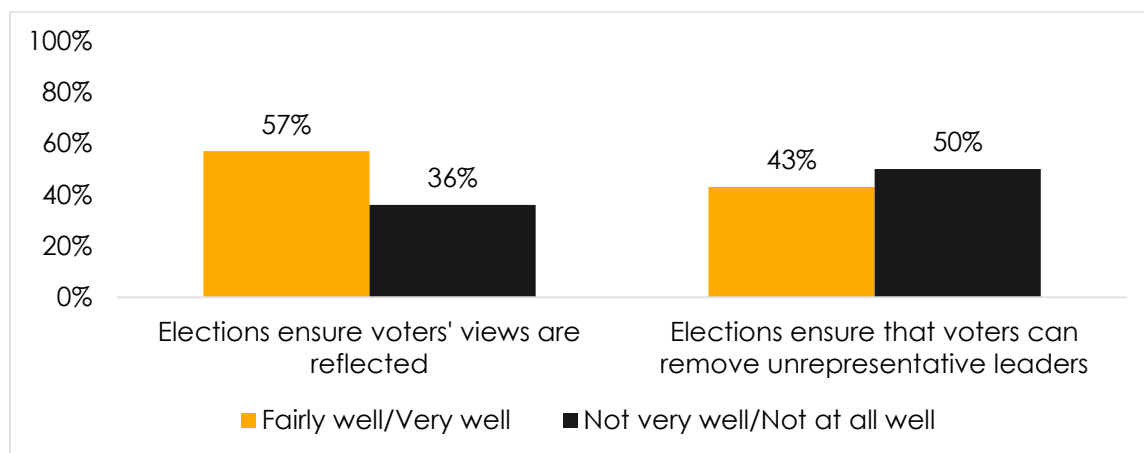
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¹ Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income)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

Elections may be considered an essential tool for citizens to make their demands heard and hold leaders to account, allowing voters to remove from office politicians who go against the people's will. But how well do elections fulfil this function in practice?

More than half (57%) of citizens say elections work well to ensure that voters' views are reflected in Parliament, but fewer than half (43%) see elections as an effective mechanism for removing unrepresentative leaders (Figure 3). The latter finding is perhaps a sign that many citizens doubt their ability to effect political change at the ballot box.

Figure 3: Efficacy of elections | Mozambique | 2022



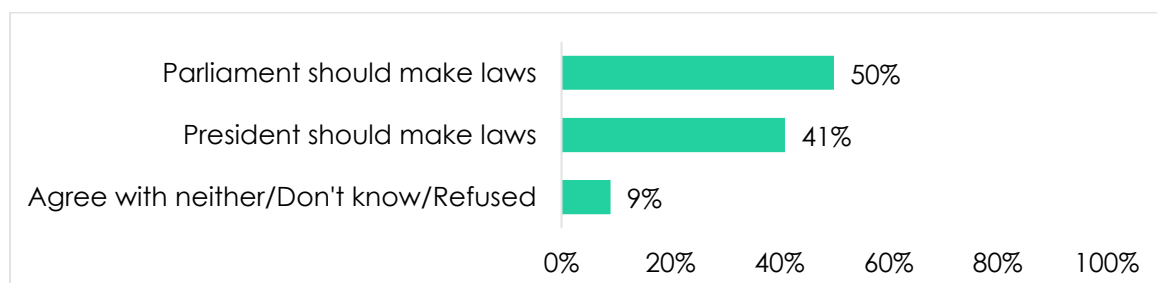
Respondents were asked: Thinking about how elections work in practice in this country, how well do elections: Ensure that representatives to the National Assembly reflect the views of voters? Enable voters to remove from office leaders who do not do what the people want?

Presidential accountability to Parliament

One of the critical challenges facing many countries is how to make governments work for the people by developing laws that respond to citizens' needs, using resources efficiently, and delivering public goods and services.

Asked whether Parliament or the president should make laws, Mozambicans appear to be divided: Half (50%) say it is Parliament's responsibility to make laws, even if the president doesn't agree with them, but four in 10 (41%) instead believe that the president should be responsible for legislation without worrying about what Parliament thinks (Figure 4).

