



Dispatch No. 706 | 27 September 2023

# Zambians endorse gender equality, want greater government effort for women's rights

**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 706 | Edward Chibwili**

## Summary

Despite constitutional imperatives and government policies aimed at achieving gender equality, Zambian women continue to trail men in a variety of spheres. Women hold only 15% of parliamentary seats and 16% of ministerial positions. While they make up 86% of the informal labour force, only 13% of firms have female top managers (World Economic Forum, 2023; Tembo, 2022).

The Constitution attaches importance to valuing women and men equally and to their rights to shape the country's political, legal, economic, and social direction (Government of Zambia, 2016). The National Gender Policy was revised in 2014 to address gender imbalances, strengthening calls for equal opportunities for women and men to participate in and contribute to national development, and the Gender Equity and Equality Act of 2015 reinforces the legal framework to eradicate all forms of discrimination against women and girls (Ministry of Gender and Child Development, 2015, 2019).

Despite this policy framework, the country's ranking in the Global Gender Gap Index declined in 2023, slipping from 62<sup>nd</sup> to 85<sup>th</sup> place out of 146 countries (World Economic Forum, 2023).

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 Chibwili, 2023).

Survey findings show that Zambian women continue to trail men in educational attainment and ownership of key assets such as mobile phones and bank accounts. Majorities endorse equal rights for women in employment, land ownership, and political leadership. But significant minorities consider it likely that female candidates for public office might suffer criticism, harassment, or family problems.

Most Zambians approve of the government's performance in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women, though they also say greater efforts are needed.

## 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. Nine rounds of surveys have been completed in up to 42 countries since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2023) cover 39 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Zambia, led by the Institute of Economic and Social Research (INESOR), a research wing of the University of Zambia, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,200 Zambian adults between 3 August and 7 September 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 surveys were conducted in Zambia in 1999, 2003, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2014, 2017, and 2020.

## Key findings

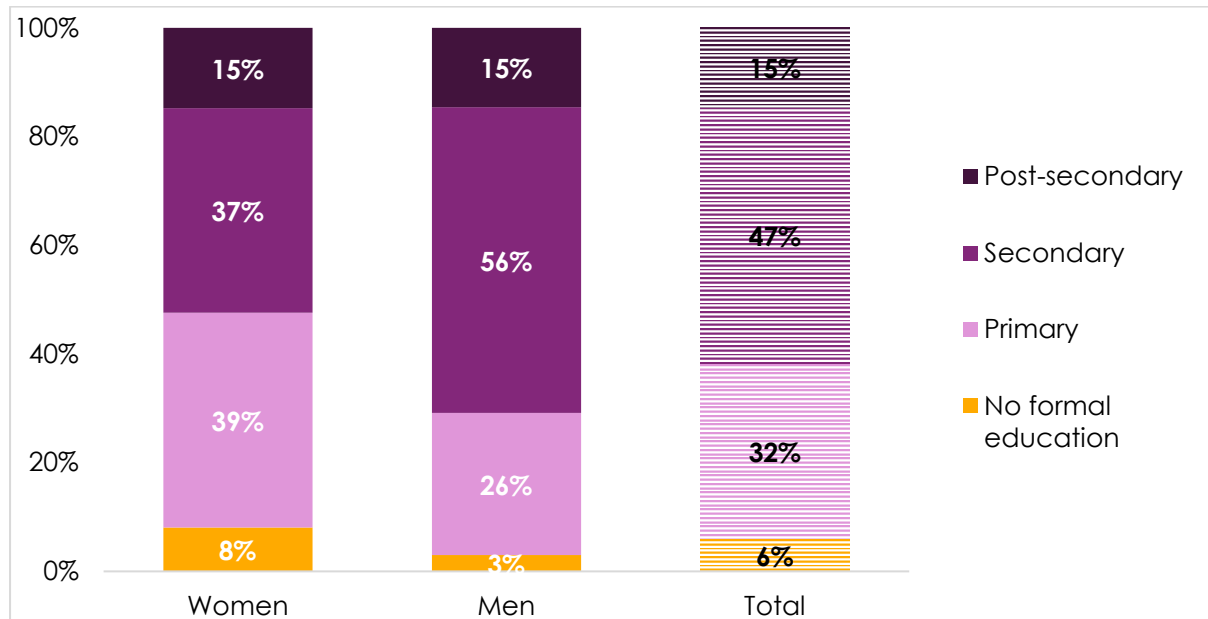
- In Zambia, equal proportions of women and men have post-secondary education (15%), but women are significantly less likely than men to have secondary schooling (37% vs. 56%).
- Women trail men in control over key assets such as a mobile phone, bank account, computer, and motor vehicle.
  - But the data indicate no major gender gap when it comes to control over how household money is spent.
- Large majorities say women should have the same rights as men to get paying jobs (72%) and to own and inherit land (81%).
  - Most citizens say women today do enjoy equal rights when it comes to jobs (70%) and land ownership (74%).
- Three-quarters (76%) of Zambians say women should have the same chance as men of being elected to public office.
  - Eight in 10 citizens (81%) think a woman who runs for public office will gain standing in the community, although 43% think it's likely she will be criticised or harassed by others in the community, and 33% say she will probably face problems with her family.
- More than seven in 10 respondents (72%) say the Zambian government is doing a "fairly good" or "very good" job of promoting equal rights and opportunities for women.
  - At the same time, about two-thirds (65%) say the government should do more to promote gender equality.
- Citizens cite gender-based violence as the most important women's-rights issue that the government and society must address, followed by unequal access to education, too few women in influential positions in government, and unequal opportunities or pay in the workplace.

