

Property rights, domestic roles still question marks amid strong support for gender equity in eSwatini

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 235 | Sipho Kunene

Summary

The government of the Kingdom of eSwatini recognizes gender inequality as an impediment to sustainable national development and has backed its constitutional guarantees of equality with a number of statutes, policies, and strategies. These include its 2004 ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (United Nations, 2012), its National Gender Policy (2010), and its 2018 Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Bill (Swaziland Action Group Against Abuse, 2018).

Despite these efforts, women's rights continue to be a challenging issue in eSwatini. According to the 2014 Swaziland Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, one in five women believe that a husband is justified in beating his wife under certain circumstances (Central Statistical Office and UNICEF, 2016). Women hold only four seats (6%) in Parliament, a dramatic decline from 22% after the 2008 elections (Genderlinks, 2013).

The United Nations in Swaziland (2018) notes that "violence and abuse are a major development concern in eSwatini, profoundly affecting women and children": About one in three women experienced some form of sexual violence as a child, and one in four experienced other forms of physical violence as a child.

Given these challenges, what are ordinary citizens' views on gender equality? Based on findings from the most recent Afrobarometer survey in eSwatini, most citizens applaud the government's efforts to promote women's rights and opportunities and believe that men and women in eSwatini have equal access to education and gainful employment. But only half say women have an equal chance to own and inherit land, and most citizens still feel that it's better for a woman, rather than a man, to be 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 2015, and Round 7 surveys are being completed in 2018. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in eSwatini, led by activQuest, interviewed 1,200 adult citizens in March 2018. 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 eSwatini in 2013 and 2015.

Key findings

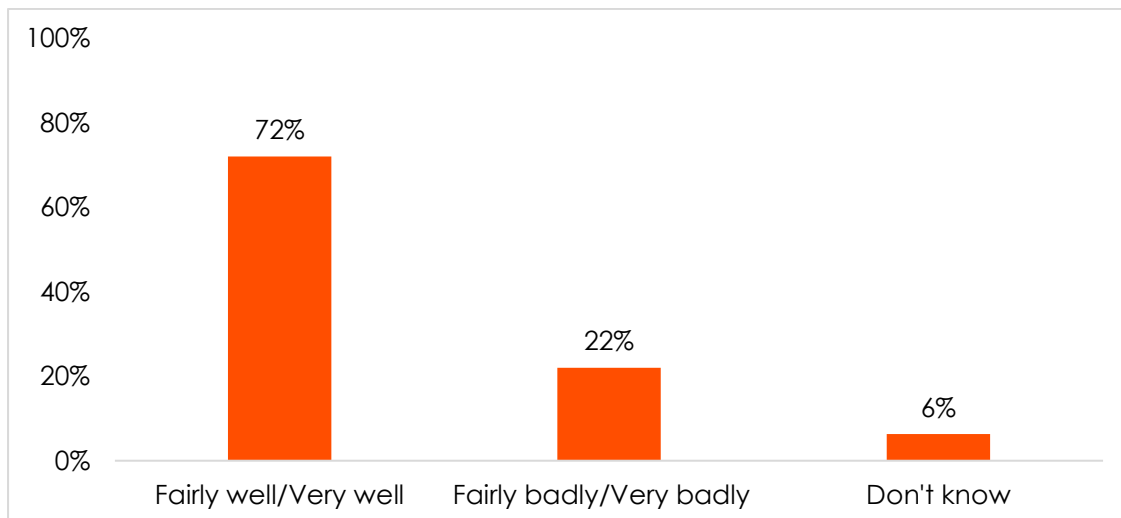
- More than seven in 10 eSwatini citizens (72%) say the government is doing “fairly well” or “very well” in promoting equal treatment and opportunities for women.
- But only three in 10 (29%) say that treatment and opportunities for women have improved over the past few years.
- While overwhelming majorities of respondents say that women have equal access to education (91%) and gainful employment (81%), only half (52%) believe they have the same chance as men to own or inherit land.
- More than three-quarters (78%) of citizens say women should have the same chance as men of being elected to political office.
- Seven in 10 eSwatini citizens (71%) believe that it's better if a woman, rather than a man, takes care of the household and children.
- Women are twice as likely as men to say they experienced gender-based discrimination (9% vs. 5%) and half as likely as men to see wife-beating as justified (3% vs. 7%).

