



Reaching for equality: Zimbabweans endorse gender equity in politics but say citizens treated unequally before the law

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 87 | Stephen Ndoma and Richman Kokera

Summary

Equality is a principle enshrined in Zimbabwe's Constitution and legal system, which seek to guarantee both gender equity and equal treatment for all – regardless of class, religion, or race – before the law. According to Section 3(1) of the Constitution, “recognition of the equality of all human beings” is one of the country's founding principles.

More specifically, Section 17(1) of the Constitution requires the state to promote gender balance and the full participation of women in all spheres of Zimbabwean society. In pursuit of these objectives, the country has crafted a National Gender Policy; established a Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development; enacted a variety of laws to ensure women's rights (e.g. inheritance rights, protection from domestic violence); and ratified the 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.

Women have served as Zimbabwe's vice president, deputy prime minister, president of the Senate, deputy speaker of the House of Assembly, and judge president of the High Court. However, in the current administration, only three of 26 Cabinet ministers, three of 13 ministers of state, and five of 24 deputy ministers are women, and only 11.5% of the Cabinet is female – far below women's 52% share of the population (Zaba & Ndebele, 2013).

Reality remains out of sync with Zimbabwe's law as well as with the aspirations of its citizens: Findings from the latest Afrobarometer survey show that more than two-thirds of Zimbabweans support gender equality in politics, and most of them feel “very strongly” about this issue.

When it comes to ensuring all citizens' right to equality before the law, a majority of Zimbabweans say this isn't a reality yet, either. While perceptions of unequal treatment have been decreasing since 2009, Zimbabweans are still far more likely to expect impunity for public officials than for ordinary citizens who commit crimes.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, 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 were conducted in 2014 and 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 Zimbabwe, led by Mass Public Opinion Institute, interviewed 2,400 adult Zimbabweans in November 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 Zimbabwe in 1999, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2010, and 2012.