## Education and control of assets

Equal proportions of Zambian women and men report having post-secondary education (15%), while more men than women have secondary schooling (56% vs. 37%). Women are more likely than men to have primary education (39% vs. 26%) or to lack formal education altogether (8% vs. 3%) (Figure 1).

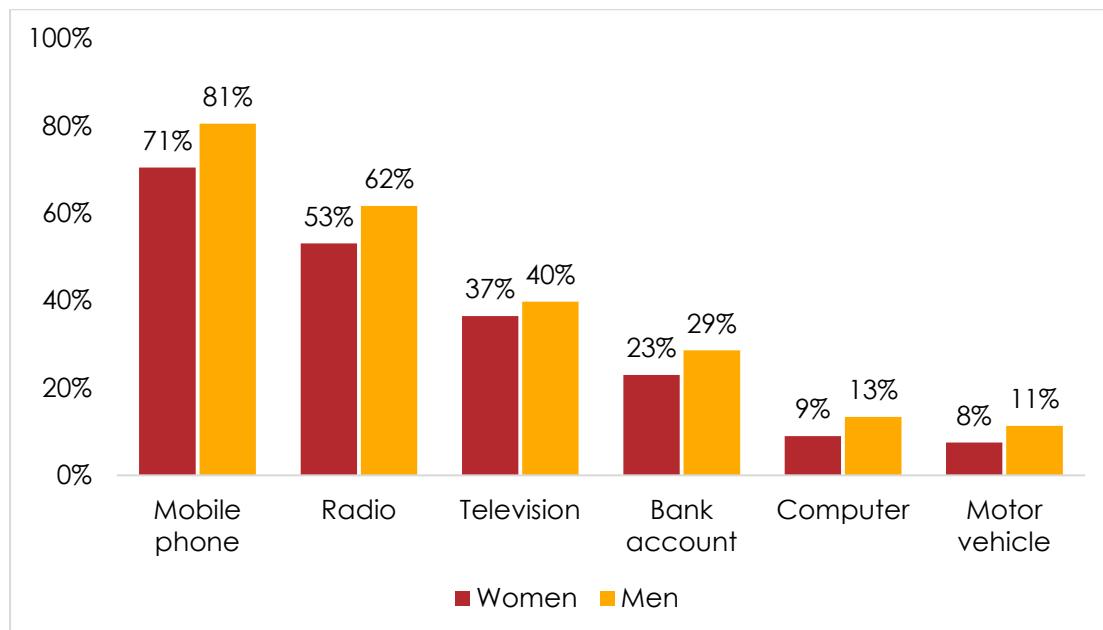
Women are also less likely than men to have control over key assets (Figure 2). Fewer women own a mobile phone (71% vs. 81% of men), a radio (53% vs. 62%), a television (37% vs. 40%), a bank account (23% vs. 29%), a computer (9% vs. 13%), and a motor vehicle (8% vs. 11%).

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



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

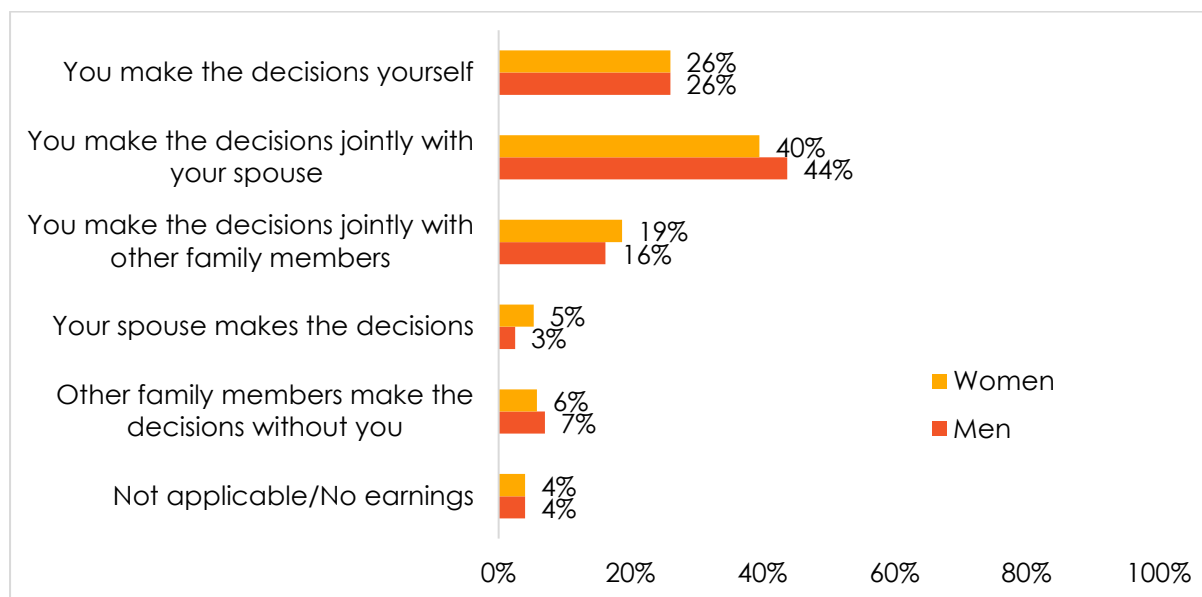
**Figure 2: Asset ownership** | by gender | Zambia | 2022



