

# Ghanaians disapprove of illegal mining, endorse alternative livelihood support by government

---

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 175 | Daniel Armah-Attah

## Summary

For years, Ghana has struggled to address the problems of land degradation, water pollution, and destruction of farmlands resulting from illegal small-scale gold and diamond mining popularly known as “galamsey.”<sup>1</sup> After short-lived efforts under the previous government, the Nana Akufo-Addo administration classified “galamsey” as a major challenge to the country and imposed a six-month ban early this year. The Minister of Lands and Natural Resources followed with a 21-day ultimatum to all “galamseyers” to cease operations and surrender their equipment.

The government also launched a Multilateral Mining Integrated Project (MMIP) aimed at enacting more stringent mining regulations and improving enforcement of mining laws, including the use of drones and other monitoring technology (Ghana Business News, 2017). Around the same time, then-Chief Justice Georgina Theodora Woode designated 14 courts to handle “galamsey” cases, Vice President Mahamadu Bawumia announced the suspension of issuance of licenses for small-scale mining, and a number of Ghanaians and foreigners were arrested on suspicion of illegal mining by a ministerial task force (CitiFMonline, 2017).

A Media Coalition Against Galemsey<sup>2</sup> formed to support the government's efforts (Ghana Star, 2017a) and collaborated with the public-interest group Occupy Ghana to organize a National Red Friday crusade to rally citizens (Ghana Star, 2017b). It is estimated that about 1 million people (nationals, other West Africans, and Chinese) are involved in illegal small-scale mining (some diamond mining but mostly gold) in Ghana, each earning on average between US\$100 and US\$300 per month (Phys Org, 2017).

Afrobarometer's latest national survey in Ghana shows that most Ghanaians support efforts to wipe out illegal small-scale mining and approve of the government's performance on this issue. But they also overwhelmingly support the government's proposed initiatives to develop alternative livelihoods for those affected by an end to “galamsey.”

## Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 35 countries in Africa. Six rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2015,

---

<sup>1</sup> The term “galamsey” comes from the pidgin phrase “gather am and sell,” which was used by persons involved in illegal small-scale mining to refer to sieving and gathering gold particles from sand debris and selling them.

<sup>2</sup> The coalition includes the Graphic Communication Group Limited, the Ghana Independent Broadcasters Association, the Ghanaian Times, the Ghana Journalists Association, the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation, the Christian Council of Ghana, and the Private Media Practitioners Association of Ghana.

and Round 7 surveys (2016/2018) are currently underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Ghana, led by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), interviewed 2,400 adult Ghanaians between September 9 and 25, 2017. A sample of this size yields results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Ghana in 1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, and 2014.

