



Dispatch No. 477 | 16 September 2021

Zimbabweans' fear of retaliation for reporting corruption compounds 'pandemic within a pandemic'

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 477 | Stephen Ndoma

Summary

In his inaugural speech in November 2017, President Emmerson Mnangagwa pledged to fight corruption, a scourge that he said “remains the major source of some of the problems we face as a country, and its retarding impact on national development cannot be over-emphasized” (Sithole-Matarise, 2017).

Ahead of the July 2018 elections, the president campaigned on a promise of zero tolerance for corruption. In July 2019, he swore in a reconstituted Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission following the dissolution of the previous commission on allegations of incompetence (Xinhua, 2019).

How successful has he been in his anti-corruption campaign?

According to Transparency International's (2020) Corruption Perceptions Index, Zimbabwe ranks among the most corrupt countries in the world (157th out of 180). The Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission reports that Harare metropolitan province accounted for 93.2% of all corruption cases it received in 2020 (Taruvinga, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic seems to have exacerbated – or at least highlighted – the problem. A report by Zimbabwe's auditor general exposed extensive mismanagement and looting of pandemic-related funds and said that allowances destined for vulnerable households had not reached the intended beneficiaries due to duplicate payments and disbursement of funds to people with fictitious names, among other reasons (Dube, 2021).

Zimbabwe's Minister of Health, Obadiah Moyo, was sacked in June 2020 after allegations that he illegally awarded a multimillion-dollar contract to a shadowy company that sold the government face masks and other materials at inflated prices (Mutsaka, 2020).

The previous year, Tourism Minister Prisca Mupfumira was fired after she was accused of criminal abuse of office during her time as Minister of Public Service, Labor and Social Welfare that resulted in the loss of US\$95 million at the National Social Security Authority (Reuters, 2019). Other high-profile figures arrested in recent years on allegations of corruption and abuse of office include former ministers Ignatius Chombo, Saviour Kasukuwere, Supa Mandiwanzira, Walter Mzembi, Walter Chidhakwa, and Samuel Undenge (Muleya, 2018). Undenge was found guilty, while Mzembi, Kasukuwere, and Mandiwanzira were acquitted. The other cases are yet to be concluded.

While the government says its intention is to eradicate corruption (Machivenyika, 2019), others have dismissed the arrests as selective, politically convenient, and in some cases part of a “catch and release” game (Nyamazana, 2020).

Recent Afrobarometer survey findings show that ordinary Zimbabweans, too, are divided as to whether the government's crackdown is genuine or a move aimed at punishing rivals within the ruling ZANU-PF party.

Citizens are more unified, however, in their views that people who report corruption to the authorities risk retaliation, that graft is widespread among the police force, that some COVID-19 resources were stolen by government officials, and that the government is doing a poor job of fighting corruption.

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. Eight rounds of surveys have been conducted in up to 39 countries since 1999. Round 8 surveys (2019/2021) cover 34 countries. Afrobarometer conducts 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 of Zimbabwe in April 2021. 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 Afrobarometer surveys were conducted in Zimbabwe in 1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2014, and 2017.

Key findings

- Four out of five Zimbabweans (80%) say ordinary citizens risk retaliation or other negative consequences if they report corruption to the authorities.
- Six out of 10 citizens (59%) believe that “most” or “all” police officials are corrupt. Civil servants and members of Parliament follow with 43% and 40%, respectively.
 - Among respondents who encountered the police in situations such as checkpoints, traffic stops, or investigations during the past year, almost half (47%) say they had to pay a bribe to avoid problems.
- More than half (55%) of citizens say the overall level of corruption in the country increased during the previous year.
- A slim majority (54%) of citizens believe that “some” or “a lot” of the resources meant for responding to the COVID-19 pandemic were lost due to corruption among government officials.
- Two-thirds (66%) of Zimbabweans say the government is doing a poor job of fighting corruption.
- Views are divided on whether the government's fight against corruption is a genuine effort to reduce graft (40%) or is aimed at punishing rival factions within the ruling party (45%).

Reporting corruption

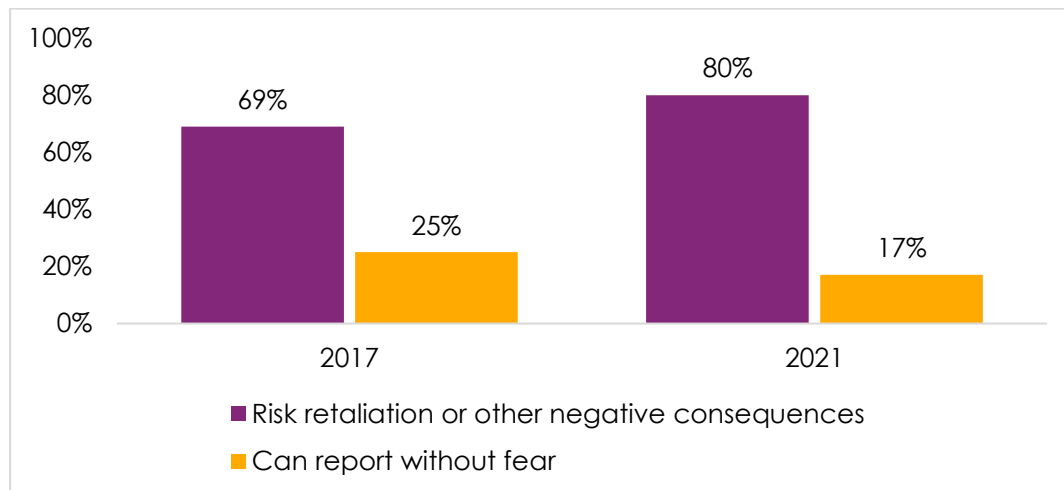
Four out of five Zimbabweans (80%) say ordinary people risk retaliation or other negative consequences if they report corruption to the authorities, an 11-percentage-point increase from 2017. Only 17% think they can report corruption without fear (Figure 1).