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

When it comes to financial autonomy, women and men differ only marginally (Figure 3). They are equally likely to report that they make decisions themselves about how to use money (26%), while slightly fewer women than men say they make decisions jointly with their spouses (40% vs. 44%) and slightly more say they decide jointly with other family members (19% vs. 16%).

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

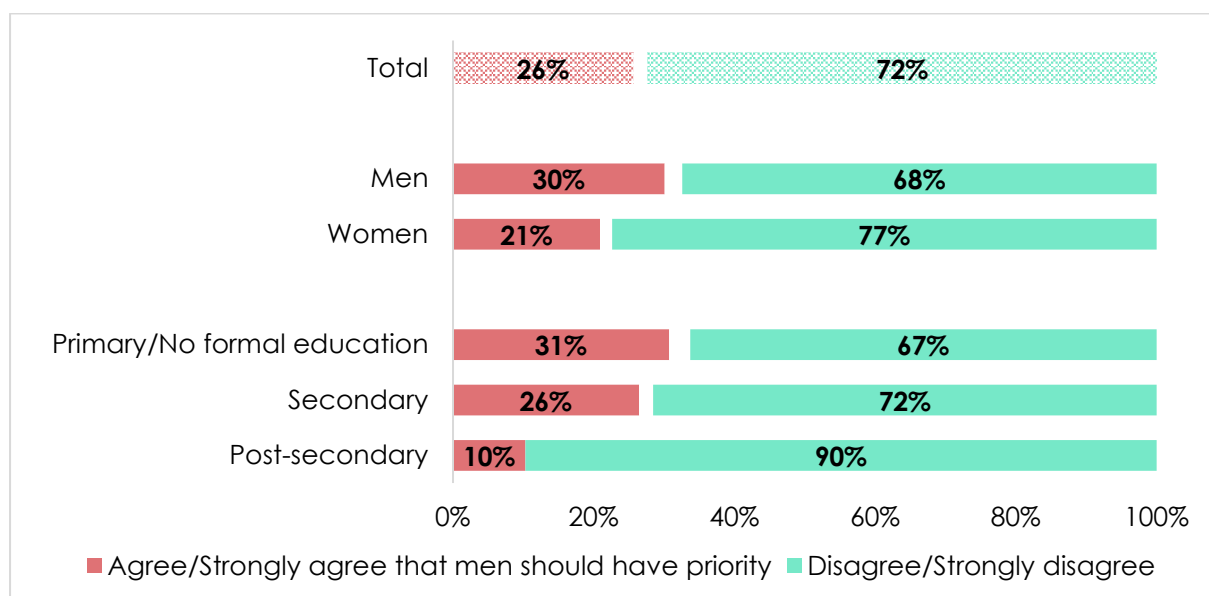


**Respondents were asked:** What is the main way that decisions are made about how to use any money that you have or earn, for example from a job, a business, selling things, or other activities?

### Rights to a job and land

More than seven in 10 Zambians (72%) reject the idea that men should be given priority over women in hiring when jobs are scarce (Figure 4). Men are somewhat less supportive of equality in hiring than women (68% vs. 77%). Support for equality increases with respondents' education level, ranging from 67% of those with primary schooling or less to 90% of those with post-secondary qualifications.

