



Dispatch No. 1075 | 11 November 2025

# Keeping the faith: Zimbabweans express support for elections, concern over process

**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 1075 | Nyasha McBride Mpani**

## Summary

In November 2017, Zimbabwe's military effected a bloodless coup, removing longtime President Robert Mugabe and transferring power to then-Vice President Emmerson Mnangagwa. Although Zimbabweans have historically been strong supporters of elections, Mugabe's ousting was widely celebrated after mass demonstrations calling for his resignation in the days leading up to his ousting (Njanji & Jongwe, 2017; Ndoma & Kokera, 2017).

Since the emergence of a strong political opposition in 1999, Zimbabwe's national elections have frequently been marked by violence, corruption, and contested outcomes. Observers have documented police brutality, abductions, assassinations, voter intimidation, and electoral irregularities, which have contributed to declining trust in the electoral system and increasing voter disengagement (Matchaba-Hove, 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2023a, 2023b; Amnesty International, 2023; International Commission of Jurists, 2023). The 2008 presidential run-off was particularly violent, resulting in more than 200 deaths as Mugabe used coercive means, including the police and military, to retain power.

Recent media reports highlight continuing concerns about partisan bias within the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC), including allegations of gerrymandering (Burke & Chingono, 2023). Voter turnout in national elections has declined over time. In the 2023 harmonised elections, 4.56 million citizens cast ballots, yielding a turnout of 68.9% of registered voters, down from 82.5% in 2018. A group of non-governmental organisations attributed this drop in turnout to citizens losing faith in the electoral process (Zimbabwe Electoral Support Network, 2023).

While Mnangagwa's second full five-year term is set to end in 2028, the ruling ZANU-PF adopted a proposal in October to amend the Constitution to extend it to 2030. Critics argue that such a deferral would violate constitutional provisions requiring elections to be held within a fixed timeframe (Muronzi, 2025; Mbofana, 2025).

In the context of popular support for Mugabe's overthrow and the current attempt to postpone the 2028 elections, this study draws on an Afrobarometer survey from 2024 to explore Zimbabweans' support for elections and perceptions of election quality.

Findings reveal that eight in 10 citizens support elections as the best way to choose the country's leaders, a level from which it has deviated little over the past two decades.

Only about half of survey participants say they trust the ZEC "somewhat" or "a lot." Trust in the electoral management body may play an important role in legitimising elections, as respondents who trust the ZEC are significantly more likely to support elections.

Fear of political intimidation or violence during election campaigns has declined markedly, from roughly four-fifths of the population in 2009 to fewer than one-third in 2024, while a growing share of the citizenry feel free to choose whom to vote for without pressure.

Expectations of representative leadership are high: An overwhelming majority of citizens say elected leaders should prioritise voter demands over their own ideas.

## 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. Ten survey rounds in up to 45 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 10 surveys (2024/2025) cover 38 countries. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Zimbabwe, led by the Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI), interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,200 adult Zimbabweans in June 2024. 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 Zimbabwe in 1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2018, 2021, 2022, and 2023.

## Key findings

- Four in five Zimbabweans (79%) support choosing their leaders through regular, open, and honest elections, while 21% favour alternative methods.
  - Among 38 African countries surveyed in 2024/2025, Zimbabweans' support for elections is above average (74%).
  - Among citizens who trust the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) "a lot," nine in 10 (90%) support elections, compared to 70% of those who trust it "not at all."
- Fewer than half (49%) of respondents trust the ZEC "somewhat" or "a lot."
  - Trust falls sharply as educational attainment rises.
- A slim majority (52%) of Zimbabweans rate the 2023 election as "completely free and fair" or "free and fair with minor problems."
- Three-fourths (76%) of citizens say they are free to choose whom to vote for without feeling pressured, up from 65% in 2009.
- Fear of political intimidation or violence during election campaigns declined sharply over the same period, from 83% to 31%.
- An overwhelming majority (88%) of respondents believe elected officials should follow voters' demands rather than their own ideas.

