



## Batswana support gender equity, want greater government action to promote equal rights

**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 589 | Keneilwe Mooketsane, Wilford Molefe, Mir Muhtadi Faiaz, and Anita Raj**

### Summary

Achieving gender equality is central to any state's social, economic, and political progress, as more gender-equal societies also tend to be more prosperous, more peaceful, and healthier (United Nations, 2022). More importantly, women's rights are human rights, and as women and girls represent half of the world's population, any progress must include them.

The government of Botswana has shown commitment to ending gender-based violence (GBV) and discrimination by formulating policies, strategies, and programmes such as the National Policy on Gender and Development (with a National Gender Commission to monitor implementation), the National Gender-Based Violence Strategy 2015-2020, and the Women's Economic Empowerment Programme (Republic of Botswana, 2017; UN Women, n.d.). The government also subscribes to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 5 – "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" (United Nations, 2022). Gender equality is a cross-cutting principle underlying most other SDGs, highlighting that development can only succeed if women and men enjoy its benefits equally.

Despite Botswana's efforts to promote gender equality, it needs significant progress to achieve SDG 5. According to the World Economic Forum's (2022) Global Gender Gap Index, Botswana ranks 66<sup>th</sup> among 146 countries in terms of gender parity in critical dimensions: economic opportunities, education, health, and political leadership. Within sub-Saharan Africa, Botswana places 14<sup>th</sup> among 36 countries considered in the index, well behind top-rated Rwanda, Namibia, and South Africa.

This dispatch reports on a special survey module included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 (2021/2022) questionnaire to explore citizens' attitudes, experiences, and perceptions with regard to gender equality in educational attainment, control over assets, hiring, land ownership, and political leadership.

Findings show that majorities of Batswana express support for women's right to equality in hiring, land ownership, and political leadership. But almost half consider it likely that women will suffer criticism, harassment, or family problems if they run for political office. Overall, fewer than half of Batswana approve of the government's performance in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women, and an overwhelming majority say the government should do more.

### 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, and Round 9

surveys are currently underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Botswana, led by Star Awards, interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1,200 adult Batswana in July - August 2022. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Surveys conducted in Botswana previously took place in 1999, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, 2017, and 2019.

## Key findings

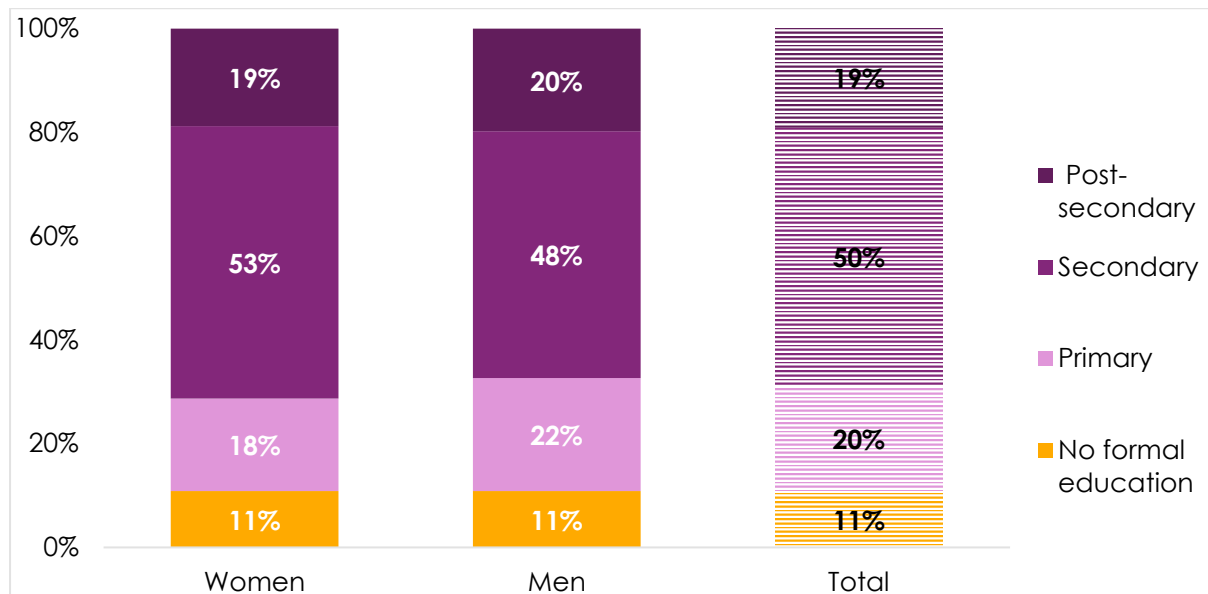
- Educational attainment is close to gender-equal in Botswana, with a slightly higher proportion of women with secondary schooling.
- Asset ownership favours men when it comes to motor vehicles, computers, television sets, and radios but is gender-equal with regard to mobile phones and bank accounts.
- A larger proportion of women (58%) than of men (52%) say they make independent decisions regarding how household money is spent.
- More than three-fourths (77%) of Batswana endorse gender equality in hiring, rejecting the idea that when jobs are scarce, men should be given priority. Women (82%) and highly educated citizens (86%) are especially likely to support equal rights to a job.
- Citizens agree overwhelmingly (91%) that women should have the same right as men to own and inherit land.
- Almost nine out of 10 citizens (86%) say women should have the same chance as men of being elected to political office. However, many also think that if a woman runs for political office, she is likely to be criticised or harassed by others in the community (43%) and to face problems with her family (40%).
- Only 42% of citizens say the government is doing “fairly well” or “very well” in its efforts to promote equal rights and opportunities for women.
  - About twice as many (80%) say the government needs to do more to advance gender equality.

