



Afrobarometer Briefing Paper No. 29

March 2006

Public Perceptions of Operation Murambatsvina in Zimbabwe

In mid-May 2005, the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) launched, with little advance warning, a massive ‘urban clean up’ campaign. The exercise was code-named “Operation Murambatsvina/ Restore Order” hereafter referred to as OM. Murambatsvina is a Shona word meaning literally: “one who refuses dirt.” Initially, there were two separate ‘operations’, one on “Murambatsvina” and the second on “restoring order” but the two imperceptibly fused in the process of implementation and the twin campaigns are now commonly referred to as one.

The Government justified the program as a strategy to eradicate illegal dwellings and to clamp down on alleged illicit activities, including informal trade but especially foreign currency transactions in the black market. However, the programme attracted massive and overwhelming condemnation that forced GoZ to invite the United Nations to “see for itself.” Analysts and other observers in and outside the country commented that the operation was carried out in an indiscriminate and unjustified manner, considering its negative impact on people’s livelihoods. The Operation was also criticized for breaching national and international human rights law provisions guiding evictions. Some commentators within Zimbabwe therefore renamed the crackdown as “Operation Murambavanhu” meaning “Operation Anti-People.” The people themselves popularly referred to OM as a “Tsunami”, illustrating the scale of its destructive impact.

What do Zimbabweans think about this crackdown? Do the *direct* victims of OM think differently about the critical issues troubling the country compared to the ‘mainstream’ public opinion? These are only two of the many questions that Round 3 of Afrobarometer survey of adult Zimbabweans sought to answer.

Method

The survey was conducted from 9 to 26 October 2005, that is, after operation Murambatsvina but before the senate elections of 2005. The survey covered both urban and rural segments of all ten administrative provinces in Zimbabwe. It was based on a double sample: a nationally

representative random main sample of 1096 respondents and a purposive sub-sample of 104 respondents comprising victims of the Government’s Operation Murambatsvina/Restore Order. In both cases, respondents were Zimbabwean men and women of voting age. Because of disruptions to fieldwork by some unruly political elements, completion of the survey was aborted towards the end. We were able to collect 1048 interviews of the main sample and 64 of the sub-sample, totalling 1112 interviews overall. The Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI), a Zimbabwean non-governmental research organisation, conducted all fieldwork.

Effects/Impact of OM

First, how widespread were the effects of OM? To gauge the extent of the impact we asked all respondents: “were you, or a member of your immediate family, affected by Operation Murambatsvina in any of the following ways?” The “ways” in which respondents could have been affected included: destruction of a home or dwelling; eviction from a place of residence; destruction or closure of a business; arrest for engaging in illegal trade; or loss of a job.

Figure 1: Impact of OM - Destruction of Dwelling: Main Sample

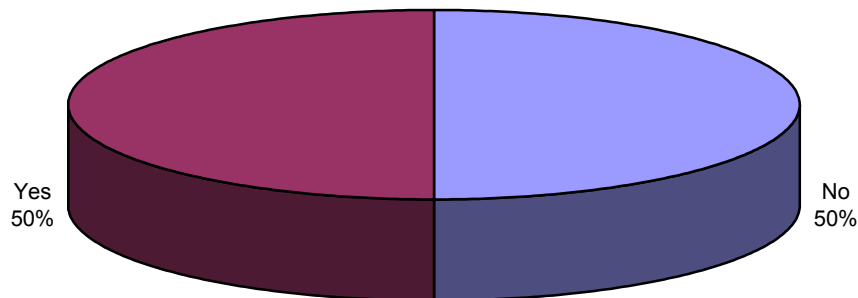


Figure 1 above suggests that the impact of OM was widespread and that exactly half of all adults in Zimbabwe were affected, at least in terms of the destruction of a home or dwelling. This category of effect includes the destruction of workers’ quarters, outbuildings or extensions that households may have leased to renters. As for the sub-sample, every respondent or an immediate relative was directly affected in this way, as Table 1 demonstrates.

