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Amid worsening drought and crop failure, Zimbabweans support government investment in climate-resilient infrastructure, green energy

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 1126 | Stephen Ndoma

Summary

Zimbabwe is highly vulnerable to the adverse impacts of climate change. The Global Climate Risk Index ranks it 34th on a list of 174 countries most affected by extreme weather events between 1995 and 2024 (Germanwatch, 2025). And the Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (2026) places Zimbabwe 171st out of 187 countries, combining high vulnerability to climate change with low readiness to deal with climate-change impacts.

The country's major challenges include reduced and erratic rainfall (Government of Zimbabwe & UNDP, 2017). Whereas droughts occurred in one in 10 growing seasons between 1902 and 1979, their frequency increased to one in four between 1980 and 2011. Climate change has also been associated with increases in average temperatures, numerous mid-season dry spells, and a shortening of the rainy season since 1960 (World Bank, 2024).

In 2024, President Emmerson Mnangagwa declared a state of national disaster in response to the impact of an El Niño-induced drought (Guardian, 2024). This followed a declaration of a state of national disaster in 2019 after Cyclone Idai ravaged the eastern part of Zimbabwe, particularly the Chimanimani and Chipinge districts of Manicaland, leaving 31 dead and more than 100 missing (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2019). In January it was reported that heavy rains during the summer had already left 70 people dead and 51 injured, and destroyed at least 1,000 houses (Shamu, 2026).

The government's response to climate change is anchored in the National Climate Change Adaptation Plan (2024-2030). The document serves as a roadmap toward a climate-resilient, low-carbon economy, which it seeks to achieve by mobilising climate finance and fostering climate-change-adaptation research, innovation, and technology development and transfer. The plan lays out how the government will plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate climate-adaptation initiatives, as well as how these will be integrated into sectoral development programmes. Other strategic priorities include strengthening institutional capacity for climate-change management, enhancing climate-information systems, and improving disaster preparedness (Government of Zimbabwe, 2024).

In September 2025, Zimbabwe gazetted the Climate Change Management Bill, a legal framework designed to bolster the country's response to climate change. If passed by Parliament and signed into law by the president, the legislation will establish a national climate fund that will draw on taxes and proceeds from the trading of carbon credits to fund adaptation, mitigation, and capacity building. Among other things, the bill provides for the obligations of sub-national governments, establishes units to monitor and regulate environmental and meteorological outcomes, and allows for "green" financial incentives (Chishuvo, 2025).

This dispatch reports on a special survey module in the Afrobarometer Round 10 questionnaire that explores Zimbabweans' experiences and perceptions of climate change and changing weather patterns.

Findings show that overwhelming majorities of citizens report worsening drought and crop failure over the past decade. More than one-third report having adapted to changing weather patterns by adjusting water consumption, reducing or rescheduling outdoor work, modifying the crops they plant or foods they eat, and, among those who have livestock, altering livestock management.

A slim majority of citizens have heard of climate change. Among them, more than nine in 10 say it is making life worse, and two-thirds say human activity is to blame for the changing climate, either on its own or in conjunction with natural processes. Majorities say that the Zimbabwean government must take urgent action to limit climate change and that rich countries should help fund the country's response.

Among all citizens, majorities support a range of potential policy responses to changing weather conditions, including greater pressure on developed countries to provide climate aid, investment in climate-resilient infrastructure and renewable technologies, use of cleaner-burning cookstoves, and a ban on cutting trees for firewood or charcoal.

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. 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 1,200 adult citizens between 1 and 15 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 standard surveys were conducted in Zimbabwe in 1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2021, and 2022.

Key findings

- Vast majorities of Zimbabweans say that crop failure (95%) and droughts (94%) have become "somewhat more severe" or "much more severe" in their region over the past decade, while 61% say floods have become less intense.
- Asked whether they have had to adapt to changing weather patterns, more than one-third of respondents say they reduced their water consumption or altered their water source (45%), adjusted their outdoor work patterns (41%), reduced their livestock holdings or changed grazing patterns (37% of those who have livestock), and changed the types of crops they plant or foods they eat (35%).
- More than half (56%) of Zimbabweans say they have heard of climate change.
 - Awareness rises with higher educational attainment, from 31% among adults with primary schooling or less to 87% among those with tertiary education, and with greater news consumption via social media, the Internet, television, and radio.
- Among those who are aware of climate change:
 - A huge majority (93%) say it is making life in Zimbabwe worse, up from 62% in 2021.

- Almost half (48%) identify human activity as the main cause of climate change; a further 18% blame a combination of human activity and natural processes.
 - Six in 10 (60%) say it is important for the Zimbabwean government to take urgent action to limit climate change, even if it is expensive or causes some job losses.
 - Nearly three-fourths say that rich countries should take immediate steps to limit climate change (72%) and that they have an obligation to help Zimbabwe cover the costs of adapting and responding to the negative impacts of climate change (73%).
- Among all respondents, large majorities express support for possible policy responses to changes in climate, including investing in climate-resilient infrastructure (80%), investing in renewable energy technologies (76%), and putting pressure on developed countries for aid (69%). More than half also favour requiring cookstoves that use cleaner fuels (60%) and banning tree cutting for firewood or charcoal (54%).

