

Gender equality in the Gambia: Citizens demand greater government efforts

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 663 | Baboucarr Fatty and Maame Akua Amoah Twum

Summary

In pursuit of gender equality, the Gambia has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Maputo Protocol and adopted the United Nations' (2022) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, whose Goal No. 5 – “achieve gender equality and empower women and girls” – underlies many of its other objectives as well.

At the national level, tools in the quest for gender parity and equal opportunity include the Women's Act of 2010 and the Gender and Women's Empowerment Policy 2010-2020, which the government has said is being updated (Dem, 2022; UNEP-LEAP, 2010).

Despite these measures, gender equality remains an aspiration in the Gambia, where women's disadvantage in many sectors places the country 121st out of 146 countries, or in the bottom 20%, on the Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2022). One striking disparity is the underrepresentation of women in politics: Only 8.6% of seats in Parliament are held by women, one of the smallest proportions in the world (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023; Nabaneh, 2022).

This dispatch reports on a special survey module included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 (2021/2023) questionnaire to explore Africans' experiences and perceptions of gender equality in control over assets, hiring, land ownership, and political leadership. (For findings on gender-based violence, see Jaw and Gassama, 2023).

In the Gambia, women trail men in educational attainment, asset ownership, and financial autonomy. A majority of citizens endorse gender equality in hiring, land ownership, and politics, although many consider it likely that women who run for public office will face negative reactions from their communities and families.

A majority of Gambians say the government needs to do more to promote equal rights and opportunities for women.

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 being completed in 2023. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in the Gambia, led by the Center for Policy, Research and Strategic Studies (CepRass), interviewed 1,200 adult citizens between 30 August and 19 September 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 the Gambia in 2018 and 2021.

