



Trust In Public Institutions

Prepared by

Eldred Masunungure

Anyway Ndapwadza

Noma Sibanda

Naume Choguya

For any enquiries: Tel +263 (04) 771358/ 758700/756484

Fax + 263 (04) 758701

E-mail: info@mpoi.org.zw

Website address: www.mpoi.org

Trust in Public Institutions

Trust in political institutions is a key variable related to democratic governance. It is a component of social capital and is a key resource in the governance of a polity. What confidence do Zimbabweans have in their public institutions i.e. political and civic institutions? Specifically, how much trust do people have in the president (the symbol of the Zimbabwe regime since Independence), institutions of popular representation like Parliament and local government councils, institutions of 'legitimate' state coercion like the military and the police, and civic institutions like political parties and the media?

The survey was conducted from 9 to 26 October 2005 and 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 purposeful 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 of fieldwork by some unruly political elements, completion of the survey was aborted and in the end 1048 interviews of the main sample and 64 of the sub-sample were completed totalling 1112 interviews. The Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI), a Zimbabwean non-governmental research organisation, did all fieldwork. Below are the key findings relating to trust in political and civic institutions.

Except for the judiciary and the military, none of the institutions surveyed attracts the trust of even half the adult populace. Table 1 shows the levels of trust accorded to these institutions. The least trusted are government newspapers (28%), followed by the country's electoral machinery - the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission - that was accorded 29% trust. The ruling party, the State President (who is also the ruling party's president) and local government councils are also low trust institutions obtaining 31% and 33% respectively. The military still retains considerable though declining trust among Zimbabweans. In 2005 it registered trust of 50%, a figure that is two percent less than the 52% recorded in 1999. In 2004, it was 55%. It is important to note that all three non-state institutions are accorded reasonably respective levels of trust in the ranges of 41% to 47%. Opposition political parties are trusted by nearly half of the randomly selected respondents and registered the highest trust (47%) among non-state institutions.

It is indisputably clear that public trust in virtually all government institutions has substantially eroded in the eighteen months between Rounds 2 (April/May 2004) and 3 (October 2005). For example, about 40% of the respondents in 2004 reported a loss of trust in the President as compared to more than two thirds (67%) in 2005. However, the low levels of public trust have not sunk to the 1999 levels when 75% reported distrust in the President. In tracking the three survey periods, 2004 was the high water mark for trust in pro-state institutions.

Table 1: Trust in Public Institutions (2005)

Institution	A lot/Somewhat
Courts of Law	53
The Military	50
Opposition Political Parties	47
Independent Newspapers	44
Independent Broadcasting Services	41
The Police	39
Parliament	35
Local Council	33
Government Broadcasting Services	33
The President	31
The Ruling Party	31
The Electoral Commission	29
Government Newspapers	28

How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

There is also a very evident rural/urban chasm in public opinion on this issue. Low trust is anchored in the urban areas while whatever amounts of trust political/governmental institutions enjoy is anchored in the rural areas. For instance, of the 14% who say they trust the president “somewhat”, 75% are in the rural areas and of the 17% of the sample who say they trust the president “a lot”, 85% are in the rural areas. The same pattern is exhibited throughout for all state institutions. It must be noted however, that opinion is more evenly split between the rural/urban with regard to the “not at all” response option for state aligned institutions. For instance, and using the same example as above, of the 34% who say they do not trust the president at all, 47% is in the urban areas and 28% in the rural areas. Again the same pattern recurs for all other state institutions. However, a different scenario is portrayed by those whose trust for state institutions is high, with a very significant magnitude aligned to the rural residents as compared to the urban residents. For example, just above eight in ten (85%) rural residents trust the president as compared to only 15% urban residents. Table 2 below portrays the trust picture in the urban and rural areas but focussing on the extreme trust response option i.e. “a lot”.