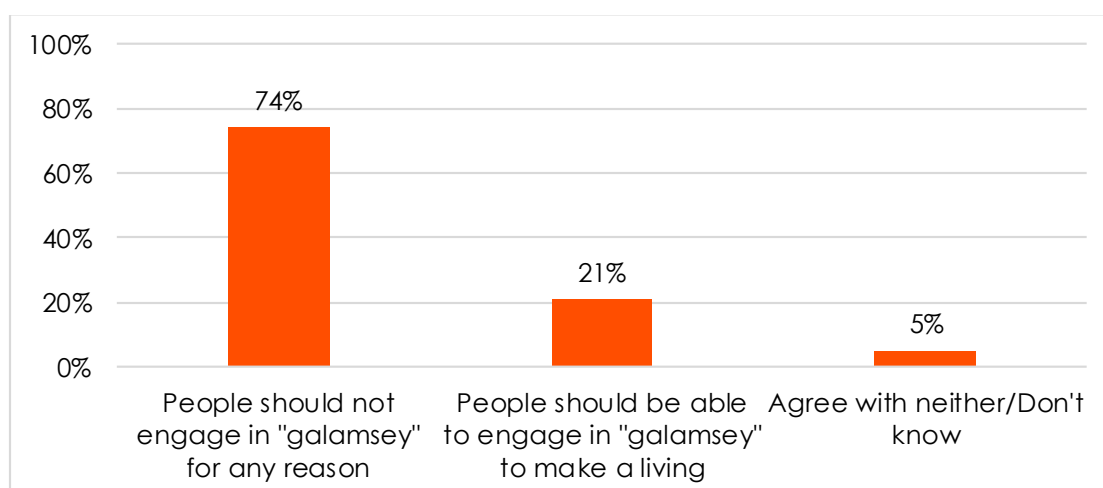
## Key findings

- Three-fourths (74%) of Ghanaians say no citizen should be permitted to engage in illegal small-scale mining or “galamsey” for any reason.
- Eight out of 10 Ghanaians (81%) approve of the government's performance in clamping down on illegal small-scale mining.
- Rejection of “galamsey” and approval of the government's handling of the fight against it are particularly strong among better-educated Ghanaians and among residents of the Central, Brong Ahafo, and Ashanti regions. Opposition to small-scale mining is weakest in the Upper East, Northern, and Upper West regions.
- Eight out of 10 Ghanaians (80%) approve – including 52% who “strongly approve” – of the idea that the government should be responsible for providing alternative livelihoods for former “galamseyers.”

## Ghanaians oppose illegal small-scale mining, approve of government efforts

Three-fourths (74%) of Ghanaians say people should not engage in illegal small-scale mining “for any reason,” although only 15% say they feel “very strongly” about the issue. One in five respondents (21%) instead “agree” or “strongly agree” that even though “galamsey” is illegal, citizens “should be able to engage in it to eke a living” (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Should people be allowed to eke out a living through ‘galamsey’?** | Ghana | 2017



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

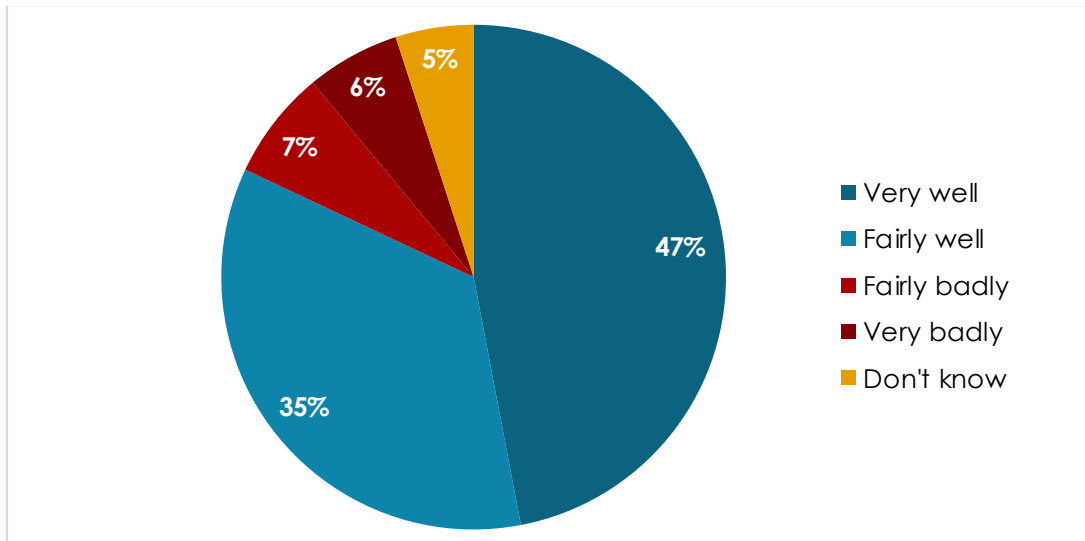
Statement 1: Even though illegal small-scale mining or “galamsey” is prohibited by law, citizens should be able to engage in it to eke a living.

Statement 2: Illegal small-scale mining or “galamsey” is prohibited by the law, and citizens should not engage in it for any reason.

(% who “agree” or “strongly agree” with each statement)

Eight out of 10 Ghanaians (81%) say the government is doing well in its effort to stamp out illegal small-scale mining, including 47% who say the government is performing “very well” on this issue (Figure 2). Just one in seven (14%) disapprove of the government’s performance in fighting “galamsey.”