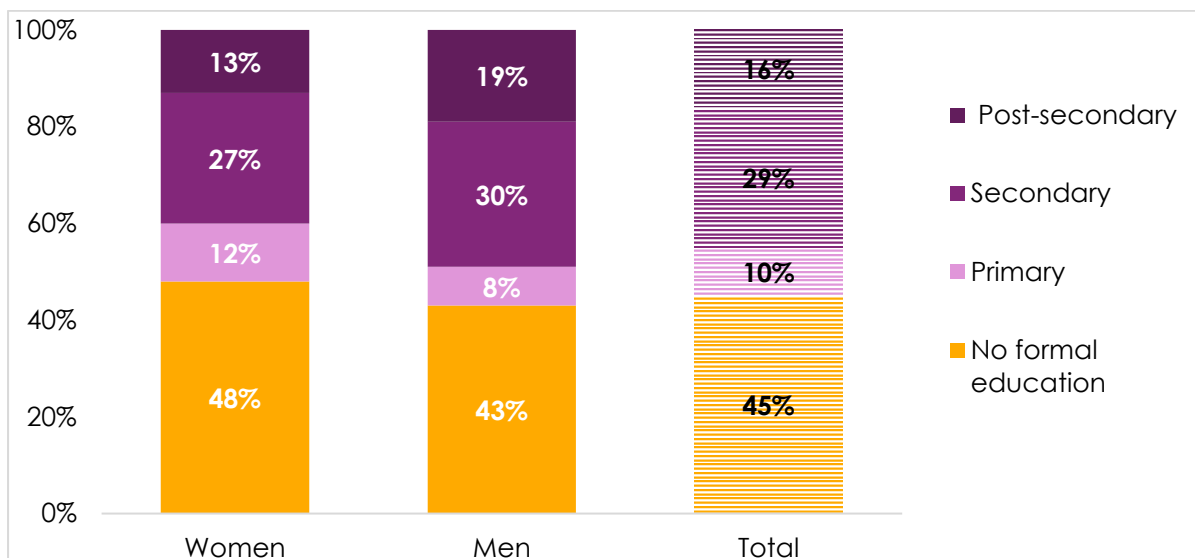
Key findings

- In the Gambia, women are less likely than men to have secondary or post-secondary education (40% vs. 49%) and more likely than men to have no formal schooling (48% vs. 43%).
- Women trail men significantly in ownership of key assets, including a mobile phone (85% vs. 95%), a bank account (24% vs. 43%), a motor vehicle (7% vs. 33%), and a computer (10% vs. 22%).
 - Similarly, women are less likely than men to say they make household financial decisions (44% vs. 61%).
- Majorities of Gambians say women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land (67%) and to get paying jobs (59%). Men are less likely than women to support gender equality in hiring and land rights.
 - About two-thirds (65%) of citizens say women in fact enjoy equal rights when it comes to jobs, but only half (50%) say the same about land ownership.
- About three-quarters (74%) of Gambians say women should have the same chance as men of being elected to public office.
 - But while more than three-quarters (78%) think a woman's family will gain standing in the community if she runs for office, 60% consider it likely that she will be criticised or harassed by others in the community, and 40% think she will probably face problems with her family.
- Seven out of 10 Gambians (71%) say the government should do more to promote equal rights and opportunities for women.

Education and control of assets

In the Gambia, fewer women than have secondary (27% vs. 30%) or post-secondary (13% vs. 19%) education. Women are more likely than men to have only primary schooling (12% vs. 8%) or no formal schooling (48% vs. 43%) (Figure 1).

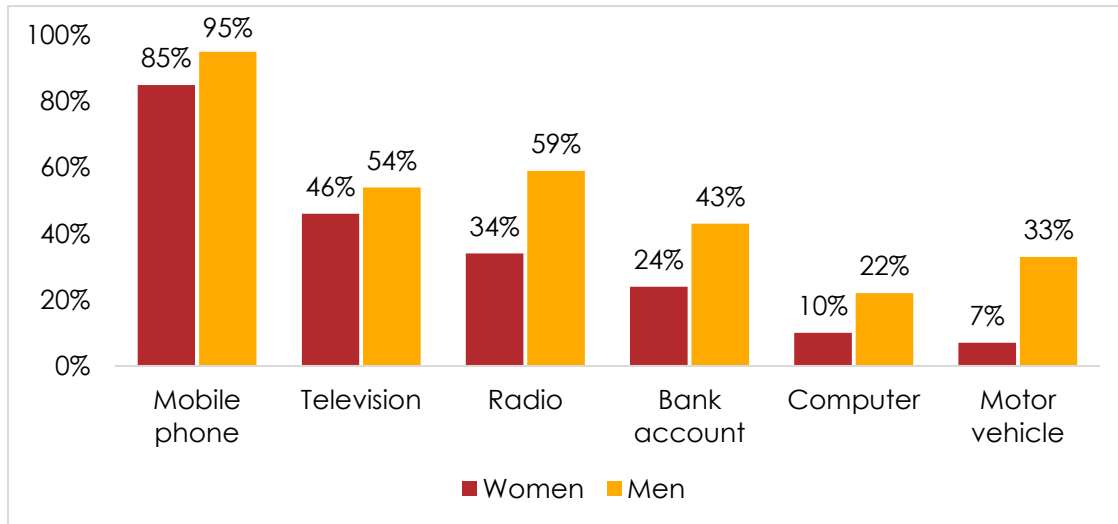
Figure 1: Educational attainment | by gender | Gambia | 2022



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

Women also lag significantly behind men in the ownership of key assets, including a mobile phone (85% vs. 95%), a television (46% vs. 54%), a radio (34% vs. 59%), a bank account (24% vs. 43%), a computer (10% vs. 22%), and a motor vehicle (7% vs. 33%) (Figure 2).

