

Amid optimism on gender equality, Mauritians see gender-based violence as a priority issue to address

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 532 | Louis Amédée Darga and Nazrana Hurroo

Summary

Mauritius' new National Gender Policy (2022-2030) provides a framework for collective action by public- and private-sector stakeholders to achieve gender equality, empower women and girls, and ensure their full enjoyment of all human rights (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare, 2022).

In line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) No. 5, the policy outlines the government's commitment to gender equality as a development and human rights concern. Among its objectives, the policy aims to promote inclusion of gender equality in legislation and policies, to ensure equal participation of women in decision making at all levels, and to eliminate all forms of gender-based violence.

The government is also drafting a gender equality bill designed to accelerate the country's progress toward gender equality in the social, economic, and political arenas (Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare, 2022).

Despite the government's efforts, gender equality remains an unfinished agenda in Mauritius. In 2021, Mauritius ranked in the lowest-performing third (110th among 156 countries) on the Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2021). Only 20% of seats in Parliament are held by women – below average both globally and in sub-Saharan Africa (IPU Parline, 2022; World Economic Forum, 2021). Women make up only 40% of the country's labour force and are unemployed at higher rates than men (10.6% vs. 8.1%) (Statistics Mauritius, 2021).

This dispatch reports on a special survey module included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 (2021/2022) questionnaire to explore Africans' experiences and perceptions of gender equality in control over assets, hiring, land ownership, and political leadership. A separate dispatch will report findings on gender-based violence.

In Mauritius, strong majorities express support for women's right to equality in hiring, in land ownership, and in political leadership. But substantial minorities also consider it likely that a woman might suffer criticism, harassment, or family problems if she runs for elected office.

A majority of Mauritians approve of the government's performance in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women, although many say greater efforts are needed. Citizens say gender-based violence and a dearth of women in influential government positions are the most important women's rights issues that the government and society must address.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Eight survey rounds in up to 39 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 9 surveys

(2021/2022) are currently underway. Afrobarometer's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Mauritius, led by StraConsult Ltd., interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,200 adult Mauritians in March 2022. 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 Mauritius in 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2020.

Key findings

- Educational achievement is close to gender-equal in Mauritius, with slightly more secondary schooling among women than among men (50% vs. 46%).
- Women and men are about equally likely to own a mobile phone and a bank account, but far more men than women report owning a motor vehicle (72% vs. 38%).
- Women are significantly less likely than men to say they make decisions themselves about how household money is spent (16% vs. 28%).
- Strong majorities say women should have the same rights as men to get paying jobs (67%) and to own and inherit land (91%).
 - More than eight in 10 citizens say that in Mauritius today, women and men in fact have equal rights when it comes to jobs (83%) and land (89%).
- A large majority (83%) of Mauritians say women should have the same chance as men of being elected to public office.
 - While more than eight in 10 citizens (86%) think a woman will probably gain standing in the community if she runs for office, more than one-third (36%) think it is likely she will be criticized or harassed, and 31% say she will probably face problems with her family.
- Citizens say gender-based violence and a scarcity of women in influential positions in government are the most important women's rights issues that the government and society must address.
- Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64%) say the Mauritian government is doing "fairly well" or "very well" in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women. Urban residents (56%) and poor citizens (54%) are less likely to approve of the government's performance.
 - Six in 10 Mauritians (61%) say the government and elected officials should do more to promote women's rights and opportunities.

