

Malagasy praise government efforts to promote gender equality but want to see more

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 795 | Ariel Astant Tianjoky

Summary

Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also represents a key to achieving a more peaceful, prosperous, and healthy world (United Nations, 2022). Improving gender equality strengthens human capital and improves economic performance as women and girls gain greater access to education and the labour market, stimulating productivity, consumption, and innovation (Nguyen, 2021).

The Global Gender Gap Index 2023 ranks Madagascar 51st out of 146 countries (11th out of 36 in sub-Saharan Africa) in terms of gender parity in economic opportunity, education, health, and political leadership (World Economic Forum, 2023). That's an improvement from 84th place in 2018.

But significant gaps still disadvantage women, who are paid 37% less than men, are 20% more likely than men to be unemployed, and as of 2021 made up only 17% of the National Assembly, 37% of ministers, 9% of governors, 5% of mayors, and 7% of communal and municipal councillors (Gaye, 2020; Ramiah, 2020; Republic of Madagascar, 2022). In the health sphere, World Bank (2024) experts say women and girls still face challenges in access to maternal, sexual, and reproductive health services, a deficit that can compromise their health and bears important implications for their educational and work trajectories.

This dispatch uses data from Afrobarometer's 2022 survey to explore the experiences and perceptions of Malagasy people on the issue of gender equality.

In the eyes of respondents, the government is doing quite well in promoting women's rights and opportunities, but most citizens want it to do more. Malagasy cite unequal opportunities or pay in the workplace and too few women in influential positions in government as the most pressing women's-rights issues for the government and society to address.

But while a majority of citizens endorse gender equality in politics, most say men should have priority in hiring.

Afrobarometer surveys

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan 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's national partners conduct face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice.

The Afrobarometer team in Madagascar, led by COEF-Ressources, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 1,200 adult Malagasy in April-May 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 Madagascar in 2005, 2008, 2013, 2015, and 2018.

Key findings

- More than eight in 10 Malagasy (82%) say the government is doing “fairly well” or “very well” in its efforts to promote women’s rights and opportunities, a 15-percentage-point increase since 2018.
- But a similarly large majority (78%) say it needs to do more to promote gender equality, including 58% who expect “much more.”
- Citizens see unequal opportunities or pay in the workplace and a dearth of women in influential positions in government as the most important women’s-rights issues that their government and society must address.
- Men are more likely than women to have secondary or post-secondary education (52% vs. 44%).
- Two-thirds (66%) of Malagasy say men should be given priority in hiring. A majority (59%) of women support this form of gender discrimination.
- Three-fourths (76%) of citizens endorse equal opportunities for men and women to be elected to public office, up from 62% in 2015.

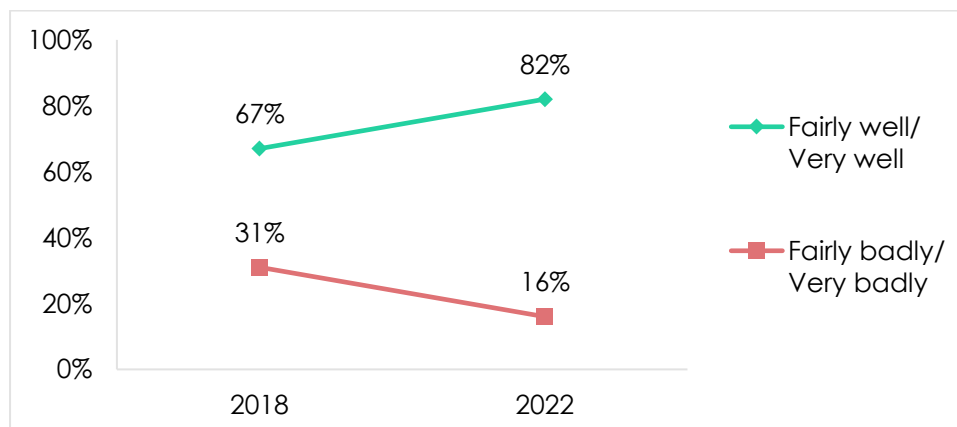
Government performance in promoting gender equality

Economic development depends on the participation of women (Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa-EISA, 2020). In Madagascar, the vast majority (82%) of adults say the government is doing “fairly well” or “very well” on promoting equal rights and opportunities for women, up from 67% in 2018 (Figure 1).

