

## Though a leader in gender representation, Namibia still has work to ensure full equality

**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 224 | Nangula Shejavali**

### Summary

Namibia performs well on many gender-equality indicators, including gender representation in governance. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2017), Namibia currently ranks 12th globally and fourth on the African continent for the proportion of women in Parliament. Getting to this level of gender representation required a number of important changes in recent years, most notably the adoption of a 50/50 alternating party list by the majority party, Swapo, which holds 80% of National Assembly's voting seats (Gender Links, 2014).

According to the latest Afrobarometer survey findings, Namibians want more of this. They believe that not only should gender quotas be applied more broadly in both the National Assembly and in regional councils to bring about greater gender equality, but they also feel that the performance of the National Assembly has improved in recent years due to the increased number of women in this house.

On the whole, Namibians believe that the government is doing a good job on gender equality and prevention of gender-based violence, and more than two-thirds of citizens say that equal opportunities and treatment of women are better now than they were a few years ago.

That said, survey findings also demonstrate that much work remains to be done to ensure that Namibians fully experience the gender equality envisaged in Namibia's Constitution and gender policies. Despite strong gender-equality attitudes, 14% of Namibians say they experienced discrimination based on their gender during the previous year, and a majority believe that it is better for women to have the main responsibility of taking care of the home and children.

Finally, women continue to trail men in their interest in politics, although differences in political participation are slight.

### 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 2015, and Round 7 surveys are being conducted in 2016/2018. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Namibia, led by the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), interviewed 1,200 adult Namibians between 5 and 27 November 2017. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Namibia in 1999, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2008, 2012, and 2014.

## Key findings

- More than two-thirds (68%) of Namibians say women should have the same chance as men of being elected to public office. This is about the same level of support recorded in 2005 and 2012 surveys but reflects an 11-percentage-point drop from 2014, the year Swapo instituted its gender-equal party list.
- More than two-thirds (69%) of Namibians say that all political parties should be required to adopt a gender quota to ensure 50/50 representation of men and women in the National Assembly. A similarly strong majority (70%) support the adoption of a gender quota for regional council elections.
- A majority (59%) of Namibians say that increasing the number of women in the National Assembly has made Parliament “somewhat more” or “much more” effective.
- Namibians support gender equality in other forms: 84% say it is “never” justified for men to beat their wives, 87% say women should have the same rights as men to inherit and own land, and 63% disagree with the idea that men should have more right to jobs than women. However, a majority (58%) think it’s better if a woman, rather than a man, takes care of the home and children.
- About one in seven Namibians (14%) say they experienced gender-based discrimination during the previous year.
- More than seven in 10 Namibians say the government is performing “fairly well” or “very well” in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women (75%) and in preventing gender-based violence (71%).
- The proportion of Namibians who say they discuss politics at least “occasionally” has decreased from 71% in 2014 to 55%. Women trail men in this regard, 50% vs. 60%.
- In Namibia, gender differences on indicators of political engagement are slight to non-existent.

## Support for gender-equal leadership

Namibia is a strong example across the continent with respect to the number of women in public leadership. Women make up 43% of the National Assembly and 39% of members across both houses of Parliament (National Assembly and National Council) – making the country one of the global leaders when it comes to gender representation at this level (Inter-

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Parliamentary Union, 2017). This is largely because of the 50/50 “zebra style” party list adopted by Swapo before the 2015 National Assembly elections, which gave the party 77 of 96 voting seats, in addition to eight non-voting seats selected by the president (Electoral Commission of Namibia, 2014). Complementing the strong representation of women in the

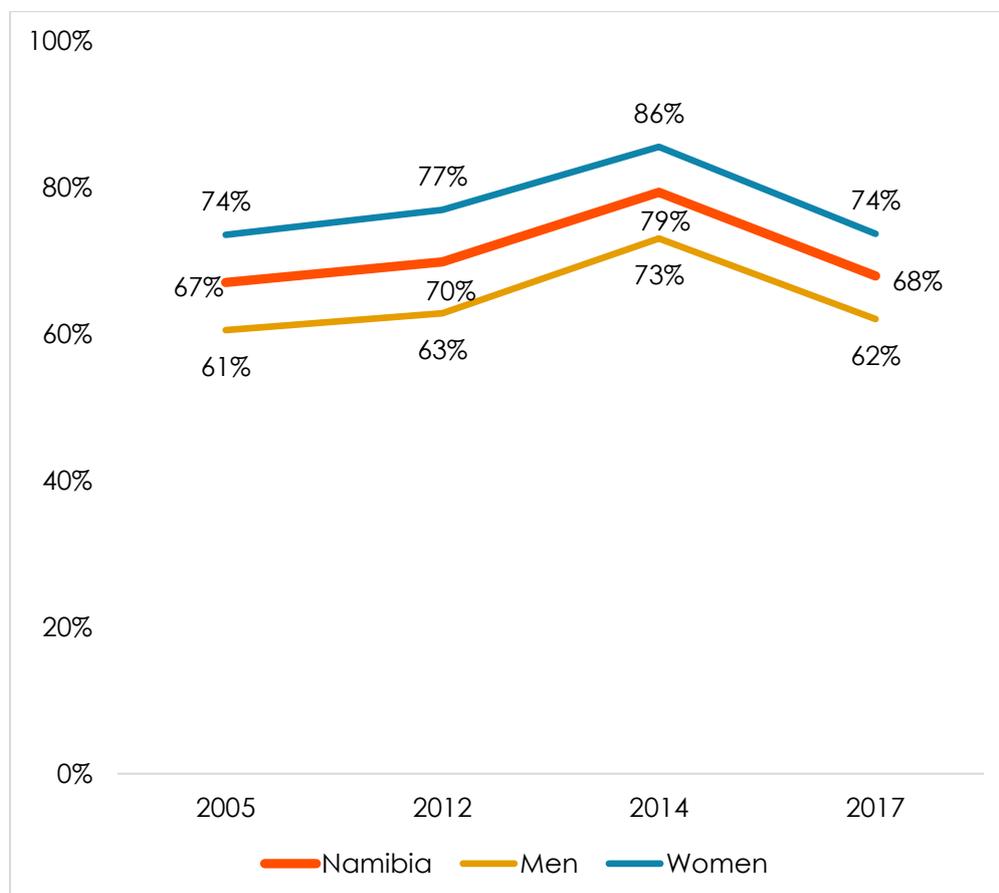
National Assembly, 32% of mayors, 48% of local authority councillors, and 59% of deputy ministers are women (Legal Assistance Center, 2017; Nakale, 2018).