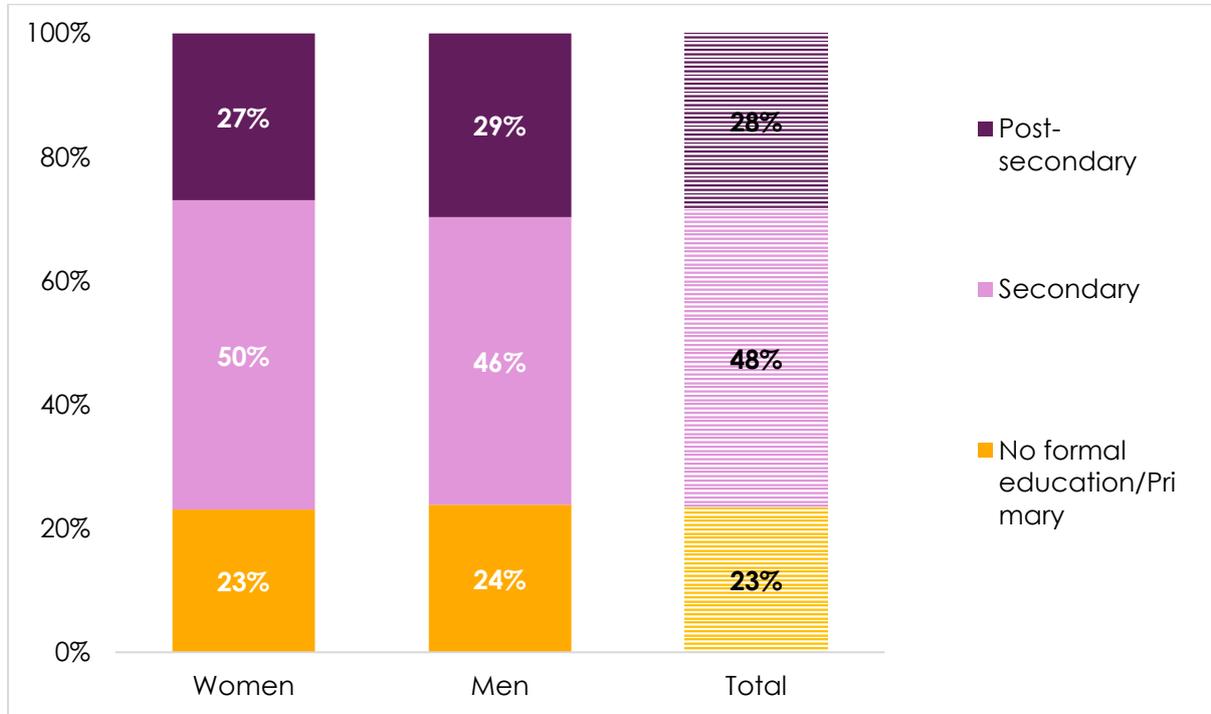
Education and control of assets

Educational achievement is nearly gender-equal in Mauritius (Figure 1). Women are about as likely as men to have post-secondary qualifications (27% vs. 29%) and slightly more likely to have secondary schooling (50% vs. 46%). Proportions with primary or no formal schooling are about equal (23% of women, 24% of men).

When it comes to control over assets, men and women are about equally likely to own a mobile phone (95% of women vs. 97% of men) and a bank account (99% vs. 98%). More men than women own a radio (92% vs. 84%), a television (93% vs. 79%), and a computer (54% vs.

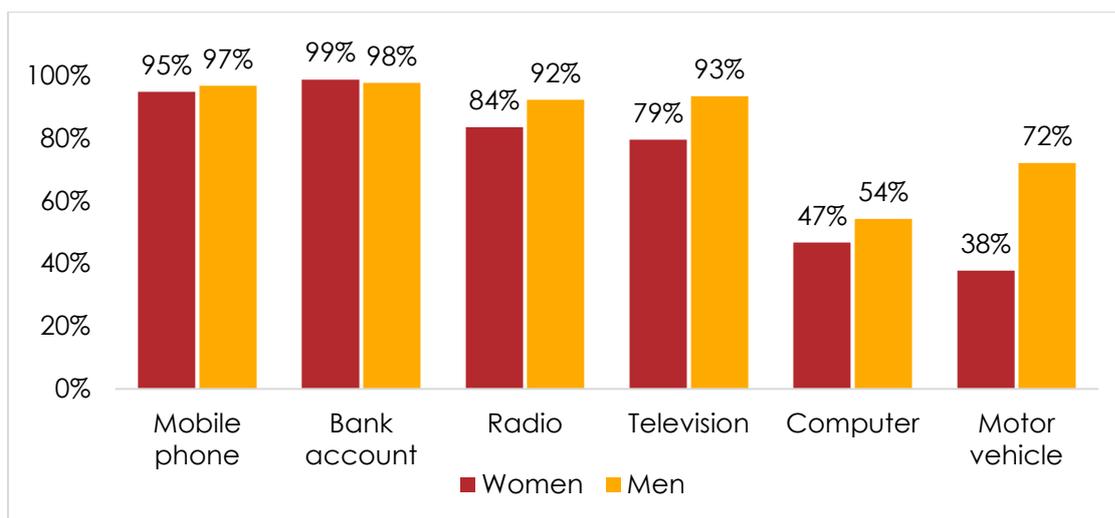
47%). And men are almost twice as likely as women to own a motor vehicle (72% vs. 38%) (Figure 2).

Figure 1: Educational attainment | by gender | Mauritius | 2022



Respondents were asked: What is your highest level of education?

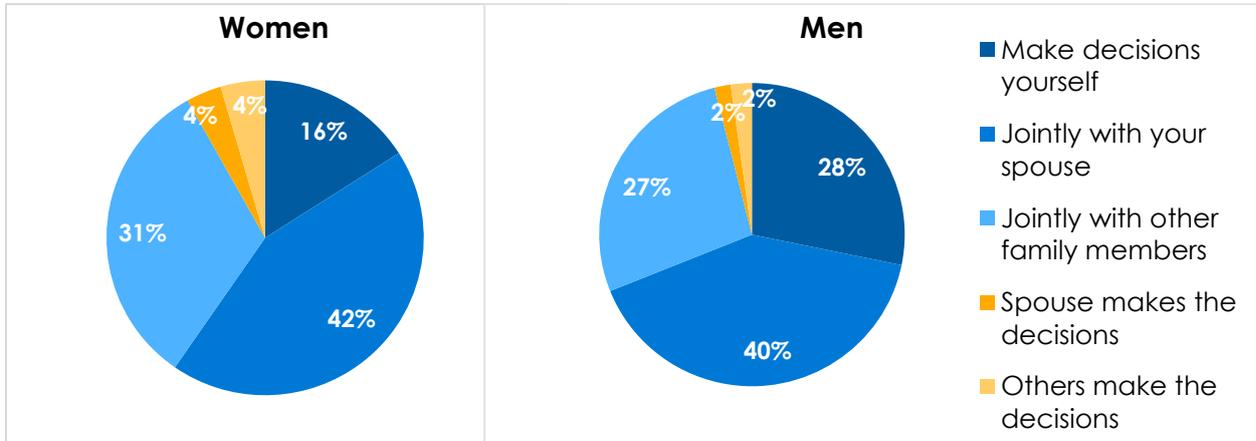
Figure 2: Asset ownership | by gender | Mauritius | 2022