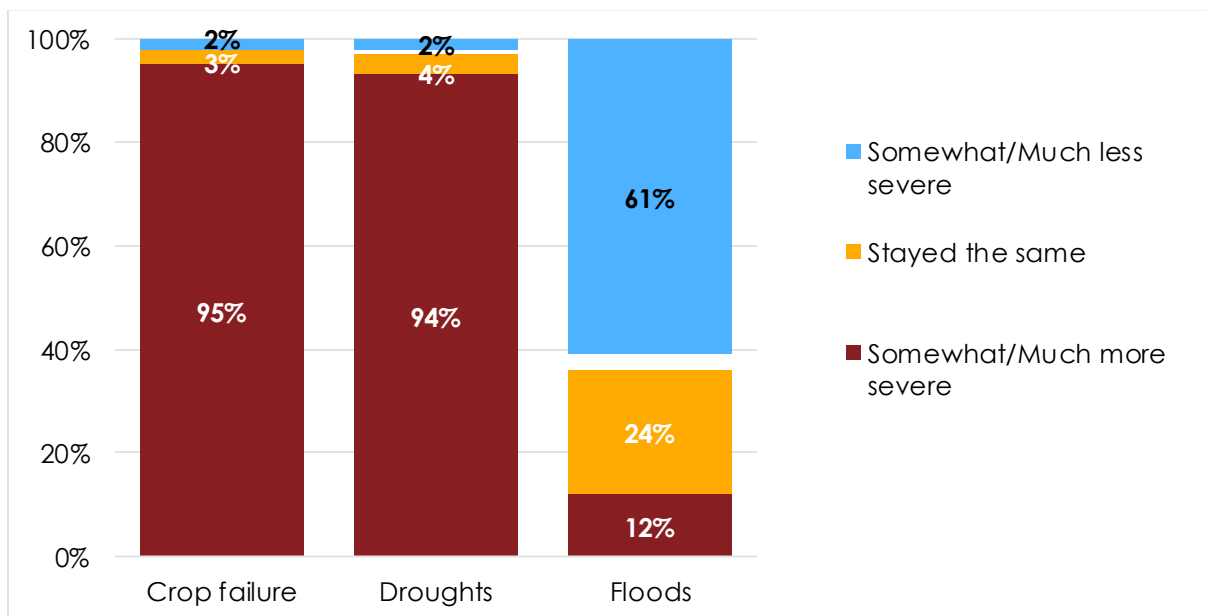
Natural disasters and citizen responses

Afrobarometer asked respondents about their experiences, if any, with extreme weather conditions and the actions they've taken to deal with them.

An overwhelming majority (95%) of Zimbabweans say that crop failure has become "somewhat more severe" or "much more severe" in their region over the past 10 years, while a similar proportion (94%) say the same about droughts (Figure 1).

In contrast, about six in 10 respondents (61%) say the severity of floods has decreased.

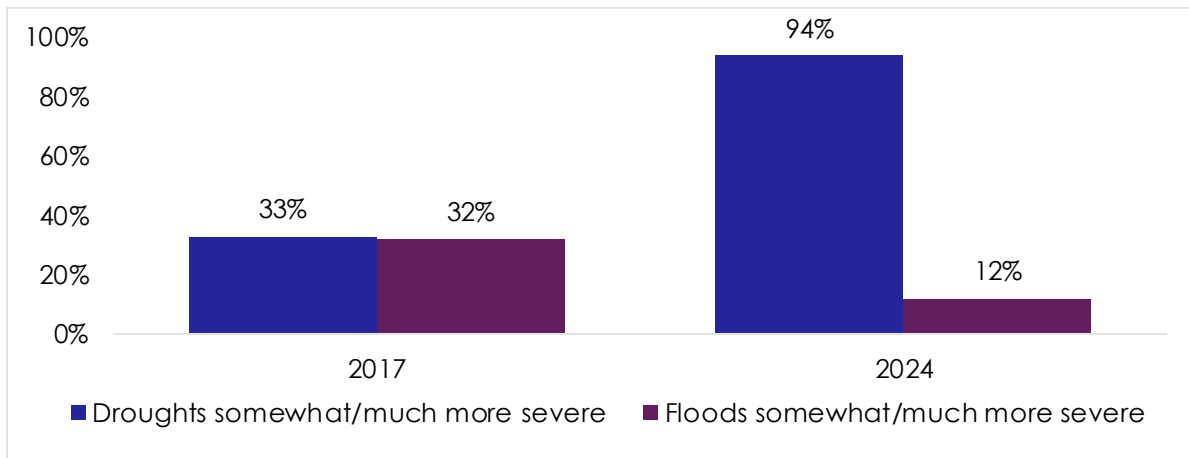
Figure 1: Severity of droughts, floods, and crop failure | Zimbabwe | 2024



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: Droughts? Flooding? Crop failure? Have they become more severe, less severe, or stayed about the same?

Trend analysis reveals a stark increase in reports of worsening droughts, nearly tripling from 33% in 2017 to 94% in 2024 (Figure 2). In contrast, the share of those reporting more severe floods fell by 20 percentage points over the same period.

Figure 2: Increased severity of droughts and floods | Zimbabwe | 2017-2024



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? Flooding? Have they become more severe, less severe, or stayed about the same?*

In response to changing weather patterns, more than four in 10 citizens (45%) report having had to reduce their water consumption or change their water source (Figure 3). This strategy is more common among rural residents (51%) than urbanites (38%).

Four in 10 (41%) say they adjusted their outdoor work patterns, while 35% say they changed the types of crops they plant or the foods they eat. Rural residents are far more likely than their urban counterparts to report changing their outdoor work hours (46% vs. 34%) and altering crop production or food consumption (43% vs. 23%).

