

São Toméans demand greater government efforts for gender equality

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 719 | Divine Ntiamoah Berko and Maame Akua Amoah Twum

Summary

Over the past two decades, São Tomé and Príncipe has taken important policy steps that strive to achieve gender equality, exemplified by the Political Parity Law passed in 2022. This law mandates that at least 40% of elective and Cabinet positions be reserved for women, who currently hold just 15% of seats in the National Assembly (Overvest, 2022; IPU Parline, 2023).

Efforts to promote girls' education have also seen advancement, with the elimination in 2020 of the Disciplinary Act, which prohibited pregnant girls from attending classes or engaging in school activities (Ramos, 2020). This aligns with such other measures as the Education Sector Plan and the Educational Policy Charter 2012-2020, which promote girls' schooling in deprived areas and provide incentives, such as study grants, for children from disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds (Ministry of Education, Culture and Training, 2016).

To strengthen protection for women, São Tomé and Príncipe in 2012 replaced its colonial-era penal code with a law that formally recognises domestic violence as a criminal offence (Oliveira et al., 2016).

Despite these efforts, gender disparities grounded in patriarchal norms persist in education, employment, access to productive resources, financial inclusion, and political voice, among other areas (African Development Bank, 2023; Groussard, di Ricco, & Mazoni, 2023).

This dispatch reports on a special survey module included in the Afrobarometer Round 9 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 Twum and Owusu, 2023).

Findings show that in São Tomé and Príncipe, women trail men in educational attainment and asset ownership. 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 approve of the government's performance on gender equality, but most say it 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. Nine survey rounds in up to 42 countries have been completed since 1999. Round 9 surveys (2021/2023) cover 39 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

In São Tomé and Príncipe, Ovilingwa - Estudos de Opinião Pública of Angola, in partnership with a local consultant and the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), interviewed 1,200 adult São Toméans in December 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 São Tomé and Príncipe in 2015 and 2019.

Key findings

- In São Tomé and Príncipe, women are less likely than men to have secondary or post-secondary education and more likely than men to have only primary or no formal schooling.
- Women trail men in ownership of key assets, including a bank account (31% vs. 46%), a motor vehicle (13% vs. 28%), and a computer (13% vs. 20%).
 - But women and men are equally likely to say they make decisions themselves about how household money is spent.
- Majorities say women should have the same rights as men to get a paying job (61%) and to own and inherit land (83%). Men are far less likely than women to endorse gender equality in hiring (54% vs. 68%).
 - Strong majorities say that, in practice, women enjoy equal rights when it comes to getting a job (78%) and owning/inheriting land (83%).
- Almost nine in 10 São Toméans (86%) say women should have the same chance as men of being elected to public office.
 - But 56% consider it likely that a woman who runs for elective office will be criticised or harassed by others in the community, and 40% think she will probably face problems with her family.
- While 61% of citizens think the government is doing “fairly well” or “very well” at promoting equal rights and opportunities for women, 76% say it should do more.