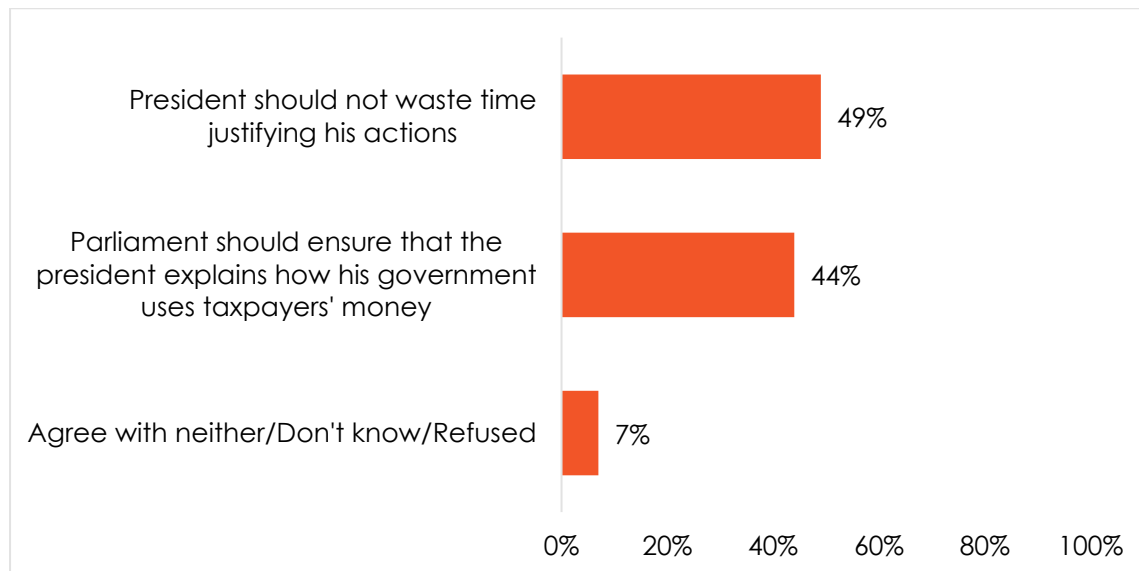
Figure 4: Should Parliament or the president make the laws? | Mozambique | 2022



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Members of Parliament represent the people; therefore they should make laws for this country, even if the president does not agree.
 Statement 2: Since the president represents all of us, he should pass laws without worrying about what Parliament thinks.
 (% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)

Do Mozambicans want MPs to hold the president accountable or should he be free to act on his own? On this question, citizens are again divided: About half (49%) say the president should be able to devote his full attention to developing the country rather than wasting his time justifying his actions, while almost the same share (44%) think he ought to regularly report to Parliament on how his government spends taxpayers' money (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Should Parliament hold the president accountable? | Mozambique | 2022

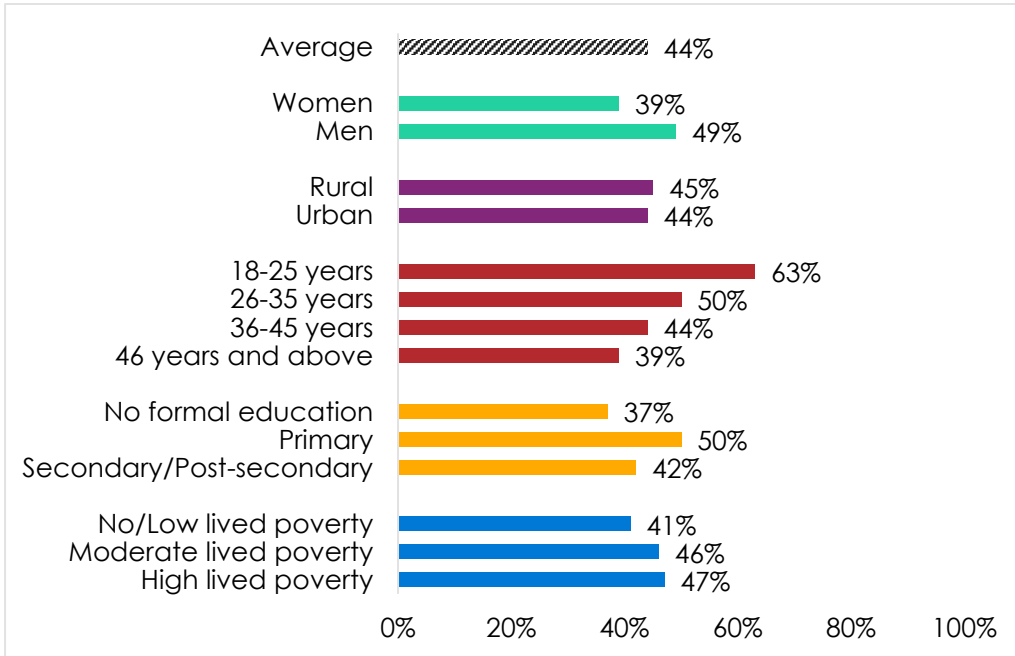


Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Parliament should ensure that the president explains to it on a regular basis how his government spends taxpayers' money.
 Statement 2: The president should be able to devote his full attention to developing the country rather than wasting time justifying his actions.
 (% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)