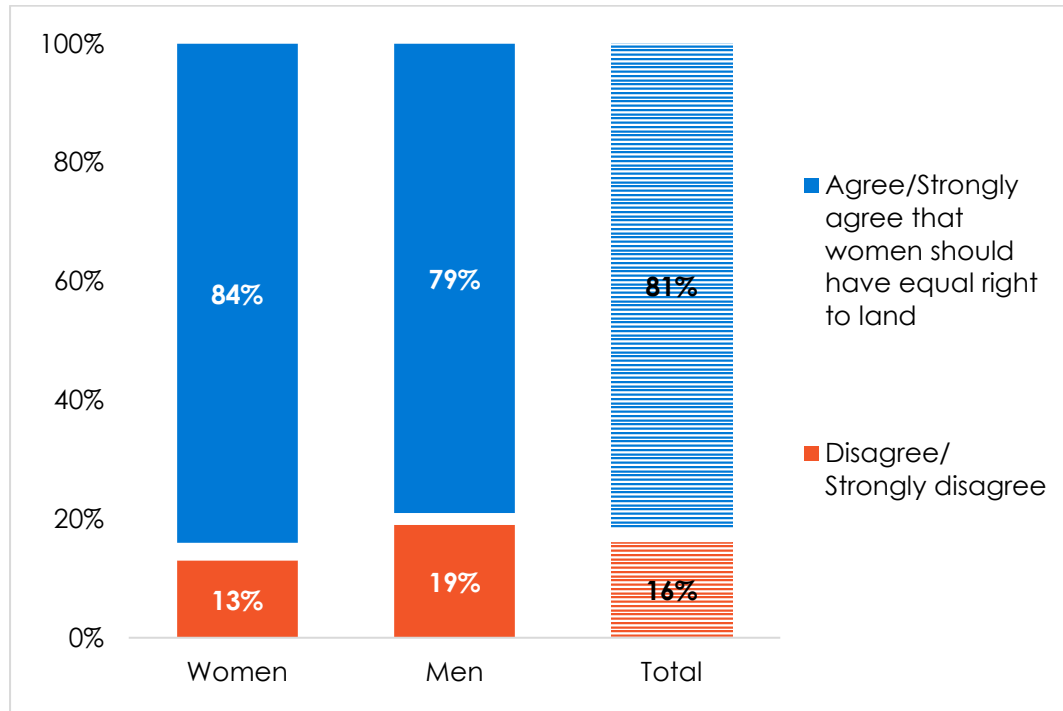
**Figure 4: Should men have priority when jobs are scarce? | by gender and education | Zambia | 2022**



**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.

Most Zambians (81%) also think women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land. Again, men are less likely than women to believe in this form of equality (79% vs. 84%) (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Should women have equal rights to land?** | by gender | Zambia | 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.

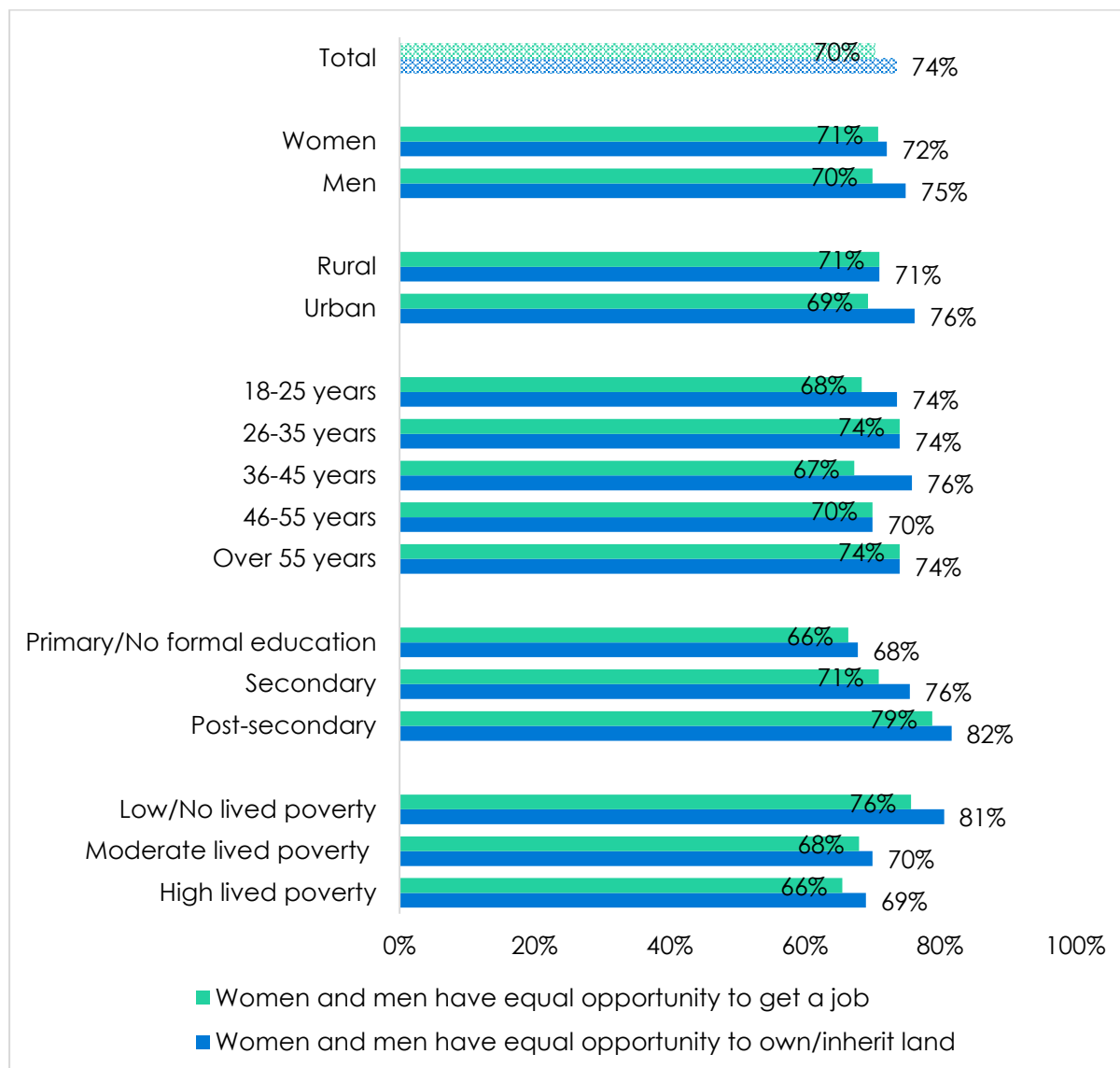
While large majorities say women should have equal rights to jobs and land, are those rights a reality in Zambia today? Seven in 10 Zambians (70%) say women have the same opportunities as men to get a paying job, and 74% say they have the same opportunities to own and inherit land (Figure 6).

