Are Zimbabweans "*Poll-arised*" by opinion polls?

Report produced by Research & Advocacy Unit (RAU) & the Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI)

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Contents

Executive Summary

Afrobarometer surveys on Zimbabwe frequently run into criticism about both the methodology and the findings. This was the case with the public release of the Round 7 (2017) survey results. A particular bone of contention was what to make of apparently contradictory findings. For example, participants were confused by the findings that a majority of Zimbabweans both trust and fear the President, Robert Mugabe. This confusion was driven apparently by a failure to appreciate the limitations of quantitative research.

The methodological confusion was answered by the Afrobarometer itself (Howard & Logan. 2017), but another issue emerged from the criticism. This was more interesting, and we hypothesized that this might derive from the actual knowledge base of the critics. It raised the question about whether the critics were as informed about the views and opinions of the Zimbabwean polity as they claimed. It led us to speculate that the critics were an "elite", and, as such, more detached from the reality of public opinion than they knew. There was some basis for this hypothesis derived from an earlier study that suggested the middle class was composed of "disconnected democrats" (RAU. 2015).

Accordingly, we derived a test of this hypothesis by constructing a measure of "elitism". We used this measure to test political agency in a comparative fashion: we compared the opinions and expressed behaviours of "elites" and "non-elites". We looked at seven indices of political agency:

- **Voice** – the ability to express one's views in public around political issues: feeling free to express one's views and criticise officials;
- **Community Participation** – the ability to participate in public activities: belonging to organisations and participating in community activities;
- **Political Participation** – the ability to participate in political activities, with elections as the chosen vector: discussing politics, voting, and participating in electoral events;
- **Activism** – active contact with duty bearers such as MPs, local government officials, government officials, etc.
- **Political Trust** – trust in public officials and bodies, such as the president, parliament, ZEC, the police, etc.
- **Support for democracy** – preferring democracy and being satisfied with Zimbabwe's democracy;
- **Political party affiliation** – expressed support for a political party.

Given our overall research question - *are the views of the elite grounded in their experience of engagement in the general political life of* Zimbabwe – we examined five sub-hypotheses as follows:

- *Voice* – Elites should have higher scores on voice;
- *Community participation* – Elites should have higher scores on community participation;
- *Political participation* – Elites should have higher scores on political participation;
- *Activism* – Elites should have higher score on activism;
- *Support for democracy* – Elites should have higher scores on support for democracy;

- ***Political trust** –* Elites should have lower scores on political trust;
- ***Political affiliation*** – Should be no difference between Elites and Non-elites. We might predict that Elites would support MDC-T and that Non-elites would support ZANU-PF, but it seemed parsimonious to predict a split as suggested.

Results

The findings were interesting. Apart from Voice, where there was no difference between "elites" and "non-elites"; "non-elites" showed greater political agency on every index than "elites". The "non-elites" had greater *community participation, political participation, activism, support for democracy,* and *political trust*. It did not appear that the "fear factor", raised by many critics was relevant. When asked the question about who was the survey sponsor, "elites" accurately responded that they thought it was the Afrobarometer, whilst 40% of the "non-elites" responded that it was the government.

It was also necessary to test an important variable in Zimbabwean polls – rural or urban residence. Unsurprisingly, "elitism" is strongly associated with being urban, and, perhaps unsurprising, rural respondents showed greater political agency on every one of the variables.

Additionally, nearly 50% of the "non-elite" group were willing to express a political party affiliation, with the greatest majority for ZANU-PF.

When the indices are disaggregated into their components, the following emerged for "elites":
- They do not belong to a community organisation, do not attend community meetings, or join others to raise an issue;
- They are less likely to vote, less likely to go to a campaign rally, and to work for a candidate;
- They are less active, and contact duty bearers much less frequently;
- They are stronger supporters of democracy, but not happy with the democracy they have;
- They have very little trust in political institutions and offices;
- Finally, they seem less likely to support a political party.

What value can be ascribed to the opinions of the "elite"? *Elites* show all the aspects of what we have previously termed "disconnected democrats" (RAU.2016), and hence not be best-placed to understand the general Zimbabwean polity.