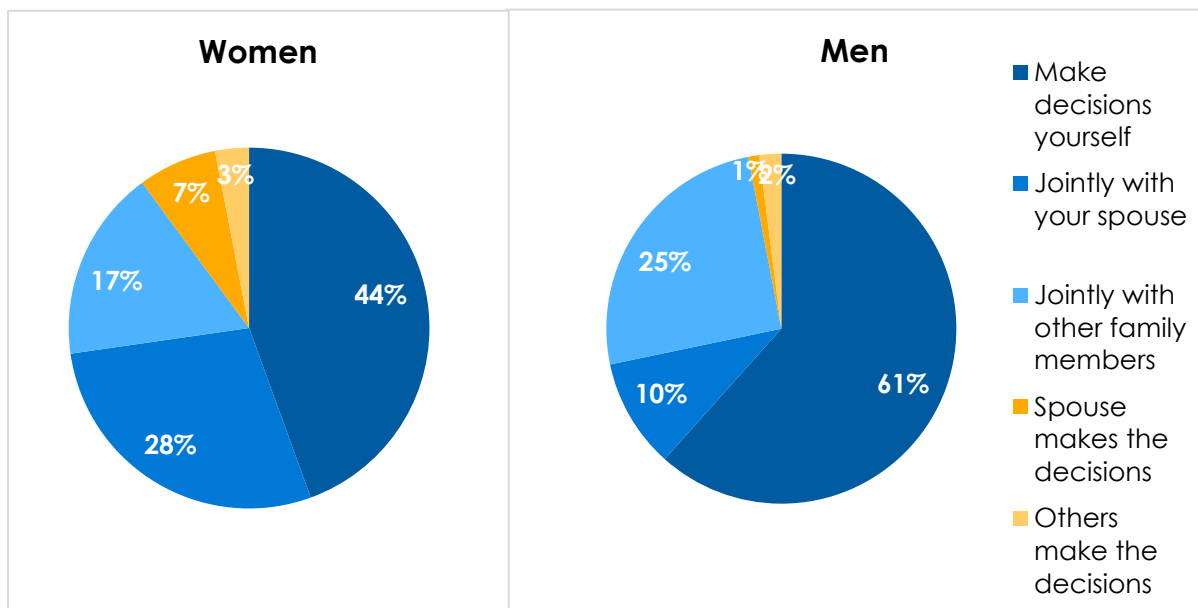
Figure 2: Asset ownership | by gender | Gambia | 2022



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

When it comes to who decides how household money is spent, men are considerably more likely than women to say they make such decisions themselves (61% vs. 44%) (Figure 3). More women than men say they decide jointly with their spouse (28% vs. 10%). One in 10 women (10%) say such decisions are made without their input, compared to 3% of men.

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



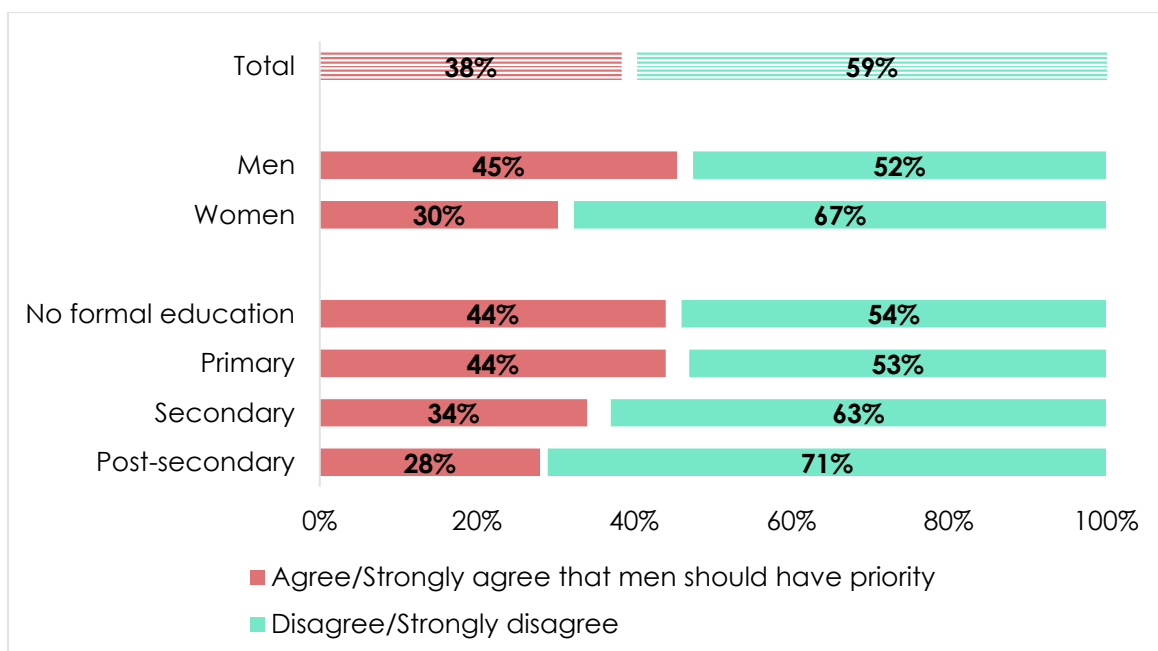
Respondents were asked: What is the main way that decisions are made about how to use any money that you have or earn, for example from a job, a business, selling things, or other activities?