Respondents were asked: Which of these things do you personally own?

In decisions about how household money is spent, men are more likely than women (28% vs. 16%) to say they make the decisions themselves. But women and men are about equally likely to say they make decisions jointly with their spouse (42% vs. 40%). Fewer men (27%) than women (31%) say they make decisions jointly with other family members (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Who decides how money is used? | by gender | Mauritius | 2022



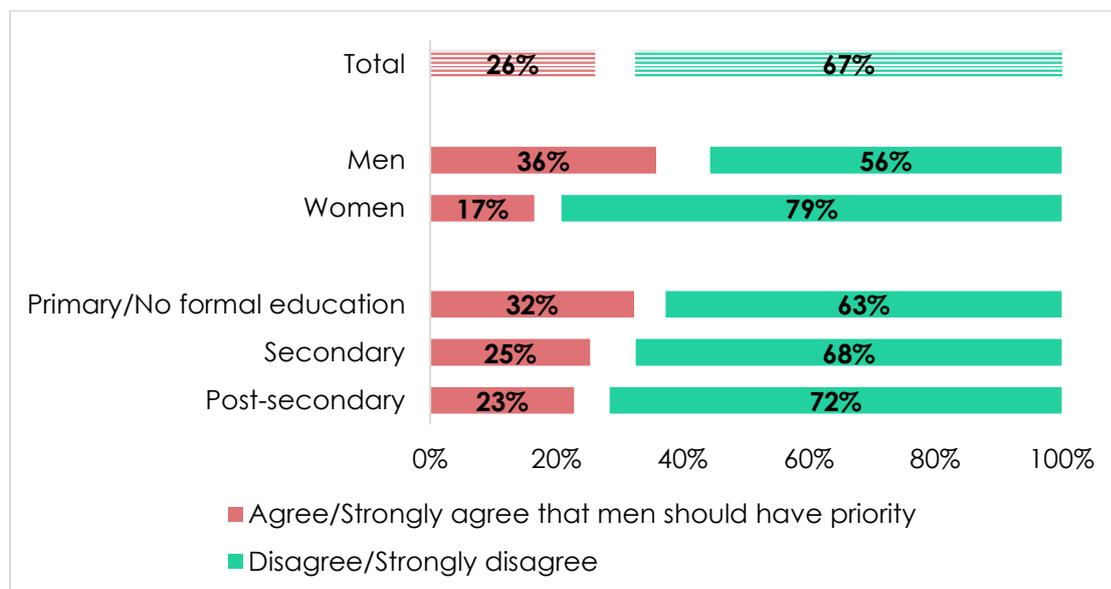
Respondents were asked: What is the main way that decisions are made about how to use any money that you have or earn, for example from a job, a business, selling things, or other activities?

Rights to a job and land

The ability to claim certain rights can be a tool to promote gender equality – or to maintain inequality. Do Mauritians want gender equality when it comes to jobs and land? And if so, how close to equality are they?

Only one quarter (26%) of Mauritian adults endorse the idea that men should be given priority over women in hiring when jobs are scarce, while two-thirds (67%) reject this form of gender discrimination (Figure 4). Men (56%) trail women (79%) in insisting on equality when it comes to jobs. Support for equality in hiring increases with respondents' education level, ranging from 63% of those with primary or no formal schooling to 72% of those with post-secondary qualifications.