Fear of retaliation or other negative consequences is more prevalent among respondents who identify themselves as feeling “close to” the MDC-Chamisa opposition party (92%) than among ZANU-PF supporters (71%) (Figure 2).

It is also more common among poor citizens (87% of those experiencing high “lived poverty”) than among their better-off counterparts (75%-79%), and among urbanites (86%) compared to rural residents (76%).

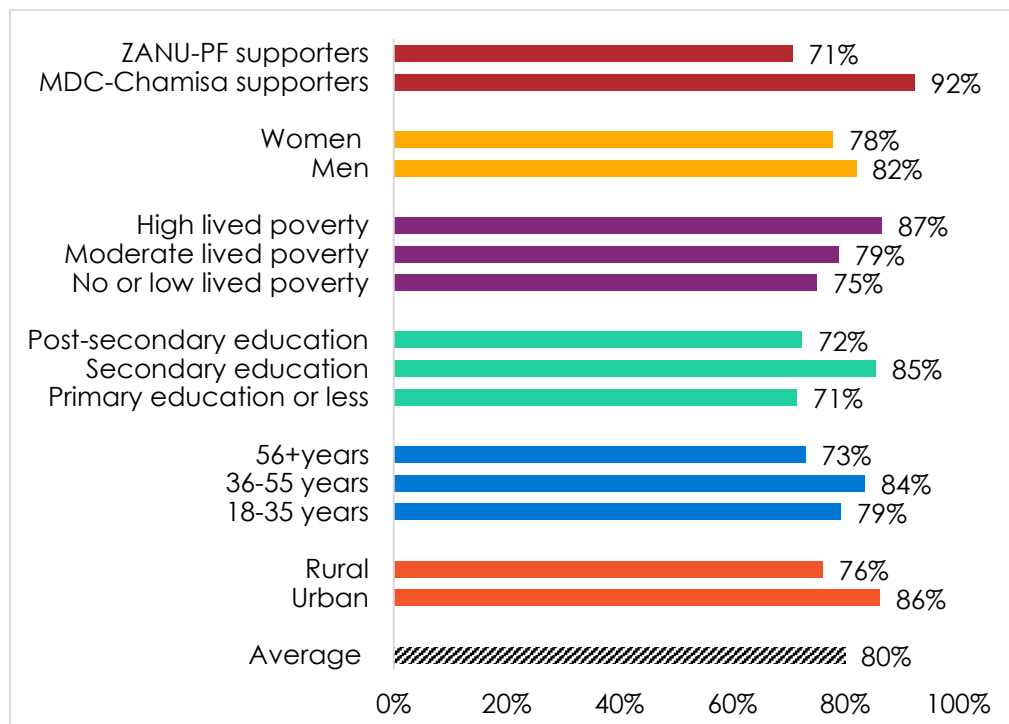
Concern about possible retaliation is the majority view across all provinces, reaching 85% in Harare and Manicaland (Figure 3).

Figure 1: Can people report corruption without fear? | Zimbabwe | 2017-2021



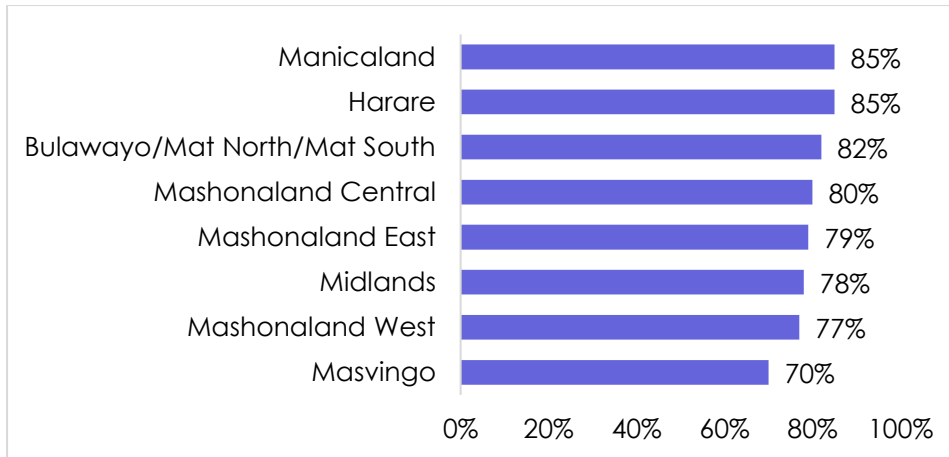
Respondents were asked: In this country, can ordinary people report incidents of corruption without fear, or do they risk retaliation or other negative consequences if they speak out?

