

Almost half of Zimbabweans have considered emigrating; job search is main pull factor

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 160 | Stephen Ndoma

Summary

According to some estimates, up to 3-4 million Zimbabweans live outside their country – a diaspora that may be one-fourth the size of the entire in-country population (UNDP, 2010). Perhaps more than 2 million Zimbabwean emigrants live in South Africa alone.

In tracing waves of emigration since the 1960s (Pasura, 2008), scholars have highlighted both economic and political reasons as factors motivating highly skilled as well as impoverished nationals to look for greener pastures abroad (UNDP, 2010). By far the largest emigration wave is the post-2000 exodus in response to controversial land reforms, economic crises, and disputed and violent elections.

Using the latest round of Afrobarometer survey data from Zimbabwe, this dispatch examines views on emigration among those who have not left the country. Remarkably, almost half of adult citizens in Zimbabwe say they have considered emigrating, although far fewer are actually making preparations to leave. The search for work is the main motivating factor for potential emigrants, who express considerable pessimism – and even anger – about the country's condition.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in African countries. Six rounds of surveys were conducted in up to 37 countries between 1999 and 2016, and Round 7 surveys are being conducted in 2017/2018. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Zimbabwe, led by Mass Public Opinion Institute, interviewed 1,200 adult Zimbabweans between 28 January and 10 February 2017. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Zimbabwe in 1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2012, and 2014.

Key findings

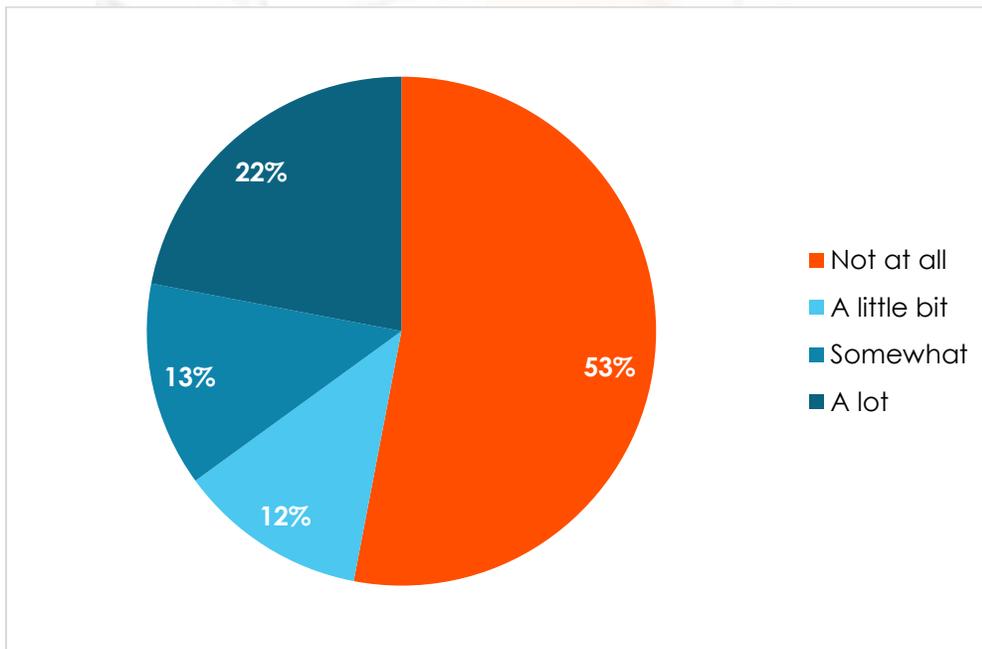
- Almost half (47%) of adult Zimbabweans say they have considered emigrating. One in 14 citizens say they are currently making preparations to leave.
- Employment is the main driver of emigration, cited as their main reason by more than six in 10 (62%) of those who have considered emigrating ("potential emigrants").

- South Africa is the preferred destination of a majority (55%) of potential emigrants.
- Young and well-educated Zimbabweans are significantly more likely to consider emigrating than their older and less-educated counterparts.
- Potential emigrants are more likely to offer negative assessments of the country's direction and economic conditions, as well as the government's performance, than those who have not considered leaving.
- Almost half (46%) of potential emigrants say they "often" or "always" feel angry about the government's failure to do enough to solve the problems confronting the nation, compared to 26% of those who have not considered moving abroad.

Considering emigration vs. preparing to leave

Almost half (47%) of adult Zimbabweans say they have considered emigrating, including 22% who say they given "a lot" of thought to the idea (Figure 1). A slim majority (53%) say they have not thought "at all" about moving to another country. Almost three-fifths (58%) of those who have considered emigration say they have previously lived in another country.