Men are more likely than women to favour the idea that MPs should hold the president accountable (49% vs. 39%), as are poorer respondents compared to their wealthier compatriots (46%-47% vs. 41%) (Figure 6). Support for this view decreases as respondents' age rises, ranging from 63% among those aged 18-25 years to 39% among those aged 46 years and above. Half (50%) of those with primary education agree with presidential accountability, 13 percentage points more than those lacking formal education (37%).

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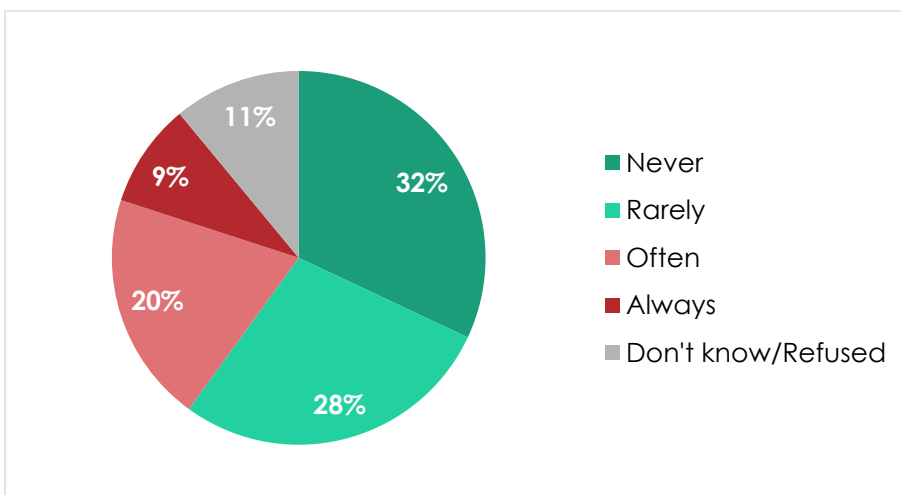
Figure 6: MPs should hold the president accountable | by demographic group
 | Mozambique | 2022



Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Parliament should ensure that the president explains to it on a regular basis how his government spends taxpayers' money.
 Statement 2: The president should be able to devote his full attention to developing the country rather than wasting time justifying his actions.
 (% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with Statement 1)

Asked how often the president ignores Parliament and just does what he wants, six in 10 (60%) citizens say this "rarely" (28%) or "never" (32%) happens, while about three in 10 (29%) disagree, suggesting that it occurs "often" (20%) or "always" (9%) (Figure 7).

Figure 7: How often does the president ignore Parliament? | Mozambique | 2022



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how often in this country does the president ignore Parliament and just do what he wants?

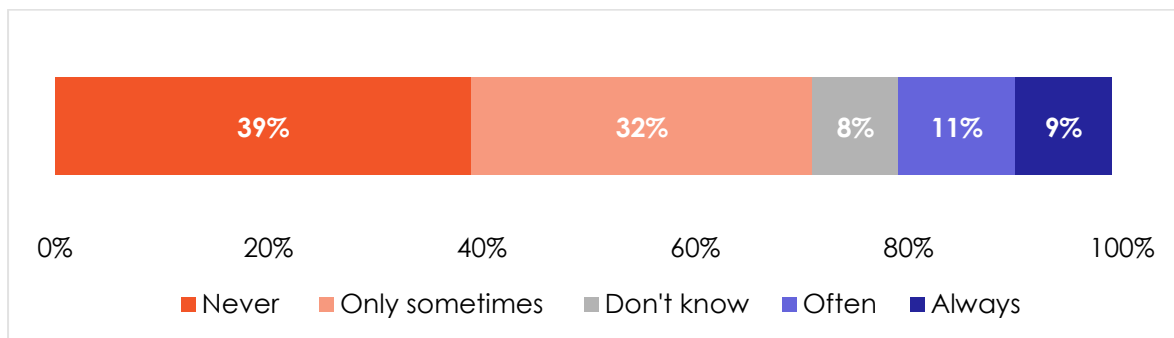
Responsiveness of MPs and citizen-initiated contact

To be guided by voters' demands requires hearing those demands. Do MPs listen to their constituents?

Only one-fifth (20%) of respondents say MPs "often" or "always" do their best to listen to what ordinary people have to say. About one-third (32%) say they "only sometimes" listen, while the largest share (39%) say this "never" happens (Figure 8).

