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Gender Equality and the Participation of Women in Public Office in Swaziland

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1. Introduction

Despite major efforts over the past two decades to create equal opportunities for women to participate in politics and to increase female representation in government leadership in sub-Saharan Africa, women's inclusion continues to be a major challenge. According to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals Report 2013, the proportion of seats held by women in single or lower houses of national parliaments in sub-Saharan Africa increased by just 8 percentage points between 2000 and 2013, from 13% to 21%.

Many international conferences have agreed to a target of 30% representation of women in decision-making positions in government and the private sector. In Africa, only 11 countries had met this target as of 1 April 2014, and only Rwanda had more women than men in Parliament (63%). The Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Gender and Development (2008) calls for 50% representation of women in decision-making positions in both public and private sectors by 2015. Only four SADC countries have met the 30% threshold, and no SADC state has met the SADC protocol recommendations.

Swaziland continues to fall well short of targets for women's representation in public affairs. In 2013 elections, only 18% (55 of 309) of nominated candidates were women, and only one was elected to Parliament. With the King appointing three additional women, four of the 65 members of the House of Assembly (6%) are women. This is a regression from the 2008 elections, in which 13% of candidates were women, nine women were elected to Parliament, and two were appointed by the King. In the upper house of Parliament, the Senate, 33% of members are women, still short of SADC protocol targets. Data compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) as of April 2014 ranks Swaziland at 132 out of 189 countries with regard to women's representation in Parliament.

The constitution of Swaziland provides that if after a general election the female membership will not meet the required 30% of Parliament, the house shall elect not more than four additional women by region. Despite this provision, Parliament did not form an electoral college to elect four additional women in 2008 or 2013. Even if these constitutional provisions were implemented, women's representation in Parliament would still be below 30%. With the next general election scheduled for 2018, Swaziland will not meet the goal for women's representation in public affairs by 2015.

Swaziland remains predominantly a patriarchal society in which cultural norms and religious institutions significantly influence the molding of gender identities. Tending to promote the notion of male superiority and female subordination, these norms give rise to different

expectations for male and female behavior and likely contribute to women’s continued under-representation in political leadership roles.

This paper explores the perceptions of Swazis on gender equality and women’s participation and representation in public affairs, based on a 2013 Afrobarometer survey.

2. Afrobarometer

Afrobarometer is a comparative series of public attitude surveys that covered 35 African countries in Round 5 (2011-2013). The first Afrobarometer survey in Swaziland was conducted in 2013. The survey measures public attitudes on democracy, the quality of governance, economic performance, and other critical issues in the surveyed countries. Afrobarometer’s main goal is to produce and share scientifically reliable data on public opinion in Africa to inform policy and practice while strengthening institutional capacities for survey research.