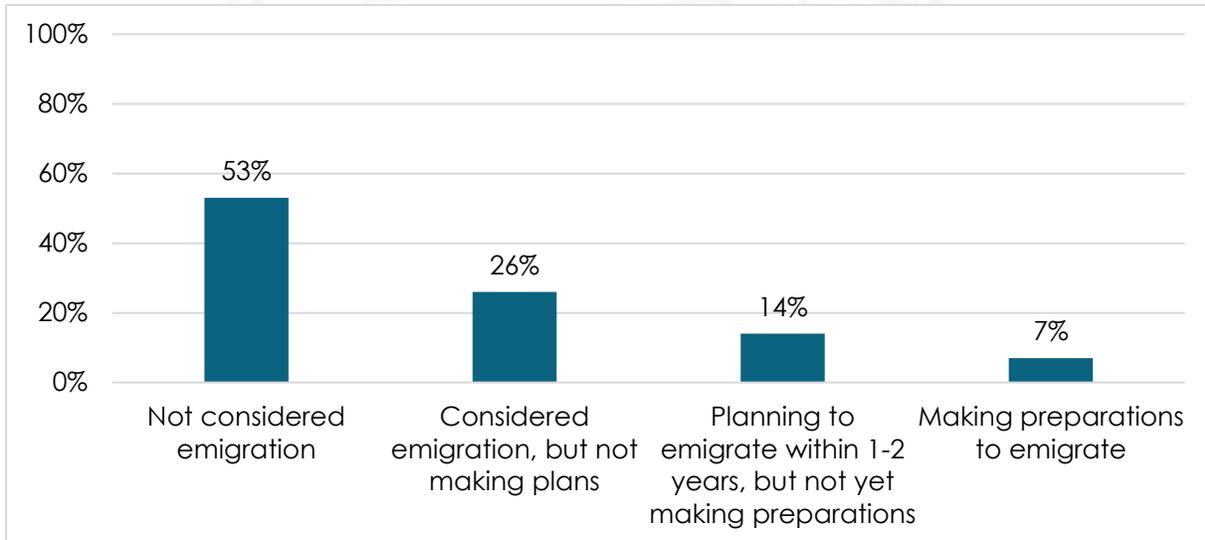
Figure 1: Considered emigration | Zimbabwe | 2017



Respondents were asked: *How much, if at all, have you considered moving to another country to live?*

A majority of those who have considered emigration are not making concrete plans or preparations to leave the country. Still, 7% of all respondents – equivalent to more than half a million adult Zimbabweans – say they are currently making specific preparations to emigrate, such as seeking a visa, while 14% say they are not yet making concrete preparations but are planning to move in the next year or two (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Making plans or preparations to emigrate | Zimbabwe | 2017

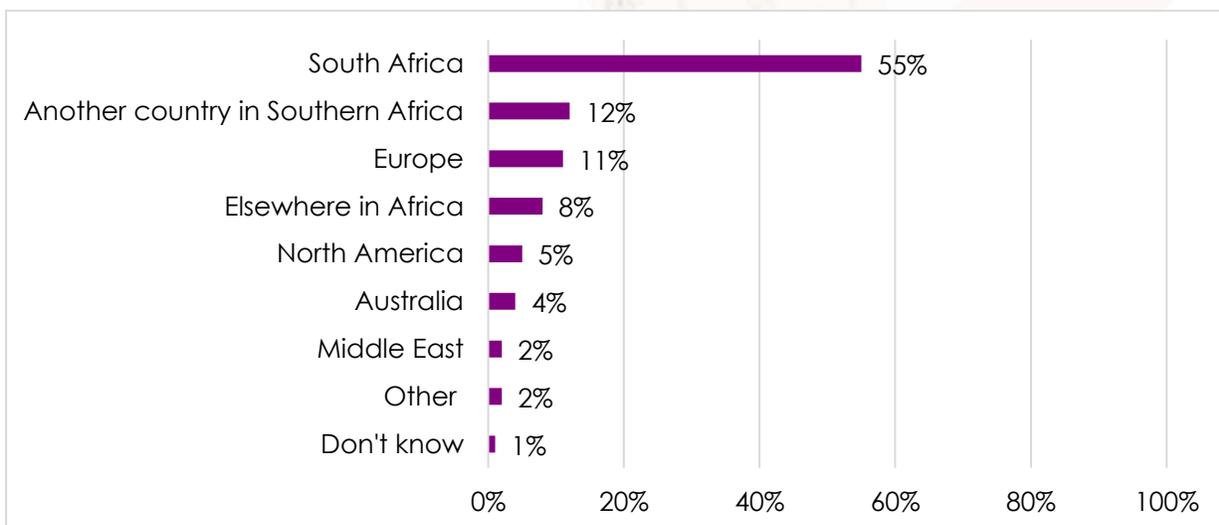


Respondents were asked: *How much planning or preparation have you done in order to move to another country to live?*

South Africa the preferred destination for potential emigrants

For those who have considered emigration ("potential emigrants"), South Africa is the most attractive destination (preferred by 55% of potential emigrants). About one in nine cite other Southern African countries (12%) or Europe (11%). Only one in 20 have their eyes on North America (5%) or Australia (4%) (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Preferred destination for potential emigrants | Zimbabwe | 2017