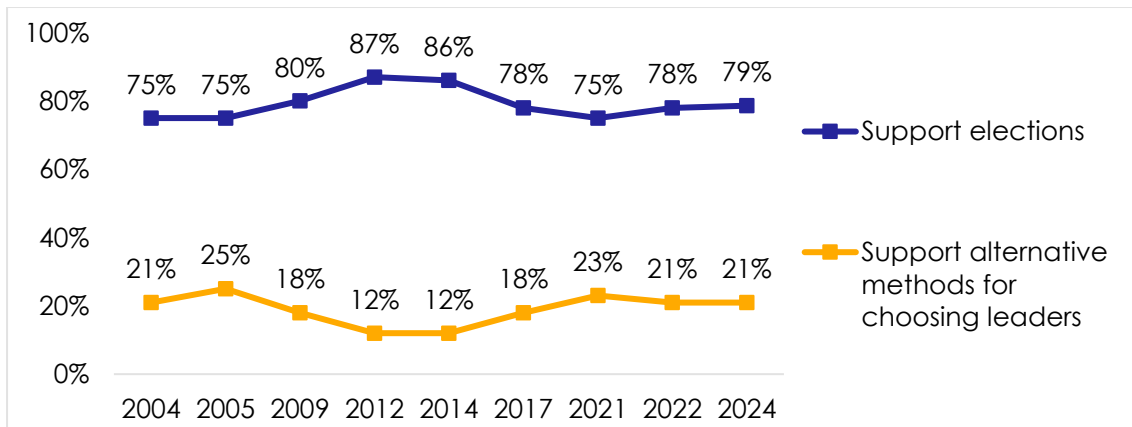
## Support for elections

Despite allegations of election rigging, electoral corruption, and political violence that have marred Zimbabwe's elections over the past quarter-century, citizens express a strong and consistent preference for elections as the best method of choosing their leaders. Support for elections has remained at three-fourths or more of survey respondents for the past two decades, peaking in the early 2010s and registering at 79% in 2024 (Figure 1).

The share of citizens who would welcome alternative methods of leadership selection continues to hover around one-fifth (21% in 2024).

Support for elections is weaker among youth (75%) than among their elders (80%-87%) and decreases as educational attainment rises (from 82% among adults with primary education or less to 74% among degree-holders) (Figure 2). Men and rural residents (both 81%) are more likely than women and urbanites (both 76%) to prefer elections. And economically better-off citizens (82%) are more supportive of elections than those experiencing moderate or high levels of lived poverty<sup>1</sup> (77%-78%).

**Figure 1: Views on methods for choosing leaders | Zimbabwe | 2004-2024**

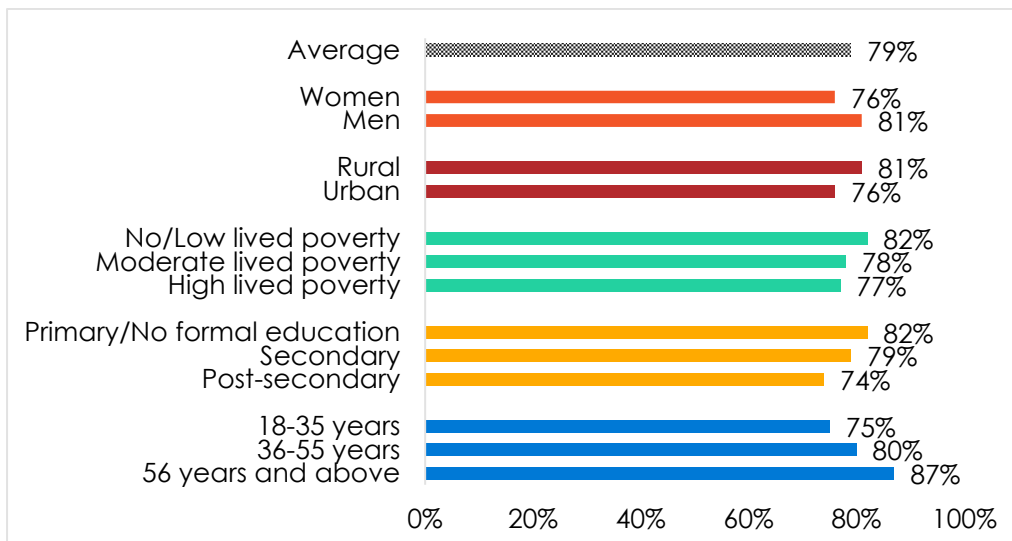


**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open, and honest elections.

Statement 2: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country's leaders.

**Figure 2: Support for elections | by demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2024**



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open, and honest elections.