Fig 1: Presidential trust (2005)

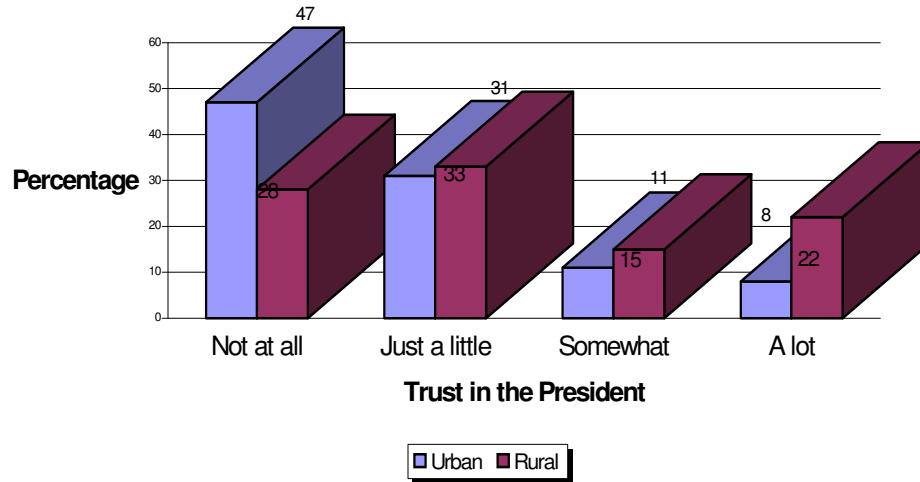


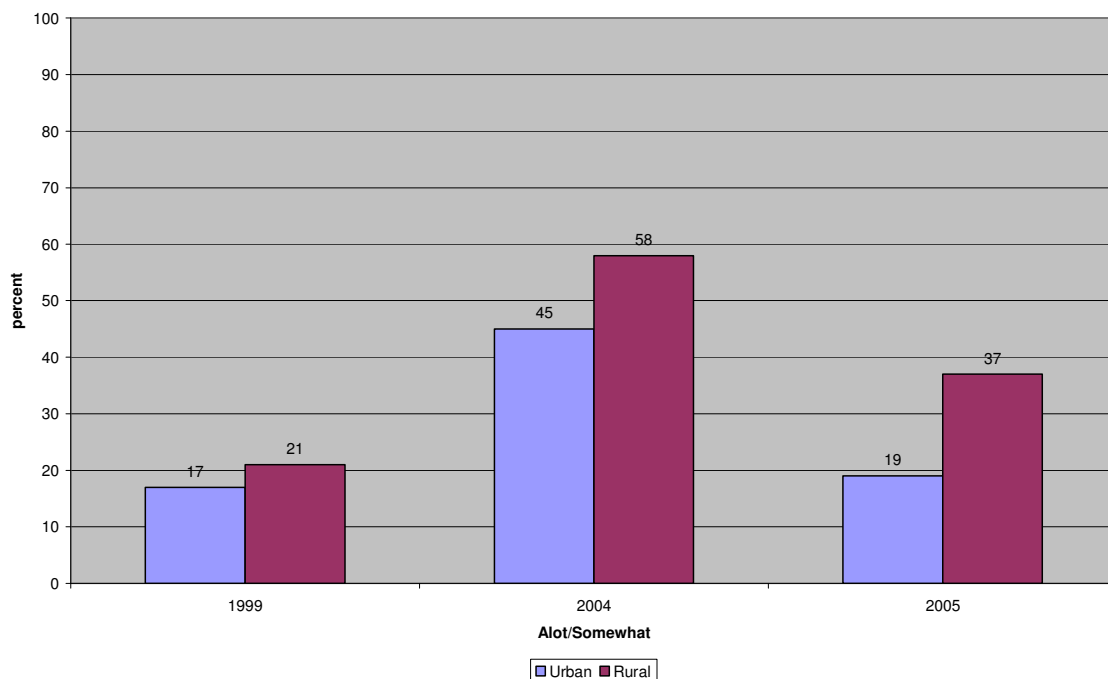
Table 2: Trust by Rural/Urban

	A lot/Somewhat	
	Urban	Rural
State-aligned institutions		
Courts of law	43	58
The Military	43	53
The Police	29	44
Parliament	22	41
Local Council	23	38
Government broadcasting services	23	37
Government newspapers	22	31
The President	19	37
The Ruling Party	19	37
The Electoral Commission	18	35
Non-state institutions		
Independent newspapers	57	37
Independent broadcasting services	53	36
Opposition parties	51	45

How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

There is an interesting variation that is manifest in the rural-urban analysis of the levels of trust accorded to public institutions. Trust levels among urban residents are highest in non-state institutions which all register above 50%. In 1999 the level of Presidential trust among the urbanites was 17%, and rose to 45% in 2004 before falling to 8% in 2005. The general picture portrayed is that of low trust in the President by the urban community, contrary to their rural folk whose trust in the President is relatively high with a percent of 37%. This is possibly because, the urban population has been the direct victims of the economic woes in the country as well as the clean-up exercise, as such they may have lost trust in the President and all state institutions as the same picture is portrayed across all state institutions. On the other side of the divide, Presidential trust by the rural community increases from 8% in 1999 to 26% in 2004 before dipping to 22% in 2005. Cannot the land reform exercise explain this? In a nutshell, hard economic conditions within the country explain the low trust from the urban population on one hand and on the other hand, the land reform program explains an increase in trust in the rural areas.

