

Ugandans applaud government efforts to promote gender equality, but want more

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 588 | Stevenson Ssevume Male, Mir Muhtadi Faiaz, Namratha Rao, and Anita Raj

Summary

Policy efforts to promote gender equality in Uganda built on the Ten-Point Programme that the ruling National Resistance Movement (NRM) announced in 1984, two years before coming to power. This programme aims to unite all Ugandans under one umbrella irrespective of their gender, religion, ethnicity, and other social characteristics (Mulera, 2020; Hitchen, 2016). Under Uganda's 1995 Constitution, 2006 National Equal Opportunities Policy, and 2007 Uganda Gender Policy, affirmative action has sought to reduce gender gaps, with some success (Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, 2006, 2007; Odaga, 2020; Goetz, 2002).

The past two decades have seen an increase in the number of women in elected office, including the confirmation of Robinah Nabbanja as prime minister in June 2021 (UN Women, 2021 a, b). Women currently hold 34% of seats in Parliament, ranking 48th out of 187 countries worldwide (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2022). In education, enrolment rates for girls have risen steadily alongside those for boys in primary education, but girls continue to trail when it comes to school retention and completion of secondary school (FHI360, 2018). Further, despite improved access to sexual and reproductive health services in the country, two in five women aged 15-49 lack decision-making control over sexual relations, contraceptive use, and/or reproductive health care, and teen pregnancy rates have remained unchanged for the past 20 years, affecting one in four teen-aged girls (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Land reforms such as property co-ownership have increased women's land ownership (Rugadya, Obaikol, & Kamusiime, 2004), but men remain more likely than women to own land (48% vs. 31%) (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

Uganda has restated its commitment to gender equality as part of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and has integrated targets for SDG 5 – “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” (UN, 2022) – into its National Development Plan (Republic of Uganda, 2020; Office of the Prime Minister, 2020). The World Economic Forum's (2022) Gender Gap Index Report 2022 ranks Uganda 61st out of 146 rated countries in gender equality, 11th-best in sub-Saharan Africa.

How do Ugandan citizens see gender equality in their country?

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-gender equality in control over assets, hiring, land ownership, and political leadership.

Findings in Uganda show that women continue to trail men in educational attainment, asset ownership, and financial autonomy. By large majorities, citizens endorse gender equality in land ownership and political leadership, but support for equality in hiring is considerably weaker. Most Ugandans say the government is doing a good job of promoting equal rights and opportunities for women, but a majority say greater efforts are needed.

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 Uganda, led by Hatchile Consult Ltd., interviewed 2,400 adult Ugandans between 7 and 25 January 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. This was the 12th Afrobarometer survey in Uganda since 1999.

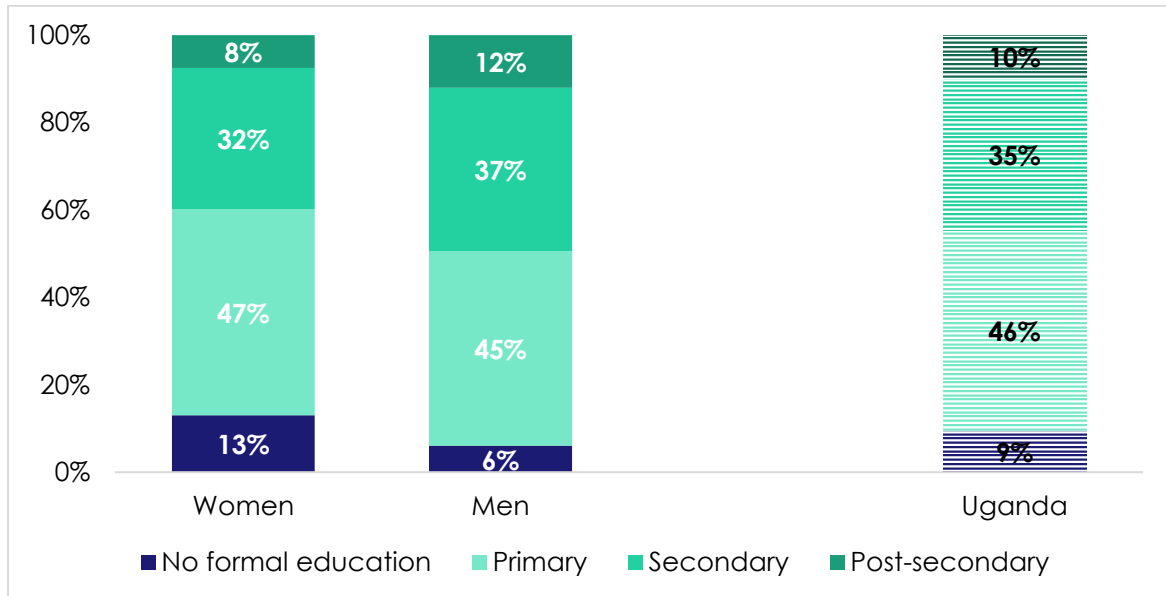
Key findings

- In Uganda, fewer women than men have completed secondary (32% vs. 37%) or post-secondary (8% vs. 12%) education, while more women than men have no formal schooling (13% vs. 6%).
- Women are less likely than men to own key assets such as a mobile phone (67% vs. 81%), a bank account (17% vs. 29%), and a motor vehicle (9% vs. 19%).
- Women are slightly less likely than men to say they make decisions about the use of household monies independently (33% vs. 37%) or jointly with their spouse (33% vs. 37%).
- Fewer women than men say they are employed full time (25% vs. 32%) or part time (11% vs. 16%).
- Only a slim majority (55%) of Ugandans endorse gender equality in hiring, while 43% instead believe that when jobs are scarce, men should be given priority.
 - However, more than three-fourths (78%) say women and men have equal opportunities to get a paying job in Uganda today.
- More than two-thirds (69%) of Ugandans say women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land.
- More than eight in 10 citizens (84%) say women should have the same chance as men to be elected to political office.
- While respondents overwhelmingly believe that a woman and her family will gain standing in the community if she runs for election (90%), notable proportions also consider it likely that she will be criticised, called names, or harassed by others in the community (51%) or will face problems with her family (46%).
- More than eight in 10 Ugandans (83%) applaud the government's performance in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women. But a majority (56%) also say the government and elected officials should do more to advance gender equality.
- Ugandans consider gender-based violence the most important women's-rights issue that the government and society must address (cited by 42% of respondents), followed by unequal property rights (16%) and unequal access to education (15%).