**Figure 2: Government performance in curbing illegal small-scale mining | Ghana | 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: Fighting illegal mining or “galamsey”? (Note: 1-percentage-point differences between the sum of sub-categories (e.g. 47% “very well” and 35% “fairly well”) and the overall reported total (e.g. 81%) are due to rounding.)

While rejection of “galamsey” and approval of the government’s efforts are strong across most socio-demographic groups, the proportions holding these views differ significantly based on respondents’ level of education, where they live, and which political party they favour (Figure 3).

While about two-thirds of citizens with no formal education oppose illegal mining (66%) and think the government is handling the issue effectively (67%), much larger proportions of better-educated citizens hold these views (71% to 81% for no illegal mining and 80% to 93% for positive rating of government effort).

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).

Both rejection of “galamsey” and approval of government performance are somewhat stronger among urban residents than their rural counterparts. Moreover, there are clear differences by region. Rejection of illegal small-scale mining is strongest in Central

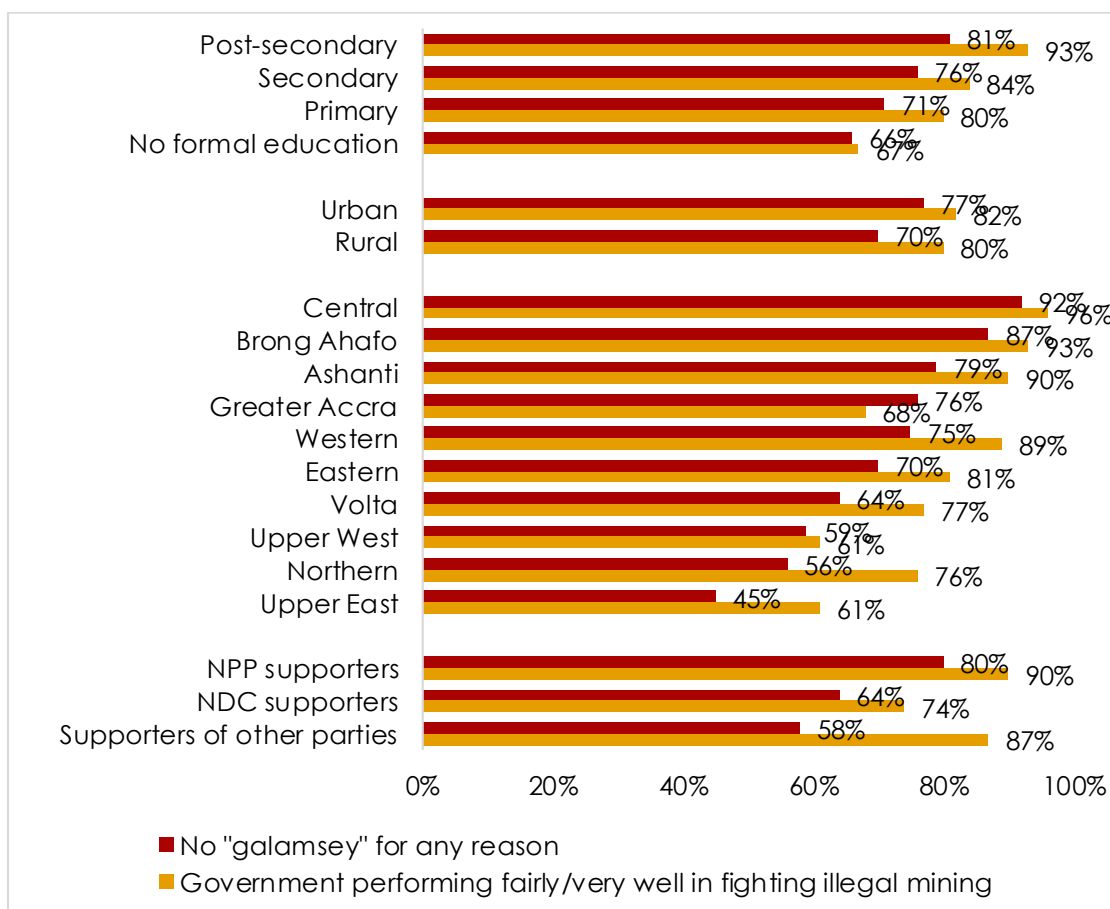
(92%), Brong Ahafo (87%), and Ashanti (79%) regions, as is approval for the government’s performance (96%, 93%, and 90%, respectively).