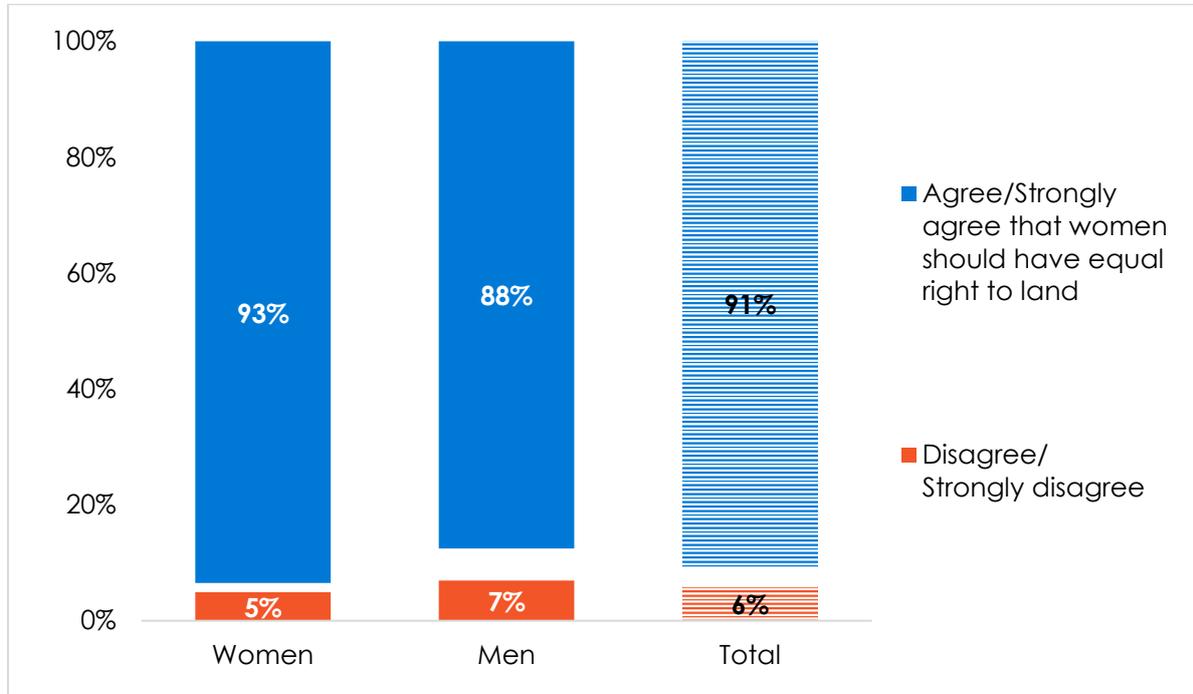
Figure 4: Should men have priority for scarce jobs? | by gender and education | Mauritius | 2022



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 rights to a job than women?

An even larger majority (91%) endorse equal rights to own and inherit land. Here, too, men are somewhat less likely than women to believe in equality (88% vs. 93%) (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Should women have equal rights to land? | by gender | Mauritius | 2022



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?

While large majorities say women should have equal rights to jobs and land, do they already enjoy equality? More than eight in 10 Mauritians say women do have the same opportunities as men to get a paying job (83%) and to own and inherit land (89%).

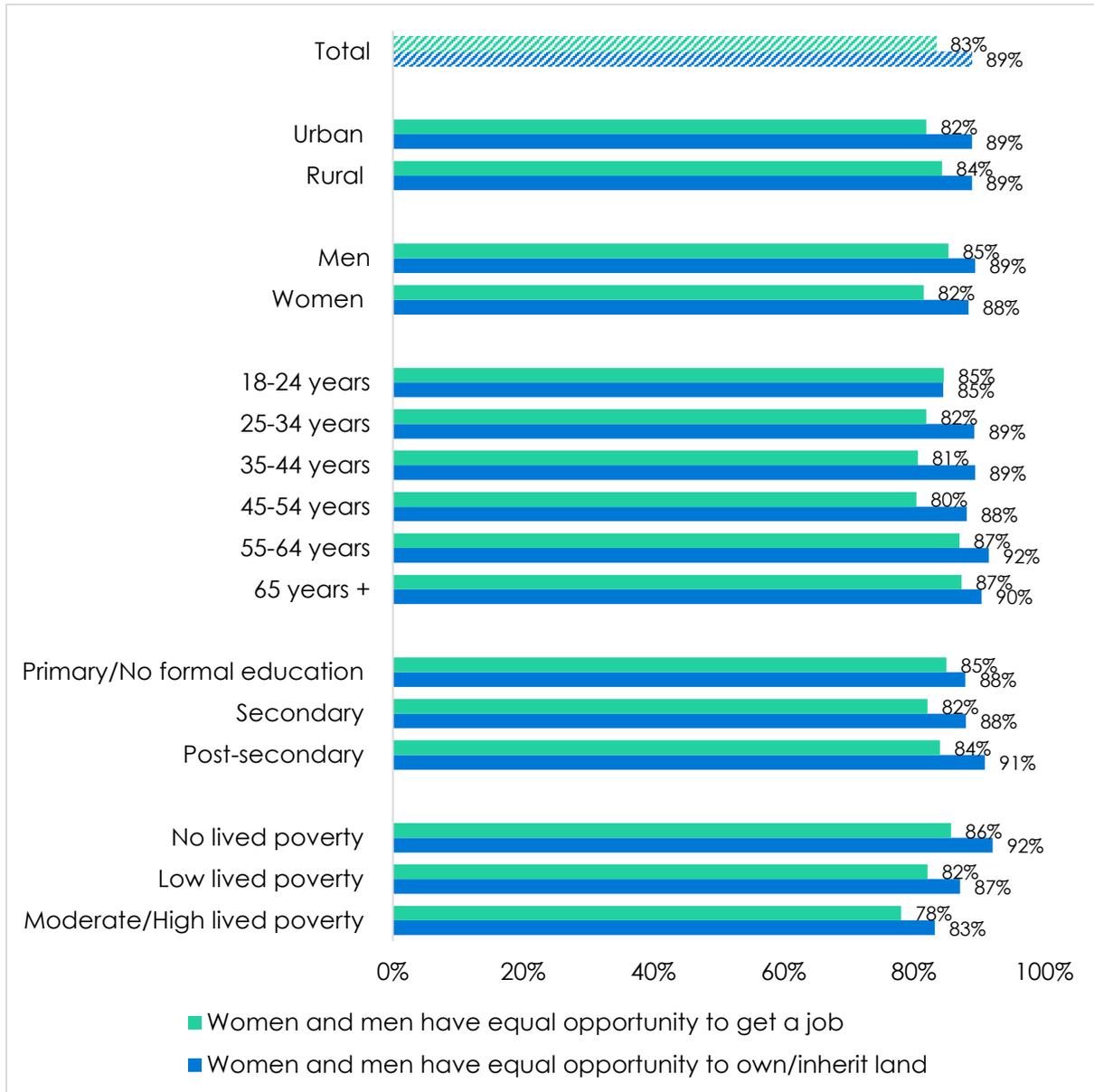
Views on these two questions are quite similar across key demographic groups (Figure 6). Women are slightly less likely than men to say they enjoy equal opportunities in hiring (82% vs. 85%).

