



Zimbabweans see progress on women's rights, applaud government efforts to promote equality

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 181 | Stephen Ndoma

Summary

As a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform of Action, and the Southern African Development Community's Declaration on Gender and Development, Zimbabwe has taken significant steps toward gender equity. Guided by a National Gender Policy since 2003 and a Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development since 2005, the country also guarantees, in its 2013 constitution, that every woman should have full and equal dignity of the person, including equal opportunities in political, economic, and social activities. The Zimbabwe Gender Commission is charged with monitoring issues related to gender equality.

Despite these commitments, women and girls in Zimbabwe continue to face disadvantages in the political, social, and economic spheres. Public decision-making institutions are dominated by men: In 2015, women held 32%, 48%, 15%, and 24%, respectively, of posts in the House of Assembly, Senate, Cabinet, and ambassador corps (ZimStat, 2016). Of the 1,958 local councillors across the country, only 16.5% are women (ENSURE, 2014). With regard to top positions in the public service, in 2015 only 12 of 41 permanent secretaries (29%) and 12 of 51 principal directors (23.5%) were women (ZimStat, 2016).

Women also trail men in access to agricultural productive resources: Only 19% of large-scale commercial farms are owned by women, while 45% of land owners in communal areas are women (ZimStat, 2013). Although Zimbabwe has achieved gender parity in primary school education, a gender gap remains in secondary and tertiary education enrollments (National Gender Policy, 2013).

How do ordinary Zimbabweans see gender equality? Based on findings from the most recent Afrobarometer survey in Zimbabwe, a majority of Zimbabweans give a thumbs-up to the government for its efforts to promote equality between women and men. Most see opportunities for women getting better and think that equal opportunities already exist for women to get a paying job and to own and inherit land. But most Zimbabweans also prefer having a woman in charge of the home and the 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 2016/2018. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Zimbabwe, led by Mass Public Opinion Institute, interviewed 1,200 adult Zimbabweans between 28 January and 10 February 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 Zimbabwe in 1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2012, and 2014.

Key findings

- Seven in 10 Zimbabweans (71%) applaud the government's performance in promoting opportunities and equality for women. Slightly more than half (53%) believe opportunities and treatment for women are "better" or "much better" now than a few years ago.
- Nine in 10 Zimbabweans (90%) say girls and boys have an equal chance at getting an education, while eight in 10 say women have the same chance as men to earn an income (82%) and to get a paying job (79%). But a sizeable minority (36%) say men should be given preference in employment if jobs are scarce.
- Three-fourths (77%) of respondents say women should have the same opportunity as men to own and inherit land; two-thirds (64%) say this has already been achieved.
- Seven in 10 Zimbabweans (70%) agree – including 52% who "agree very strongly" – that women should have the same chance as men of being elected to political office.
- An overwhelming majority (80%) of citizens say it is "never justified" for men to beat their wives. About one in eight women (12%) say they experienced gender-based discrimination during the past year.
- Six in 10 Zimbabweans (62%) believe it's better for a family if a woman, rather than a man, takes care of the home and children.

Perceptions of gender equality in Zimbabwe

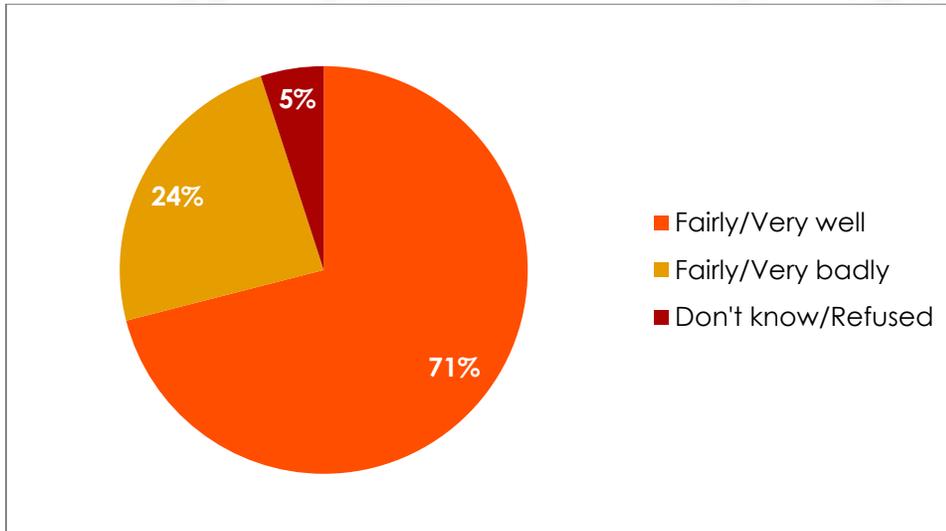
More than seven in 10 Zimbabweans (71%) say the government is performing "fairly well" or "very well" in promoting opportunities and equality for women (Figure 1). Only one in four (24%) think the government is doing "fairly badly" or "very badly" in that respect.

Approval of the government's efforts is equally strong among women and men, as well as among urban and rural residents (Figure 2). Respondents with no formal education are less likely to praise the government's performance on promoting opportunities and equality for women (60%) than their better-educated counterparts, and approval is somewhat more muted among middle-aged respondents (65%) than among youth (71%) and the elderly (76%).

Even a majority (57%) of opposition MDC-T party supporters¹ approve of the government's efforts. Matabeleland North is the only province in which opinions on the government's performance are about evenly divided, with 40% approving, 37% disapproving, and 23% saying they "don't know" or refusing to answer the question.