Rights to a job and land

The ability to claim certain rights can either advance gender equality or maintain inequality. Do Gambians want gender equality when it comes to jobs and land?

Almost four in 10 Gambians (38%) endorse the idea that men should be given priority over women in hiring when jobs are scarce, while a majority (59%) reject this form of gender discrimination (Figure 4). Men (52%) trail women (67%) in insisting on gender equality when it comes to jobs. Citizens with post-secondary education (71%) are more likely to support equality in hiring than those with less education (53%-63%).

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



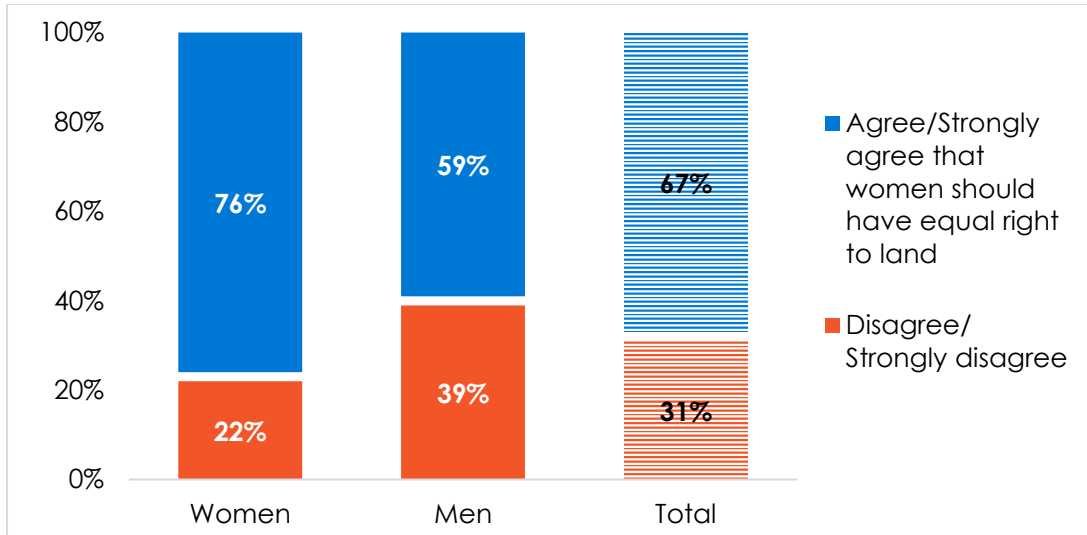
Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: When jobs are scarce, men should have more rights to a job than women.

More than two-thirds (67%) endorse equal rights to own and inherit land. Here, too, men (59%) are less likely than women (76%) to believe in equality (Figure 5).

Support for equality in land ownership is significantly weaker in rural areas than in cities (57% vs. 74%), among poorer citizens¹ (58%, vs. 76% of the best-off citizens), and among respondents with primary schooling or less (56%-65%, compared to 70%-72% among more educated citizens) (Figure 6).

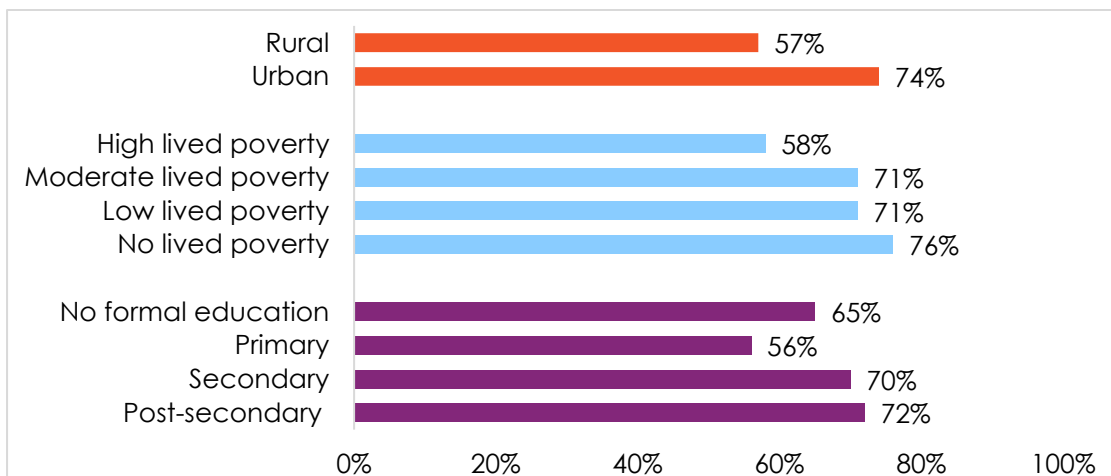
¹ Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty, see Mattes and Patel (2022).