Figure 2: People risk retaliation if they report corruption | by socio-demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2021



Respondents were asked: In this country, can ordinary people report incidents of corruption without fear, or do they risk retaliation or other negative consequences if they speak out? (% who say “risk retaliation or other negative consequences”)

Figure 3: People risk retaliation if they report corruption | by province | Zimbabwe | 2021



Respondents were asked: In this country, can ordinary people report incidents of corruption without fear, or do they risk retaliation or other negative consequences if they speak out? (% who say "risk retaliation or other negative consequences")

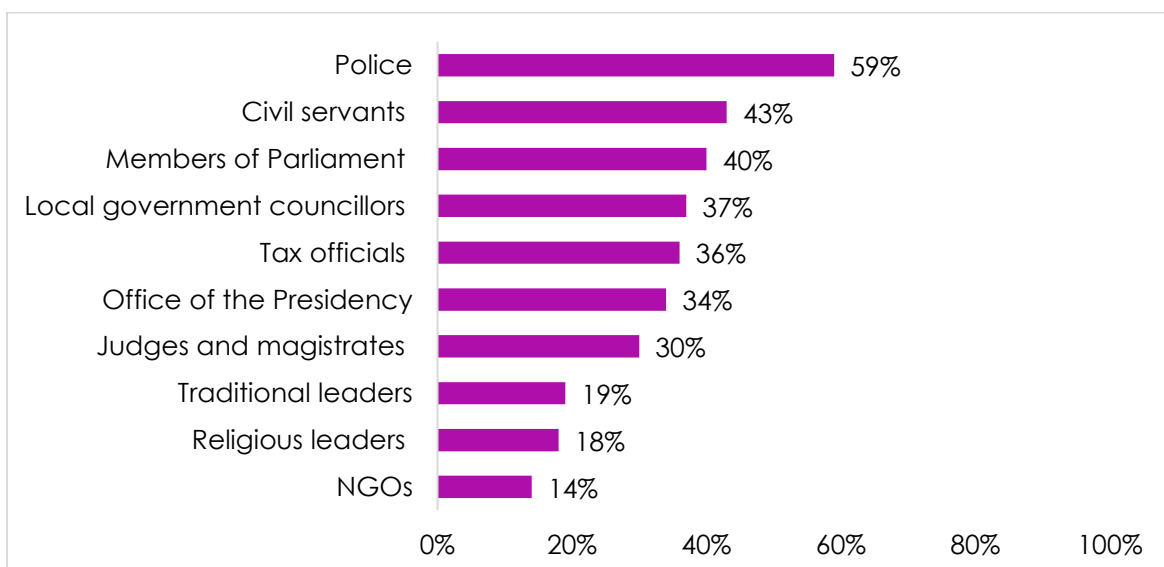
Perceptions of corruption

Among institutions and leaders that Afrobarometer asked about, the police force is most widely seen as corrupt: 59% of Zimbabweans say "most" or "all" police officials are involved in corruption (Figure 4).

Civil servants and members of Parliament follow with 43% and 40%, respectively, while roughly one-third of citizens see widespread corruption among local government councillors (37%), tax officials (36%), officials at the Presidency (34%), and judges and magistrates (30%).

Traditional leaders (19%), religious leaders (18%), and nongovernmental organizations (14%) are less widely seen as corrupt.

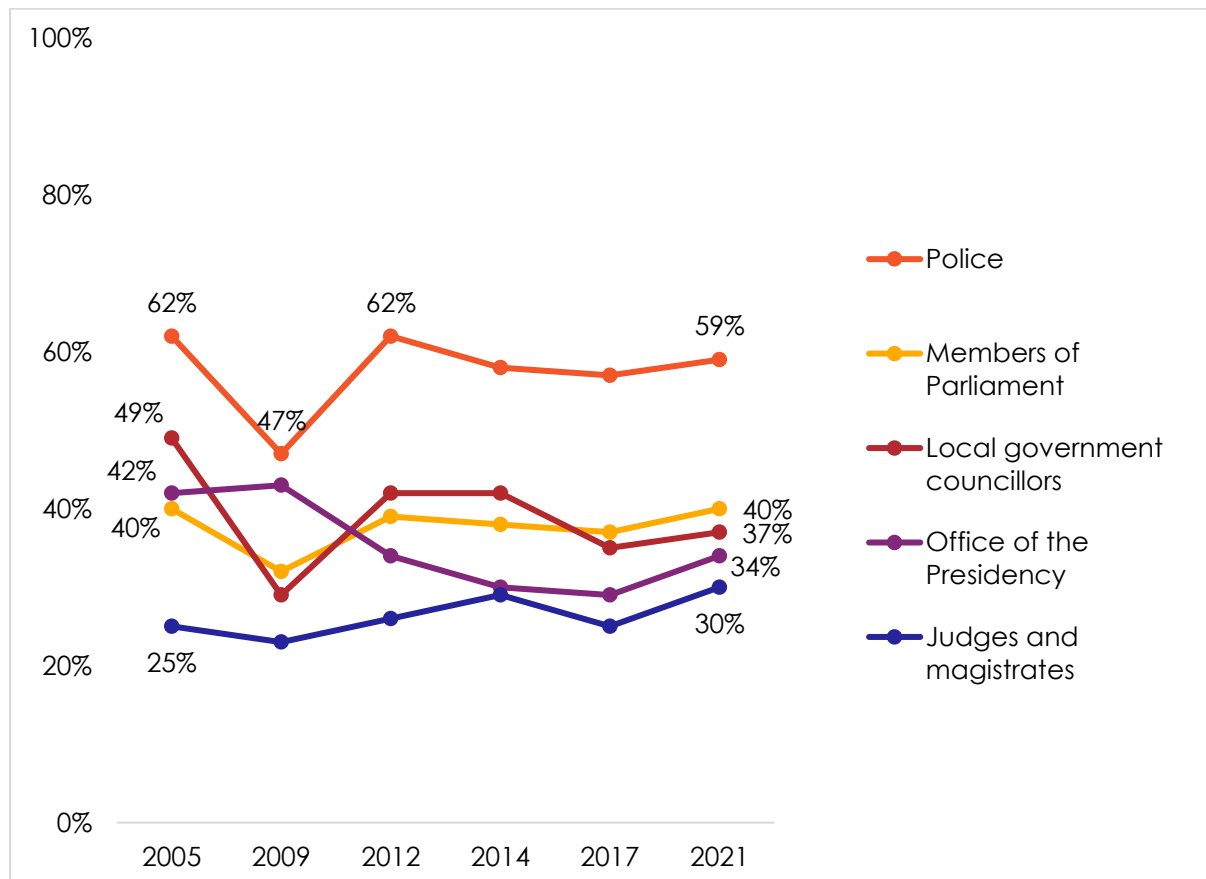
Figure 4: Perceptions of corruption | Zimbabwe | 2021