On both indicators, poor citizens are less likely to perceive gender equality than their better-off counterparts.¹

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¹ Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes (2020).

Figure 6: Do women and men have equal opportunities to get a job and to own/inherit land? | by demographic group | Mauritius | 2022



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

In our country today, women and men have equal opportunities to get a job that pays a wage or salary?

In our country today, women and men have equal opportunities to own and inherit land?

(% who “agree” or “strongly agree”)

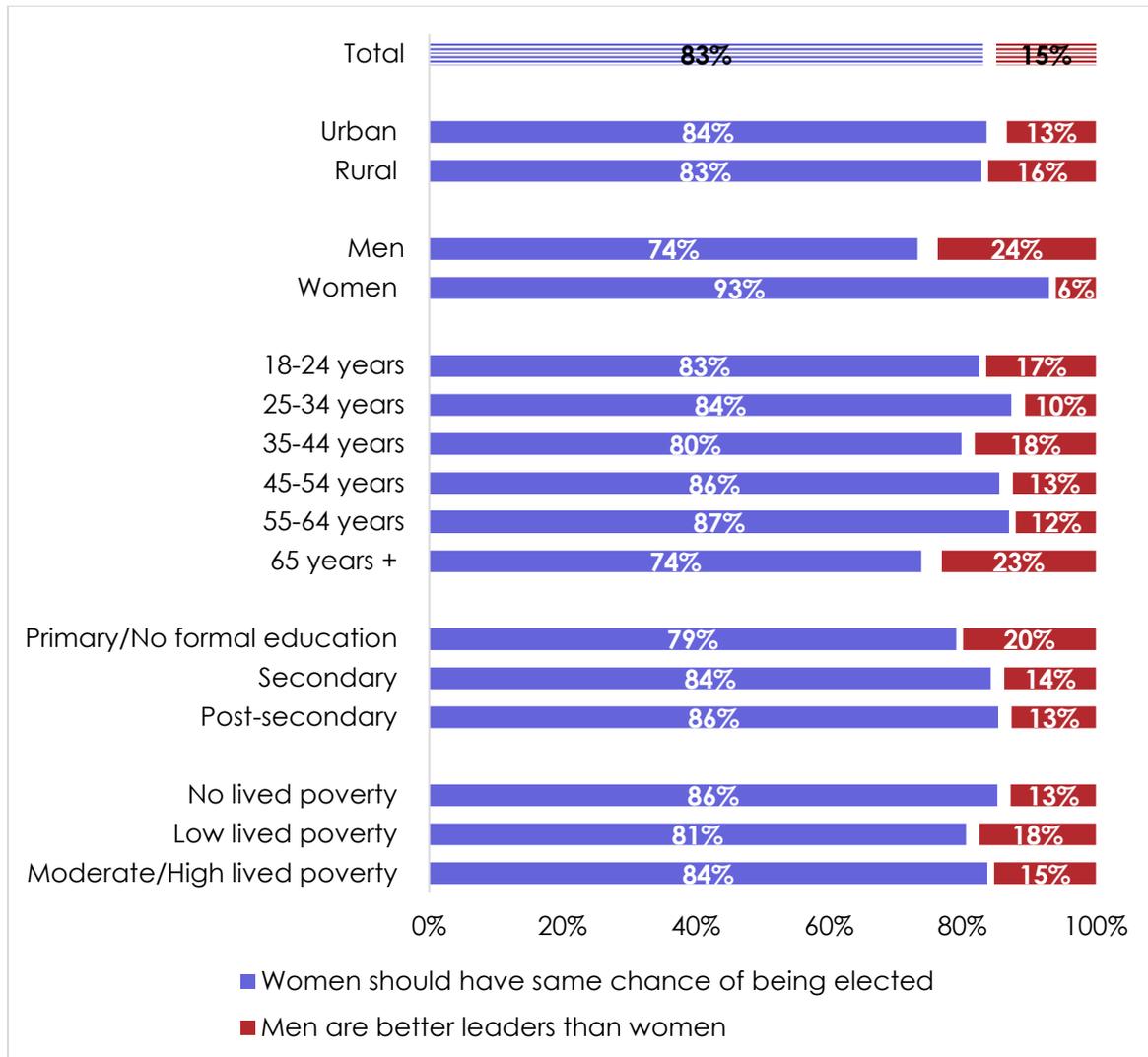
Gender equality in political participation

