

Nigerian women face persistent disadvantages, limited support for gender equality

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 541 | Sunday Joseph Duntoye and Raphael Mbaegbu

Summary

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) describe gender equality as “not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world” (United Nations, 2022). Highlighted as SDG 5, it is also a cross-cutting principle underlying most of the other goals in pursuit of development whose benefits are enjoyed equally by women and men.

In Nigeria, gender equality remains a challenge despite some government efforts to address it, including the Better Life for Rural Women Programme and the creation of the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (National Population Commission, 2014). In addition to traditional rules and practices that treat men preferentially (Adeosun & Owolabi, 2021), the country’s male-dominated Parliament has repeatedly rejected or failed to act upon proposed legislation to promote women’s rights. Most recently, in March 2022, the National Assembly voted down five bills aimed mostly at increasing women’s political leadership opportunities, prompting public protests in several cities (Premium Times, 2022).

The Federal Executive Council approved a revised National Gender Policy in March designed to promote gender equality, good governance, and accountability across the country’s three tiers of government (Guardian, 2022), though it awaits implementation.

This dispatch reports on a special survey module included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 (2021/2022) questionnaire to explore Africans’ experiences and perceptions related to gender. (For findings on gender-based violence, see Mbaegbu & Duntoye, 2022.)

In Nigeria, survey findings show that women remain at a disadvantage compared to men when it comes to hiring, land ownership, control over key assets, and participation in household financial decisions. Popular support for gender equality is limited, especially among men.

While most citizens say women should have the same chance as men of being elected to public office, many also consider it likely that female candidates will suffer criticism and harassment. Most Nigerians say the government is doing a poor job of promoting women’s rights and opportunities.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network that provides reliable data on African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. Eight rounds of surveys have been completed in up to 39 countries since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2022) are currently underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent’s choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Nigeria, led by NOIPolls, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,600 adult Nigerians between 5 and 31 March 2022.

A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2.5 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous standard surveys were conducted in Nigeria in 2000, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2013, 2015, 2017, and 2020.

Key findings

- Survey findings show significant gender imbalances in Nigerian society:
 - Women are less likely than men to have post-secondary education (17% vs. 29%) and more likely than men to have no formal schooling (20% vs. 12%).
 - Women are less likely than men to own assets such as a mobile phone (73% vs. 87%), a bank account (51% vs. 68%), and a motor vehicle (14% vs. 40%).
 - Women are less than half as likely as men to say they have control over how household money is spent (22% vs. 56%).
- Slim majorities say women should have the same rights as men to get a paying job (53%) and to own and inherit land (51%). Men are far less likely than women to endorse gender equality in hiring and land rights.
- Fewer than half of Nigerians say that in practice, women enjoy equal rights when it comes to getting a job (43%) and owning/inheriting land (30%).
- Six in 10 Nigerians (61%) say women should have the same chance as men of being elected to public office.
 - But while about eight in 10 citizens (79%) think a woman will gain standing in the community if she runs for office, almost half (47%) say it's likely she will be criticised or harassed, and 38% say she will probably face problems with her family.
- Only one-fourth (26%) of citizens say the Nigerian government is performing "fairly well" or "very well" in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women. More than half (54%) say the government should do more to advance gender equality.

Education and control of assets

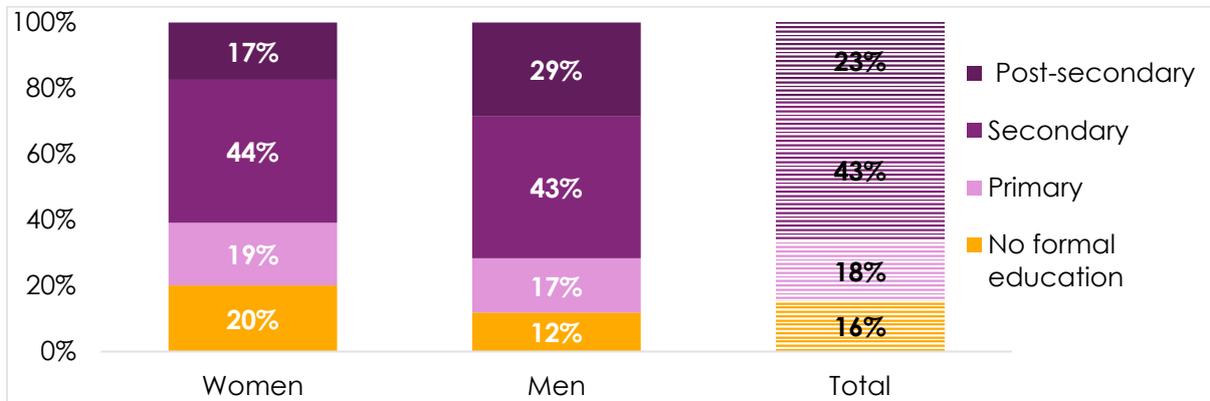
While Nigerian women are just as likely as men to have secondary schooling (44% of women vs. 43% of men) or primary schooling (19% vs. 17%), they trail significantly when it comes to post-secondary education. While three in 10 men (29%) have attained some level of tertiary education, the same is true for just 17% of women (Figure 1).

