

Basotho less supportive of women's political leadership, opposed to traditional chieftain role

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 12 | Libuseng Malephane and Mamello Nkuebe

Summary

Basotho women still find it hard to attain leadership positions due to discriminatory cultural practices and laws, Afrobarometer's most recent survey shows. Survey results also suggest that women are less active than men in community and political organising.

Support for women's political leadership declined from 2012 to 2014, and even though two-thirds of women say that women should have the same chance as men of being elected to political office, a majority of women and men still support the law that allows only sons to succeed to chieftaincy in Lesotho.

Women are somewhat less likely than men to participate in community meetings, join with others to raise issues, and attend campaign rallies, although they are equally likely to say they are leaders or active members of voluntary associations or community groups, the May 2014 survey indicates.

The Constitution of Lesotho prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender, and the Electoral Law endorses political participation by women. But gender discrimination is maintained when it comes to chieftaincy succession. The survey results suggest that gender advocacy efforts are needed to redress discrimination and legislation barring daughters from succession to traditional leadership roles.

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer is an African-led, 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 are currently under way (2014-2015). 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 Lesotho, led by Advision Lesotho, interviewed 1,200 adult Basotho in May 2014. A sample of this size yields results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys have been conducted in Lesotho in 2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, and 2012.

Key findings

- Two-thirds (67%) of women say women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men (Figure 1). But support for this position has declined among both women and men and is lower in Lesotho than in five other Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries surveyed in 2014 (Figure 2).
- Fewer than half of women (46%) say the law barring daughters from succeeding to the chieftaincy should be changed (Figure 4).

- Six women out of 10 (62%) say they attended a community meeting at least several times in the previous year, compared to 73% of men; women were roughly half as likely as men to have joined with others to raise an issue (22% vs. 38%) (Figure 5). But they were just as likely to be leaders or active members of voluntary associations or community groups.

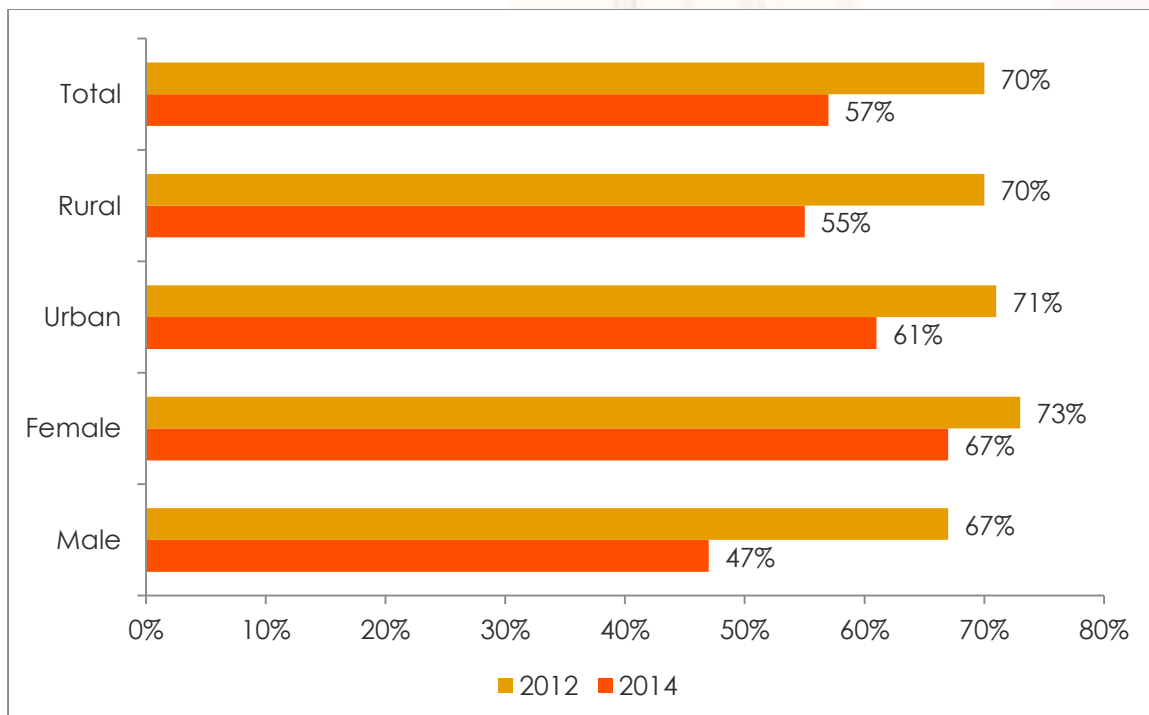
Women in political leadership

The legal environment in Lesotho has gone a long way toward facilitating the political participation of women. The Local Government Elections (Amendment) Act of 2004 provides for the allocation of one-third of seats in local government councils to women. Furthermore, the National Assembly Electoral Act of 2011 requires that all political parties registered with the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) facilitate participation by women and that party lists for proportional representation seats have equal numbers of men and women.