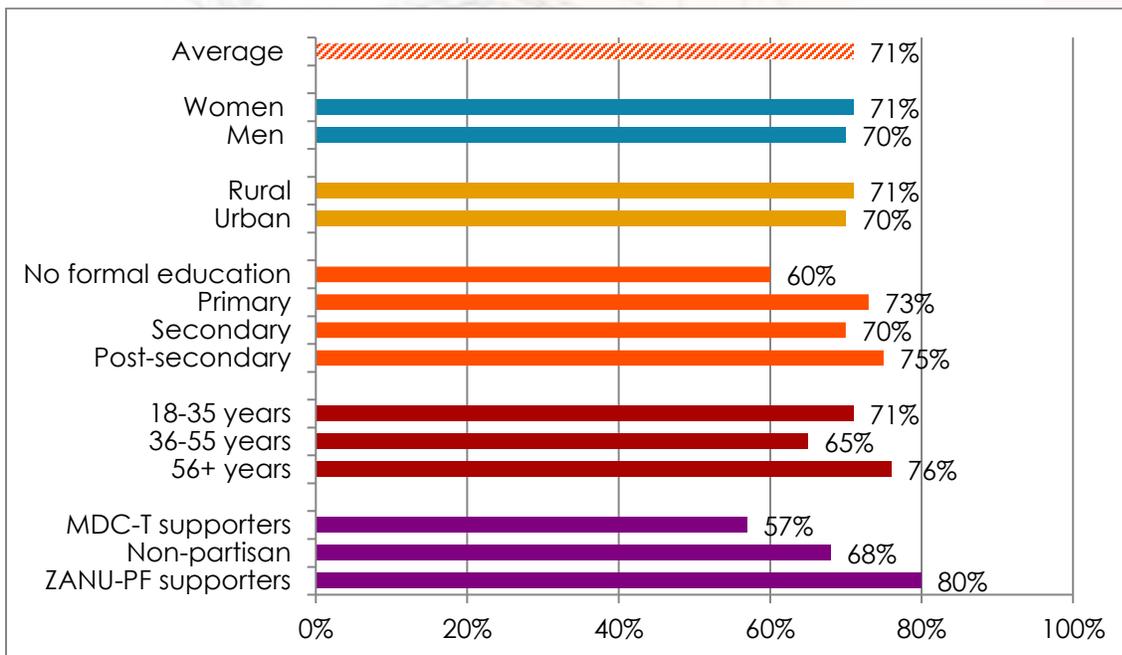
¹ Afrobarometer determines political affiliation based on responses to the questions, "Do you feel close to any particular political party?" and, if yes, "Which party is that?"

Figure 1: Government performance in promoting opportunities and equality for women
 | Zimbabwe | 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: Promoting opportunities and equality for women?

Figure 2: Government performance in promoting gender equality
 | by socio-demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2017

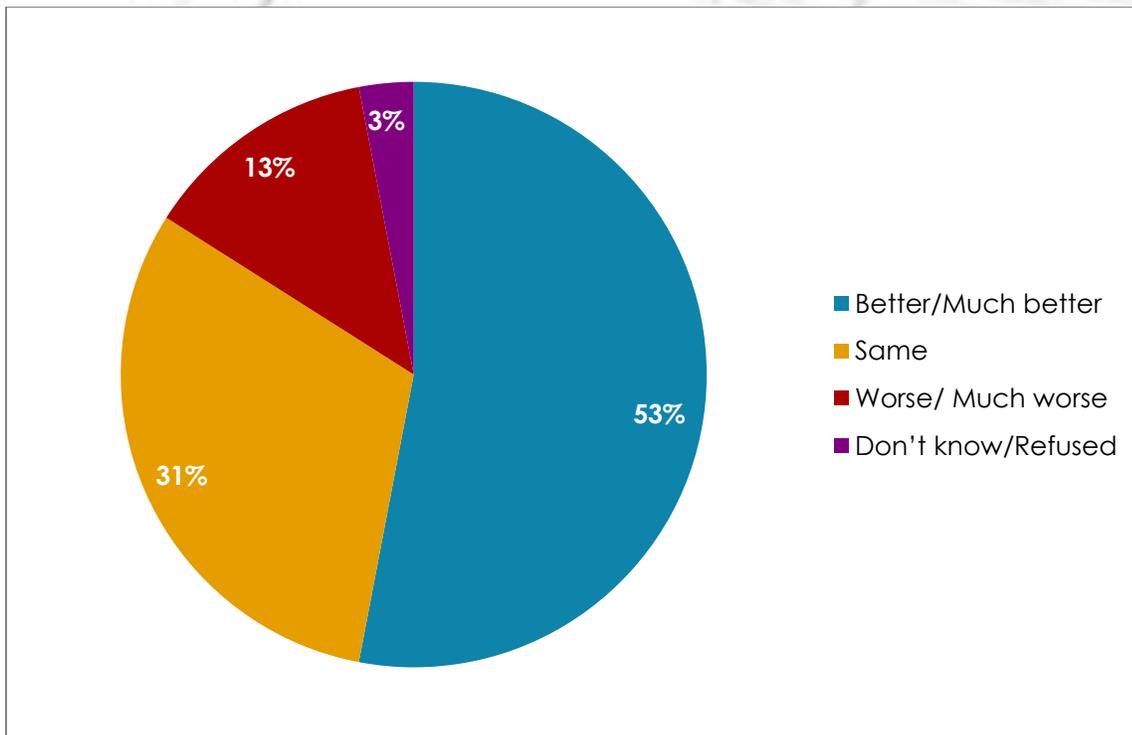


Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Promoting opportunities and equality for women? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")

Perceptions of equal opportunities and treatment for women

Asked whether equal opportunities and treatment for women have improved or deteriorated compared to a few years ago, more than half (53%) of respondents say they are now “better” or “much better” (Figure 3). About one in three (31%) say nothing has changed, while 13% say the situation has gotten worse.