Women are more likely than men to lack formal education altogether (20% vs. 12%).

Women are also considerably less likely than men to claim personal ownership of key household assets. Fewer women than men say they own a mobile phone (73% vs. 87%), a bank account (51% vs. 68%), a radio (46% vs. 76%), a television (43% vs. 57%), a motor vehicle (14% vs. 40%), and a computer (9% vs. 14%) (Figure 2).

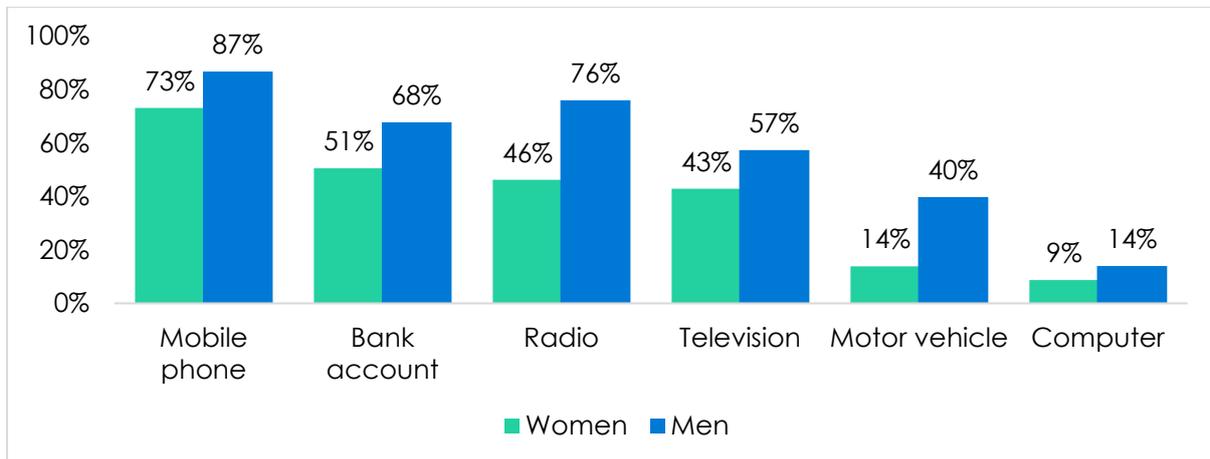
When it comes to who makes decisions about how household money is spent, women are less than half as likely as men to say they make the decisions themselves (22% vs. 56%) (Figure 3). More women than men report that they make such decisions jointly with their spouse (30% vs. 20%) or jointly with other family members (17% vs. 13%). Women are three times as likely as men to say that the spouse or others make the decisions (31% vs. 10%), leaving them without a voice in household financial decisions.