Education and control of assets

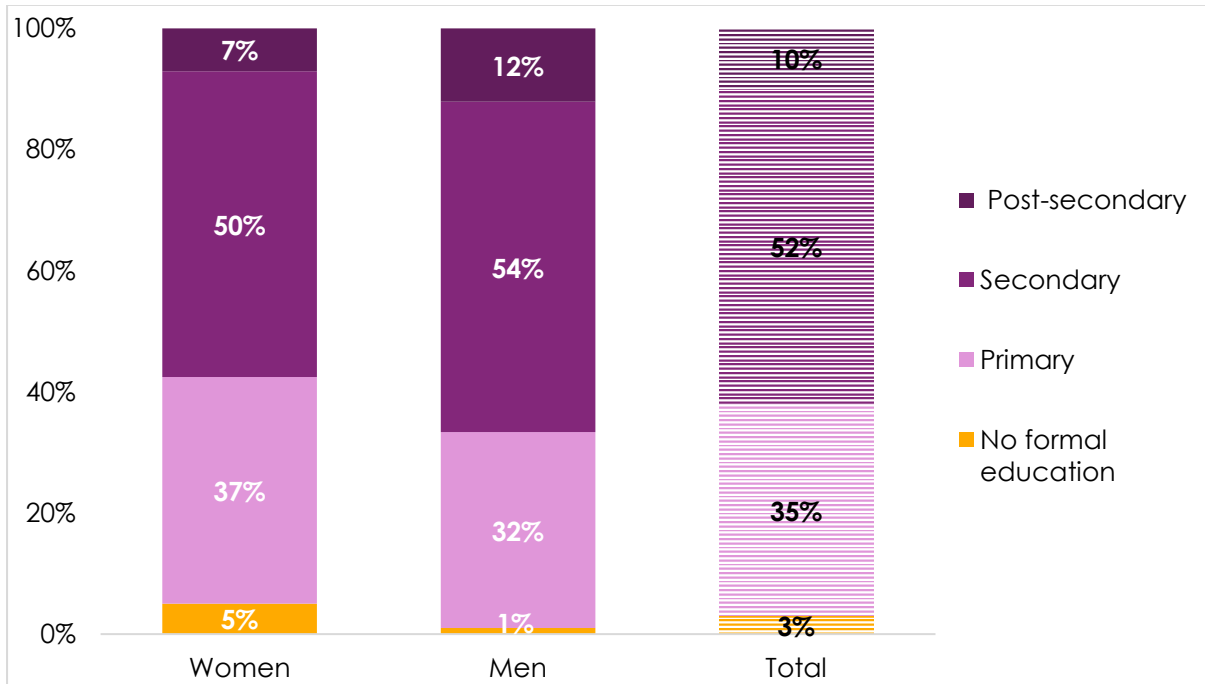
In São Tomé and Príncipe, women trail men in educational attainment, both at the secondary (50% vs. 54%) and post-secondary (7% vs. 12%) levels. More women than men have primary schooling (37% vs. 32%) or lack formal education altogether (5% vs. 1%) (Figure 1).

Women are also at a disadvantage in personal ownership of key household assets, including a mobile phone (76% vs. 80%), a television (71% vs. 76%), a radio (58% vs. 68%), a bank account (31% vs. 46%), a motor vehicle (13% vs. 28%), and a computer (13% vs. 20%) (Figure 2).

When it comes to how money is spent, an equal share of men and women say they make such decisions themselves (44%) (Figure 3). Slightly fewer men than women report that they make financial decisions jointly with their spouses (24% vs. 27%). One-fifth of men (20%) say such decisions are made without their input, compared to 16% of women.¹

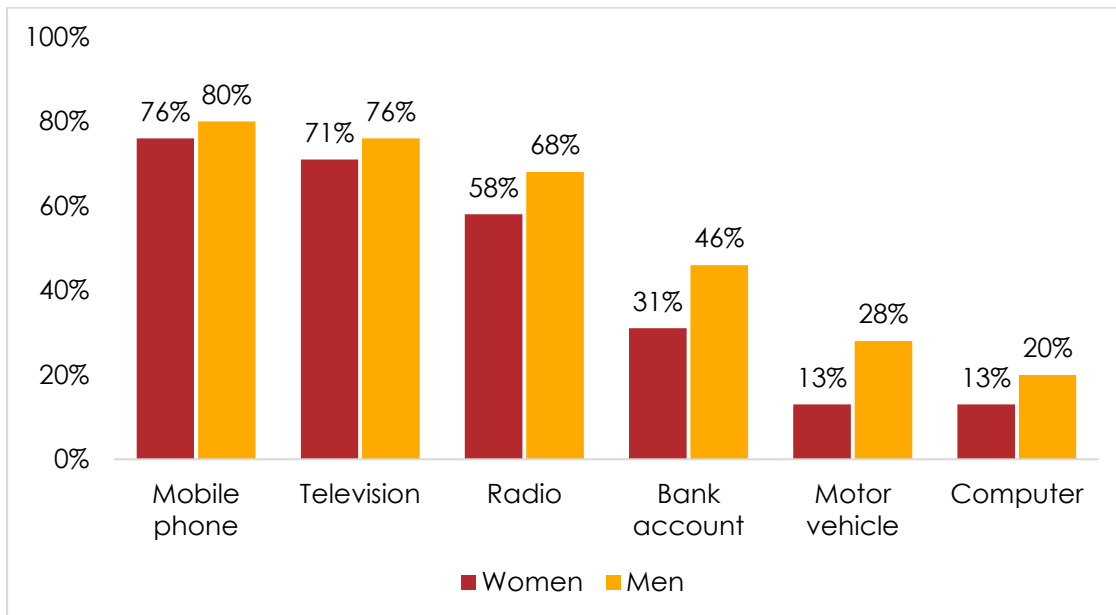
¹ Due to rounding, percentages for combined categories reported in the text may differ slightly from the sum of sub-categories shown in figures (e.g. for men, 20% “Spouse makes the decisions” and 1% “Others make the decisions” sum to 20%).