Government efforts to promote opportunities and equality for women

More than seven in 10 citizens (72%) say the government is performing “fairly well” or “very well” in promoting opportunities and equality for women (Figure 1). Only 22% see the government as doing “fairly badly” or “very badly” in this area.

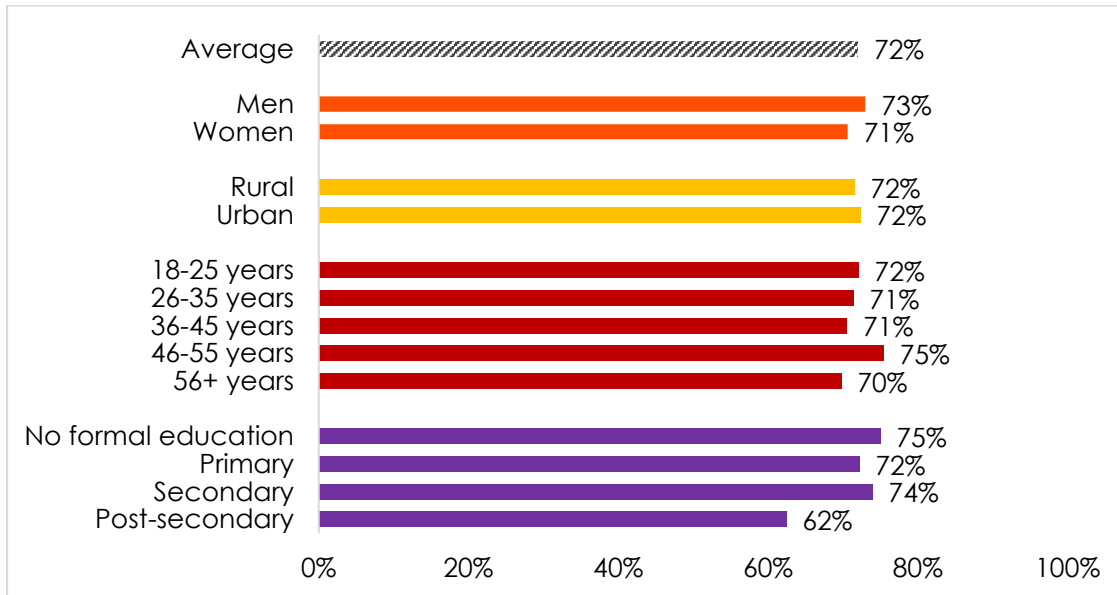
Assessments of the government's performance on gender equity are very similar across genders, age groups, and urban-rural residence locations. Citizens with post-secondary educational qualifications stand out as less likely to approve of the government's performance (62%) (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Government performance in promoting opportunities and equality for women | eSwatini | 2018



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 opportunities and equality for women | by socio-demographic group | eSwatini | 2018

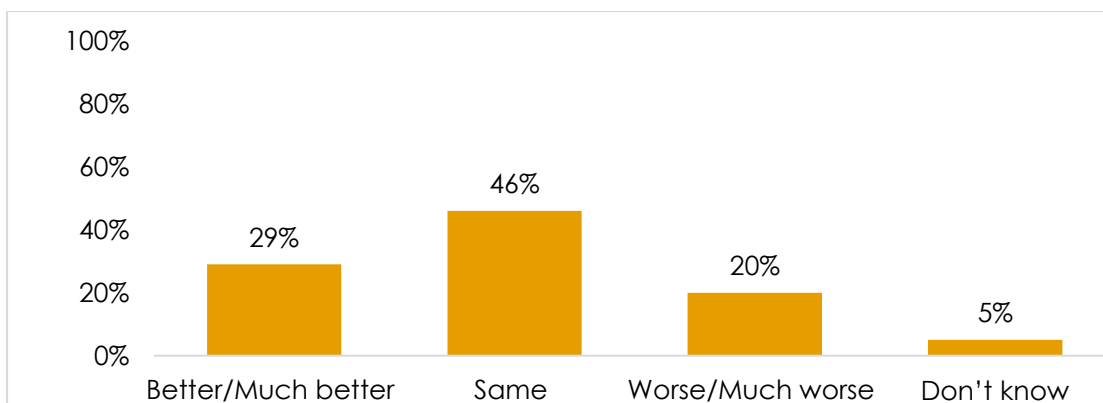


Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Promoting opportunities and equality for women? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")

Equal treatment and opportunities over time

Despite their appreciation of the government's efforts, only three in 10 citizens (29%) think that equal treatment and opportunities for women have actually improved compared to a few years ago. Almost half (46%) say there has not been any change, while two in 10 (20%) say things have gotten "worse" or "much worse" (Figure 3).