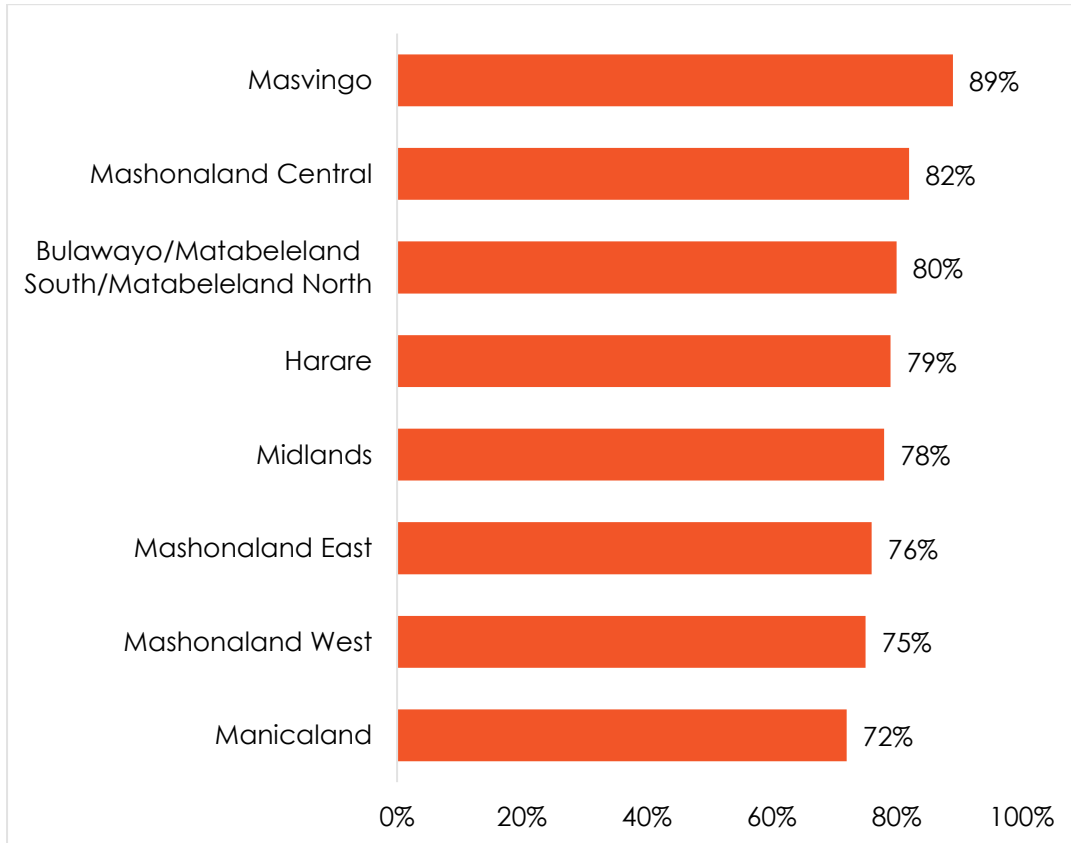
Statement 2: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country's leaders.

(% who choose Statement 1)

<sup>1</sup> Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of 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 Lekalake (2025).

The Masvingo Province stands out as expressing the strongest backing (89%) for elections, while support is weakest in Manicaland (72%) (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Support for elections | by province | Zimbabwe | 2024**

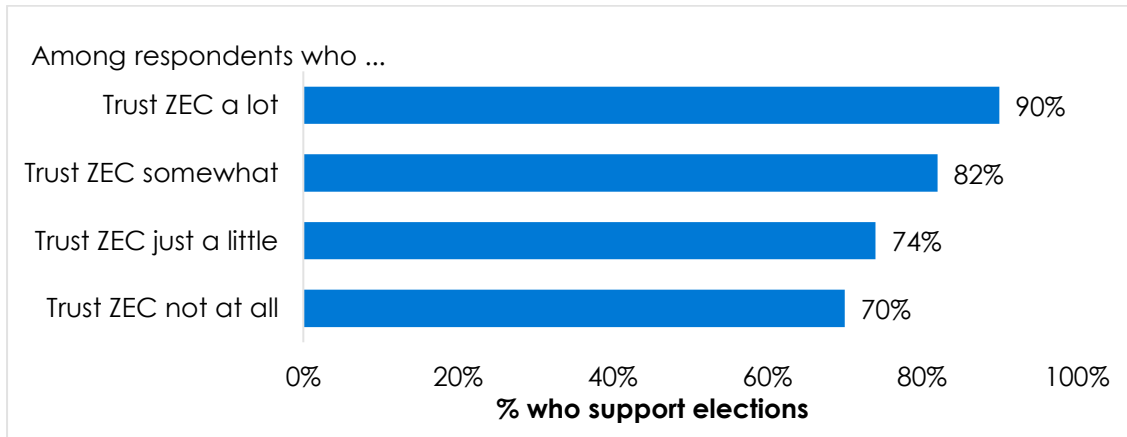


**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open, and honest elections.  
 Statement 2: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country's leaders.  
 (% who choose Statement 1)

Zimbabweans' support for elections rises with trust in the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC): Among those who trust the ZEC "a lot," 90% support elections, compared with 70% among those who lack trust entirely (Figure 4).

Zimbabweans' support for elections (79%) is above the continental average of 74% recorded across 38 African countries surveyed in Afrobarometer's Round 10 (2024/2025) (Figure 5). The Gambia and Tanzania (both 88%) top the list, while Comoros and Angola (both 55%) bring up the rear.