Figure 1: Educational attainment | by gender | São Tomé and Príncipe | 2022



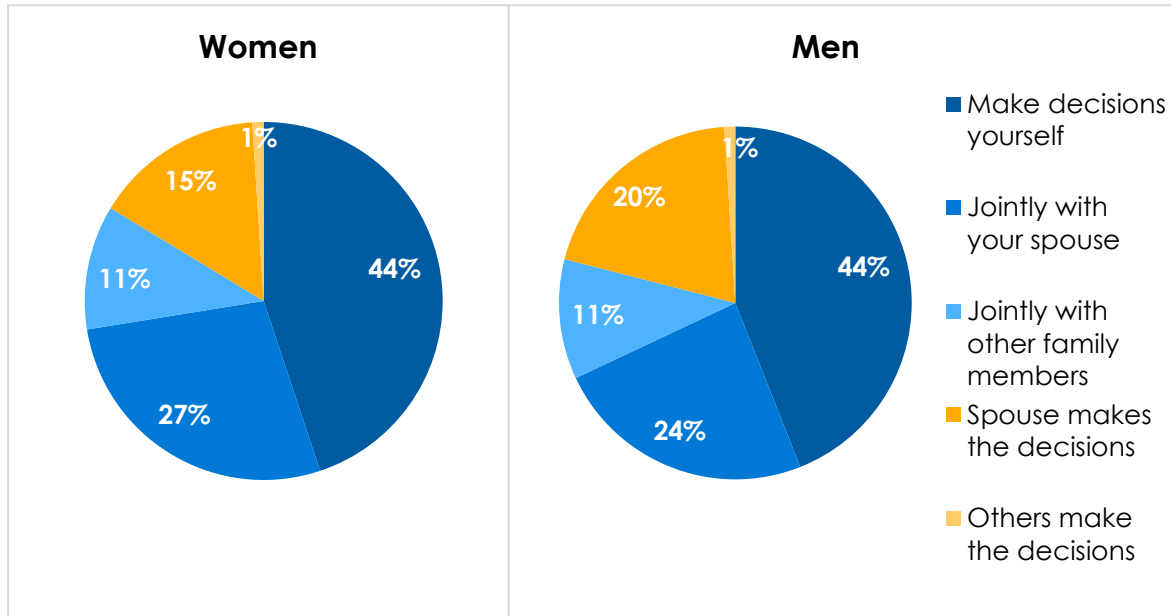
Respondents were asked: What is your highest level of education?

Figure 2: Asset ownership | by gender | São Tomé and Príncipe | 2022



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

Figure 3: Who decides how money is used? | by gender | São Tomé and Príncipe | 2022

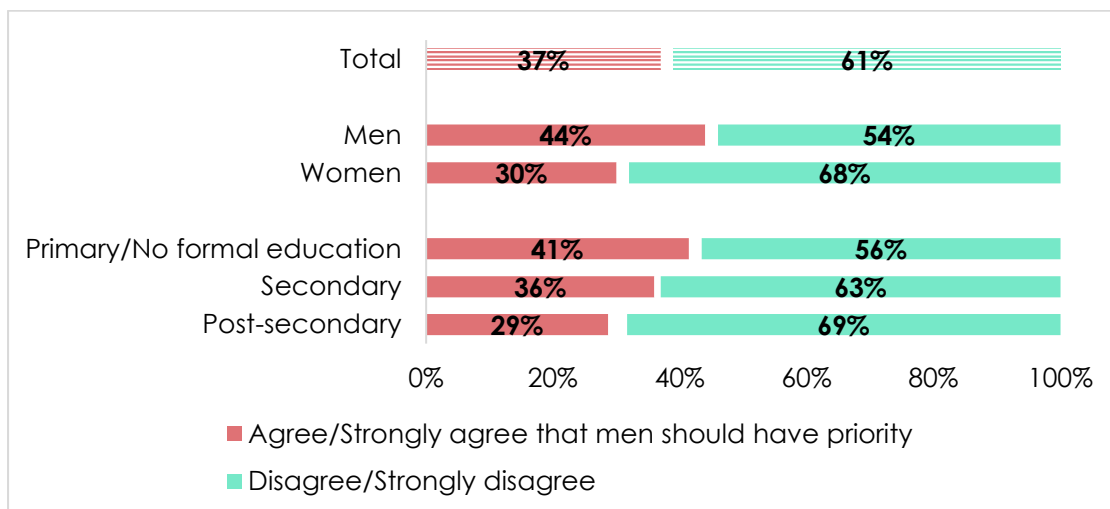


Respondents were asked: What is the main way that decisions are made about how to use any money that you have or earn, for example from a job, a business, selling things, or other activities?