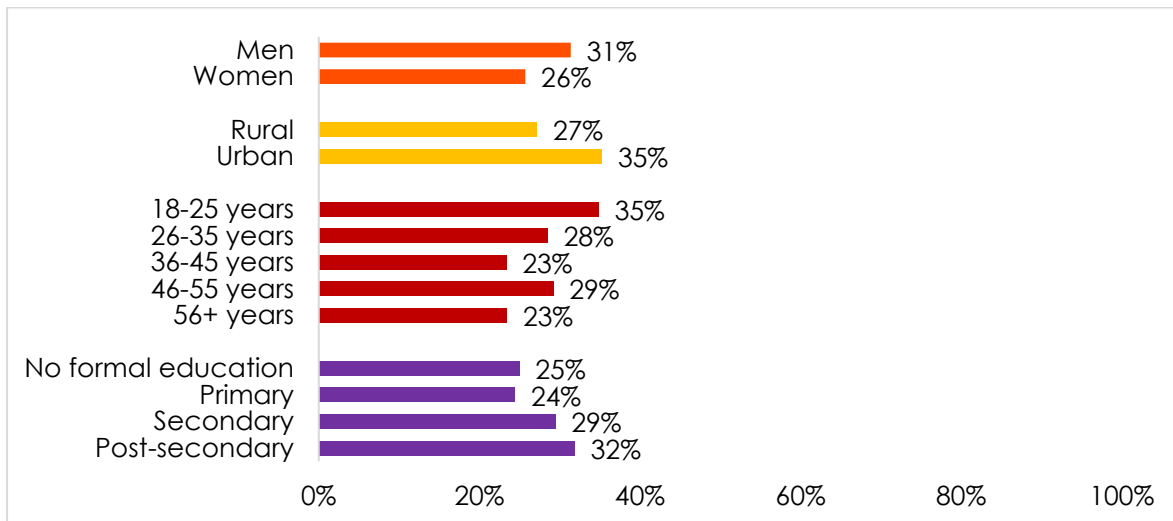
Figure 3: Change in equal opportunities and treatment for women | eSwatini | 2018



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?

Slightly more men (31%) than women (26%) and more urban residents (35%) than rural dwellers (27%) see progress in the treatment and availability of opportunities for women in the country. Young people (35% of those aged 18-25) and respondents with secondary (29%) or post-secondary education (32%) are more likely to see progress than their older and less-educated counterparts (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Change in equal opportunities and treatment for women | by socio-demographic group | eSwatini | 2018

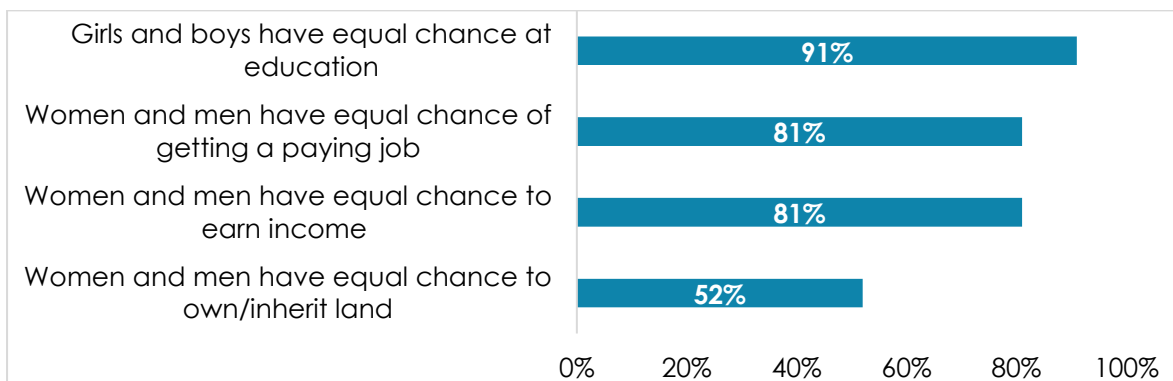


Respondents were asked: Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same: Equal opportunities and treatment for women? (% who say "better" or "much better")