While much remains to be done to attain equal gender representation in the cabinet (17% women), at ministerial level (20% women), in regional councils (16% women), and among regional governors (29% women) (Legal Assistance Center, 2017), on the whole, Namibia has performed favourably when compared to other countries on the continent (World Economic Forum, 2017).

This performance is backed by a solid two-thirds majority (68%) of Namibians who “agree” or “agree very strongly,” in the 2017 Afrobarometer survey, that “women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men.” Remarkably, however, this represents a substantial drop from the 79% who agreed with this position in the 2014 survey (Figure 1). A possible reason for this drop could be that in the run-up to Namibia’s 2014 election, there was a great deal of media attention related to Swapo’s adoption of a 50/50 list and what this would mean for gender equality in Namibia, which may have stimulated a temporary spike in 2014 in support for women’s equality.

That said, among 13 African countries surveyed in 2016/2017, the 11% drop is the steepest and moves Namibia from near the top to near the bottom in support of women’s equal right to be elected (Table 1).

**Figure 1: Support for gender-equal leadership over time | by gender | Namibia**  
 | 2005-2017



**Respondents were asked:** 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.  
 (Graph illustrates % of respondents who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with Statement 2)

**Table 1: Support for gender-equal leadership** | Namibia and 12 African countries  
| 2005-2017

	2005/2006	2011/2012	2014/2015	2016/2017	Difference between 2014/2015 & 2016/2017
<b>Botswana</b>	83%	86%	83%	82%	1%
<b>Benin</b>	85%	73%	73%	78%	5%
<b>Uganda</b>	79%	66%	73%	76%	3%
<b>Tanzania</b>	90%	81%	68%	76%	7%
<b>Côte d'Ivoire</b>		74%	79%	73%	-7%
<b>Kenya</b>	81%	75%	76%	73%	-3%
<b>Malawi</b>	80%	78%	61%	72%	11%
<b>Zimbabwe</b>	67%	76%	68%	70%	2%
<b>Zambia</b>	71%	73%	72%	69%	-3%
<b>Guinea</b>		71%	61%	69%	9%
<b>Namibia</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>68%</b>	<b>-11%</b>
<b>Mali</b>	62%	57%	57%	62%	4%
<b>Nigeria</b>	59%	53%	49%	55%	6%

**Respondents were asked:** 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.

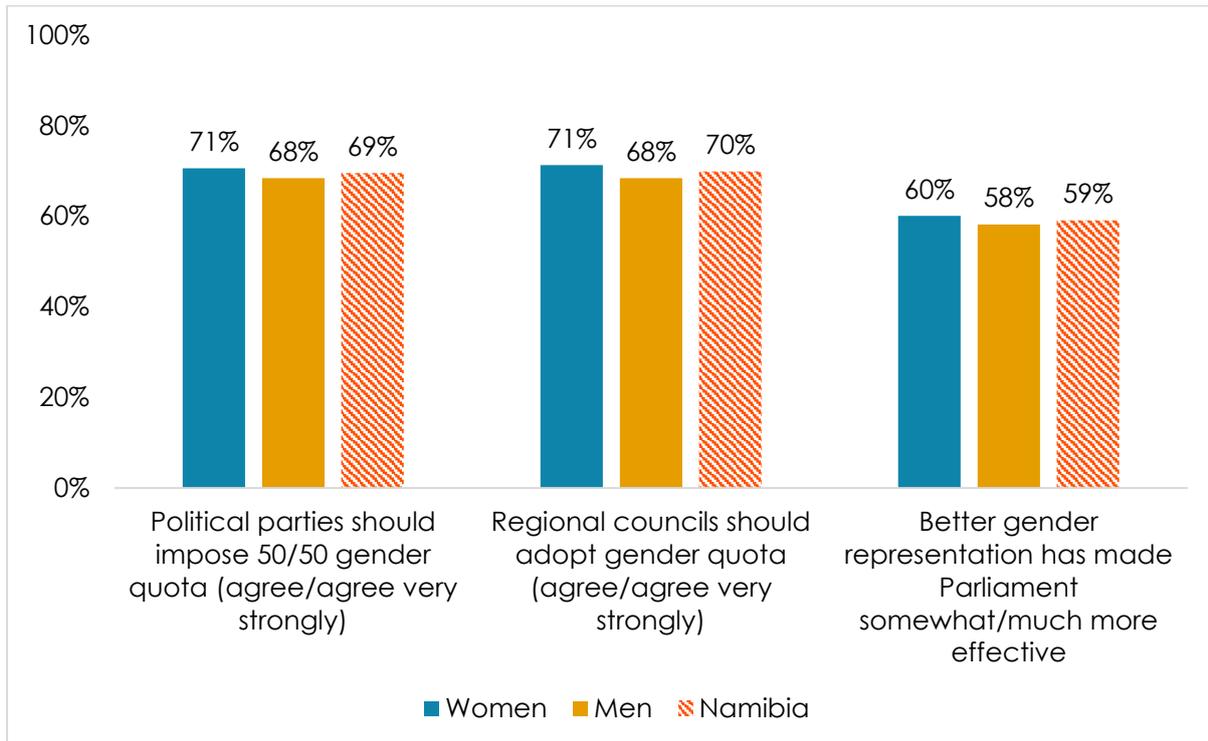
Statement 2: Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men.  
(Table shows % of respondents who "agree" or "agree very strongly")

