



## **Kenyans see gains in gender equality, but support for women's empowerment still uneven**

**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 170 | Winnie V. Mitullah**

### **Summary**

Gender equality is a principle of sustainable development that is globally acknowledged by United Nations and regional agencies, development partners, and national governments. Although the principle is operationalized through policies, legal provisions, and programs in most jurisdictions, implementation and experience vary across regions and countries, and in most cases fall short of the goal. As the United Nations Development Programme notes in its 2016 Africa Human Development Report, "gender equality for African women and girls is still far from satisfactory" (UNDP, 2016).

One measure of how far we've come in pursuit of gender equality – and how far we still have to go – is the experience of everyday women and men. A special module in Afrobarometer's Round 7 survey asked Kenyans about their views and experiences with regard to progress toward equal rights, gender-based discrimination and violence, the election of women to political office, and women's political and civic engagement. Their responses reveal that Kenyans see gains in gender equality but that support for women's empowerment is still uneven, particularly among men – a fact that can undermine programs aimed at integrating the principle of gender equality in development agendas and policy dialogues.

### **Afrobarometer survey**

Afrobarometer is a pan-African, non-partisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues across more than 35 countries in Africa. Six rounds of surveys were conducted between 1999 and 2015, and Round 7 surveys (2016/2018) are currently underway. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Kenya, led by the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Nairobi, interviewed 1,599 adult Kenyans in September-October 2016. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of +/-3% at a 95% confidence level. Previous surveys were conducted in Kenya in 2003, 2005, 2008, 2011, and 2014.

### **Key findings**

- A majority (56%) of Kenyans say equal opportunities and treatment for women have improved over the past few years. Better-educated women and men are more likely to report progress toward gender equality than their less-educated counterparts.

- Large majorities of Kenyans say women and girls already enjoy equal opportunities when it comes to primary (92%) and secondary education (90%) and earning an income (82%). A far smaller majority (58%) agree that women have the same chance as men to own or inherit land.
- About one in seven women (15%) say they experienced gender-based discrimination or harassment at least once during the previous year.
- More than three-fourths (78%) of Kenyans say that a man is “never” justified in beating his wife, but three in 10 men (29%) disagree.
- About three-fourths (73%) of Kenyans say women should have the same chance as men of being elected to political office. Men (66%) and citizens with no formal education (51%) are less supportive of equal opportunity at the ballot box.
- Women are less likely than men to discuss politics, contact leaders, join others to raise an issue, and attend community meetings.

## Gender equality and women's empowerment

Gender equality and women's empowerment have been at the center of the development dialogue since Ester Boserup's (1970) empirical findings on the neglected value of women's work inspired the 1975 World Conference of the International Women's Year (UN Women, 2017). A leading strategy has been gender mainstreaming, which focuses on “making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated” (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 1997).

Kenya has embraced gender mainstreaming through constitutional provisions, policies, and legislation, as well as structures and mechanisms to operationalize them. These include the National Gender Equality Commission and gender affairs offices in all government ministries and agencies.

Kenya is a signatory to a number of conventions and declarations on gender equality, including the 1979 Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the 1980 Copenhagen World Conference Programme of Action, which stressed the need for women to participate in the development process as both experts and beneficiaries; and the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, in which affirmative action was identified as an indispensable strategy for gender mainstreaming (United Nations, 1995).

Kenya's Draft National Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy (Government of Kenya, 2017) conceptualizes gender equality as giving women and men equal opportunities for realizing their full human rights and potential. This includes ensuring that both sexes can contribute equally to, and benefit equally from, national political, economic, social, and cultural development. The policy defines women's empowerment as enhancement of women's state and stature in society by integrating gender equality and equity into poverty reduction, democratic governance, crisis prevention and recovery, and sustainable development.

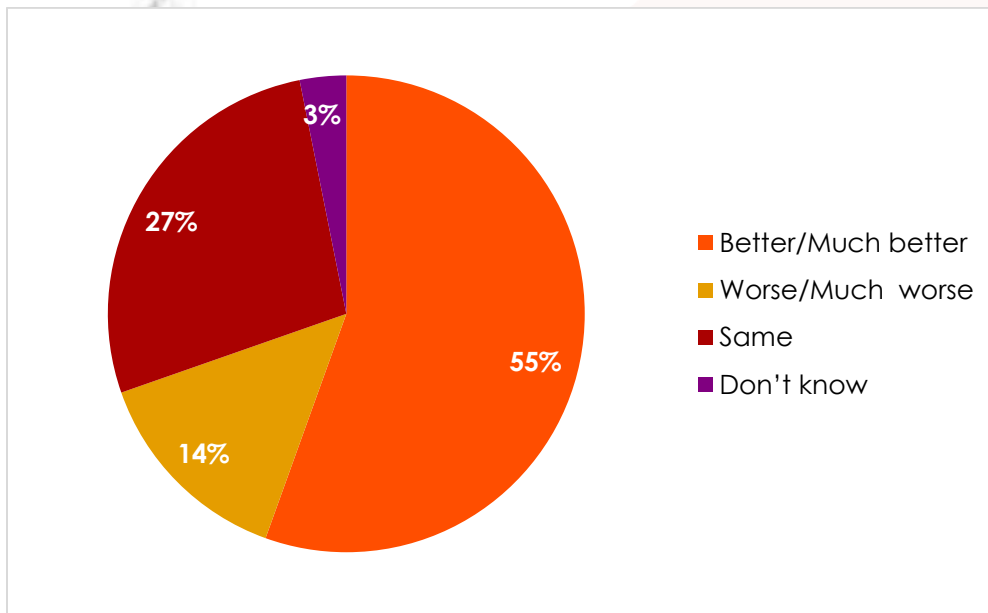
In spite of these commitments, even the government acknowledges a variety of gender-equality deficits, including too few women elected and appointed to office, economic

inequalities, and harmful socio-cultural practices and beliefs in some communities, such as female genital mutilation and tolerance of gender-based violence (Government of Kenya, 2017).