**Figure 4: Support for elections | by trust in Zimbabwe Electoral Commission**  
| Zimbabwe | 2024



**Respondents were asked:**

Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

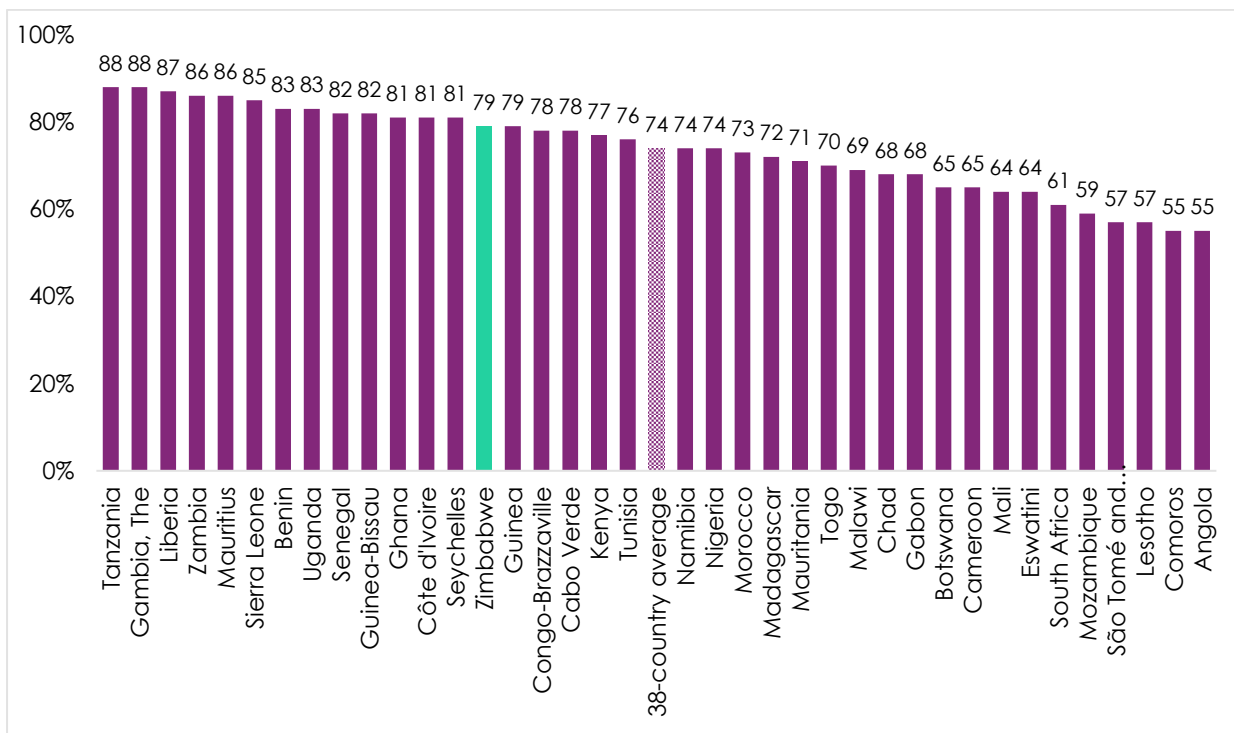
Statement 1: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open, and honest elections.

Statement 2: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country's leaders.

(% who choose Statement 1)

How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Zimbabwe Electoral Commission or ZEC?

**Figure 5: Support for elections | 38 countries | 2024/2025**



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: We should choose our leaders in this country through regular, open, and honest elections.

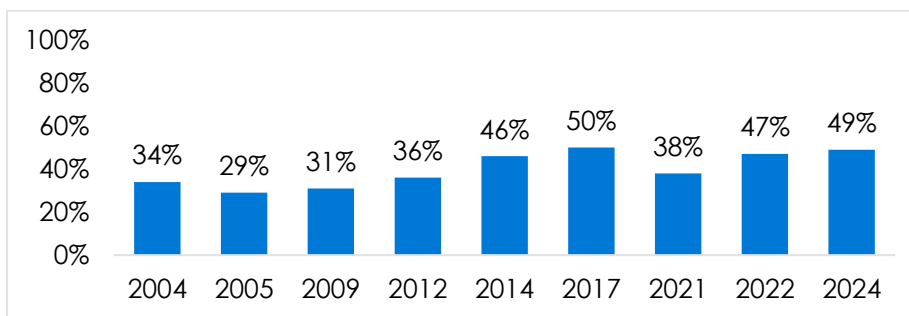
Statement 2: Since elections sometimes produce bad results, we should adopt other methods for choosing this country's leaders. (% who choose Statement 1)

## Trust in the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission

As the body responsible for overseeing and managing elections, the ZEC plays a key role in shaping public confidence in the electoral process. Trust in the commission is essential for ensuring that elections are seen as legitimate, transparent, and fair.