Rights to a job and land

Almost four in 10 São Toméans (37%) say men should be given priority over women in hiring when jobs are scarce, while 61% reject this form of gender discrimination (Figure 4). Support for gender equality in employment gathers strengths as respondents' education level increases, ranging from 56% among citizens with primary schooling or less to 69% among those with post-secondary qualifications. Men (54%) trail women (68%) in prioritising equality in hiring.

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

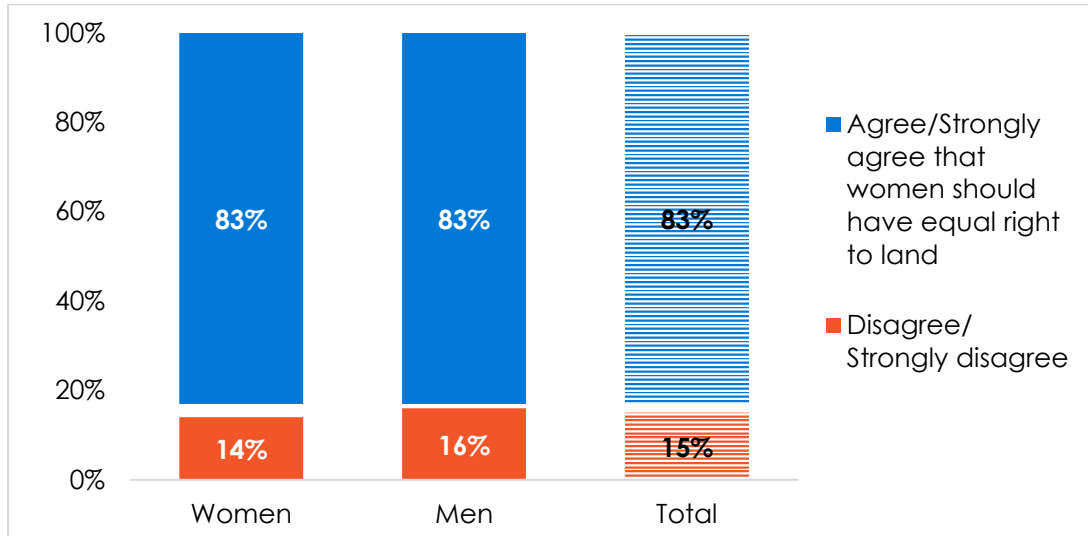


Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: When jobs are scarce, men should have more rights to a job than women.

Most São Toméans (83%) support equal rights to own and inherit land. Men and women see eye to eye on this question (Figure 5).

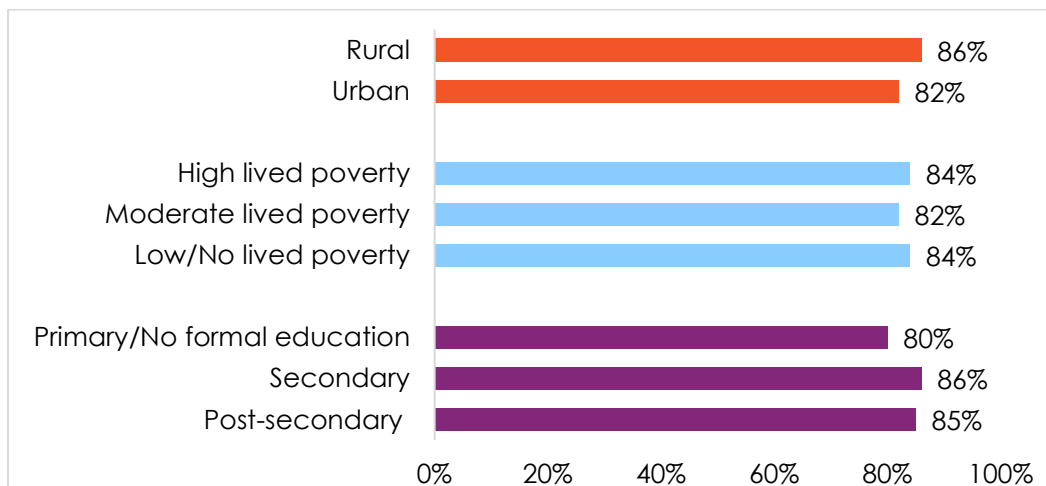
Support for equality in land rights is somewhat weaker in cities than in rural areas (82% vs. 86%) and among respondents with primary schooling or less (80%) compared to more educated citizens (85%-86%) (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Should women have equal rights to land? | by gender | São Tomé and Príncipe | 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 demographic group | São Tomé and Príncipe | 2022