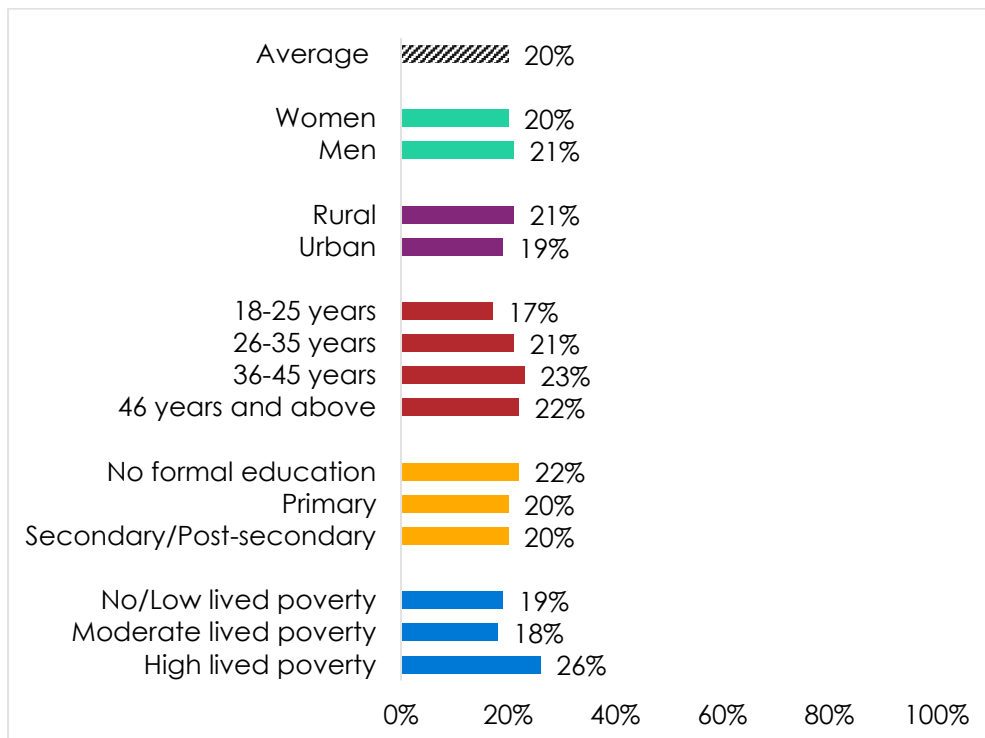
Poor Mozambicans are somewhat more likely than their better-off compatriots (26% vs. 18%-19%) to say that National Assembly members "often" or "always" listen to ordinary people. The youngest respondents are least likely to think so (17% of 18- to 25-year-olds) (Figure 9).

Figure 8: Do MPs listen to ordinary people? | Mozambique | 2022



Respondents were asked: How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what ordinary people have to say: Members of Parliament?

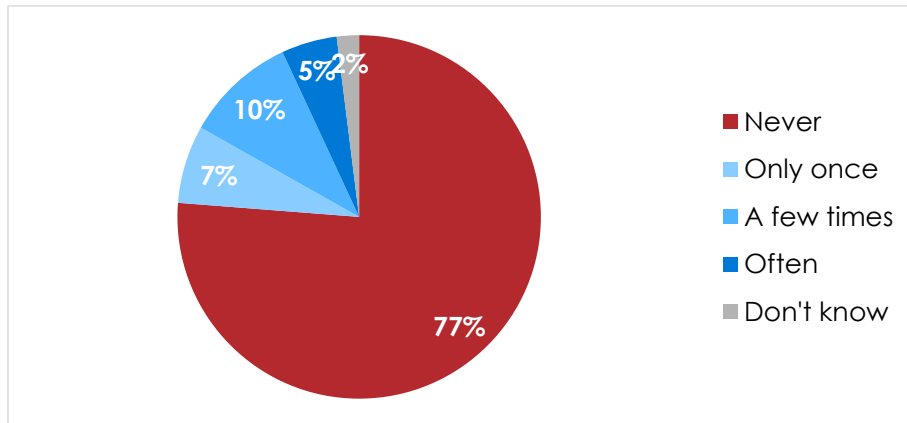
Figure 9: MPs often/always listen | by demographic group | Mozambique | 2022



Respondents were asked: How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what ordinary people have to say: Members of Parliament? (% who say "often" or "always")

When it comes to reaching out to elected officials, most respondents (77%) say they did not contact their MP during the past year to discuss an important problem or air their views (Figure 10). About one in five (22%) say they did so once, a few times, or often.