Approval of the government’s efforts on gender is consistently high across key demographic groups, although people with no formal education (66%) are less positive in their assessments than those with primary schooling or more (82%-86%) (Figure 2).

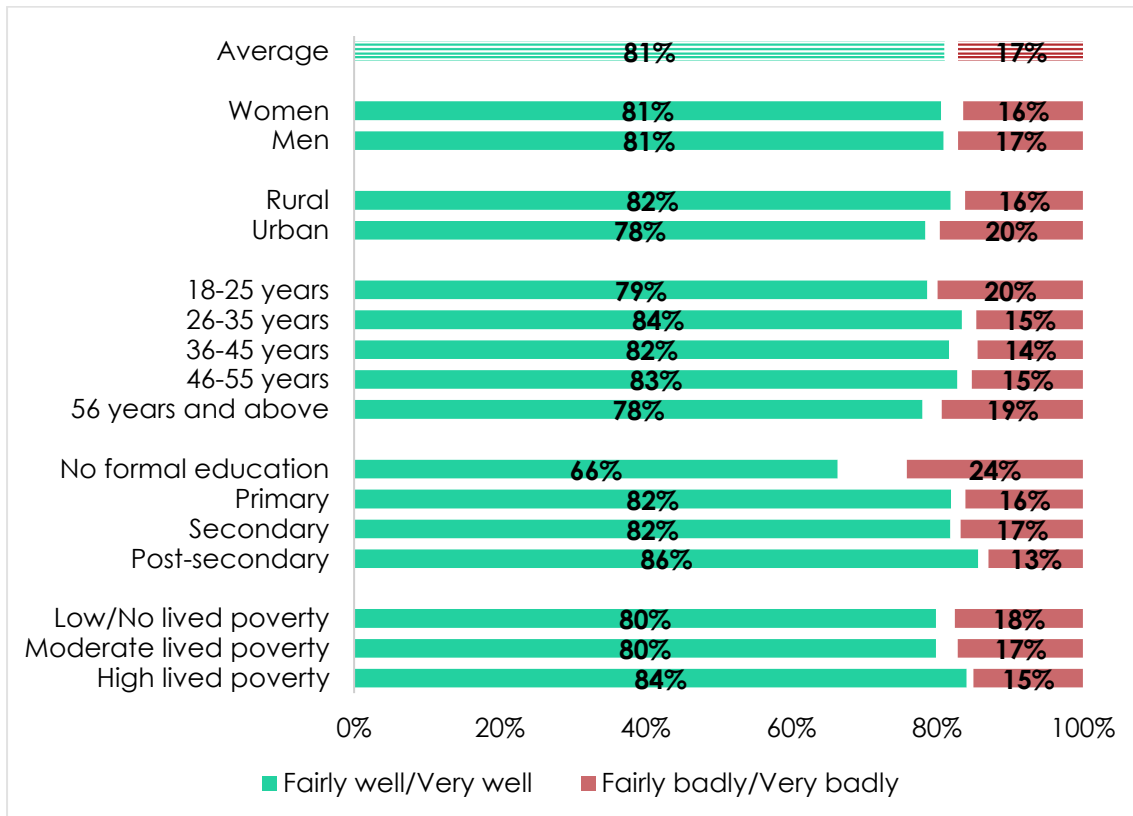
Even so, more than three-fourths (78%) of respondents say the government must do more to promote gender equality, including 58% who expect “much more” (Figure 3).

Figure 1: Government performance on promoting equal rights and opportunities for women | Madagascar | 2018-2022