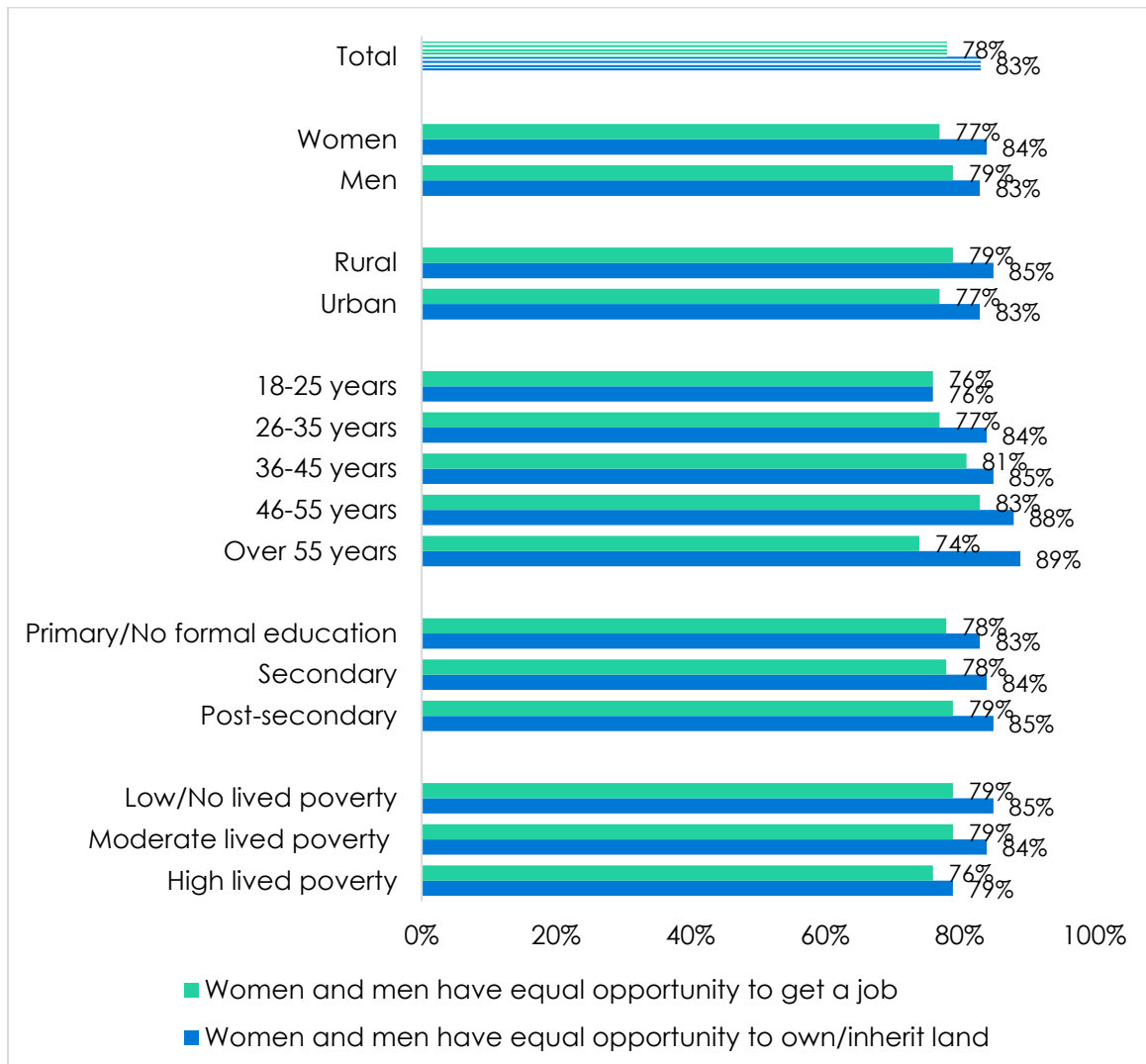
Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: Women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land. (% who “agree” or “strongly agree”)

While majorities endorse women’s equality with respect to jobs and land, has true equality been attained? More than three-quarters of citizens say women have the same opportunities as men to get a paying job (78%) and to own and inherit land (83%) (Figure 7).