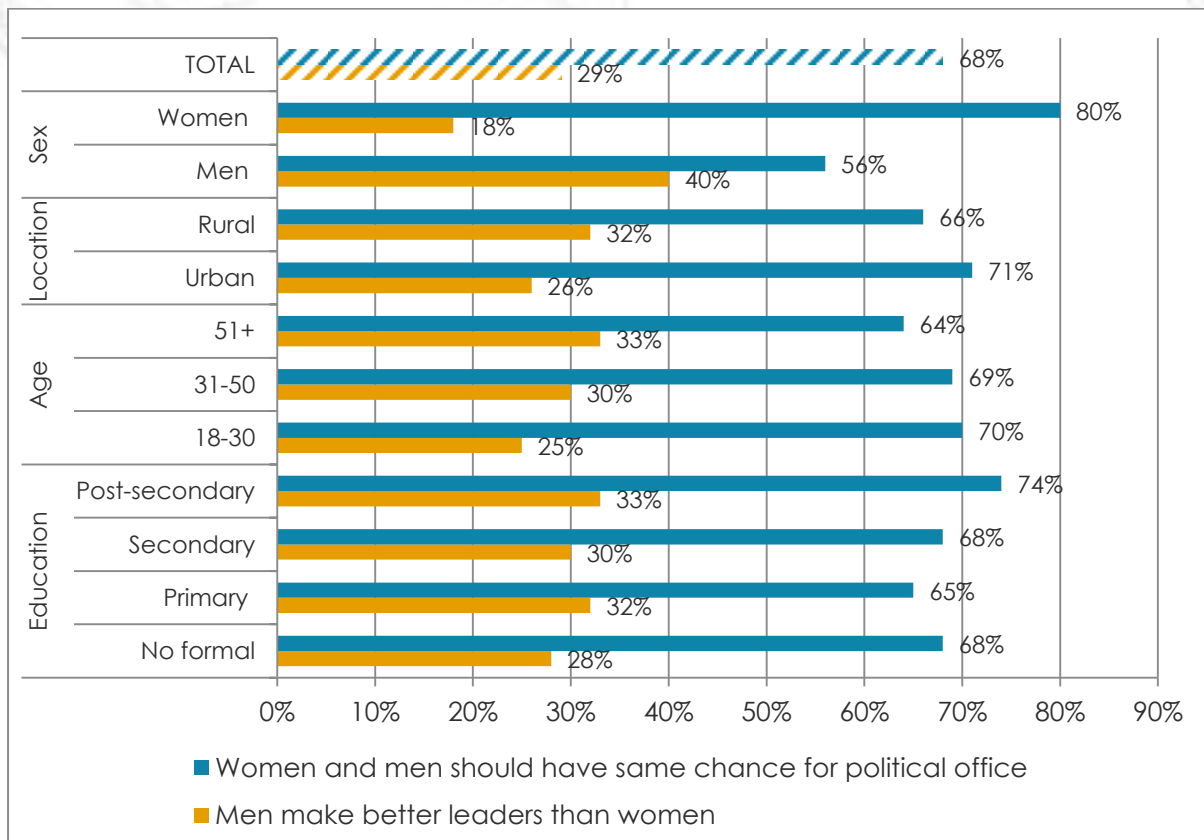
Key findings

- On gender equality, nearly seven in 10 Zimbabweans (68%) say women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men. More than half (52%) of them say they feel “very strongly” about this issue.
- With regard to equality for all, a majority (55%) of citizens think people are “often” or “always” treated unequally before the law. This perception has been decreasing since 2009.
- Nearly six in 10 (58%) say that officials who commit crimes “often” or “always” go unpunished. Only 21% think that ordinary lawbreakers get the same treatment.

Support for gender equality in politics

More than two-thirds (68%) of Zimbabweans support the view that women and men should have the same chance of being elected to political office, and most of them (52%) feel “very strongly” about this position. About three in 10 citizens (29%) disagree, saying that men make better political leaders than women (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Support for gender equality in politics | by sex, urban-rural location, age, and education level | Zimbabwe | 2014



Respondents were asked: 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 “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. Women are far more likely than men to favour gender equality, 80% vs. 56%, and almost two-thirds (64%) of women agree “very strongly” with this principle. Urbanites (71%) are somewhat more likely than rural residents (66%) to hold this view.

Citizens with some post-secondary education (74%) are more likely to support equality than those with less education, and respondents aged 50 or less are more likely to agree than their older counterparts.

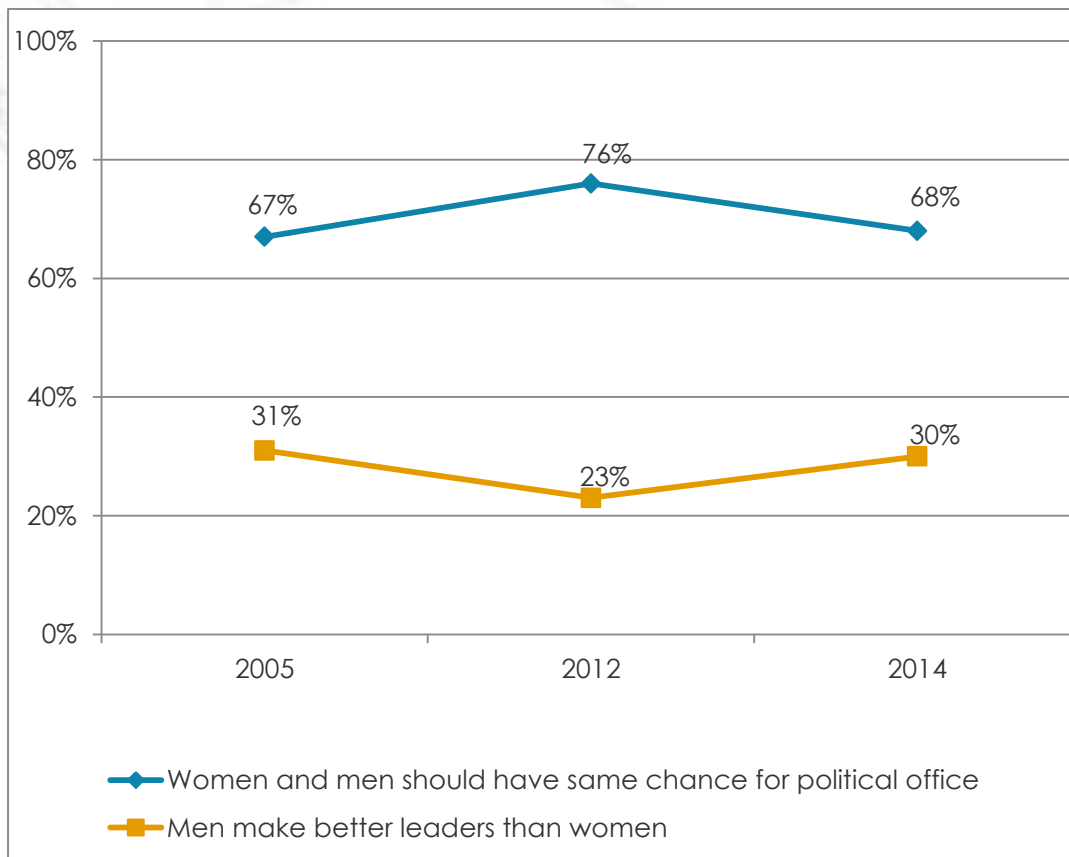
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But support for gender equality has not increased significantly over the past decade; after an increase to 76% in 2012,

