

Despite disparities, Zambians see country on right track toward gender equity

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 164 | Andrew D. Turnbull and Rhoda Chiwele

Summary

Gender equity is a vital issue in Zambia, the focus of many civil-society organisations as well as government efforts to empower women and eliminate gender disparities (Daily Mail, 2015). The government's 2014 National Gender Policy and 2015 Gender Equity and Equality Act aim to end discrimination against women, including in access to productive resources, educational opportunities, and quality health-care services (Ministry of Gender and Child Development, 2014; National Assembly of Zambia, 2015).

The United Nations has recognized President Edgar Lungu as a "promoter" of its "He for She" campaign for women's empowerment (Lusaka Times, 2015), and a number of women have been appointed to key decision-making positions in government departments and ministries, most notably the country's first female vice president, Inonge Wina, and Chief Justice Irene Mambilima.

Still, only 29 of the 166 members (17%) of the National Assembly of Zambia are women (National Assembly, 2017), below the global average (23%) and far short of the African Union's call for 50% women at all levels of political decision-making positions (UN Women, 2016; Boshia, 2014). A European Commission (2017) analysis points to multiple and complex causes for the underrepresentation of women in decision-making processes, ranging from traditional gender stereotypes and a lack of support for balancing care and work responsibilities to prevalent political and corporate cultures. The National Gender Policy (2014) notes that traditional gender roles often require girls and women to carry a disproportionate share of the burden at the household and community levels.

Afrobarometer survey findings suggest that most Zambians endorse equal rights and opportunities for women in economic and political spheres, and increasing numbers of citizens approve of the government's efforts to move toward gender equity. Nonetheless, half of Zambians think it is better for a family if a woman, rather than a man, has the main responsibility for taking care of the home and children.

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 Zambia, led by RuralNet Associates Limited, interviewed 1,200 adult Zambians in April 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 Zambia in 1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013, and 2014.

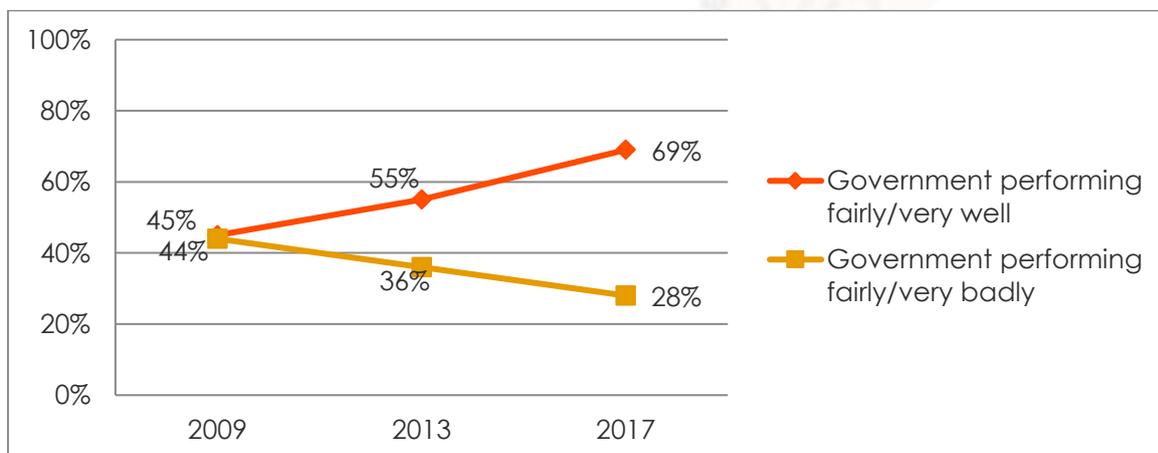
Key findings

- More than two-thirds (69%) of Zambians say the government is performing “fairly well” or “very well” in promoting opportunities and equality for women, an increase of 24 percentage points from 2009.
- About two-thirds of Zambians endorse equal opportunity for women to be elected to political office (68%) and support a proposal to reserve a certain number of National Assembly seats for women (62%).
- Zambian women are less likely than men to participate in political discussions (59% vs. 72% who say they do so at least “occasionally”) and to vote.
- Strong majorities of respondents say women should and in fact do have the same rights as men in certain economic matters, such as the right to own and inherit land and to get a paying job.
- About half (51%) of Zambians think it is better for a family if a woman, rather than a man, has the main responsibility for taking care of the home and children. Women are somewhat more likely to share this view than men (54% vs. 47%).
- One in five Zambian women (20%) say they suffered gender-based discrimination at least once during the previous year, including 7% who say it occurred “several times” or “many times.”
- Eight in 10 Zambians (81%) say wife-beating “can never be justified.”