However, only 31 of 120 members of Parliament (elected in 2012), nine of 33 senators, and eight of 30 cabinet members are women. Also, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Centre's Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) 2014 Report on Lesotho indicates that only 24% of employers are women and 23% of decision-making positions in government are occupied by women.

The Afrobarometer survey of 2014 shows that nearly six in 10 Basotho (57%) say women should have the same chance as men to be elected to political office (Figure 1). This is lower than in 2012 (70%). Further analysis indicates higher support for gender equality among women (67%, including 54% who hold this view "very strongly") than among men (47%), and slightly higher support among urban dwellers (61%) than rural (55%).

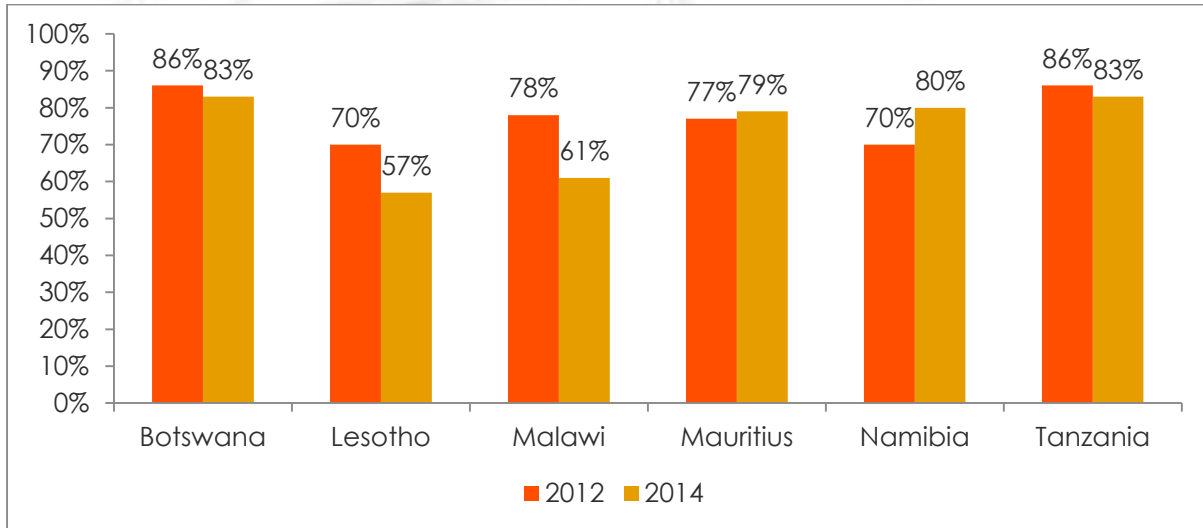
Figure 1: Support for political leadership by women | by gender and location | Lesotho | 2012-2014



Participants 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 Statement 2)

In comparison with five other countries in the SADC, the proportion of Basotho who support women being given the same chance at political leadership as men remains the lowest (Figure 2). In Namibia, which ranked with Lesotho at the bottom in 2012, support increased significantly in 2014, to 80%.

Figure 2: Support for political leadership by women | by SADC country | 2012-2014



Participants 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 Statement 2)