### Popular views on gender equality and bias

If gender bias has historically favoured the male gender, survey responses show that a majority of Kenyans believe the situation is improving: 56% say equal opportunities and treatment for women are now “better” or “much better” than they were “a few years ago” (Figure 1). About one in four respondents (27%) say the situation has remained the same, while 14% say things have gotten “worse” or “much worse.”

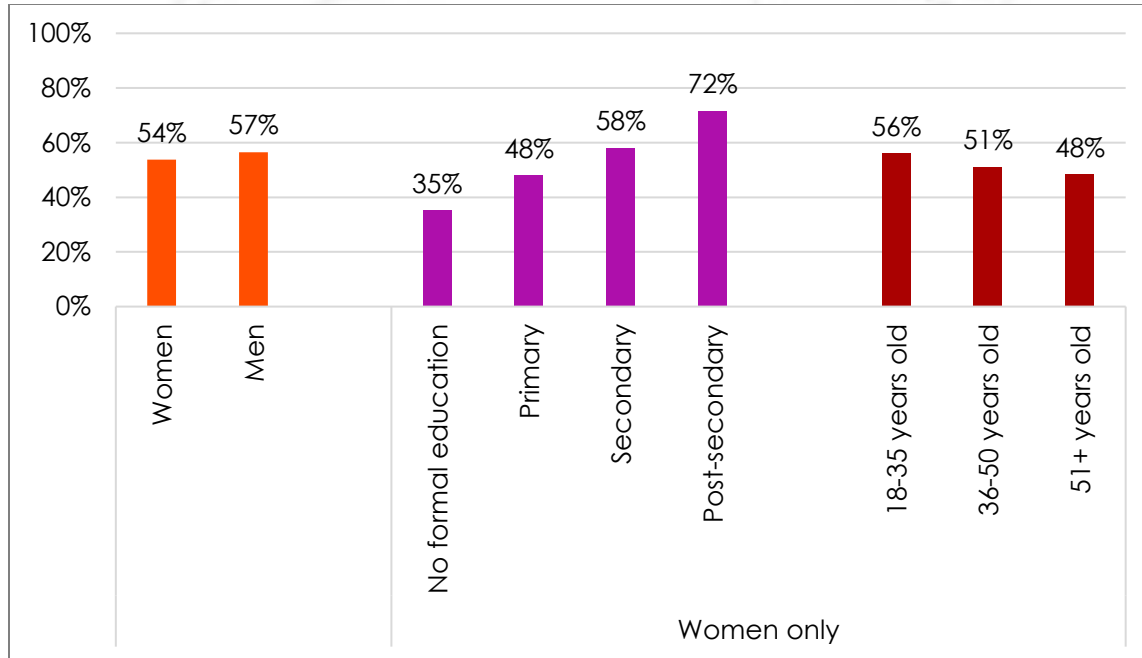
**Figure 1: Progress on equal opportunity and treatment for women | Kenya | 2016**



**Respondents were asked:** Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same: Equal opportunities and treatment for women?

Men are slightly more likely than women to see improvement (57% vs. 54%), and younger women are somewhat more likely to see progress than their elders (56% among women aged 18-35 vs. 48% among those above age 50). But respondents' education level makes a huge difference in their perceptions of progress on women's opportunities and treatment: Women with a post-secondary education are twice as likely to see progress as women with no formal education (72% vs. 35%) (Figure 2). A similar difference exists among men of different education levels (70% vs. 37%).

**Figure 2: Progress on equal opportunity and treatment for women** | by gender, education level, and age | Kenya | 2016



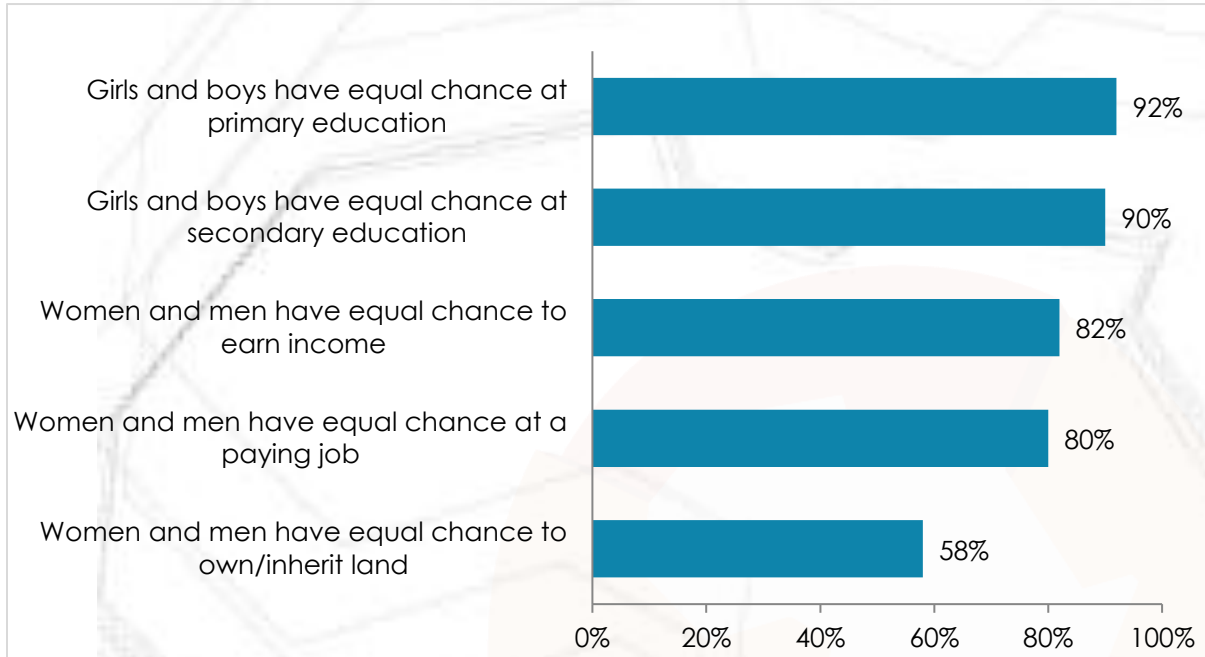
**Respondents were asked:** Please tell me if the following things are worse or better now than they were a few years ago, or are they about the same: Equal opportunities and treatment for women? (% who say things have gotten "better" or "much better")

On specific key issues, large majorities of Kenyans say gender equality already exists (Figure 3). Nine out of 10 respondents say girls and boys have an equal chance at a primary education (92%) and a secondary education (90%). About eight in 10 affirm that women have the same chance as men to earn an income (82%) and to get a paying job (80%). A far smaller majority (58%) agree that women have the same chance as men to own or inherit land.