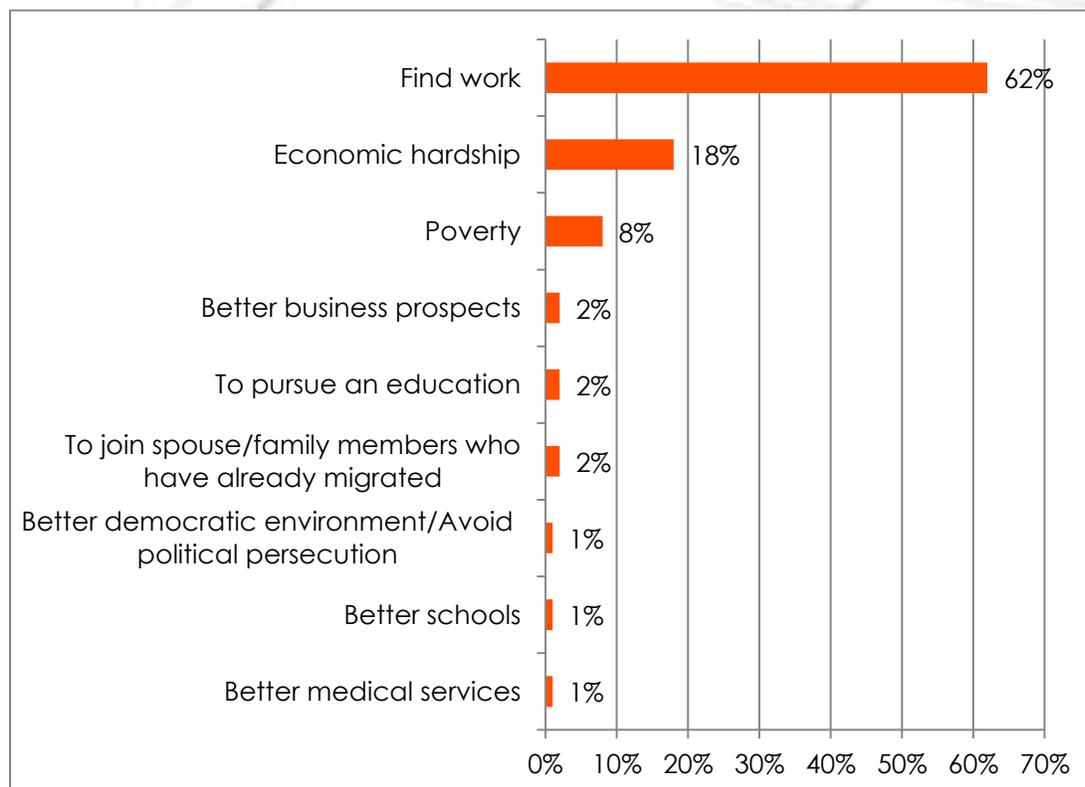


Respondents were asked: *If you were to move to another country, where would you most likely go? (Note: Respondents who have not considered emigration are excluded.)*

Search for employment drives potential emigrants

The search for work is the major pull factor for Zimbabweans who have considered moving out of the country. More than six in 10 potential emigrants (62%) say they are mulling emigration in order to look for employment, while another one in four cite economic hardship (18%) or poverty (8%) as the main reason (Figure 4). Only 1% cite a “better democratic environment” or “political persecution” as their main reasons.