Among respondents with livestock, 37% say that they were compelled to change grazing patterns or reduce the number and type of livestock that they keep.

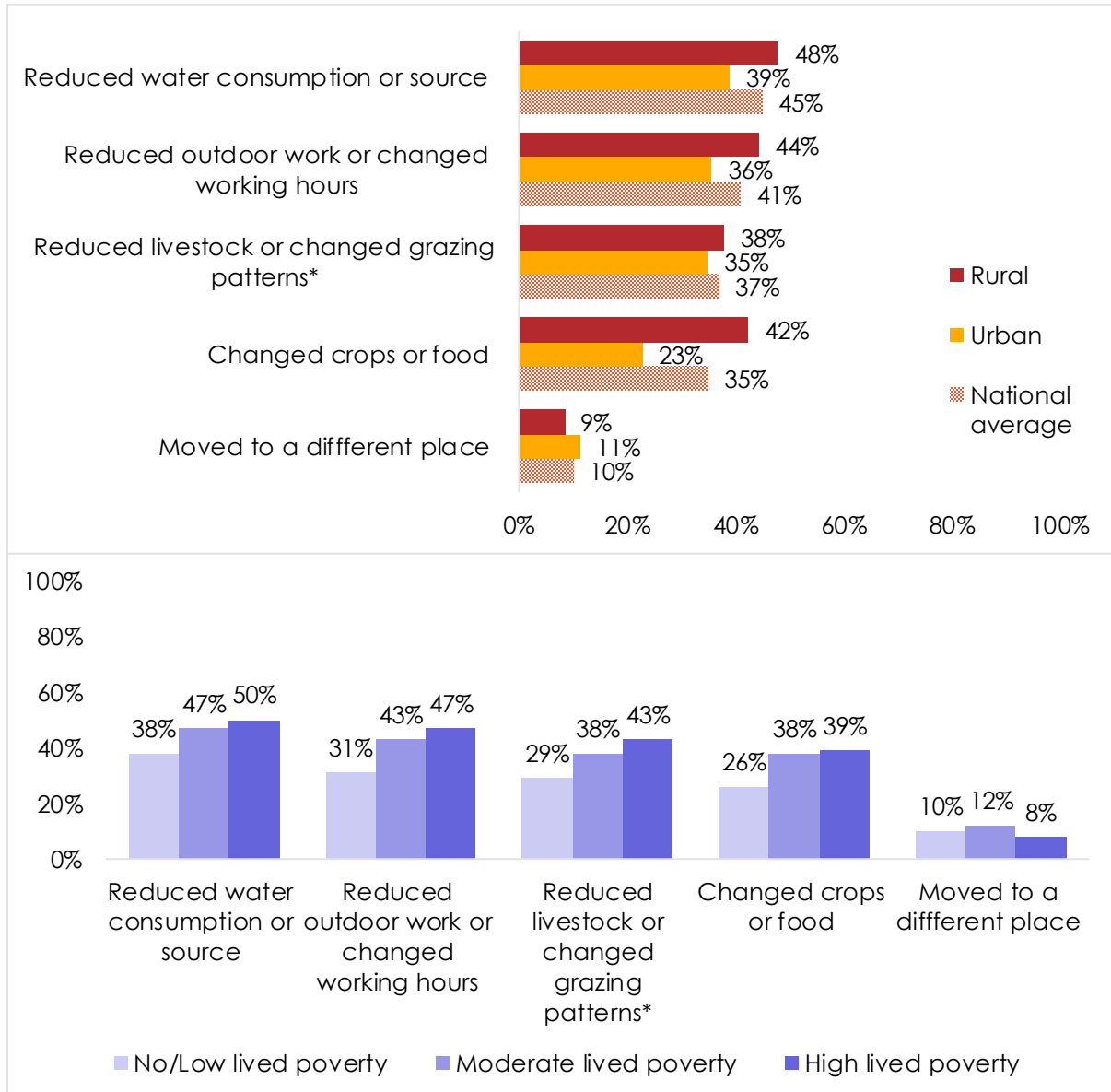
The very poor¹ are more likely than their better-off counterparts to report having adapted to changing weather patterns in these four ways.

Among all citizens, one in 10 (10%) say they relocated in response to climatic changes.

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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 preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes and Lekalake (2025).

Figure 3: Actions taken in response to changing weather patterns | by urban-rural location and lived poverty | Zimbabwe | 2024



Respondents were asked: Here are a range of actions that some people have had to take because of climate changes or changing weather patterns. Please tell me whether you or your family have had to do any of the following in the past five years: Change the source or reduce the amount of water that you use? Reduce the amount of work you do outdoors or work outdoors at different times? Move to another place? Change grazing patterns or reduce the number and type of livestock you keep? Change the types of crops you plant or the types of food you eat? (% who say "yes")

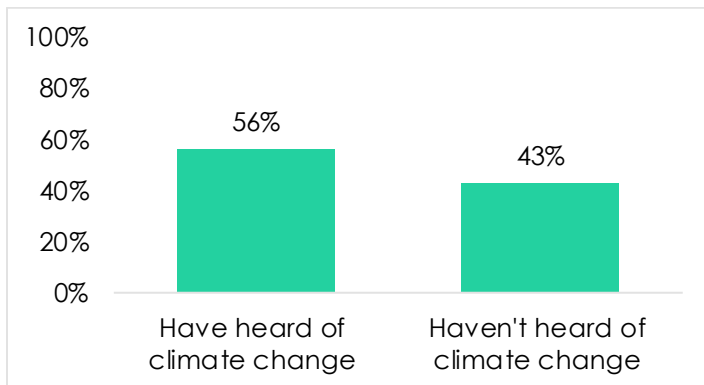
* The question about livestock was posed only to respondents who have livestock.