Perceptions of gender equality

Over the past eight years, the proportion of Zambians who think the government is performing “fairly well” or “very well” in promoting opportunities and equality for women has grown steadily, from 45% in 2009 to 69% in 2017 (Figure 1).

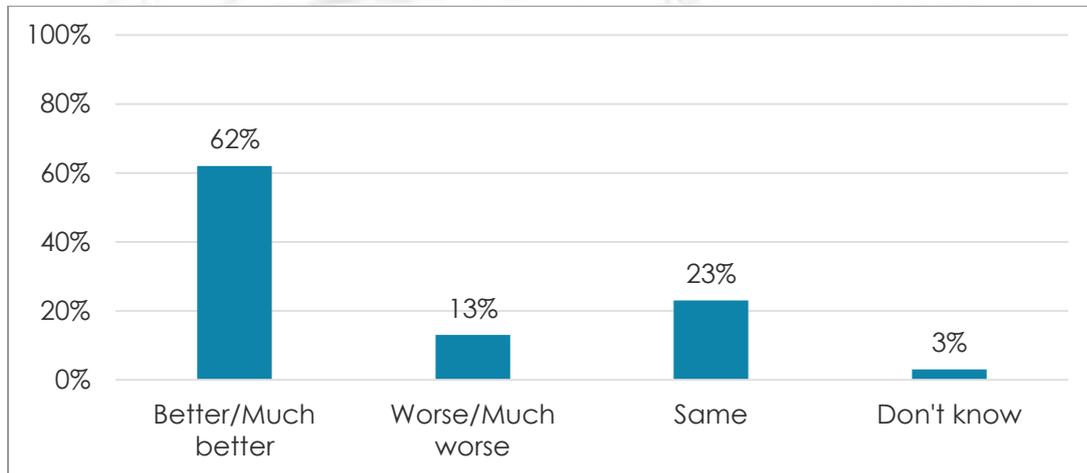
Figure 1: Government performance in promoting gender equality | Zambia | 2009-2017



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: (In 2009 and 2013:) Empowering women? (In 2017:) Promoting opportunities and equality for women?

Similarly, more than six in 10 Zambians (62%) think equal opportunities and treatment for women are “better” or “much better” than they were “a few years ago.” About one in eight (13%) say the situation has worsened, while one in four (23%) say nothing has changed (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Equal opportunities and treatment for women | Zambia | 2017

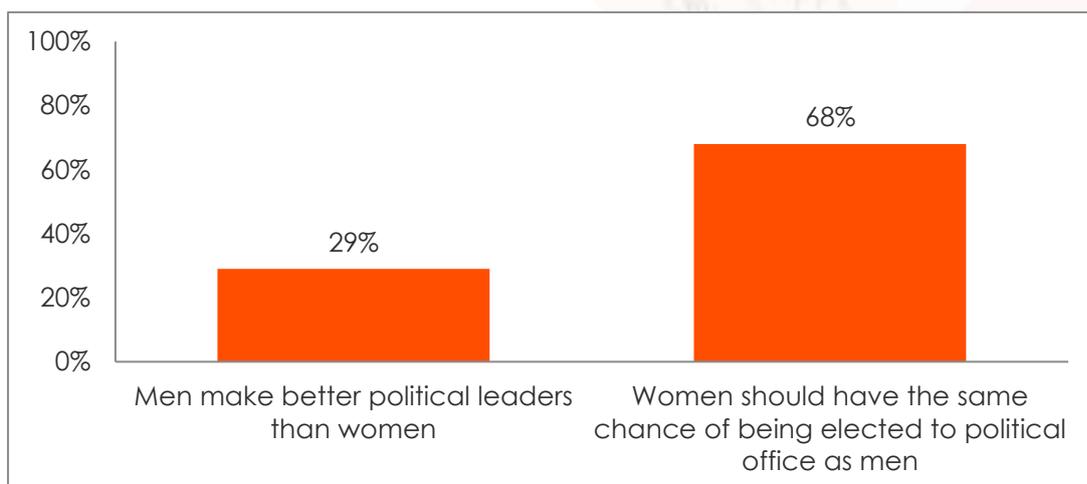


Respondents were asked: Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same: Equal opportunities and treatment for women?