Fig 2: Presidential trust by Rural/Urban (1999-2005)



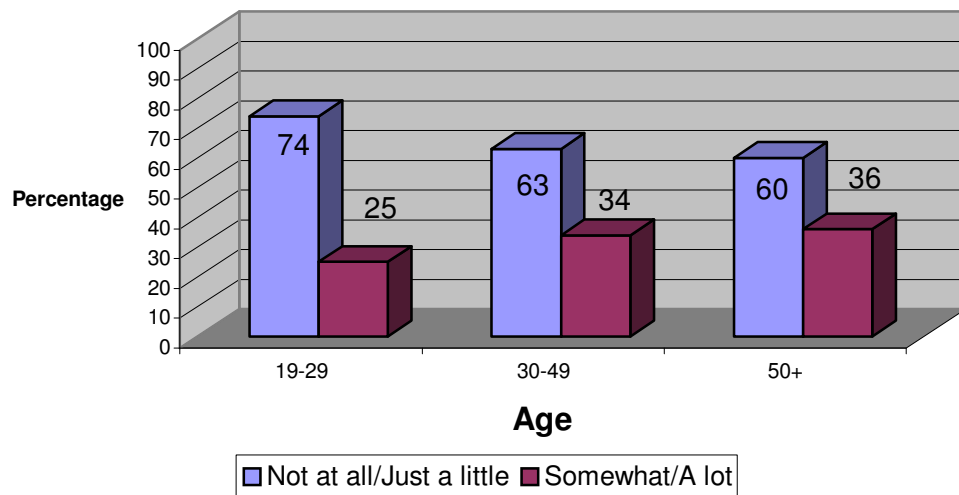
How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

Trust in the public face of Zimbabwe (i.e. the President) dropped fifteen percentage points from nearly half (47%) of all survey respondents in 2004 to less than a third (31%) in 2005. This has to be read in conjunction with his job approval rating, which dropped from a respectable 58% in 2004 (a dramatic recovery from a low of only 21% in 1999) to only 26% in 2005, a 32 percentage in approval rating. Further analysis reveals a positive correlation between job performance and trust of public institutions. For example, of those who strongly disapprove of Presidential performance, about 65% did not trust the

President at all; as compared to just 2% among those with a high trust rank. Additionally, among those who were satisfied with the Presidential performance over the last twelve months, the majority (93%) reported trusting the President “a lot”.

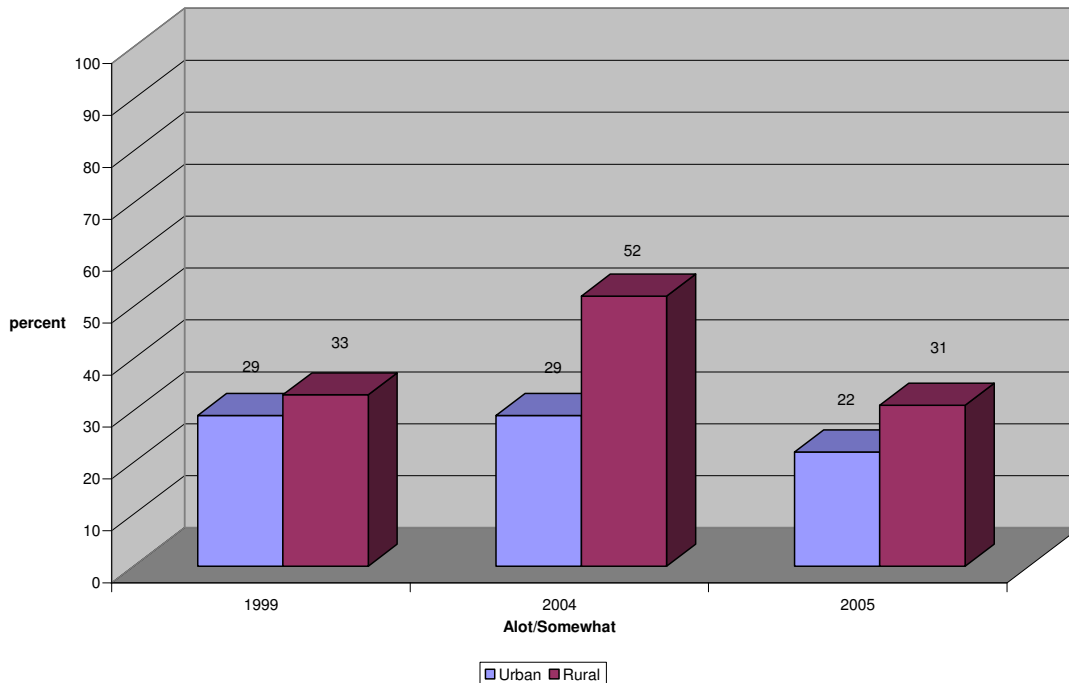
Age unravels an interesting picture of Presidential trust, with trust levels increasing with an increase in age. In the young category (19-29 years), 25% trust the President a lot, a figure which rises to 34% and 36% in the middle-aged (30-49 years) and the old (50 years+) categories respectively. Almost three quarters (74%) of the young Zimbabweans reported that they do not trust the President at all or just a little, a figure, which drops to 63% for the middle-aged group and further declines to 60% for the old age category. Given the current economic squeeze that these young Zimbabweans are exposed to, it becomes inevitable that they do not trust the President. Fig 3 below shows this graphically.