Figure 4: Most important reason for considering emigration | Zimbabwe | 2017



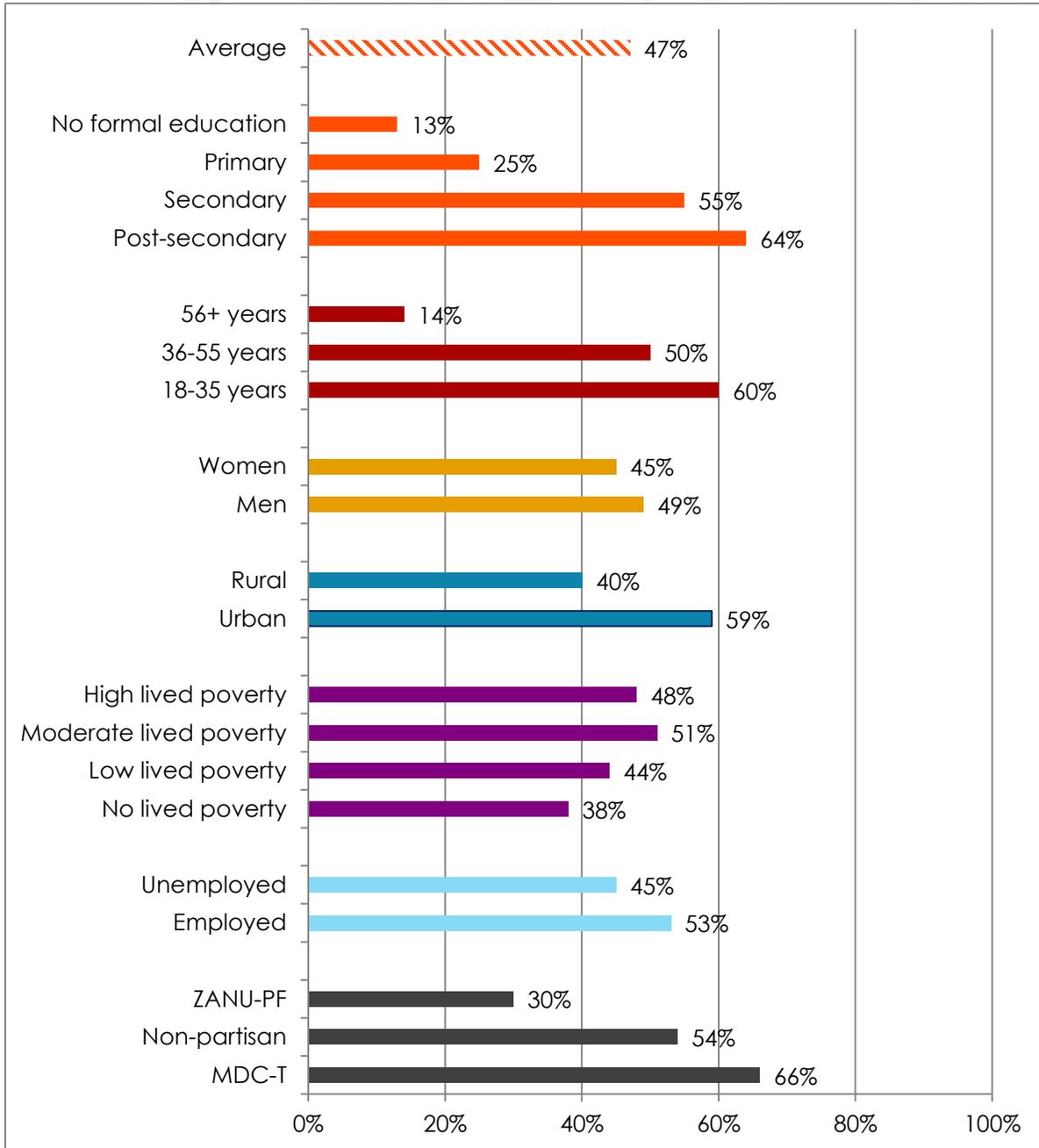
Respondents were asked: *There are several reasons why people leave their home to live in another country for an extended period of time. What about you? What is the most important reason why you would consider moving from Zimbabwe? (Note: Respondents who have not considered emigration are excluded.)*

Profile of potential emigrants

Among socio-demographic factors that might affect people's willingness to emigrate, education and age stand out. Respondents with post-secondary (64%) or secondary qualifications (55%) are far more likely to consider emigrating than those with primary school (25%) or without formal education (13%) (Figure 5). And younger citizens are more prone to consider emigrating than their elders (60% of those aged 18-35 years vs. 50% of those aged 36-55 years and 14% of those aged 56 years or older).

In absolute numbers, too, most of those who have considered emigrating are young (66% are aged 18-35) and well-educated (87% have secondary or post-secondary qualifications).

Figure 5: Considered emigrating | by socio-demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2017



Respondents were asked: How much, if at all, have you considered to moving to another country to live? (% who say "a little bit," "somewhat," or "a lot")

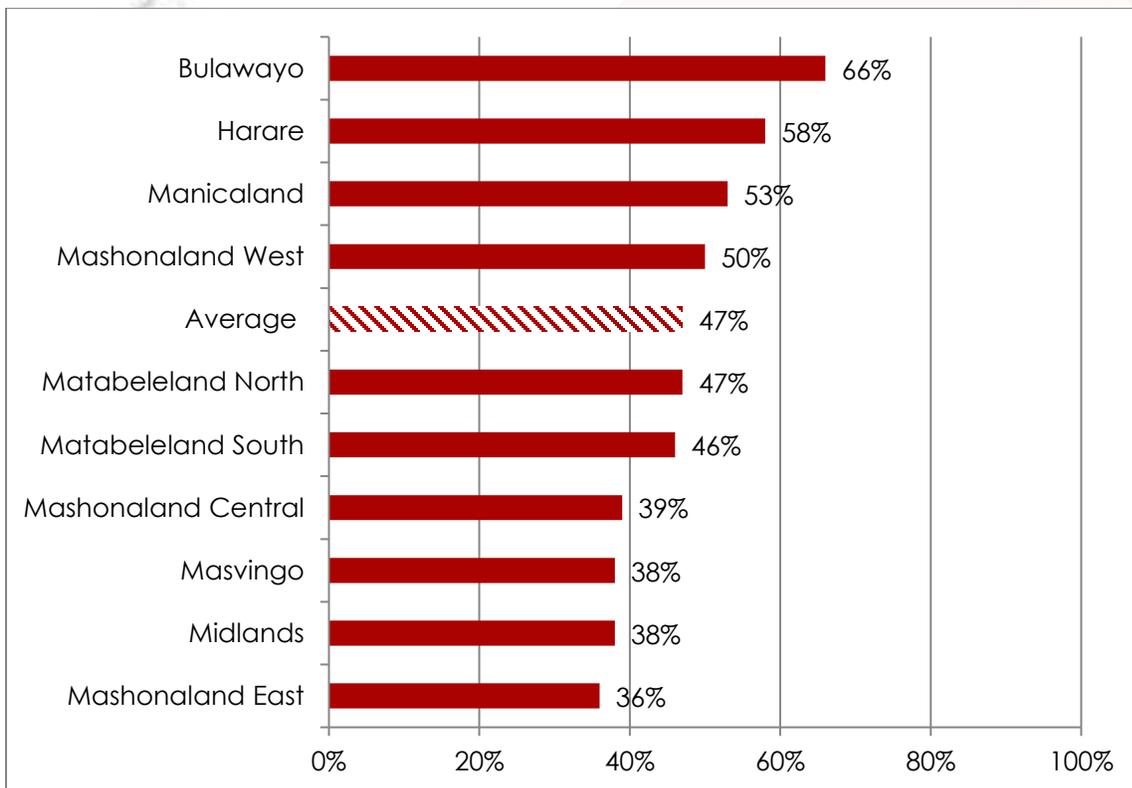
Men are only slightly more interested in emigration than women (52% vs. 48%), but a larger gap separates urban residents (59%) from their rural counterparts (40%).