Trust in the ZEC has fluctuated over the past two decades, but at no point have more than half of adults said they trust the commission “somewhat” or “a lot” (Figure 6). Low levels of confidence throughout the 2000s (29%-34%) were potentially influenced by allegations of electoral malpractice during that period. Trust rose throughout the 2010s, reaching 50% in 2017, a level it almost matched in 2024 (49%).

**Figure 6: Trust in Zimbabwe Electoral Commission | Zimbabwe | 2004-2024**



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

When comparing key demographic groups, we find considerable variation in trust levels (Figure 7). Less educated citizens are more than twice as trusting as their tertiary-educated counterparts (65% vs. 29%), perhaps in part due to less awareness of historical election irregularities.

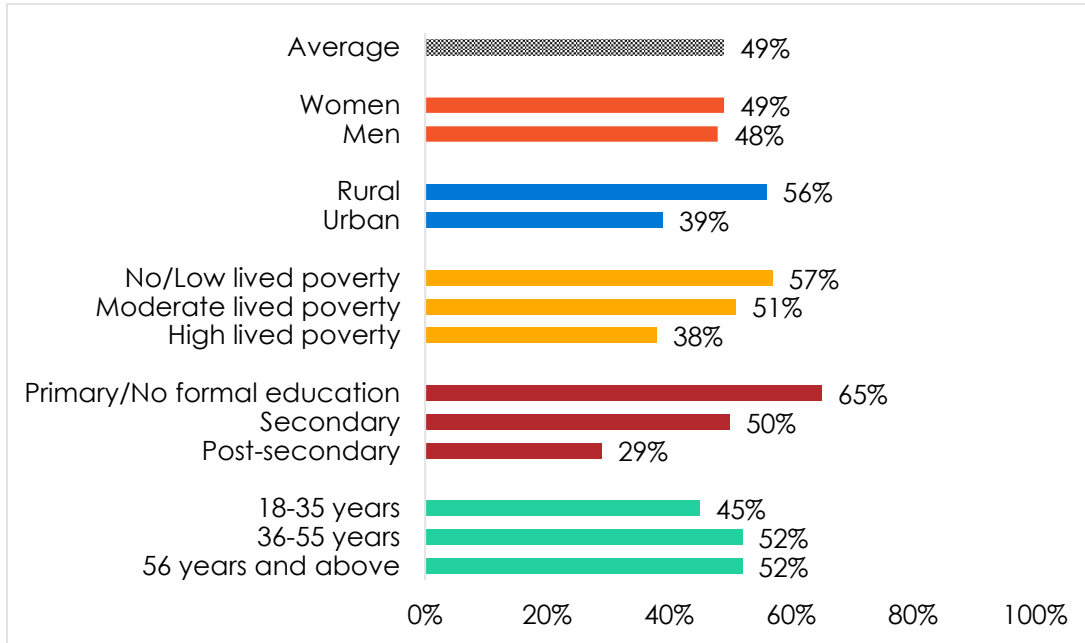
Faith in the ZEC also differs according to socioeconomic status: Those experiencing no or low lived poverty report the highest levels of trust (57%), while the poorest express the least confidence (38%).

Narrow majorities of 36- to 55-year-olds and senior citizens (both 52%) express confidence in the ZEC, while fewer than half (45%) of young people say they trust the ZEC “somewhat” or “a lot.”

Rural residents display a higher level of trust than urban residents (56% vs. 39%).

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](http://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis).

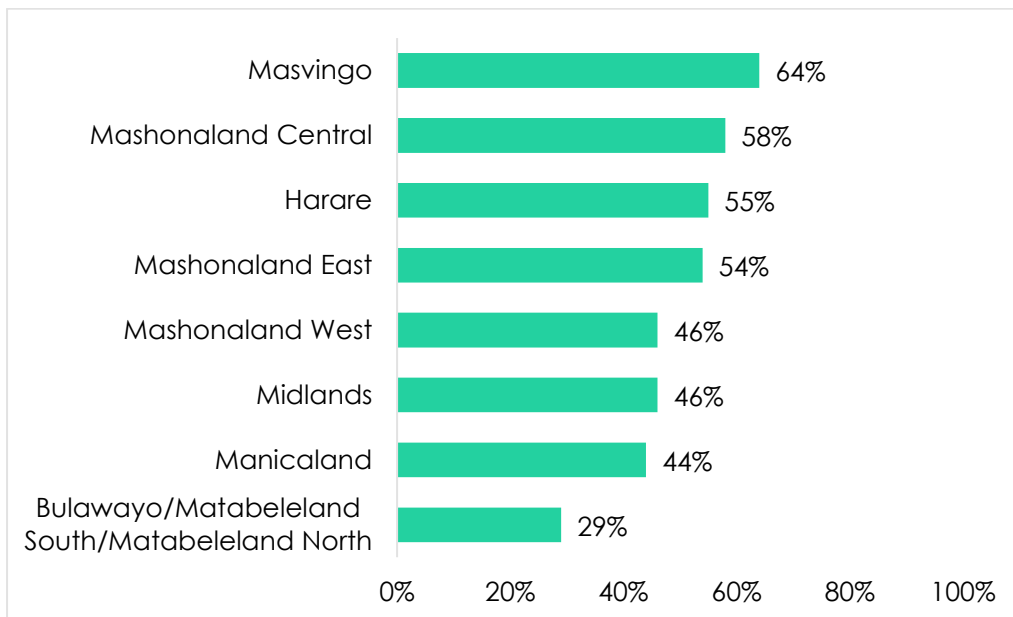
**Figure 7: Trust in Zimbabwe Electoral Commission | by demographic group**  
 | Zimbabwe | 2024