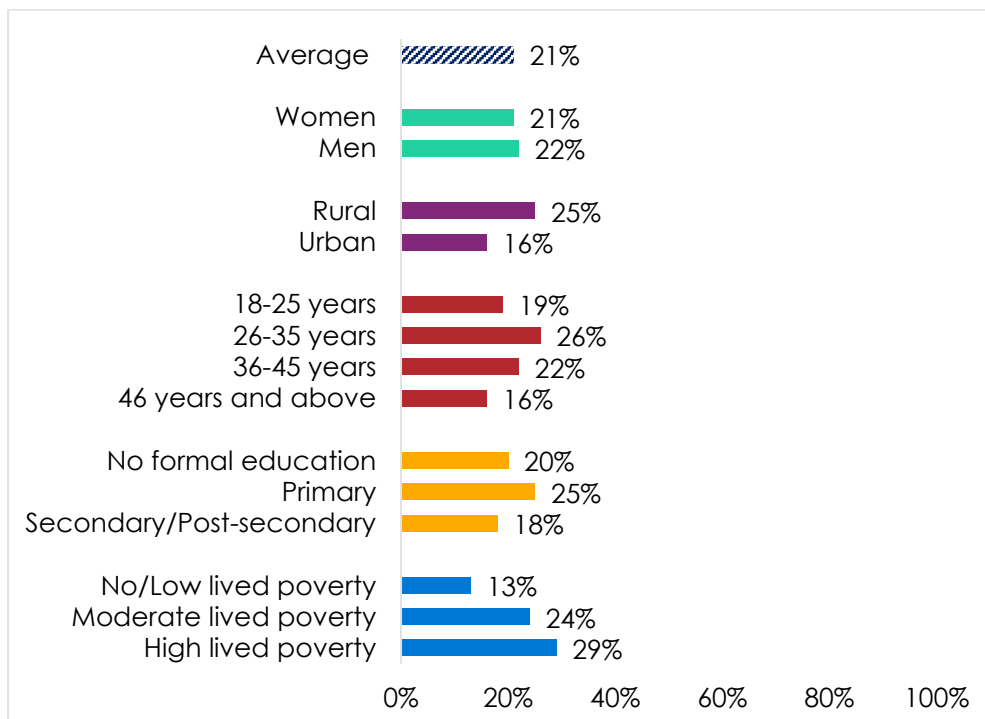
Figure 10: Contacted MP in past year | Mozambique | 2022



Respondents were asked: During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views: A member of Parliament?

Self-reported contact with an MP was low across key demographic groups. However, one-fourth or more reached out among the poorest Mozambicans (29%), youth aged 26-35 years (27%), rural residents (25%), and those with primary education (25%) (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Contacted MP in past year | by demographic group | Mozambique | 2022



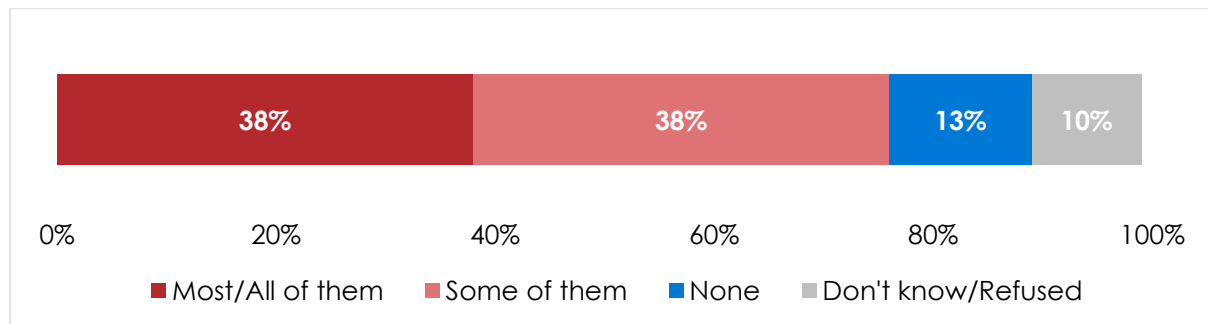
Respondents were asked: During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views: A member of Parliament? (% who say "only once," "a few times," or "often")

Perceived corruption and trust

Most Mozambicans perceive at least some MPs to be corrupt: Nearly four in 10 survey respondents (38%) think “most” or “all” MPs are involved in corruption, and an equal share (38%) say “some” of them are corrupt (Figure 12). Only 14% think all MPs are innocent of graft.