Views regarding equal opportunities in hiring and land ownership don't differ significantly by gender, urban-rural location, or education level.

But citizens experiencing high lived poverty² are less likely than their economically better-off counterparts to view land rights as gender-equal (79% vs. 84%-85%). So are youth (76% among 18- to 25-year-olds) compared to their elders (84%-89%).

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

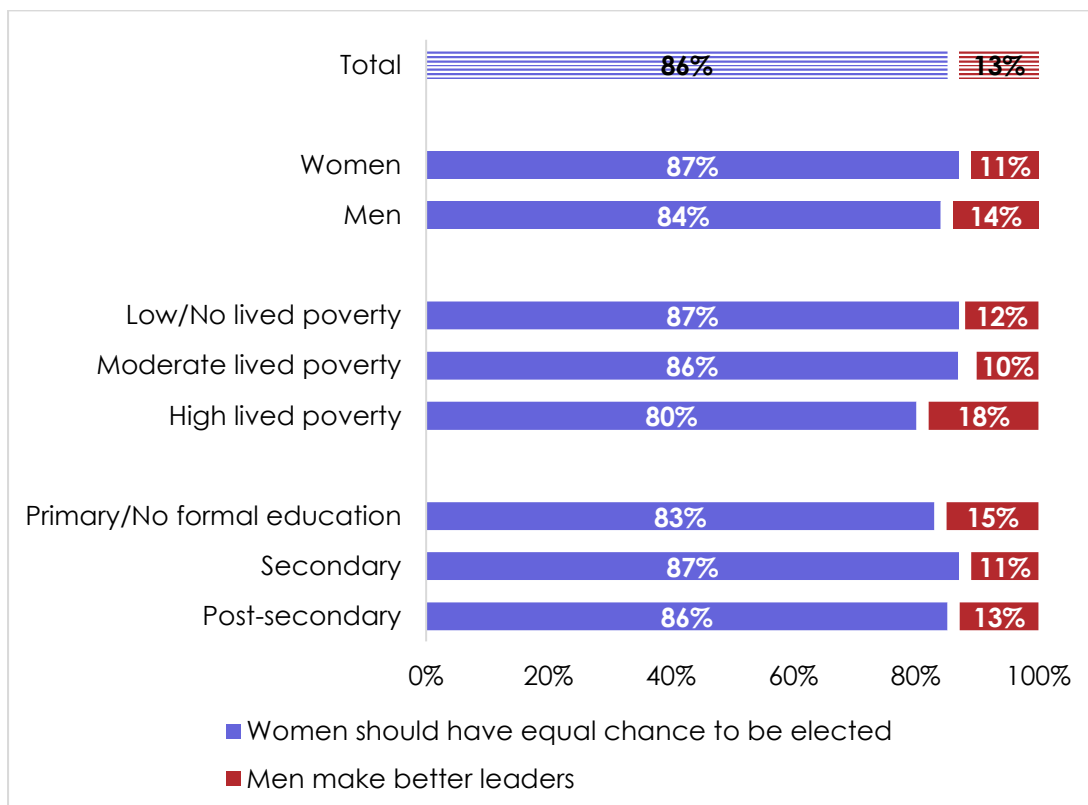
(% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

² 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).

Gender equality in political participation

An overwhelming majority (86%) of São Toméans say women should have the same chance as men to be elected to public office, while only 13% believe that men make better leaders and should be prioritised as candidates (Figure 8). Men (84%), poor respondents (80%), and those with primary schooling or less (83%) are slightly less likely to endorse gender equality in politics than women (87%), economically better-off citizens (86%-87%), and those with secondary or post-secondary education (86%-87%).