Educational attainment

Despite gains in recent years, Ugandan women still trail men in educational attainment. Women are less likely than men to have post-secondary (8% vs. 12%) or secondary (32% vs. 37%) education, and are twice as likely as men to have no formal education at all (13% vs. 6%) (Figure 1).

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

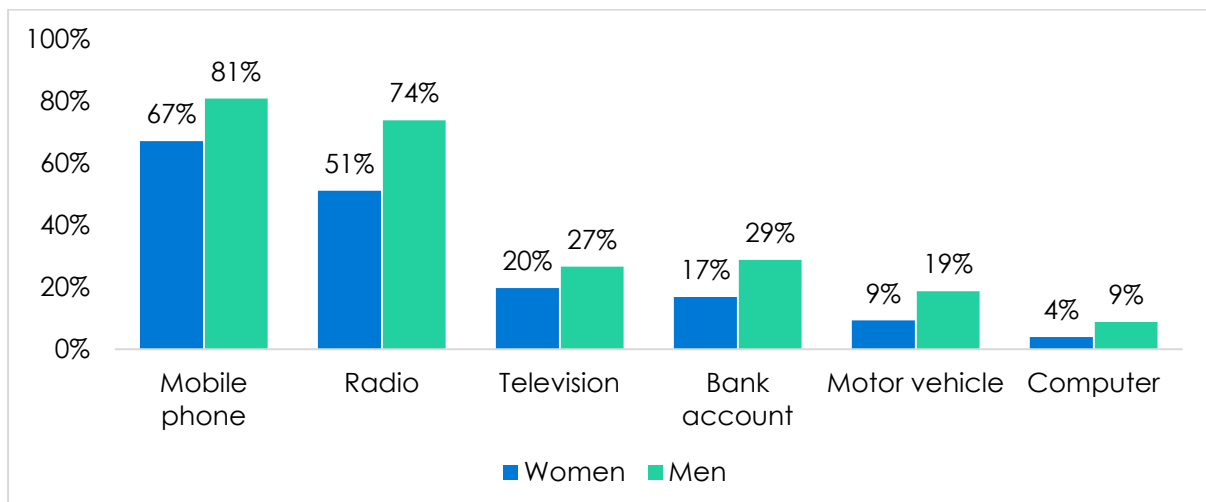


Respondents were asked: What is your highest level of education?

Asset ownership and decision making in households

Women are less likely than men to have control over key assets (Figure 2). Fewer women than men say they own a mobile phone (67% vs. 81%), a radio (51% vs. 74%), a television (20% vs. 27%), a bank account (17% vs. 29%), a motor vehicle (9% vs. 19%), and a computer (4% vs. 9%).

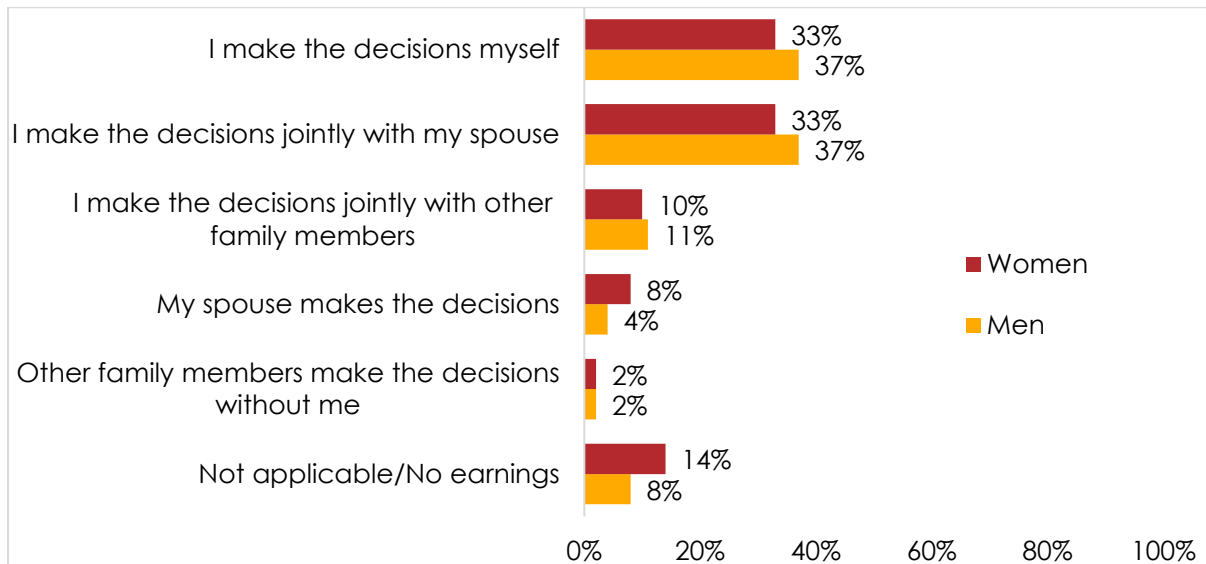
Figure 2: Asset ownership | by gender | Uganda | 2022



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

Findings also suggest a modest gender gap in financial autonomy (Figure 3). Women are slightly less likely than men to report that they make decisions about the use of household monies independently (33% vs. 37%) or jointly with their spouse (33% vs. 37%). Instead, women are more likely than men to say that their spouse makes financial decisions (8% vs. 4%) or that they have no discretionary monies that require decision making (14% vs. 8%).

