



In Malawi, women lag in political participation; support for women's leadership declines

Afrobarometer Dispatch No.14 | Happy Kayuni

Summary

Despite having been led by southern Africa's first female president, Malawi has made little progress toward equal political participation by women, Afrobarometer's most recent survey suggests. Women in Malawi remain less likely than men to engage in political activities, and public support for women's leadership has declined.

From a legal perspective, Malawi has made substantial progress in enhancing gender equality. Malawi's Constitution states that women enjoy the same rights as men, and Malawi is a signatory to regional and international protocols encouraging gender equality, such as the 2008 Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development. The country has enacted several laws aimed at building gender equality, most notably the Gender Equality Act (2012). The Ministry of Women and Child Development and civil society organisations were instrumental in promoting women candidates in the 2009 and 2014 elections, mainly through their 50-50 campaign. Despite these endeavours and Malawi's first female president (Joyce Banda) from April 2012 to March 2014, survey results show no significant headway toward increasing women's participation in politics.

Perhaps reflecting public dissatisfaction with Banda's performance as president, women's representation in Parliament decreased to 17% in the 2014 elections, after having risen from 6% in 1994 to 22% in 2009.

Together, these election and survey results suggest a need for a more robust approach to tackle gender inequality in political participation in Malawi.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is an African-led, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 30 countries in Africa. Five rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2013, and Round 6 surveys are currently under way (2014-2015). Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples of between 1,200 and 2,400 respondents.

The Afrobarometer team in Malawi, led by the University of Malawi's Centre for Social Research, interviewed 2,400 adult Malawians between 24 March and 5 April 2014. A sample of this size yields results with a margin of error of +/-2% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Malawi in 1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, and 2012.

Key findings

- Malawian women are less likely than men to discuss politics and to be interested in public affairs. While almost eight in 10 men (79%) say they discuss politics "occasionally" or "frequently," only six in 10 women (65%) say the same. Interest in public affairs shows the same gap, 77% for men vs. 64% for women. These gender gaps have persisted or increased since 2002.

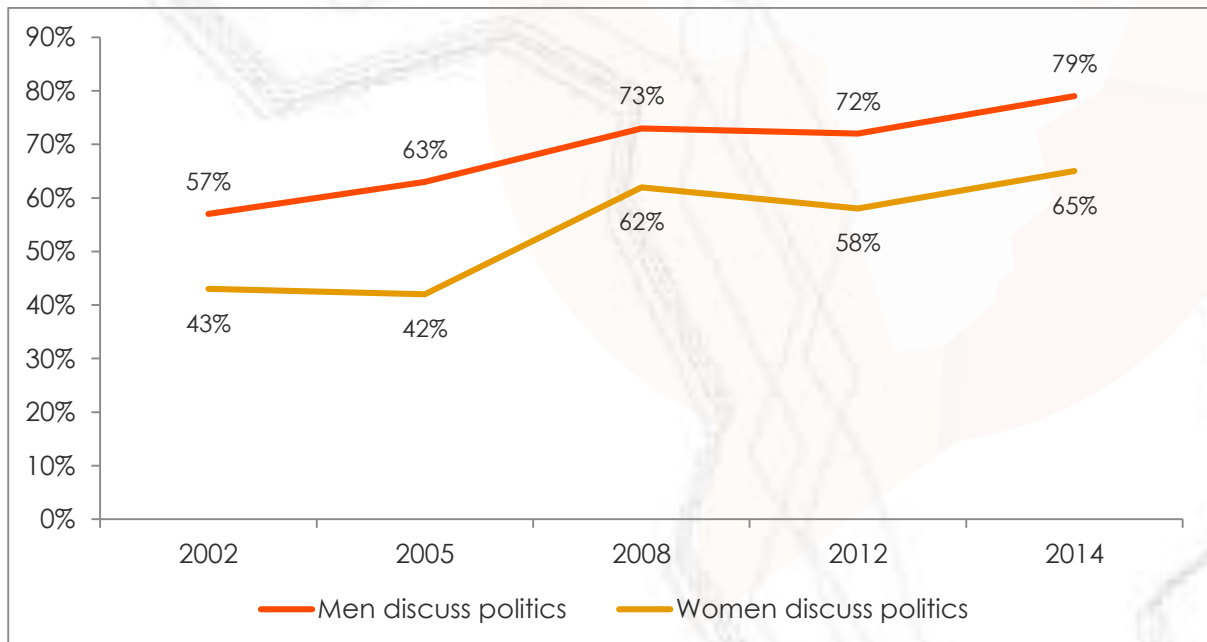
- Women in Malawi are less likely than men to participate in political activities. While more than half (56%) of men say they attended a political rally in the previous year, only 44% of women did so. Women were also 8-12 percentage points less likely than men to attend a campaign meeting, persuade others to vote a certain way, or work for a political candidate.
- The proportion of Malawians who say women should have the same chance as men of being elected to political office has declined since 2012, from 78% to 61%.