### Quotas

In addition to supporting women's fair chance to be elected, strong majorities of Namibians favour practical measures to promote gender-equal representation (Figure 2). More than two-thirds of respondents say that all political parties should be mandated to adopt a gender quota to ensure 50/50 representation of men and women in the National Assembly (69%) and that a gender quota should be adopted for regional council elections (70%). Support for gender quotas in regional council elections is especially strong in rural areas, with 73% of rural Namibians, compared to 67% of urban residents, supporting gender quotas at this level. Currently, women make up only 16% of regional council members – a situation that the Institute for Public Policy Research (2015) has previously described as "a thorn in the flesh for gender equality in Namibia" given the gains in other areas of political leadership.

Moreover, a majority (59%) of Namibians believe that better gender representation in the National Assembly has made Parliament "somewhat more" or "much more" effective. While there is no research on whether or how Parliament has improved since the increase in the number of women in 2015, it could be assumed that enhanced representation that better matches the national demographic provides for a stronger perception of effectiveness amongst both men and women.

**Figure 2: Support for gender quotas | by gender | Namibia | 2017**



**Respondents were asked:**

- I would like us now to discuss issues related to women's participation in Parliament. Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: All political parties should be mandated to adopt a gender quota, to ensure a 50/50 representation of men and women in the National Assembly.  
 Statement 2: Political parties should be able to decide on their own party lists without a gender quota being imposed.  
 (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly")
- Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: A gender quota system should be adopted for regional council elections to ensure that more women are represented in regional government.  
 Statement 2: The way in which regional council elections are run should not be changed, even if this results in the underrepresentation of women in regional government.
- The representation of women in the National Assembly has been increasing in Namibia over the past few years. Do you think that having better gender representation in Parliament has made Parliament more effective, less effective, or not made any difference?

**Attitudes toward equality**

In addition to supporting gender quotas, Namibians generally express progressive attitudes on other gender-equality indicators (Figure 3). More than eight in 10 Namibians say that it is "never" justified for men to beat their wives (84%) and that women should have the same rights as men to inherit and own land (87%). And almost two-thirds (63%) "disagree" or "strongly disagree" with the idea that when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to jobs than women.

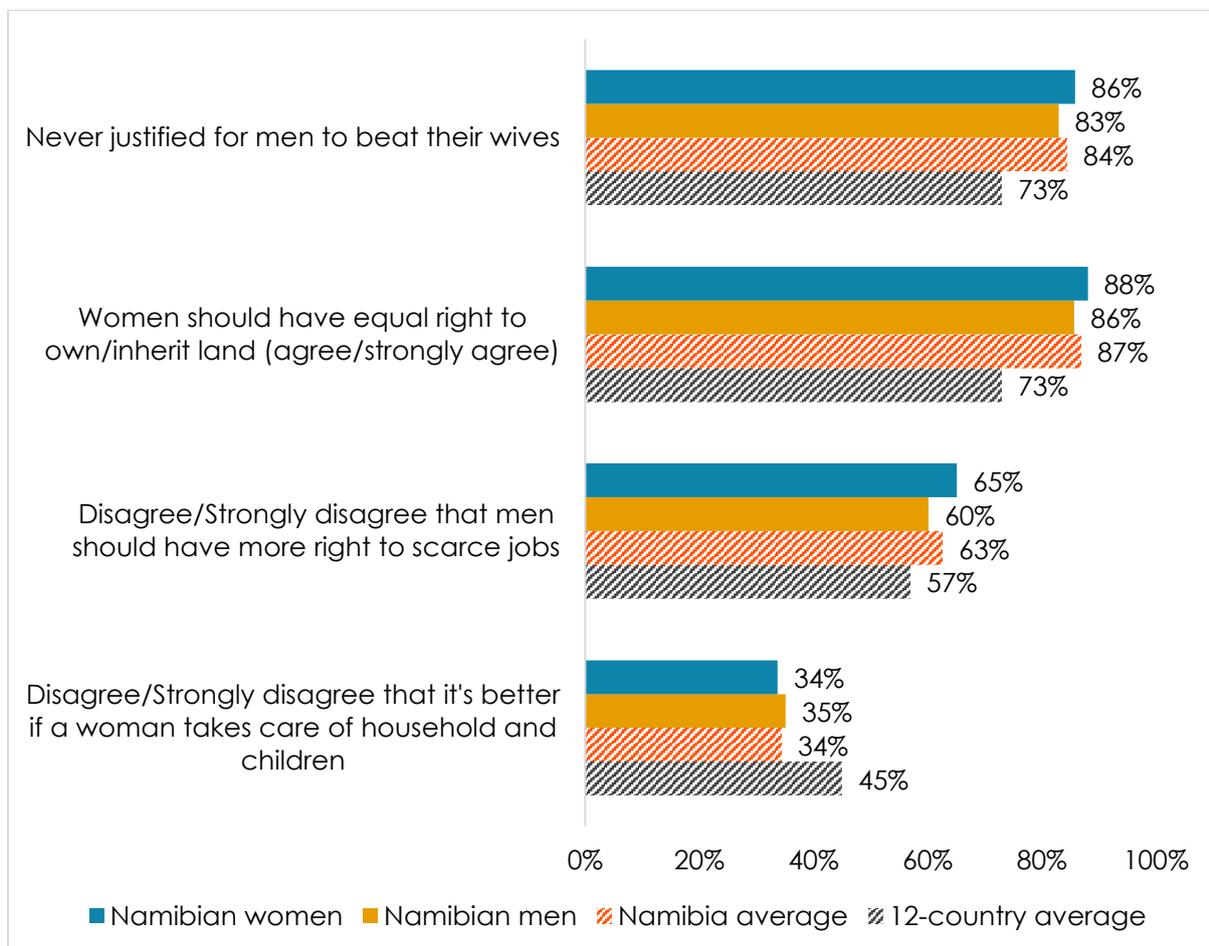
On these three indicators, Namibians' attitudes are considerably more strongly in favour of gender equality than the average across the other 12 surveyed countries.