Political participation

According to survey responses, Zambians are ready to improve the gender imbalance among political leaders. Two-thirds (68%) of citizens agree (including 52% who “agree very strongly”) that women should have the same chance as men of being elected to political office (Figure 3). Moreover, more than six in 10 (62%) approve of reserving a certain number of National Assembly seats for women in order to promote gender equity (Figure 4).

Figure 3: Equal chance for women to be elected | Zambia | 2017

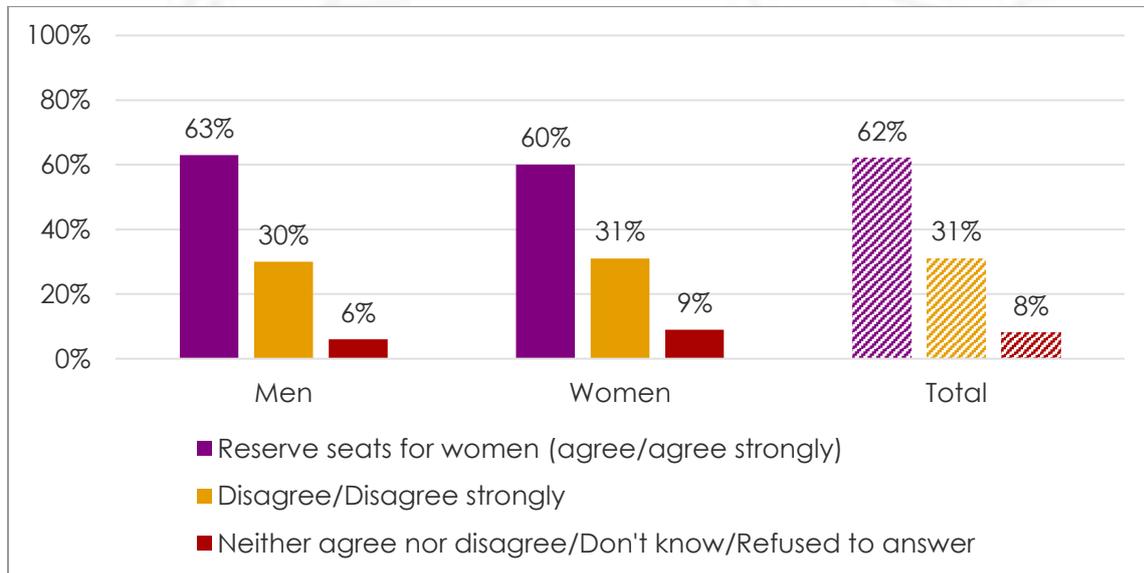


Respondents were asked: Let’s talk for a moment about the kind of society you would like to have in this country. Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

Statement 1: Men make better political leaders than women, and should be elected rather than women.

Statement 2: Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men. (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with each statement)

Figure 4: Should some National Assembly seats be reserved for women? | Zambia | 2017

