



## Kenyans want greater government efforts to close persistent gender gaps

---

**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 704 | Simon Templer Kodiaga**

### Summary

Despite a progressive Constitution that promotes equal rights for women, gender inequality remains a key issue of concern in Kenya. The patriarchal social order supported by statutory, religious, and customary laws and practices has continued to hamper the attainment of gender equality and women's empowerment (Republic of Kenya, 2019).

The 2023 Global Gender Gap Index ranks Kenya 77<sup>th</sup> out of 146 countries, down from 57<sup>th</sup> the year before (World Economic Forum, 2023).

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also a critical aspect of sustainable development. The United Nations' (2022) Sustainable Development Goal No. 5 aims at ensuring that women and girls have equal rights and opportunity to live free of violence and all form of discrimination. According to UN Women (2021), achieving gender equality by 2030 requires urgent action to eliminate the root causes of discrimination that restrain women from realising their full potential in private and public spaces.

Kenya's Constitution recognises equality and non-discrimination as core values and calls upon the state to ensure that no more than two-thirds of elective and appointive positions of leadership are held by a single gender (Republic of Kenya, 2010; Kenya Law, 2020). In the 2022 election, women won 10% of seats in the National Assembly, 6% in the Senate, 8% in county assemblies, and 15% of governorships, according to data from UN Women (2022).

President William Ruto's Cabinet, unveiled in September 2022, included seven women, making up 32% of the Cabinet. Three other women appointed as advisers and as secretary to the Cabinet raised the representation of women in the executive to 39%, up from 30% in the 2017 Cabinet (UN Women, 2022).

In addition to Kenya's commitment as a signatory to the Maputo Protocol, recent government measures to reduce Kenya's gender gap include the Matrimonial Property Act (2013), which protects women's property rights during and upon dissolution of a marriage; the Marriage Act (2014), which gives effect to constitutional provisions on equality between parties to a marriage; and the Land Act and Land Registration Act (2012), which secure women's rights to own land.

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.

In Kenya, findings show persistent gender gaps in higher education, asset ownership, and financial autonomy. While most citizens endorse gender equality in hiring, land rights, and politics, many also consider it likely that women who seek elective office will be criticised or harassed.

Overall, Kenyans give the government a thumbs-up on its efforts to promote gender equality but say that more needs to be done.

## 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. Nine rounds of surveys have been completed in up to 42 countries since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2023) cover 39 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Kenya, based at the Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi, interviewed 2,400 adult Kenyans in November-December 2021. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-2 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Kenya in 2003, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2016, and 2019.

## Key findings

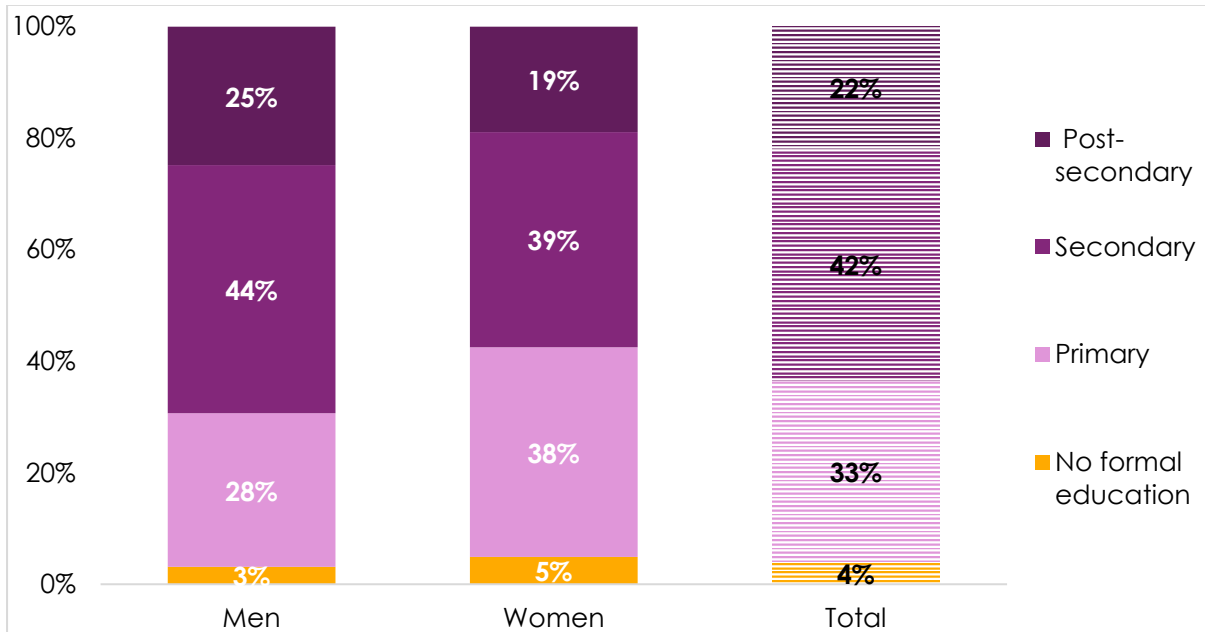
- Survey findings show significant gender imbalances in Kenyan society:
  - Women are less likely than men to have secondary education (39% vs. 44%) and post-secondary education (19% vs. 25%).
  - Women trail men in ownership of key assets such as a bank account (41% vs. 58%), a motor vehicle (18% vs. 27%), and a computer (11% vs. 17%).
  - Fewer women than men say they have control over how household money is spent (33% vs. 40%).
- Seven in 10 Kenyans (70%) oppose the idea that men should be given priority in hiring when jobs are scarce. Far fewer men than women insist on gender equality when it comes to jobs (60% vs. 81%).
- A similar majority (72%) say women should have the same right as men to own and inherit land. Again men trail women in their commitment to equality (59% vs. 84%).
- Almost nine out of 10 Kenyans (87%) say women should have the same chance as men of being elected to public office.
  - But while more than three-fourths (77%) of citizens say a woman and her family will probably gain standing in the community if she runs for elective office, many also think she is likely to be criticised or harassed (53%) and to face problems with her family (40%).
- More than six in 10 Kenyans (62%) say the government is performing "fairly well" or "very well" in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women. Even so, 77% think the government and elected officials should be doing more in pursuit of gender equality.