Climate change

Awareness of climate change

How familiar are Zimbabweans with climate change? A modest majority (56%) say they have heard about the concept (Figure 4).

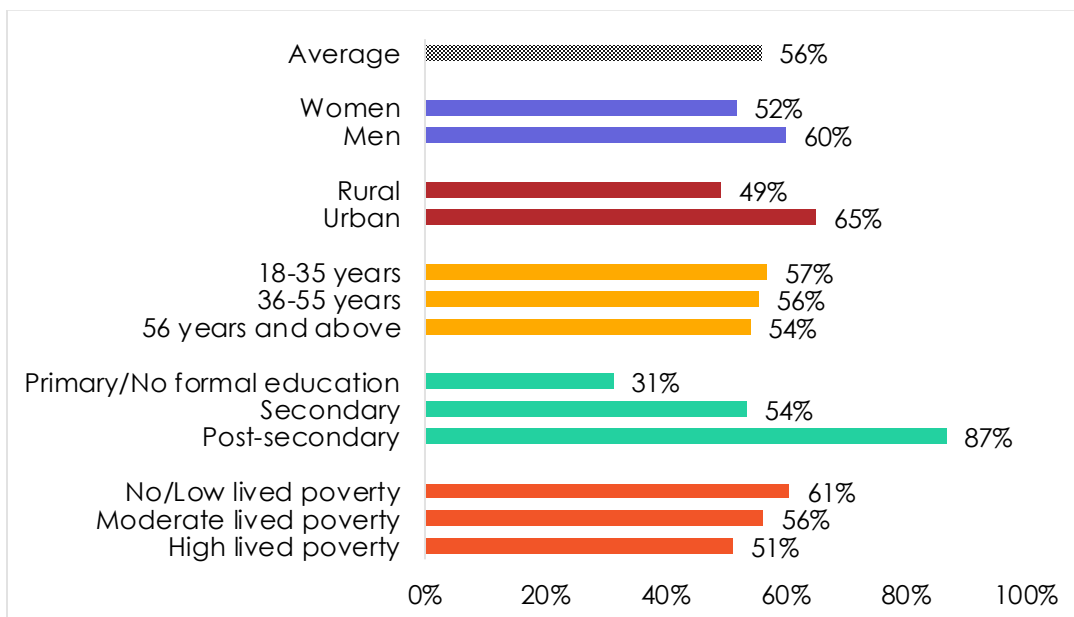
Figure 4: Awareness of climate change | Zimbabwe | 2024



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

Education seems to play a major role: The share who say they have heard of climate change increases from 31% among those with little or no formal schooling to 87% among citizens with post-secondary education (Figure 5). Awareness of climate change is more prevalent among men (60%) and urbanites (65%) than women (52%) and rural residents (49%), but varies little by age.

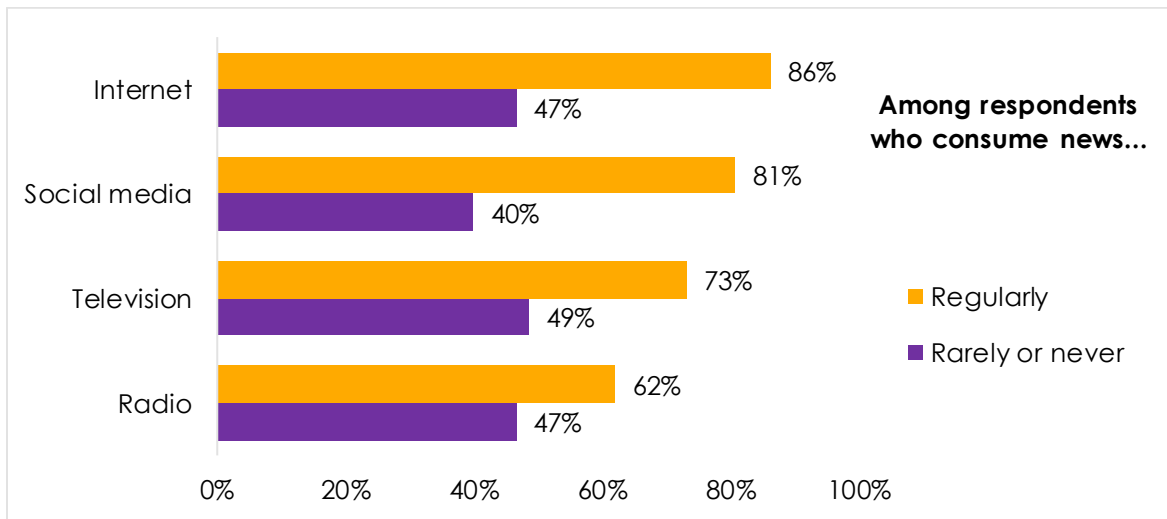
Figure 5: Aware of climate change | by demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2024



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

News consumption is positively correlated with awareness of climate change (Figure 6). Respondents who get news from social media "every day" or "a few times a week" are twice as likely to be familiar with climate change as those who consume social media news less often or not at all (81% vs. 40%). Large awareness gaps also separate regular consumers from irregular or non-consumers of news via the Internet (39 percentage points), television (24 points), and radio (15 points).