Background

Recent Afrobarometer survey findings in Zimbabwe created a firestorm of reaction in the news media and on social media – a fact for which we think Zimbabweans should congratulate themselves. A willingness to confront and debate public-opinion data is a sign of democratic health (Brian Howard & Carolyn Logan)

The response by the Afrobarometer (AB) to the many criticisms by Zimbabweans of the findings of Round Seven of the Afrobarometer was mostly to concentrate on defending the methodology behind the survey. Certainly for those that attended the public launch many criticisms were raised about the methods, but behind the criticism were a wide range of assertions about the accuracy of the content. Four main areas of criticism seemed to be the core:

- Criticism about the sampling. These are commonly raised about AB surveys, and usually revolve around the notions that the "number of the respondents" is too small, and the choice of sites is not "representative";
- Criticisms about the honesty of the respondents, mostly revolving around the "fear factor". Here the core idea is that Zimbabweans are so fearful of possible reprisal for expressing their views, and hence suspicious of the motives behind the research, that they moderate their answers in the direction of "faking good";
- Criticisms of quantitative methods as generating "shallow" data. Here there are notions that many answers to the questions should be "unpacked" in order to understand the "real meaning" of the response;
- Criticisms about the accuracy of the data in predicting future behaviour of citizens, with electoral choice being the most obvious concern, but there were criticisms of apparently contradictory findings such as trust in the president alongside with fear of criticising the same. Such criticisms seem to be based on a notion of people as wholly rational and not holding contradictory views, which they may well do.

Most of these criticisms have been dealt with by the Afrobarometer in the response cited above. Here we wish to deal with the second set of criticisms, those dealing with the "fear factor" and the implicit understanding that apparently the critics have about the nature of the Zimbabwean citizenry. The motivation for doing so is an implicit theory that maybe the critics are what might be termed (uncharitably) "arm chair critics".

We do not dispute either the very large body of evidence that there has been sustained political violence over the past 17 years, or the legacy of Gukurahundi and the Liberation War (Sachikonye. 2011). The history of political violence over the past four decades is unchallengeable, but its consequences may be more complex in its effects on the attitudes and behaviour of Zimbabwean citizens than is frequently assumed. For example, we have recently completed an analysis of "risk aversion" in Zimbabwean citizens (Masunungure et al. 2017), and it is clear that Zimbabweans are risk averse, but also that they are changing back to the orientation of the pre-2000 era, and becoming risk taking in the majority. Here, and supporting the "fear factor", it was evident that one event, *Operation Murambatsvina*, had very discernable effects on people's agency, dramatically increasing risk aversion.

However, we did note some anomalous findings:

- Urban Zimbabweans are more risk averse than their rural counterparts;
- Older Zimbabweans are more risk taking than younger Zimbabweans;
- The unemployed are as risk averse as the employed;
- Better educated Zimbabweans are more risk averse than the less educated;
- Finally, ZANU-PF supporters are less risk averse than the supporters of MDC-T.

These are findings that might be not be expected and deserve further attention, for the explanations are not immediately obvious.

An earlier study found that a simple classification of the Zimbabwean citizenry found four main groups: ZANU-PF supporters, MDC-T supporters, "*active citizens*" (those not admitting political affiliation, but evincing voice and participation), and "*disconnected democrats*" (urban, educated and employed) (RAU.2015). This did suggest that a disaggregated view of Zimbabwean citizenry was warranted. For example, the middle-class, "*disconnected democrats*", usually the defenders of democracy, were evidently not, a finding replicated at least for Zimbabwean women (RAU. 2016(a); RAU. 2016 (b)).

These findings led us to speculate that the critics of the Afrobarometer might well be "armchair critics", relying mostly on personal experience and anecdote, but basing their criticisms on theory rather than fact. The Afrobarometer offers "fact": quantitative, survey fact it is true, but nonetheless one of the very few sources of "fact" on the views of Zimbabwean citizens other than their voting preferences in elections. And given the enormous and continuous dispute about the validity of Zimbabwean elections, voting patterns seem unreliable evidence, but it can also be pointed out that careful analysis of elections using survey data can be useful in understanding citizen choice (Bratton et al, 2016).

Thus, we attempt an analysis of a group that might be very influential in shaping public opinion, but perhaps less qualified to do so than might be assumed. We term this group an "elite", but it may equally be termed middle-class. The simple question we ask: ***are the views of the elite grounded in their experience of engagement in the general political life of Zimbabwe?***

Methods

Constructing a measure of "elitism"

In order the answer this question, we first needed to determine whether we could construct a measure of "elitism". Studies elsewhere have undertaken this exercise, but explicitly in trying to analyse the middle class (ref). Here, we draw on this previous work (Cheeseman. 2014), as well as a previous study of middle-class women (RAU. 2016), but extend this by reference to other aspects of what might define an "elite". In the previous study, using Cheeseman's index for middle class in Kenya, we defined middle class through an index based on questions from the AB around *wealth*, *employment*, *education*, and *lived poverty*.