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? (% who say "most of them" or "all of them")

Corruption perceptions have consistently been worse with regard to the police than other state institutions, dipping below half of respondents (47%) only in the 2009 survey (Figure 5). Compared to 2005, ratings have improved somewhat for local government councillors (from 49% to 37%) and for the Presidency (from 42% to 34%), held steady for MPs, and worsened somewhat for judges and magistrates (from 25% to 30%).

Figure 5: Trend in perceptions of corruption | Zimbabwe | 2021



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?

The perception that “most” or “all” police officials are corrupt is particularly widespread among poor citizens (73%, vs. 51%-55% of better-off respondents) and among MDC-Chamisa supporters (76%, vs. 43% of ZANU-PF adherents).

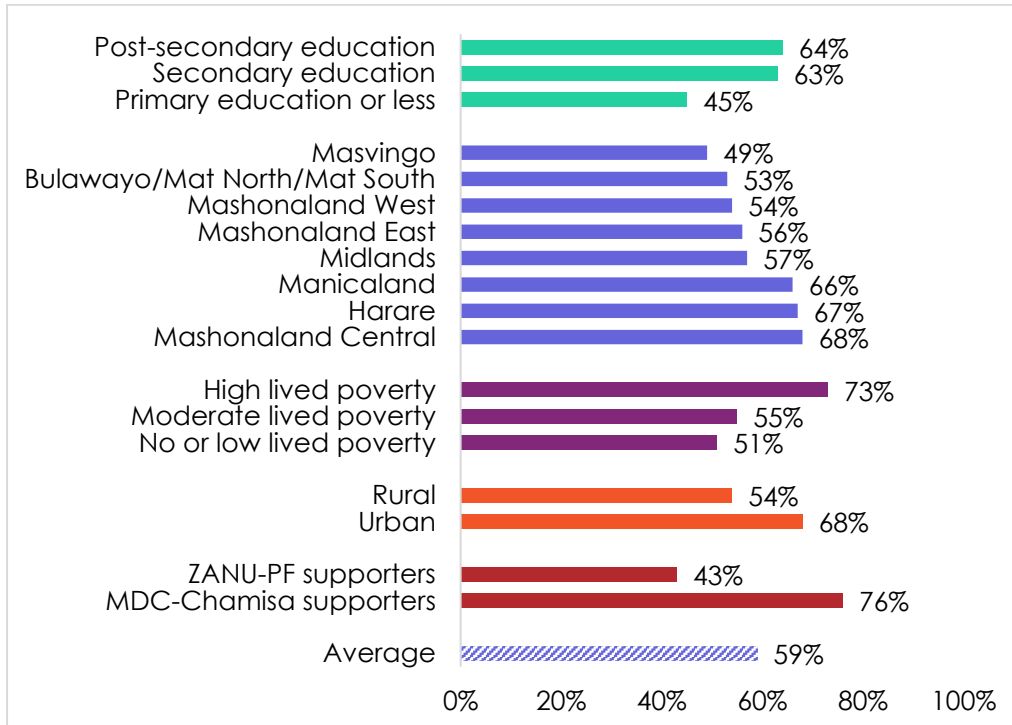
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But Mashonaland Central province, despite being a ZANU-PF stronghold, has the largest proportion of residents (68%) who see most/all police force members as corrupt (Figure 6).

Urban dwellers (68%) are more likely than rural residents (54%) to see the police as corrupt, as are citizens with a secondary

(63%) or post-secondary (64%) education compared to their less educated counterparts (45%).

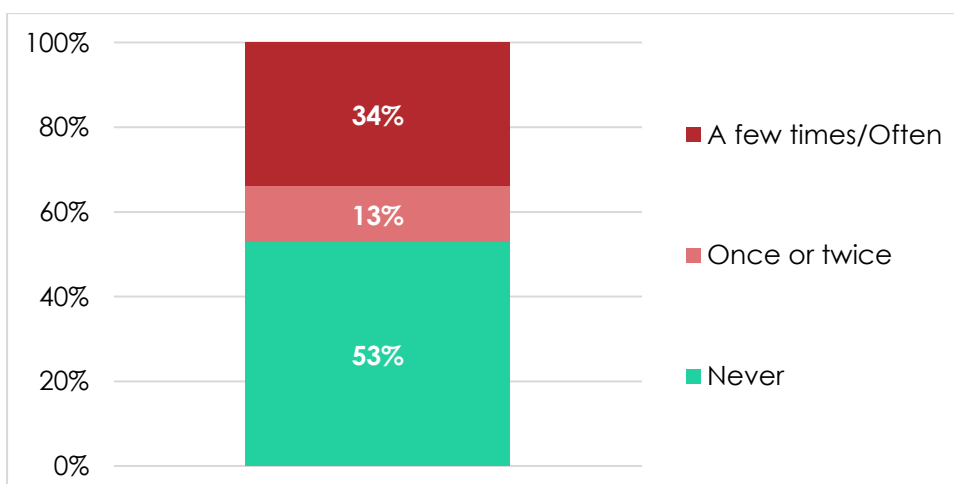
Figure 6: Most/All police are corrupt | by socio-demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2021