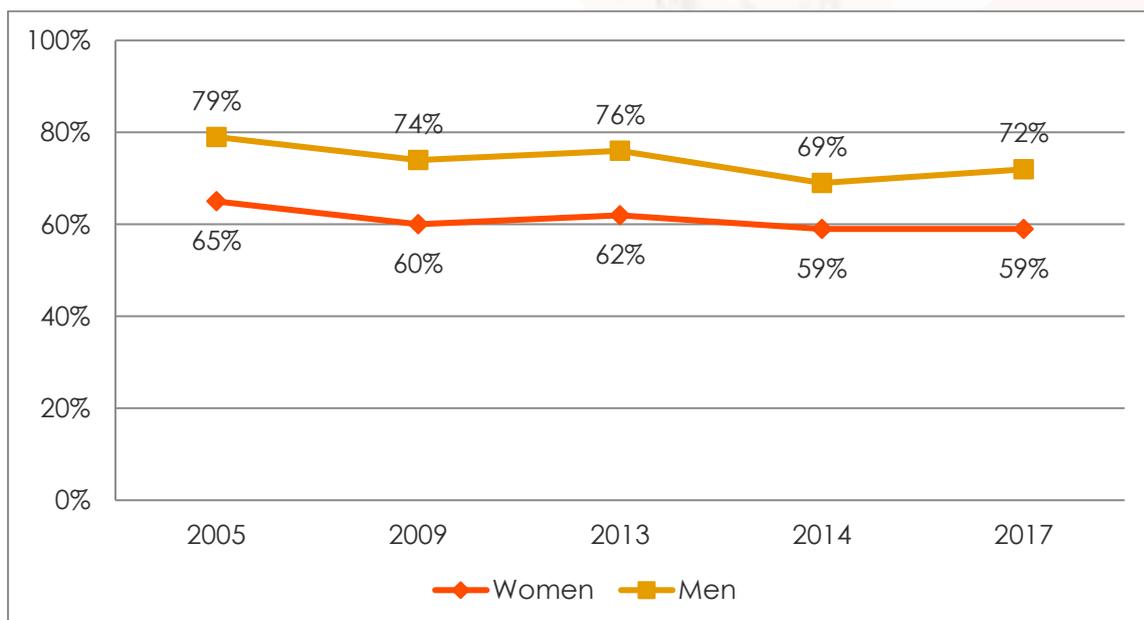


Respondents were asked: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Women should have seats reserved for them in the National Assembly by law?

While a majority of Zambians express support for ensuring equal opportunity for women to assume political leadership positions, women trail men on two indicators of political engagement. Women are less likely than men to discuss politics with others: 59% say they do so “occasionally” or “frequently,” compared to 72% of men (Figure 5).

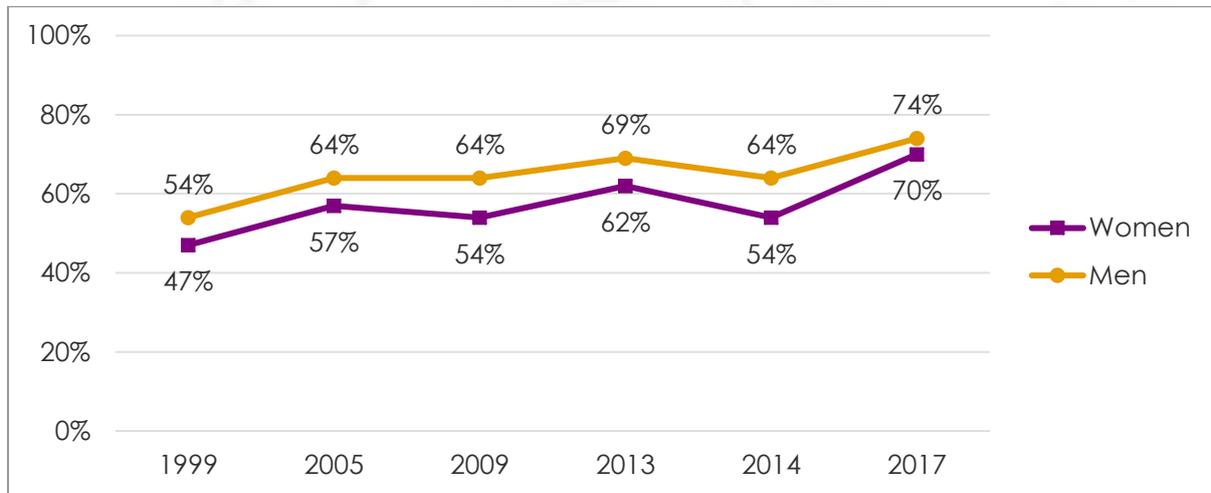
And they are less likely than men to vote, although the gap is smaller (4 percentage points) in the 2017 survey than in any Afrobarometer survey going back to 1999 (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Participation in political discussions | by gender | Zambia | 1999-2017



Respondents were asked: When you get together with your friends or family, would you say you discuss political matters frequently, occasionally, or never? (% who say “frequently” or “occasionally”)