Fig 3: Presidential Trust, by Age



How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

Fig 4: Trust of Government Press by Rural/Urban (1999-2005)



How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

Levels of trust in government press have since decreased amongst both the rural and the urban populations. The former registered a drop from 33% in 1999 to 31% in 2005, whilst in the urban areas the difference is by a 7% margin between 1999 and 2005. Could this be a reflection of the decline in the strength of government propaganda?

Trust of non-state institutions depicts a different picture when analyzed against rural and urban. The majority of rural residents distrust non-state institutions as compared to their urban counterparts. A typical example is portrayed on trust of Independent broadcasting services where, 53% of the urban residents responded that they trust the institution 'A lot/Somewhat' as compared to 36% of their rural counterparts.

With the above results, can we therefore conclude that government institutions have won the hearts of people who reside in the rural areas as compared to urban areas? Can this also confirm other survey results that support for Zimbabwean opposition political parties lie in the heart of the urban populace while the ruling party and other government institutions have their support from the rural community?

It is indisputably clear that public trust in virtually all government institutions has substantially eroded in the eighteen months between Rounds 2 (April/May 2004) and 3 (October 2005). For example, almost five in ten (46%) of the respondents in 2004 reported a lot of trust in the President as compared to only three out of ten (31%) in 2005, as shown by Table 3. However, the low levels of public trust in the President have not

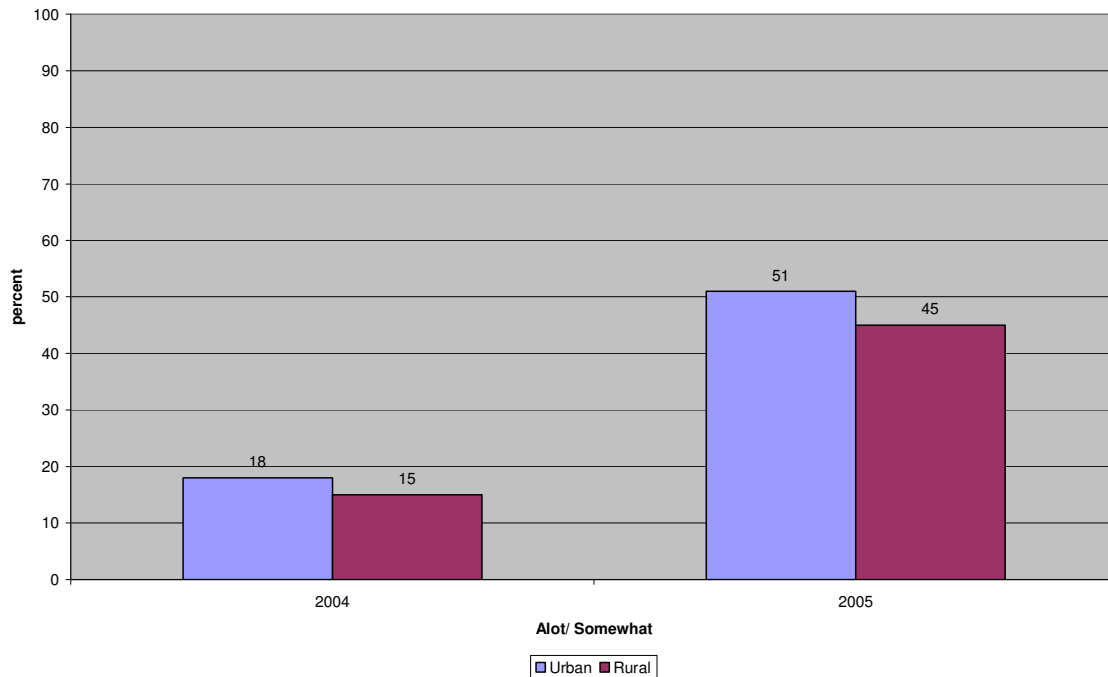
sunk to the 1999 levels (19%). In tracking the three survey periods, 2004 was the high water mark for trust in pro-state institutions.