Women and men offer similar assessments of existing equality in hiring and land ownership, while rural respondents are less likely to perceive gender equality in land ownership and inheritance than urbanites (71% vs. 76%).

On both indicators, respondents who have primary schooling or less and those who are poor (i.e. those experiencing high lived poverty<sup>1</sup>) are less likely to perceive gender equality than their more educated and better-off counterparts.

<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 and Patel (2022).

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

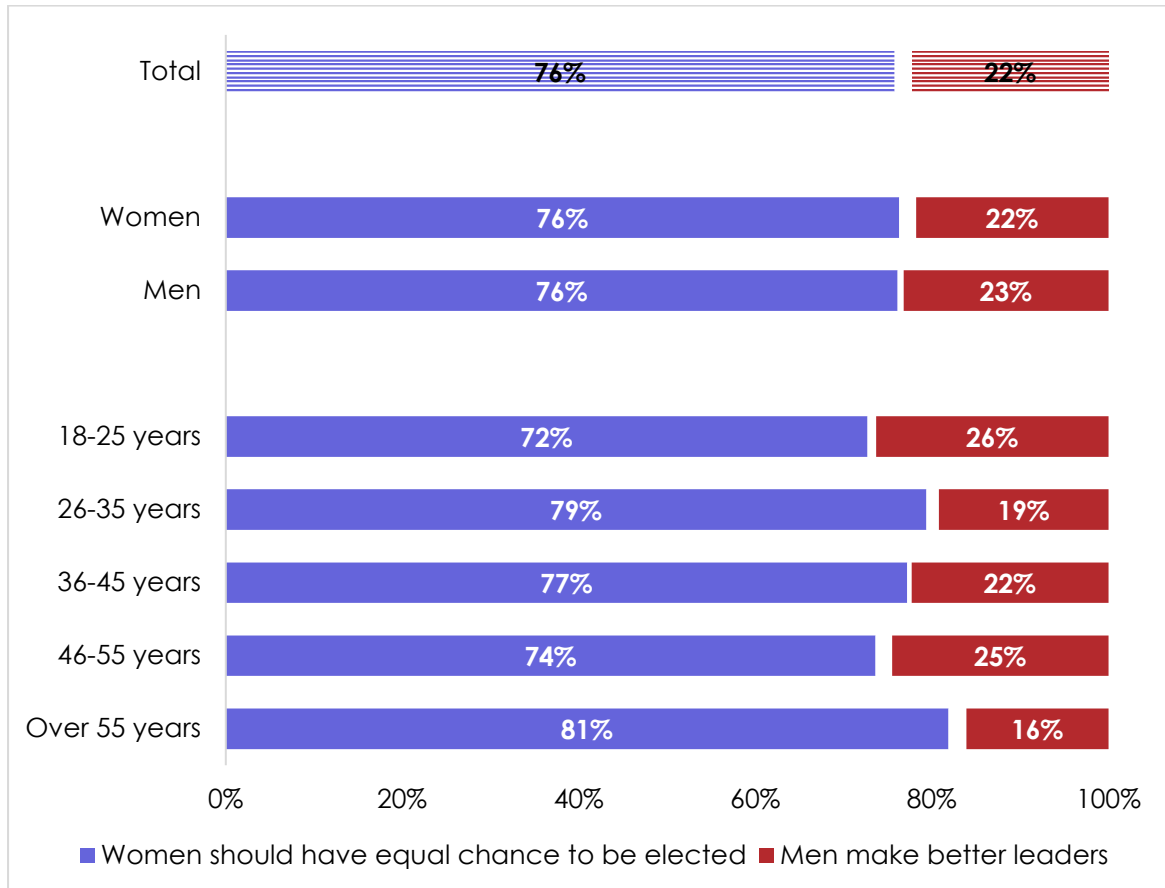
(% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

### 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 Zambia, three-quarters (76%) of citizens say women should have the same chance as men to contest for political office (Figure 7). Equal proportions of women and men endorse equality in politics, while the oldest respondents (81% of those over age 55) are more supportive of equality in politics than the youngest (72% of 18- to 25-year-olds).

