



Dispatch No. 610 | 28 February 2023

## In Zimbabwe, majority support gender equality, think greater efforts are needed

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**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 610 | Simangele Moyo-Nyede and Jonathan Kugarakuripi**

### Summary

Gender equality is a cross-cutting theme that underlies most of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and is a necessary foundation for a prosperous and inclusive world (World Economic Forum, 2015). Efforts to secure equal rights for Zimbabwean women are grounded in the 2013 Constitution, which provides for equality among all citizens, and the National Gender Policy of 2013 (Empowerwomen, 2017).

The World Economic Forum (2022) Global Gender Gap Index ranks Zimbabwe 50th out of 146 countries – eighth in sub-Saharan Africa – in gender parity, suggesting both progress and remaining challenges on the country's path toward gender equality. As of January 2023, 31% of National Assembly seats and 44% of Senate seats were held by women (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023). One-third of women aged 20–24 were married or in union before age 18 (UN Women, 2022). Access to financial services is uneven, and just 16% of firms have women in top management positions (World Economic Forum, 2022). Only two-thirds of legal frameworks considered necessary to promote, enforce, and monitor gender equality under SDG indicators are in place (UN Women, 2022).

This dispatch reports on a special survey module included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 (2021/2023) questionnaire to explore Africans' experiences and perceptions of gender equality in control over assets, hiring, land ownership, and political leadership. (For findings on gender-based violence, see Moyo-Nyede, 2022).

In Zimbabwe, majorities express support for women's right to equality in hiring, land ownership, and political leadership. But most also consider it likely that a woman will suffer criticism, harassment, or family problems if she runs for elective office.

Overall, a majority of Zimbabweans approve of the government's performance in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women, but a similar majority say greater efforts are needed. Citizens say gender-based violence and a dearth of women in influential government positions are the most important women's-rights issues that the government and society must address.

### Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Eight rounds of surveys have been completed in up to 39 countries since 1999, and Round 9 surveys are currently underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Zimbabwe, led by the Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI), interviewed 1,200 adult citizens of Zimbabwe between 28 March and 10 April 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a

95% confidence level. Previous standard surveys were conducted in Zimbabwe in 1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2021.

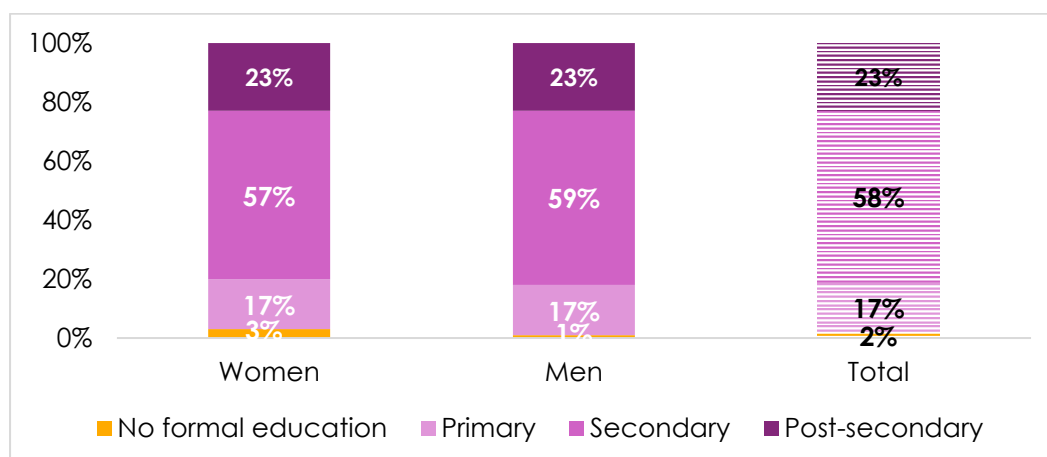
## Key findings

- Educational achievement is gender-equal in Zimbabwe, according to survey results.
- Women are less likely than men to have a bank account (38% vs. 49%) but match or slightly exceed men in ownership of a mobile phone, a computer, and a car, as well as participation in household financial decisions.
- A majority of citizens say women should have the same rights as men to get paying jobs (59%) and to own and inherit land (77%).
  - Two-thirds (66%) of citizens say women in fact enjoy equal opportunities to get a paying job, but only 44% think opportunities are equal when it comes to land ownership.
- Three-fourths (75%) of Zimbabweans say women should have the same chance as men of being elected to public office.
  - But while more than four-fifths (86%) of citizens think a woman will gain standing in the community if she runs for office, majorities also consider it likely that she will be criticised or harassed (58%) and that she will face problems with her family (54%).
- More than half (57%) of Zimbabweans say the government is doing a “fairly good” or “very good” job of promoting equal rights and opportunities for women. Poor citizens are less likely to approve of the government’s performance.
  - More than half (54%) of citizens say the government should do more to promote women’s rights and opportunities.

## Education and control of assets

Zimbabwean women and men enjoy roughly equal levels of educational attainment (Figure 1). Almost one in four women and men (23% each) have post-secondary qualifications, while about six in 10 women (57%) and men (59%) have secondary schooling, one in six (17% each) have primary schooling, and 3% of women and 1% of men have no formal education.

