

# Gender equality in Tanzania: Uproar and perceived progress

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**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 237 | Gugu Nonjinge**

## Summary

Gender makes headlines in Tanzania, as when the president attacks birth control and endorses kicking pregnant girls out of school or when fake fingernails and eyelashes are banned from Parliament (Guardian, 2017, 2018a, 2018b).

Less uproar accompanies government action that actually promotes gender equality, such as the 2016 Constitution guaranteeing women's right to own and use land; a 2016 plan to make primary education free for all; the 2017 Legal Aid Act recognizing paralegals, who can play an important role in women's empowerment (Dancer, 2018); and a promise in 2018 to institute a tax exemption on sanitary towels (Citizen, 2018).

Both outrage and progress occur against a background in which women's rights are far from secure, in areas ranging from violence (40% of women aged 15-49 have suffered physical violence) to representation in Parliament (63% male) to unequal pay and land ownership (Global Partner Governance, 2018; Tanzania Demographic and Health Survey and Malaria Indicator Survey, 2016).

Given these divergent trends and realities, how do Tanzanians perceive issues of gender equality? The latest Afrobarometer survey findings show that most Tanzanians support equal rights and opportunities for women. Most also think – or thought before the latest pronouncements on pregnant schoolgirls, birth control, and fake fingernails – that the government is doing a good job of promoting gender equality, and that in fact parity has been achieved on key issues of education, work, and land ownership.

## 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 Tanzania, led by REPOA, interviewed 2,400 adult Tanzanians in May 2017. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Tanzania in 2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, and 2014.

## Key findings

- Almost three-fourths (73%) of Tanzanians say the government is performing “fairly well” or “very well” in promoting opportunities and equality for women. More than half (59%) believe opportunities and treatment for women are “better” or “much better” now than a few years ago.

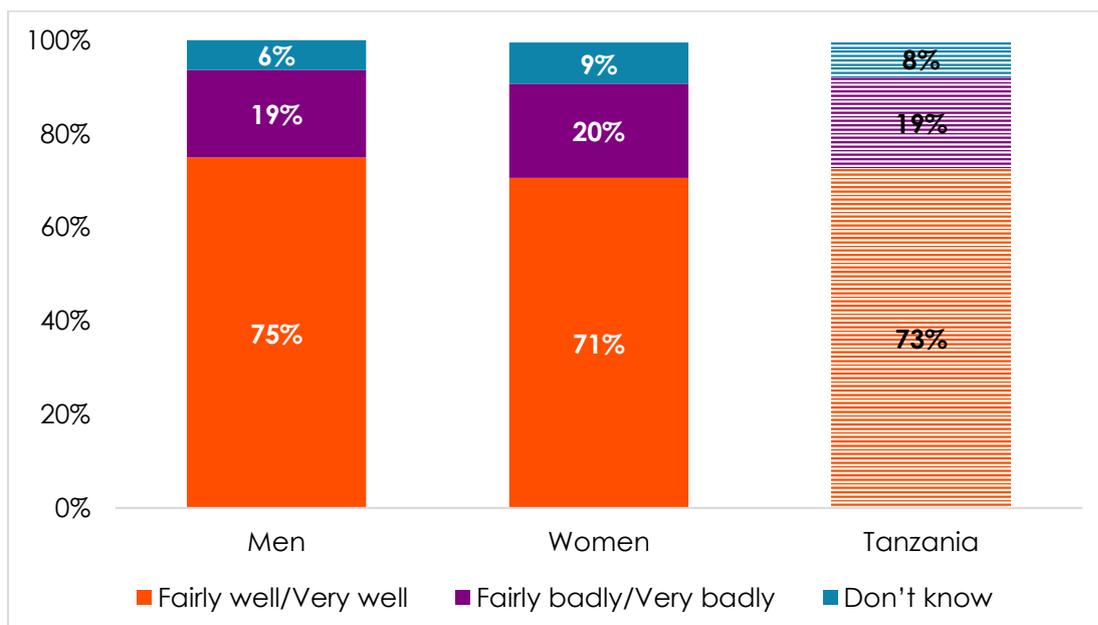
- Almost nine in 10 Tanzanians (88%) say women and men have an equal chance to own and inherit land. Most (85%) support gender equality when it comes to land.
- Even larger proportions say both genders have an equal chance to get an education (97%), to earn an income (94%), and to get a paying job (93%). But a substantial 35% “agree” or “strongly agree” that men should have more right to being hired when jobs are scarce.
- Three-fourths (75%) of citizens “agree” or “strongly agree” that women should have the same chance as men of being elected to political office.
- Only 3% of Tanzanian women say they experienced gender-based discrimination during the year preceding the survey.
- Nine out of 10 respondents (90%) say a man is “never” justified in beating his wife.