support dropped back to roughly its 2005 level (Figure 2).

Support for gender equality in elections is the majority view in all provinces but ranges from only about six in 10 in Mashonaland East, Mashonaland West, and Matabeleland South to nearly eight in 10 in Bulawayo and Manicaland (Table 1).

Figure 2: Trend in support for gender equality in politics | Zimbabwe | 2005-2014



Respondents were asked: 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 “agree very strongly” with each statement)

Table 1: Support for gender equality in politics | by province | Zimbabwe | 2014

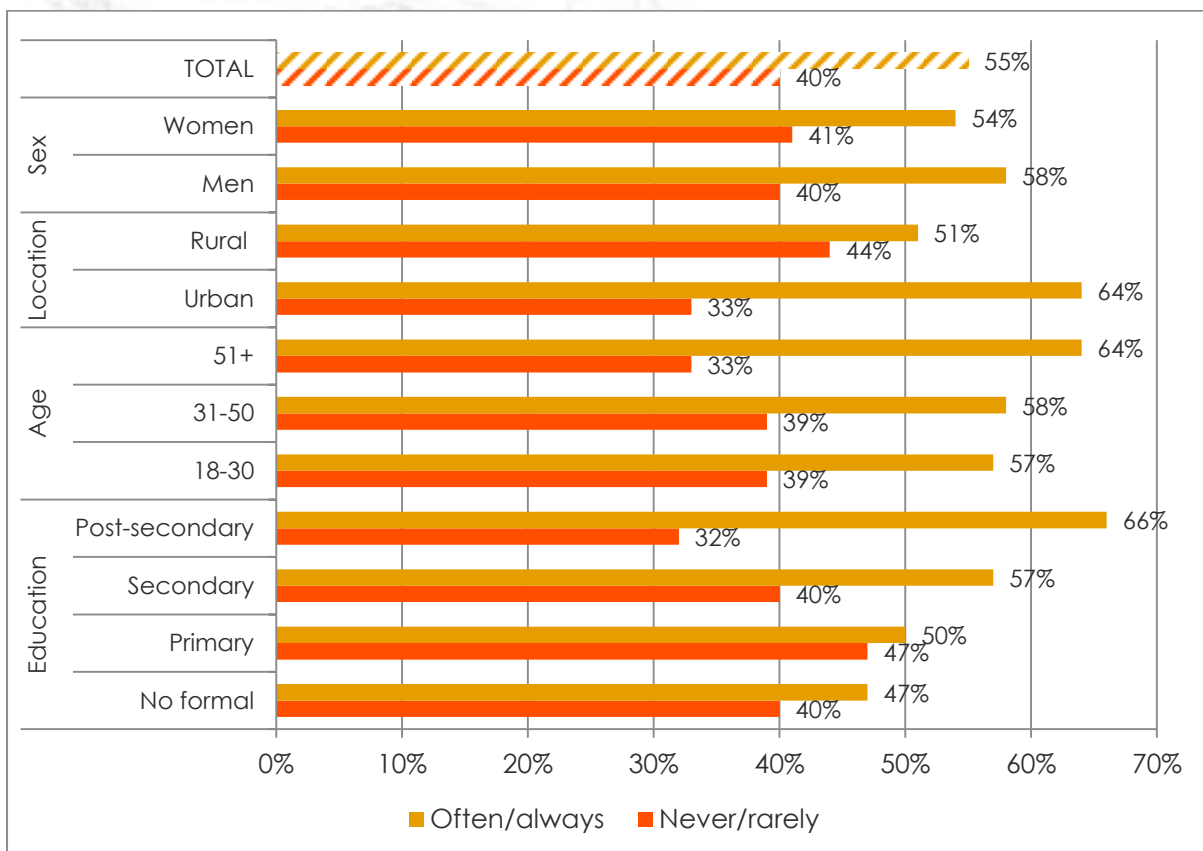
	Women and men should have equal chance to be elected	Men make better leaders than women
Bulawayo	79%	19%
Manicaland	79%	19%
Midlands	73%	27%
Mashonaland Central	71%	28%
Masvingo	69%	25%
Harare	65%	32%
Matabeleland North	64%	35%
Matabeleland South	62%	36%
Mashonaland West	61%	39%
Mashonaland East	57%	39%

(% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" with each statement)

Perceptions of unequal treatment under the law

In addition to gender equality, Zimbabwean law provides more broadly for equal protection for all citizens under the law. But a majority of Zimbabweans (55%) think people are "often" or "always" treated unequally under the law, while 40% says this "rarely" or "never" happens.

Figure 3: Perceptions of unequal treatment under the law | by sex, urban-rural location, age, and education level | Zimbabwe | 2014

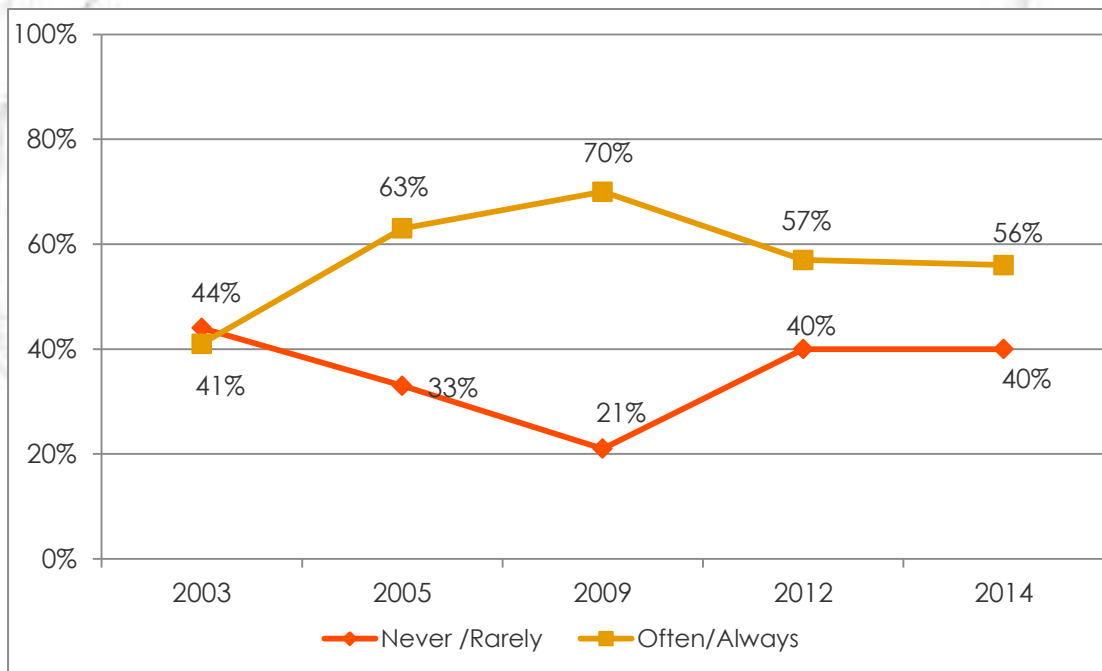


Respondents were asked: In your opinion, how often, in this country, are people treated unequally under the law?