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

Figure 6: Women should have equal rights to land | by urban-rural location, lived poverty, and education | Gambia | 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. (% who “agree” or “strongly agree”)

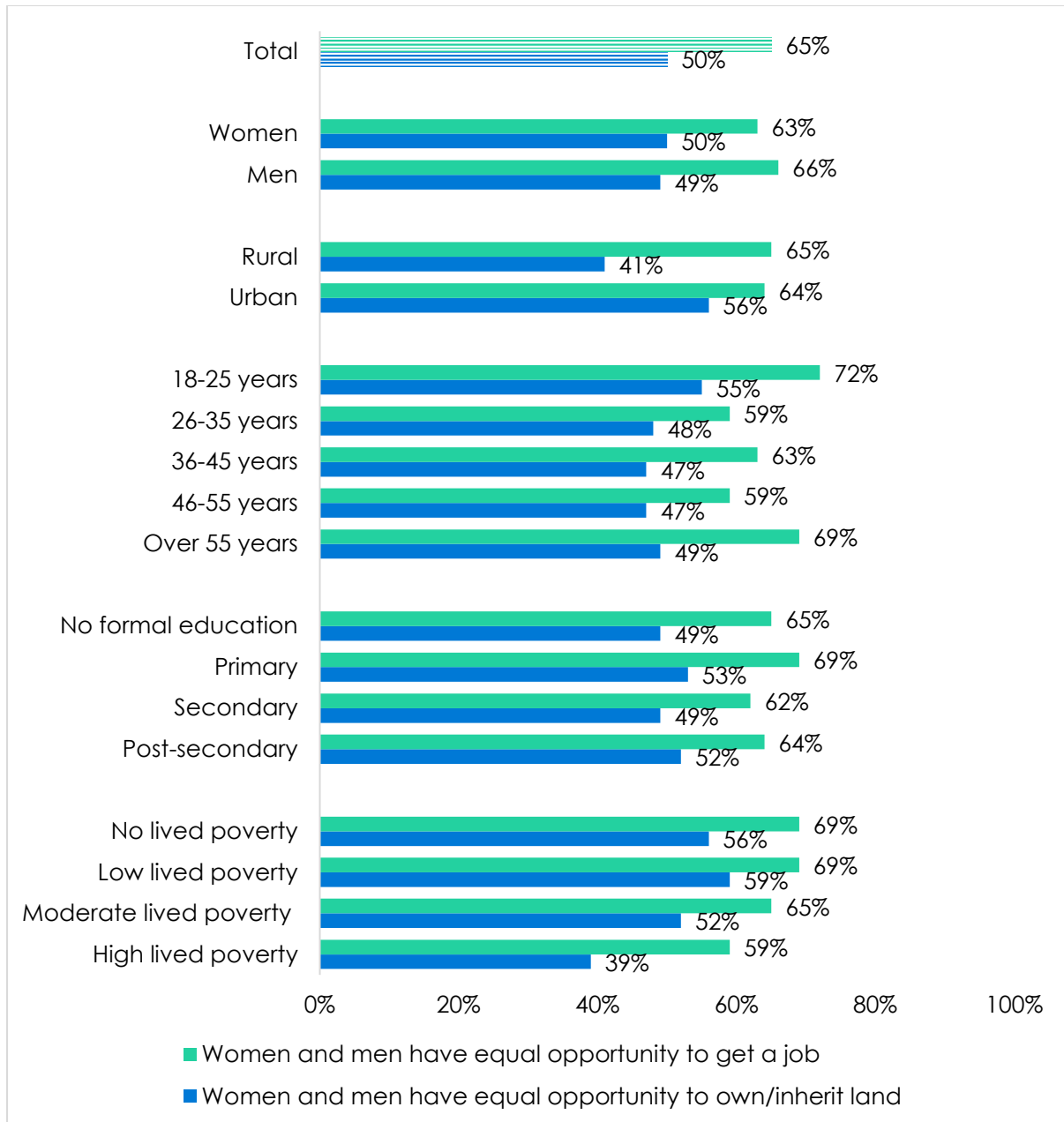
While majorities say women should have equal rights to jobs and land, have they achieved equality? Two-thirds of respondents say women do have the same opportunities as men to get a paying job (65%), while only half (50%) think that women have the same chance to own and inherit land (Figure 7).