Women lag in political engagement and interest

Survey results show that women in Malawi are less likely than men to discuss politics and to be interested in public affairs. While 79% of men indicate that they discuss politics “occasionally” or “frequently,” only 65% of women do so (Figure 1). This gap has shown little improvement over the past decade (14 percentage points in 2002 and in 2014). It is noteworthy that despite this persistent gap, the percentage of women who discuss politics has generally been growing, from 43% in 2002 to 65% in 2014.

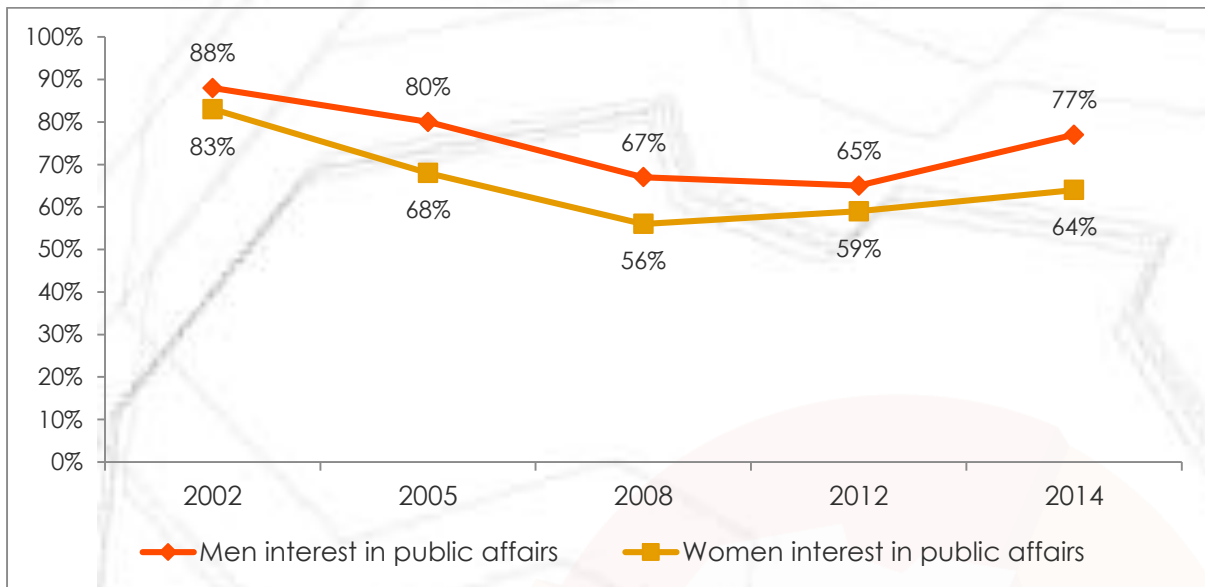
Interest in public affairs shows a similar gender gap, which has widened from 5 percentage points in 2002 to 13 points in 2014 (Figure 2). For both genders, interest in public affairs declined significantly between 2002 and 2012 before rebounding in the 2014 survey.