**Respondents were asked:** How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Zimbabwe Electoral Commission or ZEC? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

Residents in Masvingo are more than twice as likely as their compatriots in Matabeleland to express trust in the ZEC (64% vs. 29%) (Figure 8). In other provinces, trust in the ZEC lies in the 40%-60% range.

**Figure 8: Trust in Zimbabwe Electoral Commission | by province | Zimbabwe | 2024**



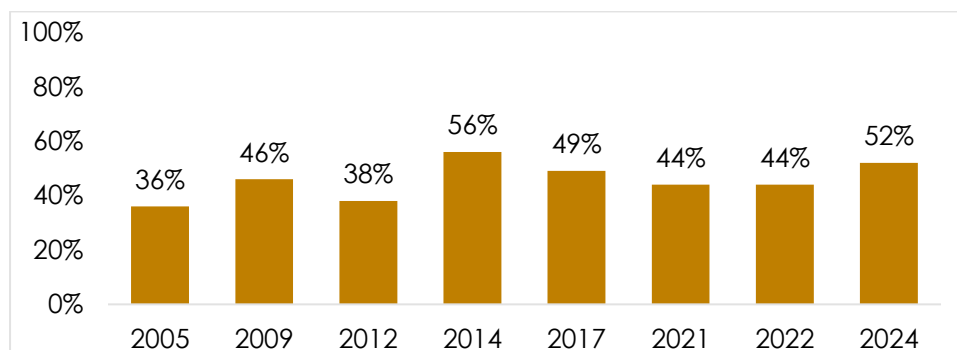
**Respondents were asked:** How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Zimbabwe Electoral Commission or ZEC? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

## Election quality

Over-time analysis reveals fluctuating public confidence in the integrity of Zimbabwe's elections (Figure 9). Between 2005 and 2012, the view that the previous election was "completely free and fair" or "free and fair with minor problems" remained a minority view (36%-46%).

A notable increase occurred in 2015 (56%), potentially signalling improved election management. Perceptions of election quality declined through to 2022 before an uptick to 52% in the most recent survey round. This increase is particularly striking given that the 2023 elections were widely reported to be flawed, as highlighted by the Southern African Development Community's Election Observer Mission (2023).

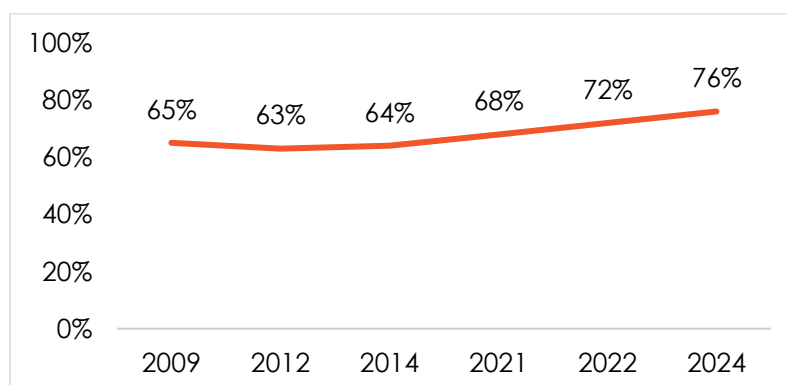
**Figure 9: Last election was free and fair | Zimbabwe | 2005-2024**



**Respondents were asked:** On the whole, how would you rate the freeness and fairness of the last national election? (% who say "free and fair with minor problems" or "completely free and fair")

The share of Zimbabweans who feel "somewhat free" or "completely free" to choose whom to vote for without feeling pressured rose from 64% in 2014 to 76% in 2024 (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Freedom to choose whom to vote for | Zimbabwe | 2009-2024**