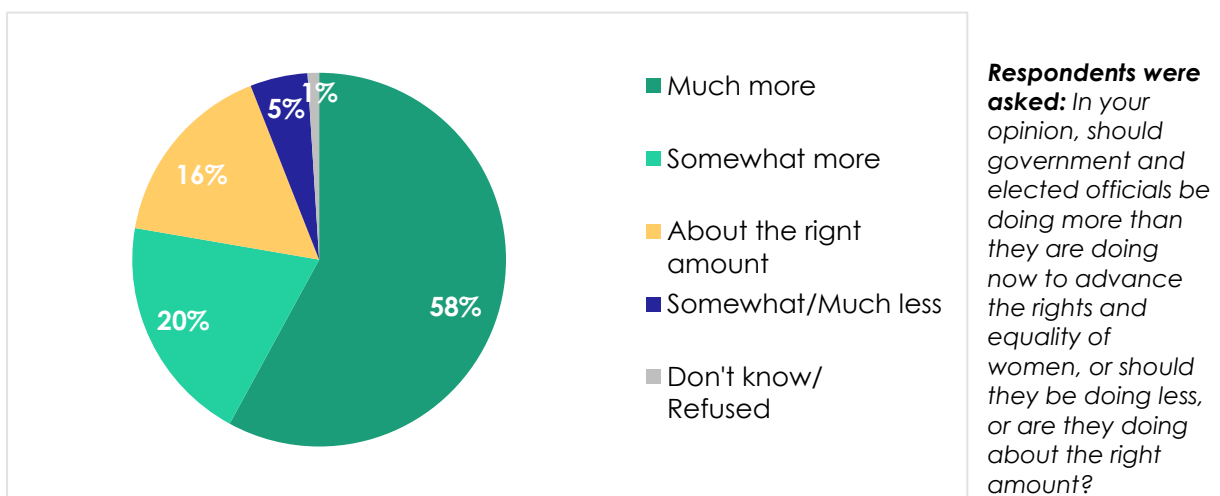
Respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Promoting equal rights and opportunities for women?

Figure 2: Government performance on promoting equal rights and opportunities for women | by demographic group¹ | Madagascar | 2022



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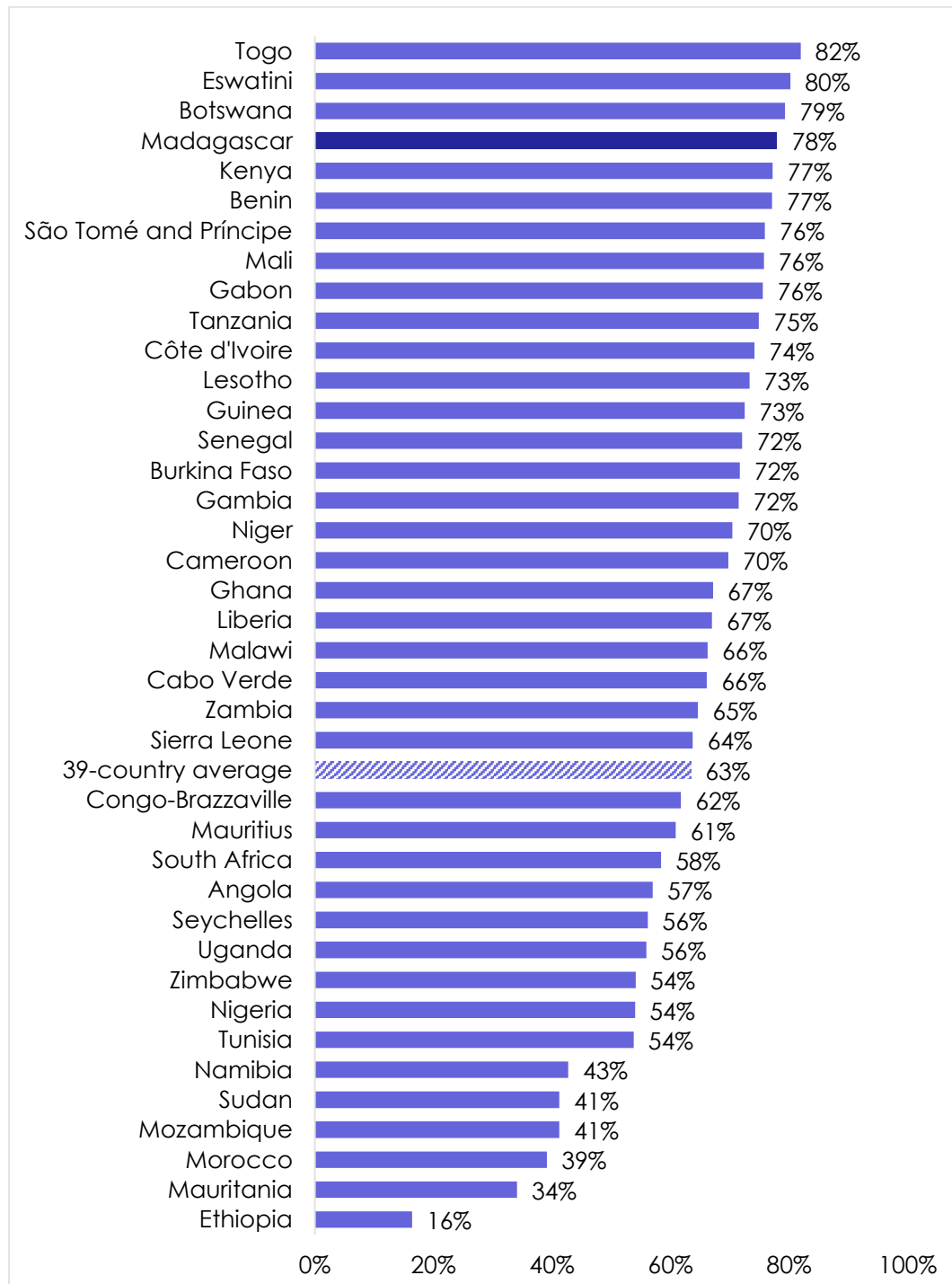
Figure 3: Should the government do more or less to promote equal rights and opportunities for women? | Madagascar | 2022