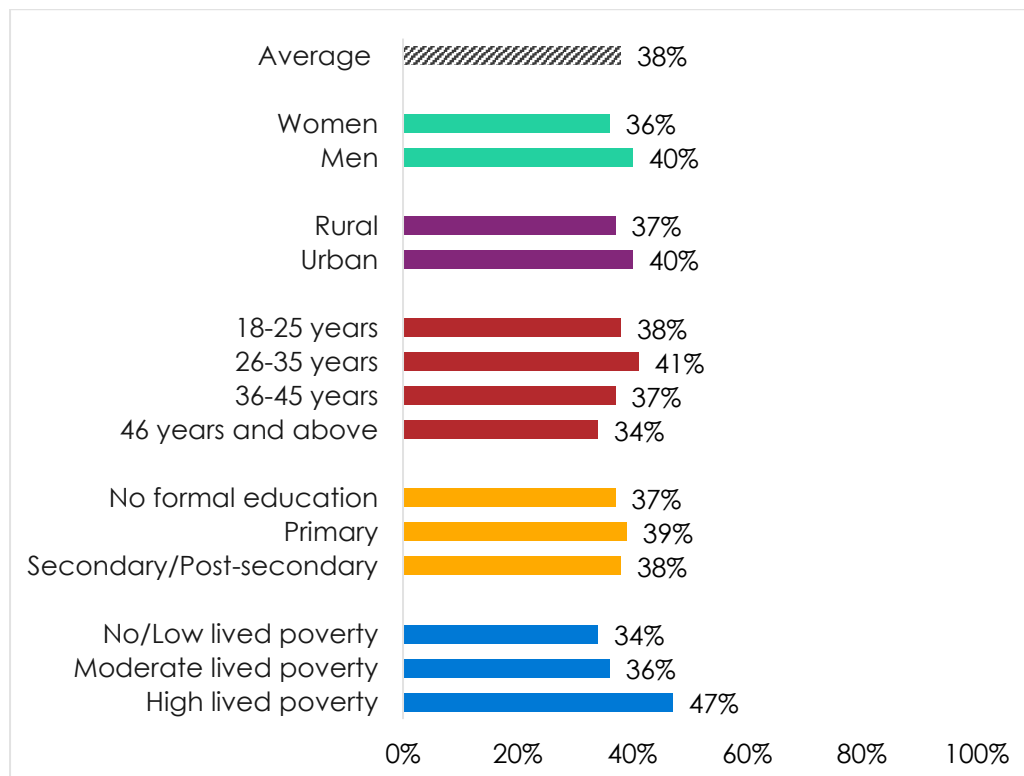
Perceptions of widespread corruption in the National Assembly are highest among the poorest respondents (47%) (Figure 13). Two-fifths or more suspect high levels of parliamentary corruption among 26- to 35-year-olds (41%), men (40%), and urban residents (40%).

Figure 12: Perceptions of corruption among MPs | Mozambique | 2022



Respondents were asked: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Members of Parliament?

Figure 13: Perceptions that most/all MPs are corrupt | by demographic group | Mozambique | 2022

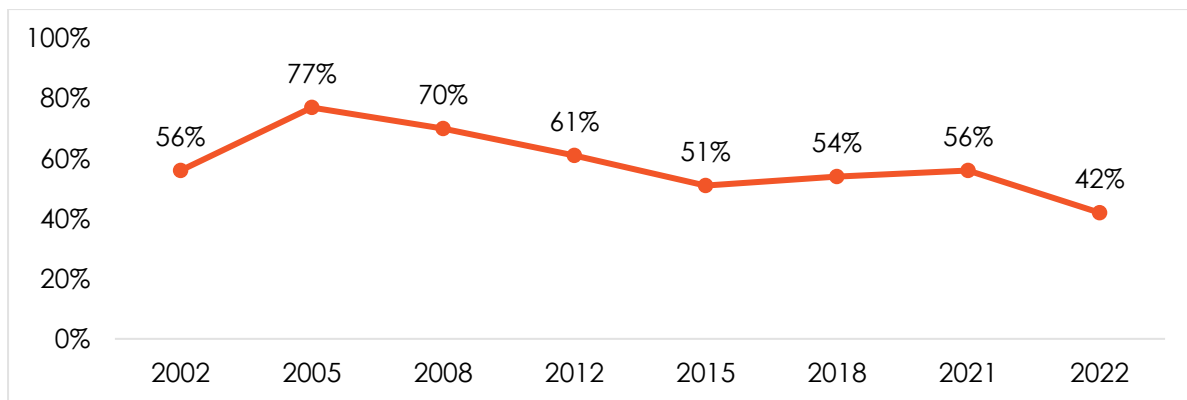


Respondents were asked: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? Members of Parliament? (% who say “most of them” or “all of them”)

One effect of perceived corruption is that it undermines popular trust in elected officials. In Mozambique, trust in MPs has experienced a sharp decline over the past two decades: The share of citizens who say they trust Parliament “somewhat” or “a lot” dropped from a high of 77% in 2005 to a low of 42% in 2022 (Figure 14).