Access to opportunities

Overwhelming majorities of citizens affirm that men and women in eSwatini have equal access to education (91%) and gainful employment (81%). However, only about half (52%) say women have an equal chance to own or inherit land (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Access to opportunities men and women | eSwatini | 2018



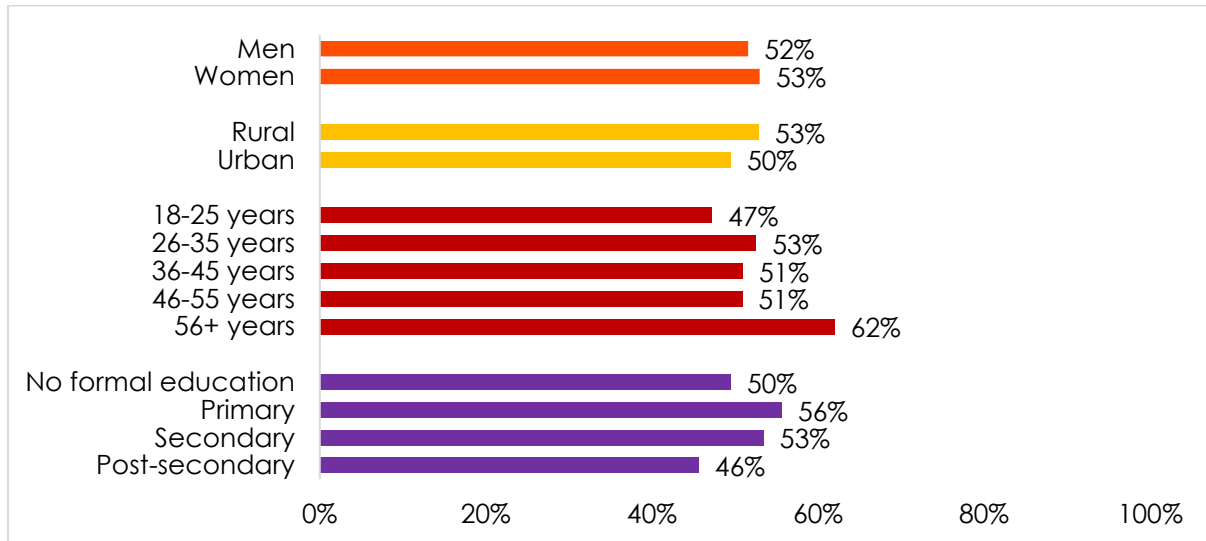
Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree, or haven't you heard enough to say: In our country today:

- 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")

On the question of equal opportunity to own and inherit land, women and men hold almost identical views, as do urban and rural residents. The youngest and best-educated respondents are least likely to see women as having an equal chance to own and inherit land: Only 47% of 18- to 25-year-olds and 46% of respondents with post-secondary qualifications hold this view (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Equal opportunity to own and inherit land | by socio-demographic group | eSwatini | 2018