Figure 6: Voting in national elections | by gender | Zambia | 1999-2017

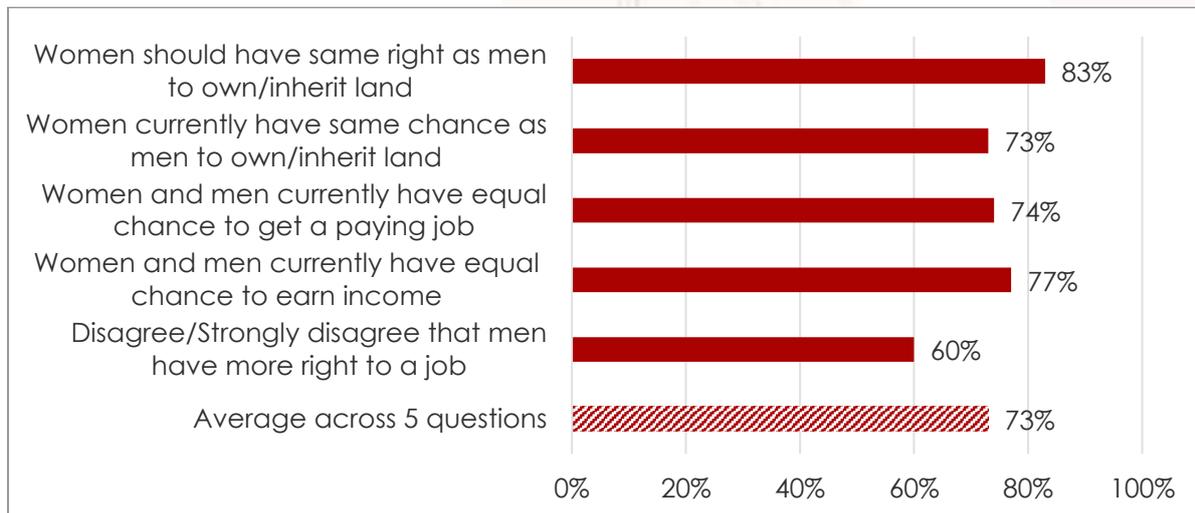


Respondents were asked: Understanding that some people were unable to vote in the most recent national election in 2016, which of the following statements is true for you? (% who say they voted)

Equal opportunities

On economic issues, strong majorities of Zambians assert that women should and in fact do have the same rights as men (Figure 7). More than eight in 10 respondents (83%) “agree” or “agree strongly” that women and men should have equal rights to own and inherit land. Slightly fewer respondents (73%) say such equality is already a reality in Zambia.

Figure 7: Equal rights and opportunities | Zambia | 2017



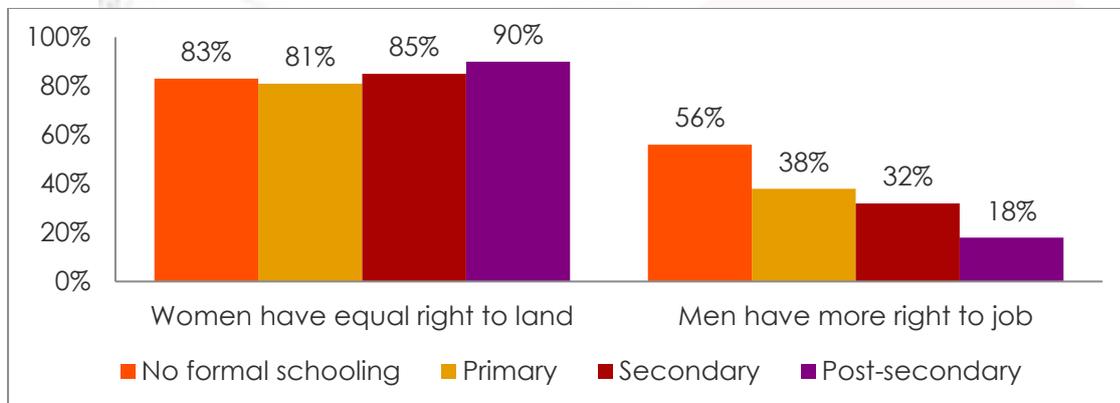
Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree, or haven't you heard enough to say?

- Women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land. (% agree/strongly agree)
- In our country today, women and men have equal opportunities to own and inherit land. (% agree/strongly agree)
- In our country today, women and men have equal opportunities to get a job that pays a wage or salary. (% agree/strongly agree)
- In our country today, women and men have equal opportunities to earn an income. (% agree/strongly agree)
- When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women. (% disagree/strongly disagree)

About three-fourths of respondents say women and men have equal chances of getting a paid job (74%) and of earning an income (77%). Even in an environment where jobs are scarce, six of 10 respondents (60%) “disagree” or “disagree strongly” with the assertion that men have more right to a job than women, although that still leaves 36% who would privilege men for scarce jobs. On average across these five questions, almost three-fourths (73%) of Zambians say equal rights are or should be enforced in their country.