Given the importance of land as an asset in Kenya, the smaller proportion who say women currently have an equal opportunity to own and inherit this resource is significant. This right is protected by the constitution's national values and principles of human dignity, equity, social justice, inclusiveness, equality, human rights, non-discrimination, and protection of the marginalized. It is enabled through the 2012 Land Act and the 2013 Matrimonial Property Act, which provides for equal property and inheritance rights and an equal portion of all wealth accumulated during marriage at the time of divorce. Furthermore, the constitution guarantees women have equal rights to acquire, administer, hold, control, use, and dispose of property, whether movable or immovable.

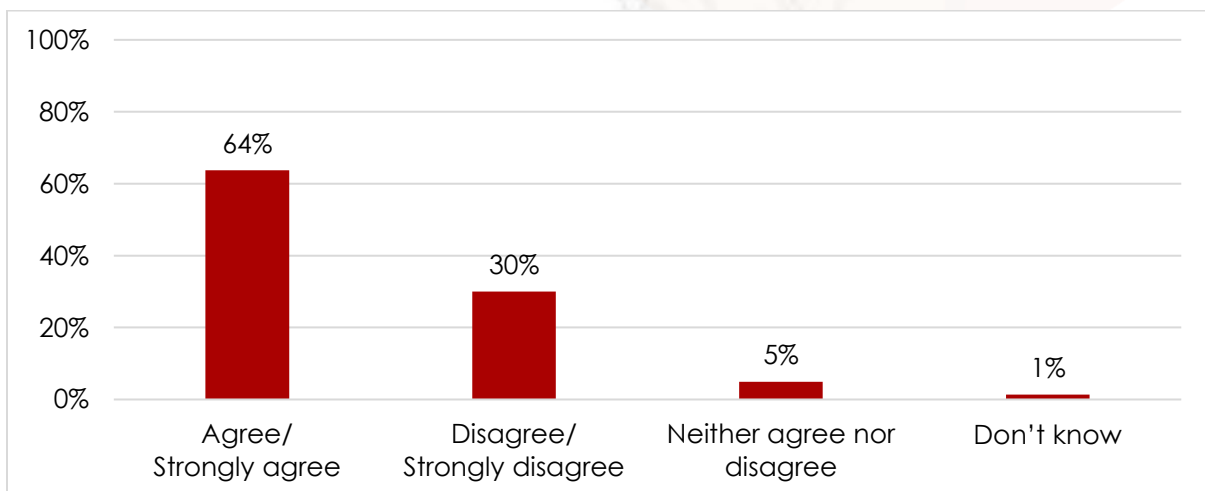
When asked whether women *should* have equal rights to own and inherit land, a somewhat larger proportion (64%) agree that they should (Figure 4). Men are almost twice as likely as women to reject equal rights for women when it comes to land (39% vs. 21%) (Figure 5). Support for equal rights is as strong in rural as in urban areas, and similar across education levels. Older respondents are less likely to be supportive of gender equality in land ownership.

**Figure 3: Equal access to life opportunities for girls/women | Kenya | 2016**



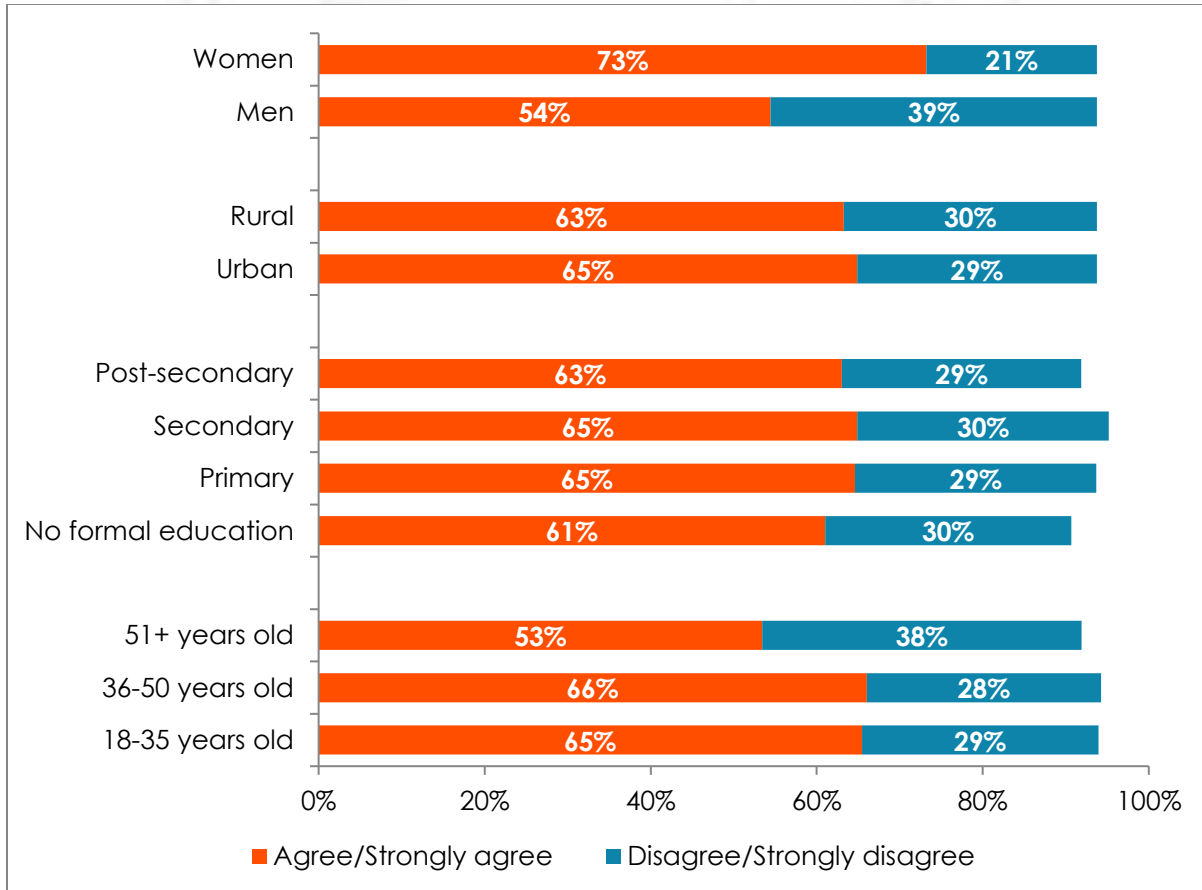
**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree, or haven't you heard enough to say? In our country today: Girls and boys have equal opportunities to get a primary education? Girls and boys have equal opportunities to get a secondary education? Women and men have equal opportunities to earn an income? Women and men have equal opportunities to get a job that pays a wage or salary? Women and men have equal opportunities to own and inherit land? (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