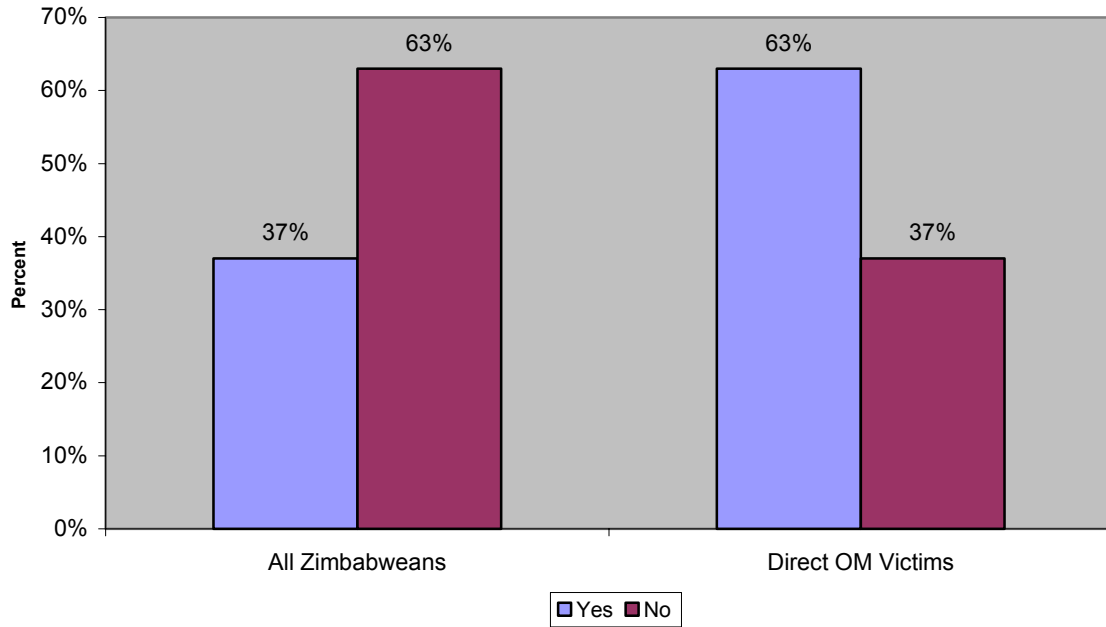
Table 1: Impact of OM- destruction of home/dwelling on property

Were you or a member of your immediate family, affected by operation Murambatsvina in terms of ...	Main Sample	OM Victims
Yes	50	100
No	50	0
DK	<1	0

Moreover, up to 37% of the respondents from the main sample (or a member of their immediate family) were evicted from their place of residence. Figure 2 depicts this picture. Many more

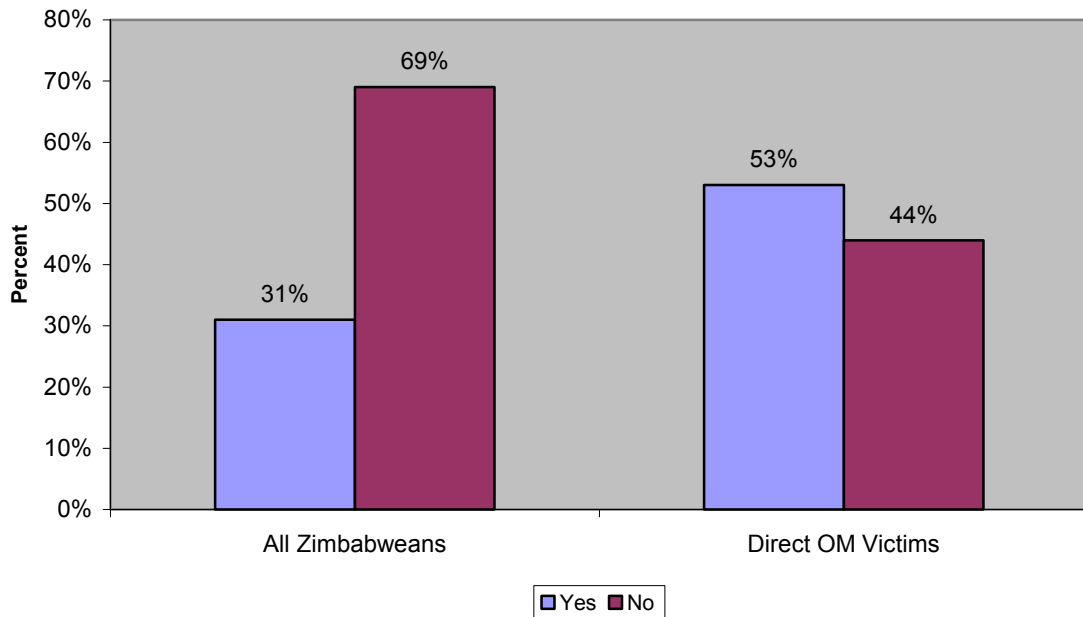
direct OM victims (67%) were affected in this way, effectively becoming homeless, at least temporarily.