Support for equal opportunities for women increases with education. For example, respondents with a secondary or post-secondary education are more likely than their less-educated counterparts to agree that women should have the same right as men to own or inherit land, and they are less likely to agree with the assertion that when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to jobs than women (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Support for equal rights to land and jobs | by education level | Zambia | 2017



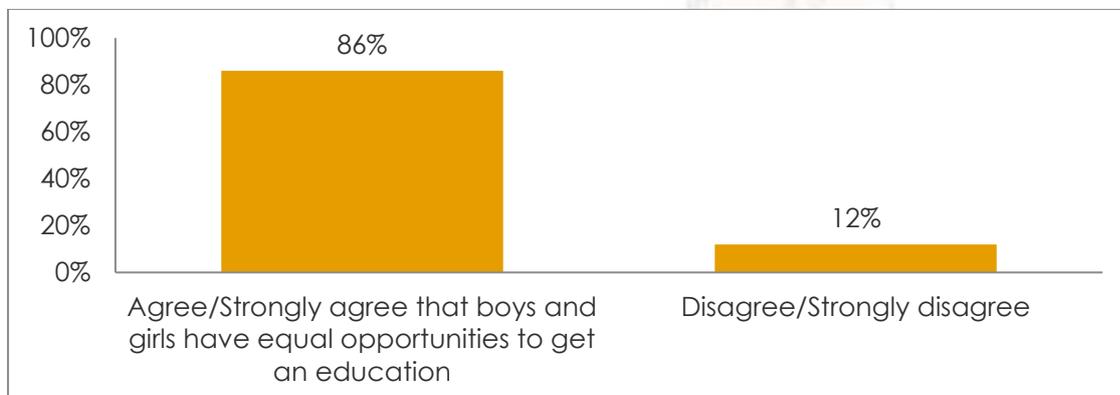
Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree, or haven't you heard enough to say?

- Women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land.
- When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women.

(% who “agree” or “strongly agree”)

When it comes to educational opportunities, most Zambians believe that their country has achieved parity: 86% “agree” or “strongly agree” that girls and boys have equal chances to get an education (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Equal opportunity for boys and girls to get an education | Zambia | 2017

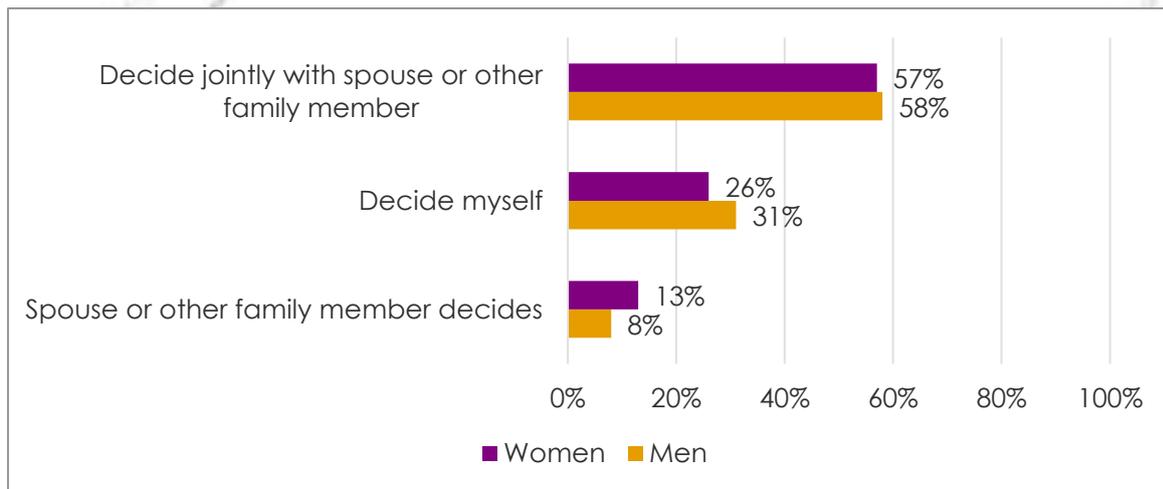


Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree, or haven't you heard enough to say: In our country today, girls and boys have equal opportunities to get an education.