**Figure 4: Should women have the same rights as men to own and inherit land? | Kenya | 2016**



**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?

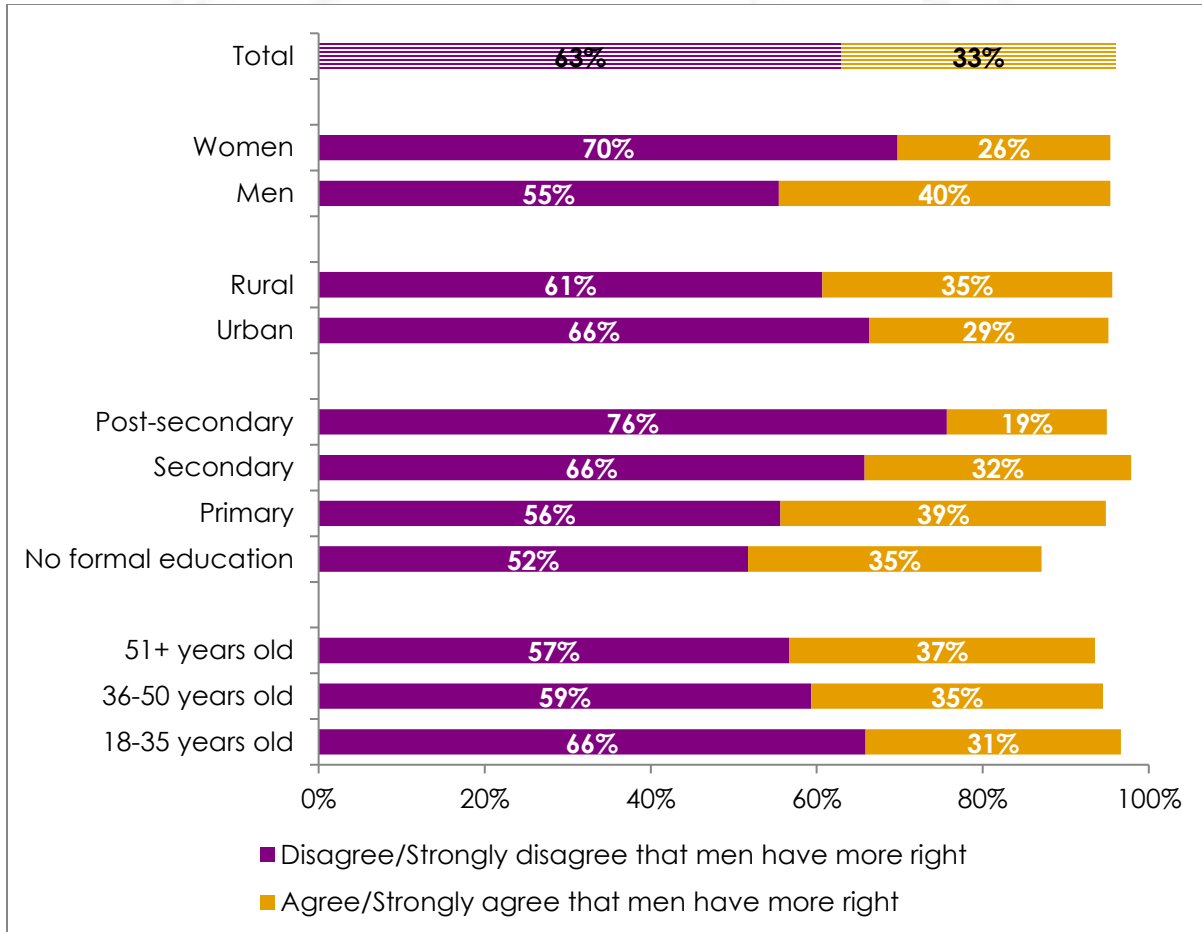
**Figure 5: Women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land**  
 | by socio-demographic group | Kenya | 2016



**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?

Similarly, more than six in 10 Kenyans favour equal rights when it comes to getting a job: 63% “disagree” or “disagree strongly” with the proposition that “when jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women” (Figure 6). Still, one in three (33%) agree with preferential treatment for men, and among male respondents, that proportion is 40% (compared to 26% of women). Insistence on equal rights when it comes to jobs is also stronger among urban residents, better-educated respondents, and younger citizens than among their rural, less-educated, and older counterparts.