Figure 1: Participation in political discussion | by gender | 2002-2014



Respondents were asked: *When you get together with your friends or family, would you say you discuss political matters? (% who said “frequently” or “occasionally”)*

Figure 2: Interest in public affairs | by gender | 2002-2014

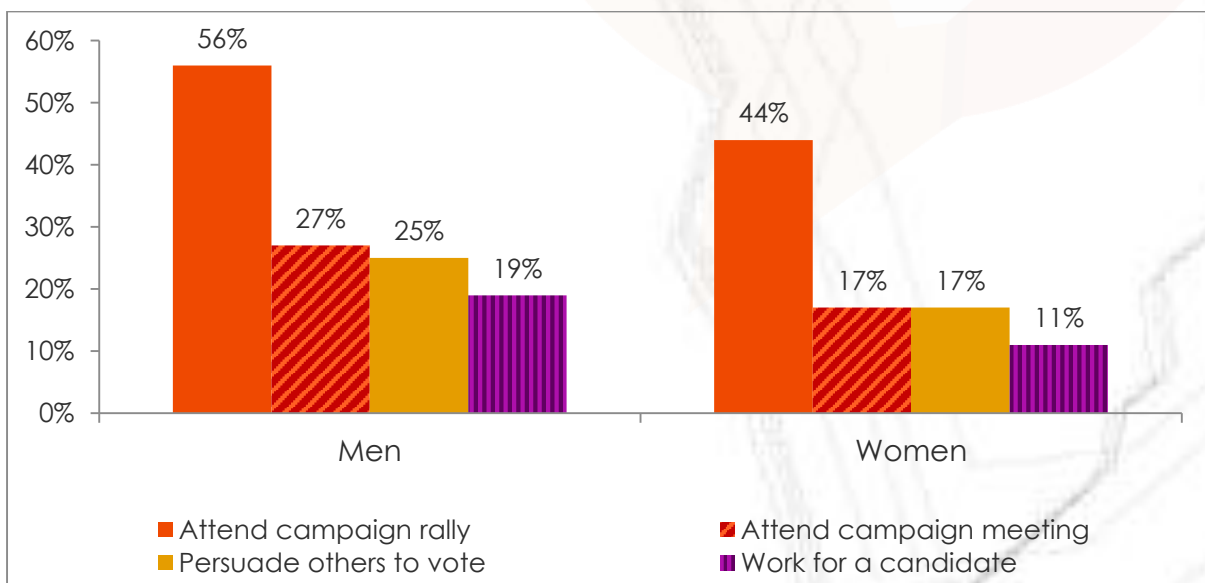


Respondents were asked: How interested would you say you are in public affairs? (% who said “very interested” or “somewhat interested”)

Women lag in political participation and activism

Women in Malawi are less likely than men to participate in political activities and activism (Figure 3). More than half (56%) of male respondents say they attended a political rally in the previous year, whilst only 44% of female respondents did so. Similar gaps are reflected in attendance at campaign meetings (27% men, 17% women), persuading others to vote for a candidate (25% men, 17% women), and working for a political candidate (19% men, 11% women).