Whilst this seemed to give a useful measure for class, it did not seem wholly useful for the present study for several reasons. Firstly, the economic situation in Zimbabwe has become so severe that "lived poverty" might well be too inclusive, and here we wished to find measures

that would distinguish an elite, and this might well be exclusive of "lived poverty". Here we hypothesized that access to amenities such as piped water and toilets in the house might be a better differentiating factor between groups. For example, according to the 2012 Census, 18% of Zimbabweans have piped water inside their houses and 33% use flush toilets (ZimStat. 2012).

Secondly, and since there are demonstrable differences in attitudes between rural and urban Zimbabweans, we wanted measures that might not be polluted by residence since we hypothesize that elites could just as easily be rural as urban, such as those now occupying commercial farms.

Thirdly, we wanted measures that tapped into differences between elites and others in the ways that they acquired information, and here access to the internet, social media and other types of information.

Fourthly, we hypothesized that forms of ownership might distinguish an elite.

However, we did retain both education and employment as variables in constructing an index of elitism as we hypothesized that these were likely to be crucial features of an elite group. Thus we used nine questions in four groups from the AB Round Seven (2017) to construct the index (See Appendix 1). The data was converted into binary variables in order to contruct an overall score for "elitism".

Thus the final index was composed as follows:

Elite = News(2) + Ownership (1) + Education (1) + Employment (1) + Amenities (2)

This gave a maximum score of 7, with the mean score on the index for the 1,200 respondents to AB Round Seven (2017) was 1.91(sd. 2.37). Although this may have been arbitrary, we took a cut-off score of 5 as representing "elitism". This gave us two groups: an elite group of 182 (18%), and non-elite group of 1018 (82%). This cut-off seemed satisfactory, given that the Census indicated that 18% of Zimbabweans had access to piped water in their homes

The scale had average reliability (.620)[1]. Additionally, the items showed good correlations between them, except with *going without income*, but reliability was not improved by removal of this item.

Constructing measures of political agency
In order to test the research question, we constructed a number of indices of political agency. These were hypothetical constructs, derived from the questions in Afrobarometer Round Seven (2017), and based on variables frequently described in the literature (See Appendix 2):

- **Voice** – the ability to express one's views in public around political issues: feeling free to express one's views and criticise officials;
- **Community Participation** – the ability to participate in public activities: belonging to organisations and participating in community activities;
- **Political Participation** – the ability to participate in political activities, with elections as the chosen vector: discussing politics, voting, and participating in electoral events;

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[1] Cronbach's Alpha.

- **Activism** – active contact with duty bearers such as MPs, local government officials, government officials, etc.
- **Political Trust** – trust in public officials and bodies, such as the president, parliament, ZEC, the police, etc.
- **Support for democracy** – preferring democracy and being satisfied with Zimbabwe's democracy;
- **Political party affiliation** – expressed support for a political party.[2]

All AB measures were converted to binary variables in order to construct a score for each index. The data was entered on a spread sheet and analysed in SPSS (20).

Hypotheses

Given our overall research question - ***are the views of the elite grounded in their experience of engagement in the general political life of*** Zimbabwe – it was appropriate to generate some testable hypotheses. These are described as follows:

- *Voice* – Elites should have higher scores on voice;
- *Community participation* – Elites should have higher scores on community participation;
- *Political participation* – Elites should have higher scores on political participation;
- *Activism* – Elites should have higher score on activism;
- *Support for democracy* – Elites should have higher scores on support for democracy;
- *Political trust* – Elites should have lower scores on political trust;
- *Political affiliation* – Should be no difference between Elites and Non-elites. We might predict that Elites would support MDC-T and that Non-elites would support ZANU-PF, but it seemed parsimonious to merely predict a split as suggested.

Results

Table 1: Elite versus Non-elite, tests of means

	Elite	Non-elite	df	*t*	Sig
Voice	2.35	2.67	1198	*-1.701*	ns
Community Participation	1.01	1.36	1198	*-3.04*	0.002
Political Participation	1.34	1.72	1198	*-3.947*	.000
Activism	0.44	0.75	1198	*-3.31*	0.001
Support for Democracy	0.36	0.46	1198	*-2.456*	0.014
Political Trust	2.88	4.24	1198	-6.681	.000

As can be seen in Table 1, virtually all hypotheses are rejected. Although there is no difference between the groups in respect of voice, ***Elites*** have lower community and political

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[2] In practice, there are only two parties (ZANU-PF and MDC-T), with negligible numbers supporting other parties, and nearly 50% either refusing to answer or stating the question was inapplicable. Here we concentrated only on expressed choice: it is not possible from the data to infer a choice from those not expressing one, even though some critics would argue that this is because of the "fear factor", with the unwillingness to disclose support of an opposition party for fear of reprisal.

participation, less activism, lower support for democracy, and less political trust than **Non-elites**. This corroborates the finding of the earlier study (RAU. 2015) that *Elites* are "disconnected democrats". These differences are shown in more detail when the disaggregated data is examined.