## Education and control of assets

In Kenya, women are less likely than men to have secondary education (39% vs. 44%) and post-secondary education (19% vs. 25%) (Figure 1). More women than men report having primary or no formal schooling (43% vs. 31%).

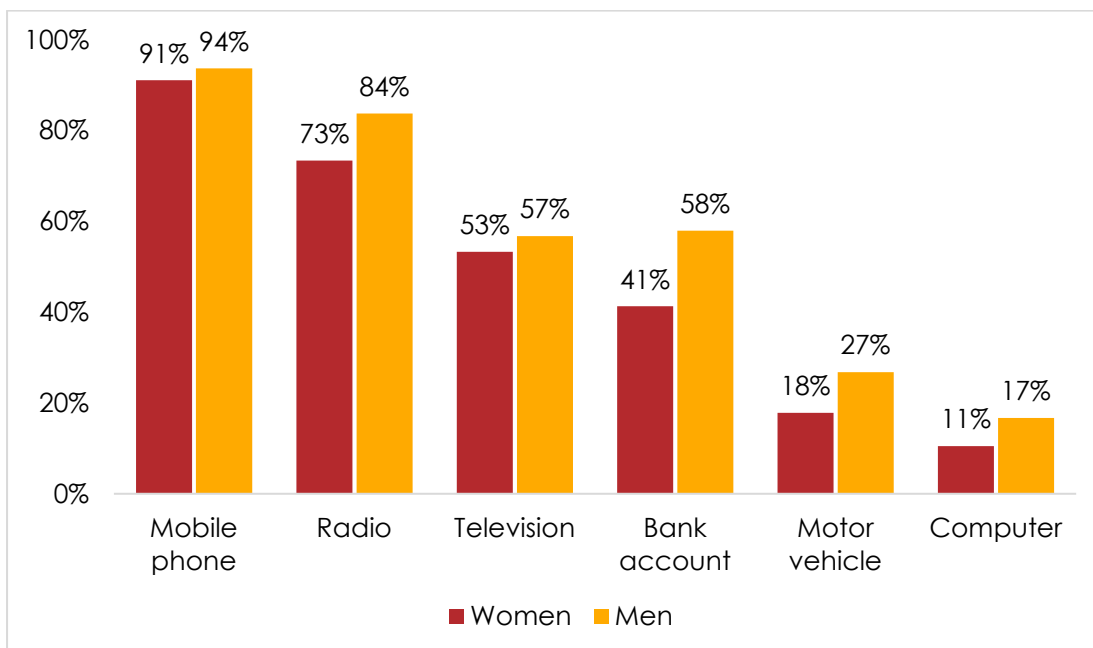
Women are also less likely than men to control certain key assets, including a mobile phone (91% vs. 94%), a radio (73% vs. 84%), a television (53% vs. 57%), a bank account (41% vs. 58%), a motor vehicle (18% vs. 27%), and a computer (11% vs. 17%) (Figure 2).