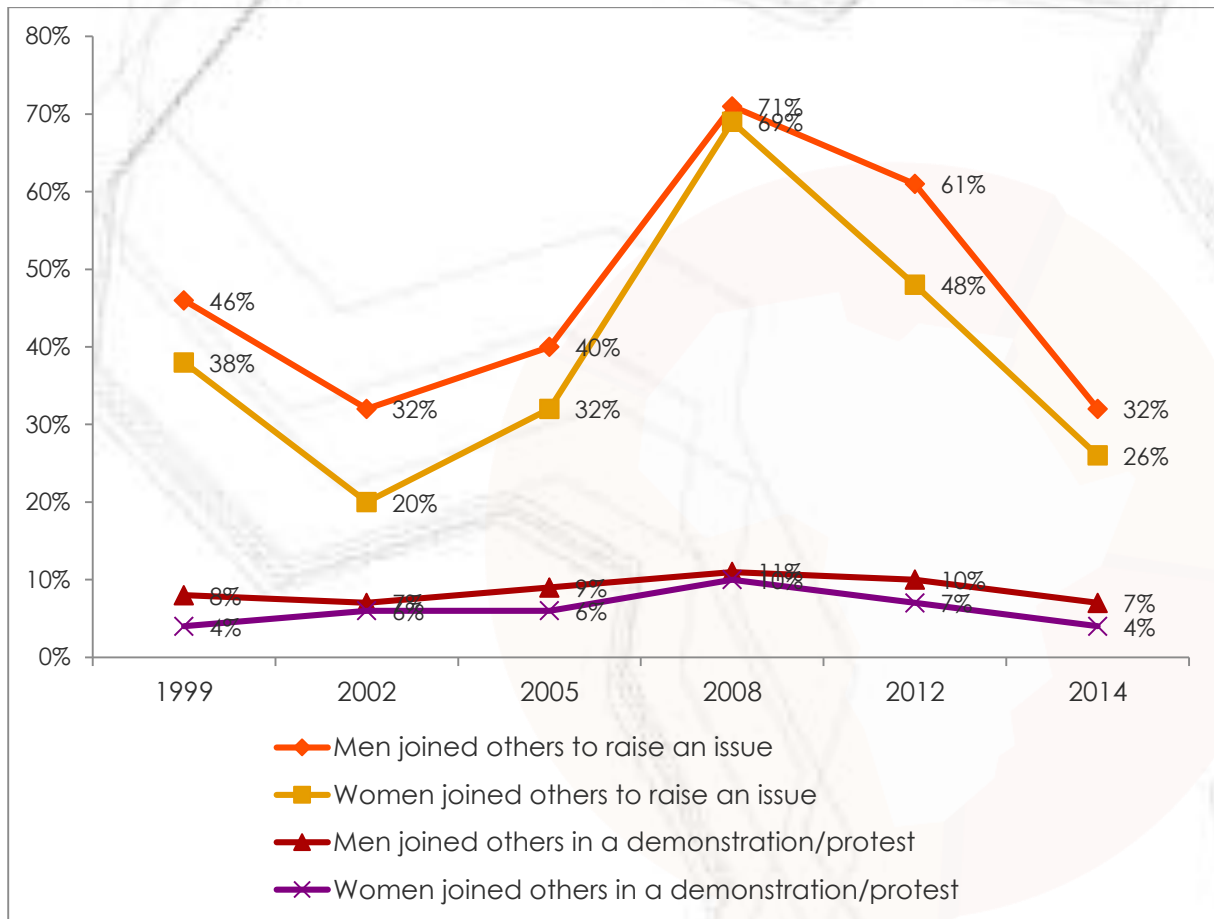
Figure 3: Electoral campaign activism | by gender | 2014



Respondents were asked: Thinking about the last national election in 2009, did you: Attend a campaign rally? Attend a campaign meeting? Try to persuade others to vote for a certain presidential or legislative candidate or political party? Work for a candidate or party? (% who said “yes”)

Furthermore, women are somewhat less likely than men to join others to raise an issue or to participate in a demonstration or protest march (Figure 4). The gap between women and men who join others to raise an issue has not changed much (8 percentage points in 1999, 6 points in 2014). It is smaller than the average gap of 14 percentage points (59% men, 45% women) across 34 African countries in the 2011-2013 Afrobarometer survey.

Figure 4: Joining others to raise an issue or participate in a demonstration/protest march | by gender | 1999-2014