**Figure 7: Should women have an equal chance to be elected?** | by gender  
 | Zambia | 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.

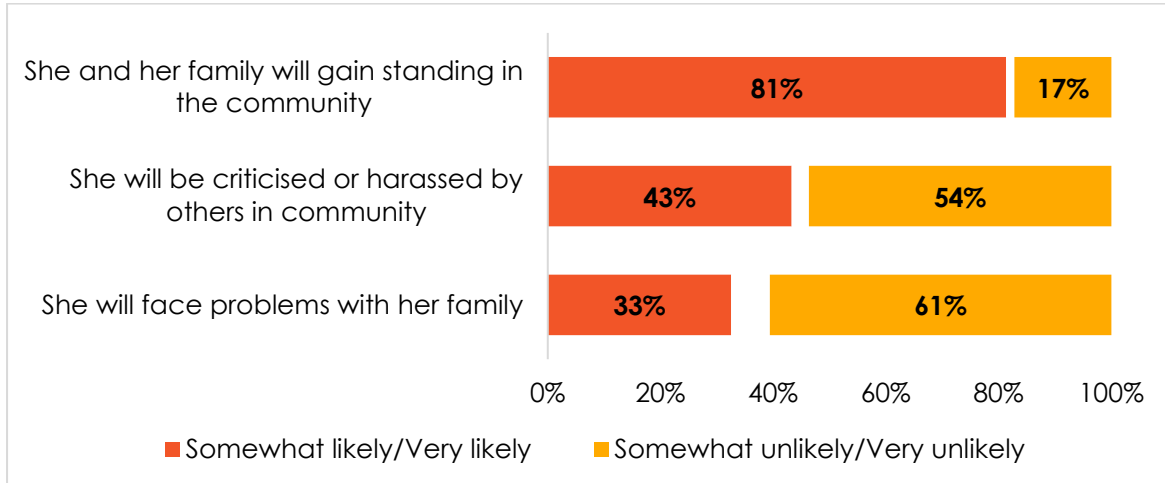
Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It’s easy and free at [www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis](http://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis).

On the positive side, 81% of Zambians believe that a woman and her family will gain standing in the community if she runs for elective office (Figure 8).

But more than four in 10 respondents (43%) consider it “somewhat likely” or “very likely” that others in the community will criticise her, call her names, or harass her for seeking public office, while 33% think she

will probably face problems with her family. Women and men hold very similar views on these questions. Such negative expectations, while not in the majority, could add to some women’s reservations about entering the political arena.

**Figure 8: For better or for worse: How running for elective office might affect women's lives | Zambia | 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?*

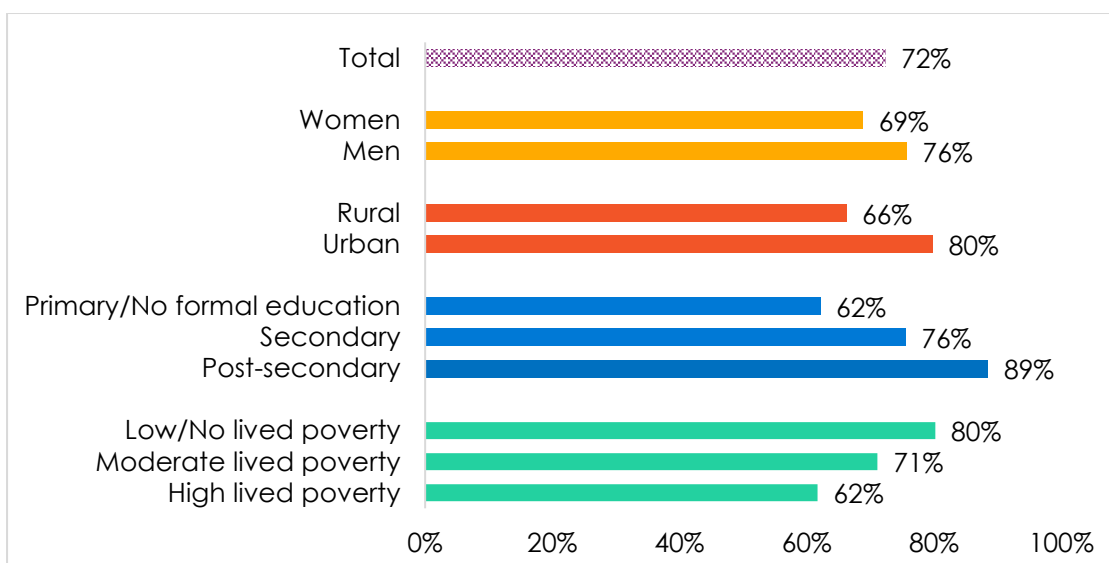
*She will be criticised, called names, or harassed by others in the community?*

*She will face problems with her family?*

### Government performance on promoting equal rights and opportunities

Overall, almost three-fourths (72%) of Zambians say their government is doing a “fairly good” or “very good” job of promoting equal rights and opportunities for women (Figure 9), while 18% disapprove of the government's performance. Women (69%) are less likely than men (76%) to give the government a positive mark on gender equality.