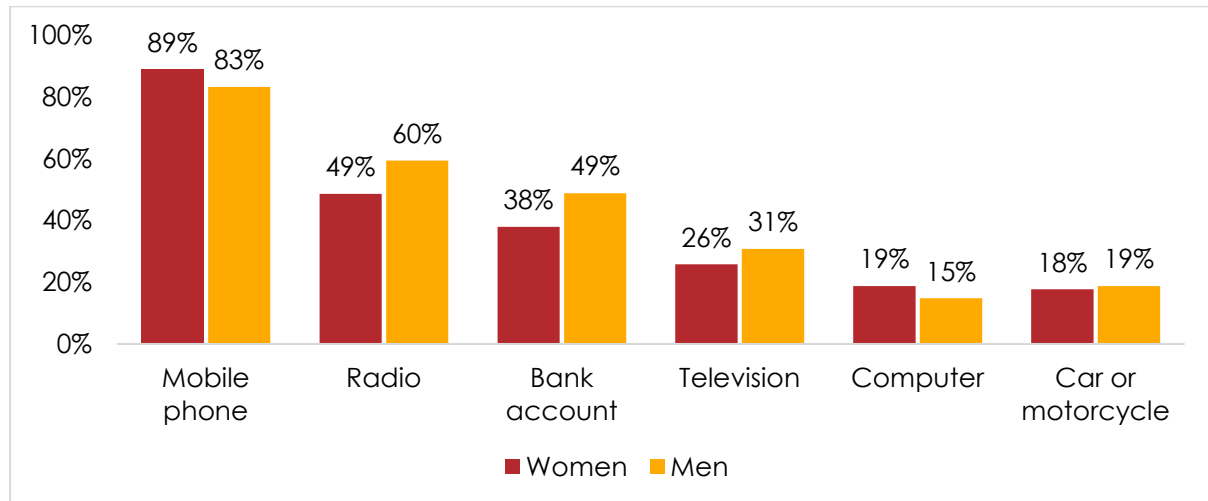
**Figure 1: Educational attainment** | by gender | Zimbabwe | 2022



**Respondents were asked:** What is your highest level of education?

When it comes to control over assets, slightly more women than men own a mobile phone (89% vs. 83%) and a computer (19% vs. 15%), and the two are about equally likely to own a car or motorcycle (18% of women, 19% of men). Women trail men when it comes to ownership of a bank account (an 11-percentage-point gap), a radio (11 points), and a television (5 points) (Figure 2).

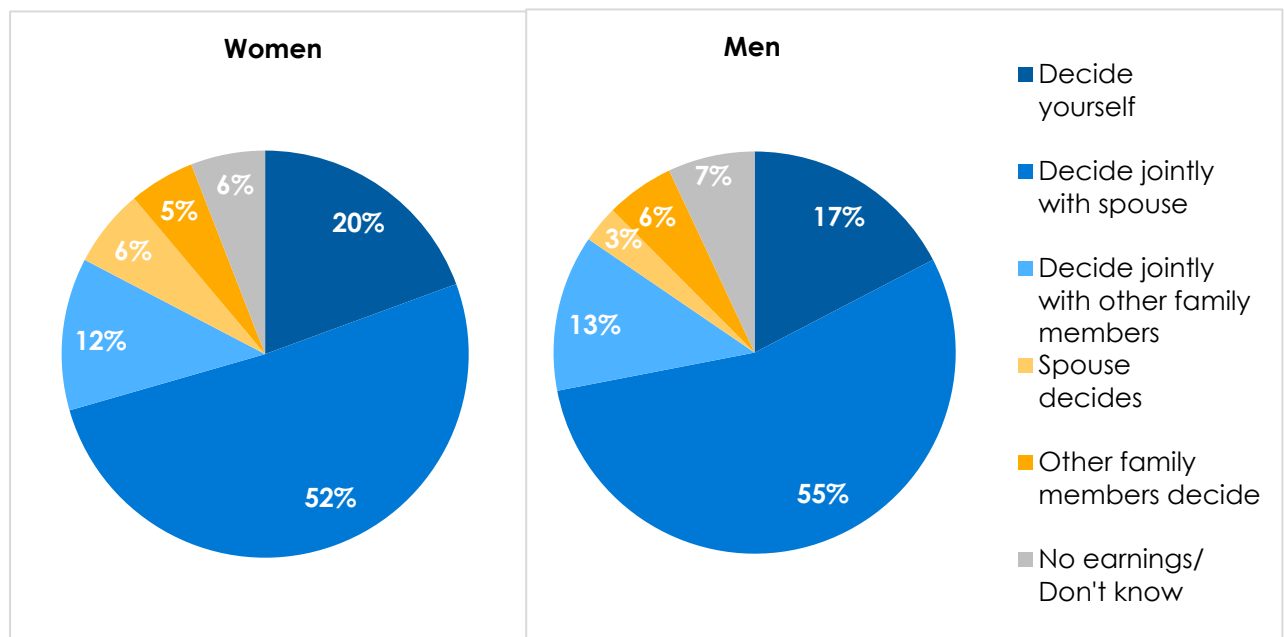
**Figure 2: Asset ownership** | by gender | Zimbabwe | 2022



**Respondents were asked:** Which of these things do you personally own?

In decisions about how household money is spent, women and men also report very similar results: Most women say they make financial decisions themselves (20%) or jointly with their spouse (52%), and so do most men (17% and 55%, respectively) (Figure 3). Similar proportions say financial decisions are made without their input (11% for women, 9% for men).