### Government’s handling of gender equality

Tanzanians rate their government very favourably on its performance on gender parity. Close to three-fourths (73%) of citizens say the government is doing “fairly well” or “very well” in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women. Only about two in 10 (19%) say the government is doing “fairly badly” or “very badly.” Approval of the government’s efforts is only slightly weaker among women (71%) than among men (75%) (Figure 1).

Tanzanians’ assessment of the government’s performance on gender equality may be a response to government action to try to improve the lives of women and girls. Speaking at the Tanzania Gender and News Summit in August 2018, for example, Minister of Constitution and Legal Affairs Palamagamba Kabudi said the government would implement a tax exemption on sanitary towels to help keep girls in school and cited the Village Land Act, which supports women’s right to own land, and the Legal Aid Act amongst several government initiatives designed to move toward gender equality in Tanzania (Gender Links, 2018).

**Figure 1: Government performance in promoting gender equality | by gender**  
 | Tanzania | 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?

## Perceptions of equal opportunities and treatment for women

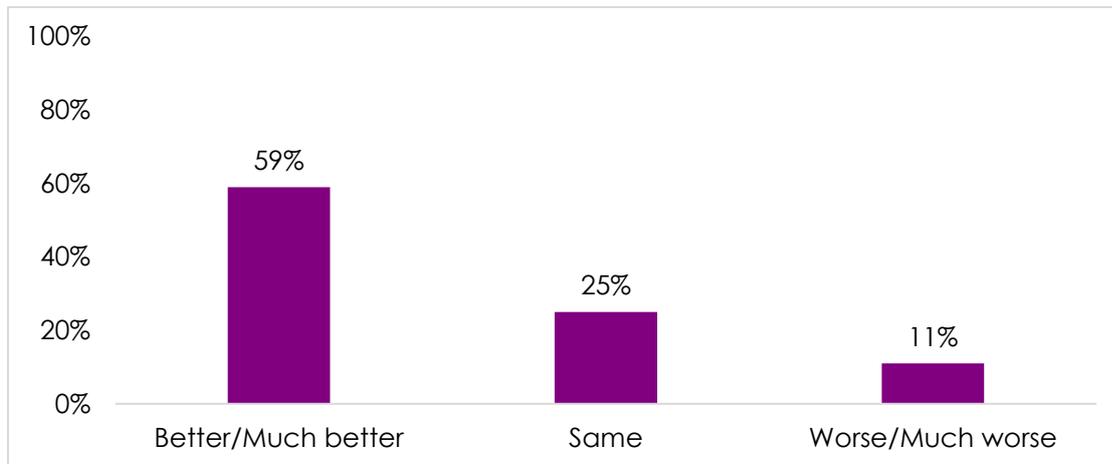
### Progress over time

More than half (59%) of Tanzanians say that equal opportunities and treatment for women are “better” or “much better” now than they were a few years ago. About one in ten (11%) say the situation has worsened, while one in four (25%) say nothing has changed (Figure 2).

Key socio-demographic groups differ little in their assessment of progress on gender equality; only 4 percentage points separate men (61% better/much better) and women (57%) (Figure 3).