Interestingly, however, when it comes to the responsibilities of women at the household level, a majority (58%) of Namibians say that it's better if a woman takes care of the household

and children rather than a man; only one-third (34%) disagree – substantially fewer than the 45% average across the 12 other surveyed countries.

On all four of these indicators, men's level of support for women's equality is very close to women's attitudes.

**Figure 3: Attitudes on gender-equality indicators** | by gender | Namibia and 12 other African countries | 2016/2017



**Respondents were asked:**

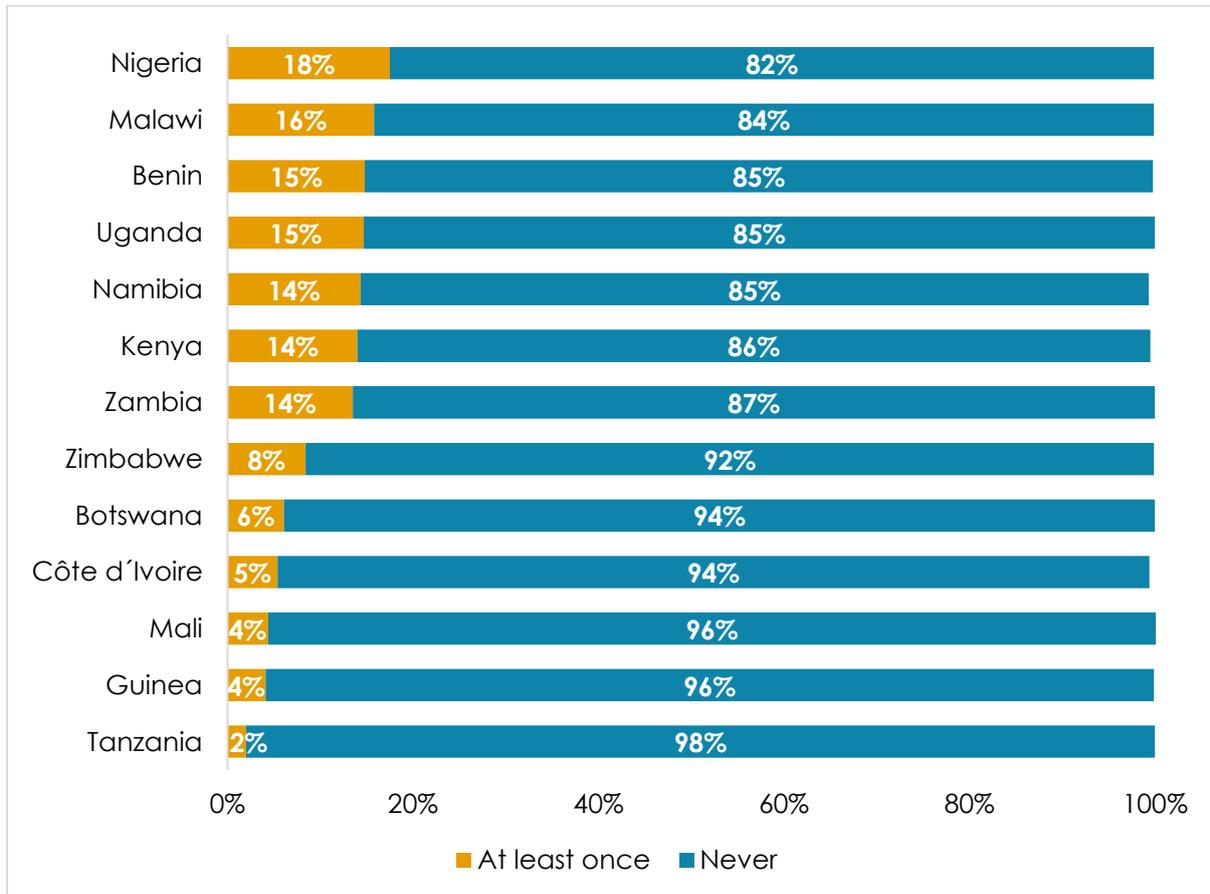
- Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, sometimes be justified, or never be justified: For a man to beat his wife?
- For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree:
  - In general, it is better for a family if a woman has the main responsibility for taking care of the home and children rather than a man.
  - When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women.
  - Women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land.

**Experience of gender discrimination**

Despite these gender-equality attitudes, one in seven Namibians (14%) say they experienced discrimination based on their gender during the year preceding the survey. Among 13 surveyed countries, this is the fifth-highest level of experienced gender discrimination, ranging from 2% of Tanzanians to 18% of Nigerians (Figure 4).