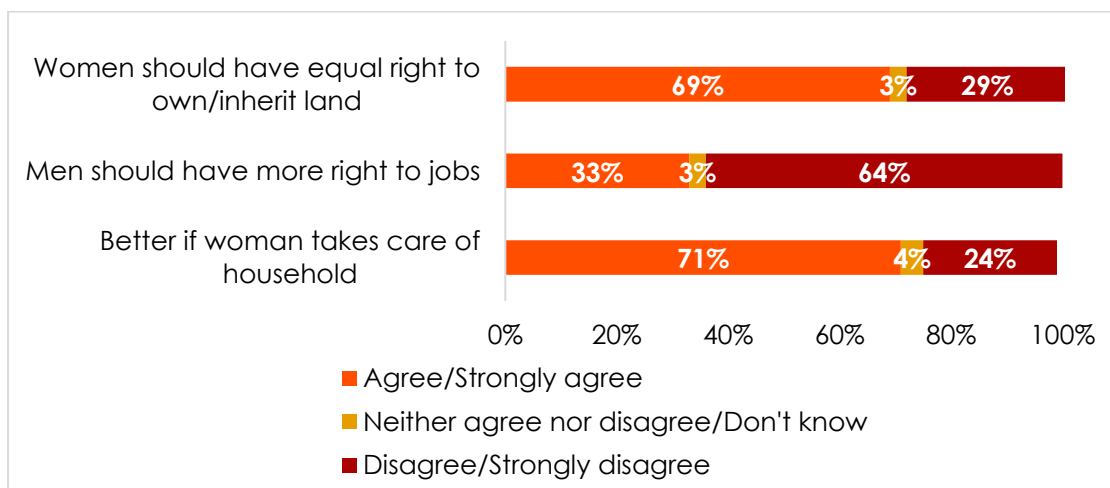


Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree, or haven't you heard enough to say: In our country today, women and men have equal opportunities to own and inherit land? (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

Support for equal rights for women

Strong majorities of the Swazi population support equal rights for women when it comes to land and work. About seven in 10 (69%) say women should have the same right as men to own and inherit land, and almost two-thirds (64%) disagree with the idea that men should have more right than women to jobs when employment is scarce (Figure 7). However, when it comes to gender roles in the home, seven in 10 respondents (71%) prefer that a woman, rather than a man, take care of the household and children.

Figure 7: Support for women's rights | eSwatini | 2018

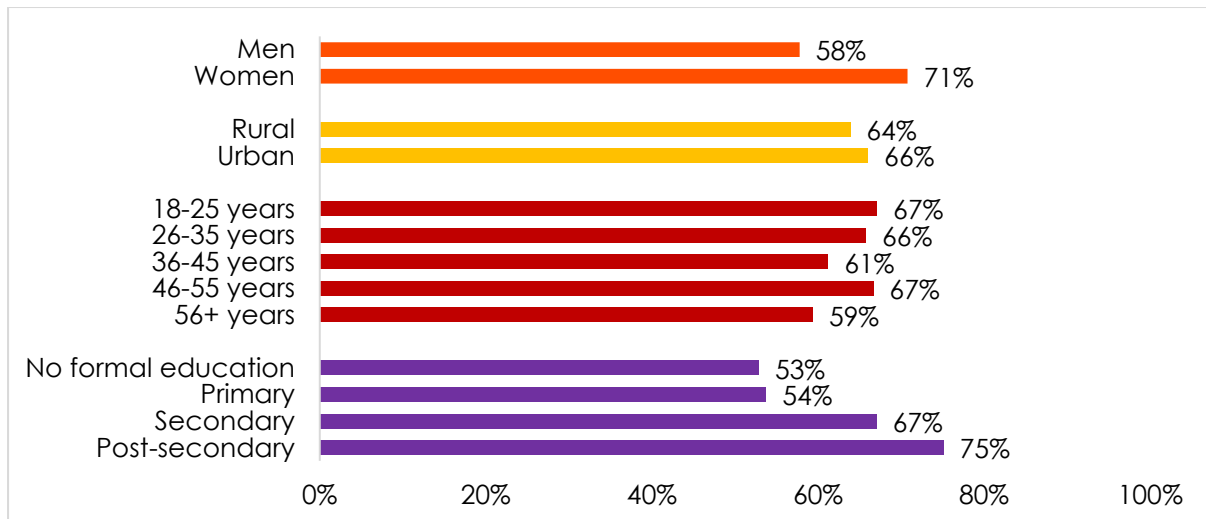


Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree:

- Women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land?
- When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women?
- 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 are more likely than men to support equal opportunity when it comes to scarce jobs, 71% vs. 58% (Figure 8). And support for equal rights to jobs is higher among respondents with secondary (67%) or post-secondary (75%) education than among their less-educated counterparts. Support for equal employment opportunity is somewhat weaker among older respondents (59% of those aged 56 years and above).