One critical aspect of gender equality is women’s participation in political leadership, which helps ensure that women’s voices are heard in policy making.

More than eight in 10 Mauritians (83%) say women should have the same chance as men to vie for political office, rejecting the idea that men make better political leaders and should

thus be given priority as candidates (Figure 7). More women (93%) than men (74%) endorse equality in politics, and those with post-secondary qualifications (86%) and greater economic stability (86%) are more likely to agree.

Figure 7: Should women have an equal chance to be elected? | by demographic group | Mauritius | 2022

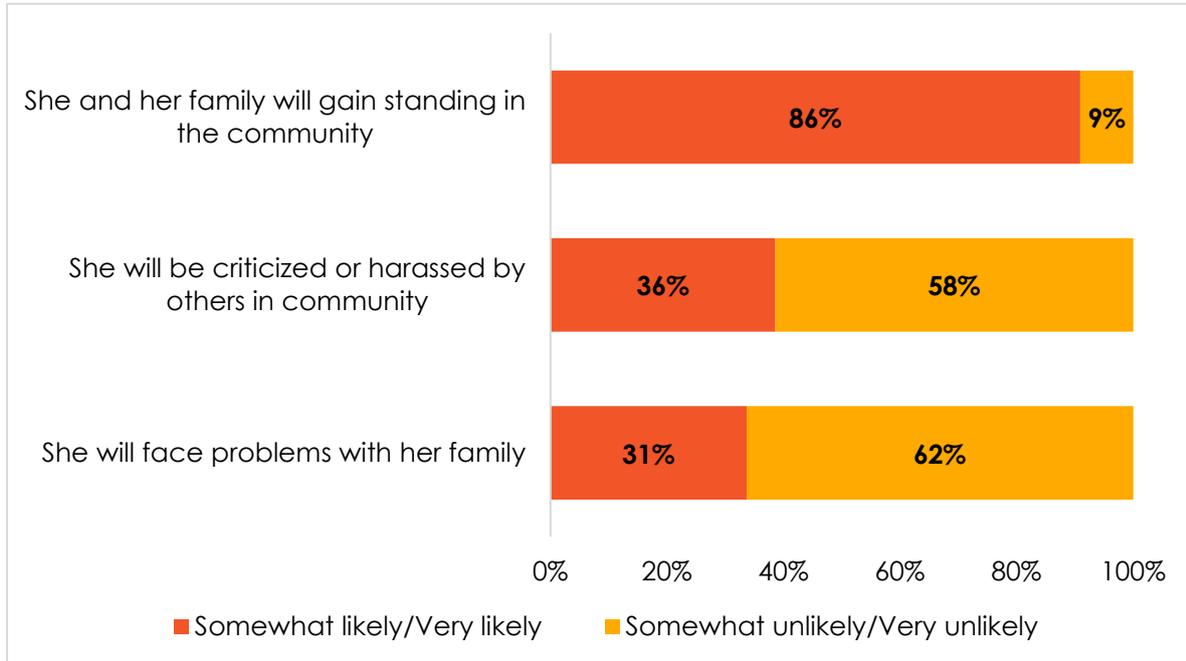


Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Men make better political leaders than women and should be elected rather than women.
 Statement 2: Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men.
 (% who “agree” or “strongly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

Even if she believes that voters will give her the same consideration as a male candidate, a woman may be encouraged to run for public office – or discouraged from doing so – by other consequences she expects to result from her candidacy.

On the positive side, more than eight in 10 Mauritians (86%) say it is “somewhat likely” or “very likely” that a woman and her family will gain standing in the community if she runs for elected office (Figure 8). But more than one-third (36%) of respondents consider it likely that others in the community will criticize her, call her names, or harass her for seeking public office, while 31% think she might face problems with her family.

Figure 8: For better or for worse: How running for elected office might affect women's lives | Mauritius | 2022



Respondents were asked: *If a woman in your community runs for elected office, how likely or unlikely is it that the following things might occur?*

She and her family will gain standing in the community?

She will be criticized, called names, or harassed by others in the community?

She will face problems with her family?