Thoughts of emigrating are somewhat more common among poor citizens than their wealthier counterparts¹ and among the employed when compared with the unemployed (although in absolute numbers, the unemployed make up 72% of those who say they have considered going abroad).

When it comes to political affiliation,² fully two-thirds (66%) of MDC-T supporters say they have considered emigrating, compared to 30% of ZANU-PF supporters and 54% of unaffiliated respondents.

By province, Bulawayo province houses the highest proportion of potential emigrants (66%), followed by Harare (58%). On the other hand, Mashonaland East province has the highest proportion of residents who have considered staying put in the country (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Potential emigrants | by province | Zimbabwe | 2017



Respondents were asked: How much, if at all, have you considered to moving to another country to live? (% who say "a little bit," "somewhat," or "a lot")

¹ Afrobarometer measures "lived poverty" based on how often during the previous year respondents or their families have gone without enough food, enough clean water, medical care, enough fuel for cooking, and/or a cash income.

² Political affiliation is determined based on responses to the following questions: *Do you feel close to any particular political party? [If yes:] Which party is that?*

Perceptions of country direction and economic conditions – ‘potential’ vs. ‘unlikely’ emigrants

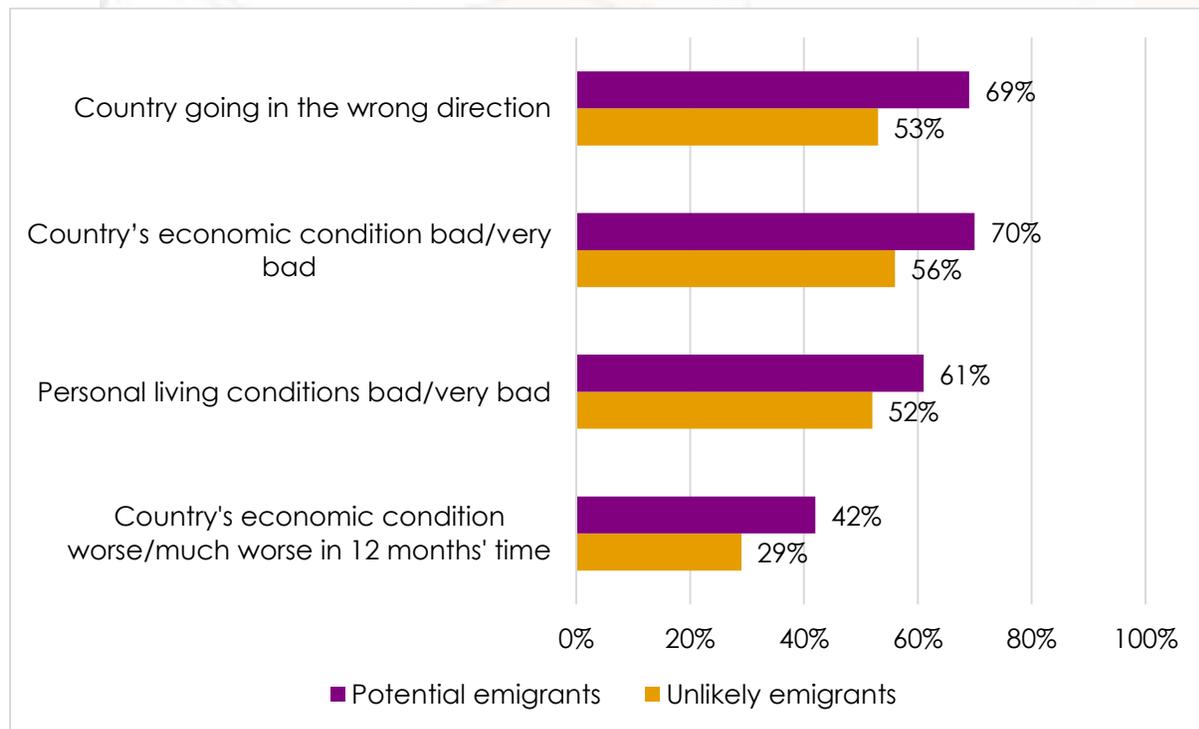
Not surprisingly, as a group, Zimbabweans who have considered emigrating hold less positive views of their country’s overall direction and economic situation than their compatriots who have not considered emigrating) (Figure 7).