Figure 6: Aware of climate change | by news consumption | Zimbabwe | 2024



Respondents were asked:

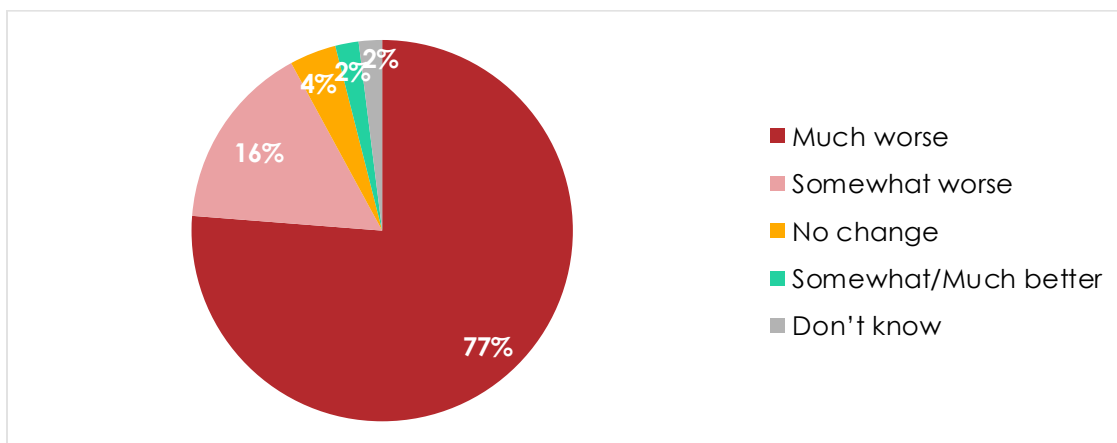
Have you heard about climate change, or haven't you had the chance to hear about this yet? (% who say "yes")

How often do you get news from the following sources? (Respondents who "regularly consume news" say they do so "every day" or "a few times a week," while those who "rarely" or "never" consume news say they do so "a few times a month," "less than once a month," or "never")

Effects of climate change

Among Zimbabweans who have heard about climate change, most (93%) say the phenomenon is making life "somewhat worse" (16%) or "much worse" (77%) (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Is climate change making life worse or better? | Zimbabwe | 2024



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

Over-time analysis shows that negative perceptions of climate change rose sharply between 2021 (62%) and 2022 (80%) and have climbed by 13 percentage points since (Figure 8).

Perceptions of climate change's adverse impacts vary little by demographic category (Figure 9).

Figure 8: Climate change is making life worse | Zimbabwe | 2021-2024

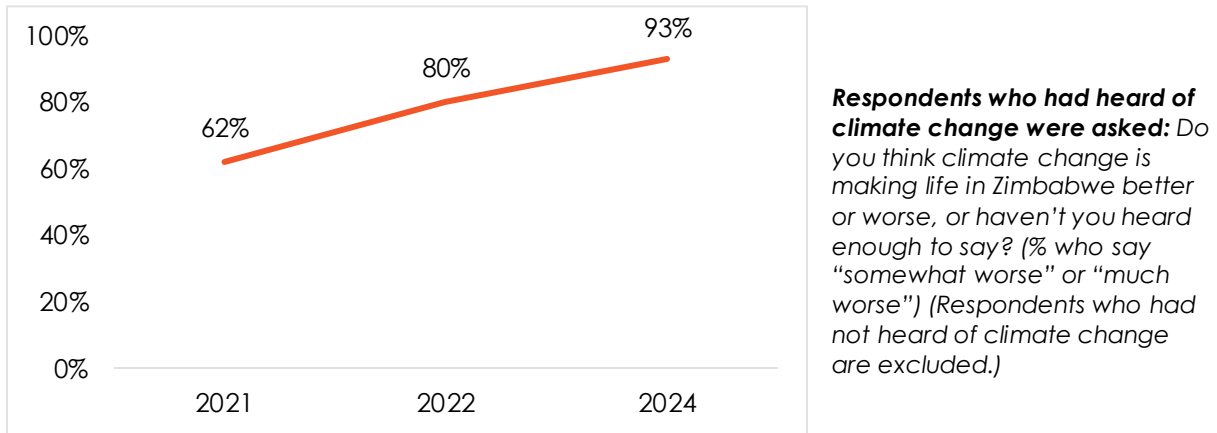
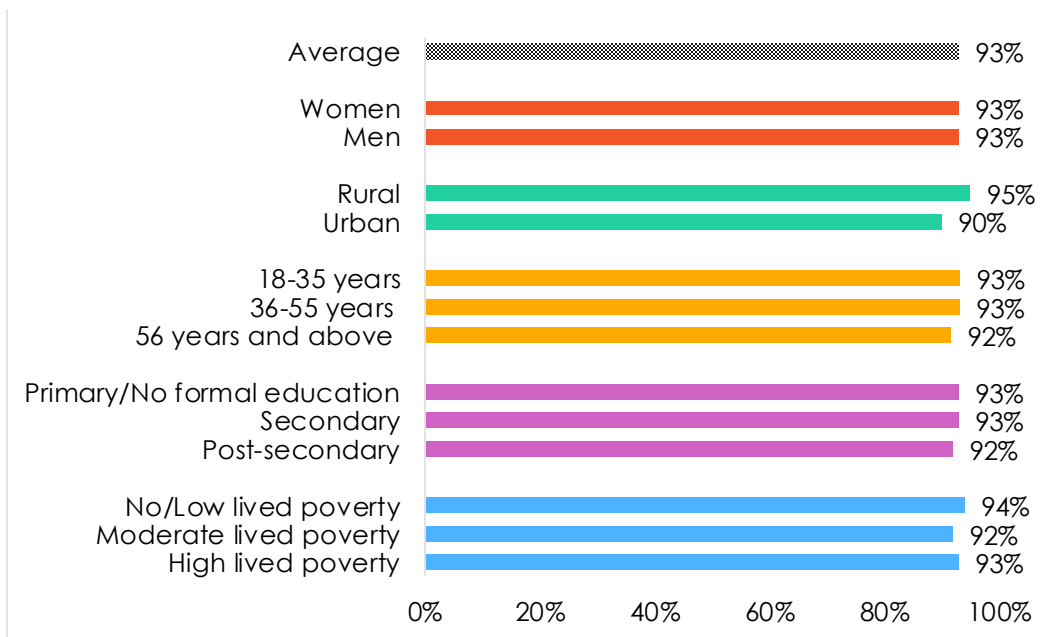