Figure 8: Should women have an equal chance to be elected? | by demographic group | São Tomé and Príncipe | 2022



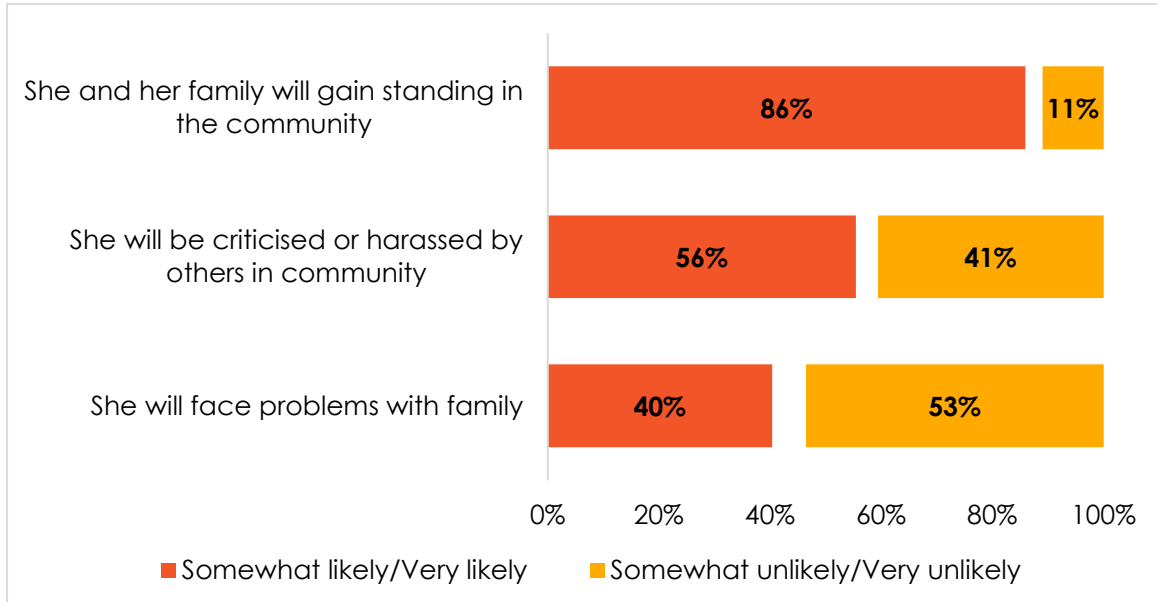
Respondents were asked: Which of the following statements is closest to your view?
 Statement 1: Men make better political leaders than women and should be elected rather than women.
 Statement 2: Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men.
 (% who "agree" or "strongly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

Close to nine out of 10 São Toméans (86%) 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 (56%) also consider it likely that 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. Such negative expectations could potentially amplify reservations among women about actively engaging in politics.

Figure 9: For better or for worse: How running for elective office might affect women's lives | São Tomé and Príncipe | 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

Overall, six in 10 São Toméans (61%) say their government is doing a “fairly good” or “very good” job of promoting equal rights and opportunities for women (Figure 10), while 27% disapprove of the government’s performance. Men (68%) are more likely than women (53%) to give the government’s performance a passing mark, as are the most educated

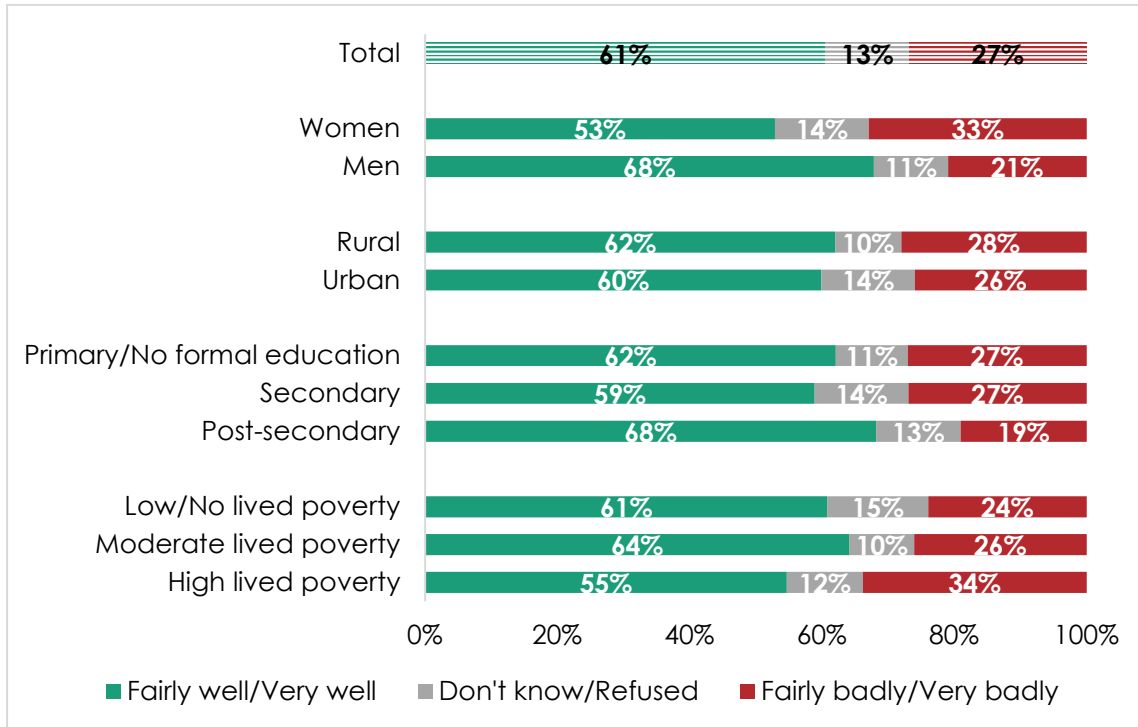
respondents (68%) compared to those with less schooling (59%-62%). The poorest citizens (55%) are less likely to approve of the government’s performance than their better-off counterparts (61%-64%).