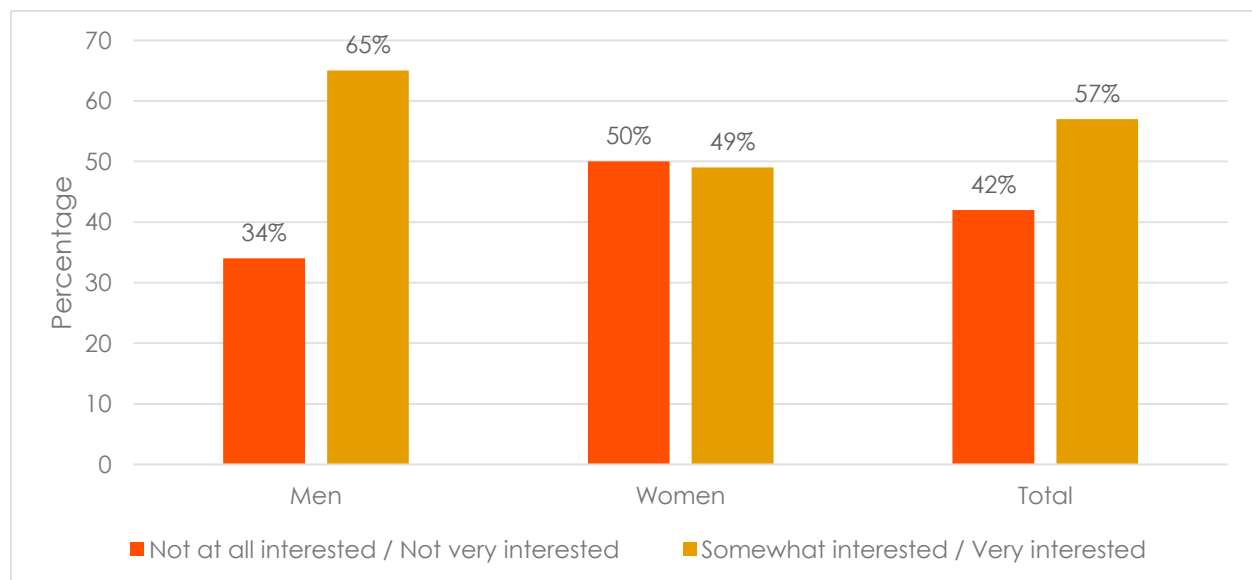
In Swaziland, Afrobarometer work is coordinated by the research team of activQuest (Pty) Ltd. Round 5 fieldwork was conducted May 22-June 4, 2013. Researchers interviewed 1,200 adult Swazis throughout the country. This sample size yields results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level.

3. Swazi women’s interest in public affairs

Studies suggest that women’s political under-representation is mirrored in a gender gap when it comes to interest in public affairs and desire to run for political office. Results from 34 African countries taken from the recently completed 2011-2013 Afrobarometer survey show that 66% of men stated they were somewhat or very interested in public affairs, compared to 53% of women.

In Swaziland, 49% of women were somewhat or very interested in public affairs, in contrast to 65% of men (Figure 1).

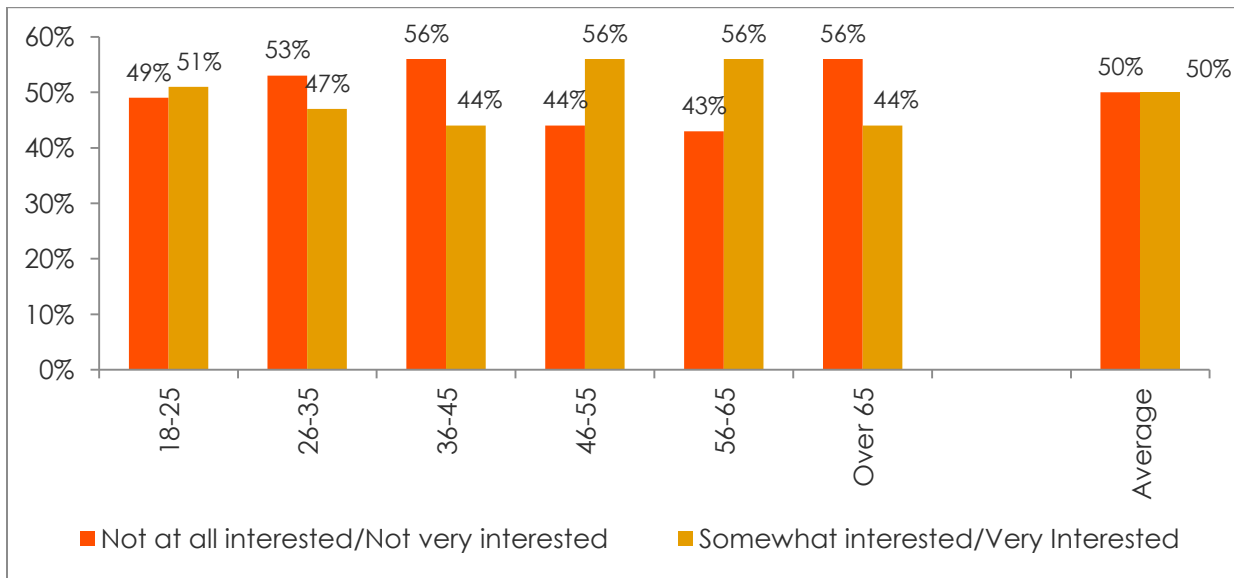
Figure 1: Interest in public affairs



Respondents were asked: *How interested would you say you are in public affairs; you know, in politics and government?*