Figure 1: Voice, Elite versus Non-elite [%]
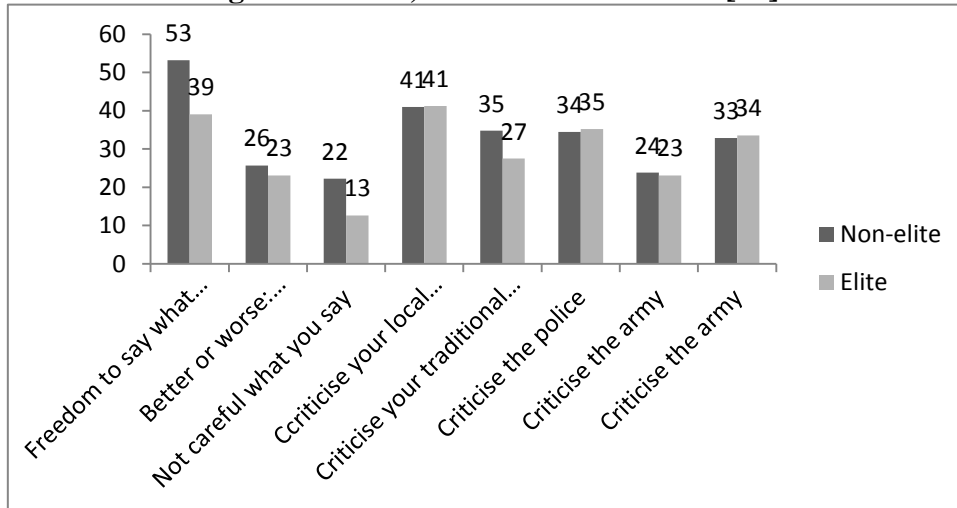
There were no significant differences between the two groups in terms of *Voice* (see Table 1), but, interestingly *Non-elites* were significantly more likely to state that they were free to say what they think,[3] and slightly more likely to be less careful what they say (Figure 1).

**Figure 2: Community Participation, Elite versus Non-elite [%]**
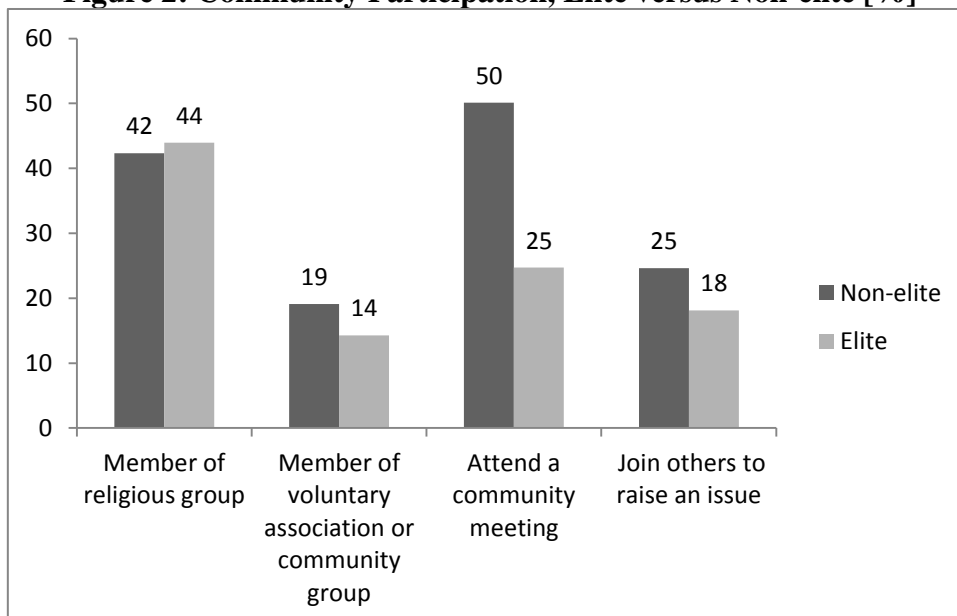
Non-elites were significantly more likely to participate in the community (Figure 2), and, as can be seen in Figure 2, especially so in respect of active participation, such as attending a

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[3] $\chi^2 = 8.9$; *p=0.01*

community meeting[4], or, less significantly, joining other to raise an issue. However, caution must be exercised in attending meetings, since it is probable that the *Non-elite* group will have a high percentage of rural residents, and attendance at meetings in the rural areas is not always voluntary, and voluntary attendance would be the marker for agency.