Figure 3: Decision making on use of money | by gender | Uganda | 2022

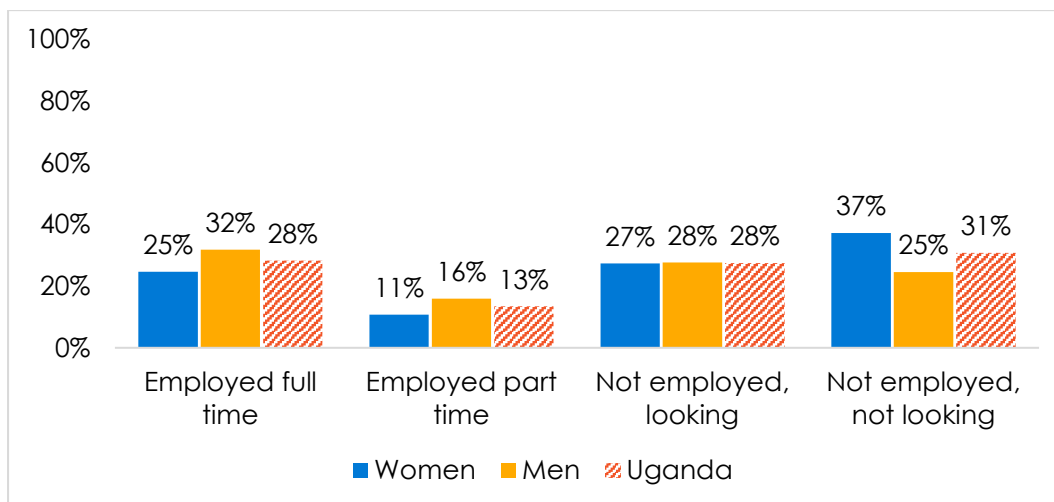


Respondents were asked: What is the main way that decisions are made about how to use any money that you have or earn, for example from a job, a business, selling things, or other activities?

Equal right to a job

Among survey respondents, fewer women than men say they are employed full time (25% vs. 32%) or part time (11% vs. 16%) (Figure 4). About the same proportion are not employed but are looking for a job (27% of women, 28% of men), while women are considerably more likely than men to be outside the labour market (i.e. not employed and not looking for employment) (35% vs. 27%).

Figure 4: Employment status | by gender | Uganda | 2022



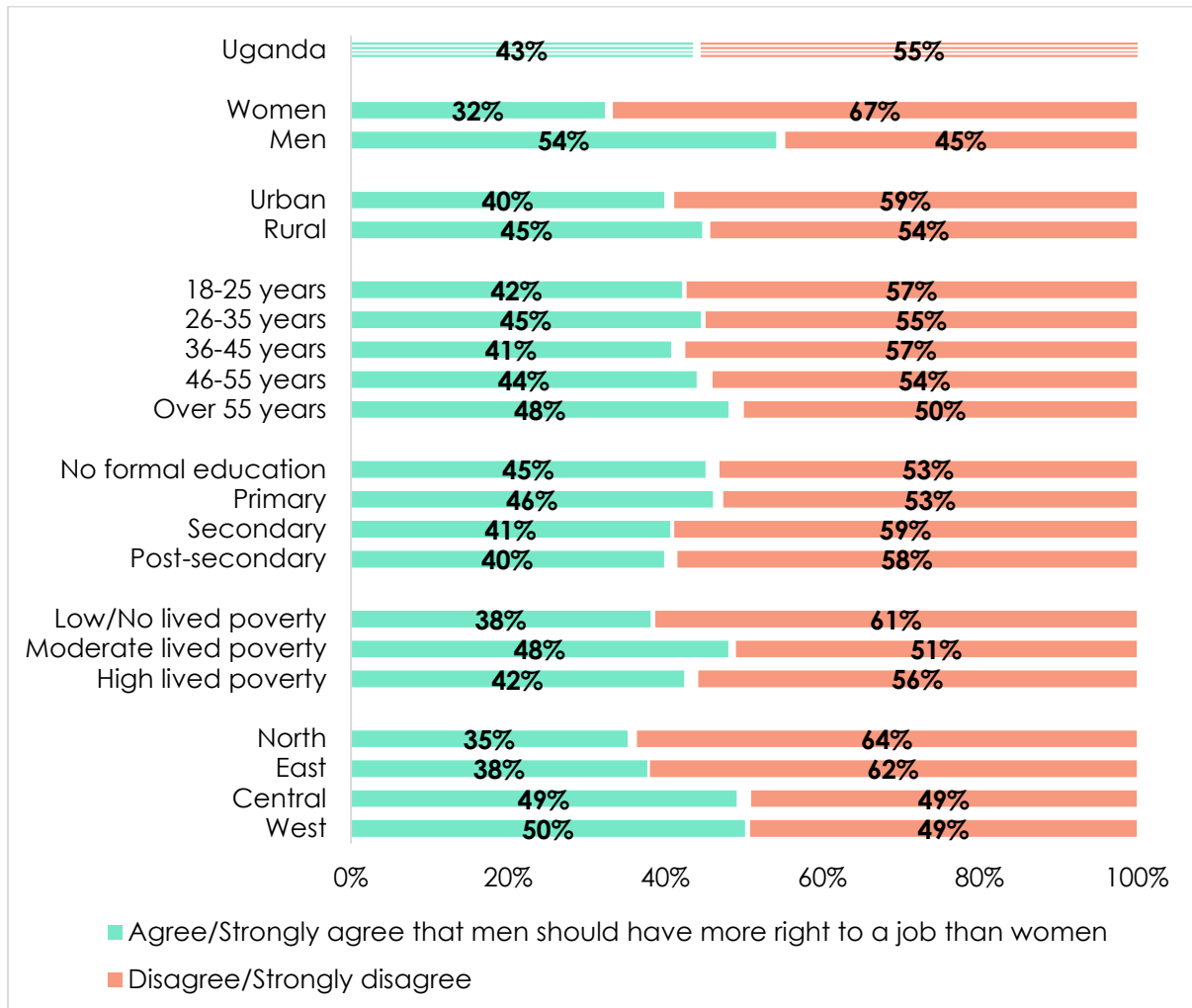
Respondents were asked: Do you have a job that pays a cash income? [If yes:] Is it full time or part time? [If no:] Are you currently looking for a job?