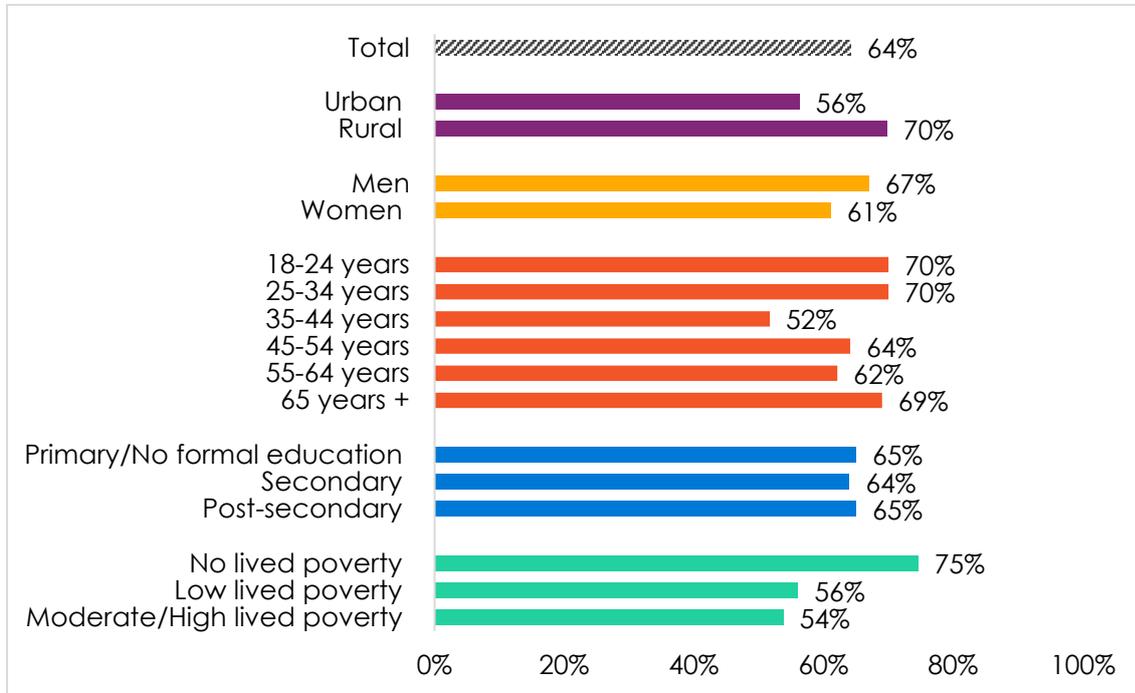
Government performance in promoting equal rights and opportunities

Close to two-thirds of Mauritians (64%) say their government is doing "fairly" or "very" well in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women (Figure 9). Women are slightly less likely than men to praise the government's efforts (61% vs. 67%).

Approval ratings are higher in rural areas than in cities (70% vs. 56%). Respondents aged 35-44 years (52%) are less likely to be satisfied with the government's efforts than those in other age groups. Approval increases with wealth, ranging from just 54% of those experiencing moderate/high lived poverty to 75% of those with no lived poverty. These findings suggest that some of the benefits of growing gender equality may not be reaching poorer populations.

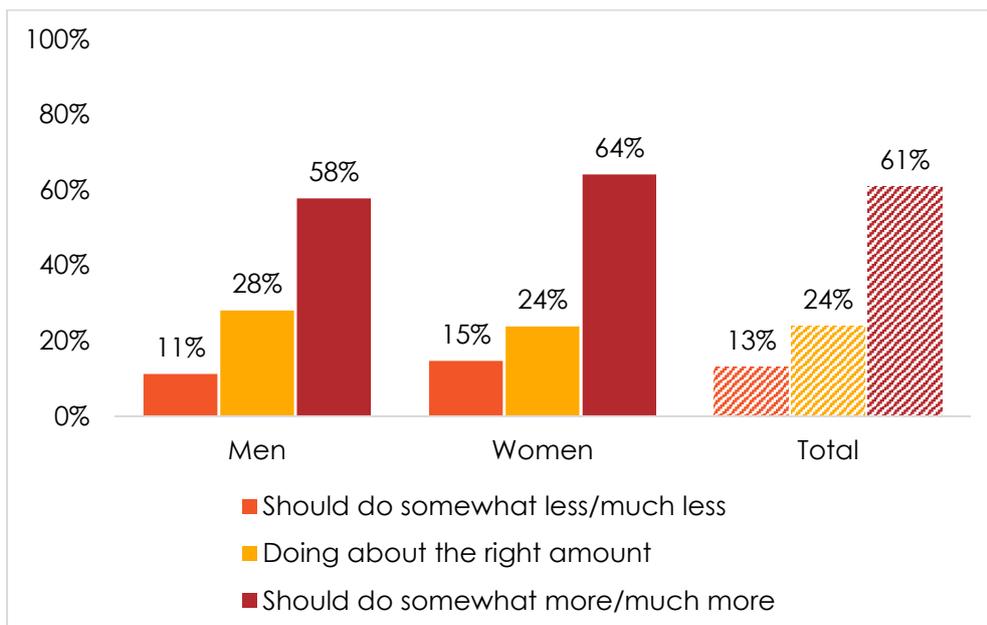
Even if the government's performance ratings are generally positive, a majority (61%) of citizens think the state and elected officials could do "somewhat more" or "much more" to promote equal rights and opportunities for women. One in four (24%) say they are doing about the right amount, while 13% think they should reduce their gender-equality efforts. Women (64%) are more likely than men (58%) to call for greater efforts to promote gender equality (Figure 10).