Figure 2: Impact of OM: Eviction from place of residence (Main sample)



Other Zimbabweans were double victims: they had their business premises destroyed as well as their homes. Included in this category were roadside kiosks or stands at informal flea markets. The destruction or closure of a business affected nearly a third (31%) of all respondents or their immediate families, and 53% of direct OM victims (see Figure 3)

Figure 3: Impact of OM: Destruction or Closure of Business (Main and Sub Samples)



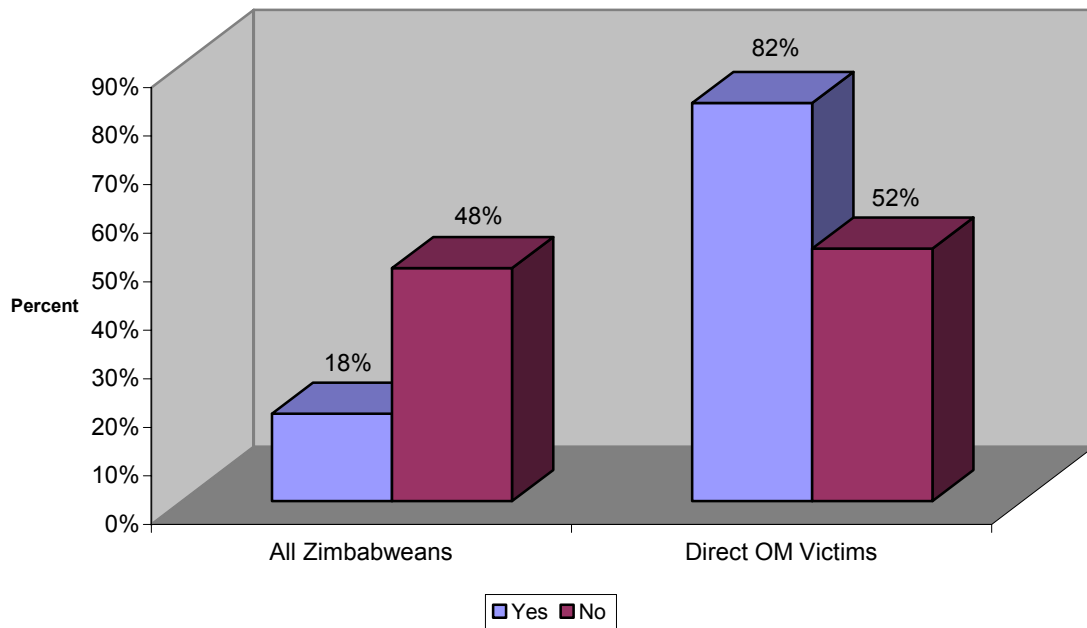
It is worth noting that up to three quarters (76%) of the main sample were not employed and were therefore immediately denied a source of income and livelihood. In fact, 25% of all respondents reported losing a job consequent upon OM. For up to half (47%) of the most severely affected Zimbabweans, OM represented a loss of livelihood as well as a loss of shelter. (Table 2)

Table 2: Impact of Operation Murambatsvina – Loss of job

Were you or a member of your immediate family, affected by operation Murambatsvina in terms of ...	Main Sample	OM Victims
Yes	25	47
No	74	53
DK	1	0

These numbers swell when those arrested for engaging in “illegal” trade are also counted. Almost two in every ten Zimbabweans say they (or someone from their immediate family) were apprehended, with virtually all of them paying “admission of guilt” fines to gain their freedom. From the sub-sample, almost half (48%) of the respondents or a member of their immediate family was arrested as shown in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Impact of OM – Arrested for engaging in illegal trade



The Scope of OM

The scope of the OM crackdown has been a subject of debate and dispute within Zimbabwe and beyond. As a way of contributing to this conversation, we report in this section some rough estimates of the numbers of OM victims based on the Afrobarometer Round 3 survey results.

