

Ethiopians rate government highly on promotion of gender equality, though disparities persist

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 813 | Mulu Teka

Summary

Ethiopia stated its commitment to gender equality in its 1993 National Policy on Women, which aimed to establish frameworks within government entities and institutions to foster equitable and gender-sensitive public policies (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 1993). The government reaffirmed its commitment in the 1995 Federal Constitution, which enshrines women's political, economic, and social rights (Federal Negarit Gazzeta, 1995). Civil society activists have joined with government programmes and initiatives to pursue gender equality and women's empowerment (Mehary, 2023; Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations, 2021).

But the country is far from achieving gender parity. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index (2023), Ethiopia ranks 75th out of 146 countries in gender equality, with relatively low scores – meaning high barriers – in economic and political participation. Similarly, the Ethiopian Gender Development Index 2021 points to barriers that prevent women from accessing health services and education and fully participating in public life and economic opportunities (Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations, 2021). Political representation is still below parity, although Sahle-Work Zewde became the country's first female president in 2018 and the share of parliamentary seats held by women increased from 28% in 2010 to 39% in 2015 and now stands at 41% (Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations, 2021; Demo Finland, 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 controlling assets, hiring, land ownership, and political leadership.

Survey findings show that a clear majority of Ethiopians endorse equal rights in employment, land ownership, and political participation. While data indicate persistent gender gaps in educational attainment and asset ownership, a majority of citizens approve of the government's performance in promoting gender equality and don't think greater efforts are needed.

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 Ethiopia, led by ABCON – Research & Consulting, interviewed a nationally representative sample of 2,400 adult Ethiopians in May-June 2023. 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 Ethiopia in 2013 and 2020.

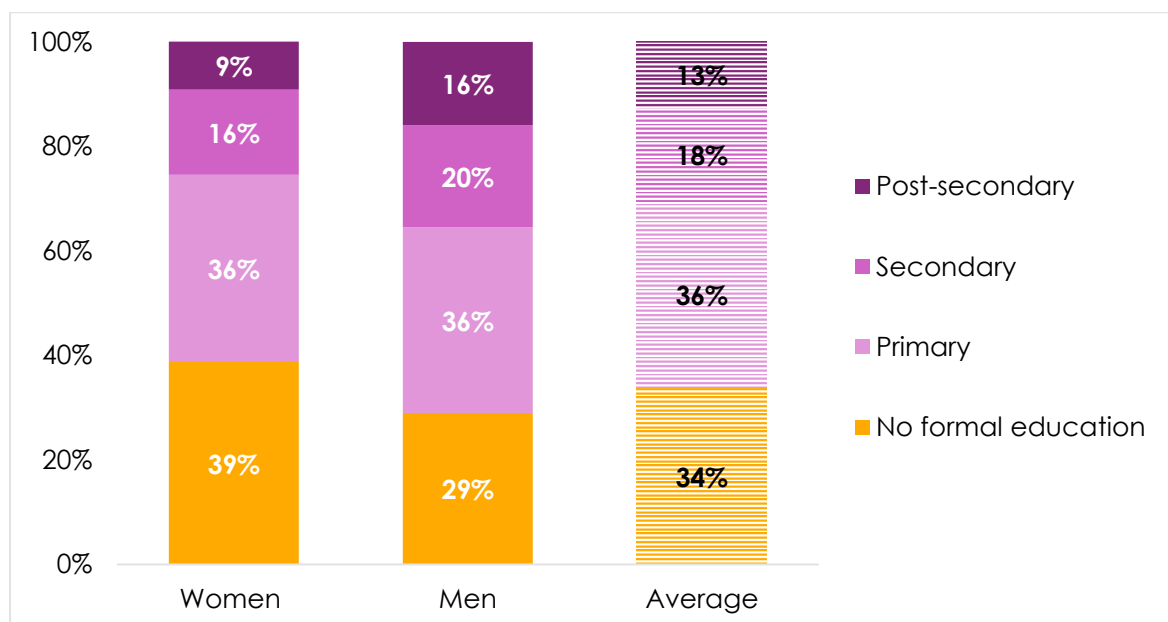
Key findings

- In Ethiopia, fewer women than men have secondary education (16% vs. 20%) and post-secondary education (9% vs. 16%). More women than men lack formal education (39% vs. 29%).
- Women are also less likely than men to own certain key assets, including mobile phones (60% vs. 68%) and bank accounts (51% vs. 64%).
- Two-thirds (67%) of Ethiopians believe that women should have the same chance as men to get jobs, and eight in 10 (80%) endorse equal land ownership and inheritance rights.
 - Large majorities say that in fact, Ethiopian women enjoy equal rights when it comes to employment (73%) and land ownership (78%).
- More than eight in 10 citizens (83%) say women should have an equal chance to be elected to political office.
 - But significant proportions also consider it likely that a woman who runs for office will be criticised, called names, or harassed by others in the community (46%) and will face problems with her family (44%).
- Almost two-thirds (64%) of Ethiopians say their government is doing a "fairly good" or "very good" job of promoting equal rights and opportunities for women, and very few (16%) think it needs to increase its efforts in this area.