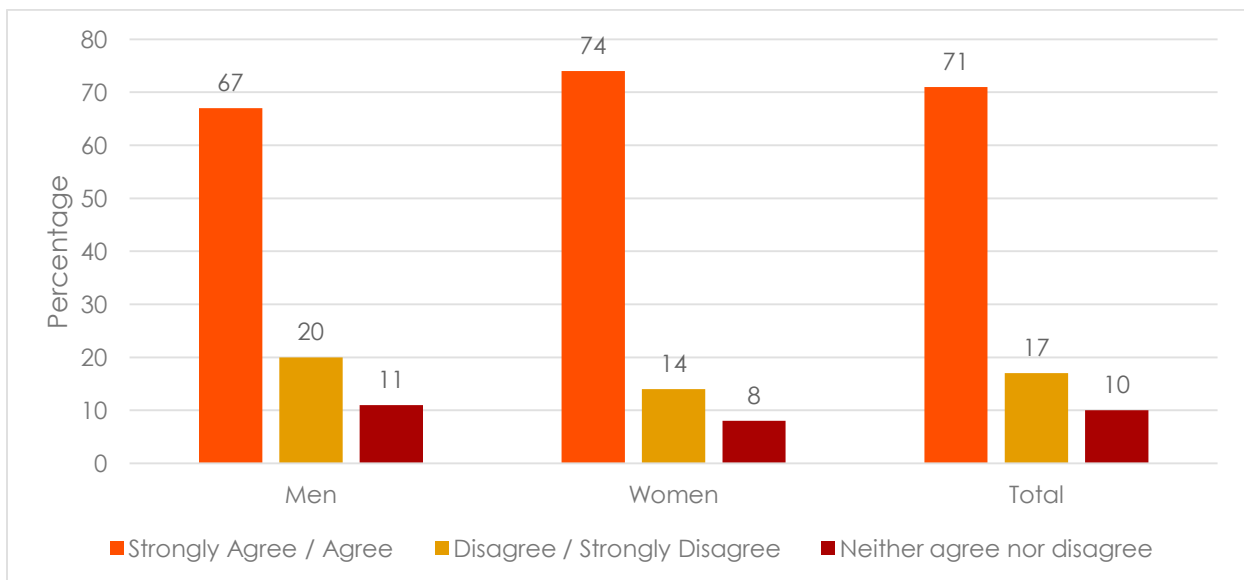
Interestingly, majorities among women ages 46-65 did express interest in public affairs (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Women’s interest in public affairs, by age group [women only]



Significantly, three-fourths of women (74%) agreed with the statement that “sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me cannot really understand what is going on” (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Respondents who say politics and government are complicated