**Figure 1: Educational attainment** | by gender | Kenya | 2021



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

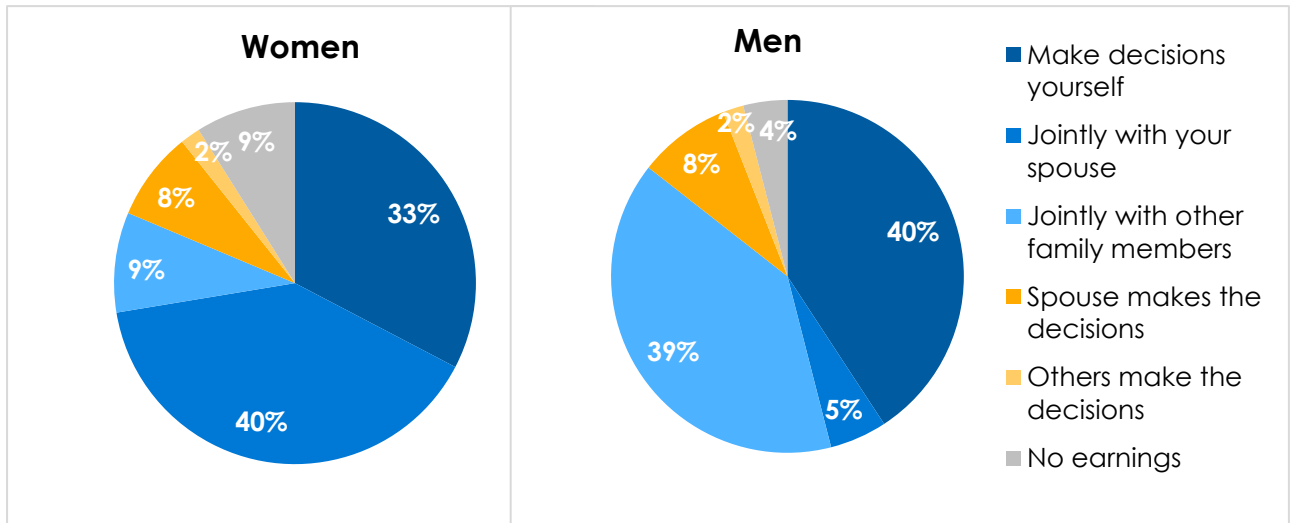
**Figure 2: Asset ownership** | by gender | Kenya | 2021



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

When it comes to deciding how to use money in the household, women are less likely than men to say they make the decisions themselves (33% vs. 40%) (Figure 3). Women and men are about equally likely to say that they make decisions jointly with their spouse or other family members (49% for women, 48% for men), and more women than men indicate that decisions are made by others or that they have no money to spend (18% vs. 12%).

**Figure 3: Who decides how money is used? | by gender | Kenya | 2021**

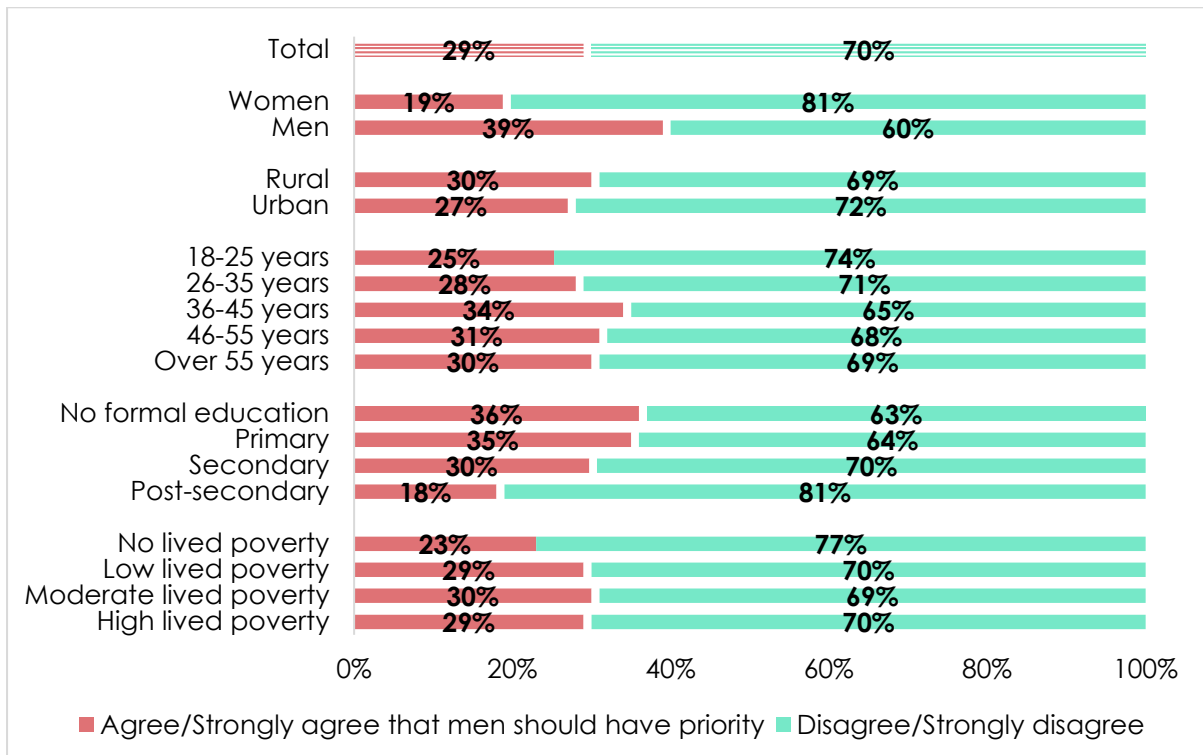


**Respondents were asked:** What is the main way that decisions are made about how to use any money that you have or earn, for example from a job, a business, selling things, or other activities?