Gender disparities in education and control of assets

Ethiopian women and men are equally likely to have primary education as their highest level of education (36% each), but men are more likely than women to progress to secondary (20% vs. 16%) and post-secondary education (16% vs. 9%) (Figure 1). In addition, a greater share of women lack formal education (39% vs. 29%).

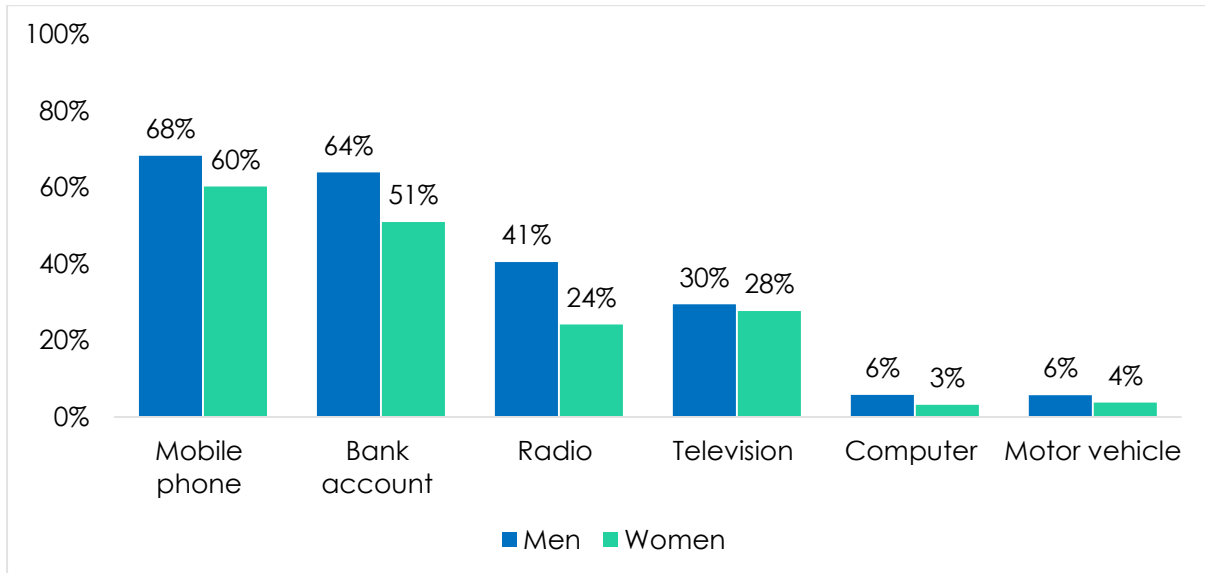
Figure 1: Educational attainment | by gender | Ethiopia | 2023



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

The ownership of selected key assets also shows gender gaps. While women and men are about equally likely to own a television, a computer, and a motor vehicle, fewer women than men report personally owning a mobile phone (60% vs. 68%), a bank account (51% vs. 64%), and a radio (24% vs. 41%) (Figure 2).

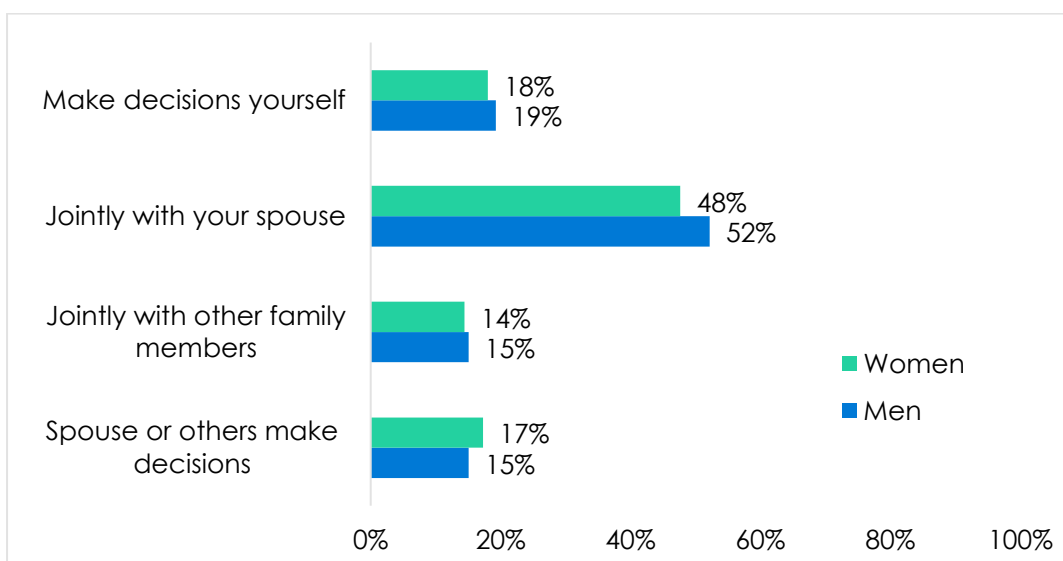
Figure 2: Asset ownership | by gender | Ethiopia | 2023