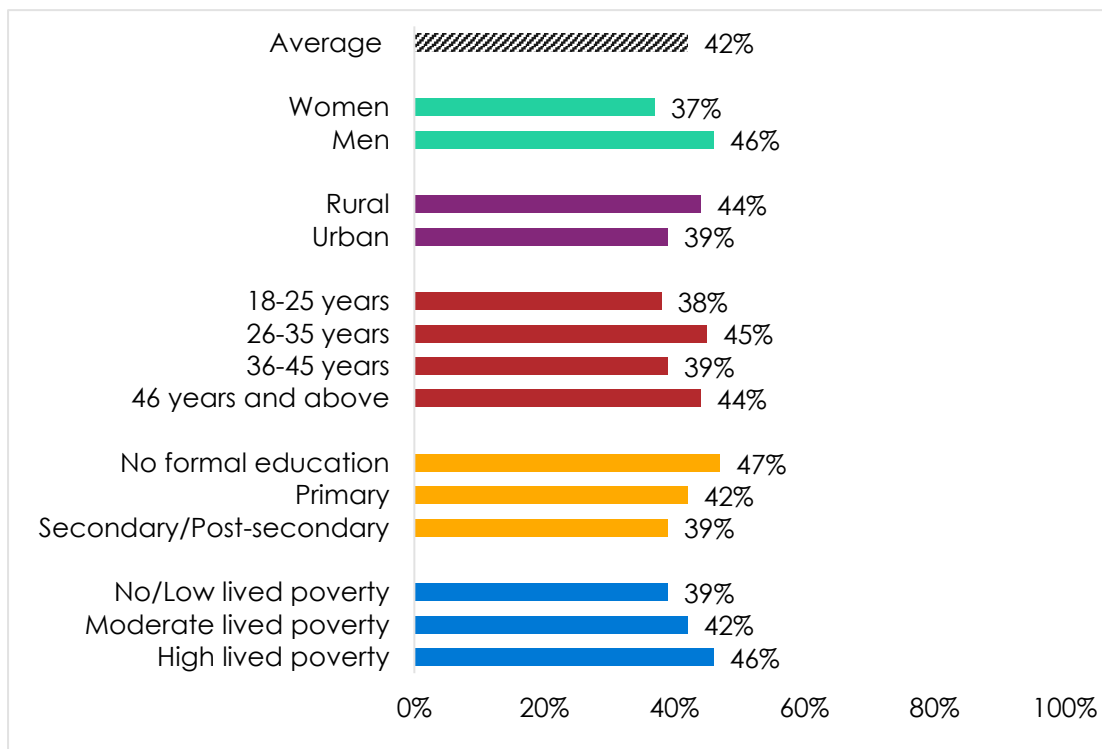
Trust in MPs is higher among men than women (46% vs. 37%) and in rural areas compared to cities (44% vs. 39%) (Figure 15). Respondents with no formal education (47%) are also more trusting of Parliament than those with more education (39%-42%). The poorest respondents are slightly more likely to express faith in Parliament than their wealthier counterparts (46% vs. 39%-42%).

Figure 14: Trust in Parliament | Mozambique | 2002-2022



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Parliament? (% who say “somewhat” or “a lot”)

Figure 15: Trust in Parliament | by demographic group | Mozambique | 2022



Respondents were asked: How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Parliament? (% who say “somewhat” or “a lot”)