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: The police? (% who say "most of them" or "all of them")

Citizens' perceptions of widespread corruption among the police are confirmed by their reported personal experiences. Among the 84% of respondents who say they encountered the police during the previous 12 months in situations such as checkpoints, traffic stops, or investigations, almost half (47%) say they had to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour to avoid problems (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Paid a bribe to avoid problems with the police | Zimbabwe | 2021



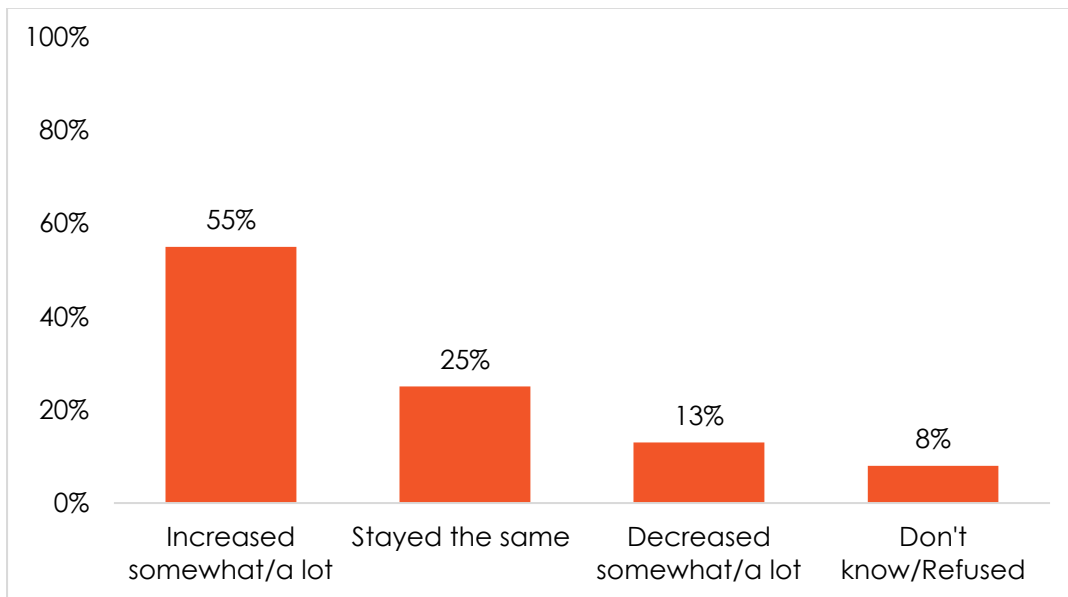
Respondents who say they encountered the police during the previous 12 months in situations such as checkpoints, traffic stops, or investigations were asked: How often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a police officer in order to avoid a problem during one of the encounters?

Overall level of corruption

Overall, a majority (55%) of adult citizens believe the level of corruption in the country increased “somewhat” or “a lot” over the previous year. A quarter (25%) say it remained unchanged, while 13% think it decreased at least “somewhat” (Figure 8).

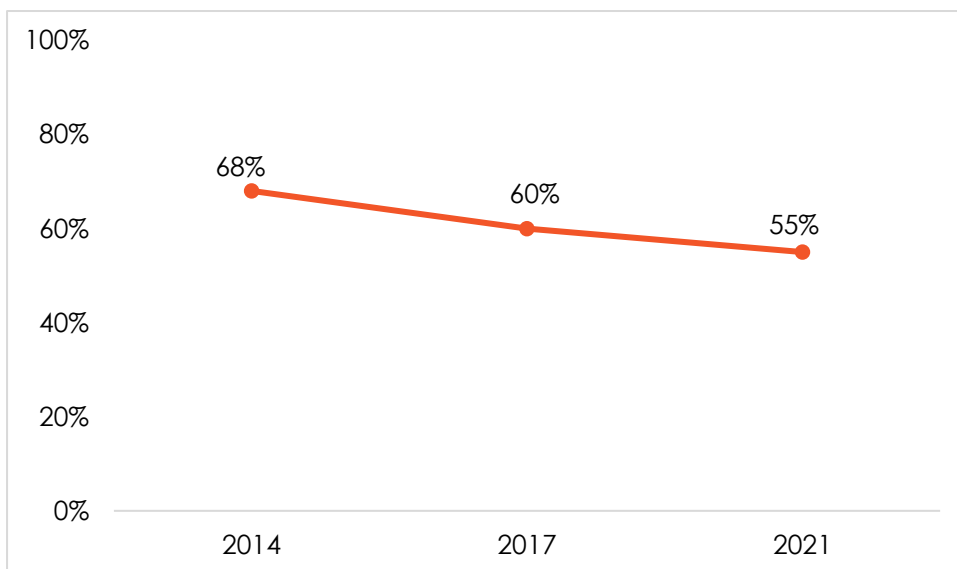
The proportion of citizens who see corruption increasing has declined by 13 percentage points since 2014 (68%) (Figure 9).

Figure 8: Has the level of corruption increased or decreased over the past year?
 | Zimbabwe | 2021



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, over the past year, has the level of corruption in this country increased, decreased, or stayed the same?