**Figure 2: Opportunities and treatment for women compared to a few years ago**

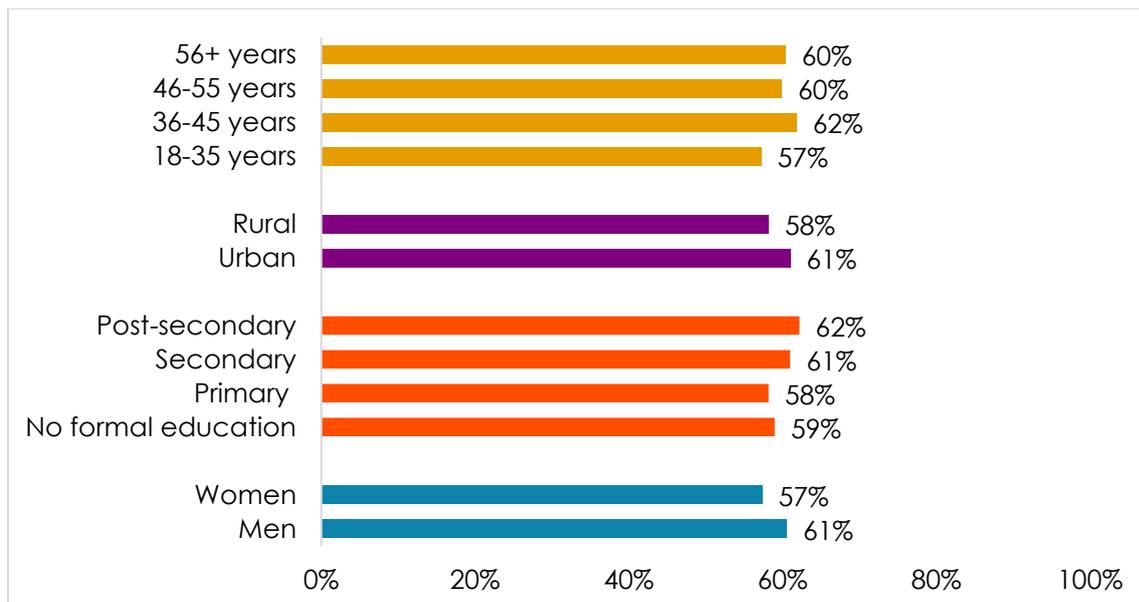
| Tanzania | 2017



**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?

**Figure 3: Change in equal opportunities and treatment for women**

| by socio-demographic group | Tanzania | 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”)

One advance that may contribute to a perception of progress is Tanzania's new Constitution passed in 2016, which, among other rights, enshrines women's entitlement to "acquire, own, use or develop land under the same conditions as for men" (Reuters, 2014). We note, however, that the Afrobarometer survey was conducted before widely publicized remarks by President John Magufuli in which he endorsed a law allowing states to expel students who become pregnant (Guardian, 2017) and said that people who use birth control are just too lazy to work hard and feed a large family (Guardian, 2018a).