Women are slightly less likely than men to report equal opportunities in hiring (63% vs. 66%) but views regarding land ownership don't differ by gender.

While rural and urban residents hold identical views on opportunities in hiring, rural residents are less likely than urbanites to perceive gender equality in land ownership and inheritance (41% vs. 56%).

Poor respondents are less likely than their economically better-off counterparts to say that gender equality in hiring and land ownership is a reality, perhaps suggesting that progress toward gender parity has not benefited all social strata equally.

Figure 7: Do women and men have equal opportunities to get a job and to own/inherit land? | by demographic group | Gambia | 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.

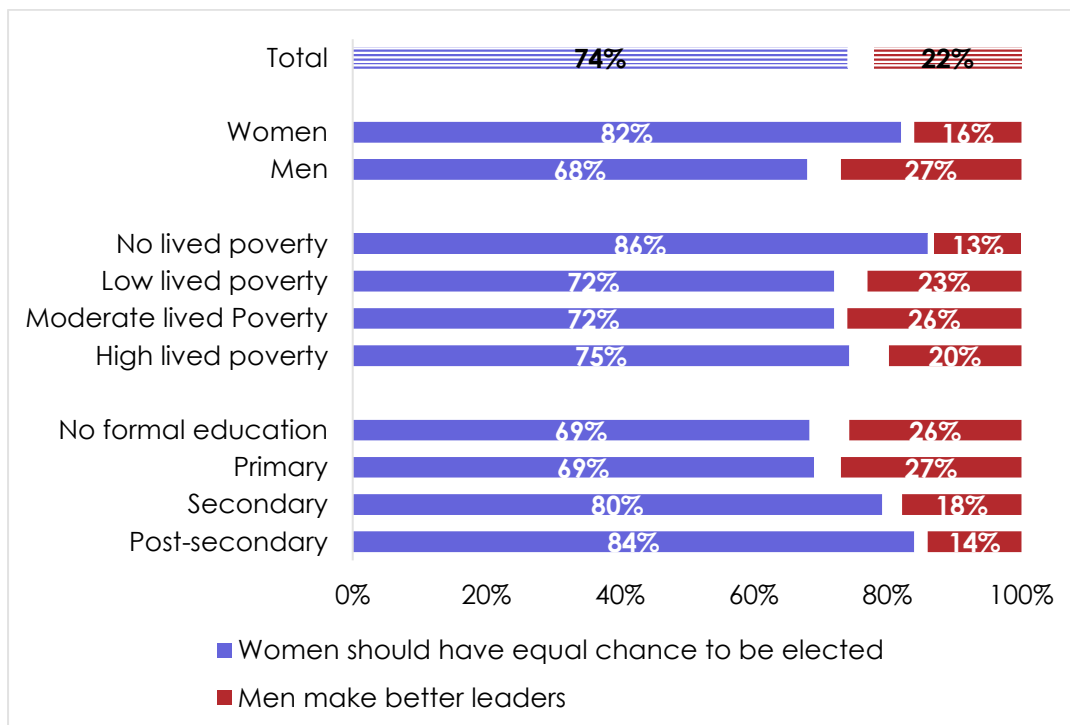
(% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

Gender equality in political participation

Increasing the number of women in political leadership positions is one way to help achieve gender parity and ensure that their opinions are considered when developing policies.

In the Gambia, about three-quarters (74%) of citizens 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 8). More women (82%) than men (68%) endorse equality in politics. Economically better-off citizens (86%) and those with post-secondary education (84%) are more likely to agree with this view than their poorer and less education counterparts.