Since OM had various effects – from destruction of dwellings to losses of jobs – we calculated the severity of OM effects for each individual in the survey. This indicator ranged from no effect (46% of respondents) through just one effect (13%) to five effects (14%). All told, the important estimate is that just over half (54%) of a representative sample of adult Zimbabweans reported being affected in one way or another.

The best alternative estimate to date of the numbers affected by OM has been made by the United Nations Special Envoy, Anna Tibaijuka. Her *Report of the Fact Finding Mission to Zimbabwe, 2005* divided OM victims into two groups: those directly affected and those indirectly affected. She calculated the number directly affected as “700,000 people in cities across the country (who) have either lost their homes or livelihoods or both” (p.8). She then used “a reasonable multiplier effect... (to) bring the number of indirectly affected people to over 2.1 million” (p.34). Together, and allowing for overlap between categories, “the (UN) mission estimates that the total population directly and indirectly affected... is about 2.4 million” (p.34).

The GoZ rejected this estimate. Minister of Foreign Affairs Simbarashe Mumbengegwi stated that the UN report was biased and, moreover, exaggerated the number of people affected: “throughout the report, submissions by the government are consistently referred to as ‘allegations’ while those of the opposition... are taken as statements of fact” (*Sunday Independent*, July 24, 2005).

So, who is right? As stated above, the Afrobarometer Round 3 survey estimates that 54% of the adult population say they were affected in some way by OM. The official *Census 2002* reports the total population of Zimbabwe at 11.635 million. The government’s annual intercensal population growth rate of 1.1% produces an estimated 2005 population of 12.023 million. Let us guess that 2.023 million have emigrated due to the political and economic crisis besieging the country. Of the roughly 10 million people who remain behind, approximately 50% are under the age of 18 (the World Bank’s *African Development Indicators* says 43% are under age 14). Subtracting people under the voting age, we are left with an eligible population of about 5 million adults. If 54% percent of these were affected, then the estimate of total OM victims (direct and indirect) must be raised to 2.7 million.

There are two possibilities. Either the Afrobarometer has overestimated the scope of OM effects. Or the United Nations has underestimated the effects. Whatever the case, the Government of Zimbabwe appears to be incorrect in claiming that Anna Tibaijuka has exaggerated the impact of Operation Murambatsvina.

Who are the OM Victims?

The Afrobarometer finds that Operation Murambatsvina struck the most productive segments of the population, with a plurality of 44% falling within the middle-aged group (30-49 years), followed by the young (18-29 years) at 36% (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Victims of OM, by age groups

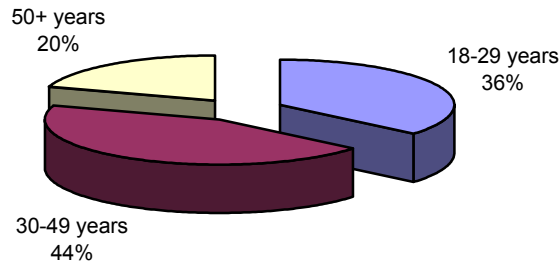
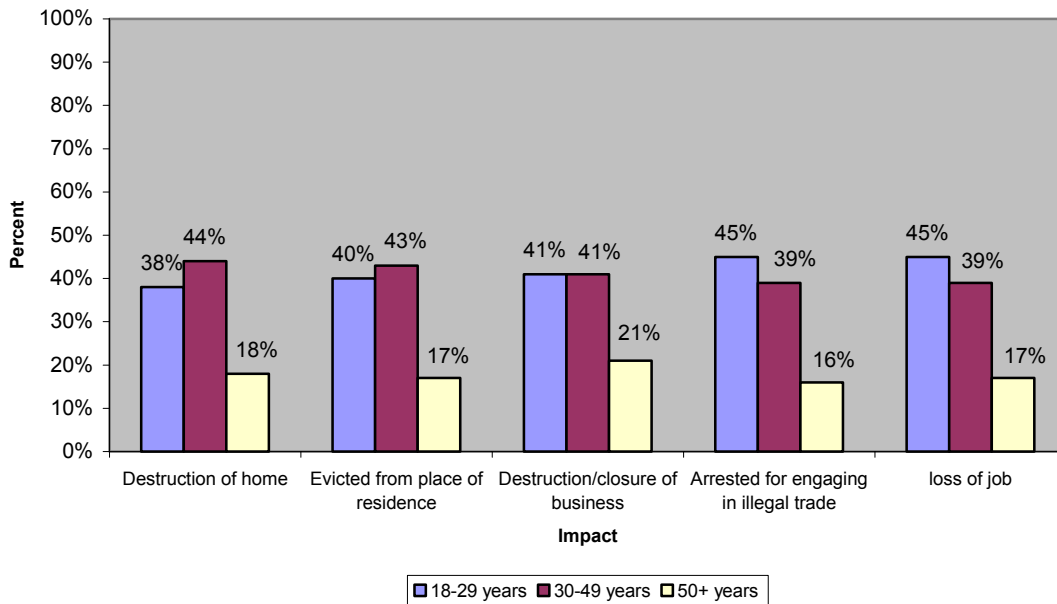