Financial decision-making and gender roles at household level

If decision-making about how to spend money reflects power, Zambian women appear to have considerable power in the home: More than eight in 10 women say they make such decisions themselves (26%) or jointly with their husband or other family members (57%) (Figure 10). About one in eight (13%) say such decisions are made by their husband or other family members (although among men, 31% say they make financial decisions themselves).

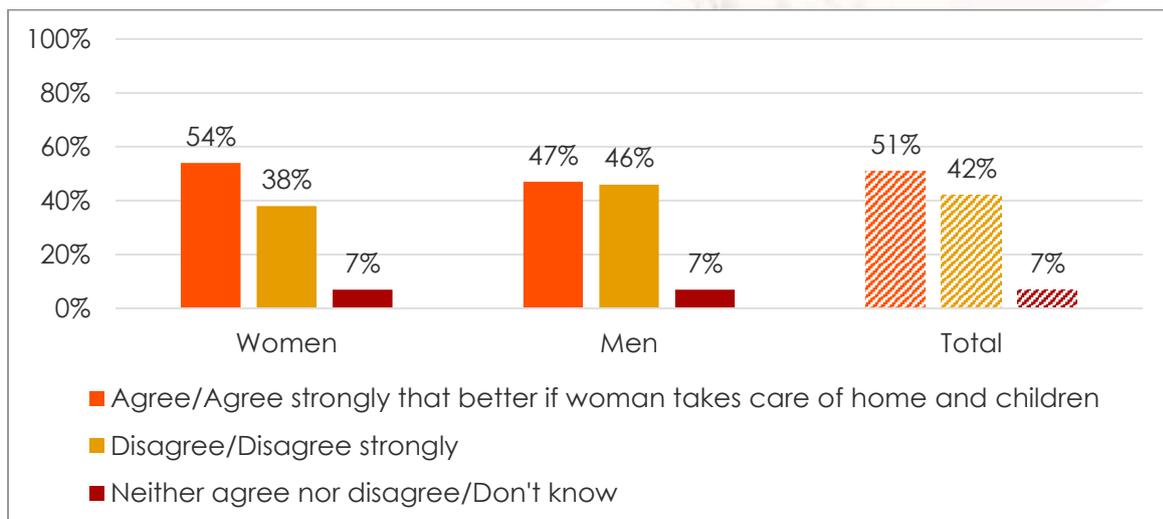
Figure 10: Decision-making regarding financial management | by gender
 | Zambia | 2017



Respondents were asked: What is the main way that decisions about the use of money that you have or earned is made?

On the other hand, a slight majority (51%) of Zambians think it is better for a family if a woman, rather than a man, has the main responsibility for taking care of the home and children. Women are somewhat more likely to agree with this sentiment than men (54% vs. 47%) (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Better if woman cares for home and children? | by gender | Zambia | 2017

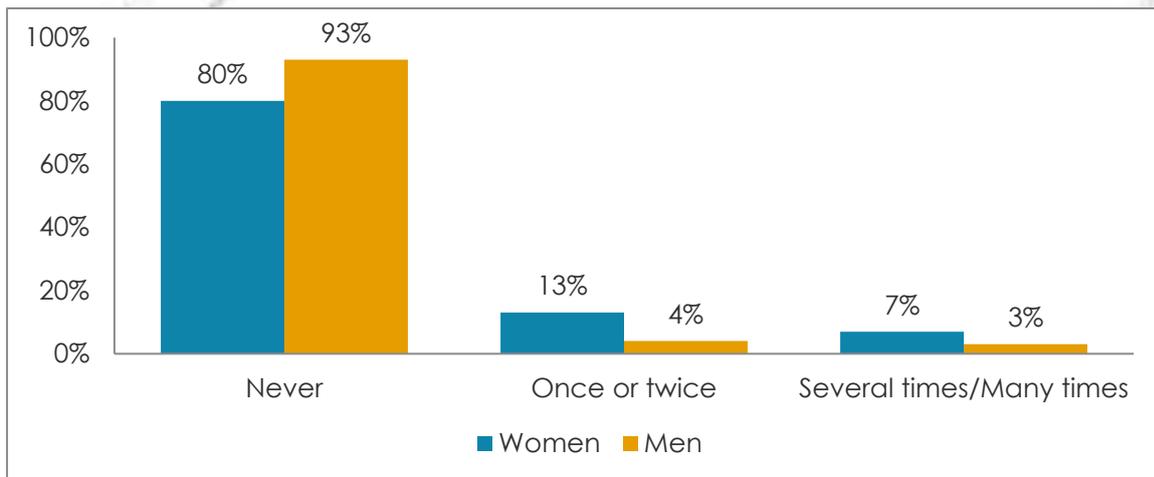


Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree, or haven't you heard enough to say: In general, it is better for a family if a woman has the main responsibility for taking care of the home and children rather than a man.