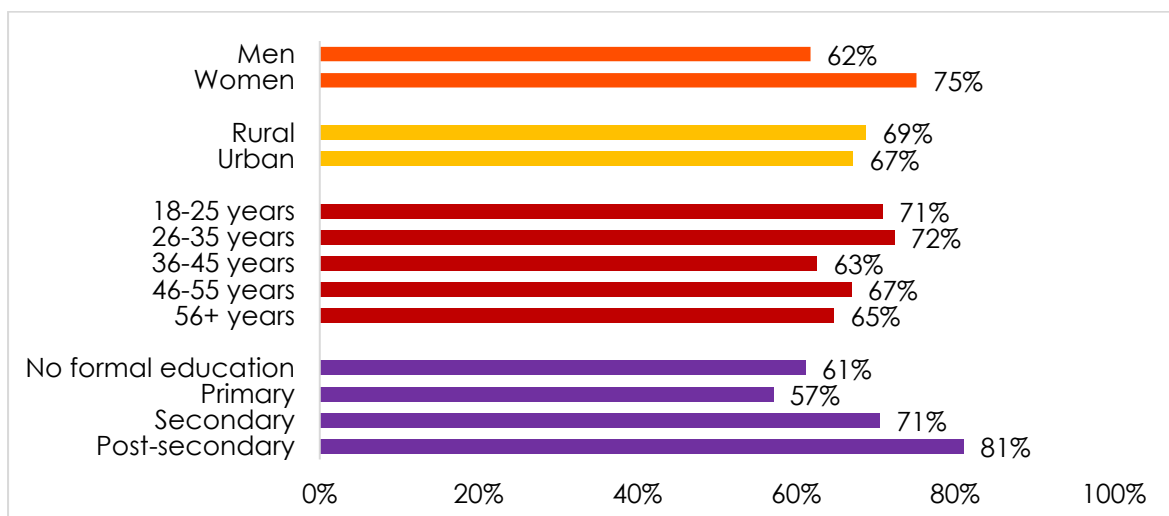
Figure 8: Support for equal right to jobs | by socio-demographic group | eSwatini | 2018



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 women's right to own and inherit land shows a similar pattern of stronger approval among women (75%, vs. 62% of men), younger respondents, and citizens with secondary or post-secondary education (Figure 9).

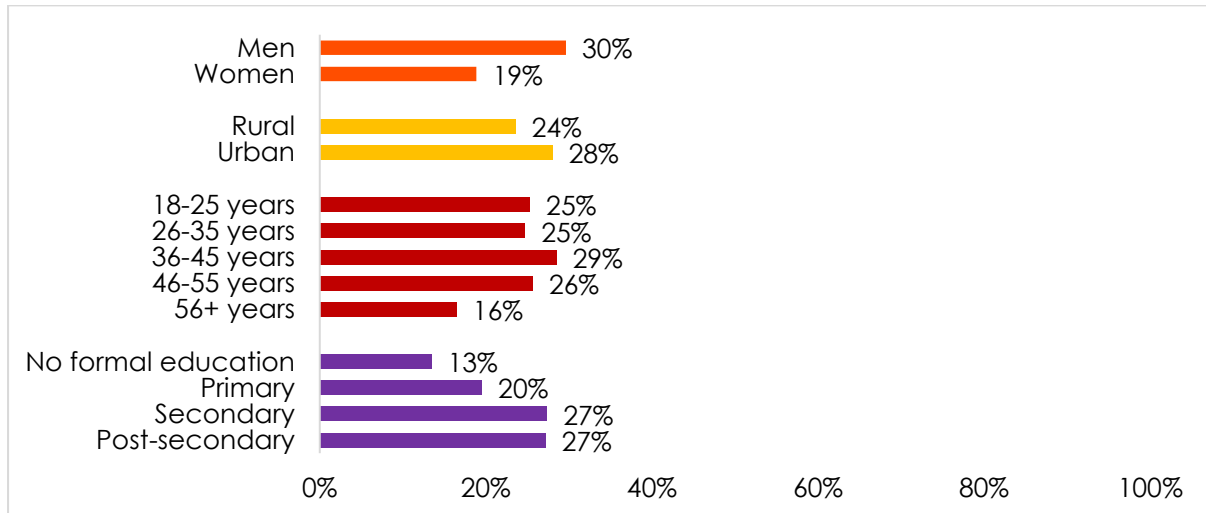
Figure 9: Support for women's right to own and inherit land | by socio-demographic group | eSwatini | 2018



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 “agree” or “strongly agree”)

While most eSwatini citizens feel that families are better off if women, rather than men, take care of the home and children, men are actually more likely than women to disagree with this idea (30% vs. 19%) (Figure 10). Respondents with more than a primary education are twice as likely as those with no formal education to disagree with the idea of women's superiority as homemakers (27% vs. 13%). Only about one in six respondents above age 55 (16%) think men are as good as women at taking care of the home and children.