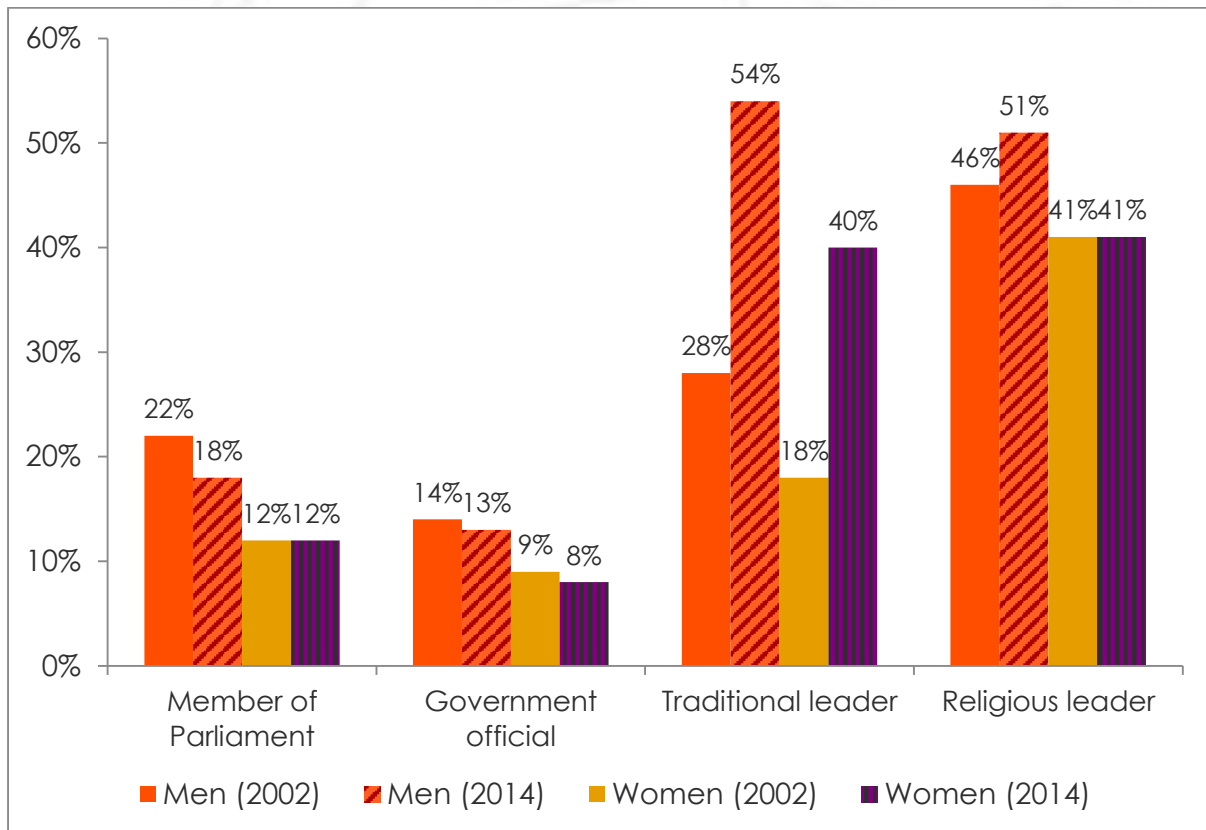


Respondents were asked: Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens when they are dissatisfied with government. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year:

- Joined others in your community to request action from government?
 - Participated in a demonstration or protest march?
- (% who said "only once," "a few times," or "often")

Similarly, women are less likely than men to contact local officials and leaders (Figure 5). Only 12% of women made contact with a member of Parliament (MP) in the year before the survey, compared to 18% of their male counterparts, and only 8% of women made contact with government officials, vs. 13% of men. This gap has also been fairly steady since 2002.

Figure 5: Contact with officials and leaders | by gender | 2002 and 2014



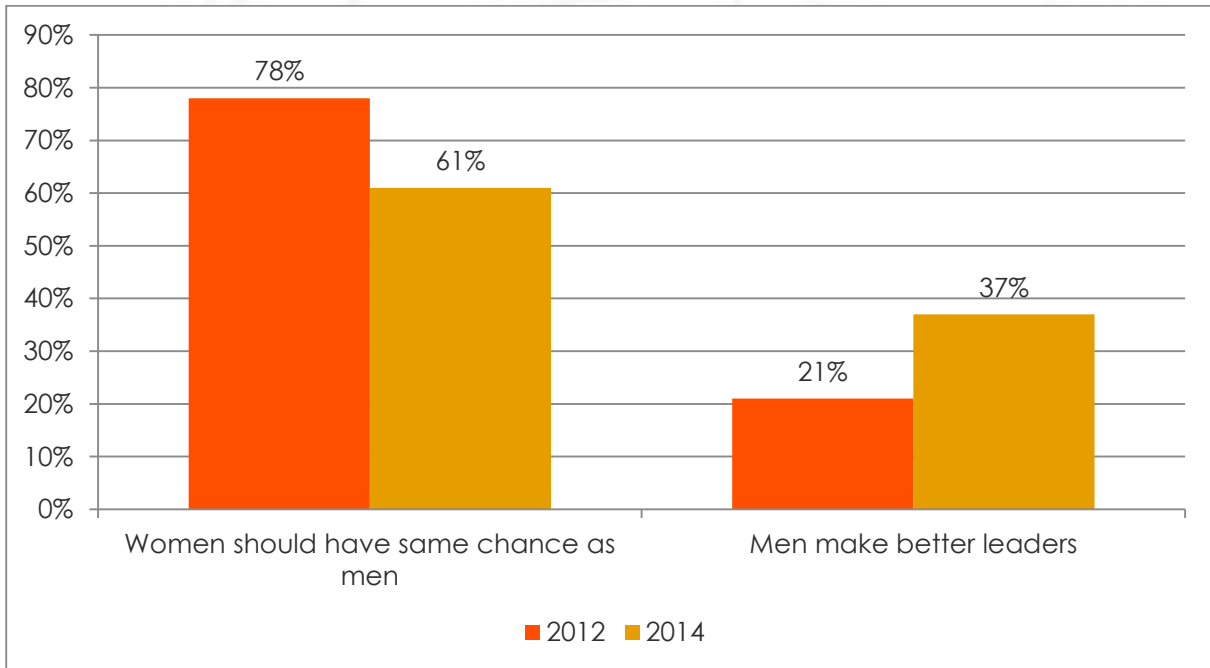
Respondents were asked: *During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views? (% who said "only once," "a few times," or "often")*