While employment patterns may reflect personal choices (e.g. a parent's decision to stay home to raise children), they can also reflect societal attitudes. In Uganda, more than half (55%) of survey respondents endorse gender equality in hiring, but a strong minority (43%) instead say that when jobs are scarce, men "should have more rights to a job" than women (Figure 5).

More women (67%) than men (45%) disagreed with this form of discrimination; among men, a majority (54%) would give priority to male applicants.

Support for gender equality in hiring is somewhat stronger than average among urban residents (59%), the youngest respondents (57%), more educated citizens (58%-59%), economically better-off citizens¹ (61%), and residents in the North (64%) and East (62%) regions.

Figure 5: Should men have more right to a job than women? | by demographic group | Uganda | 2022

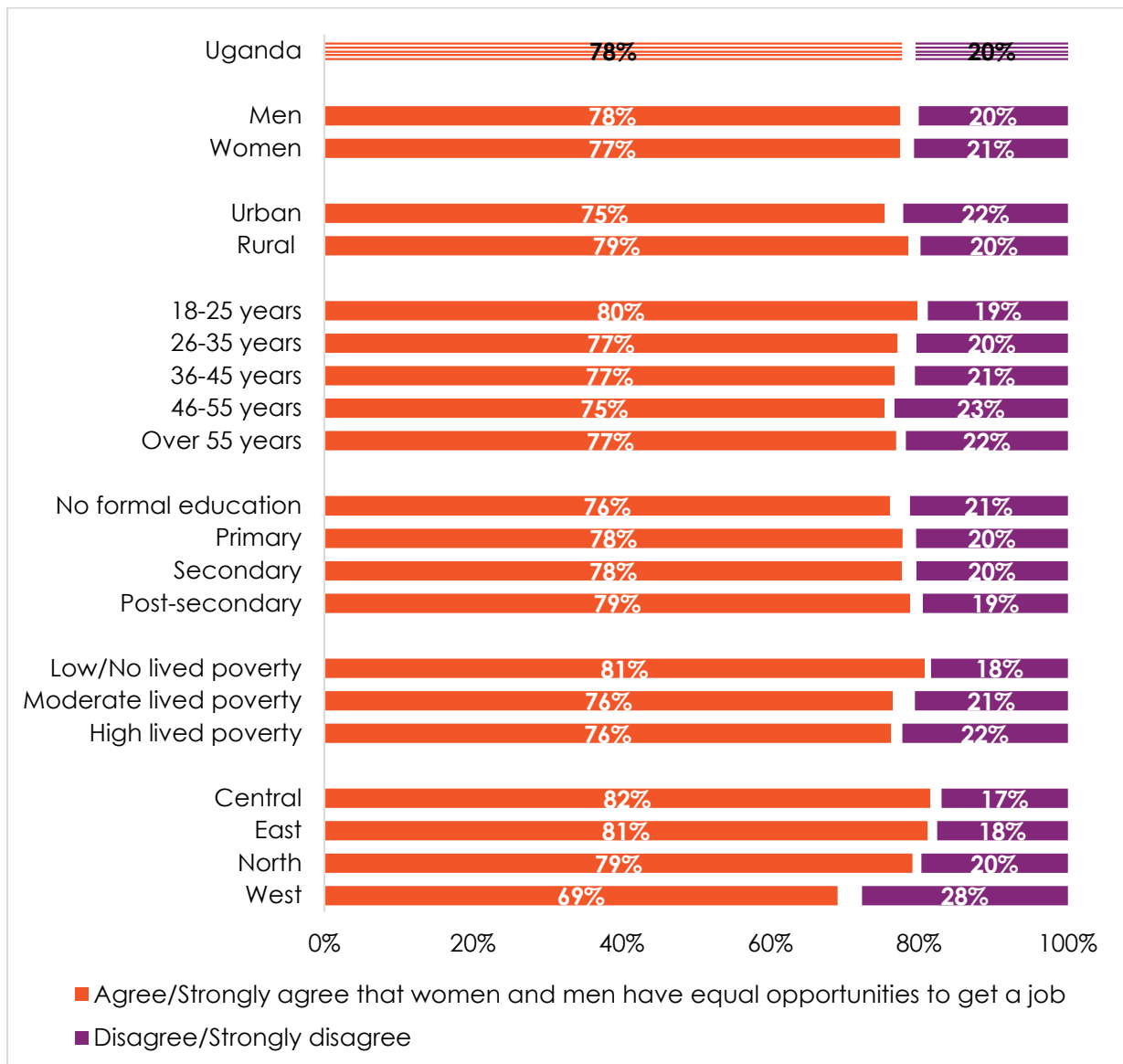


Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree; When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women.

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).

In practice, large majorities of both women (77%) and men (78%) say that the two genders now enjoy equal opportunities to get a job (Figure 6). At least three-fourths of respondents agree with this view across all key demographic groups except among residents of the Western region (69%).

Figure 6: Do women and men have equal opportunities to get a job? | by demographic group | Uganda | 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.