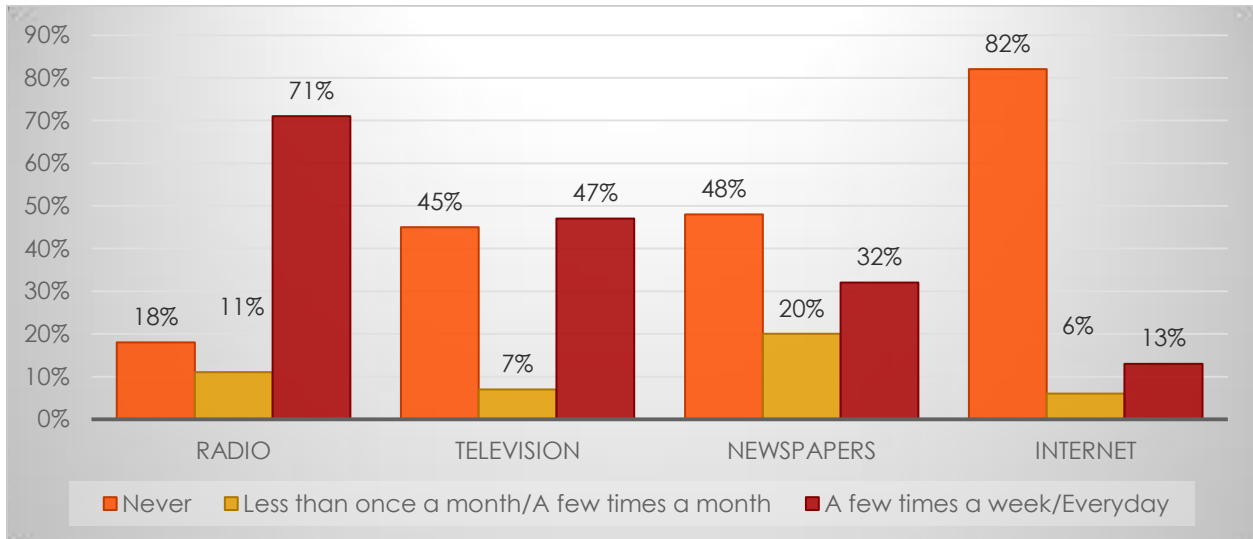


Respondents were asked: *Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me cannot really understand what is going on.”*

4. News sources

Information about key public issues is normally conveyed through broadcast and print media, and almost three quarters of women surveyed (71%) confirmed that they received news from the radio. Radio was the most common news source for women, with television and newspapers ranked second and third by usage (Figure 4). Very few women cited the Internet as a news source; 71% of urban women and 85% of rural women said the Internet was never a news source for them.