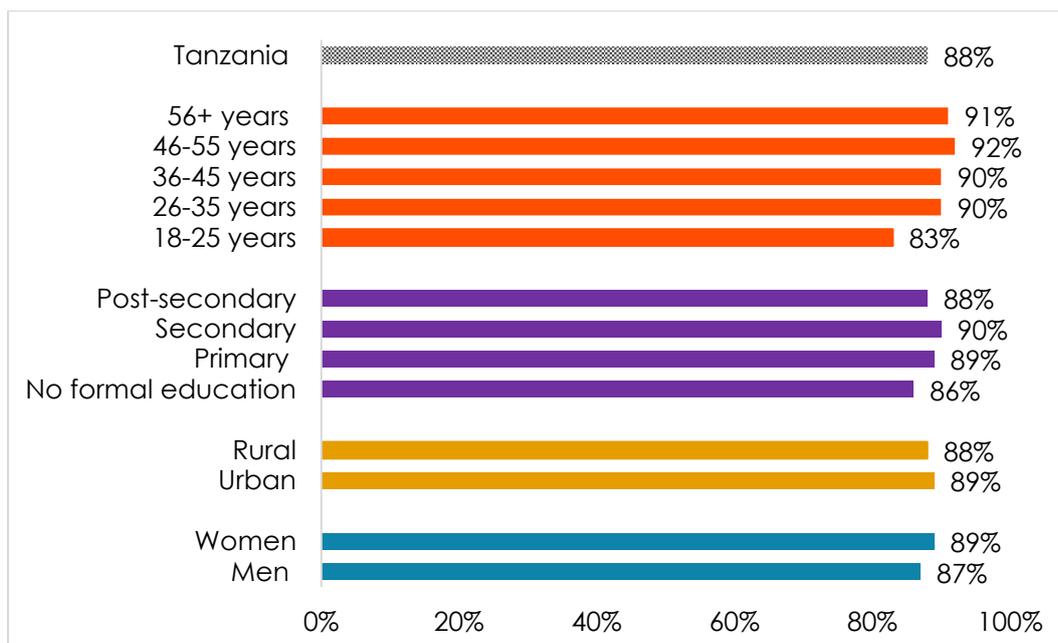
### Access to land

On one issue that is central to women's economic empowerment, most Tanzanians believe they have already achieved gender equality: women's right to own and inherit land.

In Tanzania, access to land is critical for food production and income generation, as well as a source of power and social status (SIDA, 2015); in rural areas, many women's livelihoods depend almost entirely on their land. While women have the same rights as men, under Tanzanians law, to own and control land, women rarely buy land (UNA Tanzania, 2017). Customary practices in Tanzania often require women to access land through their fathers, brothers, husbands, or other men (Guardian, 2014). Only 24% of Tanzanian women report that they own land alone or jointly with someone, while a mere 9% of women have sole ownership of a house or land (Tanzania National Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Only about 15% of Tanzania's privately owned land is under sole female ownership, while 47% is owned by men and 38% is under joint male-female ownership (World Bank, 2013). Under pressures from population growth, land-based investments, and poor land management, land conflicts have increased and tenure security has declined (Walwa, 2017).

Nonetheless, almost nine in 10 Tanzanians (88%) say women and men have equal opportunities to own and inherit land. These views are shared equally amongst men and women and amongst both urban and rural residents. Young people are less likely to agree with this assessment (83% amongst 18- to 25-year-olds) than their elders (Figure 4).

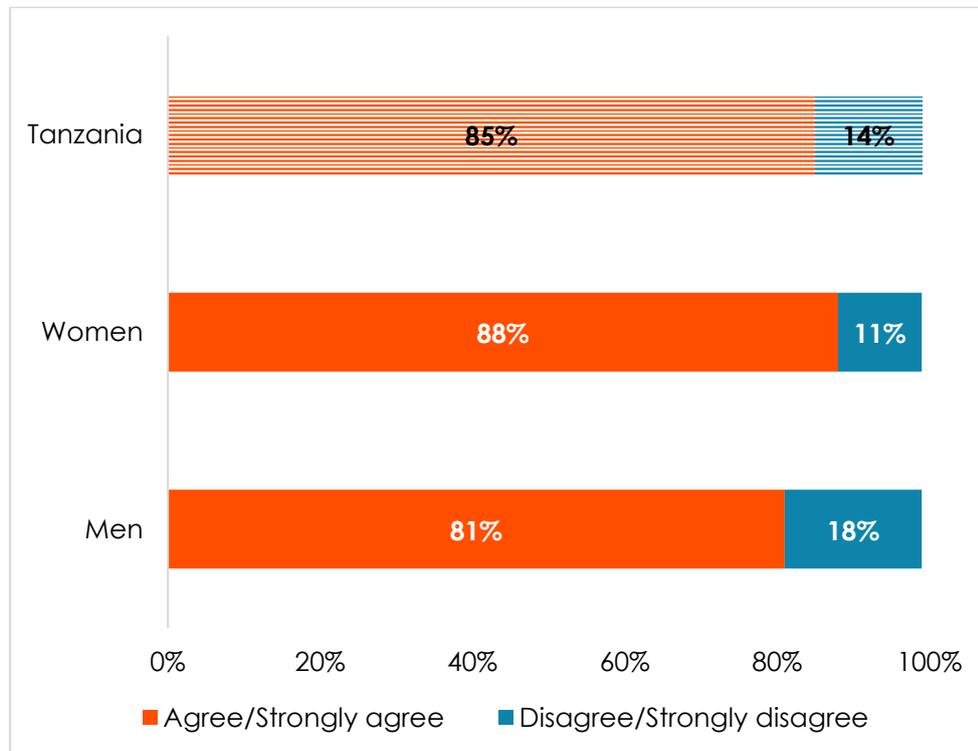
**Figure 4: Equal opportunity for women and men to own and inherit land**  
 | by socio-demographic group | Tanzania | 2017