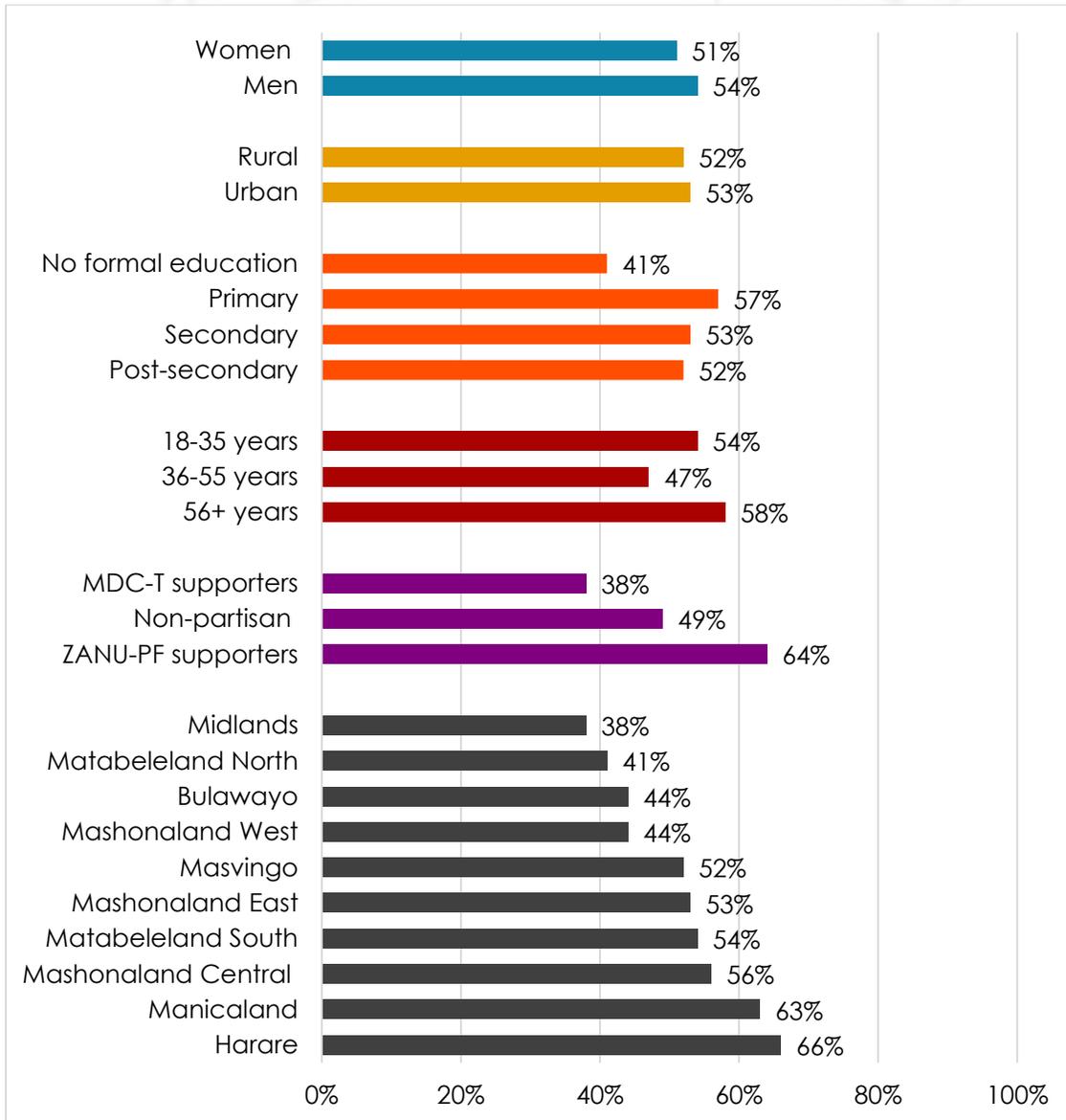
Figure 3: Change in equal opportunities and treatment for women | Zimbabwe | 2017



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?

Again, differences are slight between the genders and urban vs. rural residents, while sub-groups that are least likely to see progress in opportunities and treatment for women are citizens without formal education (41%), the middle-aged (47%), and MDC-T supporters (38%) (Figure 4). While two-thirds (66%) of Harare residents see progress, this is a minority view in Midlands (38%), Matabeleland North (41%), Bulawayo (44%), and Mashonaland West (44%).

Figure 4: Equal opportunities and treatment for women | by socio-demographic group and province | Zimbabwe | 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? (% who say "better" or "much better")

Equal access to life opportunities

On several key issues, large majorities of respondents say gender equality already exists in Zimbabwe (Figure 5). Nine out of 10 respondents "agree" or "strongly agree" that girls and boys have an equal chance to get an education (90%). This view is shared to a similar degree across

genders, age groups, and urban-rural residence but is less widespread among citizens with no formal education (78%) and among residents of Matabeleland North (67%).

About eight out of 10 Zimbabweans also assert that women have the same chance as men to earn an income (82%) and to get a paying job (79%). Here, too, respondents with no formal education (72% and 69%, respectively) and residents of Matabeleland North (62% and 58%) stand out as less convinced that equality exists.

A solid, though smaller, majority (64%) believe that women have the same chance as men to own or inherit land. Women and men are about equally likely to share this view, while rural, less-educated, and younger respondents are less convinced that equality exists (Figure 6). Supporters of the opposition MDC-T party (50%) are less likely than ZANU-PF adherents (70%) to assert that women have equal rights when it comes to land, and residents of Manicaland (51%), Bulawayo (54%), Matabeleland North (55%), and Mashonaland West (55%) are less convinced than their counterparts in Mashonaland East (72%), Midlands (72%), and Harare (74%).