Figure 9: Climate change is making life worse | by demographic group² | Zimbabwe | 2024



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

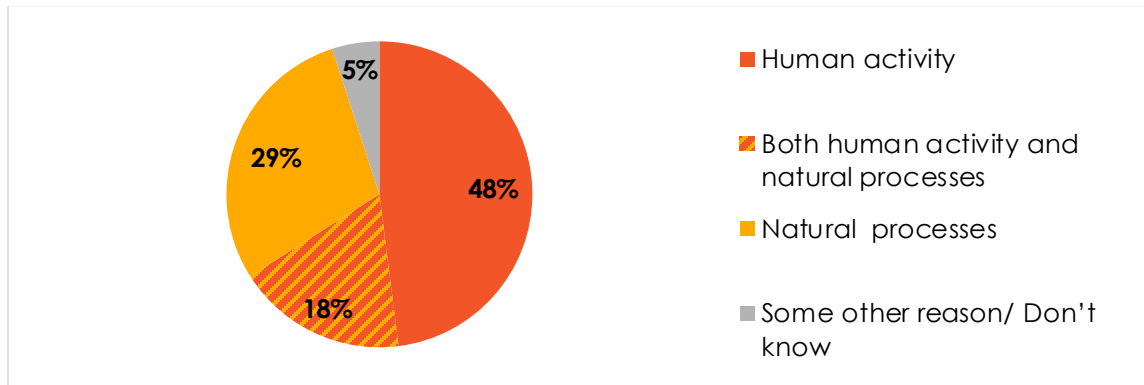
Causes of climate change

Among Zimbabweans who are aware of climate change, about two-thirds blame climate change on human activity such as the burning of fossil fuels, either on its own (48%) or in conjunction with natural processes (18%) (Figure 10). Three in 10 (29%) attribute it to natural weather patterns alone.

² Due to the small number of respondents who had heard about climate change among those with primary or no formal education (n=82) and those aged 56 years and above (n=92) in the survey sample, the margins of error are higher than for larger samples. Generalisations about these groups should therefore be treated with caution.

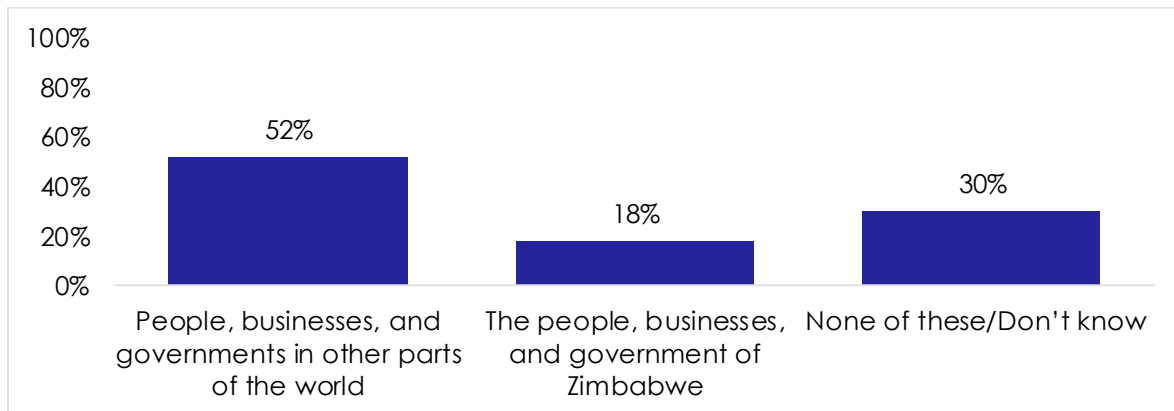
Asked who they think are the main contributors to climate change, a slim majority (52%) cite people, businesses, and governments in other parts of the world, compared to 18% who point the finger at actors in Zimbabwe (Figure 11). But 30% think it is “none of these” or say they “don’t know.”

Figure 10: Main cause of climate change | Zimbabwe | 2024



Respondents who had heard of climate change were asked: People have different ideas about what causes climate change. What about you? Which of the following do you think is the main cause of climate, or haven't you heard enough to say: Human activity, like cutting down forests, or burning fuel and other activities that pollute the atmosphere? Natural weather patterns or natural processes? (Respondents who had not heard of climate change are excluded.)

Figure 11: Who is responsible for causing climate change? | Zimbabwe | 2024



Respondents who had heard of climate change were asked: Who do you think is most responsible for causing climate change: The people, businesses, and government of Zimbabwe? People, businesses, and governments in other parts of the world?