Figure 6: Impact of OM, by Age (Main Sample)



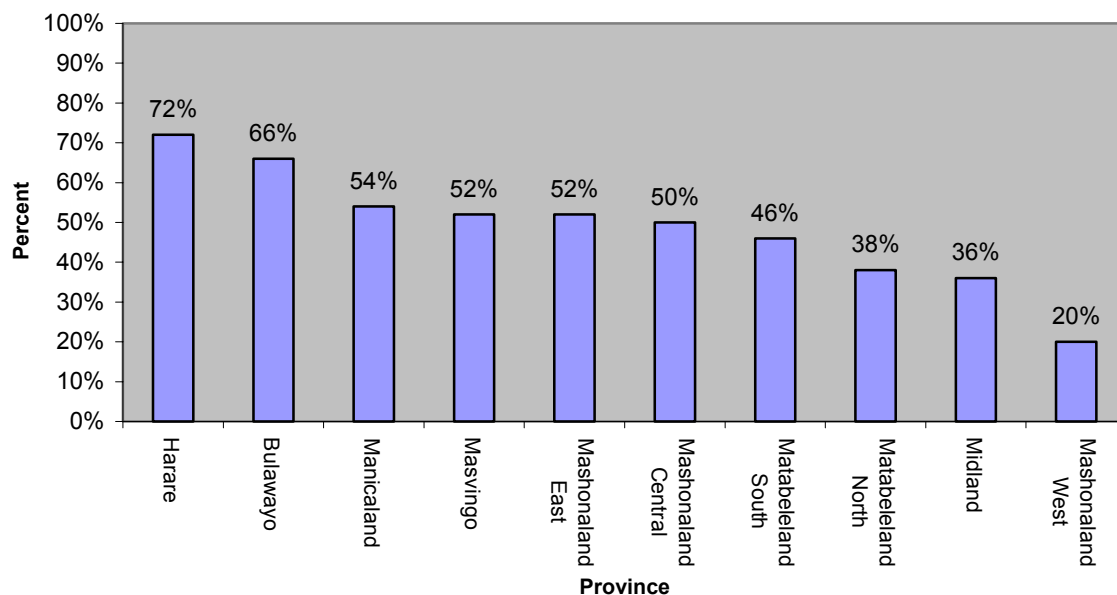
But the type of impact varied with age. The middle-aged population (30-49) was most likely to absorb a loss of property. Figure 6 above shows that middle aged people were most likely to experience the destruction of a dwelling (44%) or to be evicted from their place of residence (43%). By contrast, young people were most likely to suffer a loss of livelihood (45% of those arrested for illegal trading were young) or the loss of a job (45%).

Slightly less than two in ten of respondents in the older (50+) age group were affected one way or another by OM, making them the least affected group in the country. Whilst there is variance on age, when analysed against gender, there is no statistically significant difference on the impact of OM.

What was the geographic impact of OM? Which provinces were hardest hit by this catastrophe? This question can only be answered using the main sample since the sub-sample was purposive, i.e. covering only Bulawayo, Harare and Manicaland.

Figure 7 below shows the provincial breakdown of those who had their homes or dwellings destroyed. Harare experienced the largest proportion that had a dwelling destroyed (72%), business closed (63%), or suffered eviction from their homes (56%). In Bulawayo (38%) and Matabeleland South (33%) the largest proportions were arrested for engaging in illegal trade (not shown). Mashonaland Central (33%) was second to Harare (63%) in terms of destruction or closure of business. For Mashonaland East and Central, a plurality lost their jobs. Thus, while the impact was widespread, OM was a largely urban phenomenon. And Mashonaland West, homeland of President Robert Mugabe and a ruling party stronghold, escaped with the least reported impact. Figure

Figure 7: Impact of OM: Destruction of home or place of dwelling, by Province



Responses of Victims to OM

What sort of survival strategies have victims of OM sought in light of such effects? Respondents were asked what course of action they took in reaction to the OM crackdown.