**Figure 3: Who decides how money is used?** | by gender | Zimbabwe | 2022



**Respondents were asked:** What is the main way that decisions are made about how to use any money that you have or earn, for example from a job, a business, selling things, or other activities?

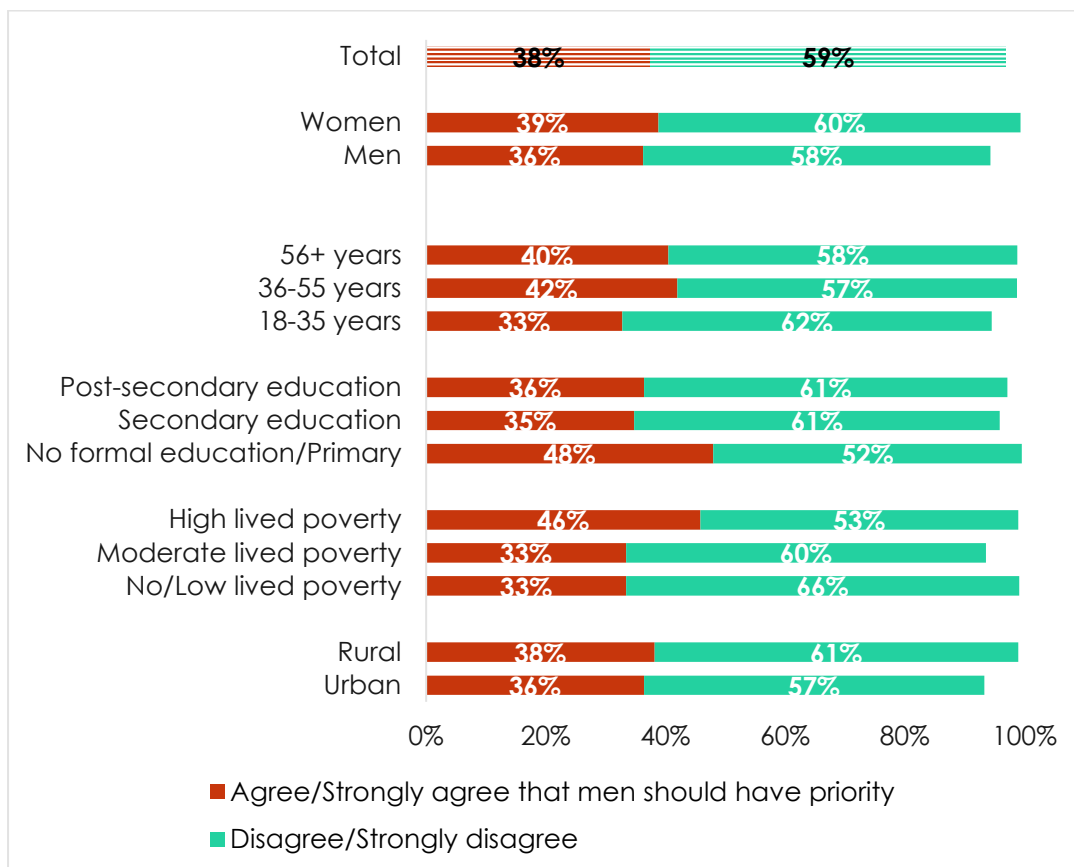
## Rights to a job and land

The ability to claim certain rights can be a tool to promote gender equality – or to maintain inequality. Do Zimbabweans want gender equality when it comes to jobs and land? And if so, how close to equality are they?

A majority (59%) of Zimbabweans reject the idea that men should be given priority over women in hiring when jobs are scarce, but almost four in 10 (38%) endorse this form of gender discrimination (Figure 4).

Men are about as likely as women to insist on gender fairness when it comes to jobs (58% vs. 60%). Support for equality in hiring increases with respondents' education level, ranging from 52% of those with primary or no formal schooling to 61% of those with secondary or post-secondary qualifications. It also increases with economic status, from 53% of the poor to 66% of those experiencing low or no lived poverty.<sup>1</sup> Urban residents (57%) trail rural dwellers (61%) in insisting on equality when it comes to jobs.