¹ Relatively small sample sizes for respondents with no formal education (N=80) and post-secondary education (N=70) yield results with relatively large margins of error.

Among 39 African countries surveyed in 2021/2023, Madagascar ranks fourth in the share of people who think the government should do more to promote gender equality, far above the 63% average (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Government should do more to promote equal rights and opportunities for women | 39 countries | 2021/2023



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? (% who say "somewhat more" or "much more")

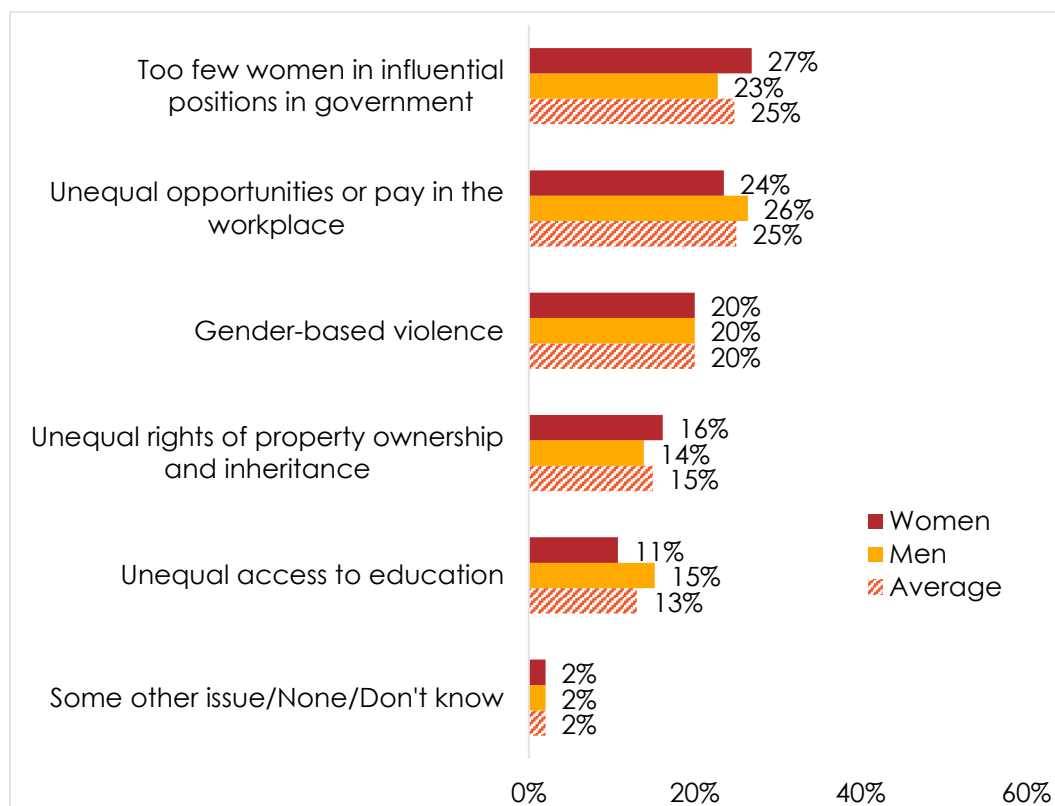
Major challenges in promoting gender equality

When asked what they consider the most important issue related to women's rights and equality that their government and society must address, Malagasy most frequently cite unequal opportunities or pay in the workplace (25%) and too few women in influential positions in government (25%) (Figure 5).