Figure 4: Frequency of news from different sources

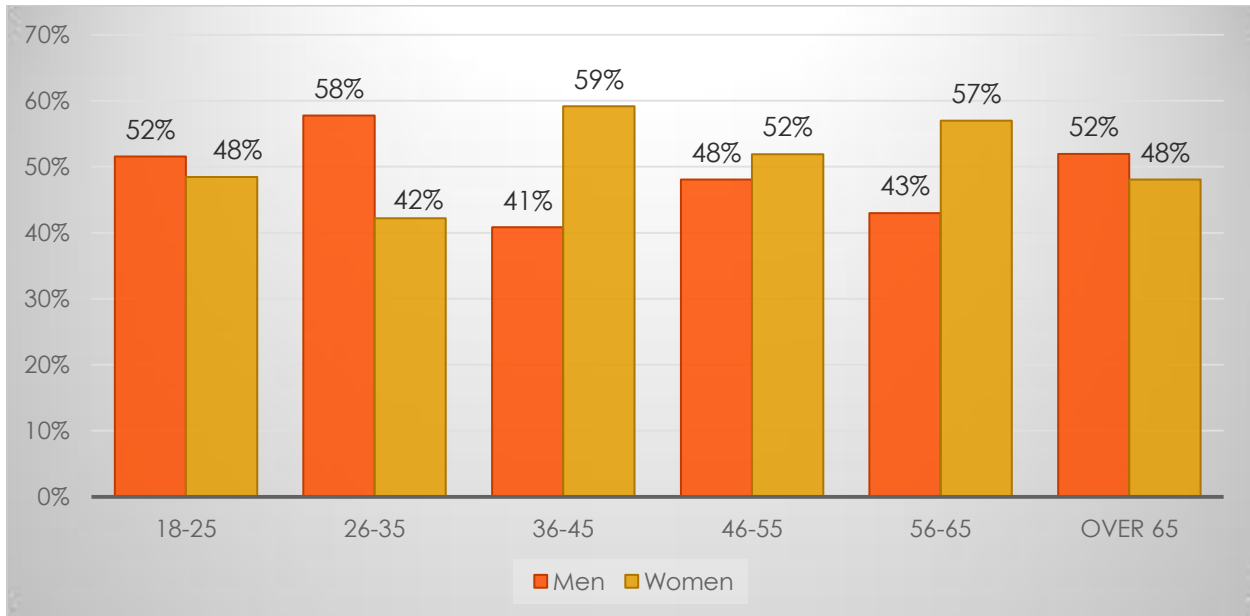


Respondents were asked: *How often do you get news from the following sources?*

5. Participation in national elections

Among survey participants, 58% reported voting in the 2008 elections (comparable to official turnout estimates of 54%). Mirroring their expressed interest in public affairs, women ages 18-35 were less likely to vote than women ages 36-65. Among men, voting rates were higher among 18- to 35-year-olds than among 36- to 65-year-olds (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Voters in 2008, by age and gender



Respondents were asked: *With regard to the most recent national election in September 2008, which statement is true for you? You were not registered to vote, you voted in the election, you decided not to vote, etc. (% saying they voted)*

Most respondents did not actively participate in an election campaign, but among those who did, men were significantly more inclined than women to attend a campaign meeting or rally (Table 1).

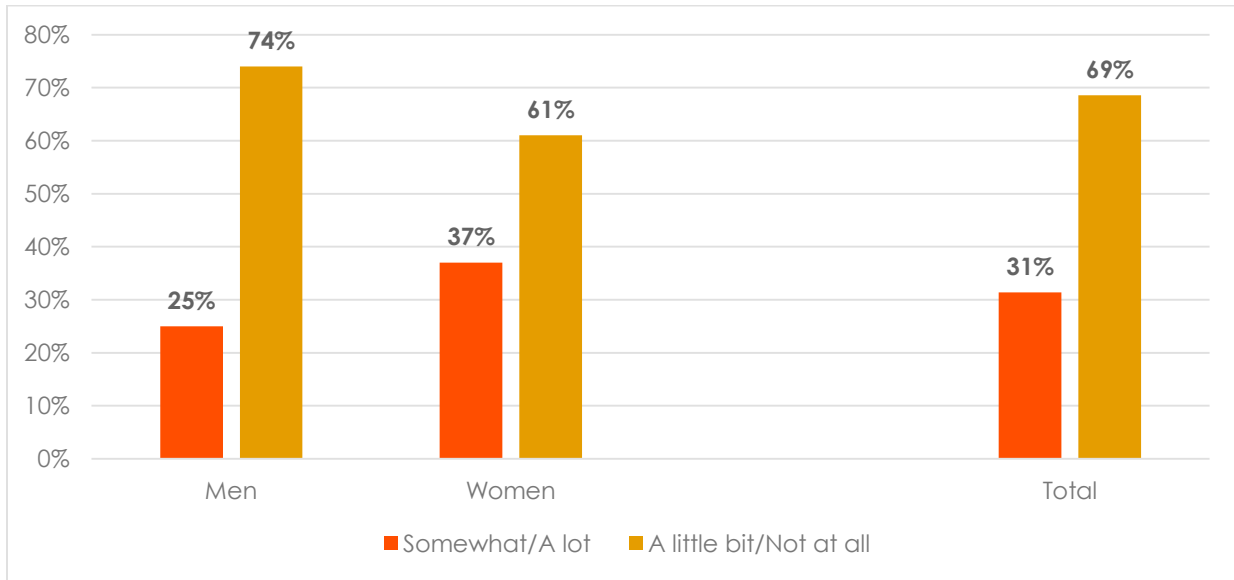
Table 1: Attendance at a campaign meeting or rally, by gender

	Gender		Total
	Men	Women	
No	74%	84%	79%
Yes	25%	16%	20%

Respondents were asked: *Thinking about the last national election in September 2008, did you attend a campaign meeting or rally?*

Women were far more likely than men to say they feared becoming a victim of political intimidation and/or violence (37% of women vs. 25% of men). Overall, almost one in three survey participants feared becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence.