**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")

Almost the same proportion support the principle of equal rights in land ownership: 85% “agree” or “strongly agree” that women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land. Only one in seven (14%) are opposed to equal rights on the land issue. Men are somewhat less likely than women to favour equal rights (81% vs. 88%) (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Support for equal rights to land | by gender | Tanzania | 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: Women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land?

### Other life opportunities

On two other key social issues – education and employment – Tanzanians are also convinced that gender parity already exists (Figure 6).

More than nine in 10 respondents (97%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that girls and boys have an equal chance to get an education. One factor that may contribute to these positive responses is the Primary Education Development Plan implemented in 2016, which aims to make primary education free for all, possibly boosting the number of girls who stay in school. However, the plan does not address other potential barriers to retention, such as long distances to school (Human Rights Watch, 2017).

Almost as many Tanzanians say women have the same chance as men to earn an income (94%) and to get a paying job (93%). Despite these assessments, the Tanzania National Bureau of Statistics (2016) reports a persistent gender pay gap: Two-thirds (67%) of women say they earn less than their husbands.

Moreover, Tanzanians are somewhat more conflicted as to whether women really should have equal employment opportunities if jobs are scarce: While six in 10 respondents (63%) endorse full equality when it comes to jobs, a substantial 35% “agree” or “strongly agree” that men should have more right to being hired in a tight job market (Figure 7).

**Figure 6: Equal rights to education and income opportunities | Tanzania | 2017**

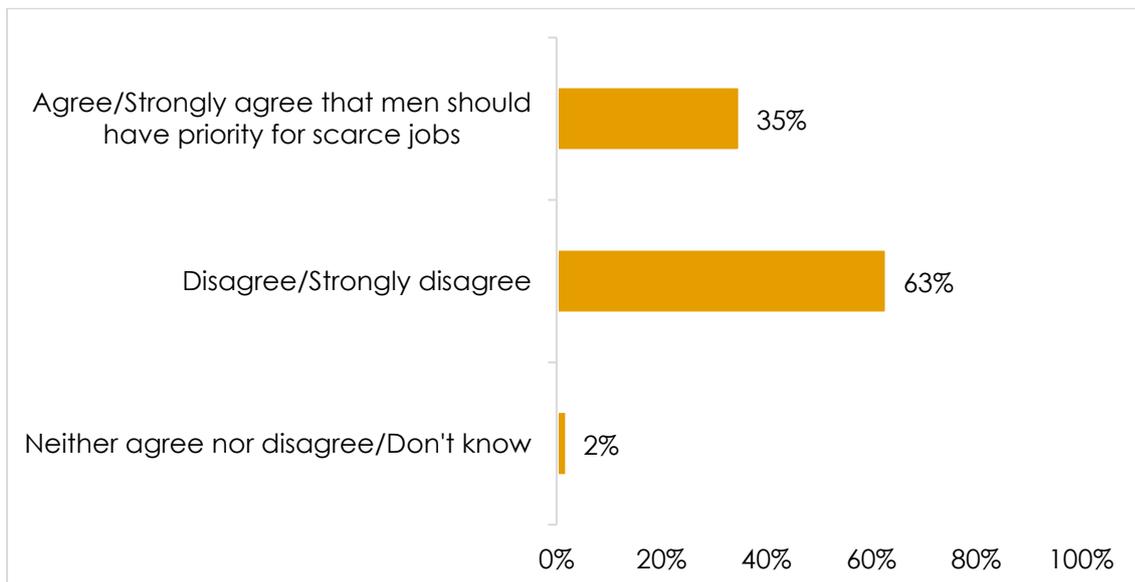


**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree, or haven't you heard enough to say? In our country today:

- 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?