The Upper East region stands out with the lowest popular rejection of “galamsey” (45%), followed by the Northern (56%) and Upper West (59%) regions. These three regions also express some of the lowest levels of approval for the government’s handling of the problem. They are “galamsey”-prone areas, making these findings something of a paradox compared to results in other noted “galamsey” regions such as Western, Ashanti, Brong Ahafo, Eastern, and Central.

Greater Accra presents a break in the pattern, with strong rejection of illegal mining (76%) but comparatively weak approval of government performance (68%) (Figure 3).

The analysis also highlights a political tint with regard to the destructive activities of “galamsey.” Whereas a large majority of supporters<sup>3</sup> of the ruling New Patriotic Party (NPP) (80%) oppose illegal small-scale mining, much lower percentages of National Democratic Congress (NDC) (64%) and other opposition parties (58%) share this position. Similarly, approval of the government’s performance is higher among NPP adherents (90%) than among NDC supporters (74%). Views on these questions differ only marginally by gender, age group, and employment status.

**Figure 3: Views on illegal small-scale mining or ‘galamsey’ | by socio-demographic group | Ghana | 2017**



**Respondents were asked:**

- Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: Even though illegal small-scale mining or “galamsey” is prohibited by law, citizens should be able to engage in it to eke a living.  
 Statement 2: Illegal small-scale mining or “galamsey” is prohibited by the law, and citizens should not engage in it for any reason.  
 (% who “agree” or “strongly agree” with each statement)
- How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven’t you heard enough to say: Fighting illegal mining or “galamsey”? (% who say “fairly well” or “very well”)

<sup>3</sup> Afrobarometer measures party affiliation based on responses to the questions “Do you feel close to any particular political party? [If yes:] Which party is that?”

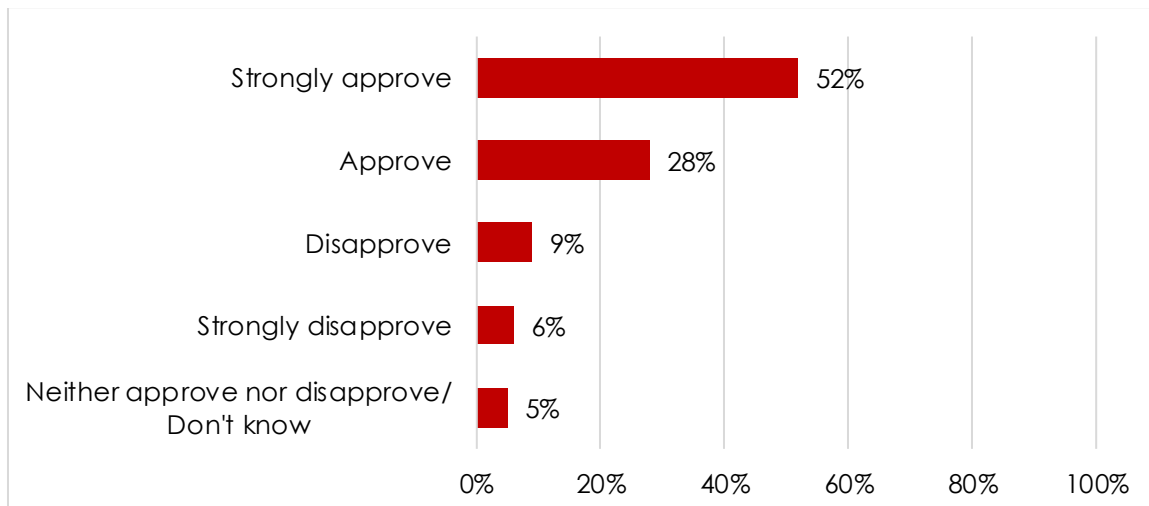
## Ghanaians support government intention to provide alternative livelihood

While dead-set against “galamsey,” the government has acknowledged the significant economic impact that its clampdown on small-scale mining will have on many Ghanaian families. At a forum with traditional leaders, President Akufo-Addo announced the formation of a cabinet-level committee that will not only design policies to fight illegal mining and reclaim degraded lands and rivers, but will also develop alternative livelihood schemes for young men and women affected by the clampdown (News Ghana, 2017).