Figure 9: Trend in perceptions in level of corruption | Zimbabwe | 2014-2021

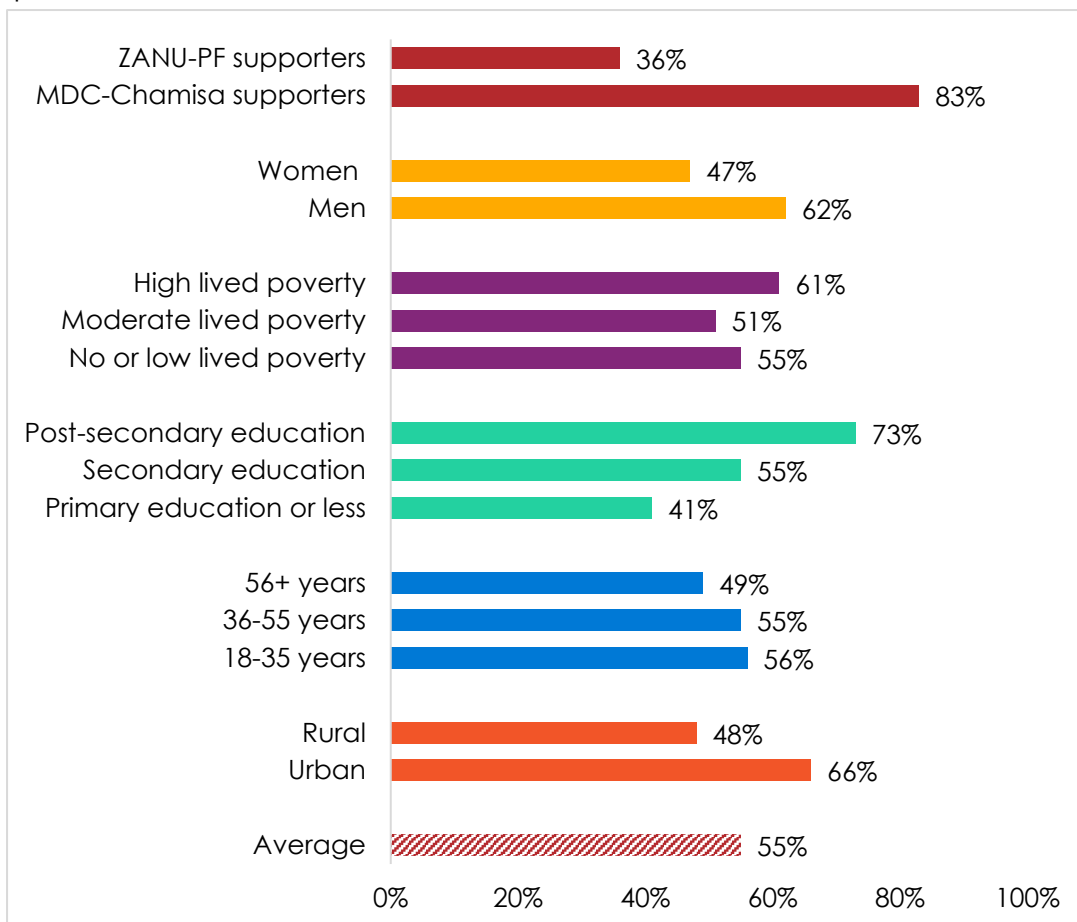


Respondents were asked: In your opinion, over the past year, has the level of corruption in this country increased, decreased, or stayed the same? (% who say “increased somewhat” or “increased a lot”)

Urban-based respondents (66%) and MDC-Chamisa supporters (83%) are more likely than rural residents (48%) and ZANU-PF adherents (36%) to say that the level of corruption increased (Figure 10).

This perception increases with respondents' level of education, ranging from 41% of those with primary schooling or no formal education to 73% of those with post-secondary qualifications. But respondents with high lived poverty (61%) are more likely to see increasing corruption than wealthier respondents (51%-55%).

Figure 10: Increased level of corruption | by socio-demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2021



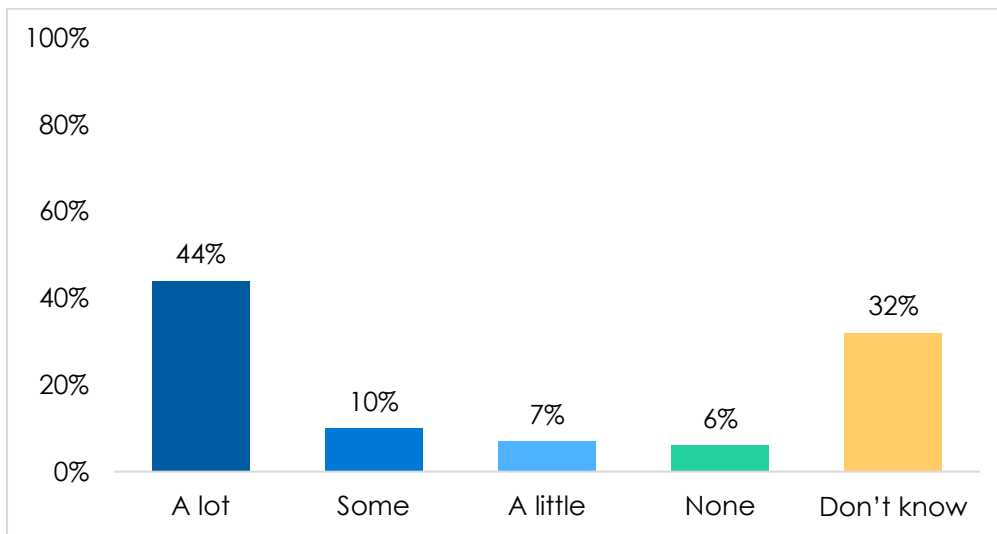
Respondents were asked: In your opinion, over the past year, has the level of corruption in this country increased, decreased, or stayed the same? (% who say "increased somewhat" or "increased a lot")

COVID-19 resources lost due to corruption?

More than half of citizens think that "a lot" (44%) or "some" (10%) of the funds and resources intended for responding to the COVID-19 pandemic were lost or stolen due to corruption among government officials. Only 6% believe that "none" of these resources were lost (Figure 11).