### Rights to a job and land

Seven in 10 Kenyans (70%) reject the idea that men should be given priority over women in hiring when jobs are scarce, while 29% favour this form of gender discrimination (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Should men have priority for scarce jobs? | by gender and education | Kenya | 2021**

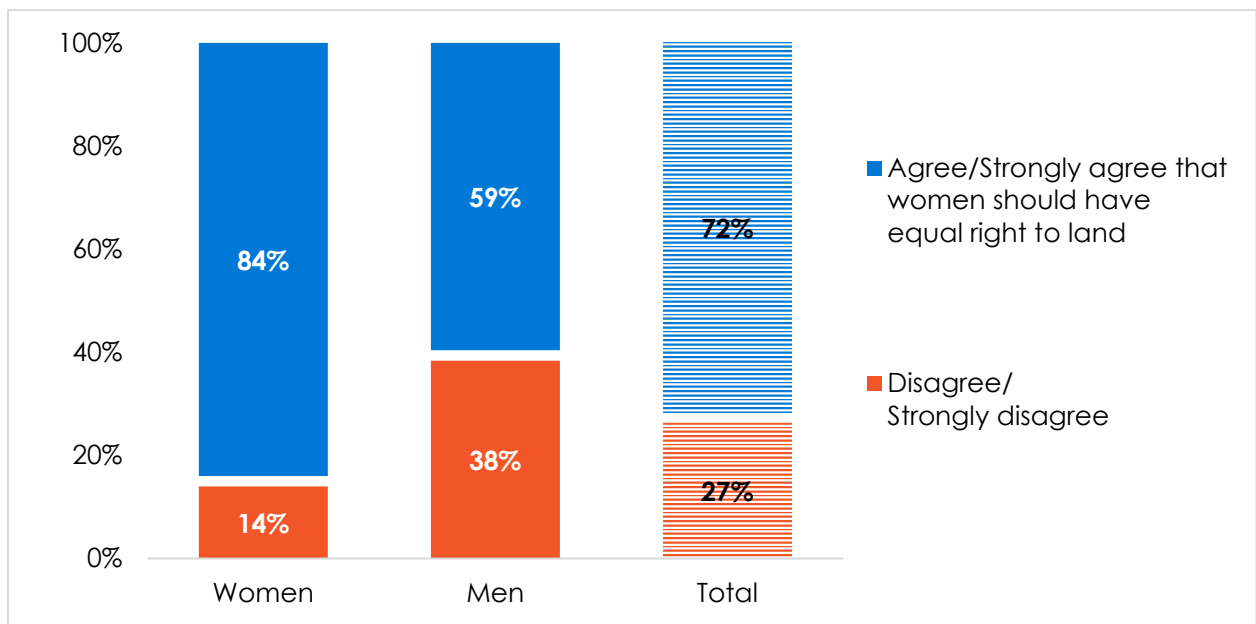


**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: When jobs are scarce, men should have more rights to a job than women.

Men trail women in insisting on gender equality when it comes to jobs (60% vs. 81%). Citizens with post-secondary education (81%) and those who are economically well off (77%) are more likely to support equality in hiring than those with less education (63%-70%) and those experiencing various levels of lived poverty (69%-70%).<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, 72% of Kenyans think women should have the same right as men to own and inherit land. Again, men are much less likely than women to believe in equality when it comes to land (59% vs. 84%) (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Should women have equal rights to land? | by gender | Kenya | 2021**



**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 currently enjoy these rights?

Two-thirds (67%) of respondents say women do have the same opportunities as men to get a paying job, while 55% think women have the same chance to own and inherit land (Figure 6).