As shown in Figure 3, the perception of frequent unequal treatment varies by demographic group. It is more common among residents in urban areas (64%) than in rural areas (51%) and increases sharply with educational level, from 47% of those with no formal education to 66% of those with post-secondary education. The sentiment is also more prevalent among men (58%) than women (54%). Older respondents are more likely to perceive unequal treatment than their younger counterparts.

The perception of frequent unequal treatment has been declining from a high of 70% in 2009 but remains considerably higher than in 2004, the only survey in which less than half (41%) shared this view (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Trend in public perceptions of unequal treatment under the law
 | Zimbabwe | 2003-2014



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often, in this country, are people treated unequally under the law?*

One example of potential inequality under the law is the treatment of officials vs. ordinary citizens. Asked how often public officials who commit crimes go unpunished, nearly six in 10 Zimbabweans (58%) say this is “often” or “always” the case. This view is more prevalent among urbanites (68%) than rural residents (53%) and among men (62%) than women (54%) (Figure 5).

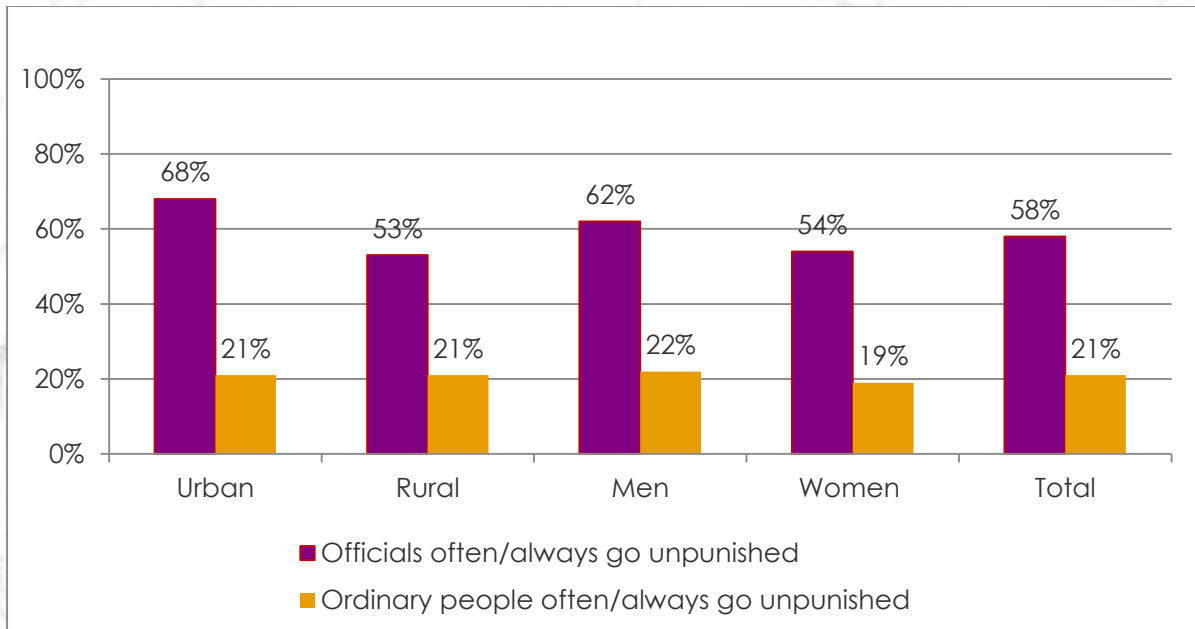
Less than half (41%) of those who have no formal schooling think that officials “often” or “always” go unpunished, while majorities of those with more education hold this view, reaching 75% among those with at least some university education.

A generational analysis shows that middle-aged Zimbabweans (ages 31-50) are most inclined to think that officials often/always go unpunished (64%, compared to 57% of younger and 50% of older citizens).

This perception has declined by 12 percentage points since 2009, when this question was asked for the first time (Figure 6). In contrast, only one-fifth (21%) of Zimbabweans hold the view that ordinary people who commit crimes “often” or “always” go unpunished (Figure 5). Views are similar across genders, ages, education levels, and urban-rural residence locations.