Respondents were asked: Which of the following do you personally own: Radio? Television? Motor vehicle or motorcycle? Computer? Bank account? Mobile phone?

Concerning decisions about how money is used in the household, about one-fifth of men (19%) and of women (18%) say they make financial decisions themselves, while about half (52% of men, 48% of women) say they decide such things jointly with their spouse (Figure 3). Slightly more women than men say that their spouse or others in the household make financial decisions without consulting them (17% vs. 12%).

Figure 3: Who decides how money is used | by gender | Ethiopia | 2023

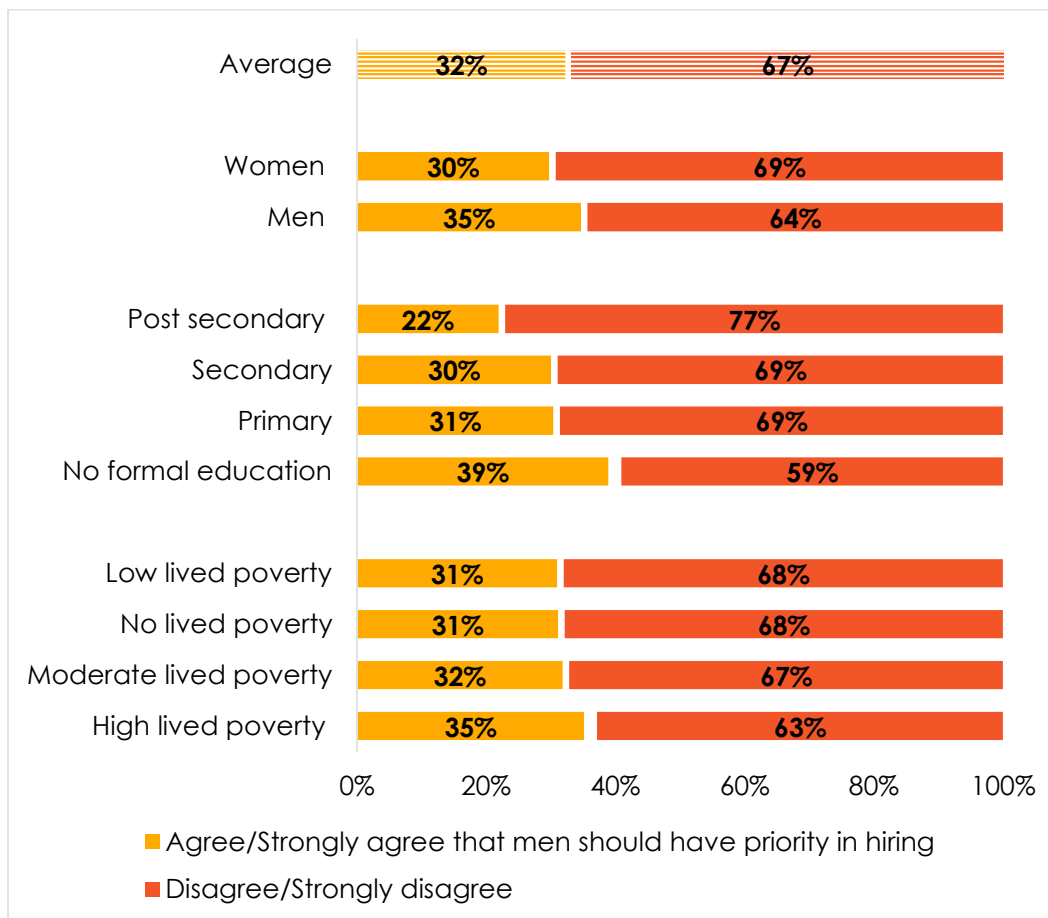


Respondents were asked: What is the main way that decisions are made about how to use any money that you have or earn, for example, from a job, a business, selling things or other activities?