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



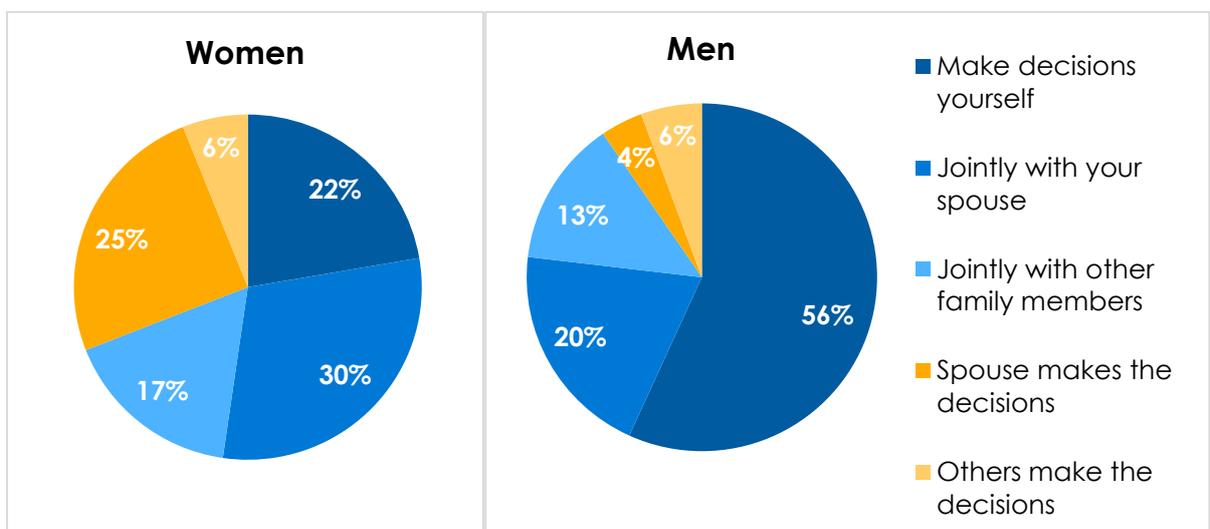
Respondents were asked: What is your highest level of education?

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



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

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

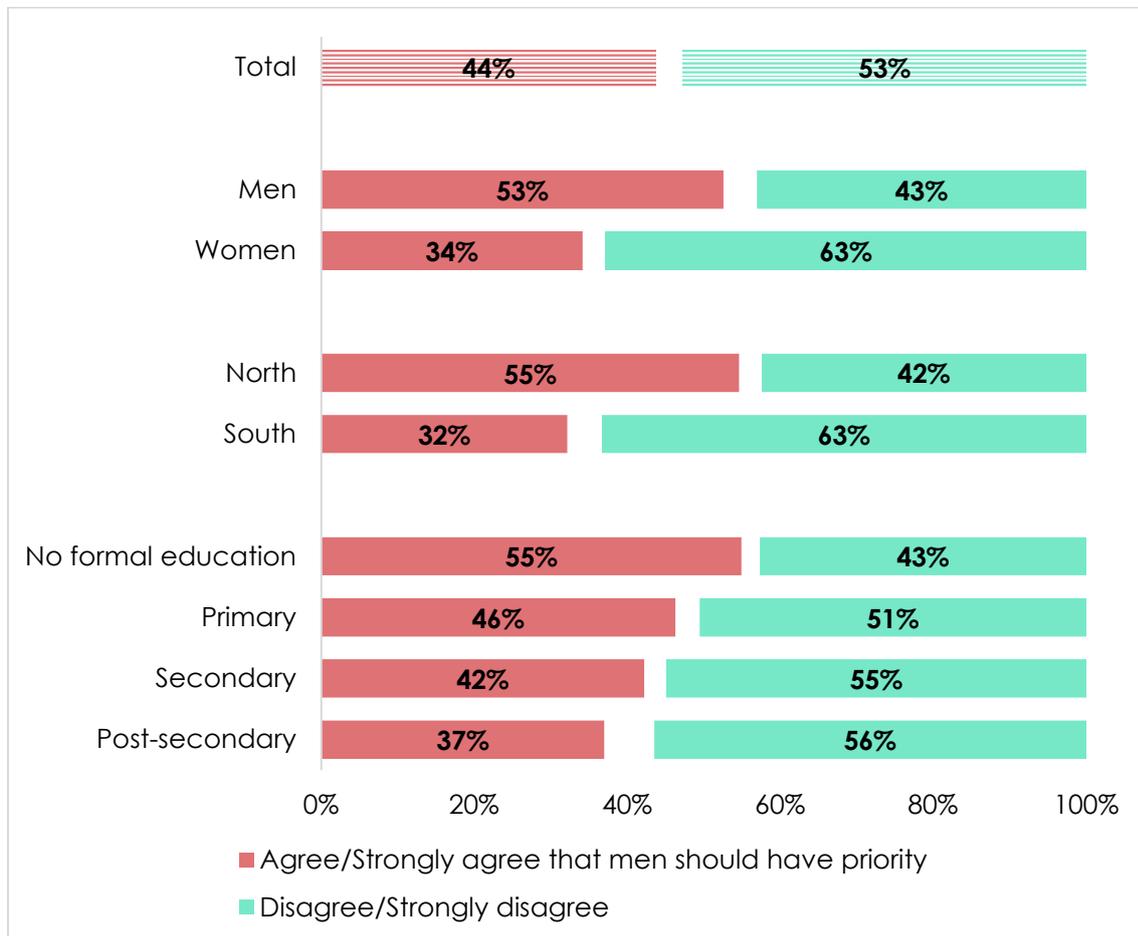
Rights to a job and land

Do Nigerians want gender equality when it comes to jobs and land? And if so, how close to equality are they?