Figure 8: Should women have an equal chance to be elected? | by demographic group | Gambia | 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.

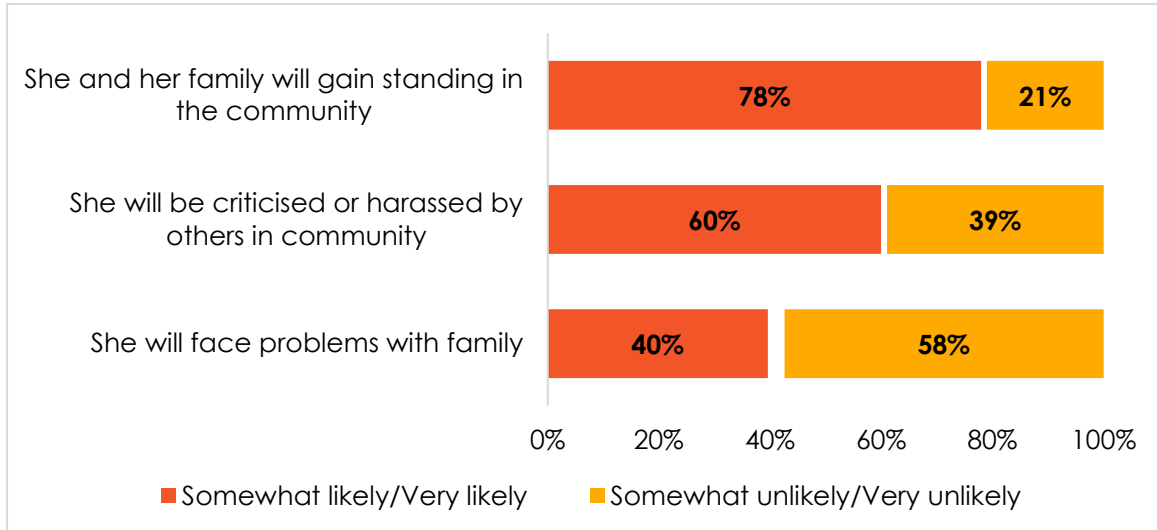
(% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with each statement)

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

On a positive note, almost eight out of 10 Gambians (78%) say it is "somewhat likely" or "very likely" that a woman and her family will gain standing in the community if she runs for elective office (Figure 9).

But a majority (60%) consider it likely that other people in the community will criticise her, call her names, or harass her for seeking public office, while 40% think she might face problems with her family. The prevalence of these negative expectations may reinforce some women's reservations about throwing their hats into the ring.

Figure 9: For better or for worse: How running for elected office might affect women's lives | Gambia | 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?

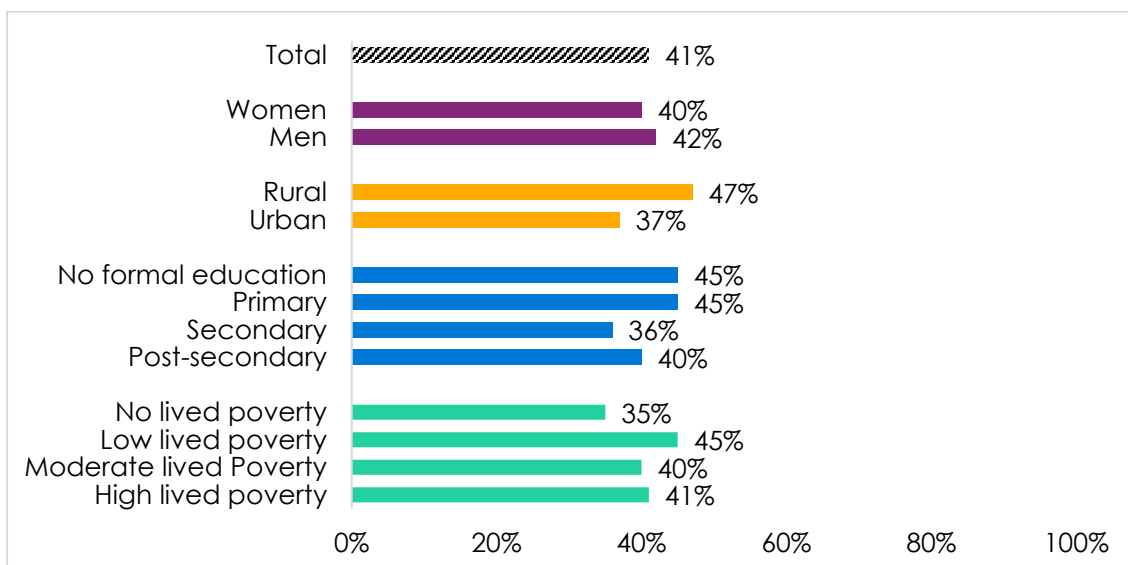
She will be criticised, called names, or harassed by others in the community?