Ghanaians are overwhelmingly supportive of such an alternative livelihood initiative: 80% “approve” – including 52% who “strongly approve” – of the idea that the government should be responsible for providing alternative livelihoods for former “galamseyers” (Figure 4).

Support for alternative-livelihood initiatives is strong (75% or more) across all regions and shows only minor differences across other key socio-demographic variables.

**Figure 4: Support for government providing alternative livelihood to ‘galamseyers’**  
 | Ghana | 2017



**Respondents were asked:** Please tell me whether you approve or disapprove of the following statement: The government should be responsible for providing alternative livelihoods for Ghanaians who are currently engaged in illegal small-scale mining or “galamsey”?

## Conclusion

Ghanaians strongly support the government's efforts to eliminate illegal small-scale mining. This support is particularly strong among better-educated citizens, suggesting that education about the negative effects of “galamsey” might be of value in the government's drive to end it. Indeed, in the short period of the government clampdown, some major rivers that were heavily polluted as a result of illegal mining (e.g. Pra and Birim rivers) are beginning to show signs of recovery (My Joy Online, 2017; GhanaWeb, 2017). Stakeholders should support serious education and sensitization programs to sustain this gradual recovery.

Ghanaians also clearly want the government to fulfill its promise of providing support for alternative livelihoods for those affected by the crackdown – a move that will also improve the chances of success for the anti-“galamsey” campaign.

## References

- Ghana Business News. (2017). Ghana government rolls out programme to deal with galamsey – Minister. 17 April 2017. <https://www.ghanabusinessnews.com/2017/04/17/ghana-government-rolls-out-programme-to-deal-with-galamsey-minister/>.
- Ghana Star. (2017a). Media coalition against galamsey launched. 5 April 2017. <https://www.ghanastar.com/news/media-coalition-against-galamsey-launched/>.
- Ghana Star. (2017b). National Red Friday observed to rally Ghanaians against galamsey. 22 April 2017. <https://www.ghanastar.com/news/national-red-friday-observed-to-rally-ghanaians-against-galamsey/>.
- GhanaWeb. (2017). Birim River taking shape after galamsey fight. 4 July 2017. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/regional/Birim-River-taking-shape-after-galamsey-fight-555332>.
- My Joy Online. (2017). Pra River witnessing improvement as galamsey fight rages on. 5 June 2017. <http://www.myjoyonline.com/news/2017/June-5th/prariver-witnessing-improvement-after-galamsey-fight.php>.
- News Ghana. (2017). I will fight galamsey, even it costs me the Presidency – President Nana Addo. 11 July 2017. <https://www.newsghana.com.gh/i-will-fight-galamsey-even-it-costs-me-the-presidency-president-nana-addo/>.
- Phys Org. (2017). All that glitters: Ghana battles illegal mining. 11 August 2017. <https://phys.org/news/2017-08-glitters-ghana-illegal.html#jCp>.

**Daniel Armah-Attoh** is the Afrobarometer project manager for anglophone West Africa, based at the Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) in Accra. Email: [daniel@cddgh.org](mailto:daniel@cddgh.org).

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.

Financial support for Afrobarometer Round 7 has been provided by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the U.S. State Department, and the National Endowment for Democracy.

Donations help the Afrobarometer Project give voice to African citizens. Please consider making a contribution (at [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org)) or contact Aba Kittoe ([akitoe@afrobarometer.org](mailto:akitoe@afrobarometer.org)) to discuss institutional funding.

For more information, please visit [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org).



Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 175 | 28 November 2017