**Figure 4: Should men have priority for scarce jobs? | by demographic group**  
 | Zimbabwe | 2022

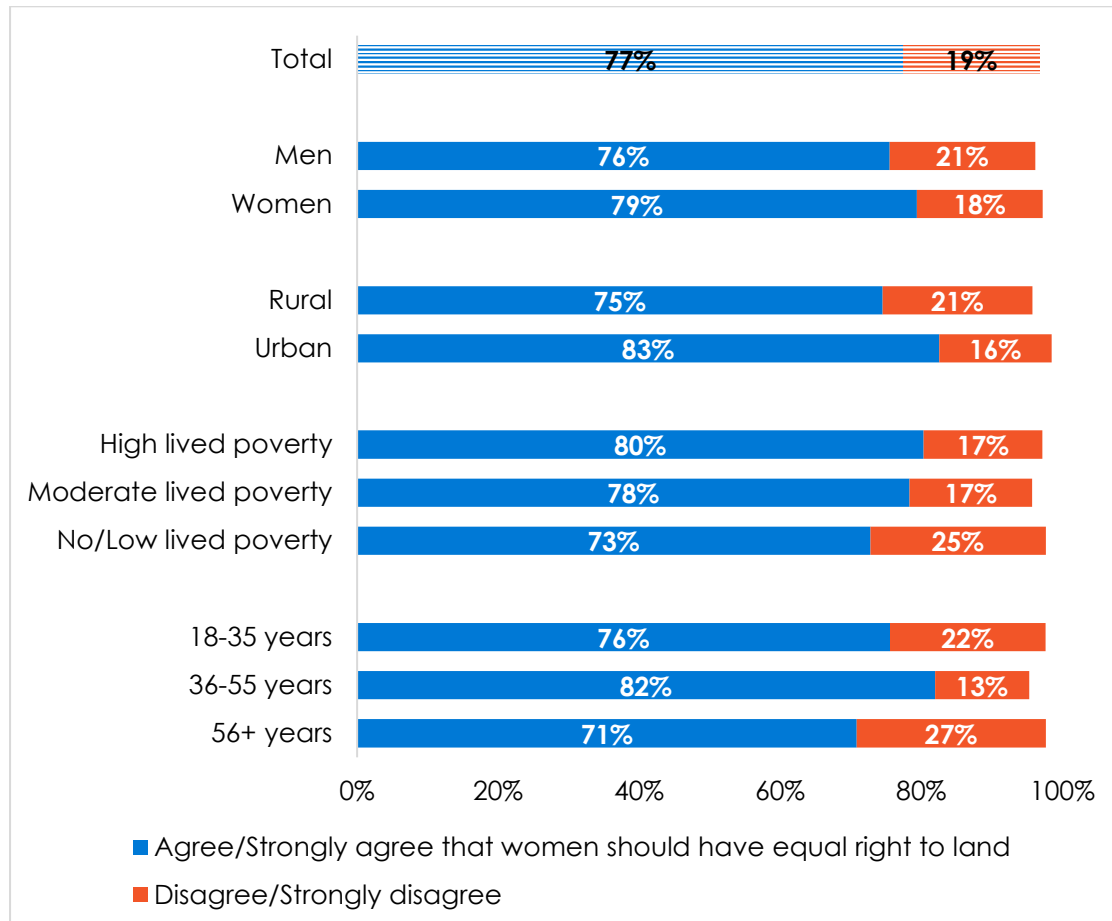


**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: When jobs are scarce, men should have more rights to a job than women.

<sup>1</sup> Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes & Patel (2022).

A larger majority (77%) endorse equal rights to own and inherit land. Only 3 percentage points (the survey's margin of error) separate women's support for equality (79%) from men's (76%) (Figure 5). But support for equality is higher among urban than rural residents (83% vs. 75%) and among poor respondents (83%) compared to their better-off counterparts (73%-78%). Older respondents are least likely to endorse equal rights to land (71%).