For example, 69% of potential emigrants say the country is headed in the wrong direction, compared to 53% of unlikely emigrants.

Similarly, seven out of 10 potential emigrants (70%) consider the economic condition of the country “fairly bad” or “very bad,” compared to 56% of unlikely emigrants. And potential emigrants are more likely to describe their personal living conditions as “fairly bad” or “very bad” than unlikely emigrants, 61% vs. 52%.

Finally, potential emigrants are also more pessimistic about the country’s economic future: 42% expect economic conditions to be “worse” or “much worse” in 12 months’ time, compared to 29% of unlikely emigrants.

Figure 7: Perceptions of economic conditions – potential vs. unlikely emigrants
 | Zimbabwe | 2017



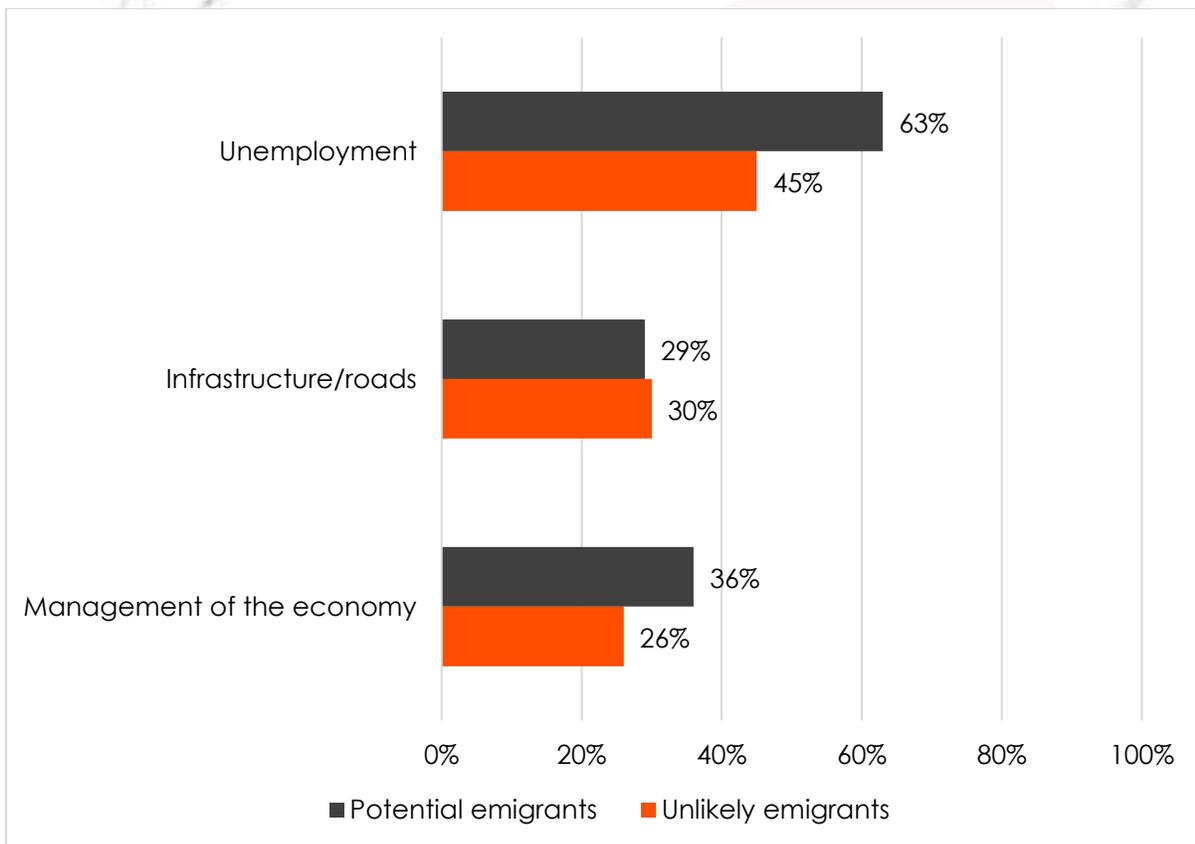
Respondents were asked:

- Would you say that the country is going in the wrong direction or going in the right direction?
- In general, how would you describe: The present economic condition of this country? Your present living conditions?
- Looking ahead, do you expect economic conditions in this country to be better or worse in 12 months' time?

Country's most important problems and government performance

Considering that employment opportunities are the most common reason cited for considering emigration, it is not surprising that potential emigrants more often cite unemployment as one of the most important problems the country faces than their stay-at-home counterparts. Unemployment is the most frequently cited problem in both groups, but draws 63% of potential emigrants vs. 45% of unlikely emigrants (Figure 8). In both groups, infrastructure/roads and management of the economy rank in the No. 2 and 3 positions, though the latter is more important among potential emigrants (36%) than among unlikely emigrants (26%).