Figure 3: Political Participation, Elite versus Non-elite [%]
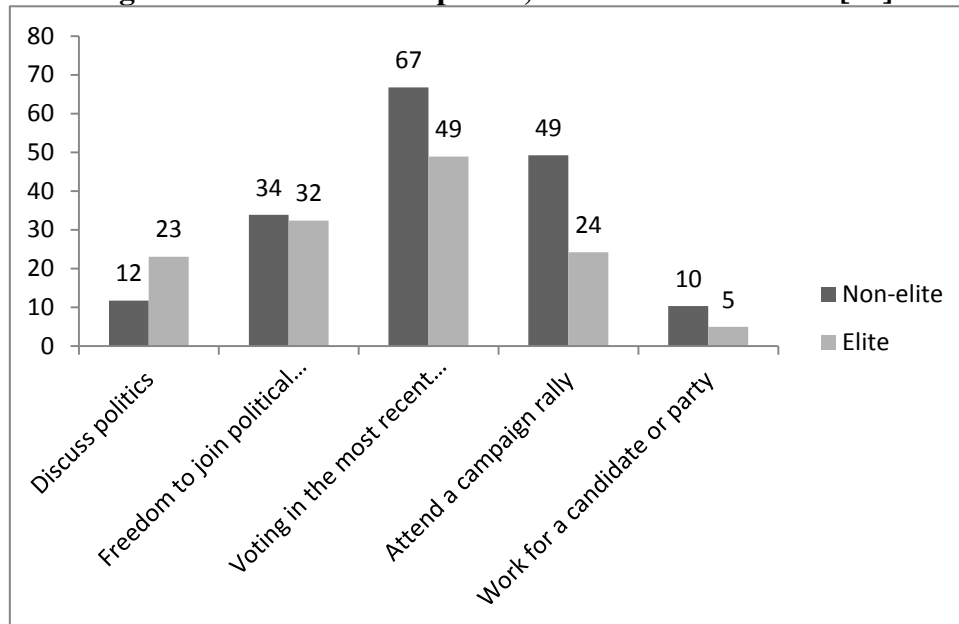
Again, *Non-elites* expressed significantly greater frequency of participating in political activities than *Elites* (Table 1 & Figure 3). Apart from the greater frequency amongst *Elites* to discuss politics,[5] *Non-elites* voted [6]and attended campaign rallies[7] significantly more frequently, as well as being more likely to work for a candidate or party[8].

Activism was defined as engaging public officials and agents, and again *Non-elites* were more likely to do so than *Elites* (Figure 4 over). This was the case for every types of contact bar contacting government officials, where *Elites* reported a slightly greater frequency. Obviously contacting traditional leaders would be more likely for rural residents, and this overall finding on *activism* is an artefact of the greater proportion of rural residents in the *Non-elite* group.[9]

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[4] $\chi^2 = 40.03$; *p=0.0001*
[5] $\chi^2 = 16.07$; *p=0.001*
[6] $\chi^2 = 21.16$; *p=0.001*
[7] $\chi^2 = 39.1$; *p=0.001*
[8] $\chi^2 = 11.19$; *p=0.001*
[9] However, it should also be noted that this high rate of contacting traditional leaders does not imply much more than this as it is also the case that only 28% of rural respondents in 2017 "trust" traditional leaders.
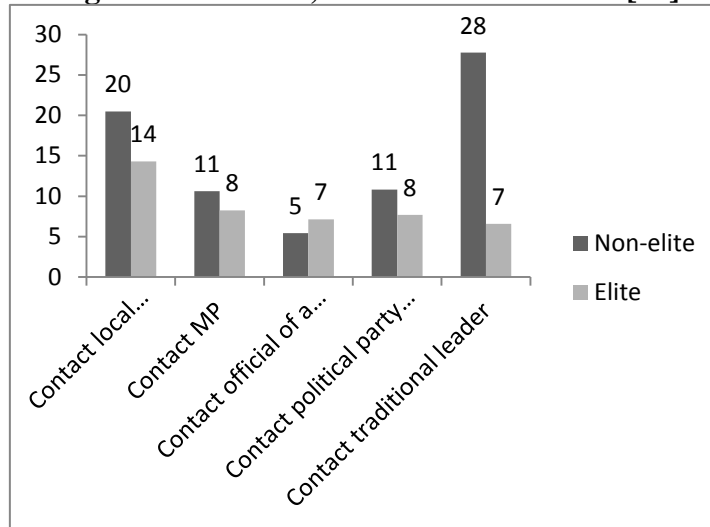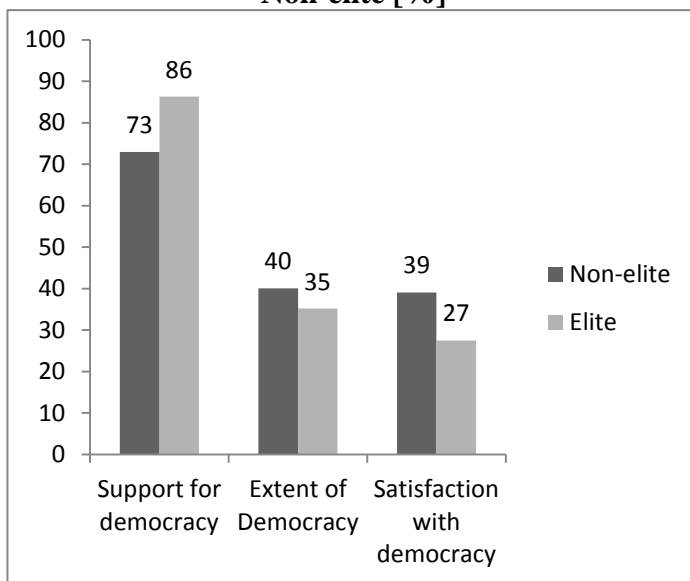
Figure 4: Activism, Elite versus Non-elite [%]