**Figure 5: Should women have equal rights to land? | by demographic group**  
 | Zimbabwe | 2022

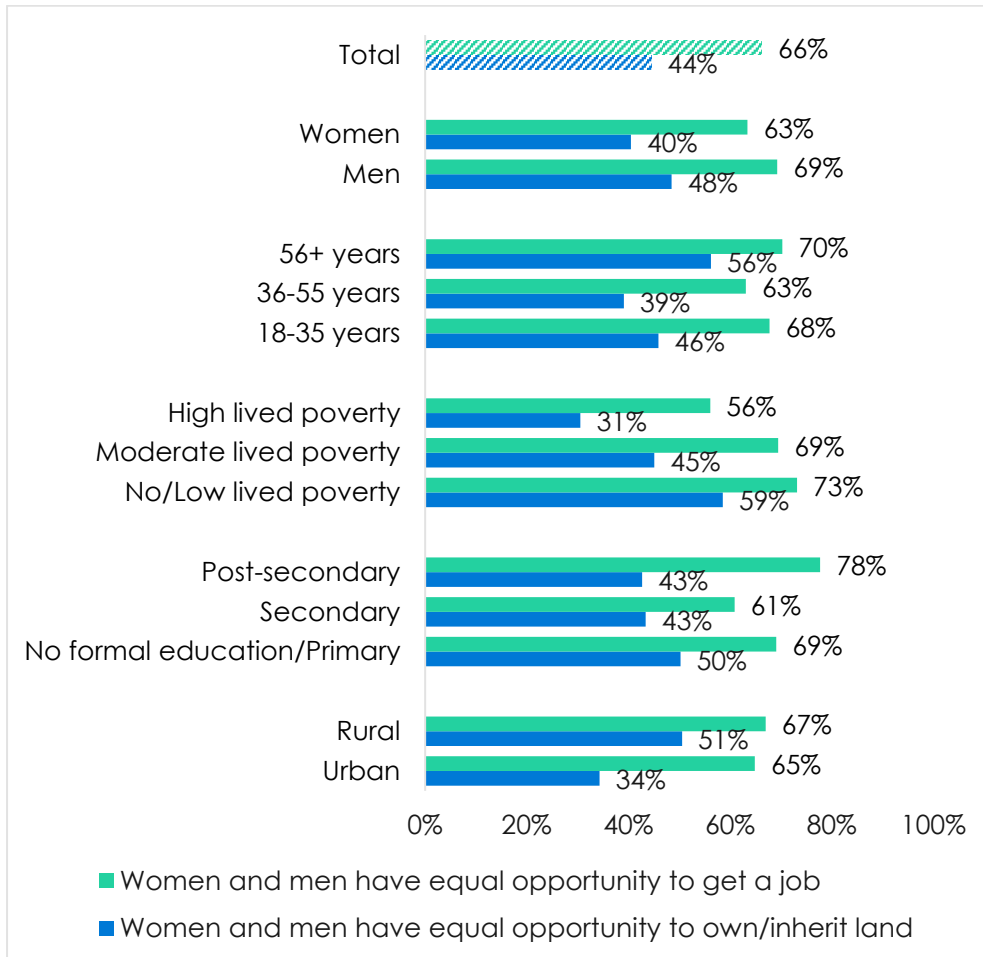


**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: Women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land.

While large majorities say women should have equal rights to jobs and land, have they achieved equality? Two-thirds of Zimbabweans (66%) say women do have the same opportunities as men to get a paying job, but fewer than half (44%) make the same claim about owning or inheriting land (Figure 6).

Fewer women than men see equality in either hiring (63% vs. 69%) or land ownership (40% vs. 48%). And the poor are less likely than the better-off to think parity has been achieved on either count. Rural residents are more likely than urbanites to report equal opportunity to own land (51% vs. 34%).

**Figure 6: Do women and men have equal opportunities to get a job and to own/inherit land?** | by demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2022



**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree:

*In our country today, women and men have equal opportunities to get a job that pays a wage or salary.*

*In our country today, women and men have equal opportunities to own and inherit land.*

(% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

## Gender equality in political participation

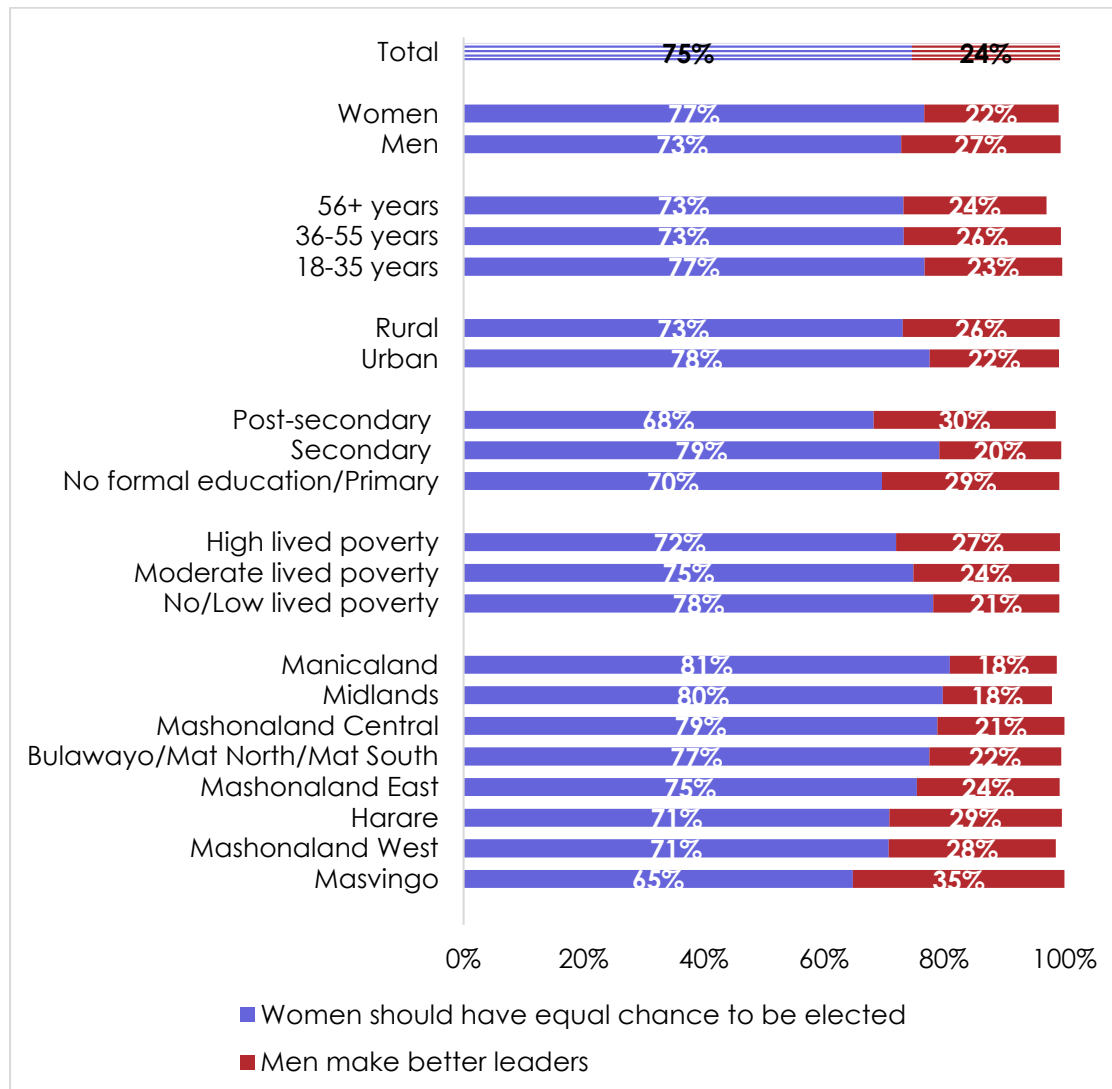
One critical aspect of gender equality is women's participation in political leadership, which helps ensure that women's voices are heard in policy making.