Employment

A majority of Ethiopian men and women denounce gender discrimination in hiring. Two-thirds (67%) "disagree" or "strongly disagree" with the notion that men should be given employment priority over women when jobs are scarce (Figure 4). Women are slightly more likely than men to insist on gender neutrality in hiring decisions (69% vs. 64%). A preference for gender fairness is especially widespread among people with post-secondary education (77%), while the category of people most likely to support preferential treatment for men are those without any formal education (39%).

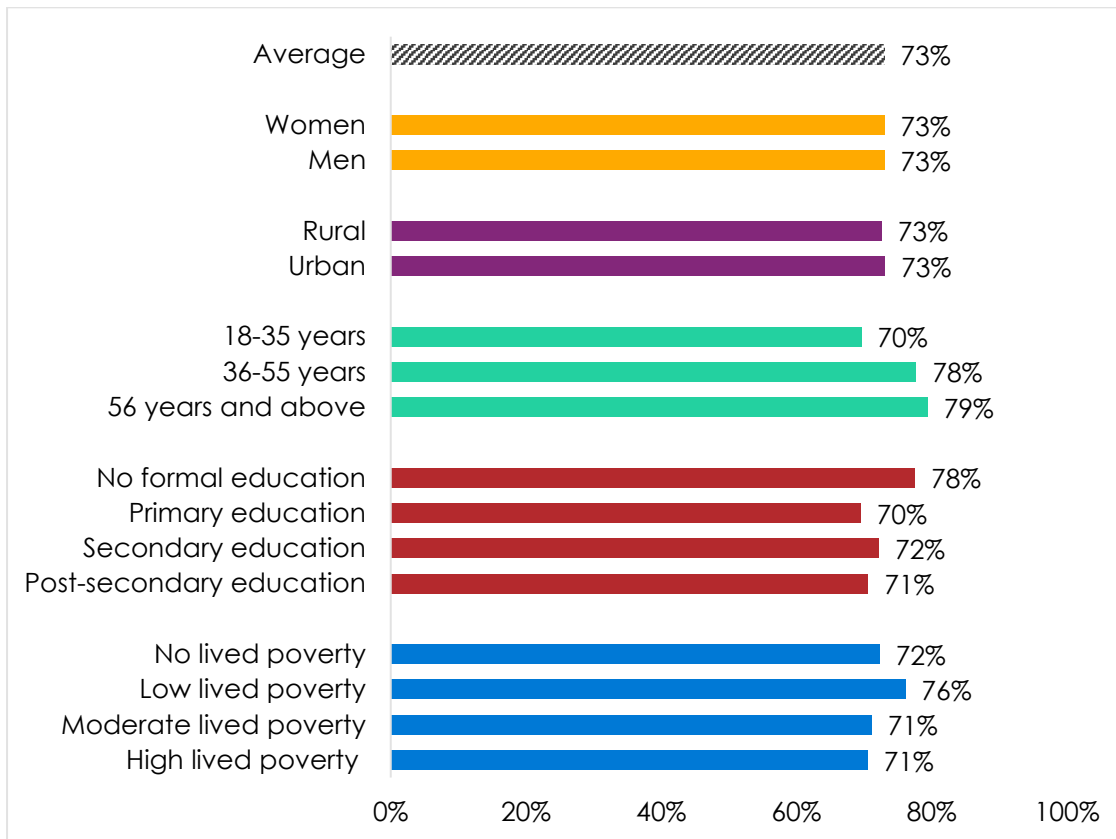
Figure 4: Should men have priority for scarce jobs? | by demographic group
 | Ethiopia | 2023



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?

In practice, nearly three-quarters (73%) of both men and women report that there is gender equality in employment opportunities (Figure 5). Youth (aged 18-35) are somewhat less likely to report gender fairness in hiring (70%) than their elders (78%-79%), while the assessment that men and women have an even chance of getting a job is particularly widespread among respondents with no formal education (78%).

Figure 5: Women and men have an equal chance of being hired | by demographic group | Ethiopia | 2023