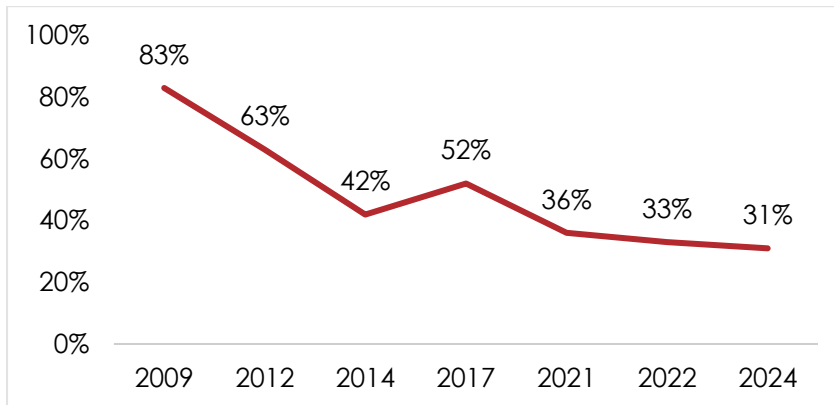


**Respondents were asked:** In this country, how free are you to choose whom to vote for without feeling pressured? (% who say "somewhat free" or "completely free")

Fear of electoral violence has declined markedly over time (Figure 11). In 2009, an overwhelming majority (83%) of Zimbabweans reported fearing ("somewhat" or "a lot") becoming a victim of violence or intimidation during the previous election, a proportion that had fallen by half by 2014 (42%).

Although fear levels have dropped further in recent years, three in 10 citizens (31%) still report worrying that they would be subject to violence in the 2023 election.

**Figure 11: Feared political violence during last election | Zimbabwe | 2009-2024**

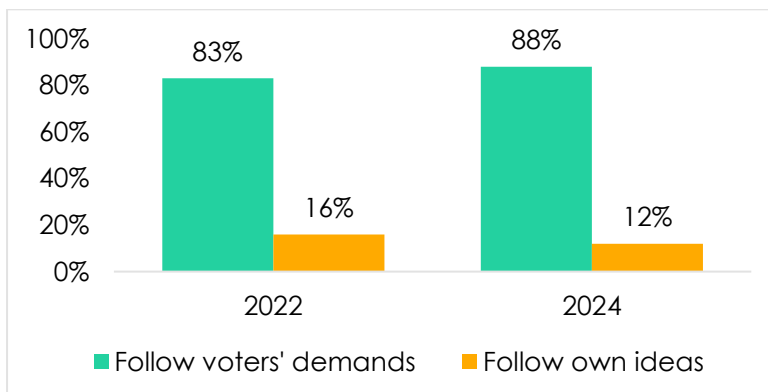


**Respondents were asked:** During the last national election campaign, how much did you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence? (% who say "somewhat" or "a lot")

### Role of elected officials

One potential reason for Zimbabweans' sustained preference for elections is the widespread expectation that elected officials should give voice to voters' concerns. Survey data reveal that in 2022, an overwhelming majority (83%) of citizens said leaders should prioritise voter demands rather than their own ideas, and this share grew to 88% in 2024 (Figure 12).

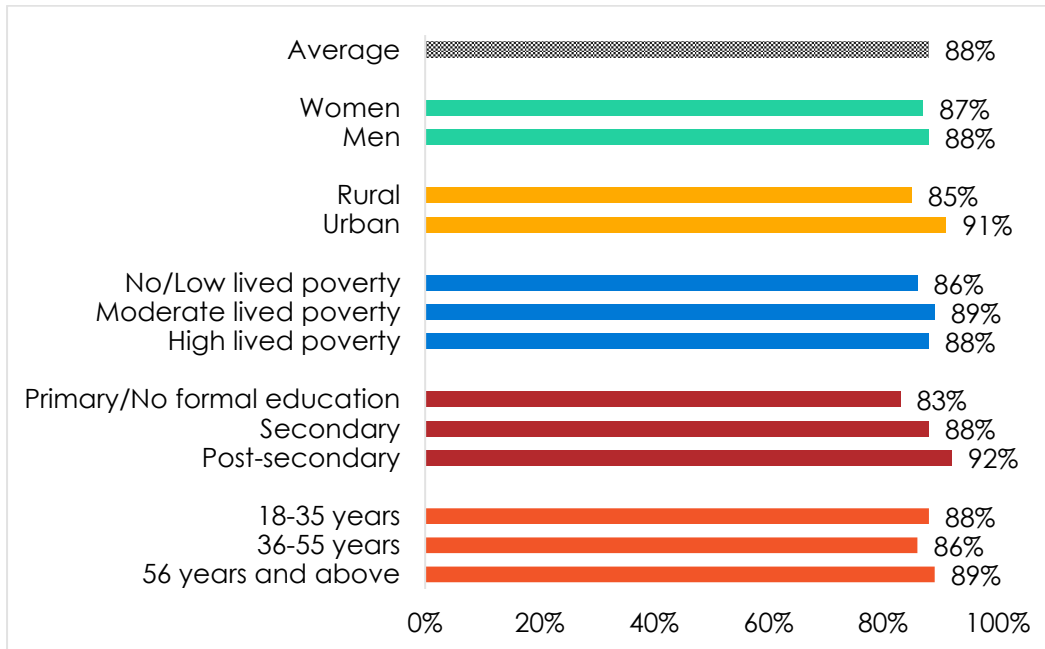
**Figure 12: Elected officials should listen to voters' demands vs. follow own ideas | Zimbabwe | 2022-2024**