In Zimbabwe, three-fourths (75%) of citizens say women should have the same chance as men to vie for political office, rejecting the idea that men make better political leaders and should thus be given priority as candidates (Figure 7).

Slightly more women (77%) than men (73%) endorse equality in politics, as do younger citizens (77%) compared to their elders (73%), urban residents (78%) compared to their rural counterparts (73%), and better-off respondents (78%) compared to the poor (72%).

Majorities in all provinces of the country reject the idea that men make better political leaders and should thus be given priority as candidates, ranging from 65% in Masvingo to 81% in Manicaland.

**Figure 7: Should women have an equal chance to be elected?** | by demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2022



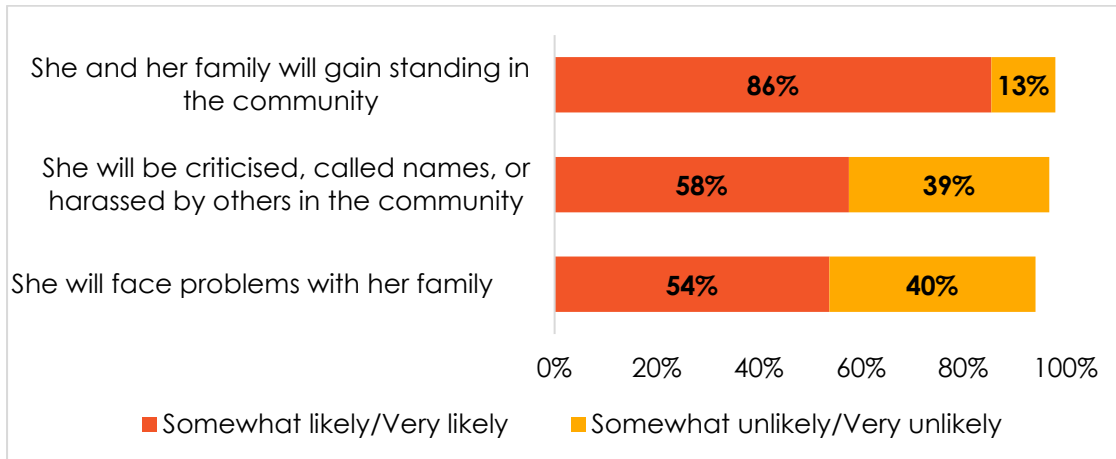
**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: Men make better political leaders than women and should be elected rather than women.  
 Statement 2: Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men.  
 (% who “agree” or “strongly agree” with each statement)

Even if she believes that voters will give her the same consideration as a male candidate, a woman may be encouraged to run for public office – or discouraged from doing so – by other consequences she expects to result from her candidacy.

On the positive side, more than four in five Zimbabweans (86%) say it is “somewhat likely” or “very likely” that a woman and her family will gain standing in the community if she runs for elected office (Figure 8).

But majorities are also clear on other potential consequences. More than half of respondents consider it likely that others in the community will criticise her, call her names, or harass her for seeking public office (58%) and that she will face problems with her family (54%) – perceptions that could give some women pause about throwing their hats in the ring.

**Figure 8: For better or for worse: How running for elected office might affect women's lives | Zimbabwe | 2022**



**Respondents were asked:** If a woman in your community runs for elected office, how likely or unlikely is it that the following things might occur?

She and her family will gain standing in the community?