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

Land rights

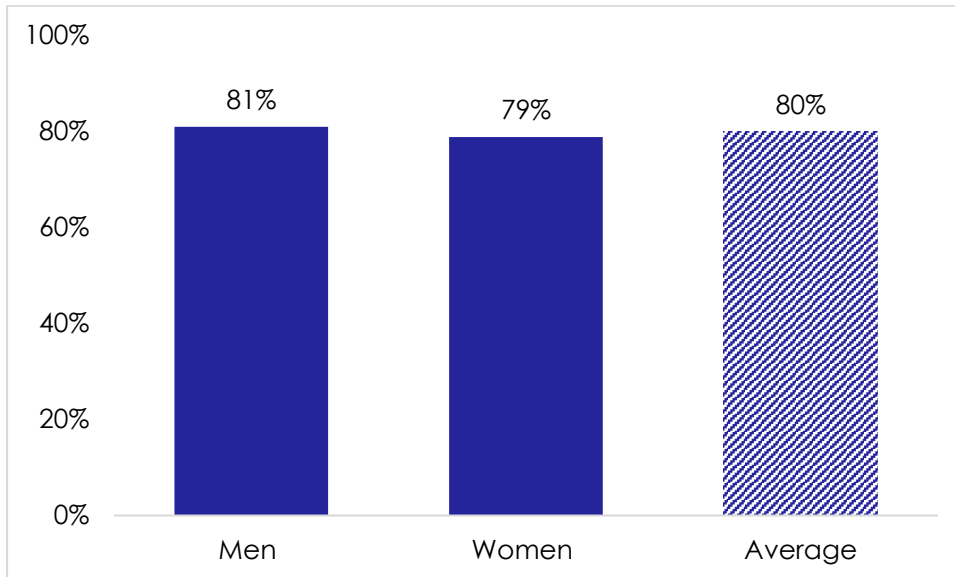
Even stronger majorities say that women and men should and do in fact have equal rights to own and inherit land.

Eight out of 10 Ethiopians (80%) endorse equality in land rights, with little distinction in responses between genders (Figure 6).

When it comes to the reality on the ground, a similar majority (78%) say men and women actually do enjoy equal opportunities to own and inherit land (Figure 7). Again, men and women see eye to eye in their assessments. However, the perception of gender equality in land rights is more common among urban residents than their rural counterparts (81% vs. 76%), the elderly than the youth (84% vs. 76%), and economically better-off citizens than those experiencing high lived poverty (83% vs. 70%).¹

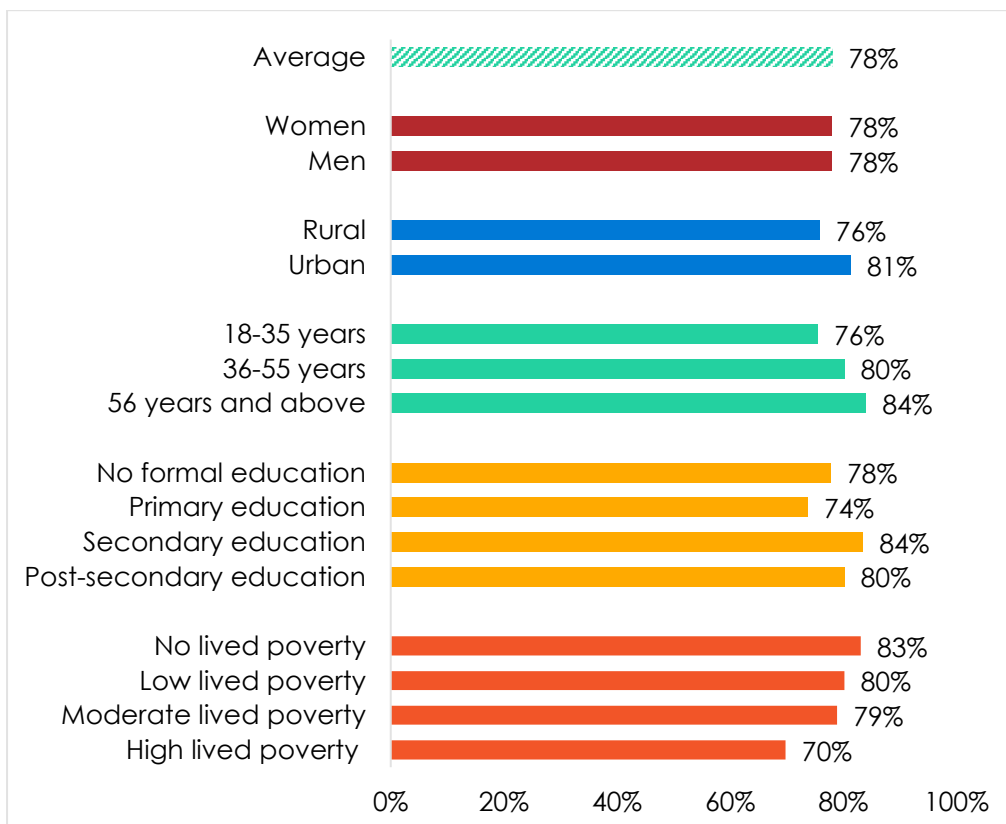
¹ Afrobarometer's Lived Poverty Index (LPI) measures respondents' levels of material deprivation by asking how often they or their families went without basic necessities (enough food, enough water, medical care, enough cooking fuel, and a cash income) during the preceding year. For more on lived poverty,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