**Figure 9: Approval of government performance on promoting equal rights and opportunities for women | Zambia | 2022**



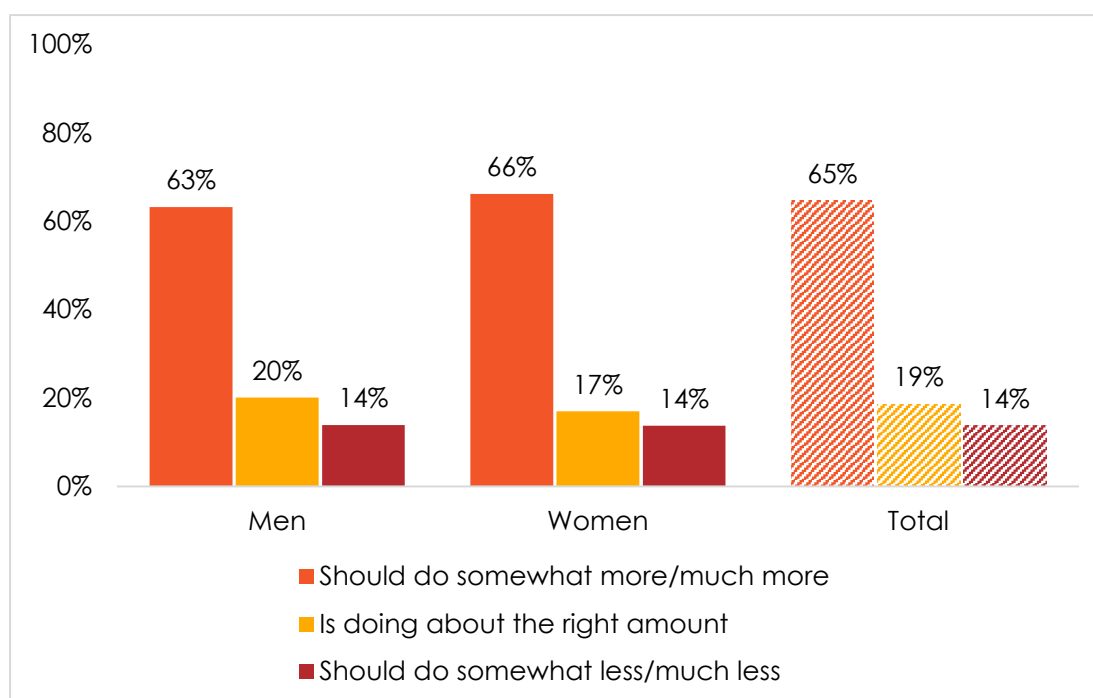
**Respondents were asked:** *How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Promoting equal rights and opportunities for women? (% who say “fairly well” or “very well”)*



Approval ratings are also significantly higher in cities than in rural areas (80% vs. 66%) and vary even more strongly based on respondents' education and economic levels. Citizens with post-secondary education (89%) are far more likely to be satisfied with the government's efforts on gender equality than those with secondary (76%) or primary schooling or less (62%). And approval increases with wealth, ranging from 62% of those experiencing high lived poverty to 80% of those with low or no lived poverty. These findings suggest that some of the benefits of growing gender equality may not be reaching rural, less educated, and poorer populations.

Even if the government's performance ratings are generally positive, about two-thirds (65%) of citizens – including 63% of men – think the government should do “somewhat more” or “much more” to promote equal rights and opportunities for women. About one in five (19%) say it's doing about the right amount, while 14% say it should do less (Figure 10).