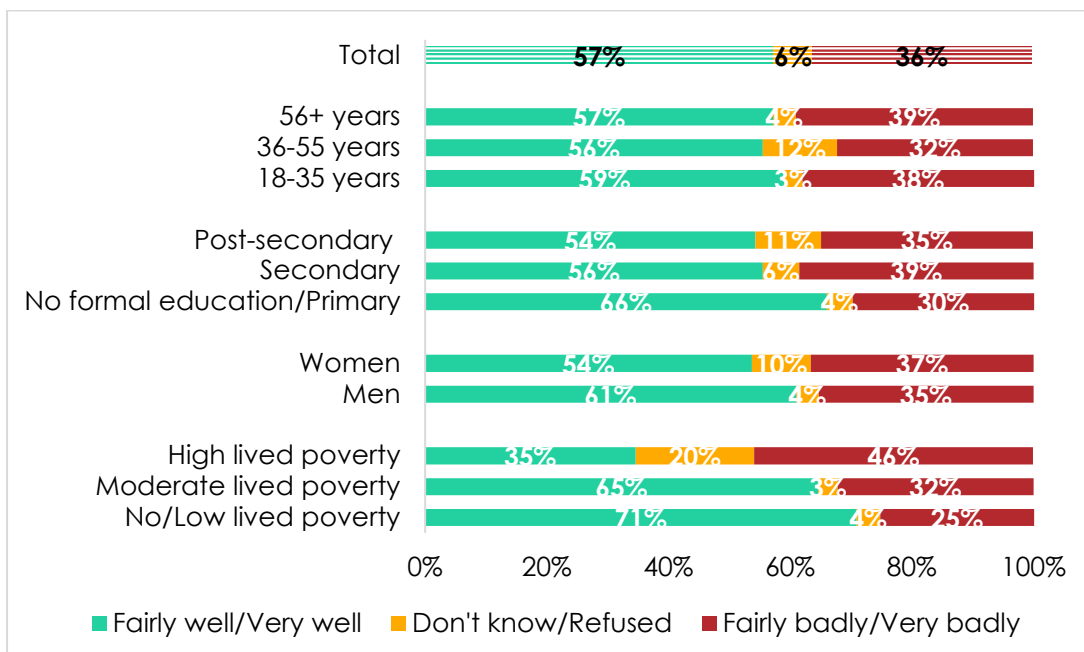
She will be criticised, called names, or harassed by others in the community?

She will face problems with her family?

### Government performance in promoting equal rights and opportunities

More than half (57%) of Zimbabweans say their government is doing a “fairly” or “very” good job of promoting equal rights and opportunities for women, while 36% disapprove of the government’s performance (Figure 9).

**Figure 9: Government performance in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women | Zimbabwe | 2022**



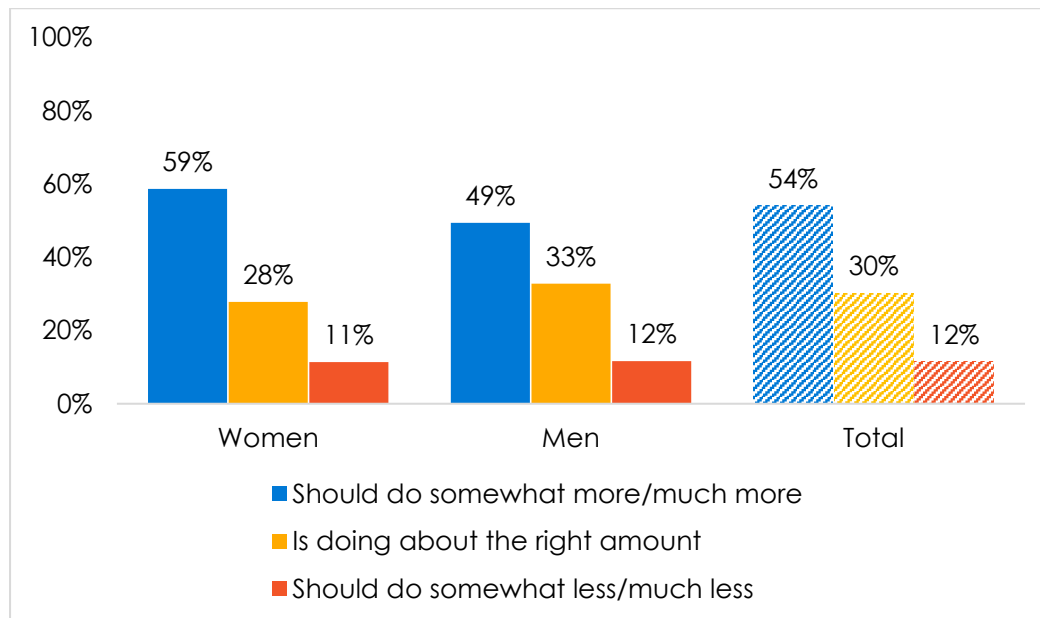
**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Promoting equal rights and opportunities for women?



Women are less likely than men to give the government's efforts a favourable assessment (54% vs. 61%). Approval ratings vary significantly by respondents' education and economic levels. Those with primary or no formal education (66%) are more likely to be satisfied with the government's efforts than those with post-secondary education (54%). But approval increases with wealth, ranging from just 35% of those experiencing high lived poverty to 71% of those experiencing no lived poverty. These findings suggest that some of the benefits of growing gender equality may not be reaching poorer populations.