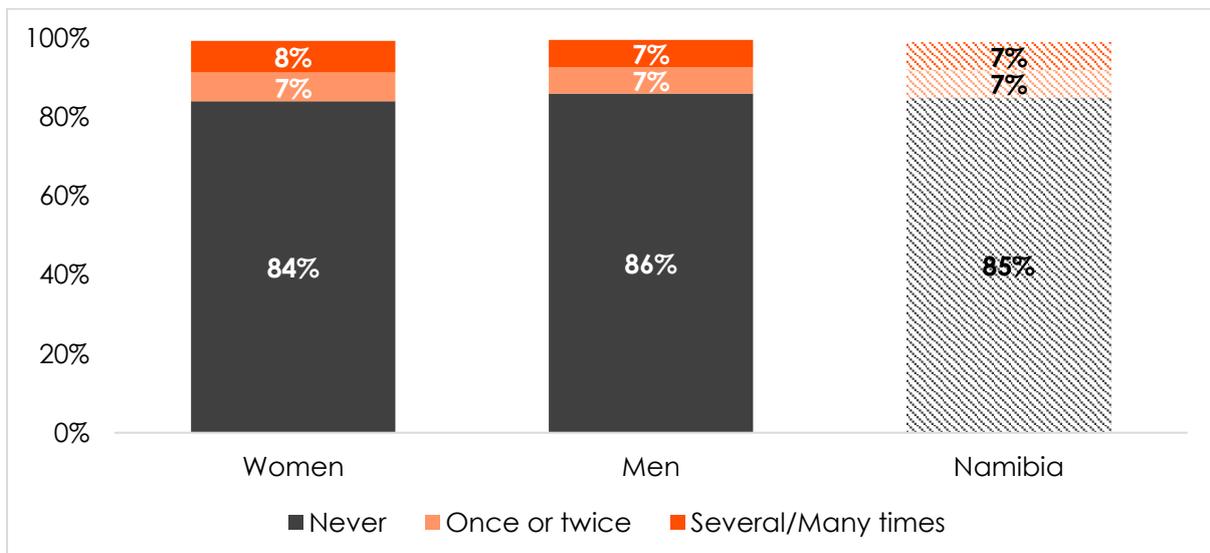
Surprisingly, women and men differ little in how likely they are to say they suffered gender-based discrimination, which might suggest under-reporting of this experience by women (Figure 5).

**Figure 4: Experience of discrimination based on gender | Namibia and 12 other African countries | 2016/2017**



**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.

**Figure 5: Experience of discrimination based on gender | by gender | Namibia | 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?

## Government's handling of gender equality and gender-based violence

On the whole, Namibians rate their government very favourably on its performance on gender-related issues – far better than on managing the economy, narrowing the gap between rich and poor, and handling job creation (Figure 6). Three-fourths (75%) of Namibians say the government is doing “fairly well” or “very well” in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women, the most positive rating on a wide range of issues that the survey asked about. And 71% approve of the government's performance when it comes to preventing gender-based violence – the third-best rating.

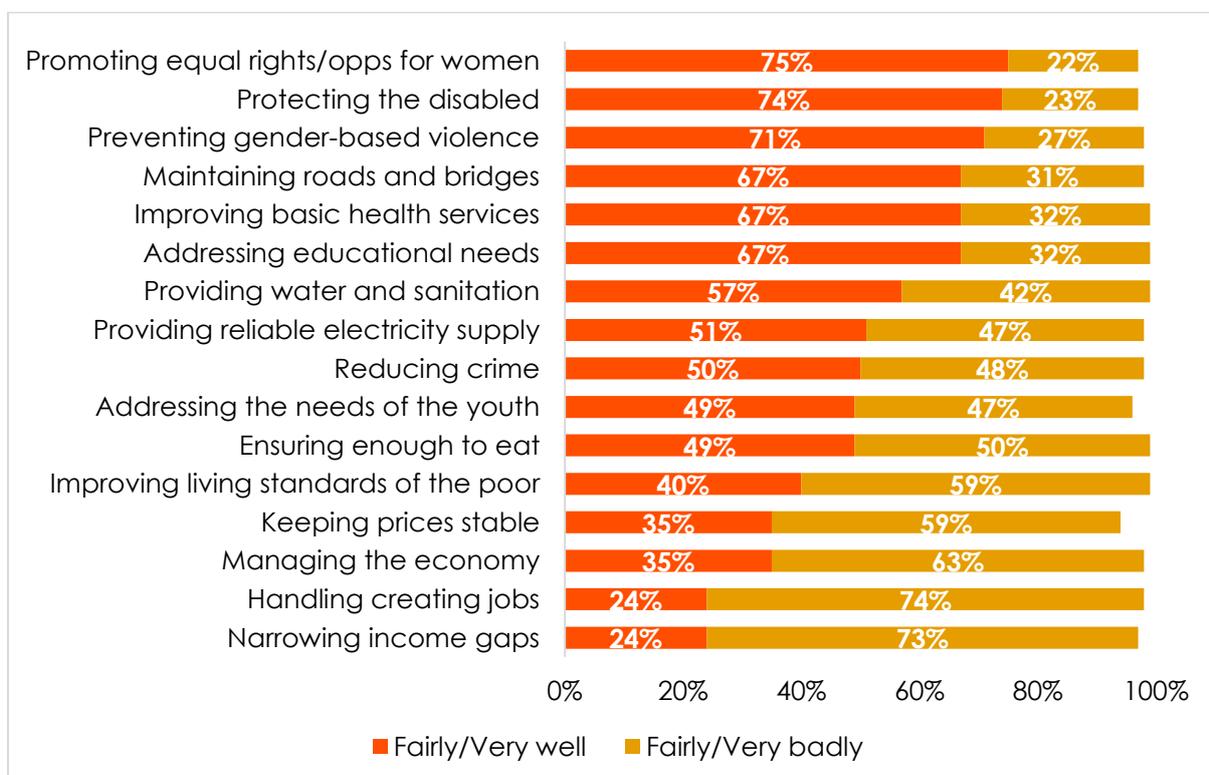
Men and women are almost identical in their assessments of the government's performance on these issues.