Declining support for women in leadership

Six of 10 Malawians (61%) say women should have the same chance as men to take up leadership positions (Figure 6). This reflects a sharp drop from 78% in 2012.

Correspondingly, the proportion of respondents who agree with the statement that "men make better political leaders than women" rose from 21% in 2012 to 37% in 2014. In the 2011-2013 survey of 34 African countries, on average 68% of respondents said women are as capable as men of being political leaders.

Figure 6: Support for women's leadership | 2012-2014



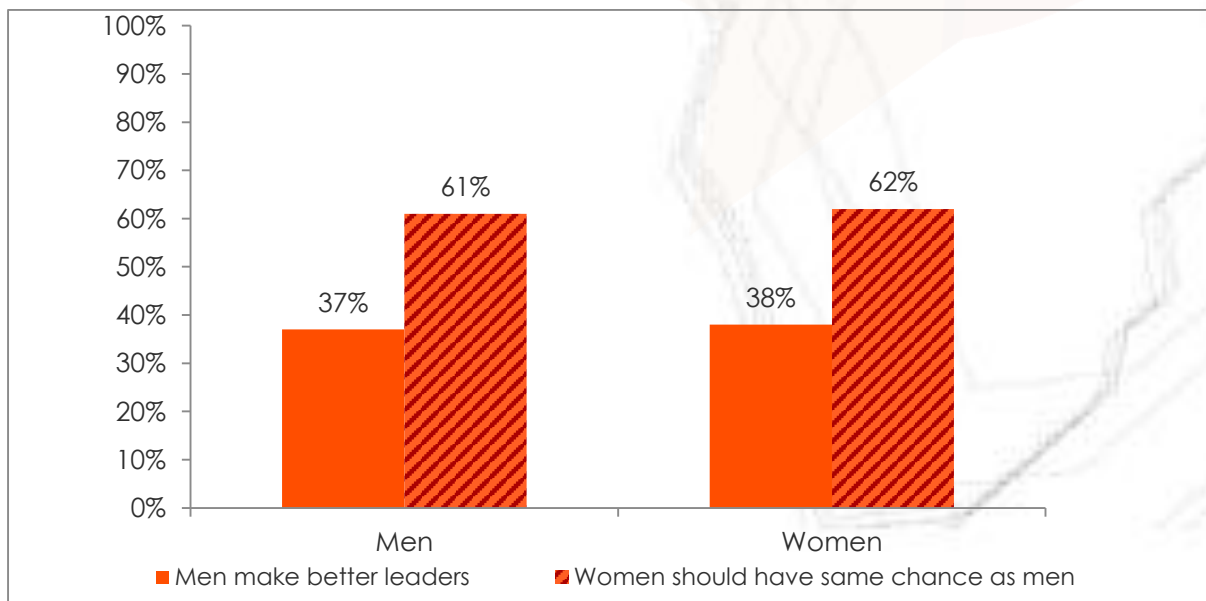
Respondents were asked: Let's talk for a moment about the kind of society you would like to have in this country. Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.

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 "very strongly agree")

Interestingly, men and women are equally likely to express the view that women should have the same chance as men of being elected to office (Figure 7). The same was true in 2012, suggesting that these views were not affected by having a female president.

Figure 7: Support for women's leadership | by gender of respondent | 2014



Happy Kayuni is an associate professor in the University of Malawi Political and Administrative Studies Department in Zomba, Malawi. Email: hkayuni2009@gmail.com

Afrobarometer is produced collaboratively by social scientists from more than 30 African countries. Coordination is provided by the Center for Democratic Development (CDD) in Ghana, the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

Core support for Afrobarometer Rounds 5 and 6 has been provided by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the World Bank.

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Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 14 | 13 February 2015