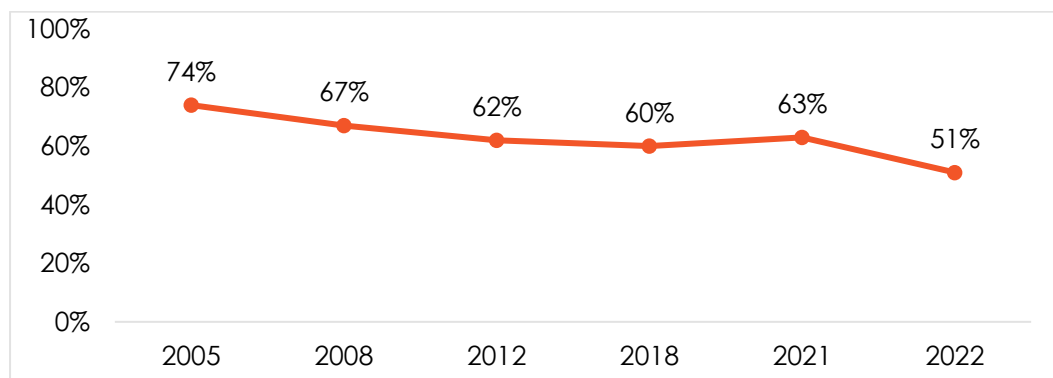
Approval ratings of MPs

Overall, how well do Mozambicans think their MPs are doing their jobs?

Since 2005, performance ratings for MPs have experienced a significant drop, decreasing from three-quarters (74%) of citizens who say they “approve” or “strongly approve” of the job their MP is doing to just half (51%) in 2022 (Figure 16).

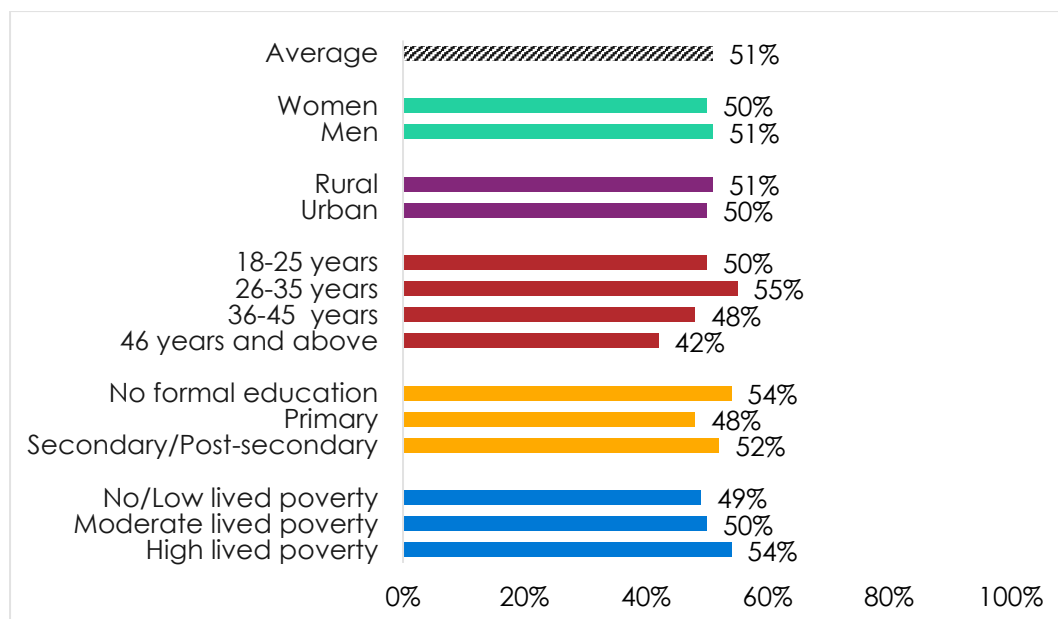
Positive ratings of MP performance are highest among young adults aged 26-35 (55%), citizens with no formal education (54%), and the poorest respondents (54%) (Figure 17). Mozambicans over the age of 45 (42%) are least likely to approve of how their MP has performed over the past 12 months.

Figure 16: Approval of MP’s job performance | Mozambique | 2005-2022



Respondents were asked: Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past 12 months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Your member of Parliament? (% who “approve” or “strongly approve”)

Figure 17: Approval of MP’s job performance | by demographic group | Mozambique | 2022



Respondents were asked: Do you approve or disapprove of the way that the following people have performed their jobs over the past 12 months, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Your member of Parliament? (% who “approve” or “strongly approve”)

Conclusion

As Mozambique prepares for an election, those running for office would do well to recognise that citizens want elected officials to prioritise voter demands rather than their own ideas.

But making their demands known to office bearers may not be simple, since most citizens believe that their MPs don't listen to them.

Survey participants are divided in their views about appropriate parliamentary responsibilities. Only half think MPs – rather than the president – should be tasked with lawmaking. And the same proportion reject the notion that the president ought to be accountable to Parliament for his actions.

Widespread perceptions of corruption colour Mozambicans' views of their MPs. This presents a challenge that the winners in the upcoming election can take up if they want to regain citizens' trust, which – along with citizens' ratings of their MPs' performance – has waned significantly over the years.

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