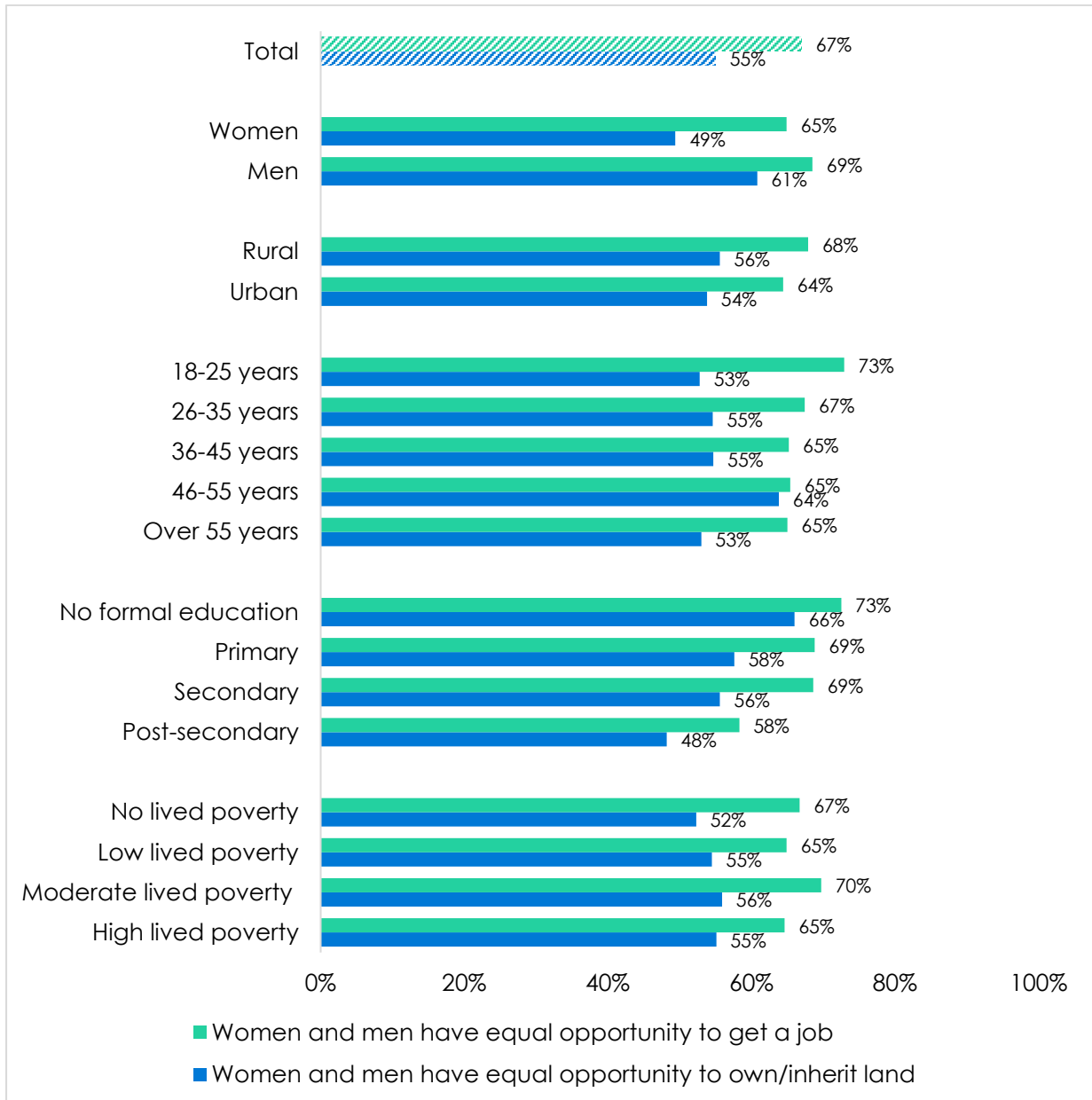
Women are slightly less likely than men to report equal opportunities in hiring (65% vs. 69%) and considerably less likely to perceive land rights as equal (49% vs. 61%).

Citizens with post-secondary education are less likely than less educated respondents to say that women now have equal rights when it comes to jobs (58%, vs. 73% of those with no formal schooling) and to owning or inheriting land (48% vs. 66%).

Almost three-fourths (73%) of 18- to 25-year-olds say job opportunities are equal, compared to 65%-67% of their elders.

<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 and Patel (2022).

**Figure 6: Do women and men have equal opportunities to get a job and to own/inherit land?** | by demographic group | Kenya | 2021



**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.*

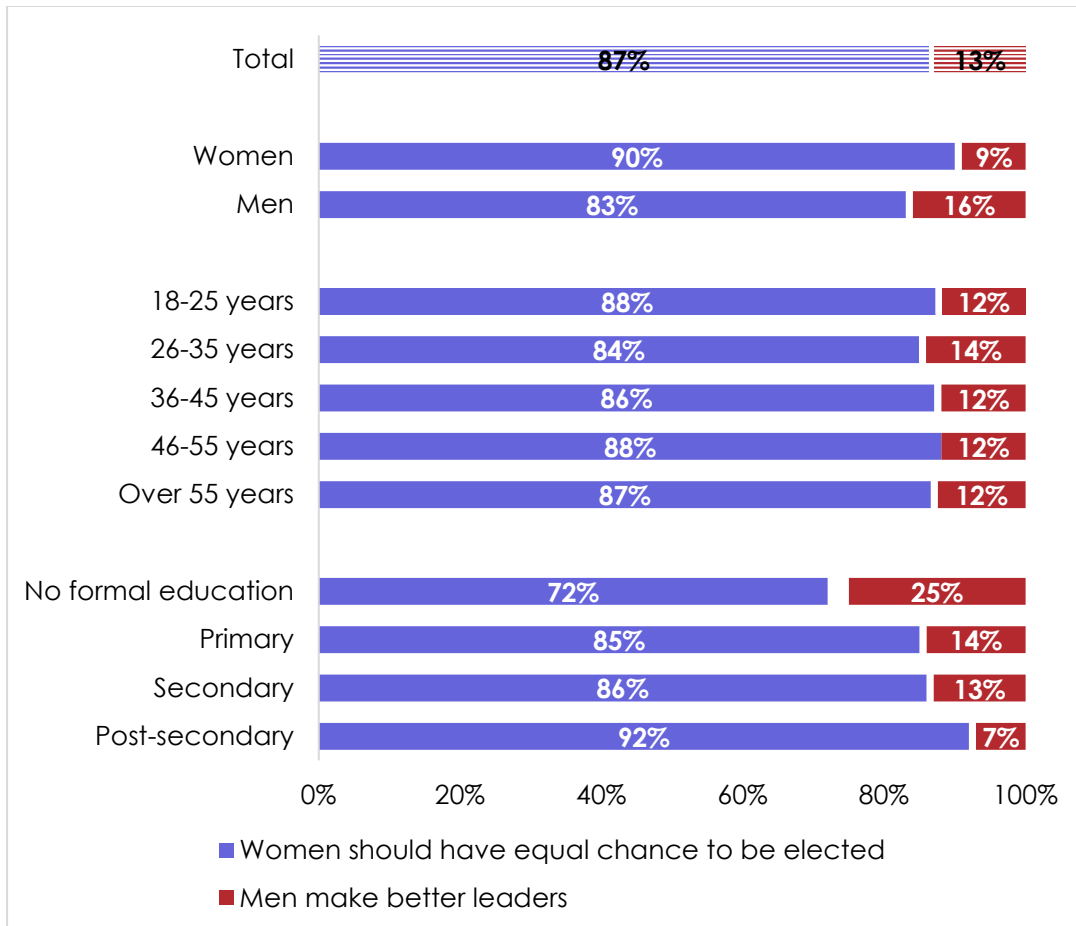
(% who “agree” or “strongly agree”)