## Education, control of assets, and financial decision-making

Equal access to education and assets is a critical indicator of gender equality in society. Survey findings show only modest gender differences in educational attainment in Botswana (Figure 1). Women are slightly more likely than men to have secondary education (53% vs. 48%), while slightly more men than women have primary schooling (22% vs. 18%). Women and men do not differ when it comes to the proportions who have no formal education (11%) and those with post-secondary qualifications (19% of women, 20% of men).

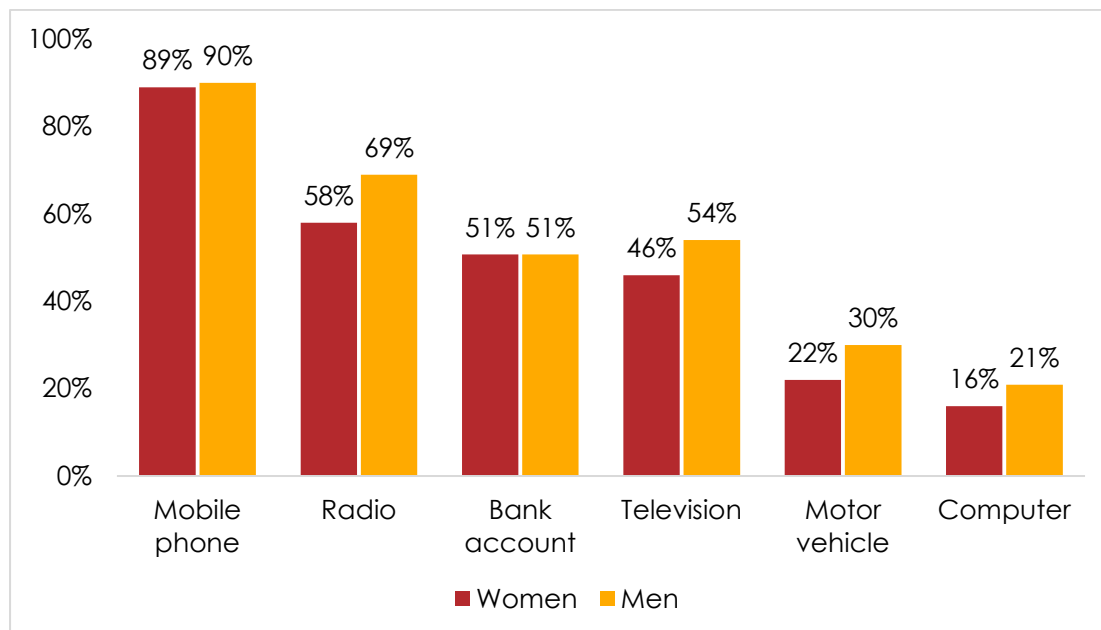
Men are more likely than women to control certain assets (Figure 2). More men own motor vehicles (30% vs. 22% of women), computers (21% vs. 16%), television sets (54% vs. 46%), and radios (69% vs. 58%). But women and men are about equally likely to own mobile phones and bank accounts.