Table 3: Trust A lot/Somewhat in Public Institutions (1999-2005)

<i>How much do you trust each of the following or haven't you heard enough about them to say?</i>	1999	2004	2005
The Ruling Party		44	31
The President	19	46	31
The Electoral Commission	26	33	29
Local Council	28	39	33
Parliament	17	37	35
The Police	36	53	39
Government Broadcasting Services	41	42	33
Government Newspapers	31	27	28
The Military	52	55	50
Courts of Law	42	56	53
Opposition Political Parties		14	47
Independent Newspapers	42	25	44
Independent Broadcasting Services			41

Public trust in Opposition forces and in independent civic institutions like the media has dramatically recovered in the eighteen months between May 2004 and October 2005. Non-state institutions portray a rise in trust by the urban residents, while the rural folks portray a decrease in trust. Figure 5 shows a rise in trust of the opposition political parties between 2004 and 2005 from 18% to 51% among the urban respondents and from 15% to 45% among their rural counterparts.

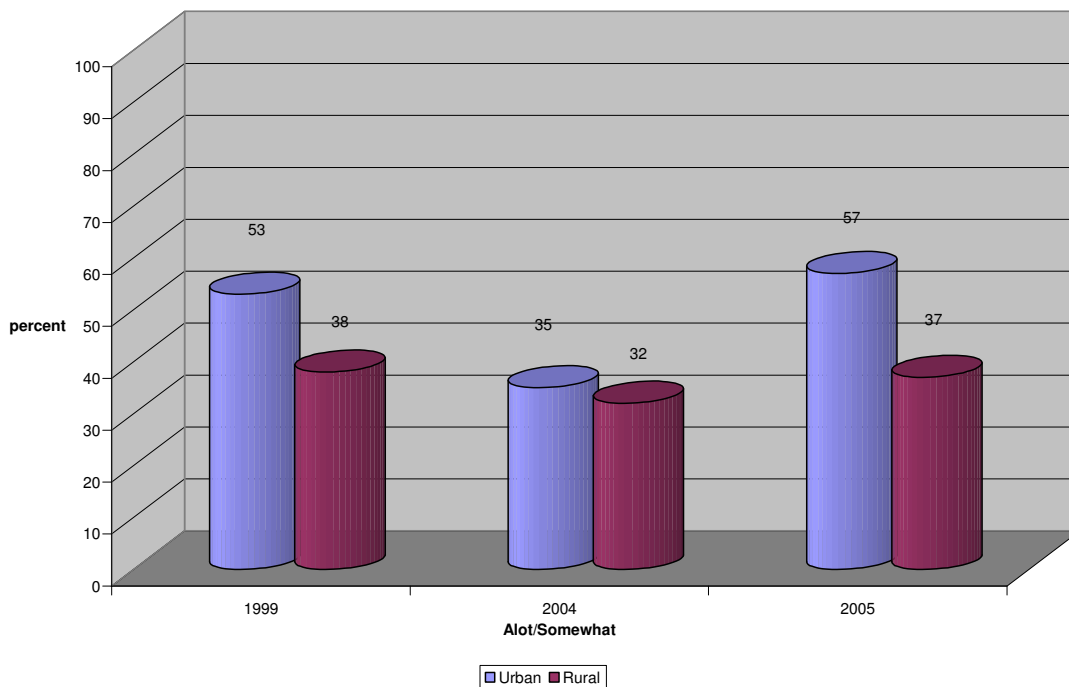
Fig 5: Trust in Opposition Political Parties by Rural/Urban (2004-2005)