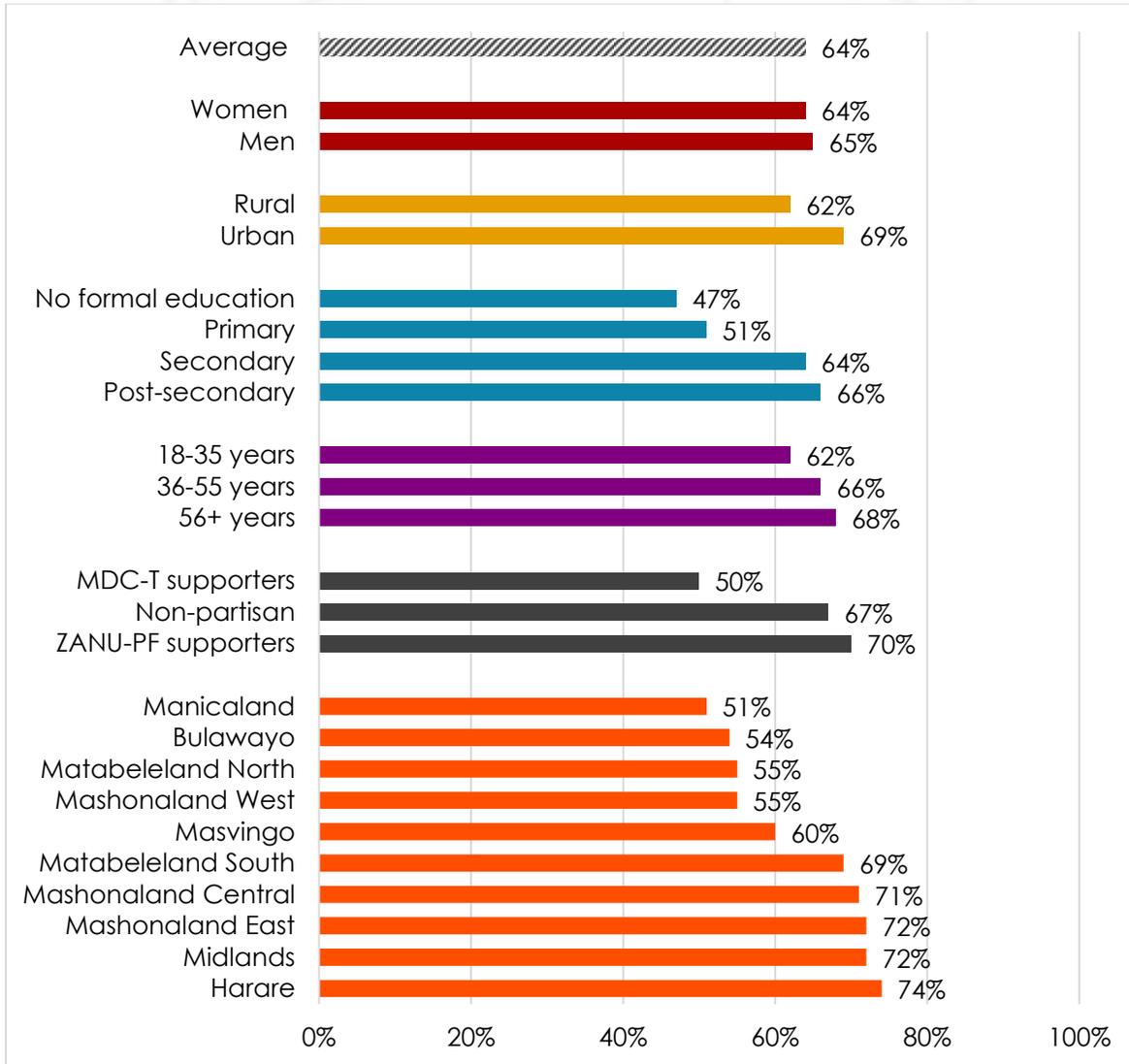
Figure 5: Equal access to life opportunities | Zimbabwe | 2017



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?
 - Women and men have equal opportunities to earn an income?
 - Women and men have equal opportunities to get a job that pays a wage or salary?
 - Women and men have equal opportunities to own and inherit land?
- (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

Figure 6: Equal opportunity for women and men to own and inherit land | Zimbabwe
 | 2017

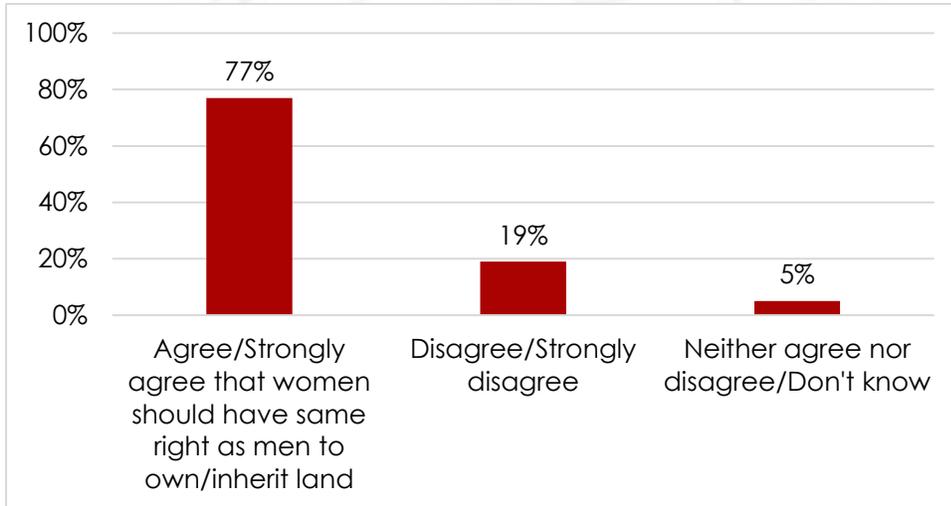


Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree, or haven't you heard enough to say: In our country today, women and men have equal opportunities to own and inherit land? (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

Support for equal rights to land and jobs

While two-thirds of Zimbabweans say women already enjoy equality with regard to owning and inheriting land, an even larger majority endorses this right in principle. More than three-fourths (77%) of respondents say women *should* have the same rights as men with regard to land (Figure 7).

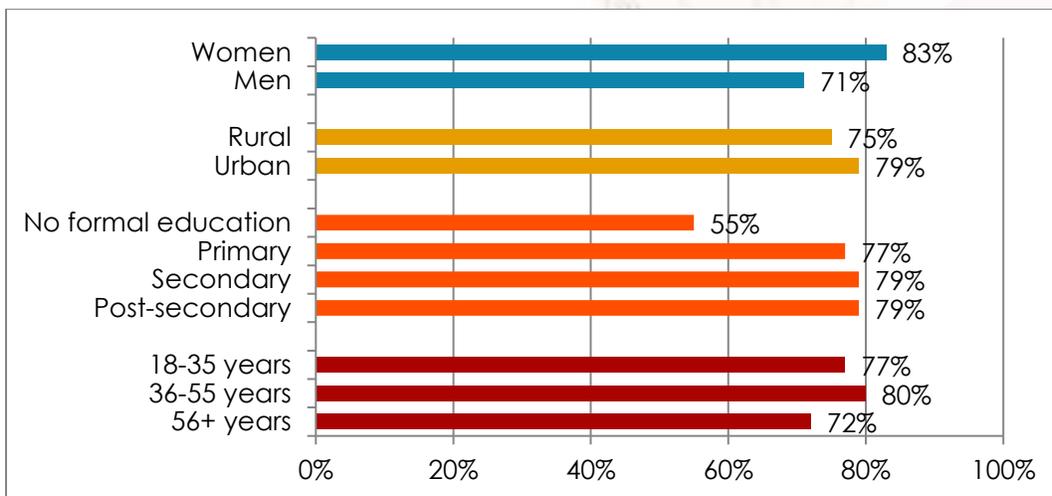
Figure 7: Support for equal right to own and inherit land | Zimbabwe | 2017



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?