**Figure 1: Educational attainment** | by gender | Botswana | 2022



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

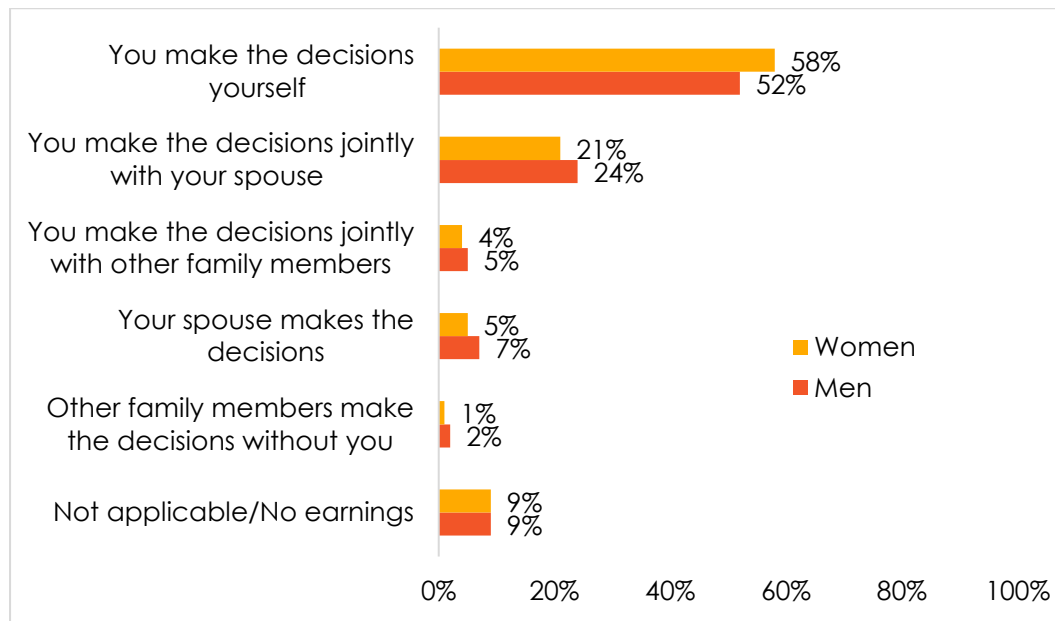
**Figure 2: Asset ownership** | by gender | Botswana | 2022



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

In terms of financial decision making, more women (58%) than men (52%) say they make independent decisions on how household money is spent (Figure 3). Only 6% of women (vs. 9% of men) say household financial decisions are made by their spouses or other family members without their input.

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

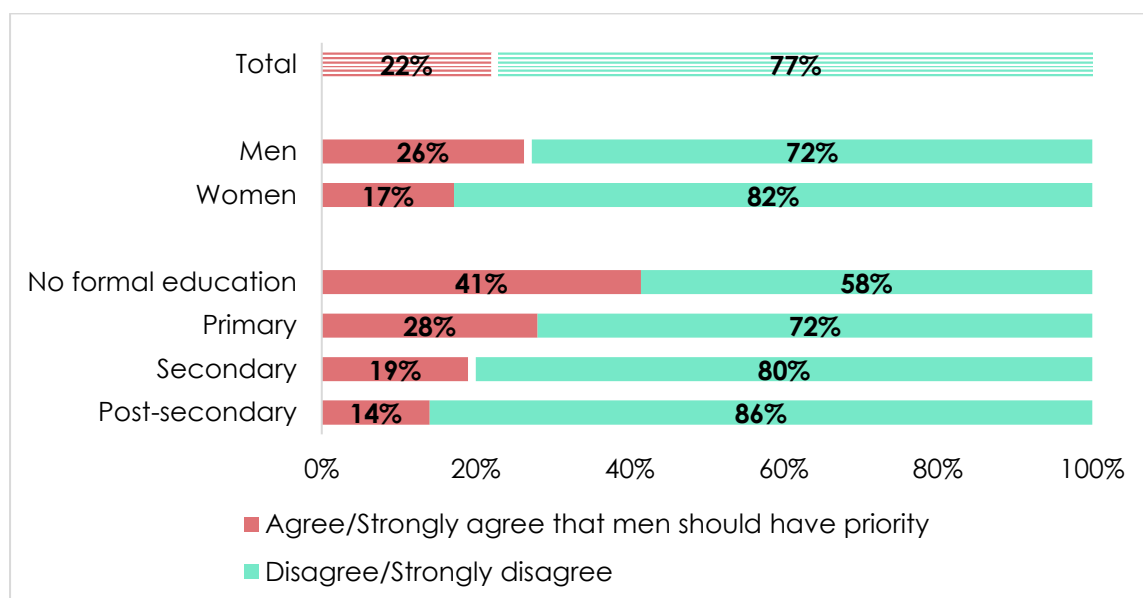


**Respondents were asked:** What is the main way that decisions are made about how to use any money that you have or earn, for example from a job, a business, selling things, or other activities?

### Rights to a job and land

Historically, Botswana has exhibited traits of a patriarchal society in which men often enjoy privileges denied to women (Kalabamu, 2006). However, more than three-fourths (77%) of Botswana endorse gender equality in hiring, rejecting the idea that when jobs are scarce, men should be given priority (Figure 4).