Figure 6: Should women have equal rights to land? | by gender | Ethiopia | 2023



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)

Figure 7: Women and men have an equal opportunity to own/inherit land | by demographic group | Ethiopia | 2023



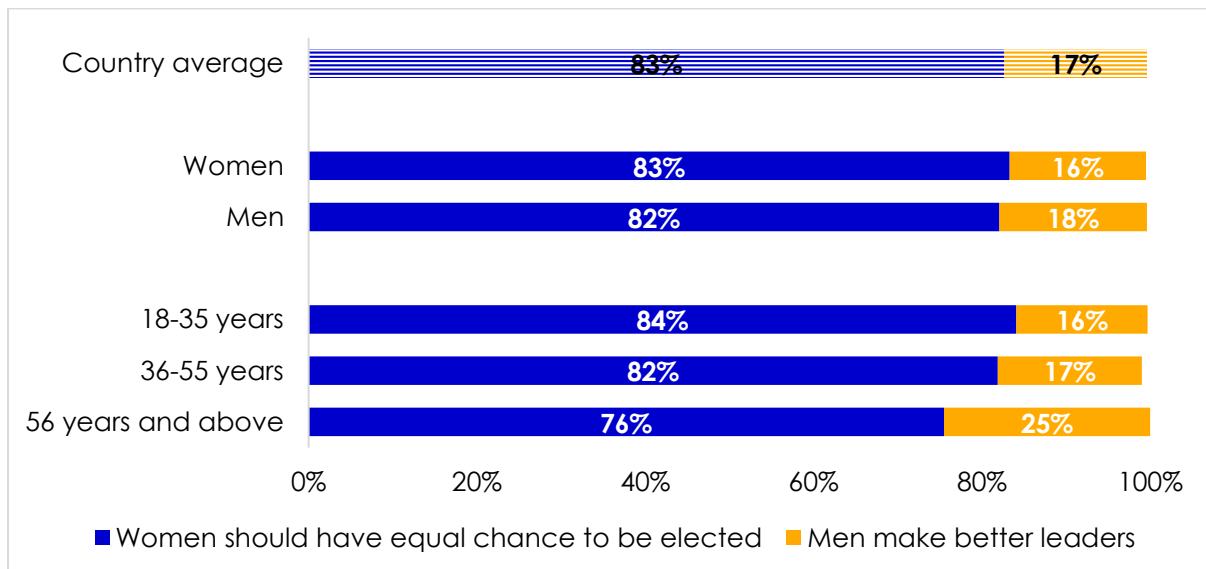
Respondents were asked: For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: In our country today, women and men have equal opportunities to own and inherit land? (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

Gender equality in political participation

Increasing women's participation and leadership in public life is a means to achieve gender parity and ensure their voices are heard in policy decisions. It is an important means to secure gender equality and women's empowerment in other areas, including education, asset ownership, land rights, and employment. How do Ethiopians view the ideal and the reality of this crucial domain?

Citizens overwhelmingly subscribe to the notion of equal gender participation in politics: More than eight in 10 respondents (83%) say that women should have the same chance as men to be elected to political office, while only 17% think men make better leaders than women and should thus be given priority (Figure 8). Men and women are on the same page in this respect. The young are more likely to hold this view than elders (84% vs. 76%), suggesting that gender equality in this arena is becoming increasingly valued over time.

Figure 8: Should women have an equal chance to be elected? | by gender and age | Ethiopia | 2023



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

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

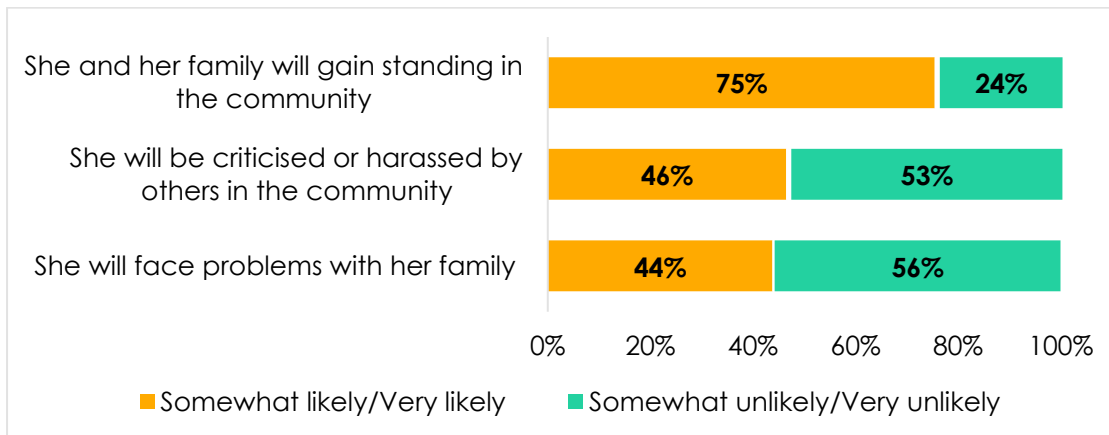
Statement 2: Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men.