Women (83%) are considerably more likely than men (71%) to support an equal right to own/inherit land, as are respondents with at least a primary education (77%-79%) compared to those with no formal education (55%) (Figure 8). Support for equal rights to land is a majority view across all 10 provinces, ranging from 66% in Matabeleland North to more than eight in 10 in Mashonaland West (81%), Midlands (82%), and Harare (83%).

Figure 8: Support for equal right to own and inherit land | by socio-demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2017



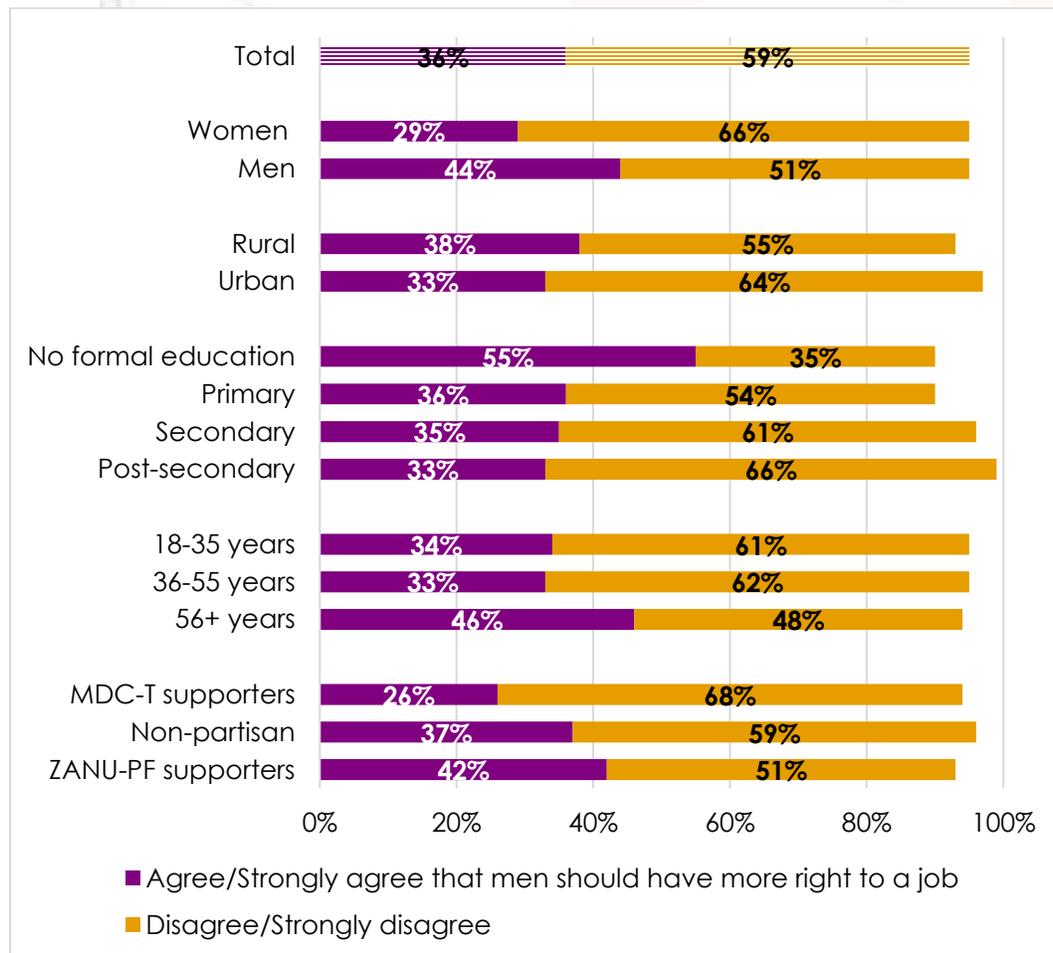
Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: Women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land. (% who said "agree" or "strongly agree")

But Zimbabweans are more conflicted as to whether women really should have equal employment opportunities if jobs are scarce: While six in 10 respondents (59%) endorse full equality when it comes to jobs, a substantial 36% “agree” or “strongly agree” that men should have more right to being hired in a tight job market (Figure 9).

Support for the idea that men should have priority for scarce jobs is more common among men (44%) than women (29%) and among respondents with no formal education (55%) than their better-educated counterparts (33%-36%). Older respondents (46% among those over age 55) and ZANU-PF supporters (42%) also express above-average support for this view.

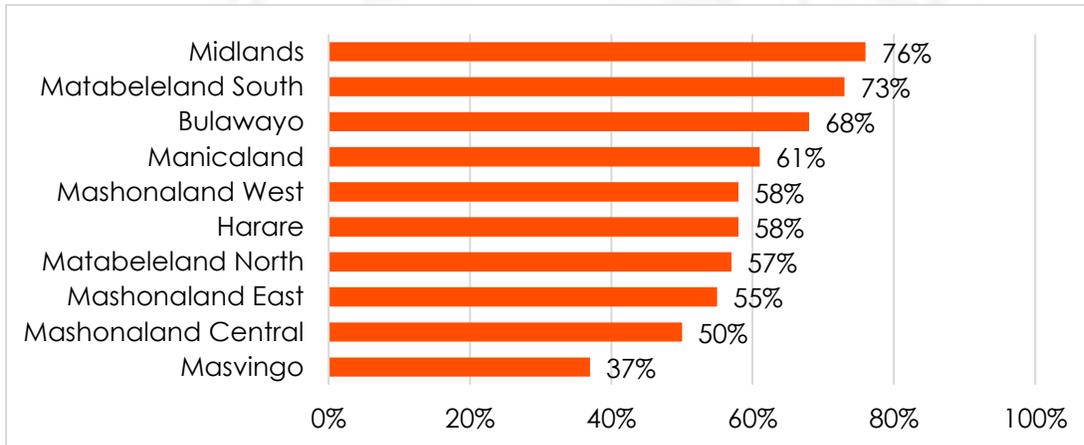
In the Midlands province, more than three-fourths of respondents “disagree” or “strongly disagree” with giving men an advantage in seeking scarce jobs – twice the proportion who oppose gender inequality when it comes to jobs in Masvingo (37%) (Figure 10).

Figure 9: Should men have more right to a job? | by socio-demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2017



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 right to a job than women?