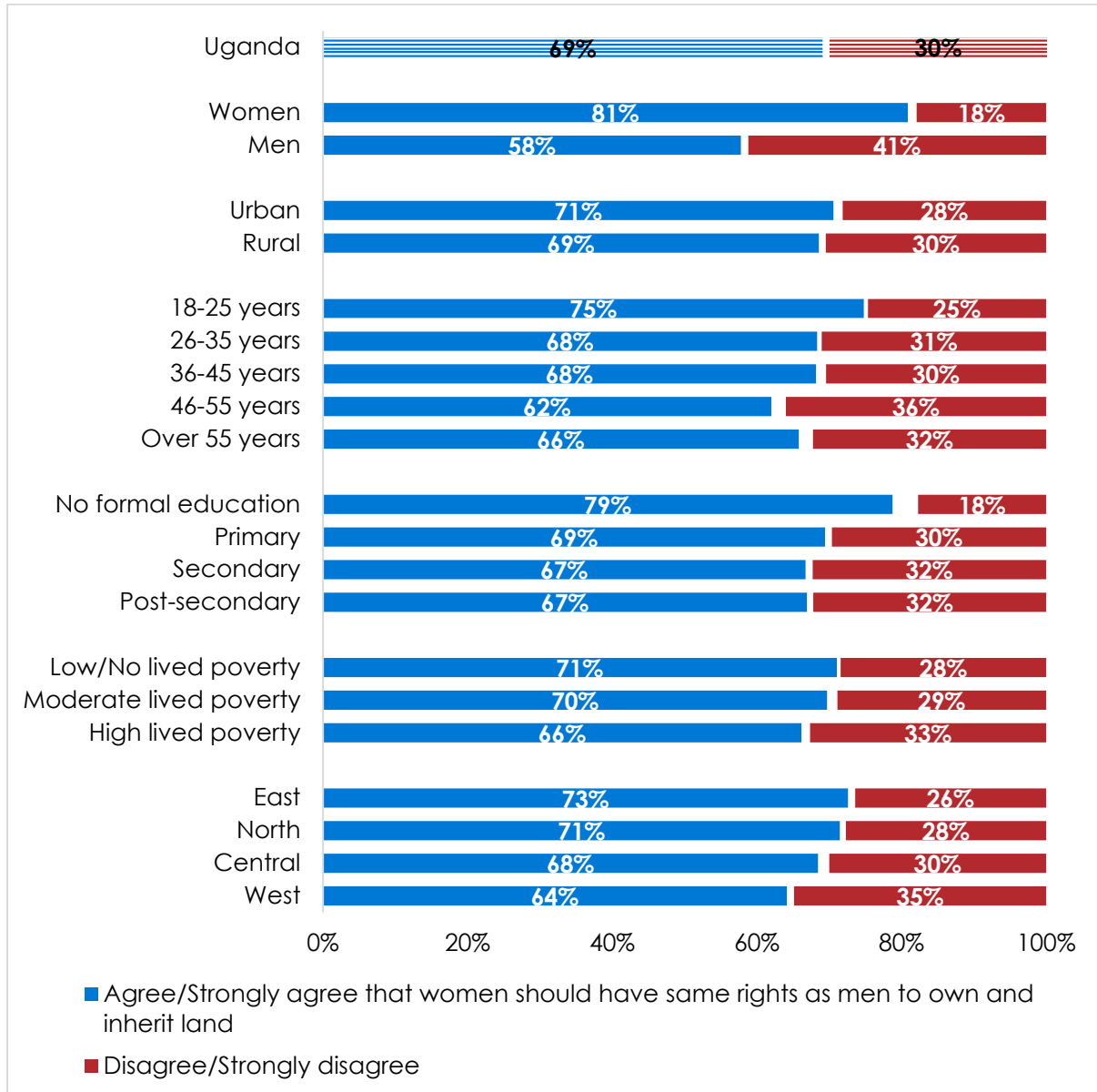
Equal right to own and inherit land

Nearly seven out of 10 Ugandans (69%) “agree” or “strongly agree” that women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land (Figure 7). But support for gender equality in land ownership is considerably weaker among men (58%) than among women (81%).

Equal rights to land are also more likely to be endorsed by young respondents (75%) than their elders (62%-68%), by citizens with no formal education (79%) than their more educated

counterparts (67%-69%), by economically better-off respondents (71%) than the poor (66%), and by residents of the East (73%) and North (71%) regions than those living in other regions (64%-68%).

Figure 7: Should women have equal right to own and inherit land? | by demographic group | Uganda | 2022