More than four in 10 Nigerians (44%) say that men should be given priority over women in hiring when jobs are scarce, while 53% reject this form of gender discrimination (Figure 4).

Men (43%) trail women (63%) in prioritising equality in hiring, as do Northerners (42%) compared to Southerners (63%). Support for equality increases with respondents' education level, ranging from 43% of those with no formal schooling to 56% of those with post-secondary qualifications.

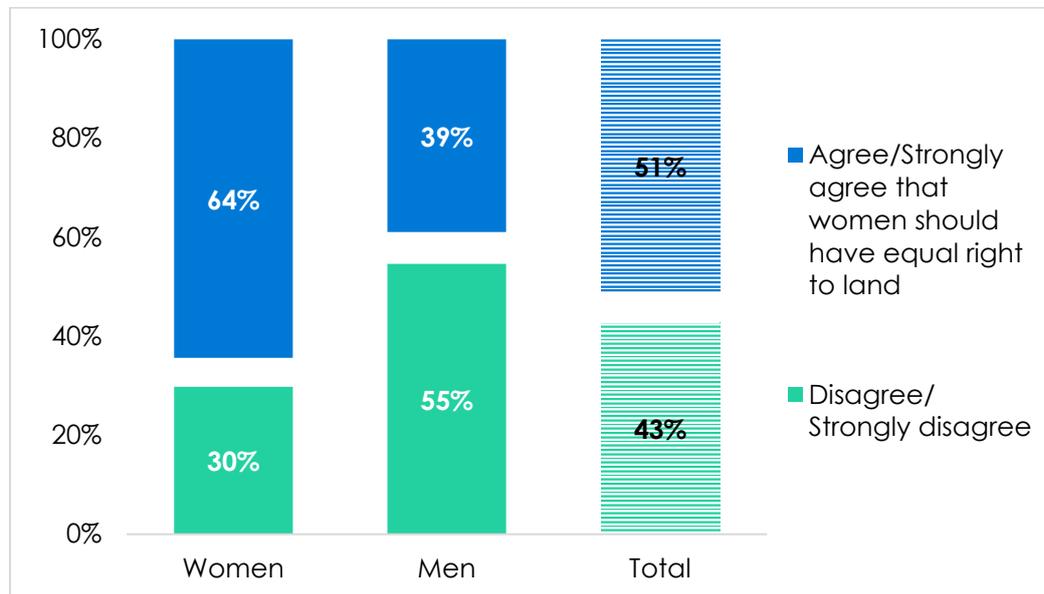
Figure 4: Should men have priority for scarce jobs? | by socio-demographic group | Nigeria | 2022



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.

Only a slim majority (51%) of Nigerians think women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land. Here, too, men are much less likely than women to believe in equality (39% vs. 64%) (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Should women have equal rights to land? | by gender | Nigeria | 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.

Given less-than-solid support for gender equality in hiring and land ownership, it may not be surprising that a majority of Nigerians report that in practice, women do not enjoy the same rights as men. Only 43% of citizens say women have the same chance as men to get a paying job, and even fewer (30%) see equality when it comes to owning and inheriting land (Figure 6).

Perceptions of gender equality differ significantly by demographic group. Women are less likely than men to report equal opportunities in hiring (39% vs. 47%), though they are actually more likely than men to say they enjoy the same rights to land ownership and inheritance (32% vs. 27%);.

Similarly, Northerners are less likely than Southerners to say women enjoy equal rights in hiring (38% vs. 49%) but more likely to see land rights as equal (34% vs. 25%).