Further, two-thirds (67%) of Namibians say that equal opportunities and treatment for women are “somewhat better” or “much better” now than they were a few years ago – a view shared equally by men and women (Figure 7).

Namibians' high rating of government performance on gender-based violence is somewhat surprising, considering the almost daily reports of such violence in the news media. But here again, government rhetoric around this issue may help account for the favourable rating.

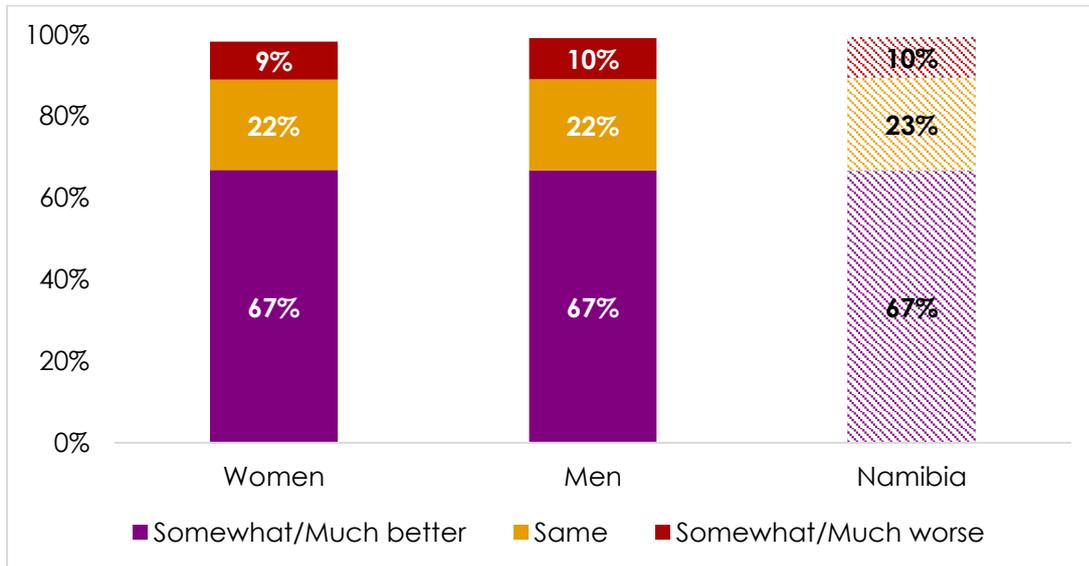
The positive assessments related to equal opportunities and treatment of women are less surprising, given the government's favourable gender-policy landscape, the large increase in the number of women in Parliament, and ongoing government communication pushing for gender equality. In fact, when asked about fair access to education, a paying job, and land inheritance and ownership, Namibians overwhelmingly indicate that gender equality is already a reality. Compared to the 12 other surveyed countries, Namibia performs well on all these equal-opportunity indicators (Figure 8).

**Figure 6: Government's handling of gender-related issues | Namibia | 2017**



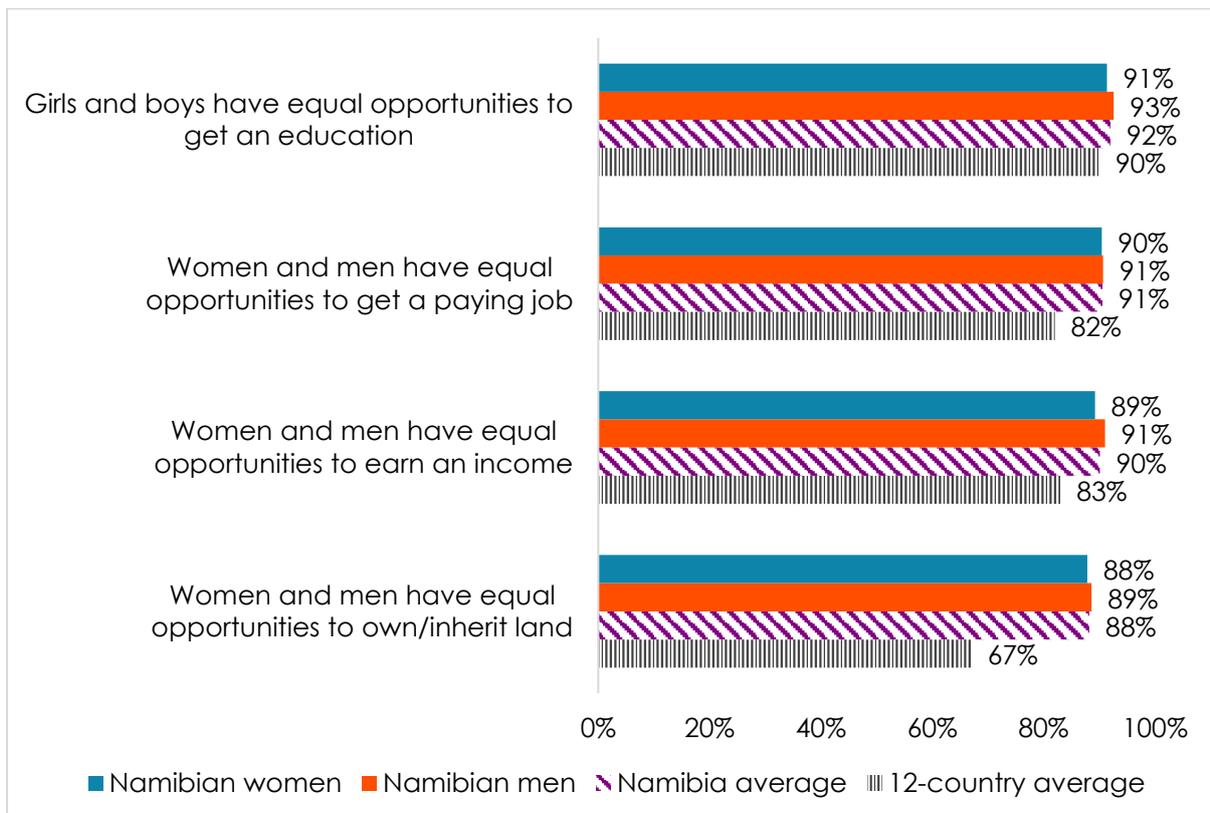
**Respondents were asked:** Now let's speak about the performance of the present government of this country. How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say?