Figure 10: Oppose prioritizing men for scarce jobs | by province | Zimbabwe | 2017

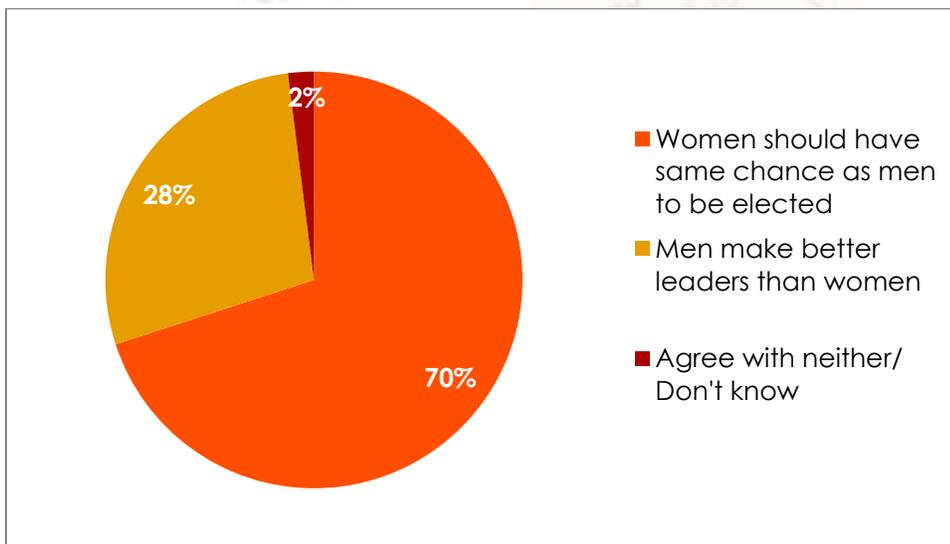


Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women? (% who “disagree” or “strongly disagree”)

Support for gender equality in politics

Beyond school, farm, and workplace, Zimbabweans also express support for equal rights in politics: Seven in 10 respondents (70%) agree – including 52% who “agree very strongly” – that women should have the same chance as men of being elected to political office. Almost three in 10 citizens (28%) disagree, saying that men make better leaders than women (Figure 11).

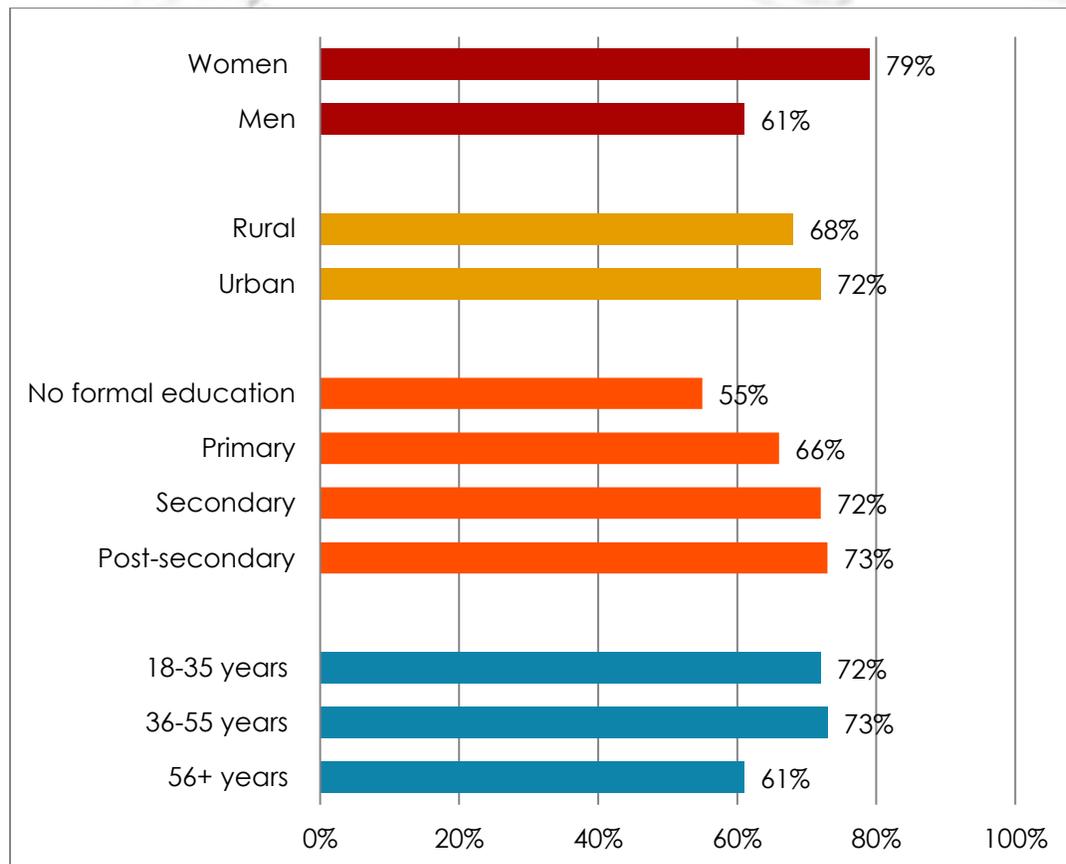
Figure 11: Support for gender equality in politics | Zimbabwe | 2017



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.
 (% who “agree” or “agree very strongly” with each statement)

Support for gender equality is the majority view across all major demographic groups, although the level of support varies (Figure 12). Women are far more likely than men to favour gender equality, 79% vs. 61%. Urbanites (72%) are somewhat more likely than rural residents (68%) to hold this view. Citizens with some post-secondary education (73%) are more likely to support equality than those with less education, and respondents aged 55 or less are more likely to agree than their older counterparts.