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

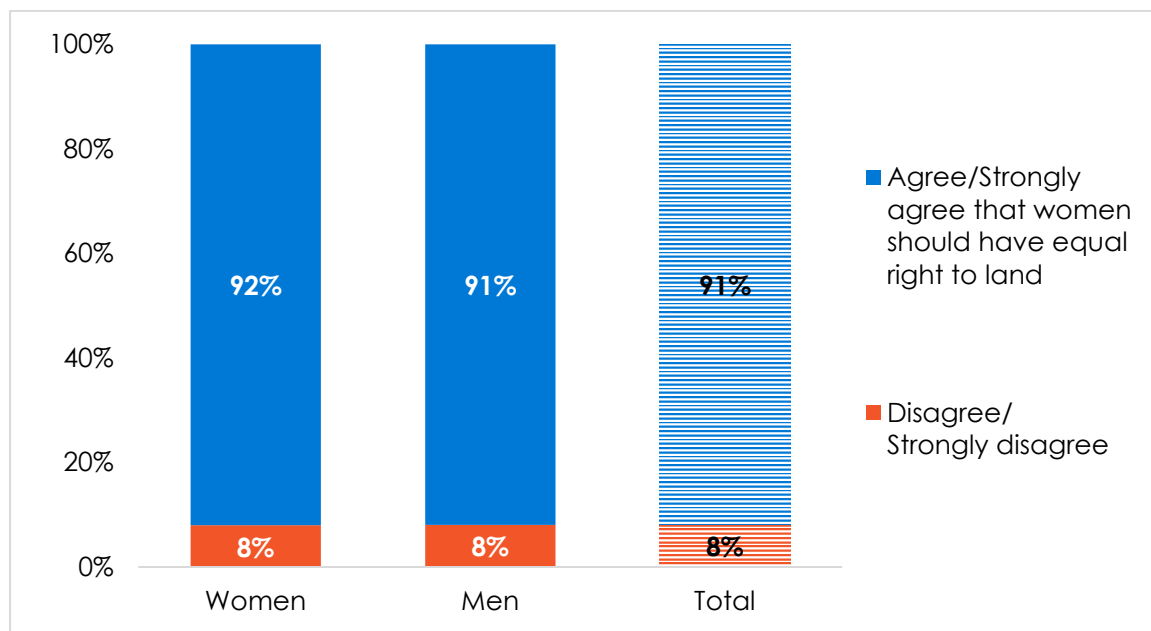


**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: When jobs are scarce, men should have more rights to a job than women.

Men are less likely than women to support gender equality in hiring (72% vs. 82%). Support for women's equal right to a job increases as respondents' education level rises, ranging from 58% among citizens with no formal schooling to 86% among those with post-secondary qualifications.

An even greater majority (91%) of Batswana "agree" or "strongly agree" that women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land (Figure 5). Men (91%) and women (92%) are about equally likely to support this attitude.