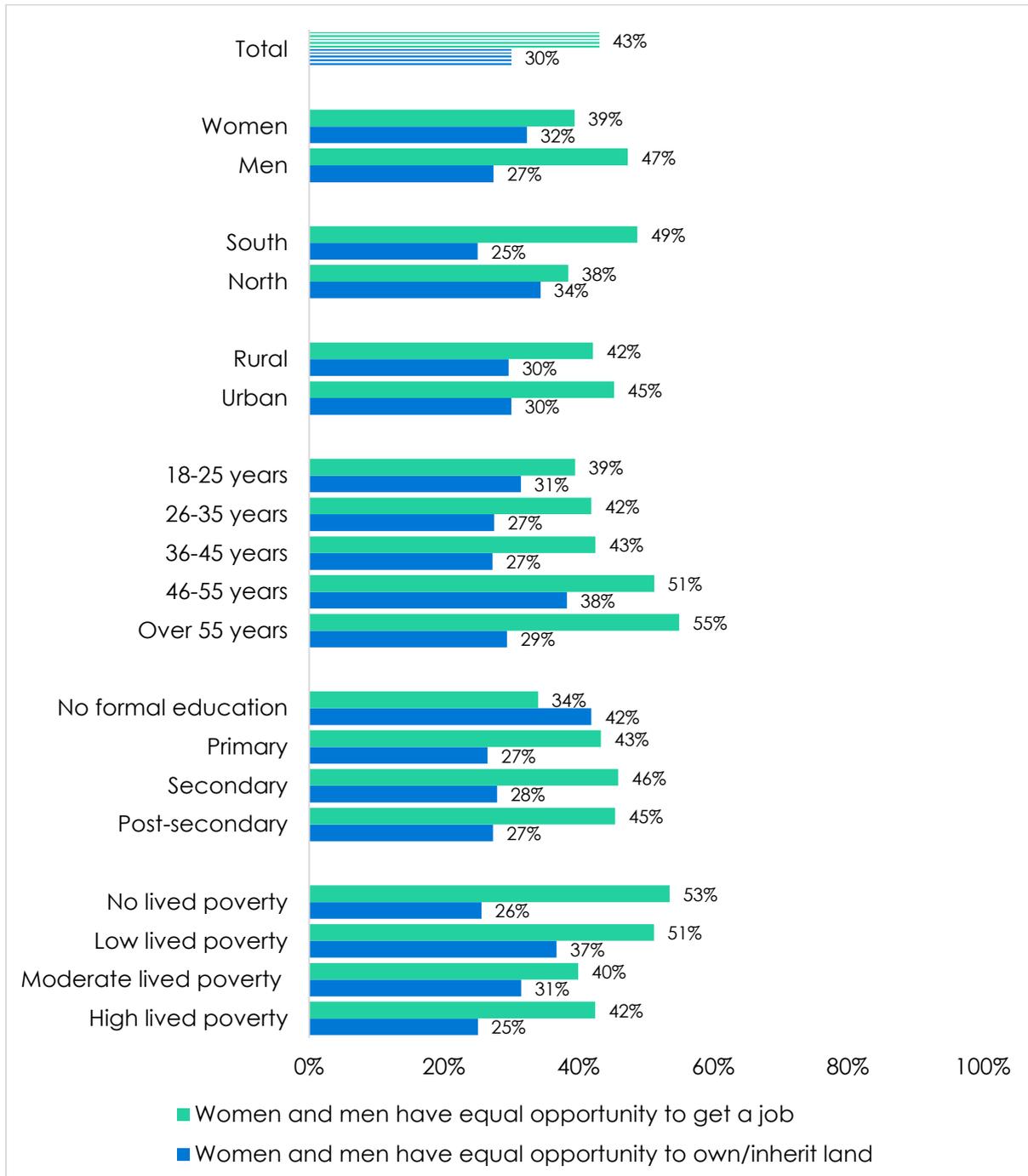
While rural and urban residents differ little on these questions, younger adults are less likely to perceive gender equality in hiring their elders.

Respondents with no formal education are most likely to perceive gender equality in land ownership (42%) and least likely to see job opportunities as equal (34%).