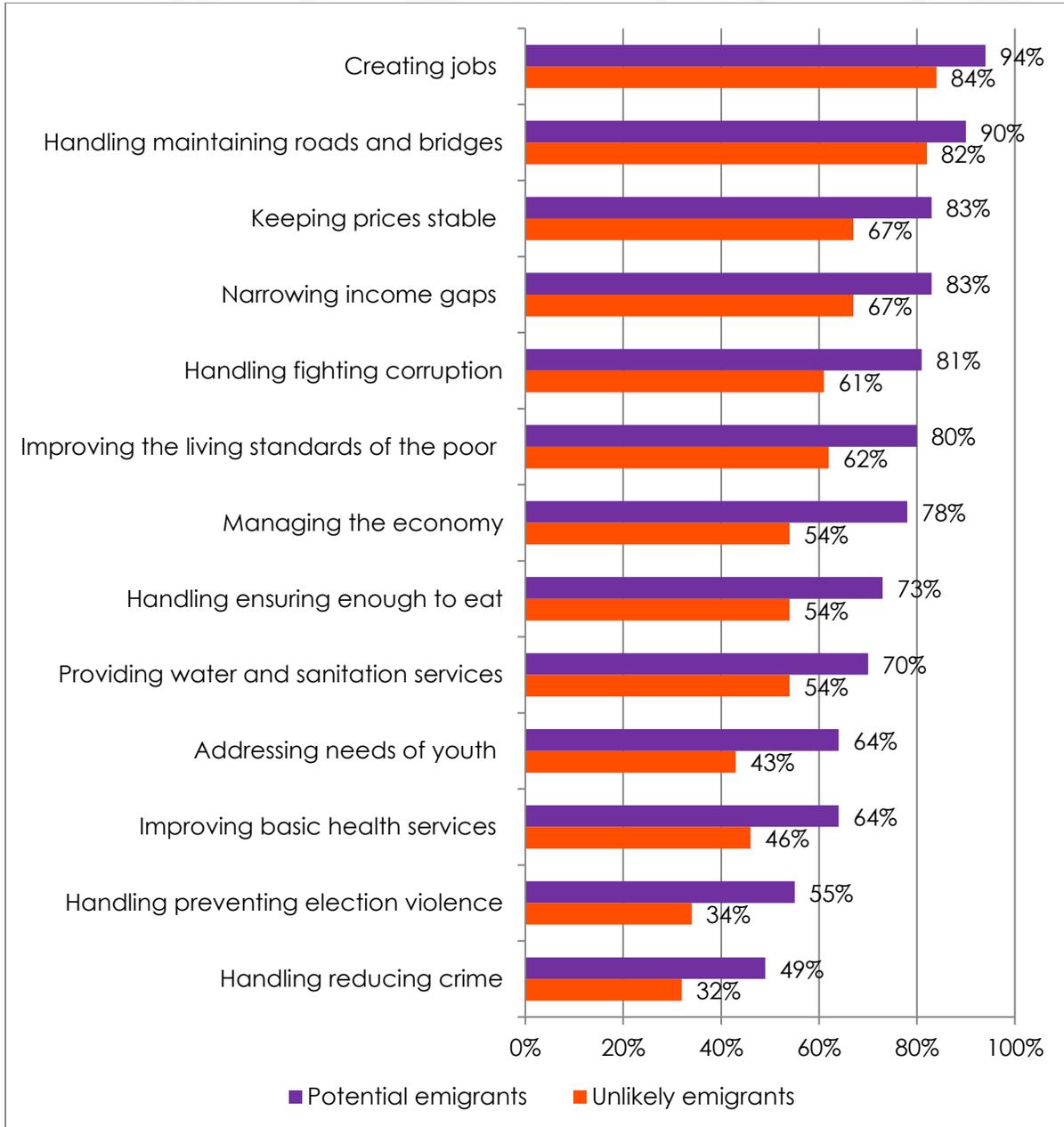
Figure 8: Country's most important problems | Zimbabwe | 2017



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing this country that the government should address?*

Similarly, negative assessments of government performance on a wide range of economic and social issues are more widespread among potential emigrants than among unlikely emigrants (Figure 9). For example, potential emigrants are almost unanimous (94%) in saying the government is performing “fairly badly” or “very badly” on job creation, vs. 84% of unlikely emigrants. On the issue of keeping prices stable, almost twice as many potential emigrants as unlikely emigrants (83% vs. 41%) describe government performance as fairly/very bad.