Gender-based discrimination and violence

Zambians' broad – but not unanimous – endorsement of gender equity is also reflected in women's reported experience: Eight of 10 women (80%) say they did not experience gender discrimination during the previous year. Still, one in five women (20%) say they suffered discrimination at least once, including 7% who say it occurred "several times" or "many times" (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Experience of gender discrimination during the past year | by gender | Zambia | 2017

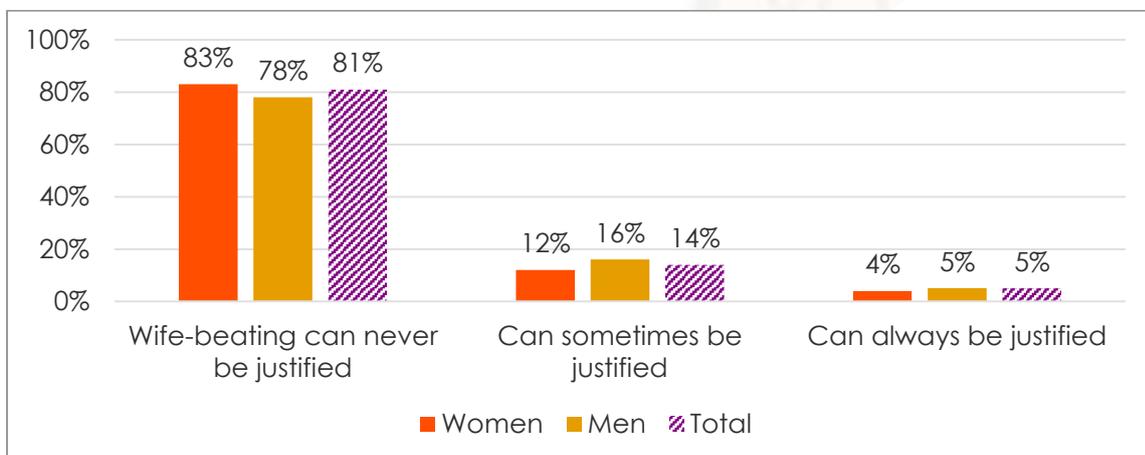


Respondents were asked: In the past year, how often, if at all, have you personally been discriminated against based on any of the following: Your gender?

A similarly strong majority (81%) say that men beating their wives "can never be justified," while again, about one in five disagree, saying it can "sometimes" (14%) or "always" (5%) be justified. Women are somewhat more likely than men to say that physical violence against wives can never be justified, 83% vs. 78% (Figure 13).

In response to a similar question in Afrobarometer's 2014 survey, 87% of respondents "disagreed" or "disagreed strongly" with the statement that "husbands should have the right to use physical punishment on their wives as a way of disciplining them."

Figure 13: Can wife-beating be justified? | Zambia | 2017



Respondents were asked: Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, sometimes be justified, or never be justified: For a man to beat his wife?

Conclusion

After her appointment in 2015, Zambia's first female vice president, Inonge Wina, said:

"I saw the continued marginalization of women: in politics, in agriculture, in business, in all areas. I realized that if we have a critical mass of women in politics, we'll be able to address these issues. My hope was that we would be able to influence the politics of the government and influence the legislation that protects women's rights" (Demo Finland, 2017).

While gender parity is still a distant dream in Zambian politics, public opinion seems eager to move in that direction. Most Zambians express support for equal rights and equal opportunities for women in politics as well as in economic matters, and a growing majority endorse the government's efforts to eliminate gender disparities. More than six in 10 even support the idea of reserving a certain number of seats in the National Assembly for women as a way to build the "critical mass" that Wina aims for. And overwhelmingly, Zambians say girls now have the same chance as boys of getting an education – a critical factor in overcoming traditional barriers to empowerment.

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