Figure 9: Government performing well in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women | Mauritius | 2022



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 equal rights and opportunities for women? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")

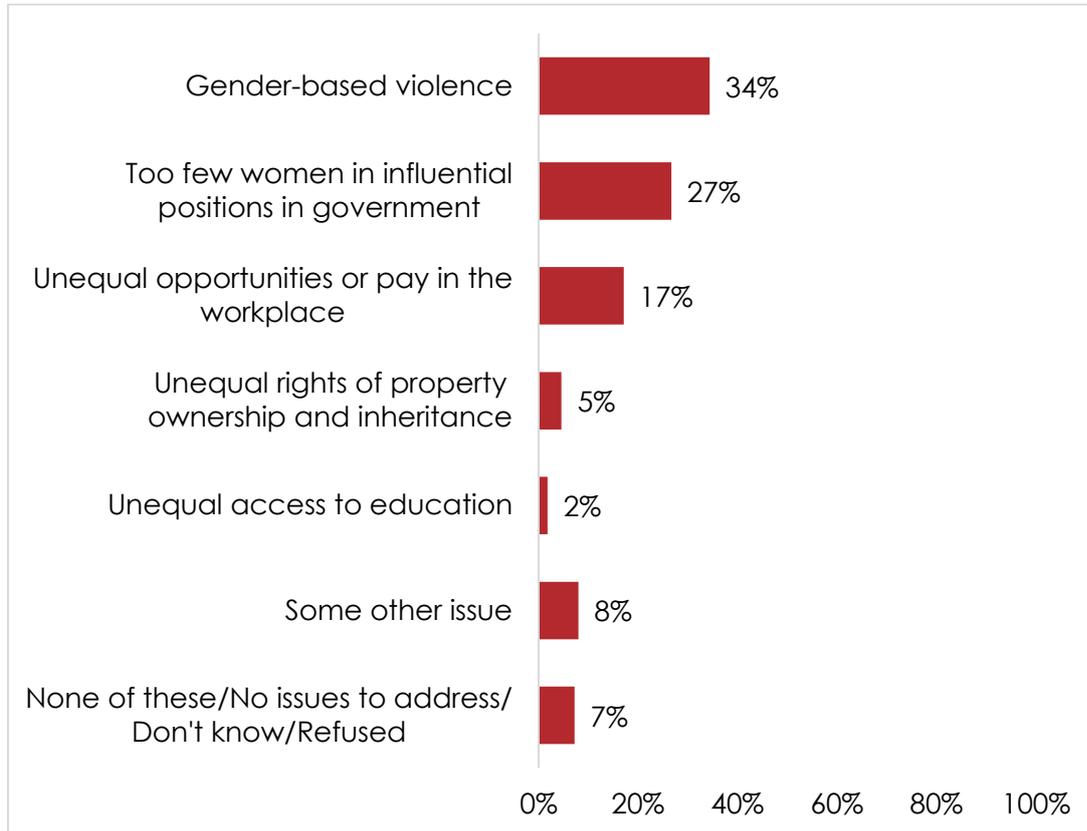
Figure 10: Should government and elected officials do more or less to promote equal rights and opportunities for women? | by gender | Mauritius | 2022



Respondents were asked: In your opinion, should government and elected officials be doing more than they are doing now to advance the rights and equality of women, or should they be doing less, or are they doing about the right amount?

Asked what they consider the most important issue related to women's rights and equality for the government and society to address, Mauritians most frequently cite gender-based violence (34%), followed by a scarcity of women in influential positions in government (27%) and unequal opportunities or pay in the workplace (17%) (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Most important women's rights issue | Mauritius | 2022



Respondents were asked: *In your opinion, which of the following issues related to women's rights and equality do you think is the most important for our government and society to address?*

Conclusion

Most Mauritians support gender equality in access to paying jobs, ownership of land, and the right to run for public office. However, a significant proportion of the population report that women may face criticism and problems with their families if they run for office.

Generally, findings on gender equality are positive, including nearly gender-equal educational achievement, though gaps in asset ownership and financial decision making remain.

A majority of Mauritians approve of the government's performance in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women, but a significant proportion say that more needs to be done, including on gender-based violence, which citizens highlight as the most important women's rights issue that the government and society should address.

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Afrobarometer, a nonprofit corporation with headquarters in Ghana, is a pan-African, non-partisan research network. Regional coordination of national partners in about 35 countries is provided by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) in South Africa, and the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Michigan State University (MSU) and the University of Cape Town (UCT) provide technical support to the network.

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