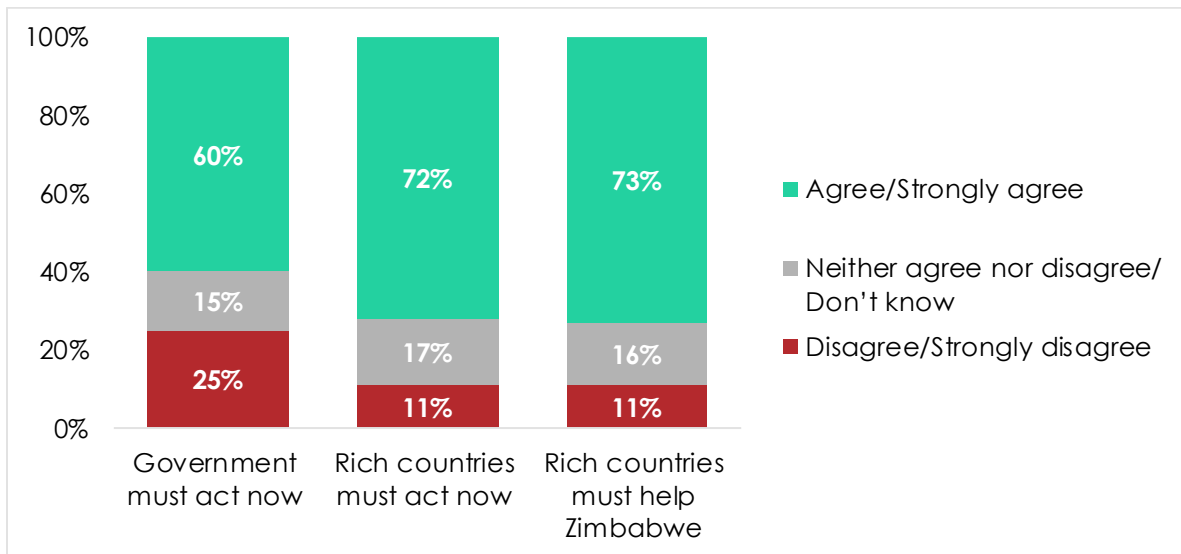
Addressing climate change

Six in 10 climate-change-aware respondents (60%) say that it is important for the Zimbabwean government to take urgent action to limit climate change, even if it damages the economy (Figure 12). Even larger majorities call on rich countries to provide climate aid to Zimbabwe (73%) and to take immediate steps to limit climate change (72%).

Zimbabweans who have heard of climate change assign primary responsibility for limiting the phenomenon to a variety of actors, including the government (30%), rich or developed countries (27%), business and industry (12%), and ordinary citizens (11%) (Figure 13).

A notable proportion (13%) say nobody is responsible for curbing climate change or think it can't be stopped or doesn't need to be addressed.

Figure 12: Who must act to limit climate change? | Zimbabwe | 2024



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

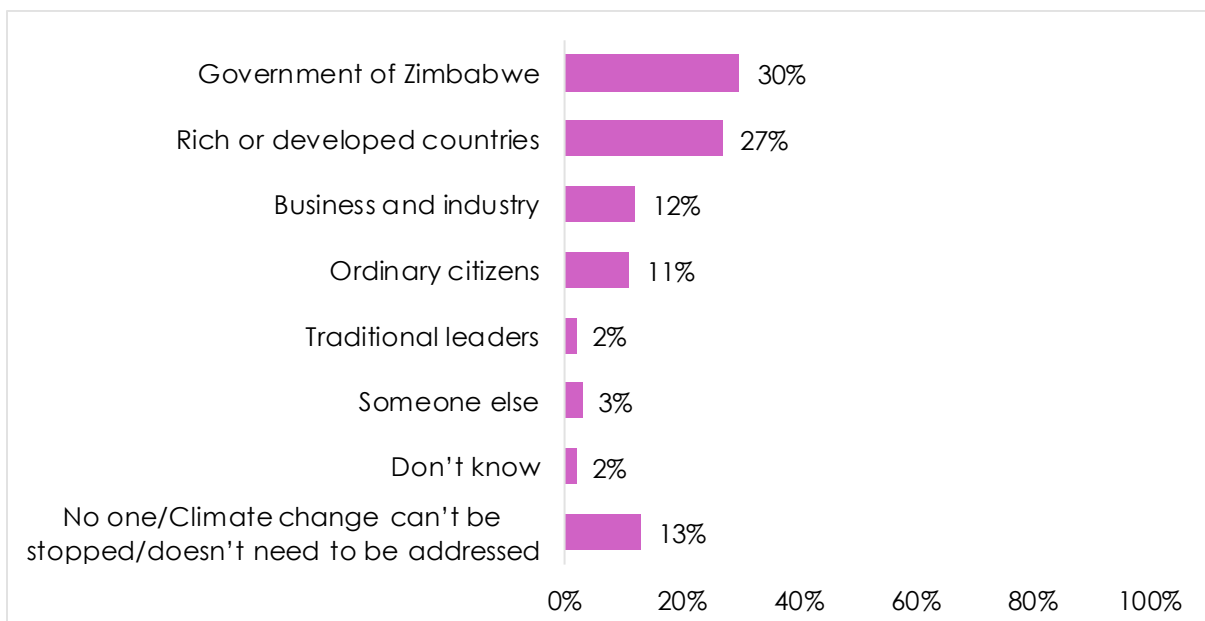
It is important for our government to take steps now to limit climate change in the future, even if it is expensive or causes some job losses or other harm to our economy.