Gender and chieftaincy succession

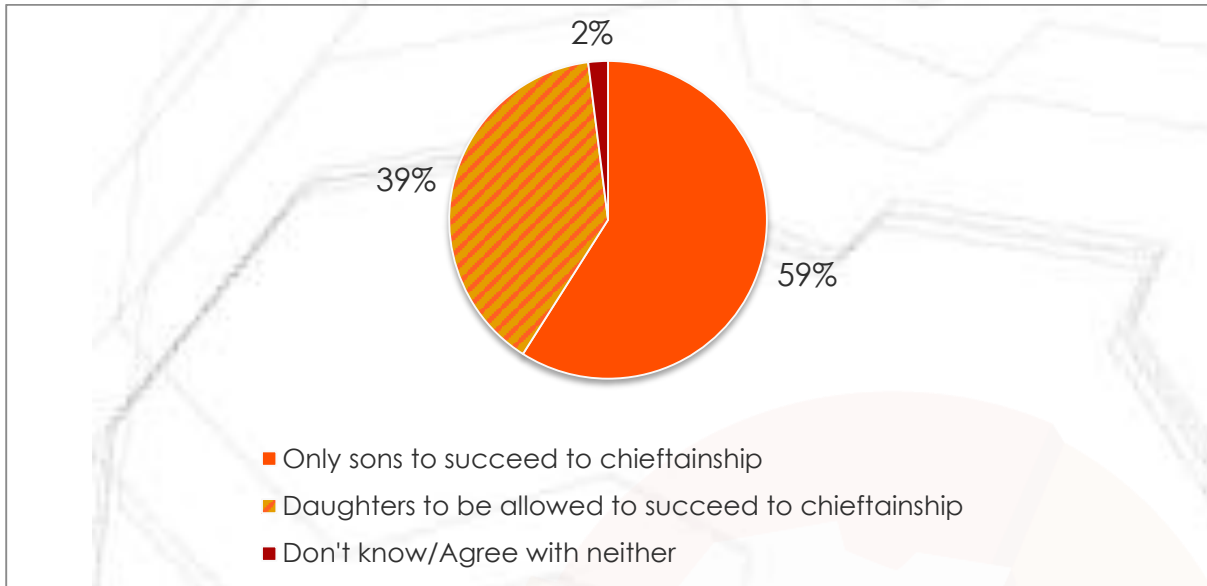
Women in Lesotho are not allowed to succeed to traditional leadership roles such as the chieftaincy, despite the Constitution's provisions for fundamental rights and freedoms (Section 4), freedom from discrimination (Section 18), and the right to equality before the law and equal protection of the law (Section 19).

The government's Gender and Development Policy of 2003 calls for repeal of discriminatory parts of Section 18 of the Constitution, but this has not been achieved to date.

The Chieftaincy Act of 1968 stipulates that only the male child can succeed his father to chieftaincy, with the wife being the caretaker chief when there is no male child to succeed. This law was recently challenged, unsuccessfully, in the Constitutional Court and then in the Appeal Court by a woman, Senate Gabasheane Masupha, the only child of the late Chief David Masupha.

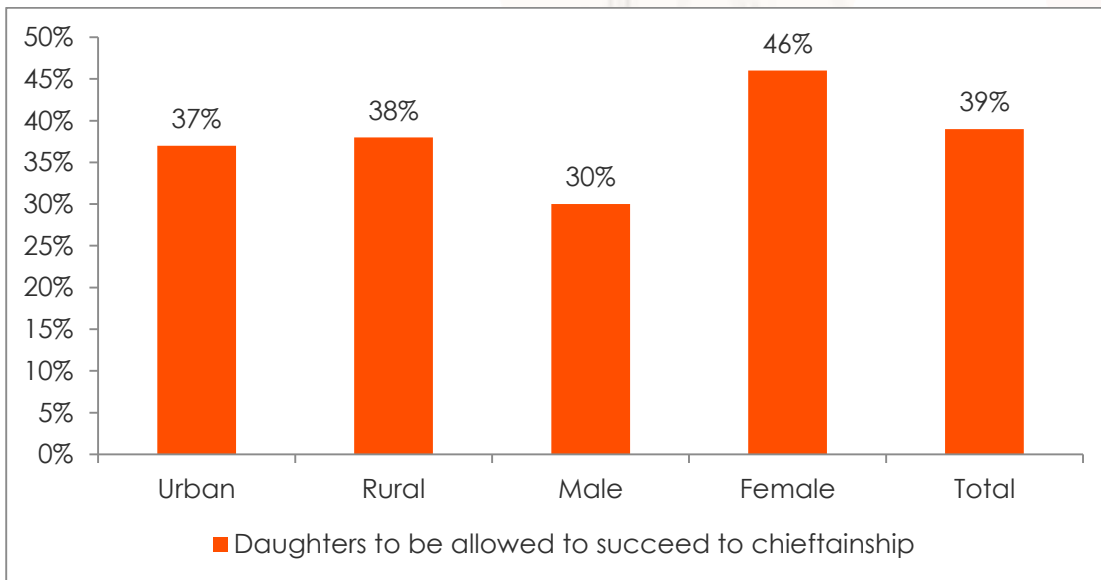
The 2014 Afrobarometer survey shows that a majority of Basotho do not support succession of women to the chieftaincy. Only four in 10 respondents (39%) support a girl child succeeding to chieftaincy, while six in 10 (59%) support the current law (Figure 3). Women were more likely than men to support succession by daughters (46% vs. 30%) (Figure 4). There was no difference by urban-rural residence.