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



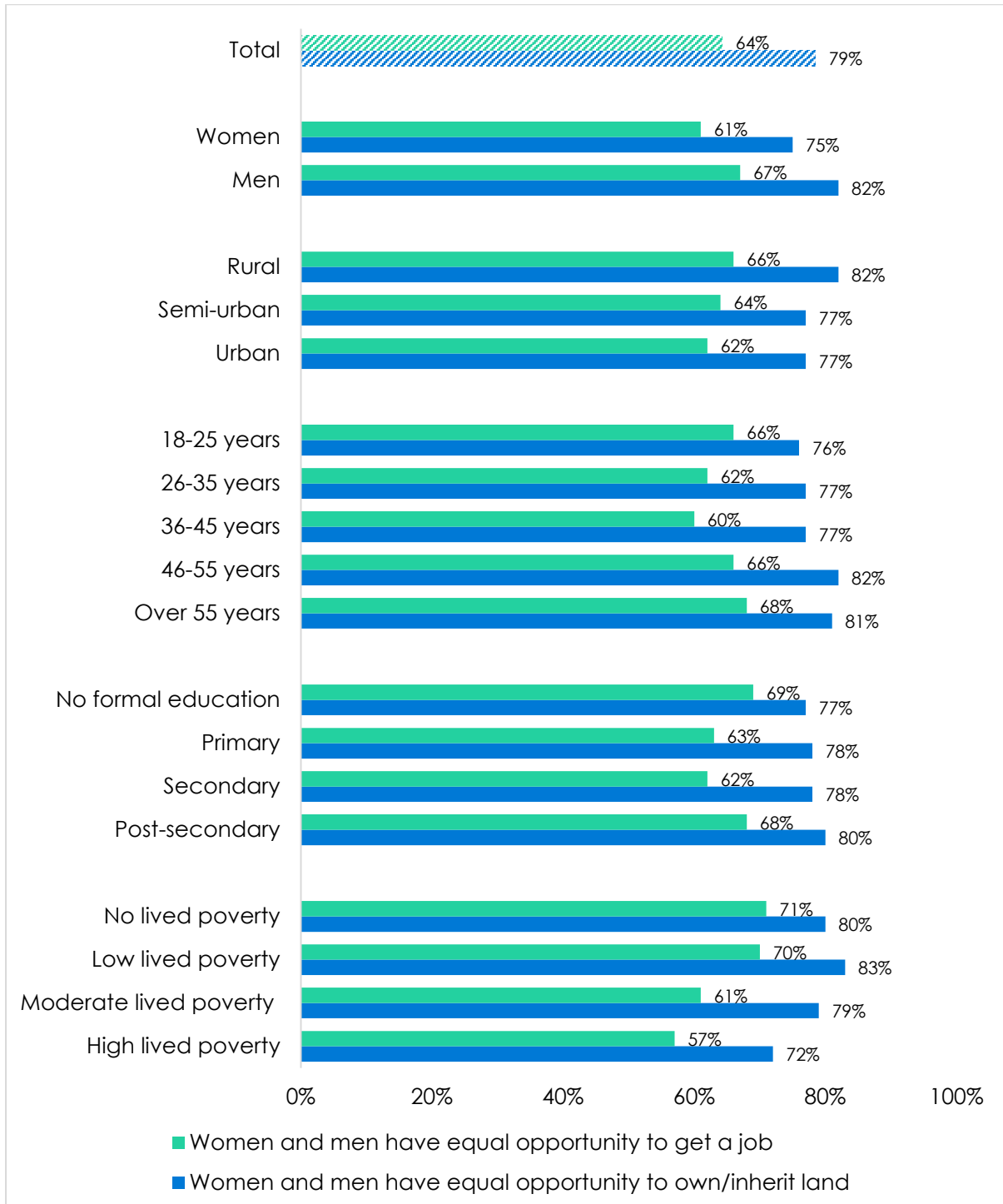
**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: Women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land.

In practice, women in Botswana already enjoy the same rights as men to get a job and to own/inherit land, according to solid majorities of those surveyed. But considerably more see gender equality as a reality in land ownership (79%) than in hiring (64%) (Figure 6).

Men and urban residents are 4-7 percentage points more likely than women and rural residents to perceive equal rights as a *fait accompli* when it comes to both land and jobs. The poorest respondents (i.e. those experiencing high lived poverty<sup>1</sup>) are considerably less likely than their better-off counterparts to report that gender equality has been achieved in either sector. For example, only 57% of the poor say women already have equality in hiring, compared to 71% of the best-off respondents.

<sup>1</sup> 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 | Botswana | 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”)

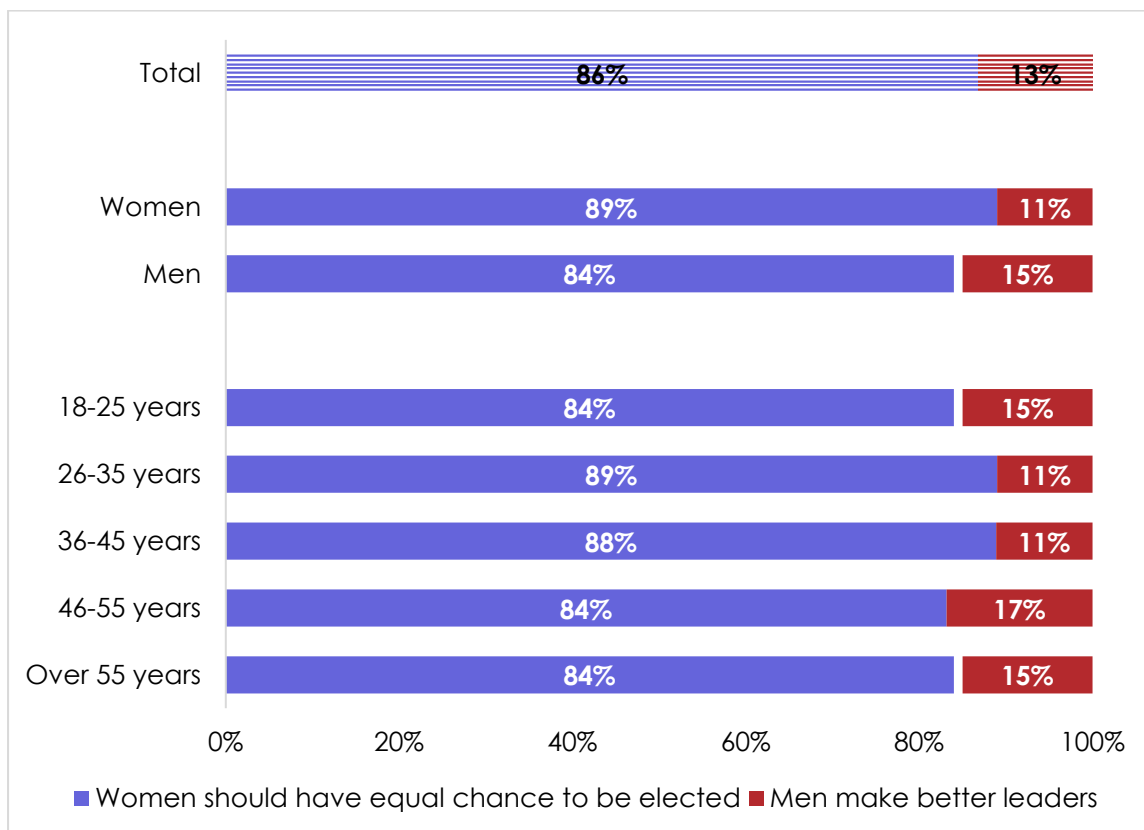
## Gender equality in political participation