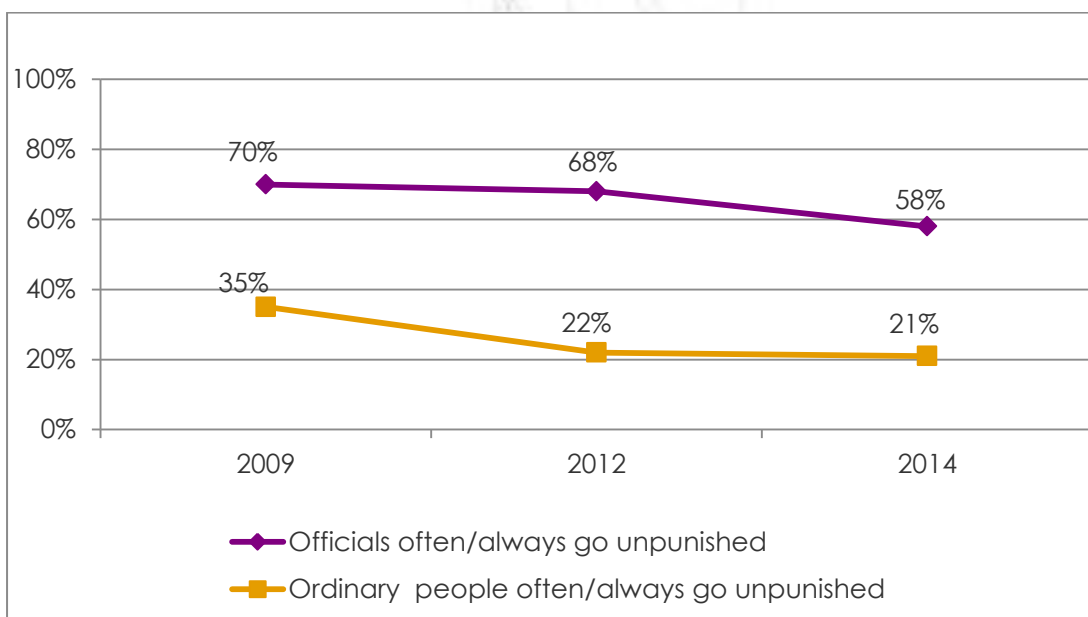
The sentiment that ordinary lawbreakers go unpunished has also been declining, from 35% in 2009 to 21% in 2014 (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Perceptions of how often officials and ordinary people who break the law go unpunished | by urban-rural location and sex | Zimbabwe | 2014



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often, in this country:*
 Do officials who commit crimes go unpunished?
 Do ordinary people who break the law go unpunished?

Figure 6: Trend in perceptions of how often officials and ordinary people go unpunished | Zimbabwe | 2009-2014



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often, in this country:*
 Do officials who commit crimes go unpunished?
 Do ordinary people who break the law go unpunished?

As shown in Table 2, provinces differ significantly in their views on equal treatment before the law. Bulawayo has the largest proportion of citizens who say people are often/always treated unequally (73%) and that public officials who commit crimes often/always go unpunished (75%), as well as the smallest proportion who say that ordinary lawbreakers go unpunished (9%). By contrast, only about one-third of citizens in Matabeleland North province perceive frequent unequal treatment (32%) and frequent impunity for officials (31%).

Table 2: Perceptions of unequal treatment under the law | by province | Zimbabwe | 2014

	Unequal treatment under the law	Officials go unpunished	Ordinary people go unpunished
Bulawayo	73%	75%	9%
Mashonaland East	65%	66%	32%
Harare	64%	66%	23%
Matabeleland South	64%	58%	27%
Masvingo	57%	63%	33%
Mashonaland Central	56%	54%	15%
Manicaland	55%	59%	15%
Midlands	52%	54%	27%
Mashonaland West	38%	48%	10%
Matabeleland North	32%	31%	12%

Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, how often, in this country:*
Are people treated unequally under the law?
Do officials who commit crimes go unpunished?
Do ordinary people who break the law go unpunished?
 (% who say "often" or "always")

Conclusion

Most Zimbabweans support gender equality for political candidates, even as women remain grossly under-represented in elective office. More broadly, equality before the law is not yet a reality for all citizens, survey findings suggest. There is a widespread perception that justice is applied selectively, with public officials who commit crimes largely going unpunished while the opposite is true for ordinary people. These findings beckon government to increase efforts to ensure equal opportunity and justice for all.

References

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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.

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