**Figure 6: Do men have more right to a job?** | by socio-demographic group | Kenya | 2016



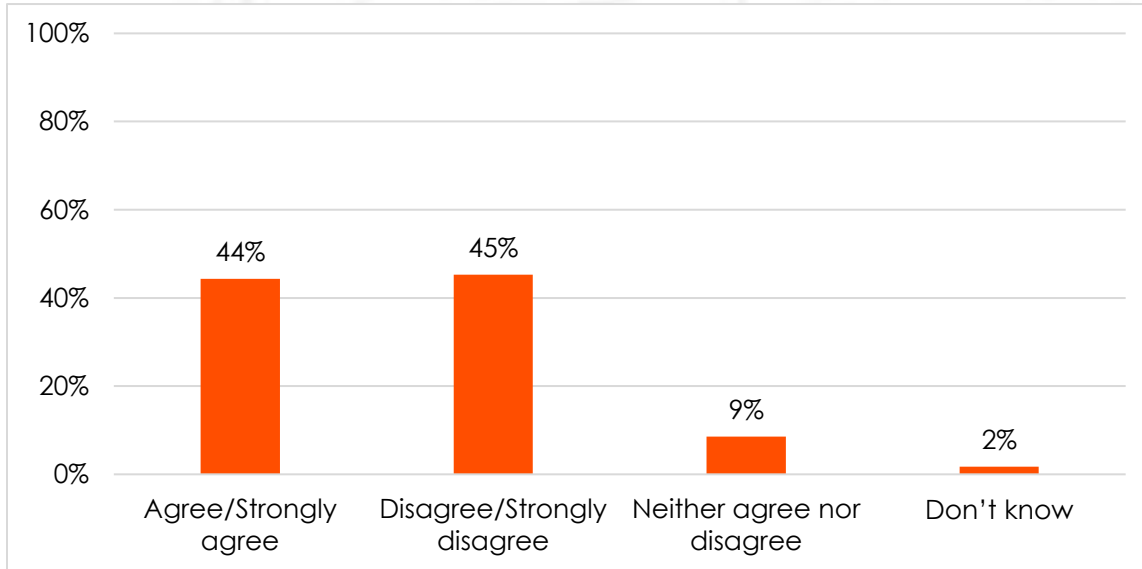
**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women?

When it comes to women's traditional roles of home-making and child-rearing, Kenyans are divided: 44% agree it is better if a woman, rather than a man, has the main responsibility for taking care of the home and children, while 45% disagree (Figure 7).

There are only small differences on this question across genders, rural and urban areas, and age groups (Figure 8). Respondents with only primary education are more likely to agree (52%) than those with higher education or no formal education.

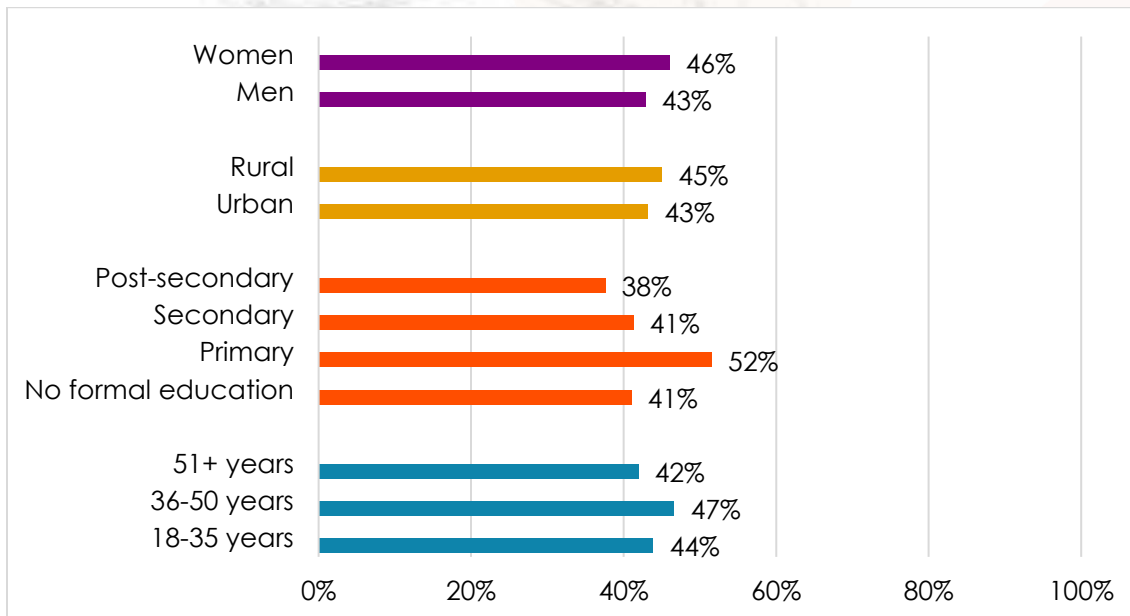
These responses speak to the UN Commission on the Status of Women's (2017) observation that women and girls undertake a disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work. The commission notes that this uneven distribution of responsibilities is a significant constraint on their progress in education and entry and advancement in the paid labour market, and thus on their economic opportunities and entrepreneurial activities.

**Figure 7: Better if a woman cares for home and children?** | Kenya | 2016



**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: In general, it is better for a family if a woman has the main responsibility for taking care of the home and children rather than a man?