For instance, where did evictees or those whose homes were destroyed find sanctuary? It is a mark of the enduring vibrancy of the close and extended family ties that four in ten from the main sample and up to nine in ten in the sub-sample moved in with relatives. Table 3 below clearly illustrates this point. These relatives could either have been in the urban (the epicentre of OM) or in the rural areas. This is so given that 35% and 53% of the main and sub-sample respectively reported relocating to the rural areas where they found sanctuary with relatives.

If the aim of OM was to disperse urban populations to rural areas where they could be more easily controlled, then it was only partly successful. Just 35% of all adults and 53% of direct OM victims report relocating to a rural area. One can also surmise that, with time, some proportion of these displaced persons will find their way back into town.

Did the GoZ succeed in stamping out the informal sector? Our evidence suggests not. Almost four in ten of the OM victims now conduct their operations from home and this constitutes close to 58% of those whose business was destroyed or closed. In the main sample, about 56% of those who lost their business are now operating from home and these constitute 19% of the sample. These Figures demonstrate the resilience or perseverance of ordinary people in piecing together alternative livelihood strategies. In sum, the evidence suggests the enormous staying power of the informal “black market” economy and the extreme difficulty of dismantling it. The authors of OM clearly underestimated this reality in their haste to break the backbone of the popular economy.

Table 3: Responses of Victims to OM

Which of the following actions did you/they take?	All Zimbabweans		OM Victims	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Moved in with relatives	40	13	89	9
Relocated to a rural area	35	17	53	38
Stayed in the open	20	28	58	30
Operates business from home	19	28	45	47
Was Taken into transit camp	8	42	14	72

Smaller proportions (8% from the main and 14% from the sub-sample) were transported to various transit camps set up by churches or the government. Many more people who lost their homes (20% and 58% respectively) reported that they stayed in the open, at least for the period soon after they were affected. In short, not much was done to shelter the victims of the OM.

The Popular Verdict on OM

Lastly, we asked all Afrobarometer respondents to give a judgement on Operation Murambatsvina. The results are depicted in Table 5 below.

Operation Murambatsvina has few defenders with up to seven in ten respondents (69%) from the main sample condemning it as “a bad thing that caused unnecessary hardships and violated people’s human rights.” The direct victims of the operation are even more condemnatory with 84% of the respondents in the sub-sample highly critical of OM. On the surface, it may appear odd that 7% of this sample praised the clean-up campaign but it could be this fraction of the sample supported the *intention* of the campaign i.e. to “rid our society of criminals and illegal activities”.

Table 5: Assessment of Operation Murambatsvina

Judgement on	All Zimbabweans	OM Victims
Agree very strongly with A	9	5
Agree with A	12	2
Agree with B	12	0
Agree very strongly with B	57	84
Agree with neither	4	9
DK	5	0

Statement A: The Government’s recent clean up campaign (you know Operation Murambatsvina) was a good thing that helped rid our society of criminals and illegal activities.

Statement B: The Government’s clean up was a bad thing that caused unnecessary hardships and violated people’s human rights.

In conclusion, many Zimbabweans, more so those who were directly affected by OM, would sympathise with the observations of U.N. Special Envoy Anna Tibaijuka who described OM as a “disastrous venture” or U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan who condemned the demolition drive as a “catastrophic injustice” and indeed U.N. Humanitarian Relief Coordinator Jan Egeland who chided the Government for launching the OM describing it as “the worst possible action at the worst possible time.”

This Briefing Paper was prepared by Eldred Masunungure, Anyway Ndapwadza and Noma Sibanda of the Mass Public Opinion Institute, www.mpoi.org and Michael Bratton of Michigan State University.

The Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from 18 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (Idasa), the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) and Michigan State University. Several donors support the Afrobarometer’s research, capacity-building and outreach activities, including the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Department for International Development (UK), the World Bank, the African Development Bank, and the U.S. Agency for International Development. For more information, see: www.afrobarometer.org