(% who "agree" or "strongly agree" with Statement 2)

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 – based on the reactions of her community.

The results are mixed for Ethiopian women who wish to throw their hats into the ring. Three-fourths (75%) of Ethiopians say it is "somewhat likely" or "very likely" that a woman and her family will gain standing in the community if she runs for office (Figure 9). However, significant proportions consider it likely that she will be criticised, called names, or harassed by community members (46%) and will face problems with her family (44%).

Figure 9: For better or worse: How running for elective office might affect women's lives | Ethiopia | 2023



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?

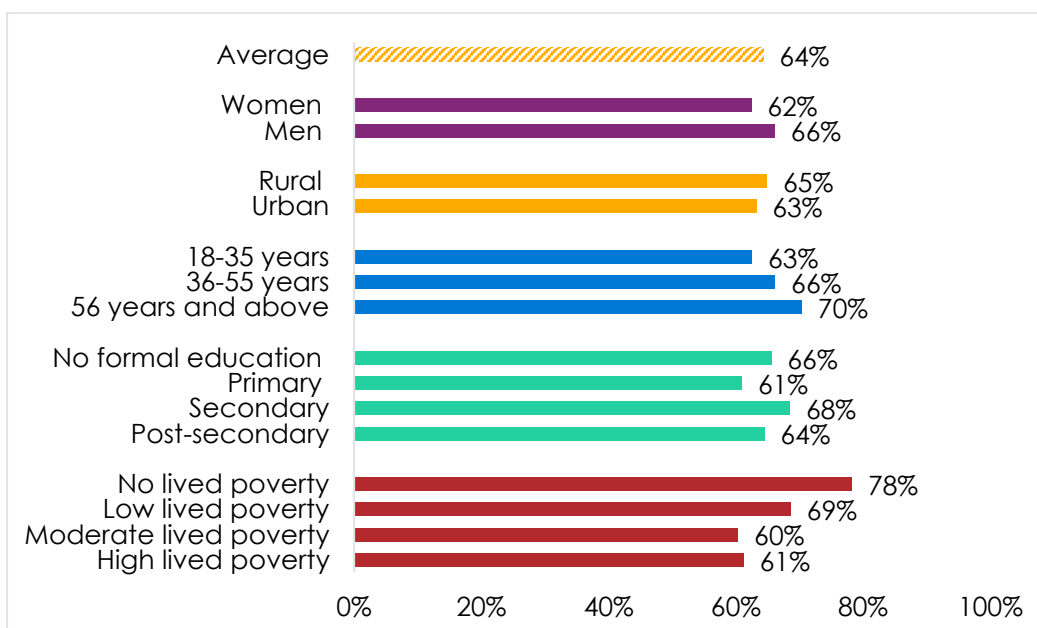
She will be criticised, called names, or harassed by others in the community?

She will face problems with her family?

Government performance in promoting equal rights and opportunities

Overall, almost two-thirds (64%) of Ethiopians think their government is doing a "fairly good" or "very good" job of promoting equal rights and opportunities for women (Figure 10). This favourable assessment is more pronounced among men than women (66% vs. 62%), among the elderly than the youth (70% vs. 63%), and among economically better-off citizens than the poor (78% vs. 61%).