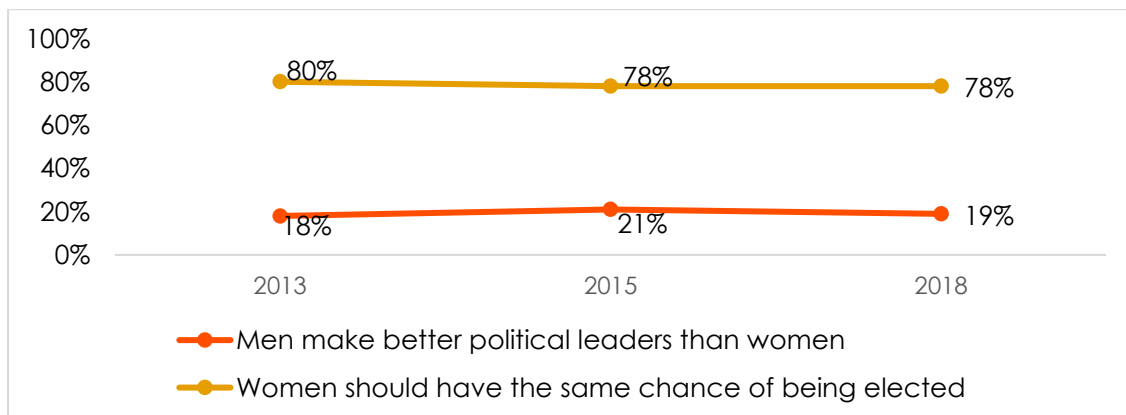
Figure 10: Gender roles in the home | by socio-demographic group | eSwatini | 2018



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

Support for gender equality extends into the political realm, as more than three-fourths (78%) of eSwatini citizens say women should have the same chance as men of being elected to public office. This level of support has been stable since Afrobarometer started surveys in eSwatini in 2013 (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Support for gender equality in politics | eSwatini | 2018



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)

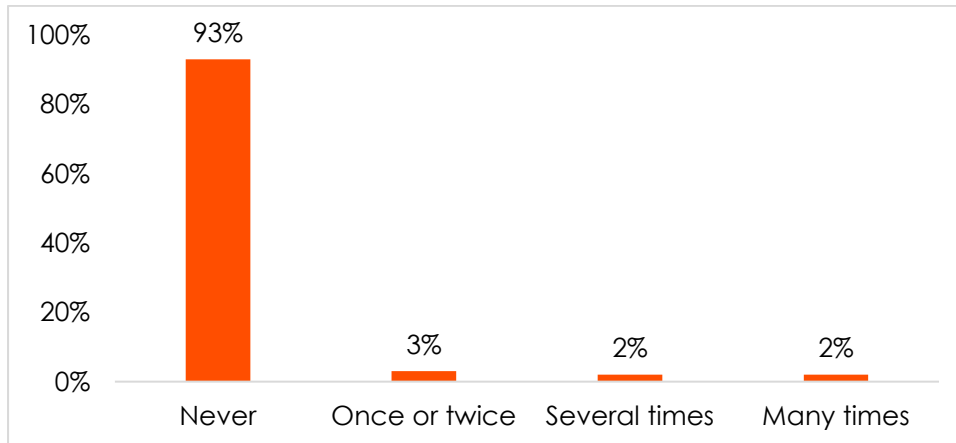
Gender-based discrimination and violence

While most eSwatini citizens (93%) say they did not experience gender-based discrimination during the year preceding the survey, about one in 14 respondents (7%) say they did suffer discrimination “once or twice,” “several times,” or “many times” (Figure 12).

Similarly, an overwhelming majority (95%) of citizens say a man is “never justified” in beating his wife, but one in 20 respondents (5%) see wife-beating as “sometimes” or “always” justified (Figure 13).