**Figure 8: Better if a woman cares for home and children** | by socio-demographic group | Kenya | 2016



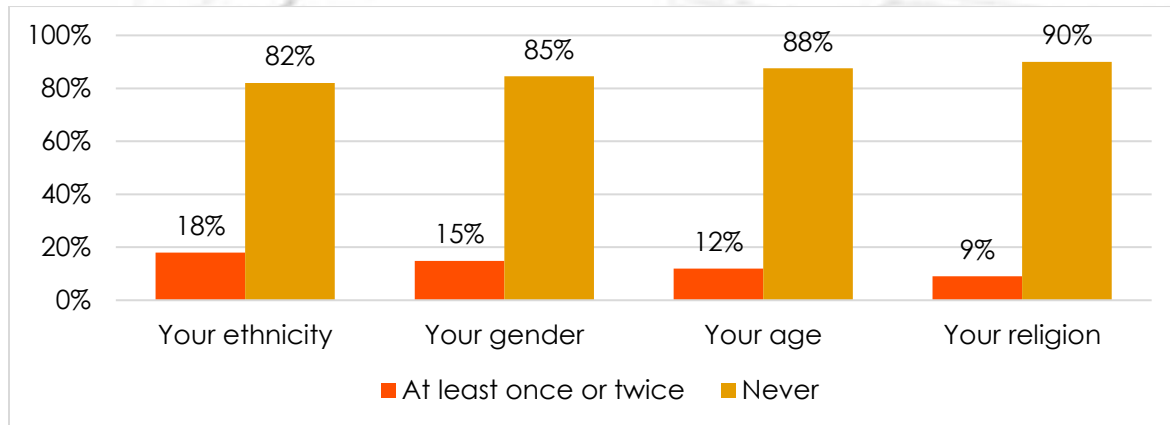
**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree: In general, it is better for a family if a woman has the main responsibility for taking care of the home and children rather than a man? (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")



## Discrimination, harassment, and violence

In addition to confronting persistent attitudes that may inhibit progress toward gender equality, some women experience discrimination and harassment. In Kenya, about one in seven women (15%) say they personally suffered discrimination or harassment based on their gender at least once during the year preceding the survey (Figure 9).

**Figure 9: Discrimination or harassment against women** | women only | Kenya | 2016

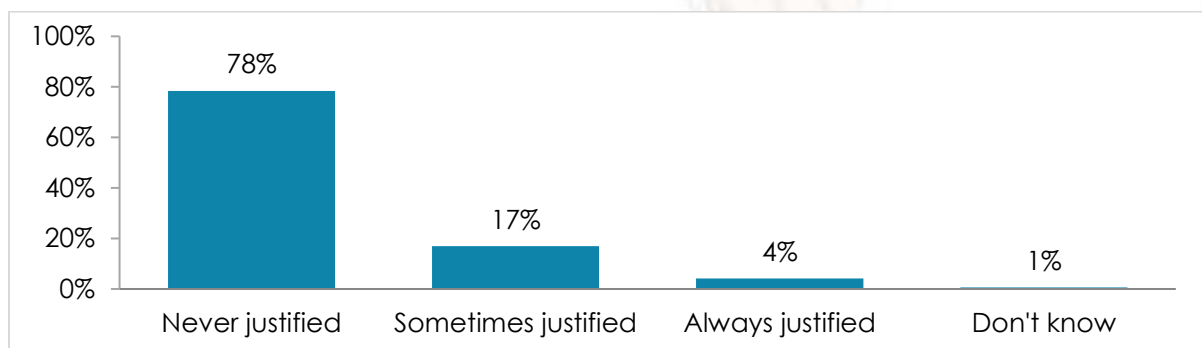


**Respondents were asked:** In the past year, how often, if at all, have you personally been discriminated against or harassed based on any of the following? (The figure shows responses from women only. "At least once or twice" includes responses of "once or twice," "several times," and "many times.")

Most Kenyans reject violence against women: More than three-fourths (78%) say that wife beating is "never" justified, while about one in five contend that it is "sometimes" (17%) or "always" (4%) justified (Figure 10).

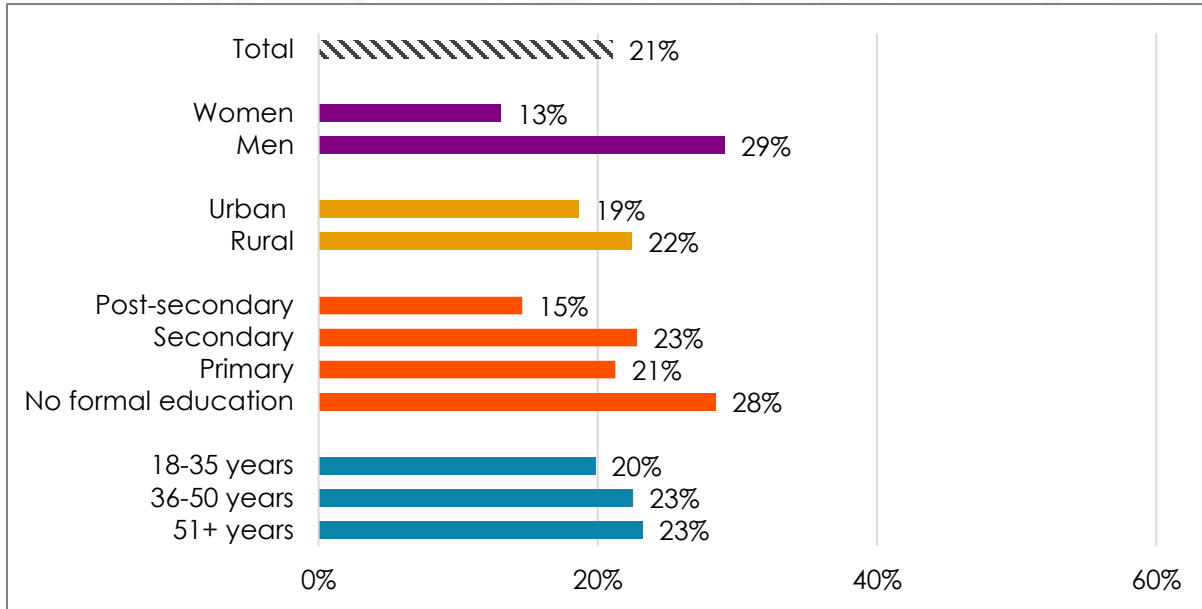
Still, almost one-third of men (29%) say that wife beating is sometimes or always justified, compared to half as many women (13%). Rejection of wife beating is considerably higher among better-educated Kenyans (85% among those with a post-secondary education) than among their less-educated counterparts (Figure 11).