### Gender equality in political participation

Almost nine out of 10 Kenyans (87%) say women should have the same chance as men of being elected to public office, rejecting the idea that men make better political leaders and should be prioritised as candidates (13%) (Figure 7).

Support for gender equality in politics is stronger among women (90%) than men (83%) and increases with respondents' education level, ranging from 72% among those with no formal schooling to 92% among those with post-secondary qualifications.

**Figure 7: Should women have an equal chance to be elected?** | by demographic group | Kenya | 2021



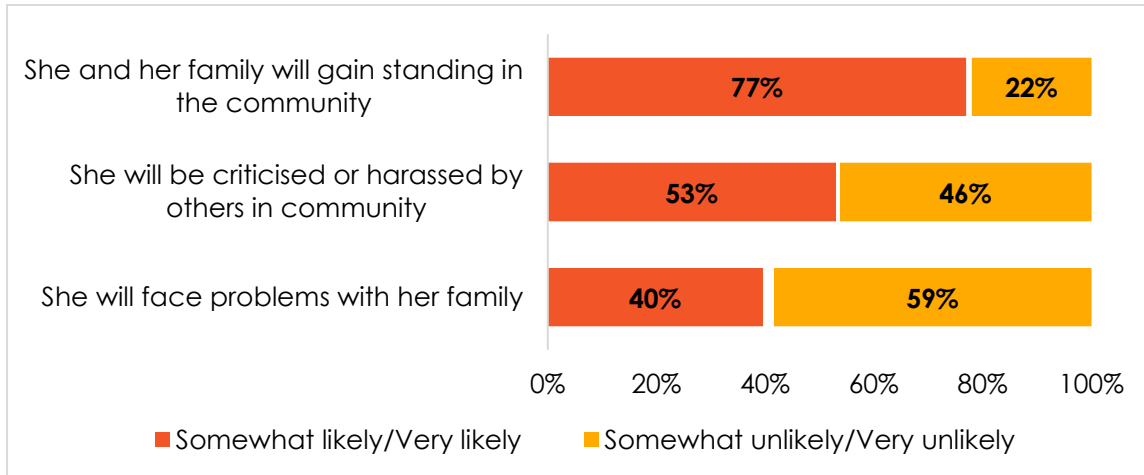
**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: Men make better political leaders than women and should be elected rather than women.  
 Statement 2: Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men.  
 (% who "agree" 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 three-fourths (77%) of citizens say it is "somewhat likely" or "very likely" that a female candidate and her family will gain standing in the community if she runs for elective office (Figure 8).

On the other hand, more than half (53%) of respondents consider it somewhat/very likely that community members will criticise her, call her names, or harass her for seeking public office, while 40% think she will probably face problems with her family – perceptions that might discourage some women from entering the political arena.

**Figure 8: For better or for worse: How running for elected office might affect women's lives | Kenya | 2021**



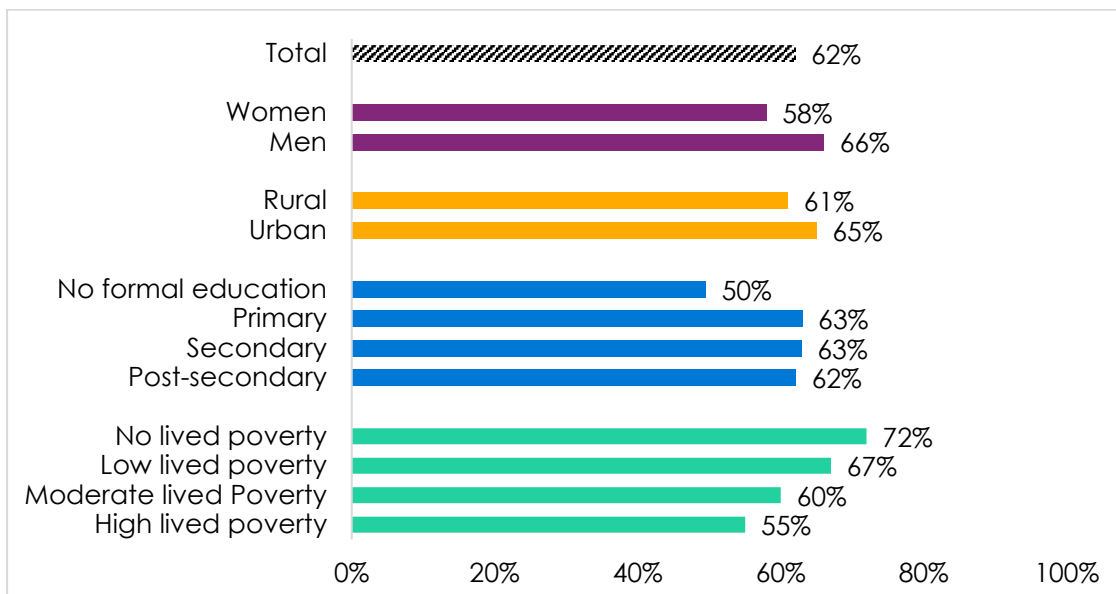
**Respondents were asked:** If a woman in your community runs for elected office, how likely or unlikely is it that the following things might occur:

- 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 on promoting equal rights and opportunities

Overall, more than six in 10 Kenyans (62%) say the government is performing “fairly well” or “very well” on promoting equal rights and opportunities for women (Figure 9). Fewer women than men see the government’s efforts as adequate (58% vs. 66%).

**Figure 9: Government performance on promoting equal rights and opportunities for women | by demographic group | Kenya | 2021**



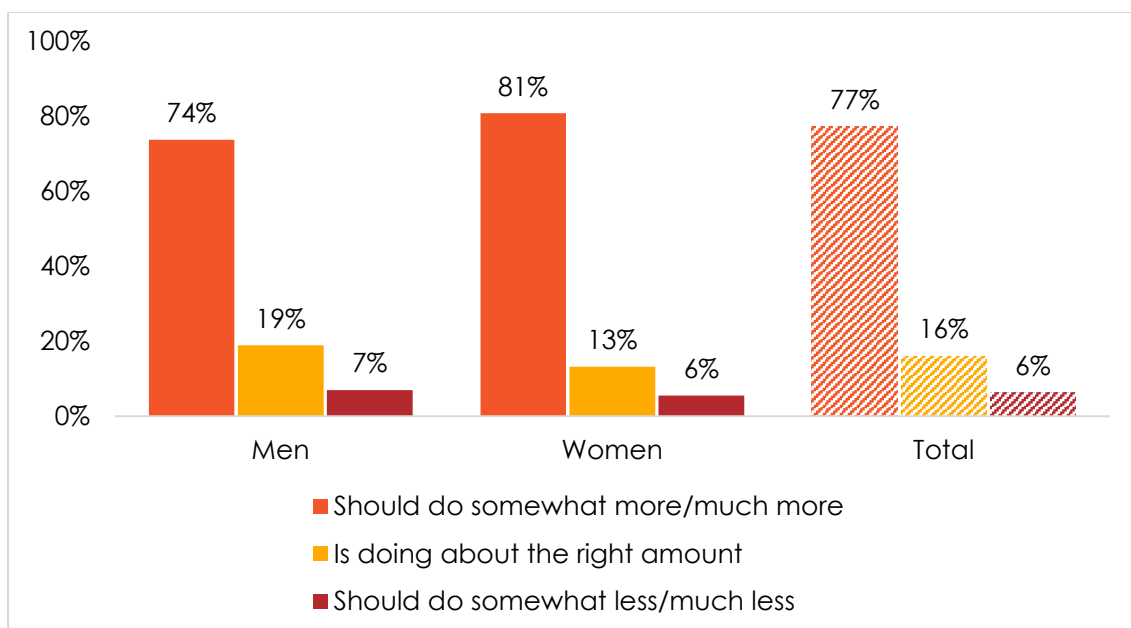
**Respondents were asked:** How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Promoting equal rights and opportunities for women? (% who say “fairly well” or “very well”)



Approval of the government's performance on gender equality is also less common among respondents with no formal education (50%, compared to 62%-63% among those with at least primary schooling). Approval increases sharply with respondents' economic status, ranging from 55% of the poor to 72% of the well-off. These findings suggest that some of the benefits of growing gender equality may not be reaching less educated and poorer populations.

Despite their positive assessment of efforts to date, more than three-fourths (77%) of Kenyans think the government and elected officials should do "somewhat more" or "much more" to promote equal rights and opportunities for women. More women than men call for greater government initiative (81% vs. 74%) (Figure 10).