Botswana ranks among the worst performing countries in the world in terms of women's representation in political decision-making positions, with women holding just 11% of parliamentary and 16% of ministerial positions (World Economic Forum, 2022).

This disparity has persisted despite overwhelming popular support for gender equality at the ballot box. Almost nine out of 10 Botswana (86%) "agree" or "strongly agree" that women should have the same chance as men to be elected to public office; only 13% say that men make better political leaders and should thus be elected instead of women (Figure 7).

Women are somewhat more likely than men to endorse equality in politics (89% vs. 84%), while 26- to 45-year-olds express the highest levels of support (88%-89%) for this view.

**Figure 7: Should women have an equal chance to be elected? | by gender**  
 | Botswana | 2022



**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

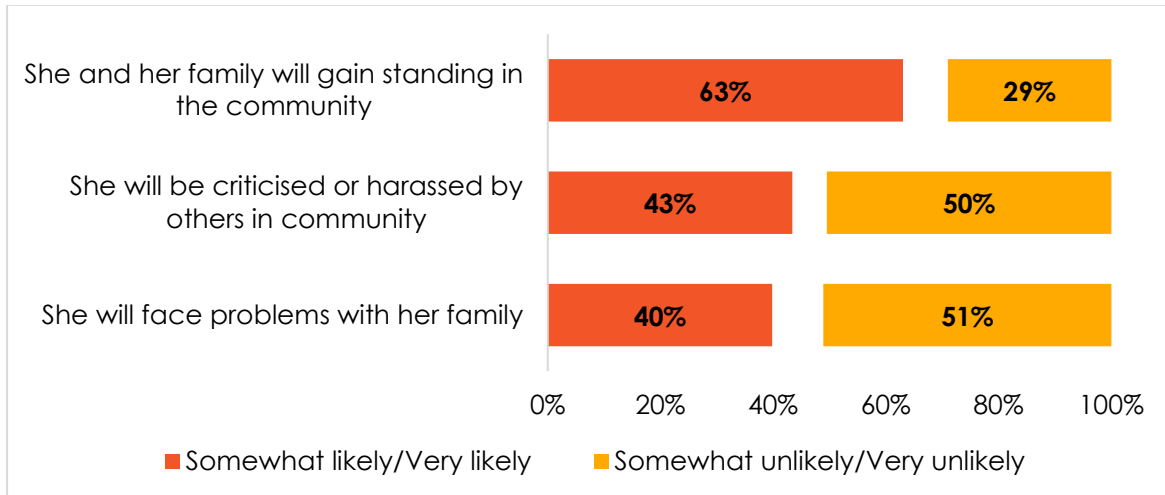
Statement 1: Men make better political leaders than women and should be elected rather than women.

Statement 2: Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men.

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

A majority (63%) of citizens are optimistic that a woman and her family will gain standing in the community if she runs for elected office (Figure 8). At least four in 10 also consider it "somewhat likely" or "very likely" that she will be criticised, called names, or harassed by others in the community (43%) and that she will face problems with her family (40%).