**Figure 10: Views on wife beating** | Kenya | 2016



**Respondents were asked:** Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, sometimes be justified, or never be justified: For a man to beat his wife?

**Figure 11: Wife beating 'sometimes' or 'always' justified | Kenya | 2016**

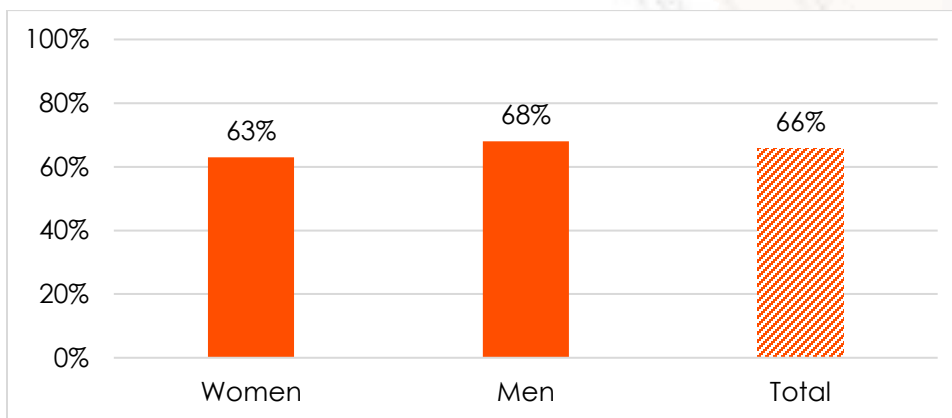


**Respondents were asked:** Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, sometimes be justified, or never be justified: For a man to beat his wife?

### Government performance on gender equality

Two-thirds (66%) of Kenyans say their government is performing "fairly well" or "very well" in promoting opportunities and equality for women (Figure 12). Women are slightly less likely than men to applaud the government's efforts (63% vs. 68%).

**Figure 12: Government promotion of opportunities and equality for women | Kenya | 2016**



**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 opportunities and equality for women? (% who say "fairly well" or "very well")

This popular approval may reflect a variety of government efforts to promote opportunities for girls and women. Of particular note is the Children Act of 2010 making it a crime to keep any child below 18 years away from school. Educational opportunity is also being enhanced by government and non-governmental programs that provide sanitary towels and build gender-specific latrines in schools to help overcome barriers to school attendance for girls.

The government is also expanding economic opportunities for women by providing training and access to credit through the Women Enterprise Fund. One persistent bottleneck for women's economic empowerment is a lack of support for child care and household work, which limits women's opportunities to work in the formal sector.

### **Women's political and civic participation**

Political and civic participation can help pave a path toward equality and empowerment, yet around the globe, women are less likely than men to join in activities such as contesting and holding political office, voting, and stepping forward to respond to public issues, for example by writing letters to editors and joining social and media discussions (McBride, Sherraden, & Pritzker, 2006; Burns, Schlozman, & Verba, 2001; Inglehart & Norris, 2003).

The Afrobarometer survey asks citizens about their views on women's political leadership and examines political participation and civic engagement through the frequency with which respondents discuss political matters with friends and family, contact leaders, join others to raise issues, and attend community meetings. In Kenya, there has been progress, but a deficit in women's political and civic participation still remains.

#### *Political leadership*

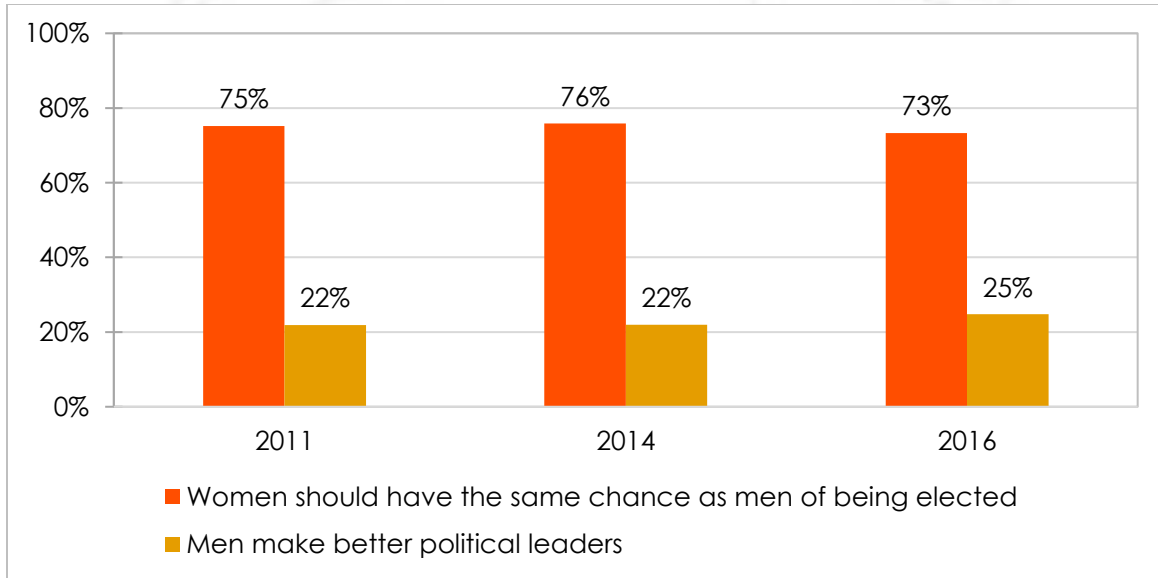
Kenya's constitution requires that no gender constitute more than two-thirds of any public agency. This provision faces great challenges, especially in electoral politics: In the National Assembly, for example, the number of female members has increased steadily (from 1% in 1969 to 10% in 2007 and to 22% in 2017) but remains well below the one-third requirement (Government of Kenya, 2017). This shortfall persists even though 47 of 290 parliamentary seats are reserved for women.