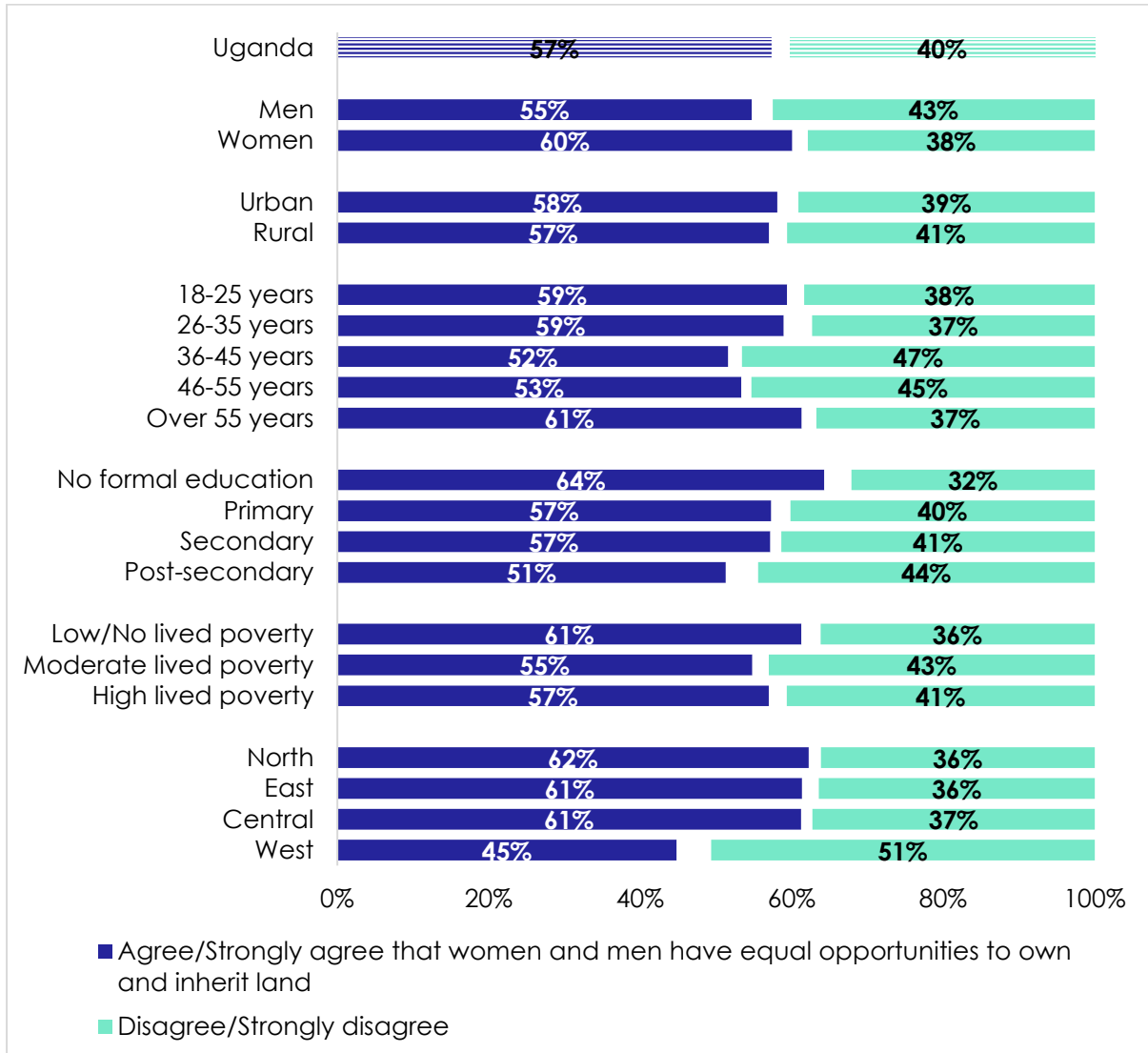


Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: Women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land.

While 69% of Ugandans endorse equal rights to land ownership and inheritance, a weaker majority (57%) affirm that women and men enjoy equal opportunities to own and inherit land in Uganda today (Figure 8).

Marginally more women (60%) than men (55%) say this form of equality has been achieved. This perception is less widespread among the most educated citizens (51%) and residents of the West region (45%).

Figure 8: Do women and men today have equal opportunities to own and inherit land? | by demographic group | Uganda | 2022



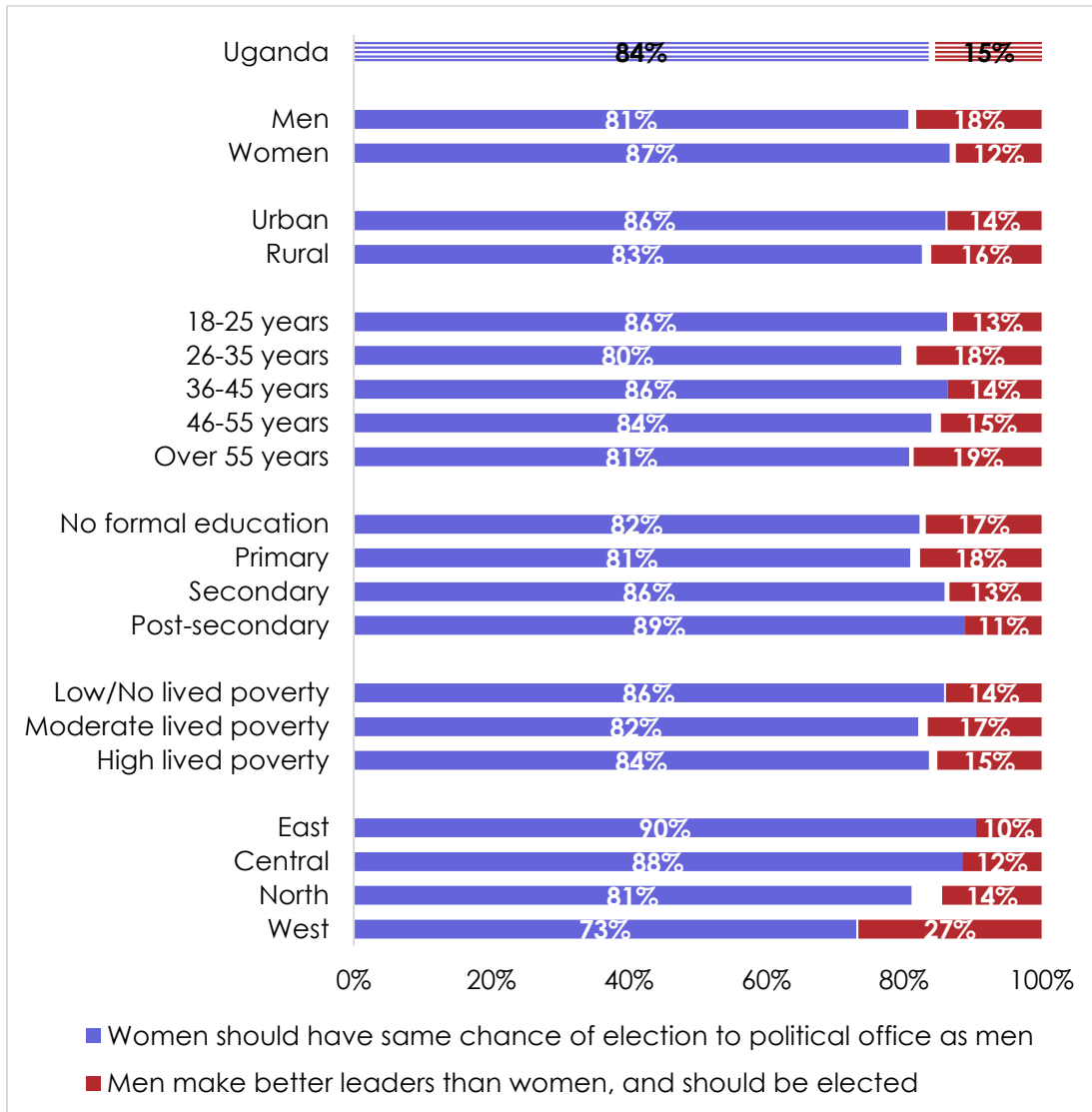
Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: In our country today, women and men have equal opportunities to own and inherit land.