**Figure 7: Opportunities and treatment for women compared to a few years ago**  
 | by gender | Namibia | 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?

**Figure 8: Equal life opportunities** | by gender | Namibia and 12 other African countries | 2016/2017



**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, ... (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

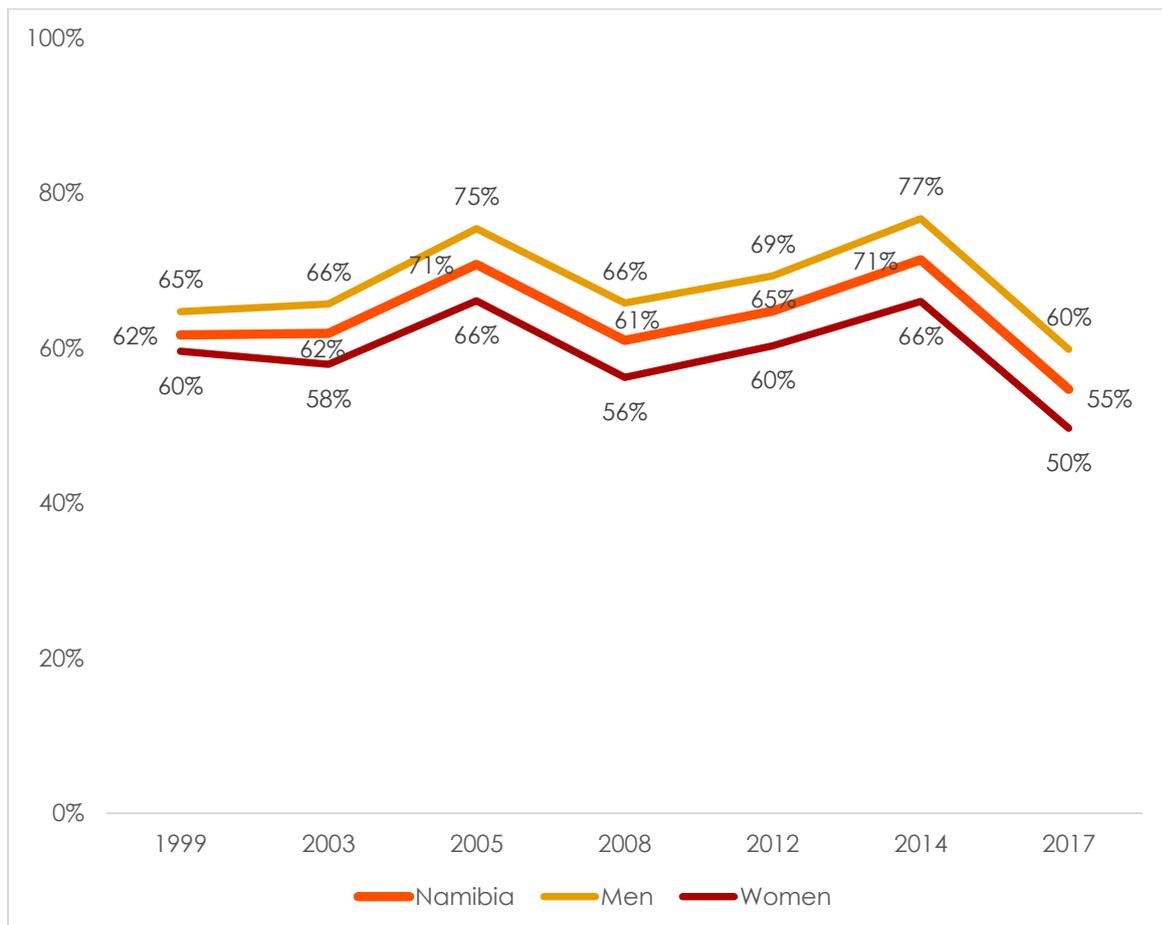
## Interest and participation in politics

Across both genders, Namibians' interest in politics – expressed in terms of how often they discuss politics – has fallen significantly. While 71% of respondents said in 2014 that they discussed politics “occasionally” or “frequently,” only 55% say the same in 2017 – the lowest level of interest recorded since Afrobarometer started its surveys in 1999 (Figure 9). This is also well below the average for the 13 surveyed countries (69%). The decline may be particularly steep because 2014 was an election year that generated excitement and dialogue on political issues. But the depth of the drop could also indicate a certain disenchantment with politics given Namibians' general views that the country is going in the wrong direction and that the government is handling key issues badly, as discussed in previous Afrobarometer press releases and dispatches (Weylandt, 2018; Tjirera, 2018).