Finally, poor citizens are less likely to think women enjoy equal opportunities to get a job (40%-42%) than their better-off counterparts (51%-53%).¹

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 socio-demographic group | Nigeria | 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

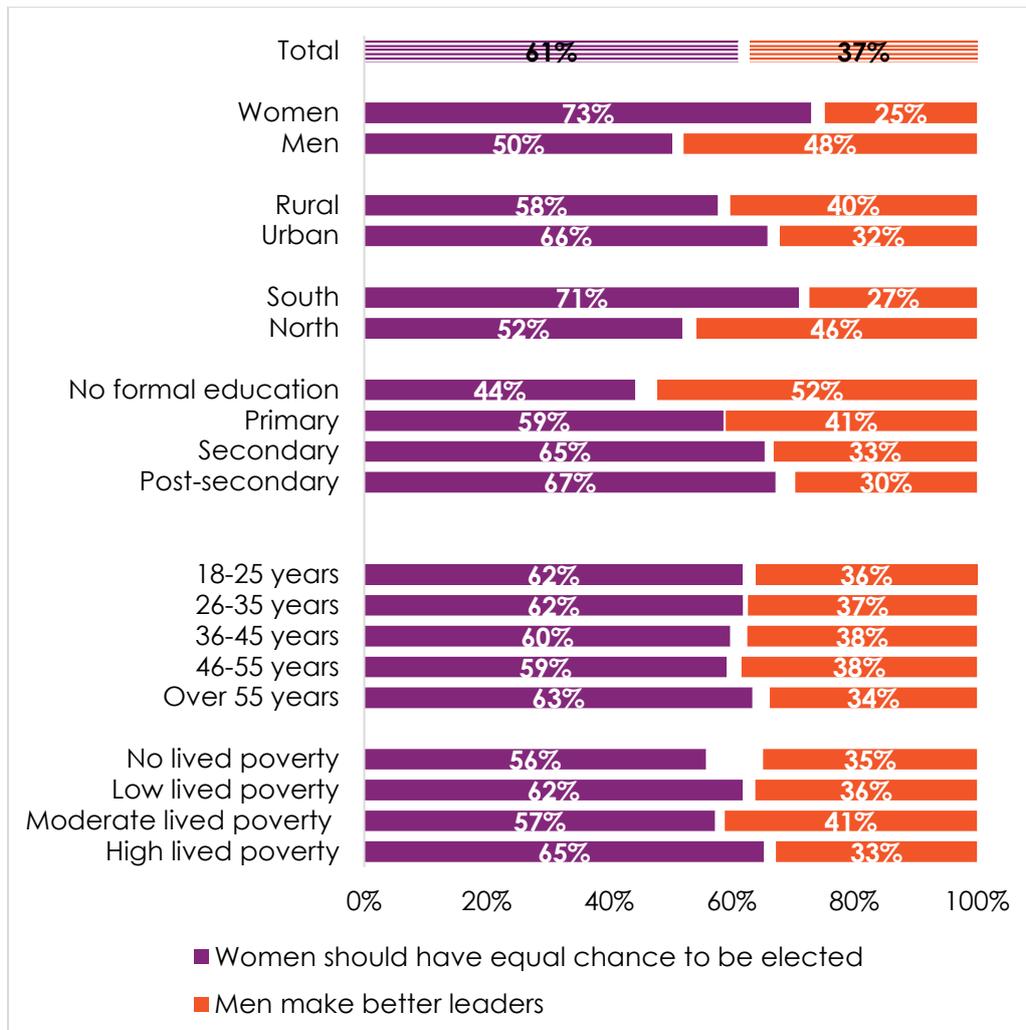
Most strategies for achieving gender equality call for more women in political leadership.

In Nigeria, more than six in 10 citizens (61%) say women should have the same chance as men to be elected to public office, rejecting the idea that men make better political leaders and should thus be given priority as candidates (Figure 7).

But far fewer men (50%) than women (73%) support gender equality in politics. And residents in rural areas (58%) and the North (52%) trail their counterparts in cities (66%) and the South (71%) in endorsing equal rights for female candidates.

Support for equality increases with respondents' education level, ranging from just 44% among citizens with no formal schooling to 67% among those with post-secondary qualifications.

Figure 7: Should women have an equal chance to be elected? | by socio-demographic group | Nigeria | 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.