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Despite majority approval of the government’s performance, three-quarters (76%) of citizens believe the government should do “somewhat more” or “much more” to promote equal rights and

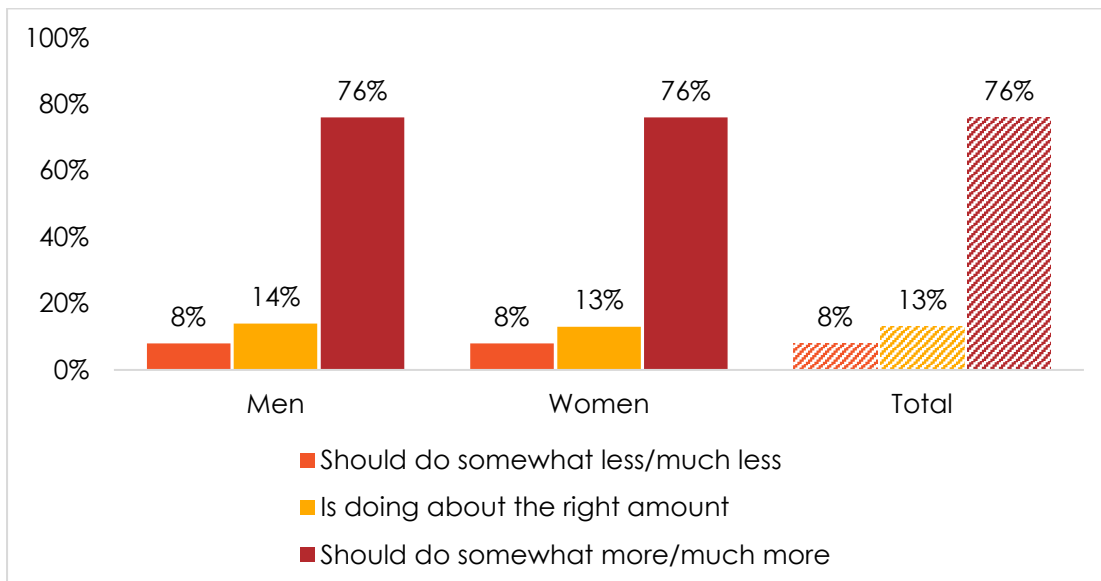
opportunities for women. About one in eight (13%) say the government is doing about the right amount, while only 8% say it should reduce its gender-equality efforts. Women and men offer almost identical appraisals of the government’s level of effort (Figure 11).

Figure 10: Government performance in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women | São Tomé and Príncipe | 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?

Figure 11: Should the government do more or less to promote equal rights and opportunities for women? | by gender | São Tomé and Príncipe | 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 in São Tomé and Príncipe show strengths and challenges when it comes to gender equality. Support for women's rights to jobs and land appear solid, though men are less committed to equality in hiring. While women claim as much power in household financial decision making as men, gender disparities in education and asset ownership persist.

And while support for women's political participation is overwhelming, concerns about potential criticism and harassment highlight the barriers that women may face when pursuing public office.

Overall, a majority of São Toméans approve of the government's efforts to promote equal rights and opportunities for women, but they want to see more.

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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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