Figure 12: Support for gender equality in politics | by socio-demographic group
 | Zimbabwe | 2017

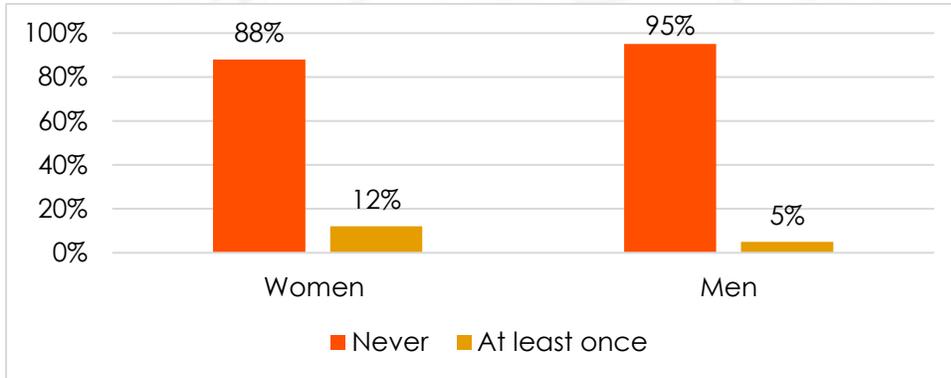


Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Men make better political leaders than women, and should be elected rather than women.
 Statement 2: Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men.
 (% who "agree" or "agree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

Gender-based discrimination and violence

Despite widespread support for equal rights, women in Zimbabwe are still more than twice as likely as men to face discrimination based on their gender. More than one in 10 women (12%) say they experienced gender-based discrimination during the year preceding the survey, compared to 5% of men (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Experienced gender-based discrimination | by gender | Zimbabwe | 2017

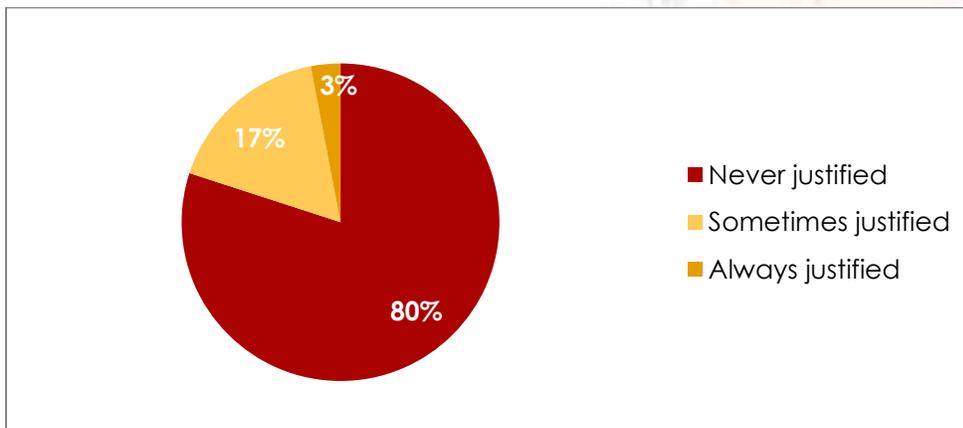


Respondents were asked: In the past year, how often, if at all, have you been personally discriminated against based on any of the following: Your gender?

Worse, domestic violence is still a reality for some women, despite overwhelming public opposition. Eight of 10 Zimbabweans (80%) say it is “never justified” for men to beat their wives (Figure 14).

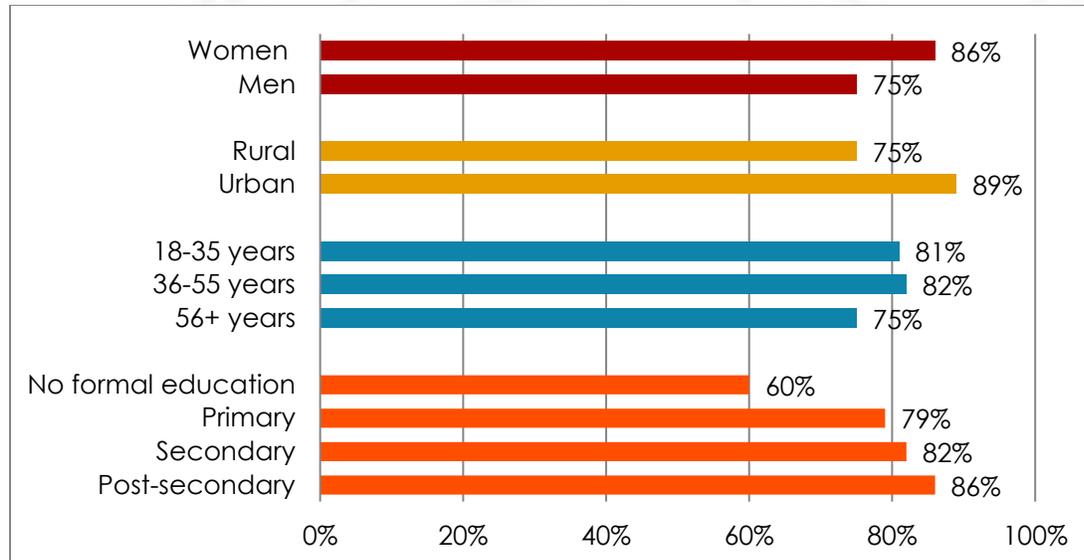
This view is stronger among women (86%) than men (75%) (Figure 15). Similarly, urban residents (89%) are more nearly unanimous in their rejection of wife-beating than are rural dwellers (75%), reflecting the common dynamic of rural traditionalism vs. cosmopolitanism. While the sentiment that there is never a justification for men beating their wives is the majority view among all age groups, it is most widely shared by middle-aged (82%) and young (81%) respondents and least common among the elderly population (75%). Respondents' levels of education show a clear association with opposition to wife-beating. Only 60% of respondents without formal education say that wife-beating is “never justified” compared to 86% of those with post-secondary qualifications. Rejection of wife-beating is nearly unanimous in Harare (93%) but far less strong in Masvingo (65%) (Figure 16).