Somewhat fewer mention gender-based violence (20%), unequal property and inheritance rights (15%), and unequal access to education (13%).

Women are slightly more likely than men to prioritise the dearth of women in government (27% vs. 23%), but otherwise the two groups differ little.

Figure 5: Most important women's-rights issue | by gender | Madagascar | 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?

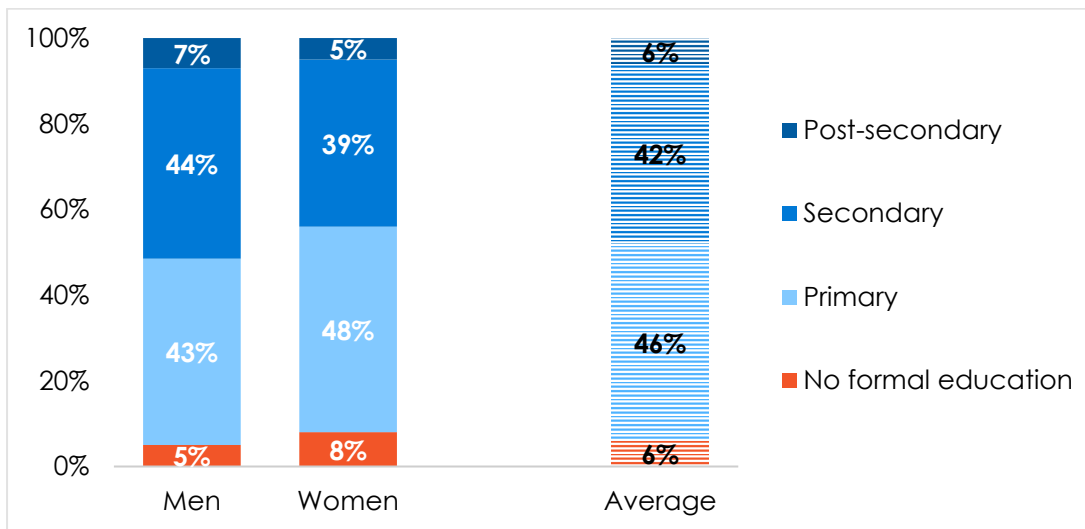
Educational and professional opportunities

Access to education

Equal access to education represents a critical indicator of gender equality. In Madagascar, primary school is free, with compulsory schooling between ages 6 and 16 (Solidarité Laïque, 2023). Most Malagasy citizens cite primary (46%) or secondary (42%) schooling as their highest level of educational attainment. Women are less likely than men to have secondary or post-secondary education (52% vs. 44%)² (Figure 6).

² 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, 44% secondary and 7% post-secondary sum to 52%).

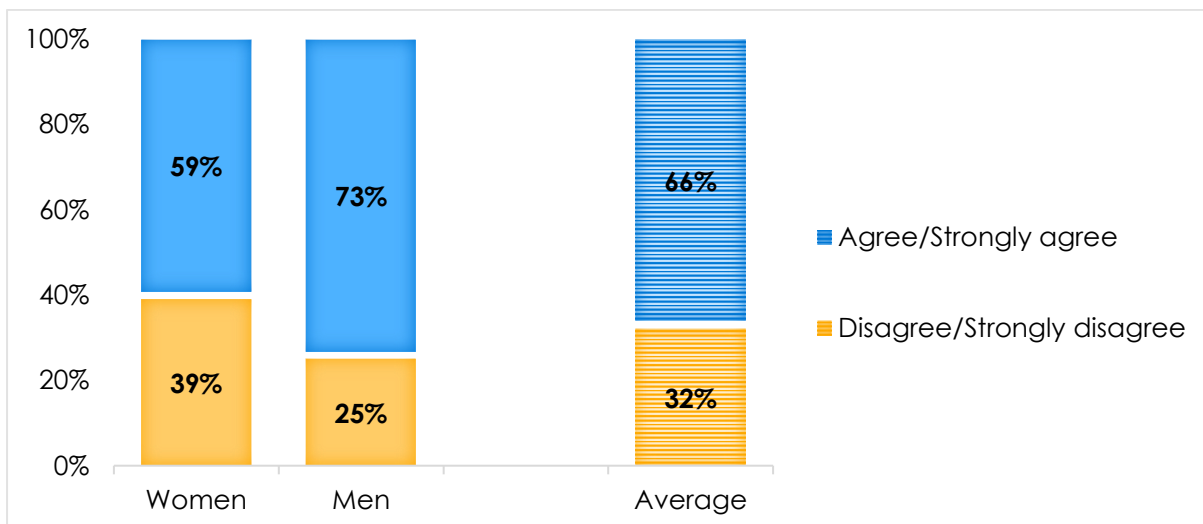
Figure 6: Educational attainment | by gender | Madagascar | 2022