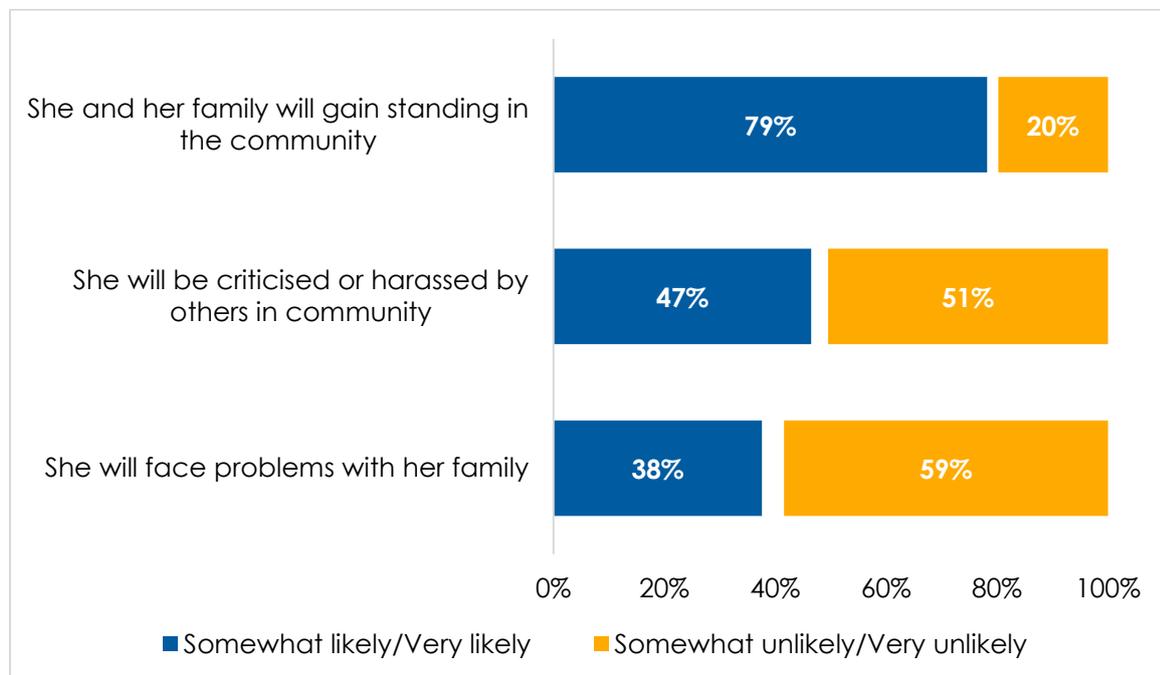
(% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)

Even if she believes that voters will give her the same consideration as a male candidate, a woman may examine potential consequences before deciding to toss her hat in the ring.

Close to eight in 10 Nigerians (79%) 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 findings are more mixed on other potential consequences. Almost half (47%) of respondents consider it likely that others in the community will criticise her, call her names, or harass her for seeking public office, while 38% think she might face problems with her family. The fact that slim majorities see it as unlikely that a woman will face community criticism/harassment (51%) or family problems (59%) as a result of running for office may or may not be enough to overcome some women's reservations about contesting.

Figure 8: For better or for worse: How running for elected office affects women's lives
 | Nigeria | 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 criticised, called names, or harassed by others in the community?

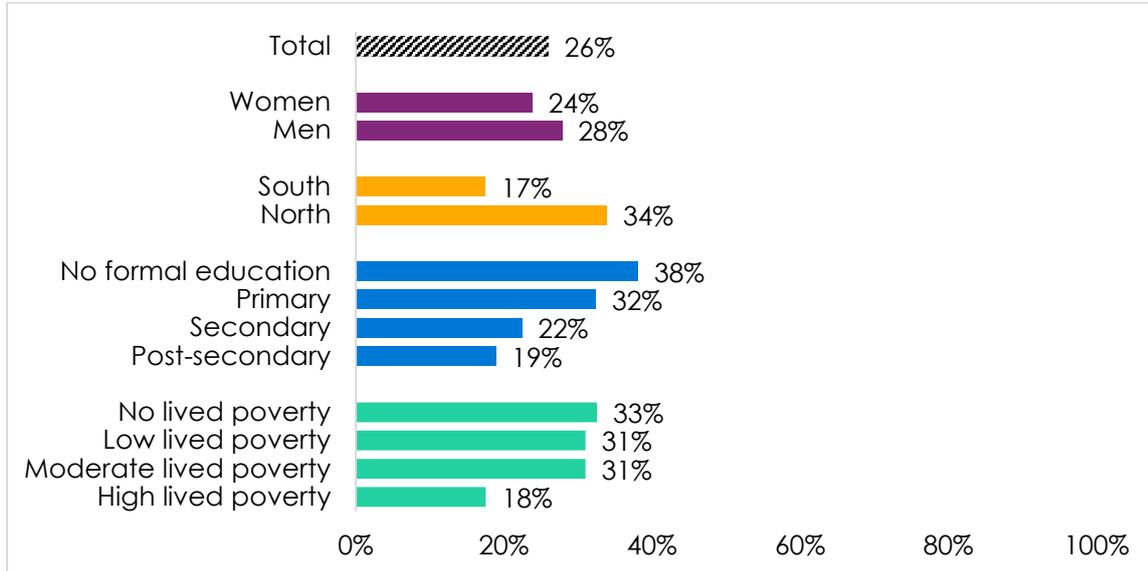
She will face problems with her family?