**Figure 8: For better or for worse: How running for elected office might affect women's lives | Botswana | 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?*

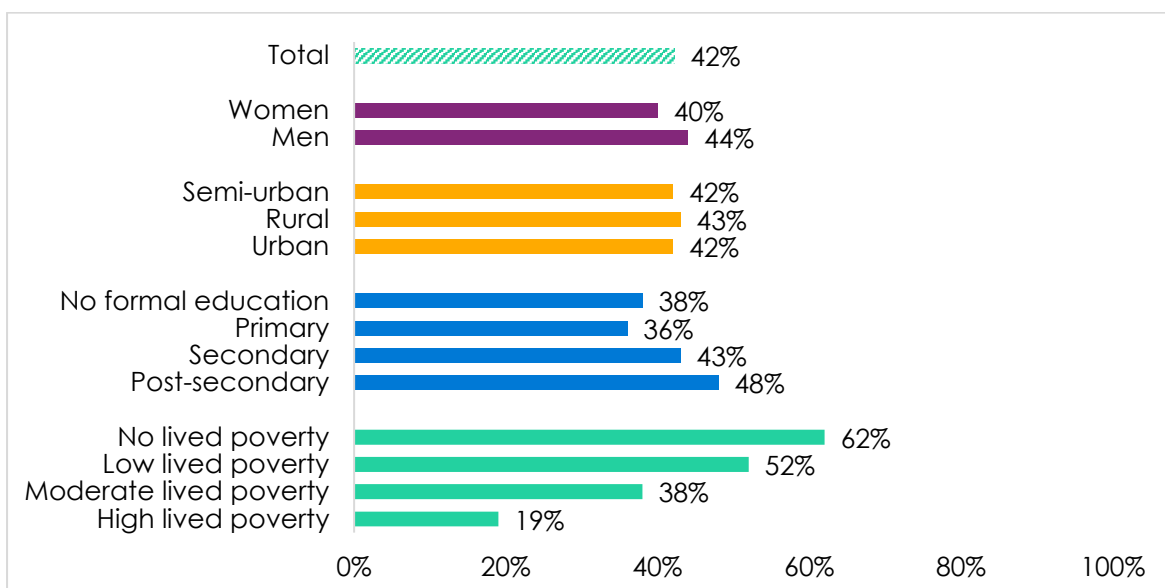
*She will be criticised, called names, or harassed by others in the community?*

*She will face problems with her family?*

### Government performance in promoting equal rights and opportunities

Fewer half (42%) of Botswana say the government is doing “fairly well” or “very well” in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women, while a majority (56%) disapprove of its performance on this issue (Figure 9).

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



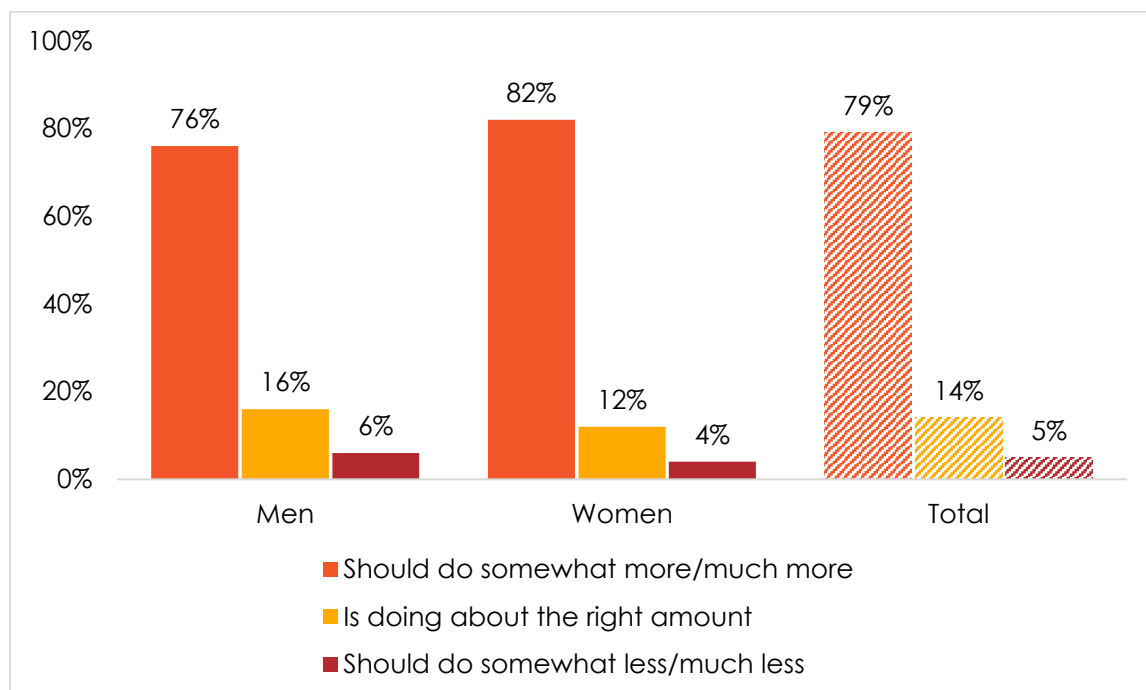
**Respondents were asked:** *How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Promoting equal rights and opportunities for women? (% who say “fairly well” or “very well”)*



Women are less likely than men to praise the government's efforts on gender equality (40% vs. 44%), as are respondents with primary or less education (36%-38%) compared to those with post-secondary qualification (48%). But much larger differences are apparent along economic lines: Well-to-do citizens (62%) are more than three times as likely as the poor (19%) to think the government is doing a good job of promoting equal rights, perhaps suggesting that gains in gender equality are not benefiting all levels of society equally.