Figure 5: Support for Democracy, Elite versus Non-elite [%]

Non-elites were significantly more likely to be supporters of democracy on the index (see Table 1 & Figure 5), but the disaggregated data show an interesting split. *Elites* are stronger supporters of democracy as the best form of government,[10] but more pessimistic about how democratic is Zimbabwe and how satisfied with the current example of democracy. *Non-elites* go in the other direction, especially in their satisfaction[11].

When it comes to *political trust*, the difference between the *Elite* and the *Non-elite* was strongly significant, and, as can be seen from Figure 6 (over), was so for every single example of political trust.[12]

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[10] $\chi^2 = 14.87$; *p=0.001*
[11] $\chi^2 = 8.98$; *p=0.01*
[12] The smallest difference was 12% (trust courts) and the largest was 26% (trust the ruling party). All are statistically significant (*p=0.001).*

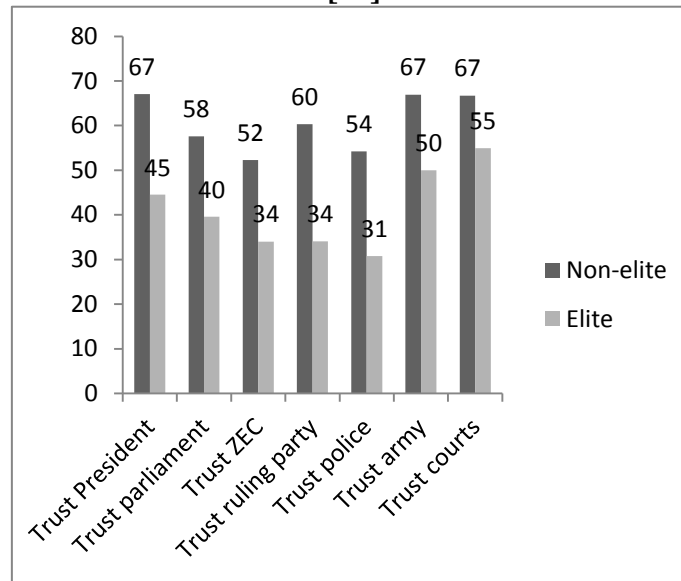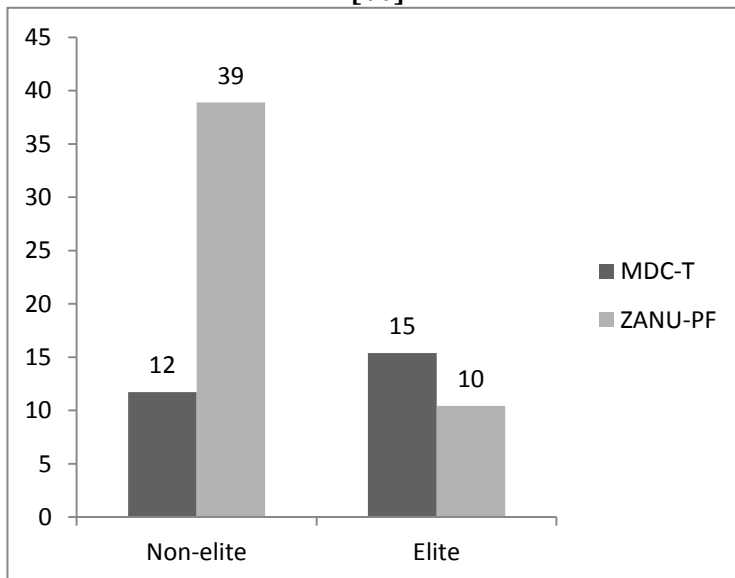**Figure 6: Political Trust, Elite versus Non-elite [%]**

**Figure 7: Political Affiliation, Elite versus Non-elite [%]**

Non-elite support for ZANU-PF was significantly greater than *Elite* support,[13] and neither expressed much support for the MDC-T. The *Elite* express marginally greater support for MDC-T, but seem to have little enthusiasm for either party.[14]

One of the criticisms of the AB's methods was that the respondents who saw the sponsors of the survey as the government would be less likely to be frank and more likely to fake good.