Figure 14: Justified for men to beat their wives? | Zimbabwe | 2017



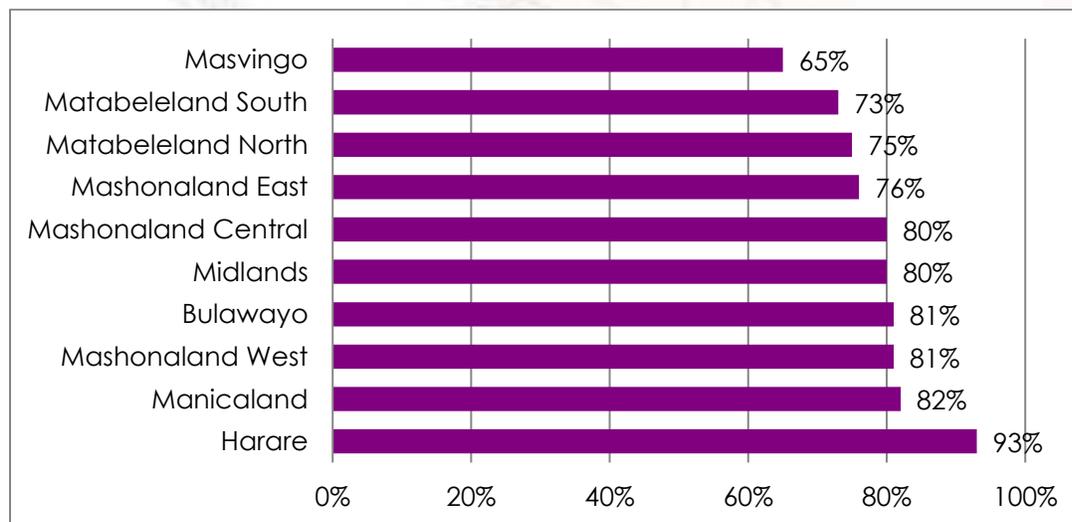
Respondents were asked: Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, sometimes be justified, or never justified: For a man to beat his wife?

Figure 15: Never justified for men to beat their wives | by socio-demographic group | Zimbabwe | 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 justified: For a man to beat his wife? (% who say "never")

Figure 16: Never justified for men to beat their wives | by province | Zimbabwe | 2017

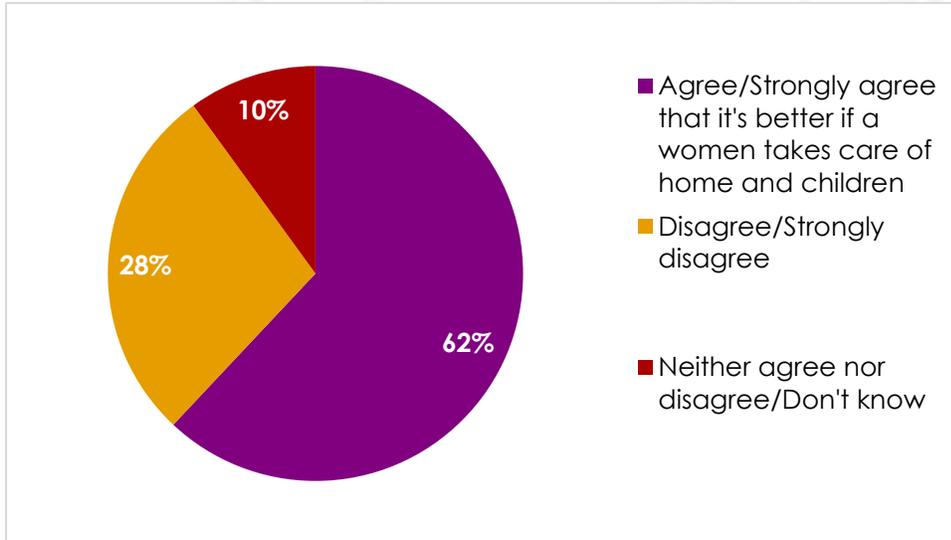


Respondents were asked: Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, sometimes be justified, or never justified: For a man to beat his wife? (% who say "never")

Gender roles at household level

Finally, despite strong support for women's equality, a majority of Zimbabweans (62%) also believe that 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. Not quite three out of 10 (28%) disagree (Figure 17).

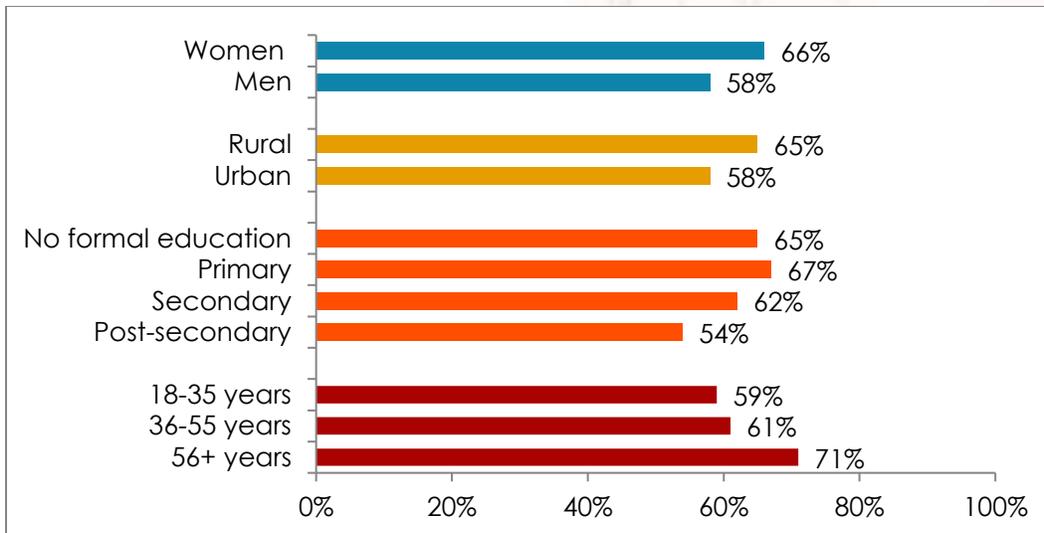
Figure 17: Better if woman takes care of home and children? | Zimbabwe | 2017



Respondents were asked: 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?

Women (66%) and rural residents (65%) are somewhat more likely to believe it's better if a woman takes care of the household and children than are men (58%) and urban residents (58%) (Figure 18). Less-educated and older respondents also are more likely to share this attitude.

Figure 18: Better if woman takes care of home and children | by socio-demographic group | Zimbabwe | 2017



Respondents were asked: 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? (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

Conclusion

A majority of Zimbabweans think opportunities and equality for women are improving, and they applaud the government's efforts to promote them. Large majorities see gender equality as already having been achieved with regard to education, jobs, and the right to own and inherit land.

Yet sizeable minorities – roughly one in three citizens – still prioritize men when it comes to getting jobs and getting elected to public office, and about one in eight women say they experienced gender-based discrimination during the preceding year. Especially among less-educated citizens and men, survey data suggest opportunities for continued gains in support for gender equality.

Aside from widespread backing for gender equality, Zimbabweans believe by a 2-to-1 margin that their homes and children are better off under the care of a woman – a view more commonly held by women than by men.

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