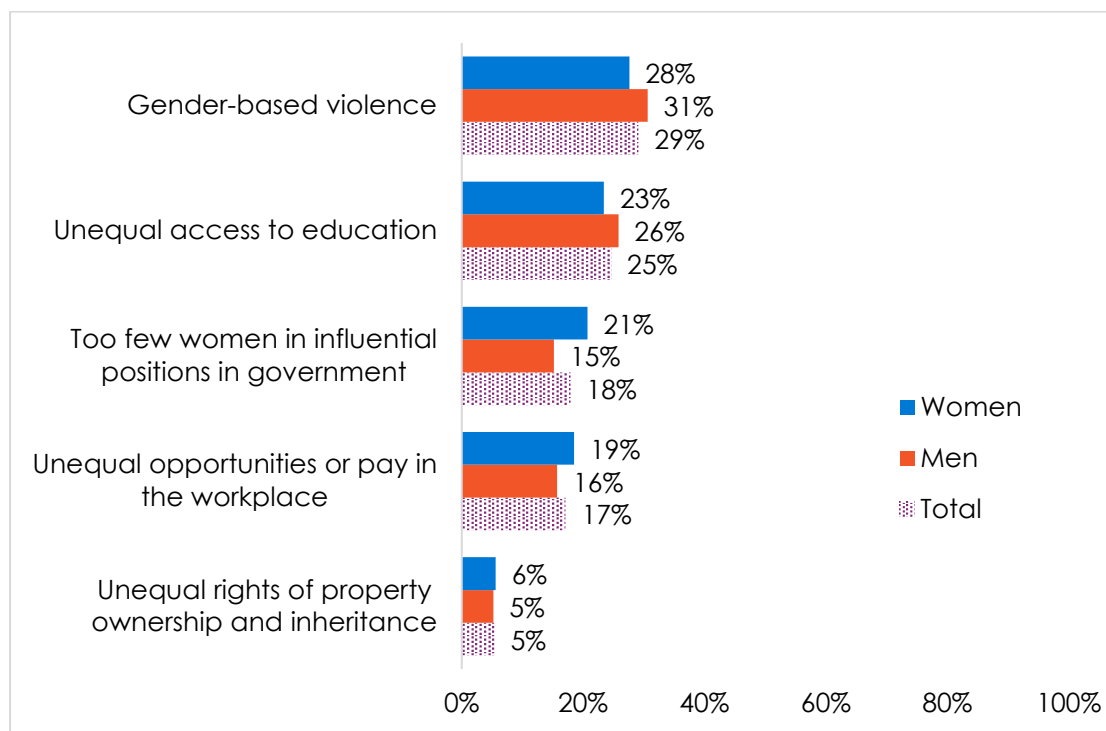
**Figure 10: Should the government do more or less to promote equal rights and opportunities for women? | by gender | Zambia | 2022**



**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 that the government and society must address, Zambians cite gender-based violence as their top priority (29%), followed by unequal access to education (25%), too few women in influential positions in government (18%), and unequal opportunities or pay in the workplace (17%) (Figure 11). Women and men differ little in their priorities.

**Figure 11: Most important women's-rights issue** | by gender | Zambia | 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

Although survey findings show that women trail men in educational attainment and ownership of key assets, most Zambians express positive attitudes toward equal rights for women in employment, land ownership, and political leadership.

But they also point to challenges that require further efforts to achieve gender equality. While endorsing gender equality in politics, many Zambians think a woman who runs for office is likely to face criticism, harassment, and family problems – perceptions that may discourage some women from seeking elective office. Furthermore, gender-based violence remains an urgent issue for the government and society to address, according to many of those who were surveyed.

Overall, most Zambians are pleased with the government's efforts to promote equal rights and opportunities for women, but satisfaction is considerably lower among rural, less educated, and poorer populations, suggesting that gains in gender equality may not be benefiting all parts of society equally. And a strong majority of citizens say the government needs to do more – a solid base for further action as gender equality is central to Zambia's social, economic, and political progress.

## References

- Chibwili, E. (2023). Zambians see gender-based violence as a top priority, though many consider domestic violence a private matter. Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 685.
- Government of Zambia. (2016). Constitution of Zambia (Amendment) No. 2 of 2016.
- Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2023). Zambia.
- Mattes, R., & Patel, J. (2022). Lived poverty resurgent. Afrobarometer Policy Paper 84.
- Ministry of Gender and Child Development. (2015). The gender equity and equality act 22 of 2015.
- Ministry of Gender and Child Development. (2019). Progress report on the implementation of the Beijing declaration and platform for action (1995) and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the general assembly (2000).
- Tembo, Z. (2022). How committed is Zambia's new government to achieving gender equality? Democracy in Africa. 14 November 2022.
- World Economic Forum. (2023). Global gender gap report 2023.

**Edward Chibwili** is a research fellow at the Institute of Economic and Social Research (INESOR), a research wing of the University of Zambia. Email: [edward.chibwili@unza.zm](mailto:edward.chibwili@unza.zm).

Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, non-partisan research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 35 countries is provided by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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 - Africa, Luminare, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Mastercard Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the European Union Commission, the World Bank Group, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda, the Embassy of Sweden in Zimbabwe, the Global Centre for Pluralism, and GIZ.

Donations help Afrobarometer give voice to African citizens. Please consider making a contribution (at [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org)) or contact Felix Biga ([felixbiga@afrobarometer.org](mailto:felixbiga@afrobarometer.org)) or Runyararo Munetsi ([runyararo@afrobarometer.org](mailto:runyararo@afrobarometer.org)) to discuss institutional funding.

Follow our releases on #VoicesAfrica.



Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 706 | 27 September 2023