Gender equality in politics

More than eight in 10 Ugandans (84%) say women should have the same chance as men of being elected to political office, while 15% instead say men make better political leaders and should thus have priority at the ballot box (Figure 9).

Support for gender equality in politics is particularly strong among women (87%, compared to 81% among men), the most educated citizens (89%), and residents of the East (90%) and Central (88%) regions.

Figure 9: Should women have an equal chance to be elected? | by demographic group | Uganda | 2022



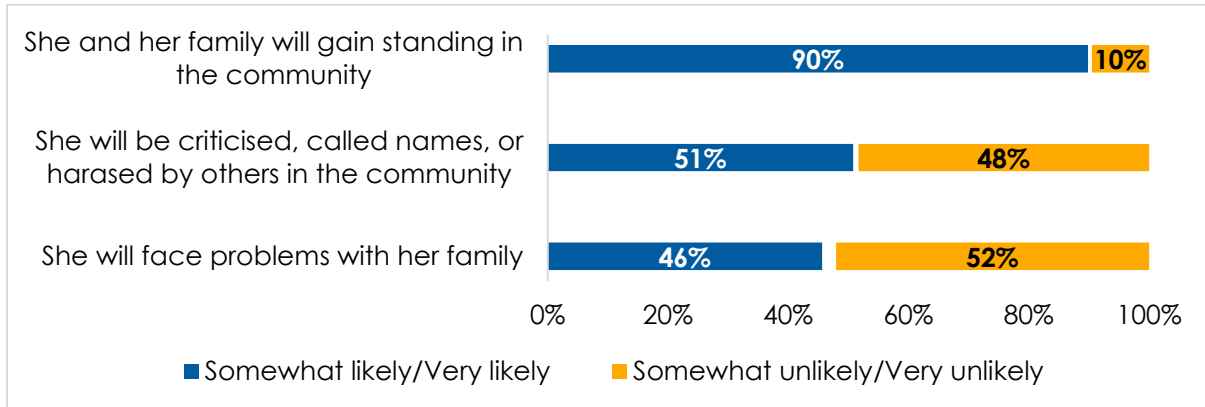
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Men make better political leaders than women and should be elected rather than women.
 Statement 2: Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men.
 (% who “agree” or “strongly 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, Ugandans overwhelmingly (90%) 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 10).

But findings are more mixed on other potential consequences. More than half (51%) of respondents consider it likely that others in the community will criticise her, call her names, or harass her for seeking public office, while 46% think she might face problems with her family.

Figure 10: For better or for worse: How running for elected office might affect women's lives | Uganda | 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?

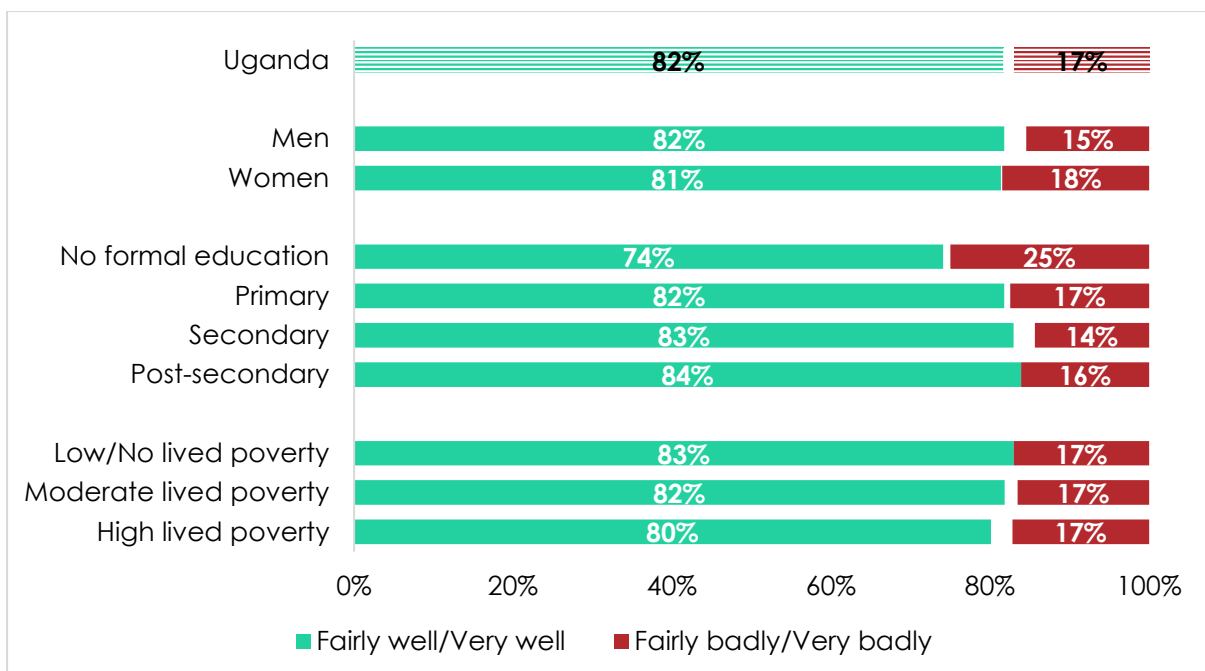
She will be criticised, called names, or harassed by others in the community?

She will face problems with her family?

Government handling of gender equality, rights, and opportunities

More than eight in 10 citizens (82%) say their government is doing a “fairly” or “very” good job of promoting equal rights and opportunities for women (Figure 11). This positive assessment is fairly consistent across key demographic groups, though somewhat weaker among respondents with no formal education (74%).