More than three-fourths of both men (76%) and women (82%) say the government needs to increase its efforts to advance women's rights and opportunities (Figure 10).

**Figure 10: Should the government do more or less to promote equal rights and opportunities for women? | by gender | Botswana | 2022**

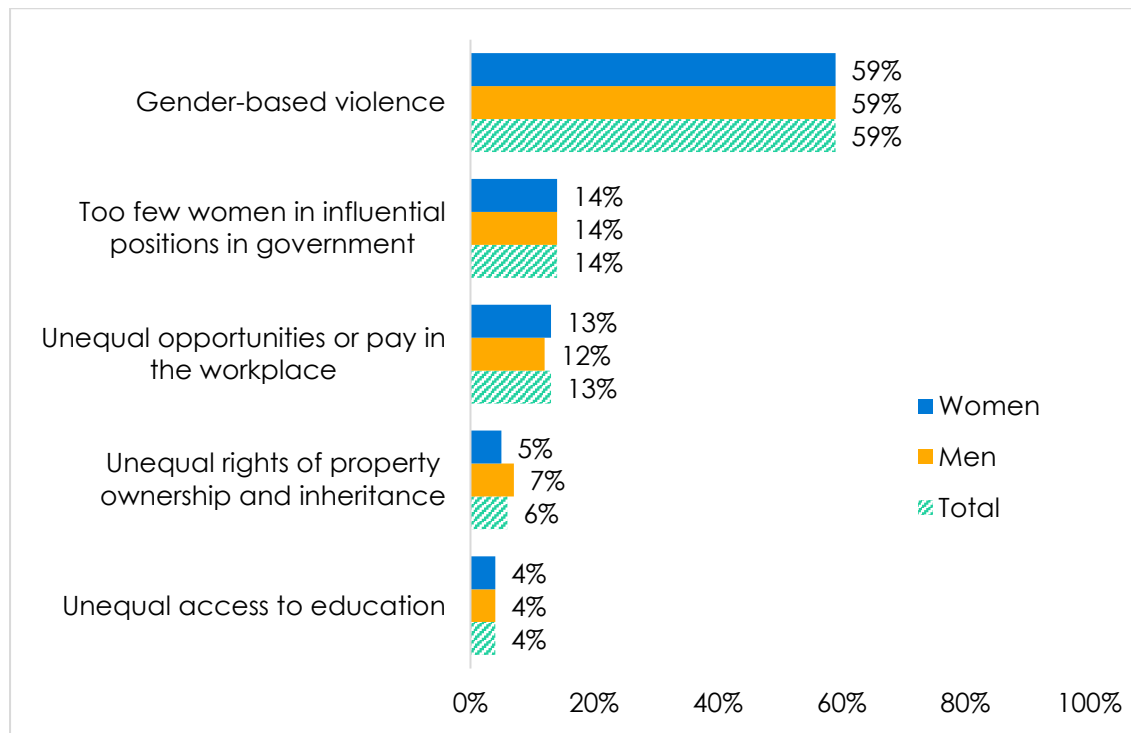


**Respondents were asked:** *In your opinion, should government and elected officials be doing more than they are doing now to advance the rights and equality of women, or should they be doing less, or are they doing about the right amount?*

When asked what they consider the most important issue related to women's rights and gender equality for their government and society to address, six in 10 Botswana (59%) cite gender-based violence (Figure 11). Far fewer would prioritise the lack of women in influential government positions (14%), unequal opportunities or pay in the workplace (13%), unequal property rights (6%), and unequal access to education (4%).

Women and men offer the same prioritisation of these issues.

**Figure 11: Most important women’s-rights issue | by gender | Botswana | 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

For policy makers and activists for women's rights, these survey findings suggest success in a number of areas, including educational attainment, financial autonomy, and societal attitudes toward equal rights in hiring, land ownership, and political leadership.

But they also point to challenges that will require further efforts to achieve gender equality. Alongside support for gender fairness in politics, many Batswana think a woman who runs for office is likely to face criticism, harassment, and family problems – perceptions that may discourage some women from seeking elective office. And gender-based violence remains an urgent issue for the government and society to address, according to a majority of citizens.

Overall, Batswana offer a solid foundation for further action – eight in 10 say the government needs to do more to promote equal rights and opportunities for women.

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