Government-controlled media services perform worse than their independent counterparts. Both the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Services (a monopoly electronic media) and its print sister (the Zimpapers stable of newspapers) are trusted by a third (33%) for Zimbabwe Broadcasting Services and 28% for Zimpapers) of the adult population sampled. The independent newspapers and independent broadcasting services attract more trust (44% and 41% respectively). Trust in independent newspapers rose sharply amongst the urban population from 35% to 57% between 2004 and 2005, whilst a small rise of 5% was recorded amongst the rural residents, within the same period. Fig 4 illustrates this graphically.

How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

Fig 6: Trust in Independent newspapers by Rural Urban (1999-2005)



Political institutions of representation suffered a less precipitous decline in public trust. Parliament dropped two percent points from 37% in 2004 to 35% in 2005, which was still twice the 17% recorded in 1999. Public trust of local government councils rose from 28% in 1999 to 39% in 2004 before dropping to 33% in 2005.

The military, though still retaining the trust of five in ten Zimbabweans, from 1999-2005, of the randomly sampled respondents, must be concerned that its trust is at an all time low compared to the previous survey periods (52% in 1999 and 55% in 2004). It must be stressed that, of all public institutions the military has the highest trust rating both in 1999 and 2005.

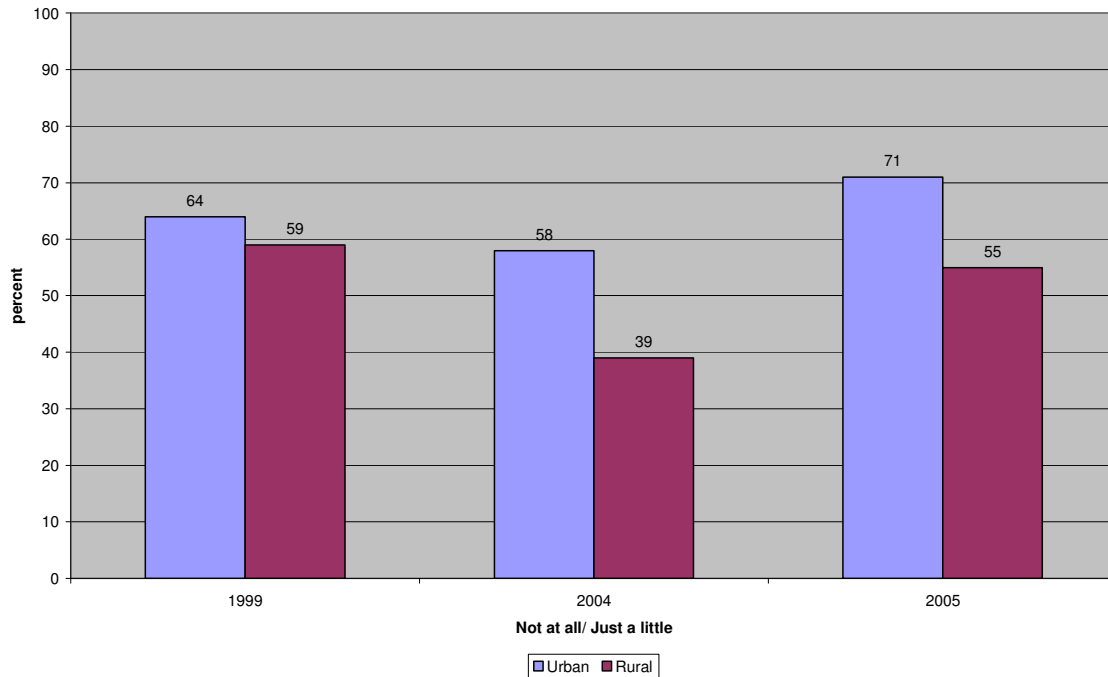
The Zimbabwe Republic Police is still struggling to attract sufficient public trust. Whereas just over half (53%) of the adult Zimbabwean population trusted the police in 2004, this has since shrunk to 39% in 2005, three percentage points higher than the 36% recorded in 1999. Could Operation Murambatsvina that was physically executed and spearheaded by the police, have played havoc with public trust in this law enforcement institution? Table 4 gives a clear insight into this.