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

Despite widespread support for greater government attention to gender equality, most Malagasy endorse inequality when it comes to hiring. Two-thirds (66%) of citizens say that when jobs are scarce, priority in employment should go to men. Even among women, a majority (59%) agree with this form of discrimination (Figure 7).

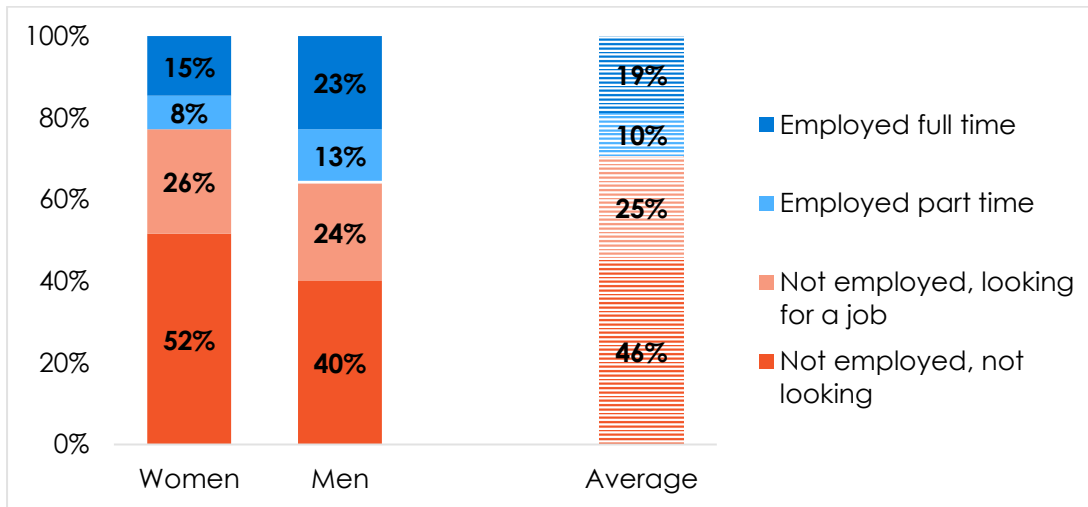
Figure 7: Should men have more right to a job than women? | by gender | Madagascar | 2022



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.

In practice, women are less likely than men to be employed full time (15% vs. 23%) or part time (8% vs. 13%) (Figure 8). But rates of unemployment – the proportion without a paid job who are looking for work – are roughly even (26% of women, 24% of men). Women are significantly more likely than men to be without paid employment and not looking for a job (52% vs. 40%), perhaps reflecting both their higher engagement in unpaid homemaking & care work and their disadvantage in education & employment opportunities.