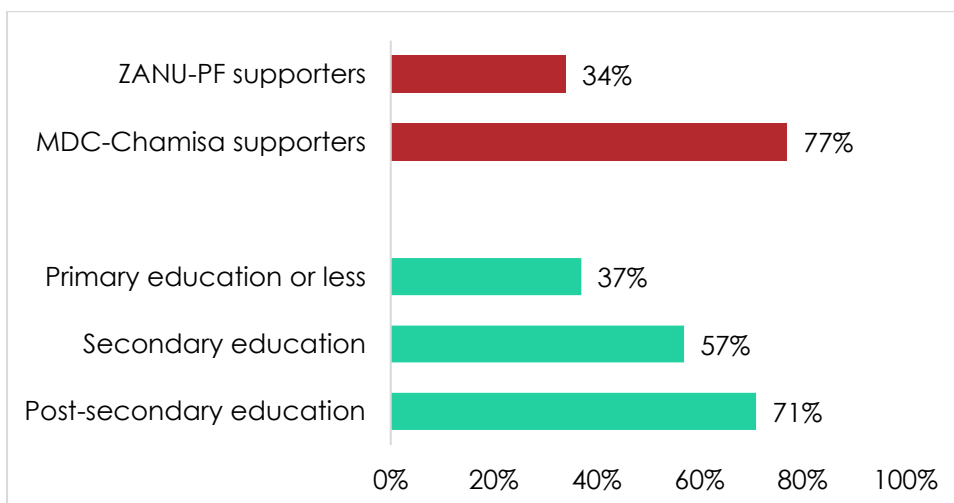
MDC-Chamisa adherents (77%) are more than twice as likely as ZANU-PF supporters (34%) to suspect that corrupt government officials stole "some" or "a lot" of pandemic-related resources. The prevalence of this view also increases sharply with respondents' education level (Figure 12).

Figure 11: COVID-19 resources lost due to corruption | Zimbabwe | 2021



Respondents were asked: Considering all of the funds and resources that were available to the government for combatting and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, how much do you think was lost or stolen due to corruption among government officials?

Figure 12: COVID-19 material lost due to corruption | by political party affiliation and education level | Zimbabwe | 2021



Respondents were asked: Considering all of the funds and resources that were available to the government for combatting and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, how much do you think was lost or stolen due to corruption among government officials? (% who say "some" or "a lot")

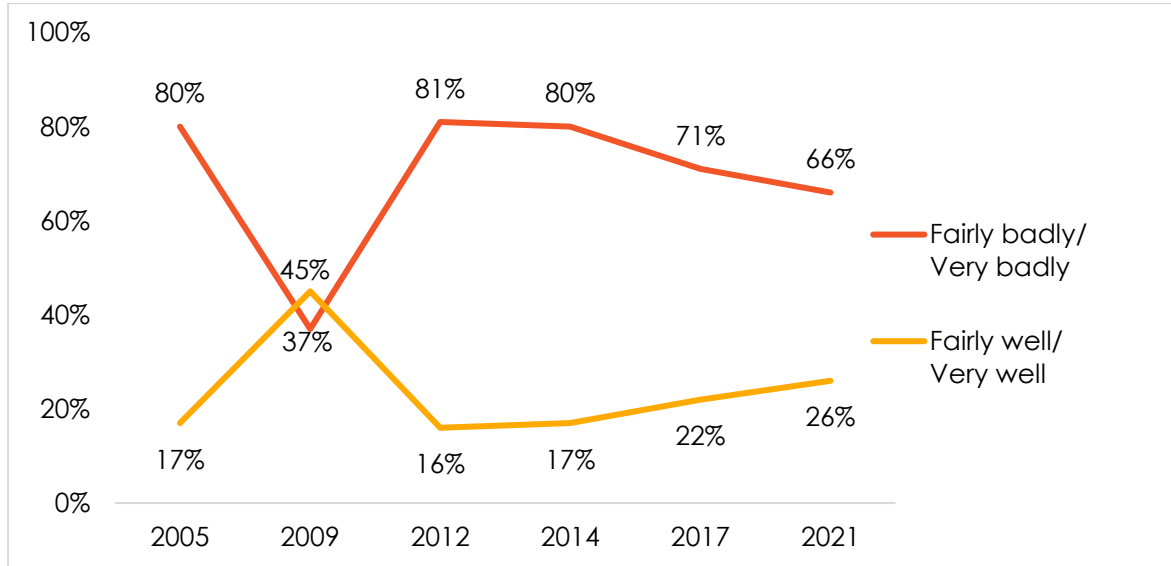
Government performance in fighting corruption

Two-thirds (66%) of Zimbabweans say the government is doing a "fairly" or "very" poor job of fighting corruption. This reflects a 15-percentage-point improvement compared to 2012, when dissatisfaction shot back up (to 81%) after a substantial dip around the time of the government of national unity (37% in 2009) (Figure 13).

Negative assessments of the government's fight against corruption follow a starkly partisan pattern: MDC-Chamisa adherents (94%) are more than twice as likely as ZANU-PF supporters (45%) to be critical (Figure 14).