Figure 3: Chieftaincy succession by daughters | Lesotho | 2014



Participants were asked: Let's talk for a moment about the kind of society you would like to have in this country. Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2. Statement 1: The current customary law which provides that only sons can succeed to the chieftaincy has served Lesotho well and should therefore be maintained. Statement 2: The customary law requiring that only sons should succeed to the chieftaincy should be replaced to allow for the succession of daughters. (% who "agree" or "agree very strongly")

Figure 4: Support for succession of daughters to chieftaincy | by gender and location | Lesotho | 2014



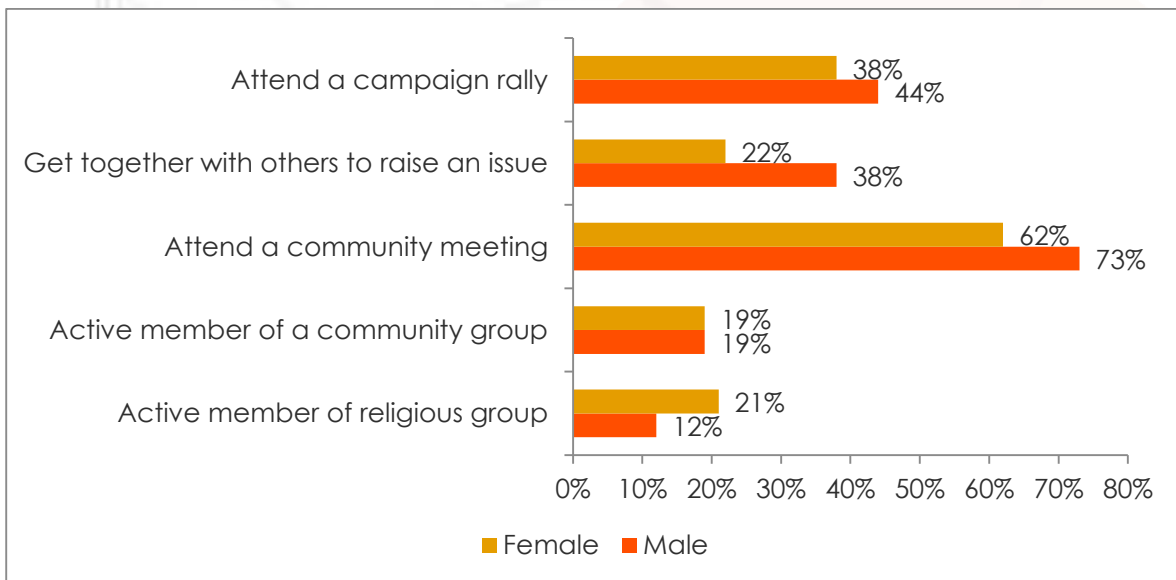
(% who "agree" or "agree very strongly")

Women less involved in community and political activities than men

The effects of socialisation and culture on gender disparity may also be reflected in women's lower levels of participation in community action and politics. While women are as likely as men to say they are leaders or active members of voluntary associations or community groups, they were less likely than men (62% vs. 73%) to attend a community meeting or to get together with others to raise an issue (22% of women vs. 38% of men) at least "several times" in the previous year (Figure 5).

On the political front, fewer than four in 10 women respondents (38%) say they attended a campaign rally in the previous year, compared with 44% of men, and fewer women than men (67% vs. 73%) understood the meaning of the word "democracy" in English or Sesotho. It was only on active membership of religious groups outside normal service that a larger proportion of women (21%) than men (12%) was involved.

Figure 5: Active participation in community and political matters | by gender
 | Lesotho | 2014



Participants were asked:

1. Let's turn to your role in the community. Now I am going to read out a list of groups that people join or attend. For each one, could you tell me whether you are an official leader, an active member, an inactive member, or not a member: A religious group that meets outside of regular worship service? Some other voluntary association or community group? (% who said "yes")
2. Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year: Attend a community meeting? Get together with others to raise an issue? If not, would you do this if you had the chance? (% who said "yes, often" or "yes, several times")
3. Thinking about the last national election in May 2012, did you: Attend a campaign rally? (% who said "yes")

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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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For more information, please visit www.afrobarometer.org.

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