**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.

The belief that elected leaders should listen to citizens' voices finds strong backing across key demographic groups. Among highly educated individuals, support for this view rises to more than nine-tenths (92%), compared to 83% of those with little or no formal schooling (Figure 13).

**Figure 13: Elected leaders should follow voters' demands** | by demographic group  
 | Zimbabwe | 2024



**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.

### Conclusion

Eight in 10 Zimbabweans say their leaders should be chosen through regular, open, and honest elections – a figure that has remained high for the past two decades – while nearly nine in 10 say elected officials must listen to voters. These data demonstrate that citizens are hungry for representative democracy.

Yet perceptions of election quality and the electoral management body indicate that citizens retain doubts concerning the election process: Only about half trust the ZEC and believe that the 2023 elections were free and fair. Support for elections rises with trust in the ZEC, suggesting the importance of electoral integrity in fostering attachment to democracy.

Three-fourths of Zimbabweans say they feel free to choose whom to vote for. And while a substantial minority still say they feared becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence during the 2023 elections, such fears have declined markedly over the past decade and a half.

These findings confirm that Zimbabweans still see elections as the most legitimate way to choose leaders, though confidence in the process remains fragile. Strengthening the ZEC's independence, curbing political violence, and levelling political field may be strategies for ensuring that the country's strong backing for elections is matched by a credible and transparent process that delivers the leadership Zimbabweans desire.

## References

- Amnesty International. (2023). Zimbabwe: Elections marred by voter intimidation, arrests and fears of internet shutdown. 24 August.
- Burke, J., & Chingono, N. (2023). 'The crocodile has not changed': Zimbabwe opposition warns of election violence. Guardian. 22 January.
- Human Rights Watch. (2023a). Crush them like lice: Repression of civil and political rights ahead of Zimbabwe's August 2023 election. 3 August.
- Human Rights Watch. (2023b). Zimbabwe: Joint statement calling on authorities to investigate the escalation of abductions, torture and killing of political activists. 15 November.
- International Commission of Jurists. (2023). Zimbabwe: Serious human rights violations call into question the legitimacy and credibility of the Zimbabwe election results. 13 September.
- Matchaba-Hove, R. (2008). Zimbabwe elections: 13 dimensions of unfairness. South African Institute of International Affairs.
- Mattes, R., & Lekalake, R. (2025). Decade of destitution? Severe lived poverty is surging in many African countries. Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 943.
- Mbofana, T. R. (2025). Postponing elections for Mnangagwa to remain in power till 2030 is still unconstitutional. Reuters. 5 February.
- Muronzi, C. T. (2025). Zimbabwe's ruling party resolves to extend president's term to 2030. Reuters. 19 October.
- Ndoma, S., & Kokera, R. (2017). Zimbabweans want open and honest elections, fear political intimidation and violence. Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 150.
- Njanji, S., & Jongwe, F. (2017). Zimbabweans jubilant during 'Mugabe must go' march. Mail & Guardian. 19 November.
- Zimbabwe Election Support Network. (2023). 2023 harmonised elections report.

**Nyasha McBride Mpani** is project leader for the Data for Governance Alliance at the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation in South Africa. Email: [nmpani@ijr.org.za](mailto:nmpani@ijr.org.za).

Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, nonpartisan 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 and the University of Malawi provide technical support to the network.

Financial support for Afrobarometer is provided by Sweden via the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation via the World Bank Think Africa Project, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Open Society Foundations - Africa, Luminare, the Ford Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Mastercard Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the Obama Foundation, the European Union Commission, the World Bank Group, the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda, and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) supported by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

Donations help Afrobarometer give voice to African citizens. Please consider making a donation to Afrobarometer. To make an online donation, kindly follow this [link](#) or this [link](#). To discuss institutional funding, contact Felix Biga ([felixbiga@afrobarometer.org](mailto:felixbiga@afrobarometer.org)) or Runyararo Munetsi ([runyararo@afrobarometer.org](mailto:runyararo@afrobarometer.org)).

Follow our releases on #VoicesAfrica.



Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 1075 | 11 November 2025