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

**Figure 7: Should men have more right to scarce jobs? | Tanzania | 2017**

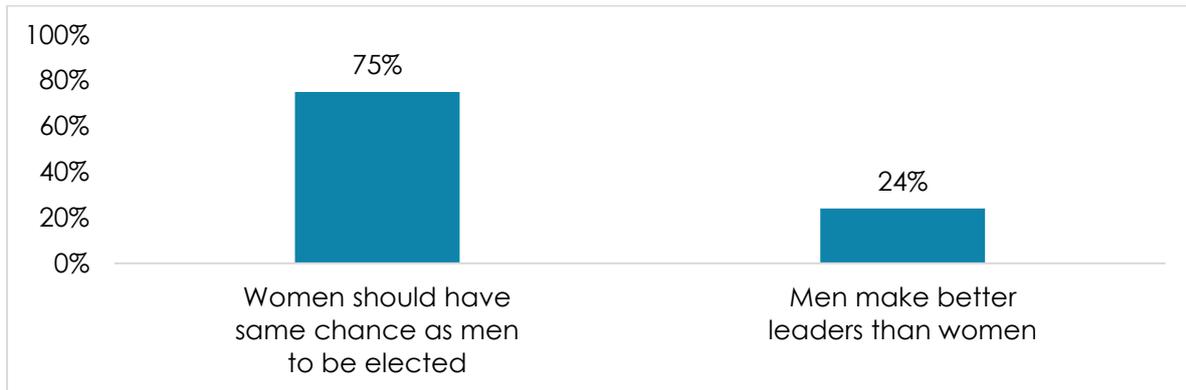


**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women?

### Gender equality in politics

According to survey responses, Tanzanians are ready to improve the gender disparity among political leaders. Three-fourths (75%) of citizens agree (including 62% who "agree very strongly") that women should have the same chance as men of being elected to political office (Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Support for gender equality in politics | Tanzania | 2017**



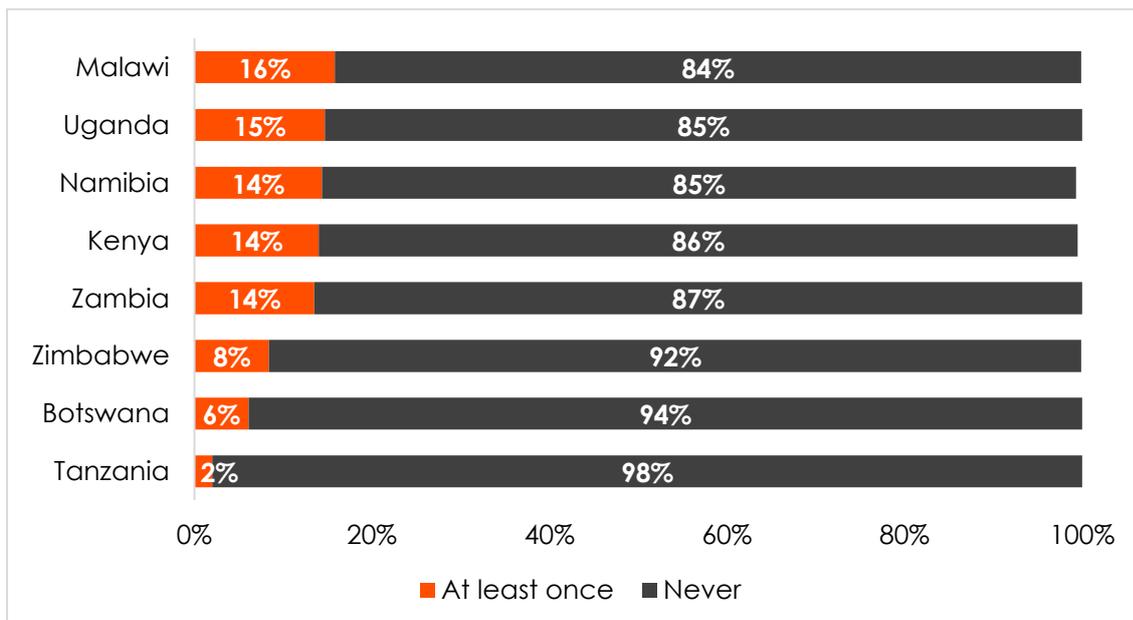
**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: Men make better political leaders than women, and should be elected rather than women.  
 Statement 2: Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men.  
 (% who "agree"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