Figure 6: Fear of becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence

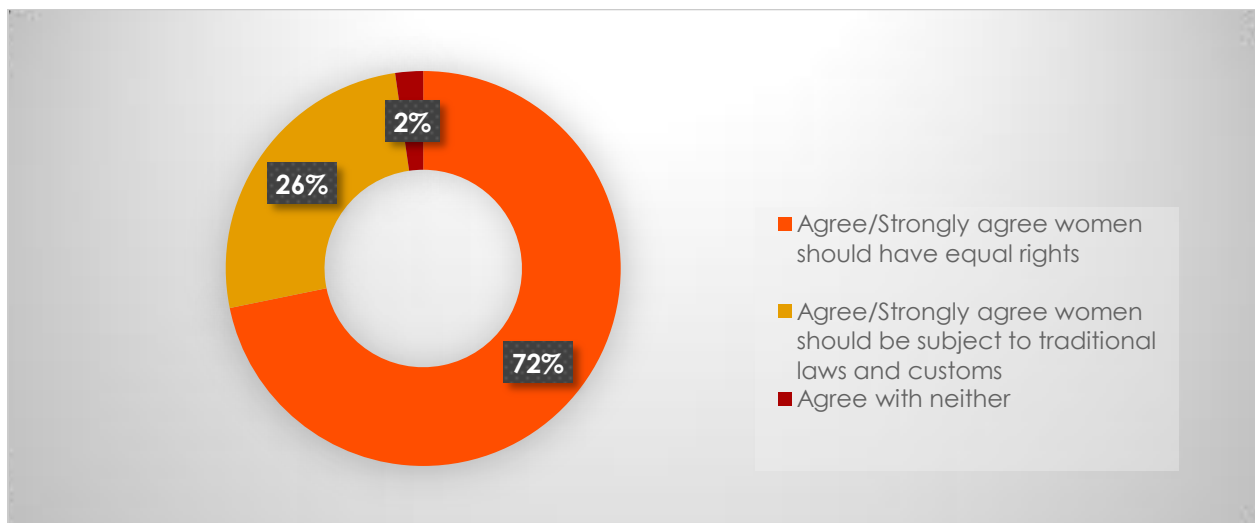


Respondents were asked: *During election campaigns in this country, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence?*

6. Swazi perceptions on gender equality

While women participate in civic life at lower rates than men, 72% of all Swazis support gender equality and say women should receive the same treatment as men. One quarter of Swazis, however, said that women have always been subject to traditional laws and customs and should remain so (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Swazi support for women's equality



Rural residents were more likely than urban dwellers to say that women should be subject to traditional laws and customs (28% vs. 20%) (Table 2). It should be noted that in Swaziland, most

rural areas fall under Swazi Nation Land (SNL), which is governed by traditional chiefs and not local governments.

Table 2: Support for gender equality, by urban or rural residence

	Urban	Rural
Agree/Strongly agree that women should have equal rights and receive the same treatment as men do	78%	70%
Agree/Strongly agree that women have always been subject to traditional laws and customs, and should remain so	20%	28%
Agree with neither	2%	2%

Men were almost twice as likely as women to say that women should continue to be subject to traditional laws, and significantly less likely to express support for equal rights (Table 3).