Government performance in promoting equal rights and opportunities

Only one-fourth (26%) of Nigerians say their government is doing a “fairly” or “very” good job of promoting equal rights and opportunities for women (Figure 9), while 70% disapprove of the government's performance. Men (28%) are more likely than women (24%) to give the government a passing grade on gender equality.

Approval ratings are higher in the North than in South (34% vs. 17%) and vary by respondents' education and economic levels. Citizens with at least a secondary education (19%-22%) are much less likely to be satisfied with the government's efforts than those with primary (32%) or no formal education (38%). On the other hand, only 18% of citizens experiencing high levels of lived poverty approve of the government's efforts on gender equality, compared to 31%-33% of better-off respondents.

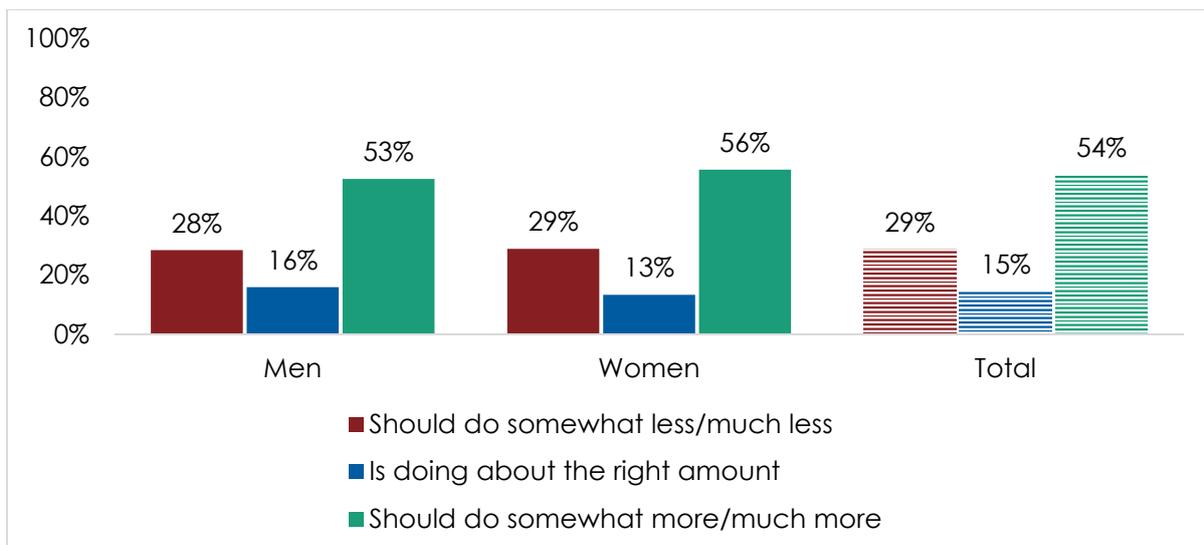
Figure 9: Government performance in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women | Nigeria | 2022



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")

In line with their negative ratings of the government's performance, more than half (54%) of citizens think the government could do "somewhat more" or "much more" to promote equal rights and opportunities for women. About one in seven (15%) say the government is doing about the right amount, while 29% say it should reduce its gender-equality efforts. Women and men offer similar appraisals of the government's level of effort (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Should the government do more or less to promote equal rights and opportunities for women? | by gender | Nigeria | 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?

Conclusion

Survey findings show that in Nigeria, women remain at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to education, control over assets, and financial decision-making. And while slim majorities endorse gender equality in hiring and land ownership, most Nigerians acknowledge that this is not the reality.

Giving women a fair shot at being elected to public office wins majority support, but at the same time, a significant segment of the population think women may face problems in the community and at home if they run for office.

Citizens overwhelmingly give the government a poor grade on its efforts to promote gender equality, and a majority say more needs to be done. But that may require the engagement of more citizens who support and demand equal rights and opportunities for women in employment, land ownership, political leadership, and other fields.

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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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