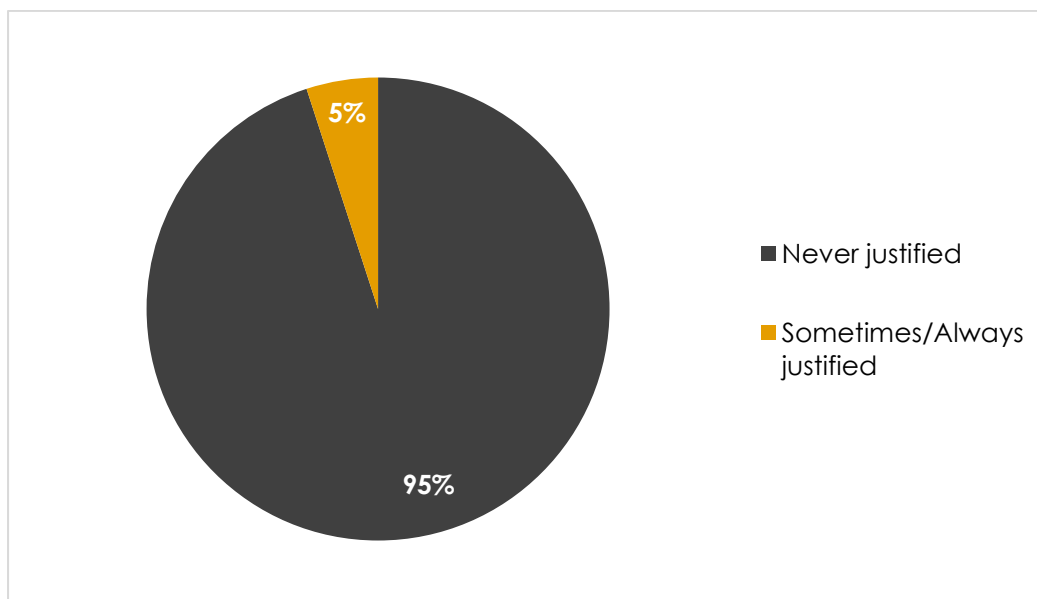
Women and men differ in their experience of gender-based discrimination as well as their views on wife-beating (Figure 14). Women are about twice as likely as men to say they suffered gender-based discrimination during the previous year, 9% vs. 5%. And they are only half as likely as men to see wife-beating as “sometimes” or “always” justified, 3% vs. 7%.

Figure 12: Experienced gender-based discrimination | eSwatini | 2018



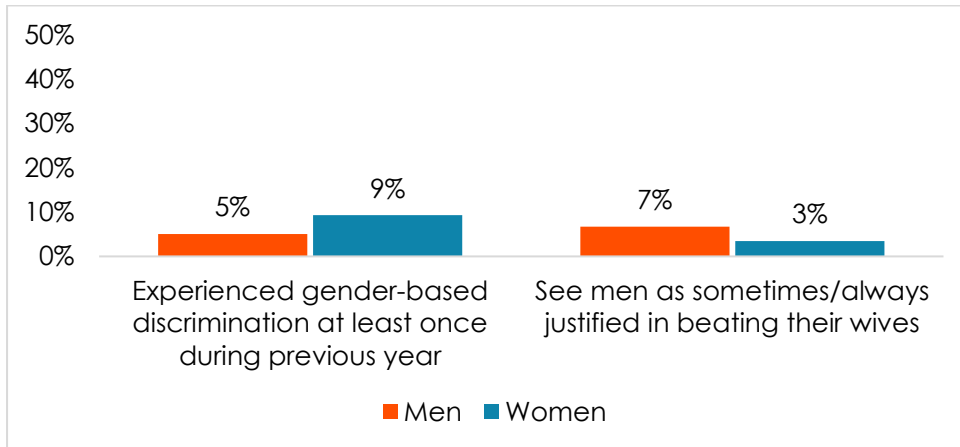
Respondents were asked: *In the past year, how often, if at all, have you been personally discriminated against based on your gender?*

Figure 13: Justified for men to beat their wives? | eSwatini | 2018



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 be justified: For a man to beat his wife?*

Figure 14: Experienced discrimination and see violence as justified | by gender
 | eSwatini | 2018



Respondents were asked:

- In the past year, how often, if at all, have you been personally discriminated against based on your gender?
- Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, sometimes be justified, or never be justified: For a man to beat his wife?

Conclusion

Citizens of eSwatini express widespread support for gender equality and applaud the government's efforts to promote equal treatment and opportunities for women. Most believe that women have achieved equal access to education and gainful employment. However, land ownership by women remains a challenge as only half of all citizens feel that women have an equal chance to own or inherit land. Views on family roles also remain largely gendered; most citizens believe it's better if a woman, rather than a man, takes care of the household and children.

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.

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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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