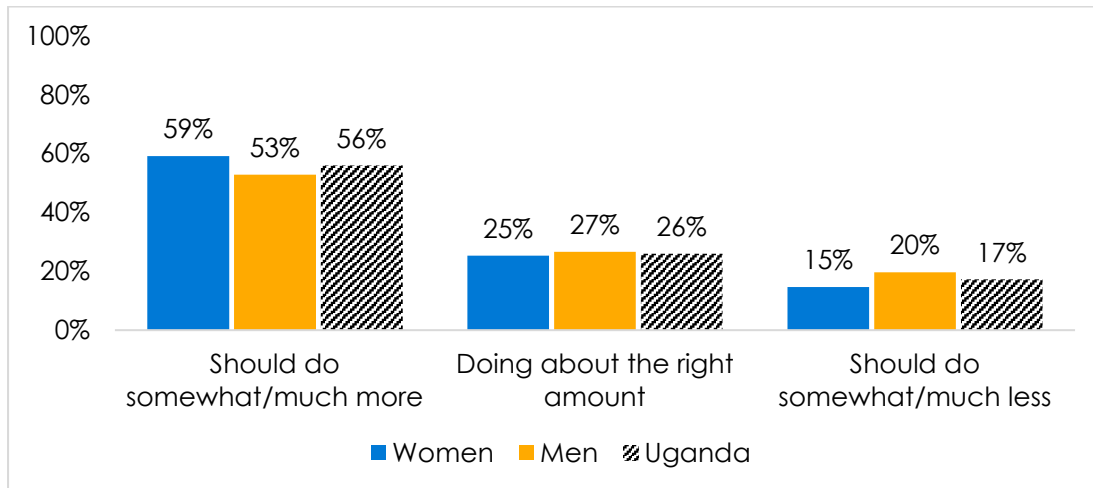
Figure 11: Government performance in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women | by demographic group | Uganda | 2022



Respondents were asked: *How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matter, or haven't you heard enough to say: Promoting equal rights and opportunities for women?*

Despite this public approval of the government's performance, a majority (56%) of citizens say the government and elected officials should be doing "somewhat more" or "much more" to advance the rights and equality of women (Figure 12). This view is somewhat more common among women (59%) than men (53%).

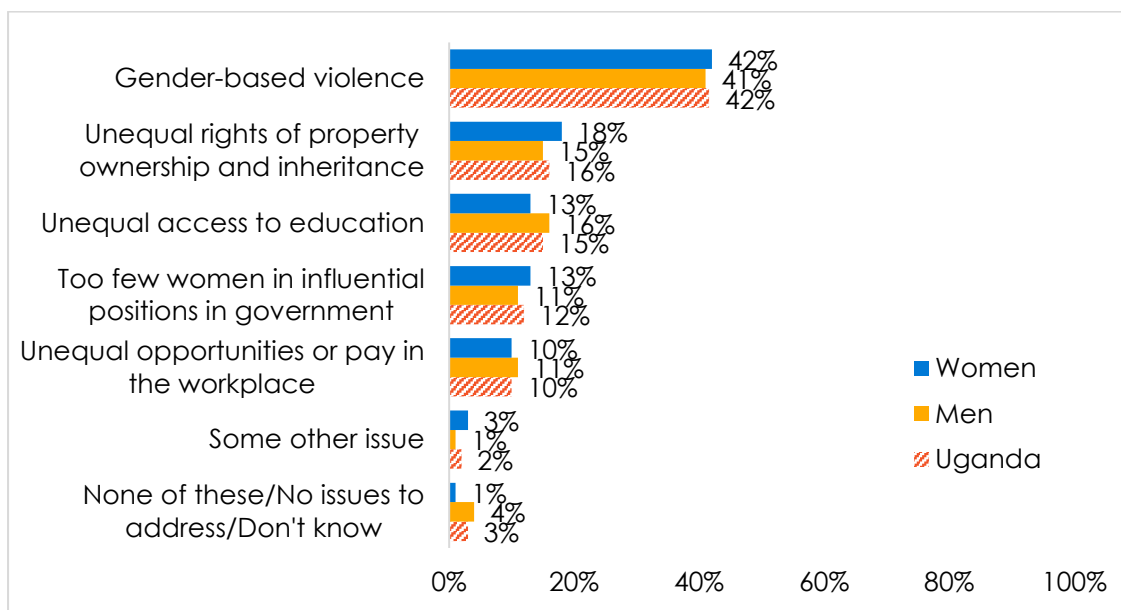
Figure 12: Should the government do more to advance women's rights? | by gender | Uganda | 2022



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 about the right amount?

When asked what they consider the most important issue related to women's rights and equality that the government and society must address, Ugandans most frequently cite gender-based violence (42% of women, 41% of men) (Figure 13). (Additional survey findings on gender-based violence will be reported in a separate dispatch).

Figure 13: Most important women's-rights issue | by gender | Uganda | 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?

In much smaller numbers, respondents cite unequal property rights (16%), unequal access to education (15%), a lack of women in influential government positions (12%), and unequal opportunities or pay in the workplace (10%) as their top priorities.

Conclusion

The Ugandan government's efforts to promote gender equality have earned an above-average ranking on the Global Gender Gap Index and largely favourable reviews from most citizens.

But survey findings also point to remaining challenges, including women's persistent disadvantages in educational attainment, asset ownership, and financial autonomy. Moreover, while a majority of Ugandans endorse equal rights to own and inherit land, support for equal rights to a job is far less solid; among men – who tend to hold greater decision-making power in hiring – a majority say their gender should have priority when jobs are scarce.

And while most citizens say women should have the same chance as men to be elected to public office, many also think that female candidates are likely to encounter criticism, harassment, and family problems – a perception that may discourage some women from throwing their hats in the ring.

A majority of Ugandans say they want the government and elected officials to do more to promote equal rights and opportunities for women. These findings suggest that in addition to energetic enforcement of existing laws, creative strategies for promoting gender-equal practices and attitudes will be needed.

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