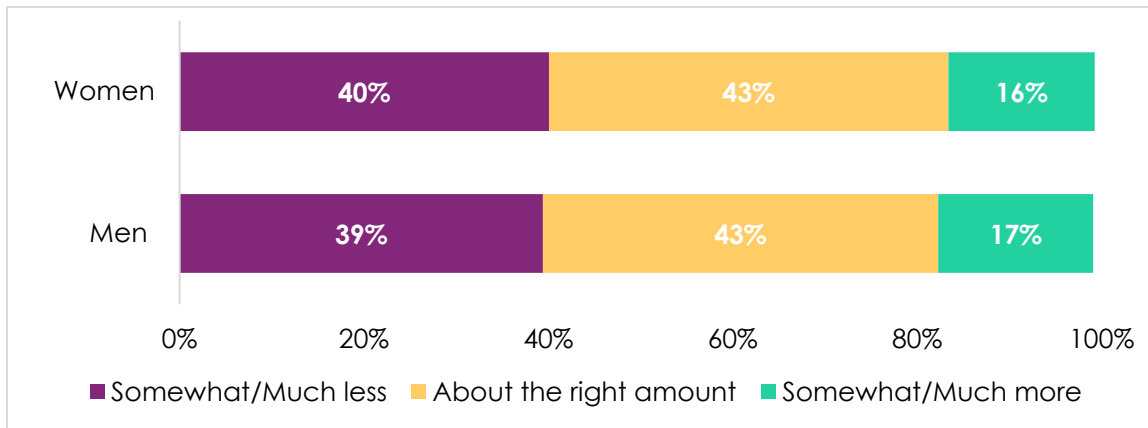
Figure 10: Government performance in promoting equal rights and opportunities for women | by demographic group | Ethiopia | 2023



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")

In line with their positive assessments, only 16% of citizens demand that the government do "somewhat more" or "much more" to promote equal rights and opportunities for women (Figure 11). More than four in 10 (43%) say the government is doing "about the right amount" in this domain, while almost as many (40%) think it should do less. Women and men hold identical views on this question.

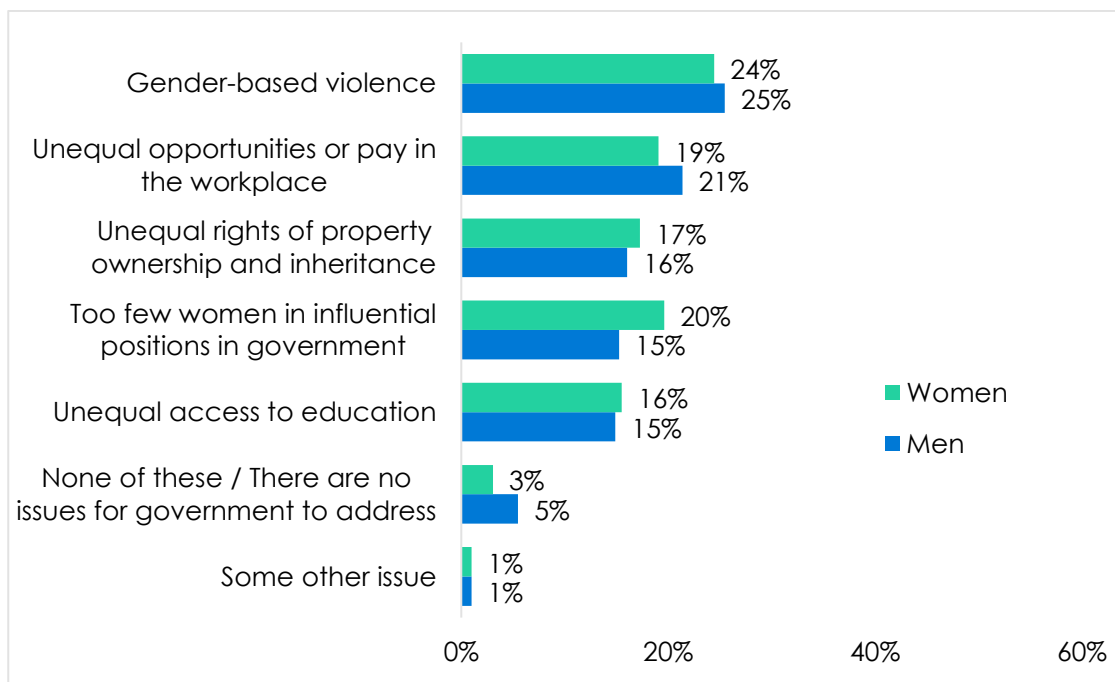
Figure 11: Should the government do more or less to promote equal rights and opportunities for women | by gender | Ethiopia | 2023



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

As for where the government should target its efforts, gender-based violence tops the list of women's-rights issues that Ethiopians say their government and society must address, cited by a quarter of both men and women as their highest priority (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Most important women's-rights issue | by gender | Ethiopia | 2023



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?

Among female respondents, a dearth of women in influential positions in government ranks second (20%), followed by unequal opportunities or pay in the workplace (19%), unequal rights of property ownership and inheritance (17%), and unequal access to education (16%). The fairly even distribution of these responses suggests that all are deemed to be areas of concern. Only 3% of women and 5% of men say there are no women's-rights issues for government and society to address.

Conclusion

Most Ethiopians express support for gender equality in employment, land rights, and political participation. But despite evidence of women's continued disadvantages in educational attainment, asset ownership, and political leadership, few citizens call for greater government efforts to promote equal rights and opportunities for women.

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