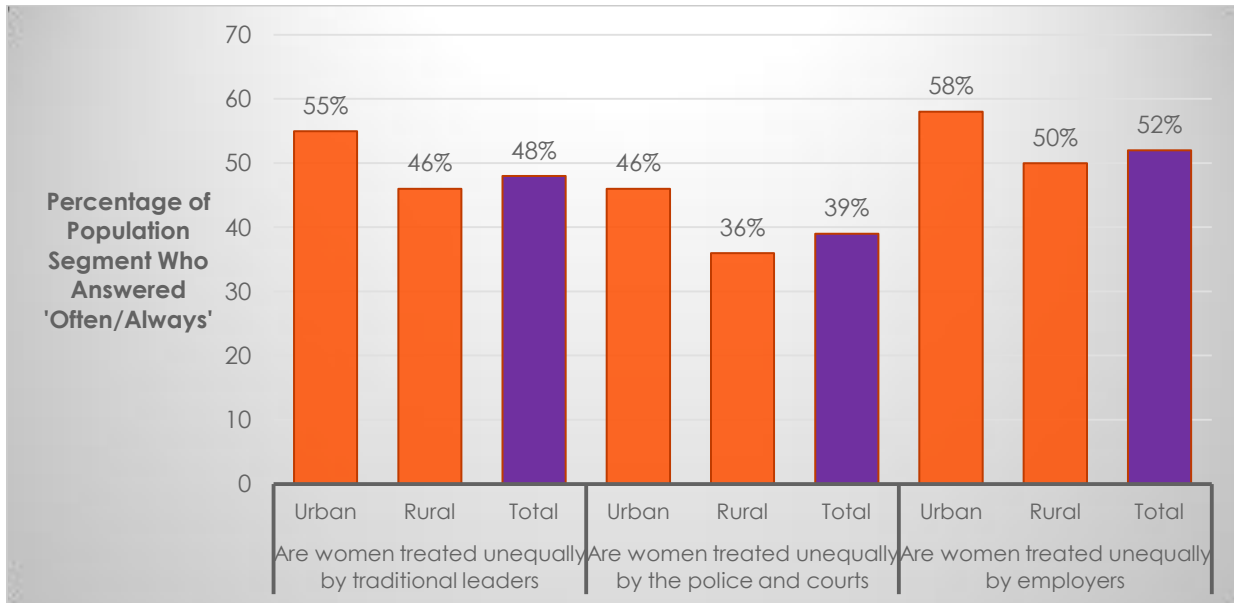
Table 3: Support for equal rights, by gender

	Men	Women	Total
Agree/Strongly agree that women should have equal rights and receive the same treatment as men do	64%	79%	72%
Agree/Strongly agree that women have always been subject to traditional laws and customs, and should remain so	34%	19%	26%
Agree with neither	2%	2%	2%

Despite substantial public support for women’s equality, many Swazis said there is still a divide between the belief and the practice. More than half (52%) of survey respondents said employers always or often treat women unequally; 48% said the same of traditional rulers, and 39% of the police and courts (Figure 8).

Perceptions of inequality and unequal treatment of women were highest among urban dwellers. Six in 10 urban Swazis (58%) said employers often or always treat women unequally.

Figure 8: Unequal treatment of women, by urban vs. rural residence



7. Conclusion

Gender equity in all areas of decision making continues to pose major challenges for governments across Africa. Despite political and legislative efforts to ensure a greater representation of women in leadership roles, most countries will miss gender targets set for 2015.

In Swaziland, which has actually regressed in the area of women’s representation in Parliament, it is back to the drawing board to plan and implement a holistic approach to increasing women’s participation in the public space (which goes well beyond the parliamentary representation that is the focus of this paper). Afrobarometer data points toward possible issues for reflection, with findings that in comparison to men, Swazi women are less interested in public affairs, more intimidated by the complexities of government and politics, less likely to participate in political campaigns, and more concerned about campaign-related violence.

There is clearly a divide between what the people say (72% say that women should have equal rights) and what is actually practiced. With no hope of meeting targets by 2015, all focus will be on the efforts of current decision makers to address these imbalances. Come 2018, election results will either discount or ratify the country’s efforts to narrow the gender gap.

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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, and the Institute for Empirical Research in Political Economy (IREEP) in Benin. We gratefully acknowledge generous support from the UK 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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