Figure 8: Employment status | by gender | Madagascar | 2022



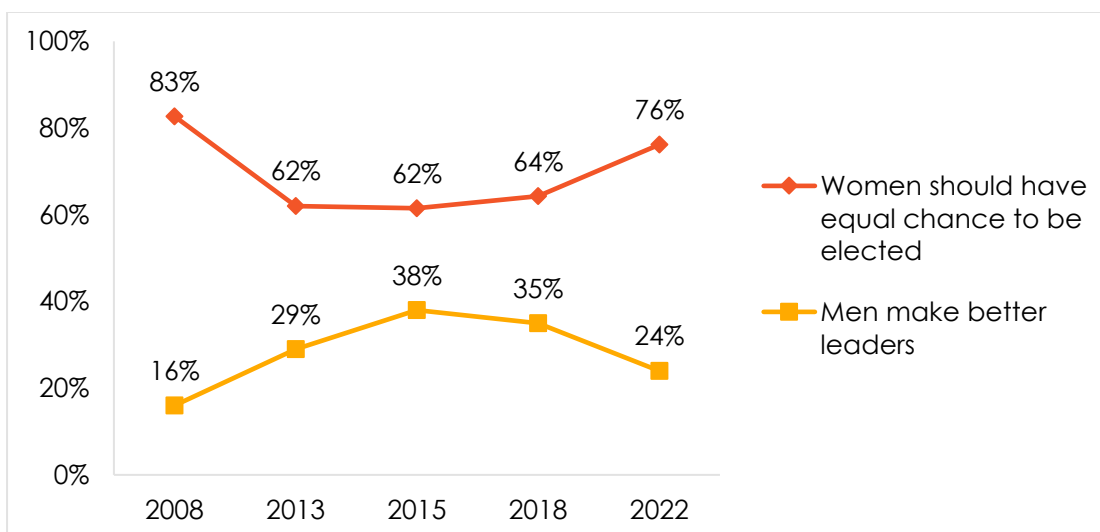
Respondents were asked: Do you have a job that pays a cash income? [If yes:] Is it full time or part time? [If no:] Are you currently looking for a job?

Participation in political life

Women's participation in politics and government broadens the country's leadership talent pool and increases the variety of experience and knowledge represented in policy making (Clayton, Josefsson, Mattes, & Mozaffar, 2019). About three-fourths (76%) of Malagasy say that women should have the same chance as men to be elected to political positions, while 24% say that men make better leaders and should therefore have priority (Figure 9).

Over time, the proportion supporting gender equality in political leadership has increased by 14 percentage points since 2015, though it still falls short of the 83% recorded in 2008.

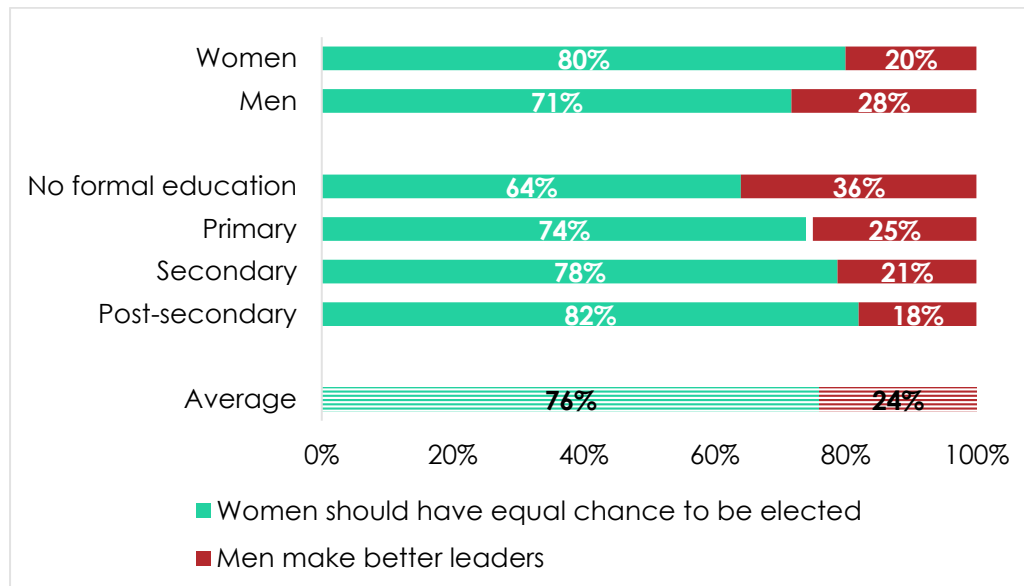
Figure 9: Should women have an equal chance to be elected? | Madagascar | 2008-2022



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)

Support for gender equality in politics is stronger among women than among men (80% vs. 71%) and increases with respondents' education level, ranging from 64% of those with no formal schooling to 82% of those with post-secondary qualifications (Figure 10).

Figure 10: Should women have an equal chance to be elected? | by gender and education level | Madagascar | 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)

Conclusion

For policy makers and women's-rights advocates, Afrobarometer findings paint a mixed picture of gender equality in Madagascar.

A growing majority of citizens support equal opportunity in politics, a critical issue in a country where men still dominate positions of power.

But women continue to trail men in educational attainment and employment, and a majority of men and women alike say men should be given priority when it comes to jobs.

Overall, most citizens praise the government's efforts to promote gender equality but say that more needs to be done.

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www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis.

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