Even if the government's performance ratings are generally positive, a majority (54%) of citizens think it should do "somewhat more" or "much more" to promote equal rights and opportunities for women. Three in 10 (30%) say it's doing about the right amount, while 12% think it should reduce its gender-equality efforts. Women (59%) are more likely than men (49%) to say the government should intensify its efforts (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Should the government do more or less to promote equal rights and opportunities for women? | by gender | Zimbabwe | 2022**

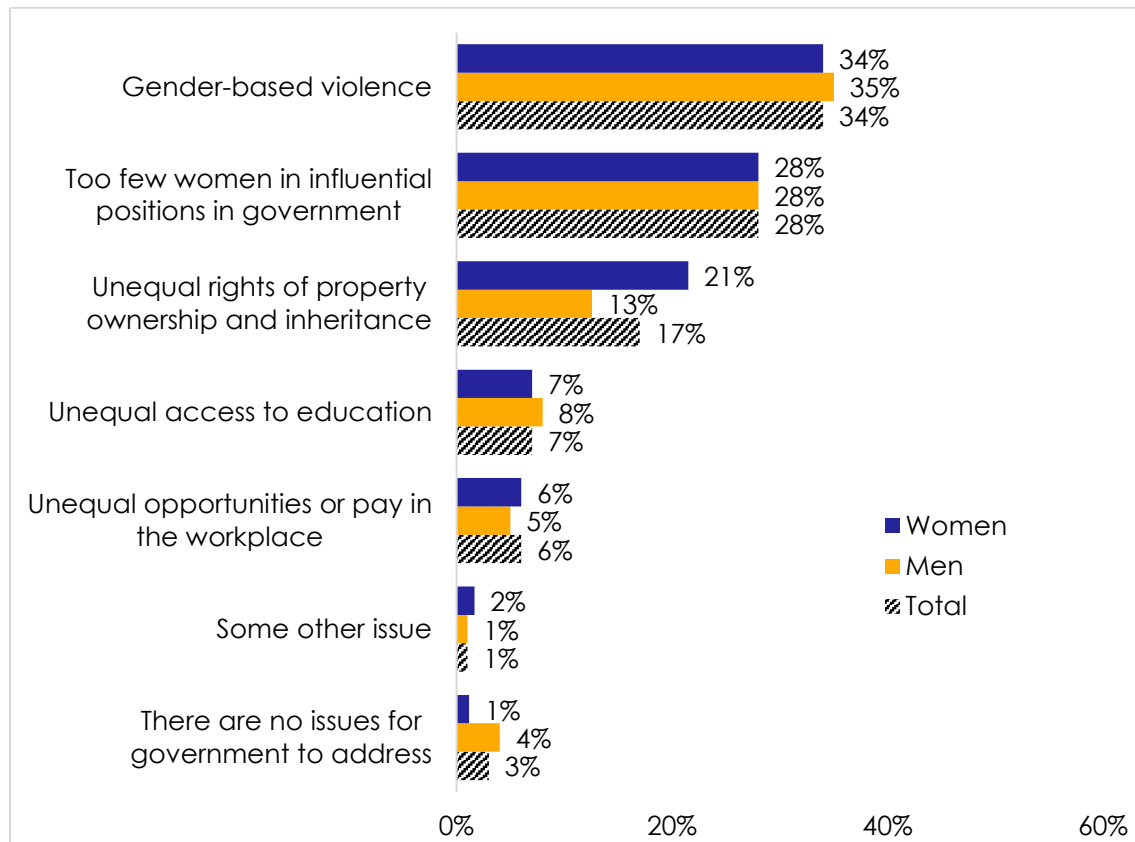


**Respondents were asked:** *In your opinion, should government and elected officials be doing more than they are doing now to advance the rights and equality of women, or should they be doing less, or are they doing about the right amount?*

Asked what they consider the most important issue related to women's rights and equality for the government and society to address, survey respondents are most likely to cite gender-based violence as their top priority (34%), followed by too few women in influential positions in government (28%), unequal rights of property ownership and inheritance (17%), unequal access to education (7%), and unequal pay or opportunities in the workplace (6%) (Figure 11).

Women and men hold very similar views on gender priorities except that men are less likely to mention unequal property rights (13% vs. 21% of women).

**Figure 11: Most important women’s-rights issue** | by gender | Zimbabwe | 2022



**Respondents were asked:** *In your opinion, which of the following issues related to women's rights and equality do you think is the most important for our government and society to address?*

## Conclusion

Most Zimbabweans express support for gender equality in access to paying jobs, land ownership, and the right to run for public office. And survey findings show gender-equal educational achievement and financial decision making. But women's-rights activists will also note that almost four in 10 citizens would give men priority in hiring, that fewer than half think equal rights in land ownership have been achieved, and that majorities consider it likely that women who seek elective office will face criticism, harassment, and family problems.

A majority of Zimbabweans approve of the government's performance in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women. But a majority also say that more needs to be done, highlighting gender-based violence and women's participation in political leadership as the most important women's-rights issues that the government and society must address.

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**Simangele Moyo-Nyede** is principal researcher for Mass Public Opinion Institute in Harare, Zimbabwe. Email: [simangelemn@mpoi.org.zw](mailto:simangelemn@mpoi.org.zw).

**Jonathan Kugarakuripi** is research officer for Mass Public Opinion Institute in Harare, Zimbabwe. Email: [jonathank@mpoi.org.zw](mailto:jonathank@mpoi.org.zw).

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Financial support for Afrobarometer is provided by Sweden via the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) via the U.S. Institute of Peace, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Open Society Foundations, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the European Union, the National Endowment for Democracy, the Mastercard Foundation, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, the University of California San Diego, the Global Centre for Pluralism, the World Bank Group, Freedom House, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda, GIZ, and Humanity United.

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