### Gender discrimination and violence

Only one Tanzanian in 50 (2%) say they experienced discrimination based on their gender during the year preceding the survey, which is surprising considering the number of women who have been victims of gender-based violence. Among eight surveyed countries in East and Southern Africa, Tanzania has the lowest level of reported gender discrimination (Figure 9).

While women (3%) are more likely than men (1%) to say they suffered gender-based discrimination, this 2-point difference lies within the survey's margin of error, precluding any reliable conclusions.

**Figure 9: Experience of gender-based discrimination | 8 countries in East and Southern Africa | 2016/2017**

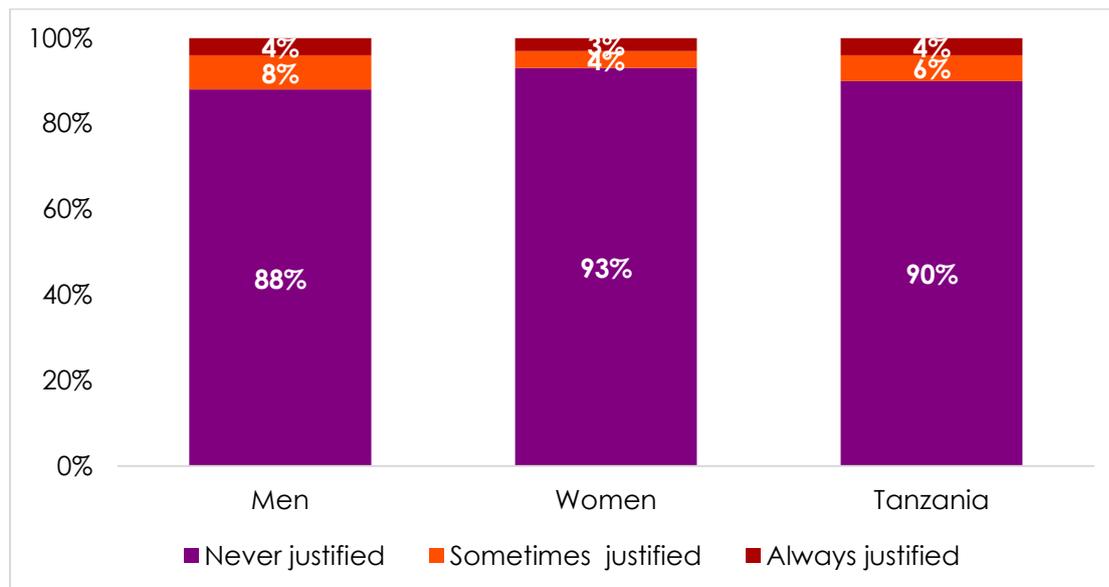


**Respondents were asked:** In the past year, how often, if at all, have you personally been discriminated against based on any of the following: Your gender?

When it comes to gender-based violence, other sources indicate that it is widespread and cuts across socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds in Tanzania. According to the Tanzania National Bureau of Statistics (2016), four in 10 women (40%) have experienced physical violence since age 15.

But an overwhelming majority of Tanzanians reject such violence. Nine out of 10 respondents (90%) say it “never” for a man to beat his wife. Women are somewhat more likely than men to reject wife-beating as never justified (93% vs. 88%) (Figure 10).

**Figure 13: Can wife-beating be justified? | Tanzania | 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?

## Conclusion

Most Tanzanians support equal rights and opportunities for women, and more than half believe opportunities and treatment for women have improved in recent years. Most also say Tanzania has achieved equal rights for women when it comes to education, employment, and land ownership.

If these positive popular assessments clash with on-the-ground realities reported in official studies and the news media, women's-rights activists may be left to wonder whether perceived progress has obscured how much remains to be done, and whether leaders' controversial public statements will serve as a reminder.

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