It is important for rich or developed countries that have done the most to cause climate change to take steps now to limit climate change in the future, even if it is costly for those countries.

Rich or developed countries that have done the most to cause climate change have an obligation to help Zimbabwe cover the costs of adapting and responding to the negative impacts of climate change.

(Respondents who had not heard of climate change are excluded.)

Figure 13: Who has primary responsibility for limiting climate change? | Zimbabwe | 2024



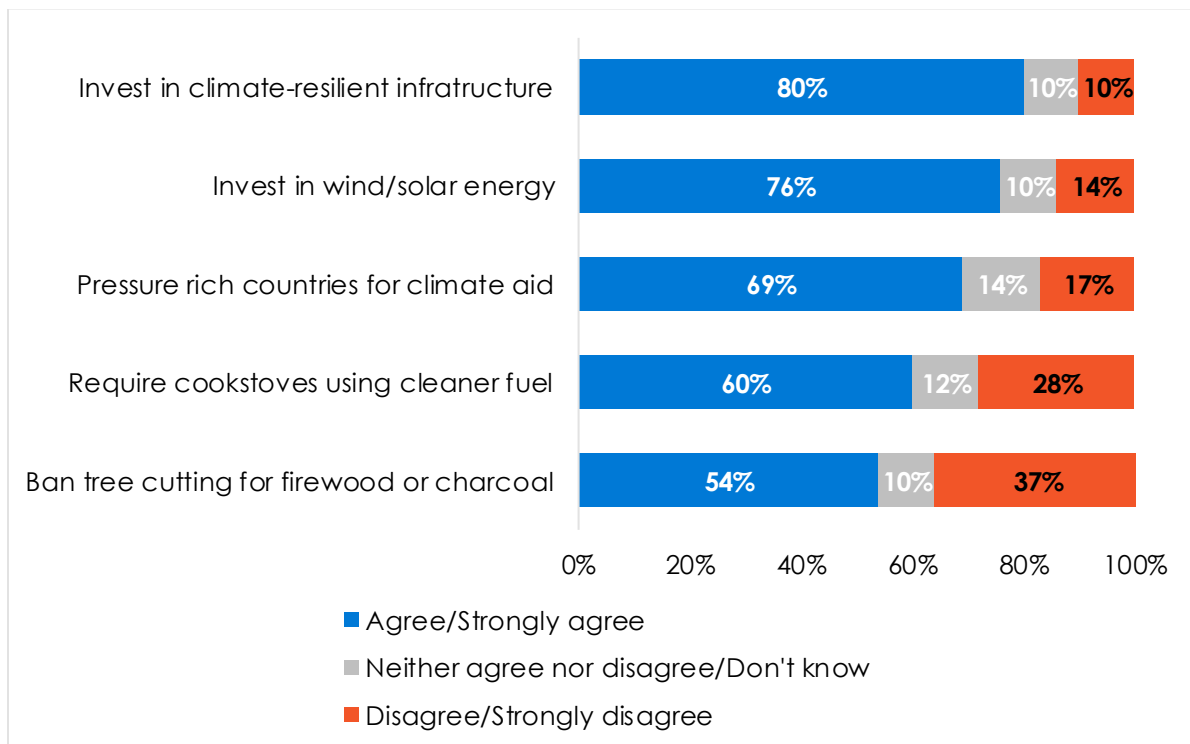
Respondents who had heard of climate change were asked: Who do you think should have primary responsibility for trying to limit climate change and reduce its impact? (Respondents who had not heard of climate change are excluded.)

Views on policies in response to changing weather patterns

Afrobarometer asked all respondents, regardless of whether they had heard of climate change, about their views on measures their government might take in response to changing weather patterns and environmental degradation.

Majorities support a range of possible policies, including more than three-fourths who favour investing in climate-resilient infrastructure (80%) and renewable technologies such as wind and solar power (76%) (Figure 14). At least six in 10 say the government should pressure rich countries to provide climate aid (69%) and introduce a requirement to use cleaner-burning cookstoves (60%), while 54% affirm a ban on tree cutting for charcoal or firewood.

Figure 14: Views on policies in response to changing weather patterns | Zimbabwe | 2024



Respondents were asked: There are many policies that our government could adopt in order to respond to changing weather patterns and environmental degradation. Please tell me whether you disagree or agree with each of the following options:

Make it illegal for people to cut down trees for firewood or charcoal, even if it means we have to pay more for other sources of energy.

Require everyone to switch to cookstoves that use cleaner fuels like electricity, gas, or propane, even if it means we have to pay more to cook our food.

Invest in improving infrastructure so our country can withstand more extreme floods and droughts.

Put more pressure on rich and developed countries to provide resources to help Zimbabweans who are affected by climate change or changes in weather conditions.

Invest in wind and solar technologies to generate electricity, even if it increases the price.

Conclusion

Almost unanimously, Zimbabweans report worsening drought and crop failure in their region, and many have adopted survival strategies such as changes in water consumption, outdoor work habits, and crop production.

Even so, awareness of climate change remains limited – an opportunity for activists seeking to build consensus for the national climate response.

Among citizens familiar with the concept of climate change, more than nine in 10 say it is making life worse. Two-thirds think human activity is at least partly responsible for climate change, and a majority want their government – with financial support from rich countries – to take urgent steps to limit its adverse impacts.

Majorities of citizens support an array of potential policy measures to combat the negative effects of climate change. These include more investment in climate-resilient infrastructure and renewable technology, greater pressure on rich countries to provide climate aid, and a requirement to use cleaner-burning cookstoves.

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