Table 4: Trust in the police

<i>How much do you trust each of the following or haven't you heard enough about them?</i>	Main sample N=1048	Sub sample N=64
Not at all/ Just a little	60%	86%
Somewhat/A lot	39%	14%

As table 4 shows, trust of the police is low from both samples, but significantly lower in the sub-sample i.e. the direct victim of Operation Murambatsvina (14%). Thus as we move away from the main sample to the sub sample, distrust of police gains 26% points. Could these people ever trust the police after the “Tsunami”?

Fig. 7: Trust of the Police by Rural/Urban (1999-2005)



Important to note is that of all the public and civic institutions surveyed; only the courts of law obtain the trust of at least half the adult population. Slightly more than half (52%) said they trust the courts of law, shedding three percentage points compared to the 56% recorded in 2004.

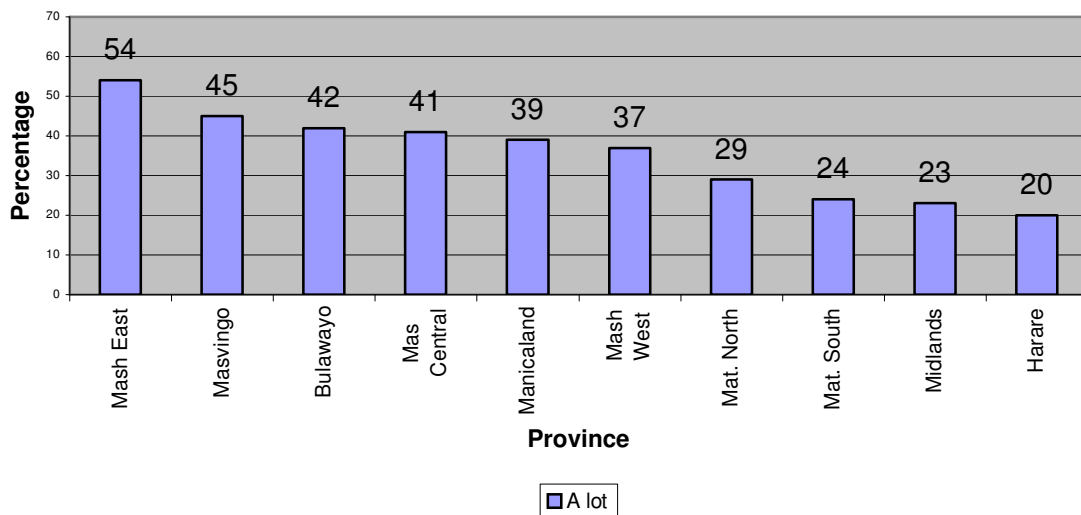
Lastly, the significant decline in those who claim not to know or that they have not heard enough about the various institutions must be noted. For instance, in 2004, some 13% of all respondents said they had not heard enough about the president but one and half years later, this dropped to only 2%. Similarly, in 2004, 16% claimed they had not heard enough about opposition political parties but only 3% gave this response in 2005. The same trend is observed throughout the thirteen political and civic institutions surveyed. Could freedom of expression to this sort of question explain a decline of the ‘don’t know response’?

Who Trusts Public Institutions?

While the results reveal a decline in trust in state institutions and a gain in trust of non-state institution over time, it is of interest also to unravel whether trust in public institutions differs across provinces.

For all state institutions, trust is low in perceived MDC strongholds, Harare, Bulawayo and Midlands, whilst high in the ruling party strongholds. For example the highest mark of distrust, i.e. 'Not at all' response for all state institutions was recorded in Harare, with 50% for the President, 39% for Parliament and 54% for the Zimbabwe Electoral Commission compared to the 'A lot' response which forked only 10%, 9% and 7% respectively. Conversely trust for Parliament is high in Mashonaland East (54%), Masvingo 45%) and Bulawayo (42%), See Fig 6 below.

Fig 6: Trust for the Parliament by Province



In virtually all Provinces save for Mashonaland East and Central, trust of state institutions is low. The picture portrayed is that of high distrust even in perceived ZANU PF strongholds: Mashonaland West. As Fig 6 indicates, two in ten reported trust for the Parliament in Harare , Matabeleland North and South and the Midlands provinces follow the same trend, with only (29%, 24%, and 23%) respectively) respondents who trust the Parliament of Zimbabwe. Could this mean that Zimbabweans doubt the legitimacy of the Members of Parliament or they do not trust the process in which the incumbents came into office?

Conclusion

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