She will face problems with her family?

Government performance in promoting equal rights and opportunities

Only four out of 10 Gambians (41%) say their government is doing a “fairly good” or “very good” job of promoting equal rights and opportunities for women (Figure 10), while 56% disapprove of the government's performance.

Figure 10: Approval of government performance in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women | Gambia | 2022

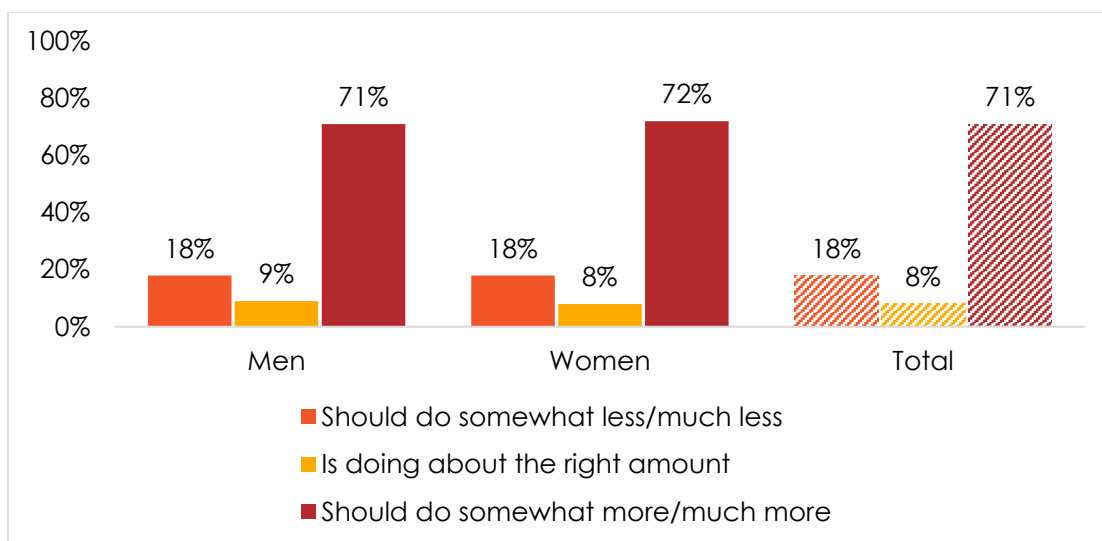


Respondents were asked: *How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Promoting equal rights and opportunities for women? (% who say fairly well or very well).*

Approval ratings are similar among men and women but vary significantly by respondents' location and education levels. Rural residents (47%) are more likely to be satisfied with the government's efforts on gender equality than urban residents (37%). Similarly, citizens with primary schooling or less (45%) are more likely to express satisfaction on this issue than their better-educated counterparts (36%-40%).

A large majority (71%) of citizens think the government should do "somewhat more" or "much more" to promote equal rights and opportunities for women. About one in 12 (8%) say it is doing about the right amount, while 18% think the government should reduce its gender-equality efforts. Women and men see eye to eye in their appraisals of the government's level of effort (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Should the government do more or less to promote equal rights and opportunities for women? | by gender | Gambia | 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 despite government efforts, gender disparities persist in the Gambia, including in educational attainment, control of key assets, and financial autonomy. Public opinion is in favour of equality in hiring and land ownership, though considerably less strongly among men than among women.

A majority of citizens also support equal opportunity in politics, though many also expect female candidates to face community and family resistance. In addition to initiatives addressing such resistance, advocates call for legal quotas to ensure women's political representation and programmes designed to foster empowerment and engagement of girls and women from a young age (United Nations-The Gambia, 2022).

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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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