As in previous years, women's interest in politics lags behind that of men: Only 50% of women say they discuss political matters at least “occasionally,” compared to 60% of men.

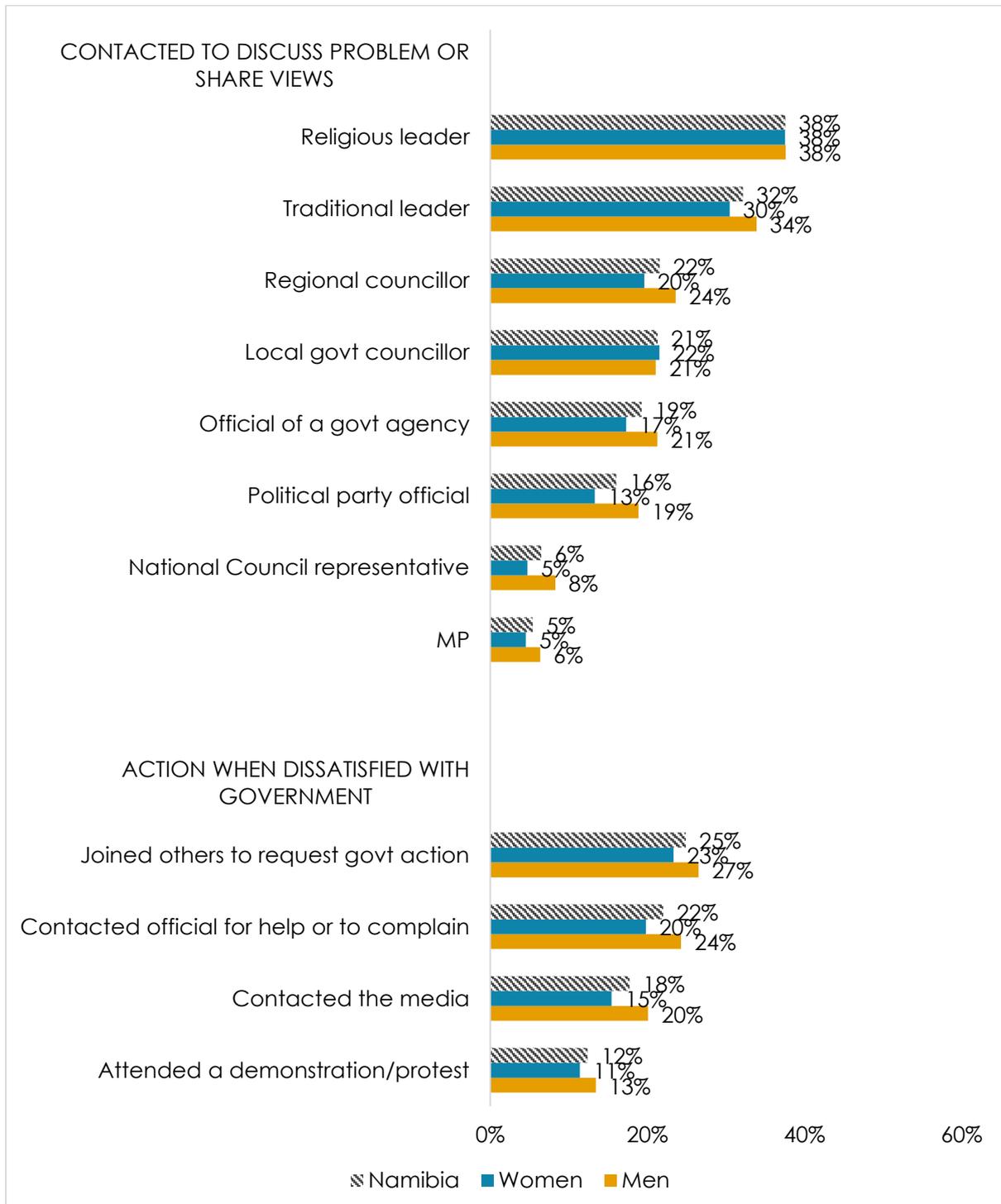
With regard to political engagement and participation, women trail men by only slim margins (4 to 6 percentage points) on some indicators (including joining others to request government action and contacting the media, a regional councillor, a government official, or a political party official) and are statistically even (within the survey's margin of error) on others (such as contacting an MP, a local government councillor, or a National Council representative and attending a demonstration) (Figure 10).

**Figure 9: Discuss politics | by gender | Namibia | 1999-2017**



**Respondents were asked:** *When you get together with your friends or family, would you say you discuss political matters?*

**Figure 10: Citizen engagement** | by gender | Namibia | 2017



**Respondents were asked:**

- During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views?
- Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens when they are dissatisfied with government. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year. If not, would you do this if you had the chance?

## Conclusion

In line with steps taken by their government and the ruling party, Namibian citizens express strong support for gender equality, even endorsing the use of mandatory gender quotas to improve women's representation in leadership. Yet a significant number of Namibians still experience gender-based discrimination, and gendered roles, such as homemaking for women, are still the norm. While Namibians feel the government is handling gender issues well, it is important to continue to work to ensure that all Namibians fully benefit from the experience of gender equality and that no one is discriminated against on the basis of gender, as provided for in the Namibian Constitution.

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