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[13] $\chi^2 = 55.47$; *P=0.001*

[14] This lack of enthusiasm for MDC-T is one of the stronger findings in the AB Round 7 survey, as also seen in the low rates of risk taking in these supporters. See RAU & MPOI (2017), *Risk Taking in 2017: Preliminary findings*. July 2017. Mass Public Opinion Institute & Research and Advocacy Unit.

Figure 8: Sponsor of Survey, Elite versus Non-elite [%]
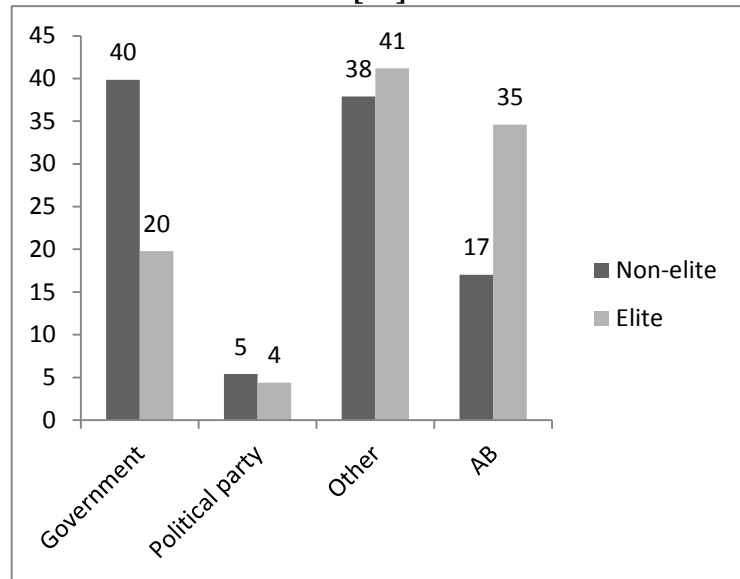
As can be seen from Figure 8, this is not supported by the data. Rather, the data suggest that seeing the government as sponsor, which the *Non-elite* do, and must have included many supporters of the MDC-T, has not deterred them from expressing a wide range or political views and attitudes as seen in the other measures. The *Elite*, on the other hand, were much more likely to believe the enumerators and accept that the survey was in fact being carried out by AB.

This does suggest that the "fear factor" had little effect on responding, and, furthermore, the large number of people refusing to express a political affiliation (51%) may be expressing a genuine loss of faith in political parties and political leadership by being unwilling to disclose their any allegiance.

The "Rural" factor

One nagging issue in this analysis must be about what is the contribution of rural or urban residence, since so much research on Zimbabwe has implicated residence as a variable determining the direction of responding (Masunungure et al. 2017). Table 10 shows this clearly: rural respondents report higher frequencies on every single variable except *Elitism.*

Table 2: Rural versus Urban, Mean scores

	Urban	Rural	*df*	t	Sig
Voice	2.24	2.86	*1198*	-4.417	.000
Community Participation	.96	1.51	*1198*	-6.516	.000
Political Participation	1.25	1.90	*1198*	-9.267	.000
Activism	.33	.92	*1198*	-8.726	.000
Support for Democracy	.40	.47	*1198*	-2.252	.024
Political Trust	3.44	4.39	*1198*	-6.320	.000
Elitism	3.05	.64	*1198*	23.821	.000

Hence, *Elitism* is strongly associated with urban residence, which is expected, and once again analysis reveals the polarised nature of Zimbabwe's polity. This further extends the finding that the notion that the responding was not biased by the perception about who was carrying out the survey: 40% of *non-elite* respondents believed the government was the sponsor, were mostly rural by residence, and yet were a group that evinced much greater voice and participation.

Conclusions

The data thus lead us to a number of conclusions.

The first is that our hypotheses were all rejected: *Elites* display much less agency than *Non-elites*, and suggests that our research question, about how grounded are the views of the elite, has been answered in the negative. *Elites* may have strong views on the personal level about the Zimbabwean polity, but it does not appear that they could obtain the evidence for these views from experience: they have low community and political participation, low activism, and little political trust. This does not mean that they cannot obtain information from sources other than personal experience, but there remains the question about what empirical sources of information there are about the Zimbabwean polity in general, other than the Afrobarometer.