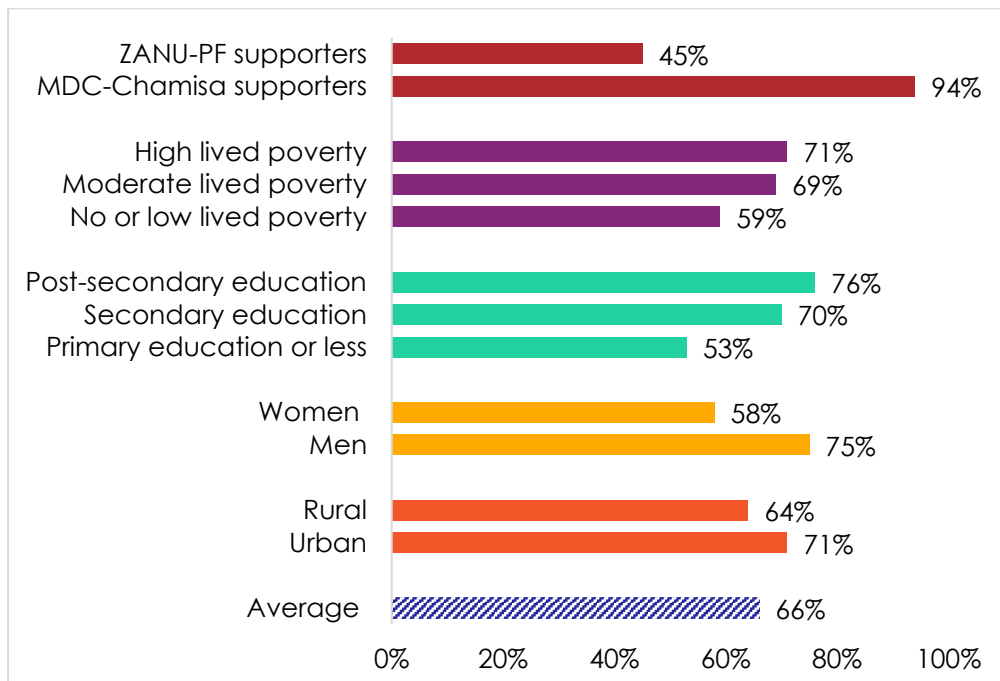
Disapproval is also more likely among citizens experiencing high or moderate lived poverty (71% and 69%, respectively) as well as among men (75%), urban residents (71%), and respondents with post-secondary educational qualifications (76%).

Figure 13: Government handling of the fight against corruption | Zimbabwe | 2005-2021



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: Fighting corruption in government?

Figure 14: Government performing badly on corruption | by socio-demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2021

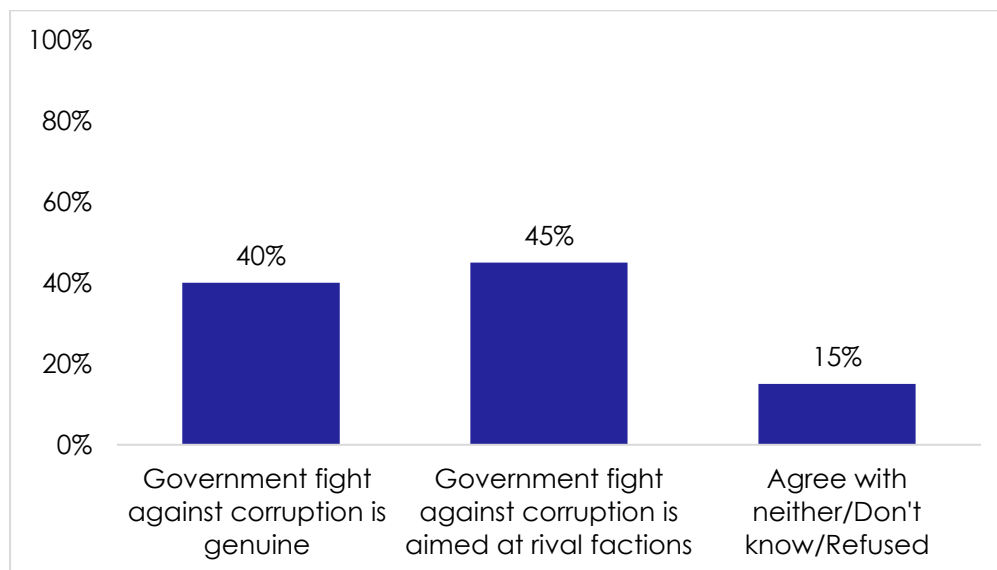


Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Fighting corruption in government? (% who say "fairly badly" or "very badly")

But Zimbabweans are divided in their opinions on whether the government is even serious about wiping out corruption: 40% believe that the government's efforts against corruption are genuine, while 45% believe they are aimed at punishing rival factions within the ruling ZANU-PF (Figure 15).

ZANU-PF supporters are far less likely than MDC-Chamisa adherents to see the government's anti-corruption efforts as part of a political game (28% vs. 71%).

Figure 15: Is government's fight against corruption aimed at punishing rival factions?
 | Zimbabwe | 2021



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

Statement 1: The government's current fight against corruption is a genuine effort to reduce graft and theft of public resources.

Statement 2: The current fight against corruption is more aimed at punishing rival factions within the ruling party than reducing graft and theft of public resources.

(% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

Conclusion

While the country battles the COVID-19 pandemic, it also continues to face a long-running war against corruption. Where the two scourges intersect – as a majority of Zimbabweans believe they do – corruption hinders progress against the coronavirus.

Despite the government's pledge to fight corruption, the public still sees the level of corruption as rising, and a majority disapprove of the government's anti-corruption performance. The police have a particularly bad reputation, backed up by citizens' personal experience of bribe-paying to avoid problems with the police.

The campaign for a corruption-free Zimbabwe is not aided by the perception that the government's efforts are intended to punish rivals within the ruling party rather than to wipe out graft. To compound matters, a huge majority of Zimbabweans believe that people who report corruption incidents risk retaliation or other negative consequences. At a minimum, these two perceptions must be proved wrong if the fight against corruption is to succeed.

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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.

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