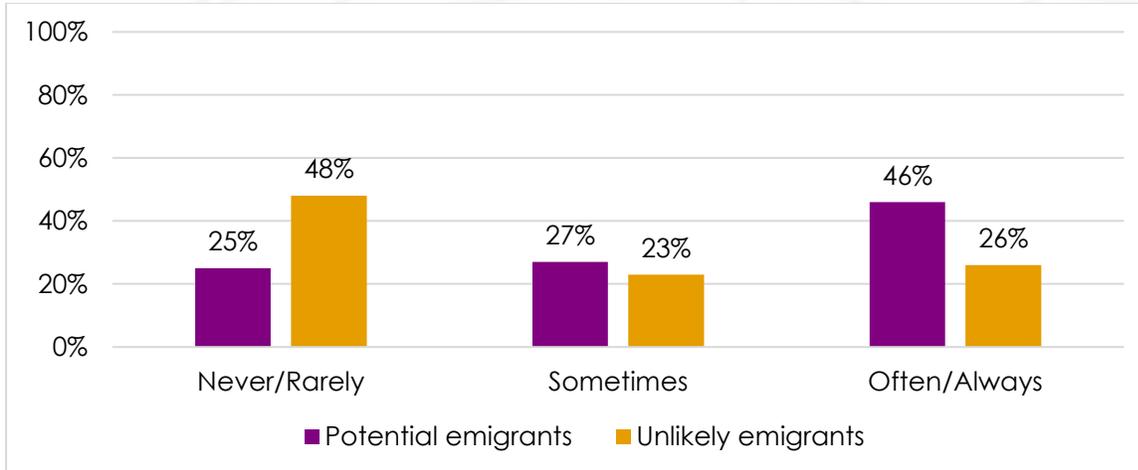
Figure 9: Negative evaluations of government performance – potential emigrants vs. unlikely emigrants | Zimbabwe | 2017



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? (% who say "fairly badly" or "very badly")

Anger about the government's failure to do enough to solve the problems confronting the nation is considerably more widespread among potential emigrants. Almost half (46%) of them say they "often" or "always" feel angry, compared to 26% of unlikely emigrants (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Anger over government's performance – potential vs. unlikely emigrants
 | Zimbabwe | 2017

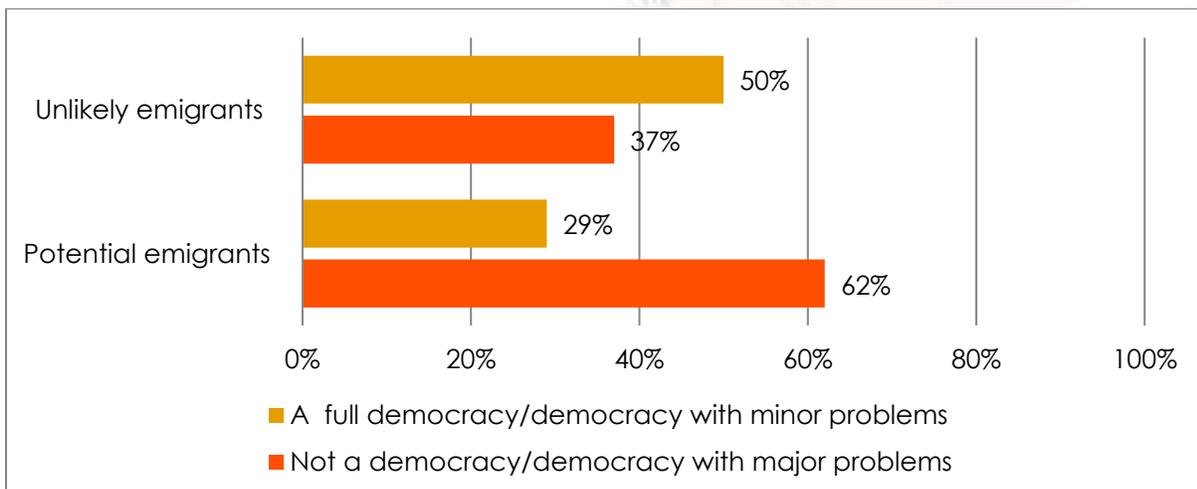


Respondents were asked: Over the past 12 months, how often, if ever, have you found yourself feeling angry about the government for not doing enough to solve the problems in the country?

Perceived extent of democracy

Although very few respondents cite democracy as their main reason for considering emigrating, potential emigrants differ from unlikely emigrants in their assessment of how democratic Zimbabwe is (Figure 11). More than six in 10 potential emigrants (62%) say the country is “not a democracy” or “a democracy with major problems,” compared to 37% of unlikely emigrants. Only 29% of potential emigrants believe the country is “a full democracy” or “a democracy with minor problems,” vs. 50% of respondents who have not considered emigrating.

Figure 11: Perceived extent of democracy – potential vs. unlikely emigrants
 | Zimbabwe | 2017



Respondents were asked: In your opinion how much of a democracy is Zimbabwe today?

Conclusion

If Zimbabwe's government wants to stem outward migration, these survey responses offer some tough insights. Almost half of the country's adult population say they have considered emigrating, in most cases to look for employment. These sentiments are most prevalent among educated urban youth, a group that the country can hardly afford to lose. South Africa is the preferred destination for those considering emigration. Such potential emigrants are more negative than their stay-at-home counterparts about Zimbabwe's economic condition and outlook. Remarkably, almost half of them say they "often" or "always" feel angry about the government's failure to address the country's problems.

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.

References

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Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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