Secondly, and when the indices are disaggregated into their components, *Elites* show all the aspects of what we have previously termed "disconnected democrats" (RAU.2016):

- They do not belong to a community organisation, do not attend community meetings, or join others to raise an issue;
- They are less likely to vote, less likely to go to a campaign rally, and to work for a candidate;
- They are less active, and contact duty bearers much less frequently;
- They are stronger supporters of democracy, but not happy with the democracy they have;
- They have very little trust in political institutions and offices;
- Finally, they seem less likely to support a political party.

Thirdly, it is clear the *Non-elite* group is dominated by a large rural subgroup, and it is evident that the influence of this subgroup over-determines the direction of this group's responses. As seen in Table 2 the rural group is significantly different to the urban group on every measure: it is rural residence that expresses agency in every way. It is also probable that this rural group are largely supporters of ZANU-PF for whom the "fear" factor" may not be relevant.

As for the "fear" factor, critics of the AB Round 7 results were vociferous in the view that the survey would not get accurate answers because of this. This seems unjustified on closer analysis of the results. As was seen in Figure 8, *non-elite* respondents were significantly more likely to see the sponsor of the survey as the government (despite being told it was being conducted by the Afrobarometer, and this did not seem to inhibit their willingness to state a political party preference. By contrast, the *elite* group, who seem to be largely urban, believed the explanation that the survey was being conducted by the Afrobarometer, and, actually, hardly anyone believed it was being conducted by a political party in either group. Thus, we would discount the thesis that the results of the survey are inaccurate due to "fear", and suggest rather that Zimbabweans as a whole can be trusted to give accurate reports of their views.

As for the criticisms around the predictive power of AB in elections, we can only endorse what Howard and Logan said:

We asked respondents in January-February 2017 how they would vote if an election were held the following day. A plurality refused to answer (24%), said they wouldn't vote (11%), or said they didn't know (5%). That's more than said they would vote for the ZANU-PF (38%) or for opposition parties (22%). Besides, a lot can happen between now and next year. So we are not offering predictions.

What we might add here is that, although 40% can be described as "unaffiliated", it is very risky to assume that the "fear" factor is operating, given our argument above in respect of the perceived survey sponsor. It can just as easily be argued that there is a crisis of leadership in the country, with splits in parties left, right, and centre, and the "unaffiliated" are saying a "plague on all their houses: they want democracy, are not very satisfied with the democracy they have, and few of the parties seem to offer much to address this?

After 37 years of independence, is this what we expect?

We wish to acknowledge the gracious access to the 2017 Afrobarometer data. The conclusions in this current paper should be attributed to RAU and MPOI and not to the Afrobarometer.

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Appendix 1
Questions used in Construction of the Elite Index.

Cash Income (1): Not going without cash income in past year

News (2):

- *How often do you get news from the following sources: Internet?*
- *How often do you get news from the following sources: Social media such as Facebook or Twitter?*

Ownership (2):

- *Own motor vehicle, car, or motorcycle*
- *How often use the internet*

Education (1): Tertiary education as opposed to other levels

Employment (1): Full time employment as opposed to part-time or unemployment, etc.

Amenities (2):

- *Please tell me whether each of the following are available inside your house, inside your compound, or outside your compound: your main source of water for household use?*
- *Please tell me whether each of the following are available inside your house, inside your compound, or outside your compound: A toilet or latrine*

Appendix 2

Questions used to construct indices of political participation

Voice (8)
- *Freedom to say what you think*
- *Better or worse: freedom to say what you think*
- *Careful what you say*
- *Free to criticise: Your local councillor*
- *Free to criticise: Your traditional leader*
- *Free to criticise: The police*
- *Free to criticise: The army*
- *Free to criticise: Your MP*

Community participation (4)
- *Member of religious group*
- *Member of voluntary association or community group*
- *Attend a community meeting*
- *Join others to raise an issue*

Activism (5)
- *Contact local government councillor*
- *Contact MP*
- *Contact official of a government agency*
- *Contact political party official*
- *Contact traditional leader*

Political trust (7)
- *Trust president*
- *Trust parliament/national assembly*
- *Trust national electoral commission*
- *Trust the ruling party*
- *Trust police*
- *Trust army*
- *Trust courts of law*

Political participation (4)
- *Discuss politics*
- *Better or worse: freedom to join political organizations*
- *Voting in the most recent national election*
- *Last national election: attend a campaign rally*
- *Last national election: work for a candidate or party*

Support for Democracy (2)
- *Support for Democracy*
- *Extent of democracy*
- *Satisfaction with democracy*

Political party affiliation (ZANU-PF v MDC-T)