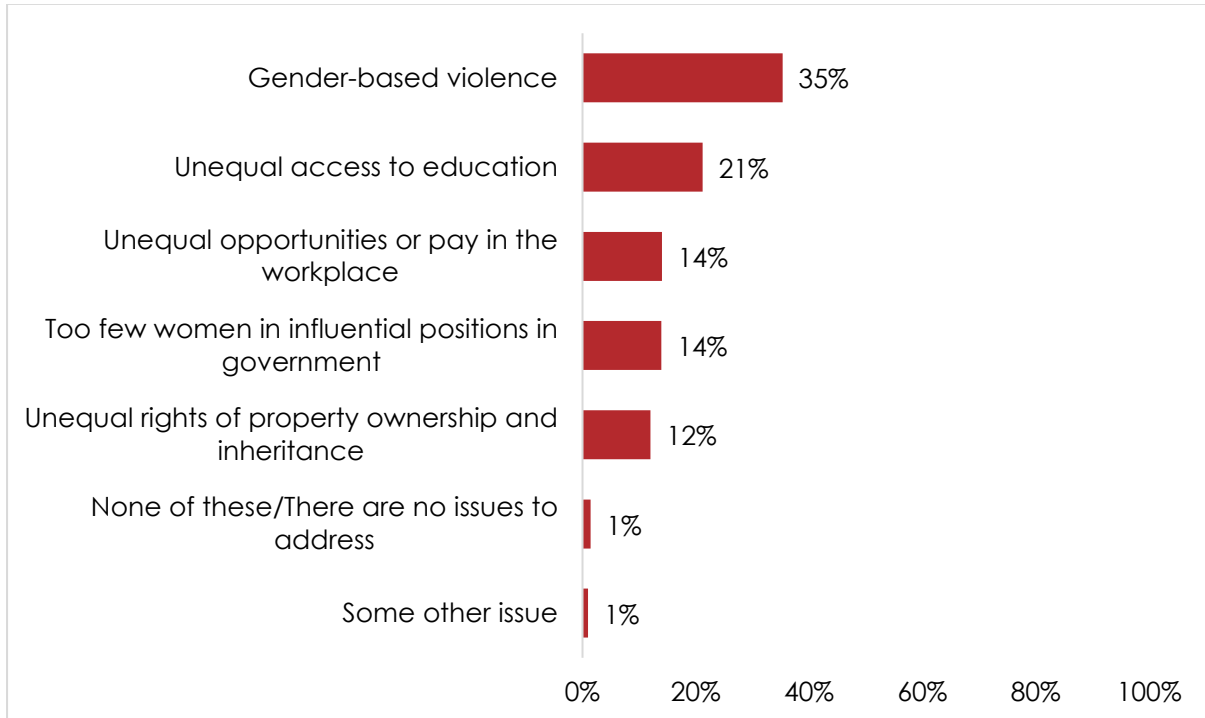
**Figure 10: Should the government do more or less to promote equal rights and opportunities for women? | by gender | Kenya | 2022**



**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?*

Kenyans rank gender-based violence (cited by 35% of respondents) as the most important women's-rights issue that the government and society must address, followed by unequal access to education (21%), unequal opportunities and pay in the workplace (14%), too few women in influential positions in government (14%), and unequal rights to ownership of property (12%) (Figure 11).

**Figure 11: Most important women’s-rights issue** | by gender | Kenya | 2021



**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

The latest Afrobarometer survey findings highlight persistent gender gaps in Kenya, including less higher education and less financial autonomy for women compared to men.

Most Kenyans support equal rights for women when it comes to hiring, owning or inheriting land, and seeking elective office. But a majority of citizens also consider it likely that women who run for office will suffer negative reactions from the community.

Overall, Kenyans approve of the government's performance on gender equality, although poor and less educated citizens are less positive in their assessments, suggesting that the benefits of growing gender equality may not be reaching all populations equally. And more than three-fourths of citizens say the government and elected officials need to do more to promote women's rights and equality.

---

Do your own analysis of Afrobarometer data – on any question, for any country and survey round. It's easy and free at [www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis](http://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis).

---

## References

- Kenya Law. (2020). National assembly speaker's statement on the gender rule.
- Mattes, R., & Patel, J. (2022). Lived poverty resurgent. Afrobarometer Policy Paper 84.
- Republic of Kenya. (2010). Constitution of Kenya 2010.
- Republic of Kenya. (2019). National policy on gender and development.
- United Nations. (2022). Sustainable development goals: Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
- World Economic Forum. (2023). Global gender gap report 2023.
- UN Women. (2021). SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
- UN Women. (2022). A summary analysis of women's performance in Kenya's 2022 election.

**Simon Templer Kodiaga** is a development communication specialist based in Nairobi, Kenya. Email: [simonkodiaga@gmail.com](mailto:simonkodiaga@gmail.com).

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.

Financial support for Afrobarometer is provided by Sweden via the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) via the U.S. Institute of Peace, the Mo Ibrahim Foundation, the Open Society Foundations - Africa, Luminare, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Mastercard Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the European Union Commission, the World Bank Group, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Uganda, the Embassy of Sweden in Zimbabwe, the Global Centre for Pluralism, and GIZ.

Donations help Afrobarometer give voice to African citizens. Please consider making a contribution (at [www.afrobarometer.org](http://www.afrobarometer.org)) or contact Felix Biga ([felixbiga@afrobarometer.org](mailto:felixbiga@afrobarometer.org)) or Runyararo Munetsi ([runyararo@afrobarometer.org](mailto:runyararo@afrobarometer.org)) to discuss institutional funding.

Follow our releases on #VoicesAfrica.



Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 704 | 25 September 2023