Progress has also been real but slow in other positions, including the first-time election in 2017 of three female governors and three female senators, as well as appointments in the previous government of women as cabinet and principal secretaries.

Three-fourths of Kenyans support political leadership by women: 73% say women should have the same chance as men of being elected to office, about the same proportion as in 2011 and 2014 surveys (Figure 13).

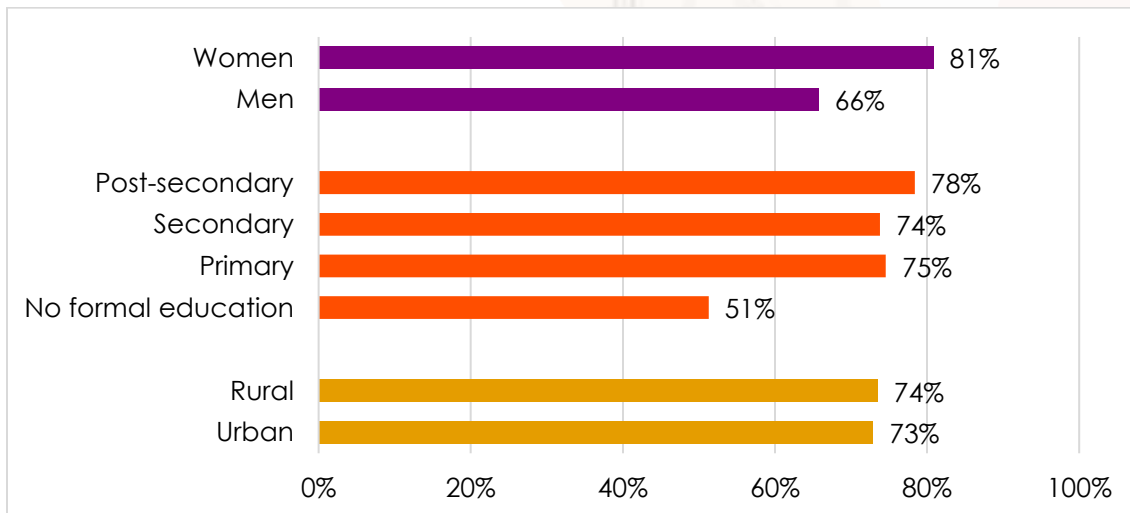
Women are considerably more likely than men to support political leadership by women (81% vs. 66%) (Figure 14). And Kenyans with at least some a primary education show greater support for electing women than those without formal education; in the latter group, only a bare majority (51%) agree that women should have the same chance as men of being elected.

**Figure 13: Should women have the same chance as men of being elected? | Kenya | 2016**



**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 “agree very strongly” with each statement)

**Figure 14: Women should have the same chance as men of being elected | by gender, education level, and urban-rural residency | Kenya | 2016**

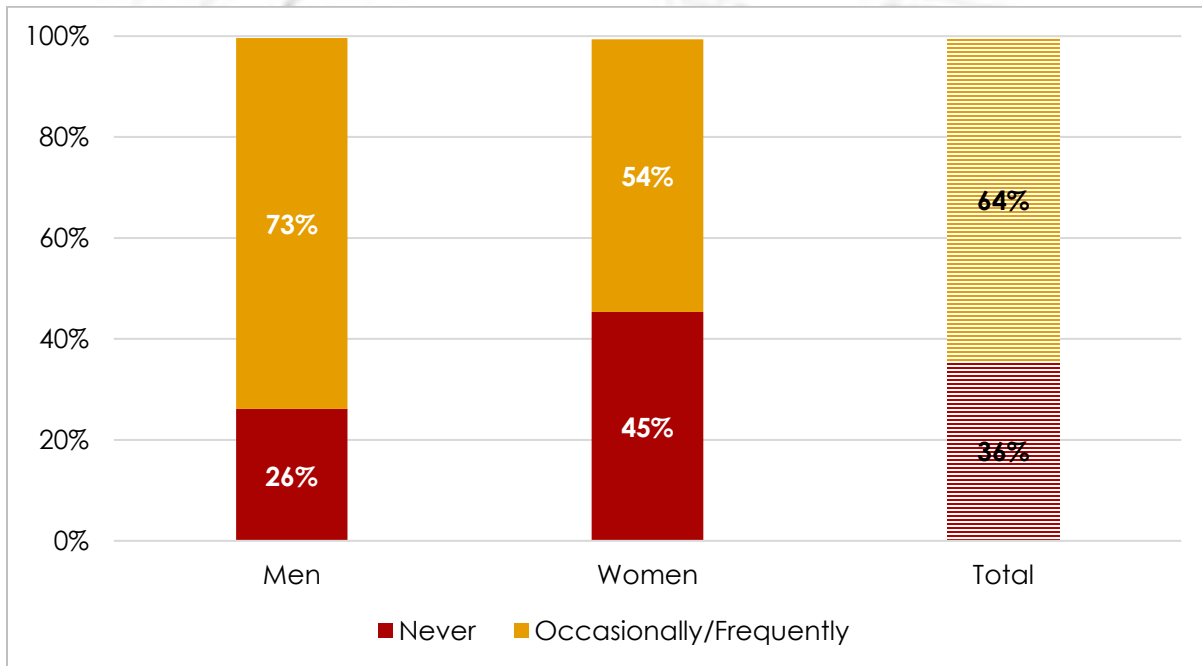


**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?  
 Statement 1: Men make better political leaders than women, and should be elected rather than women.  
 Statement 2: Women should have the same chance of being elected to political office as men.  
 (% who “agree”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

### Discussing politics

Discussing political matters with friends and family constitutes both exposure to issues and a contribution to decisions on issues that concern individuals, households, communities, and the nation. As shown in Figure 15, only 54% of Kenyan women say they “occasionally” or “frequently” discuss political matters, compared to 73% of men.

**Figure 15: Discuss political matters with friends and family | Kenya | 2016**



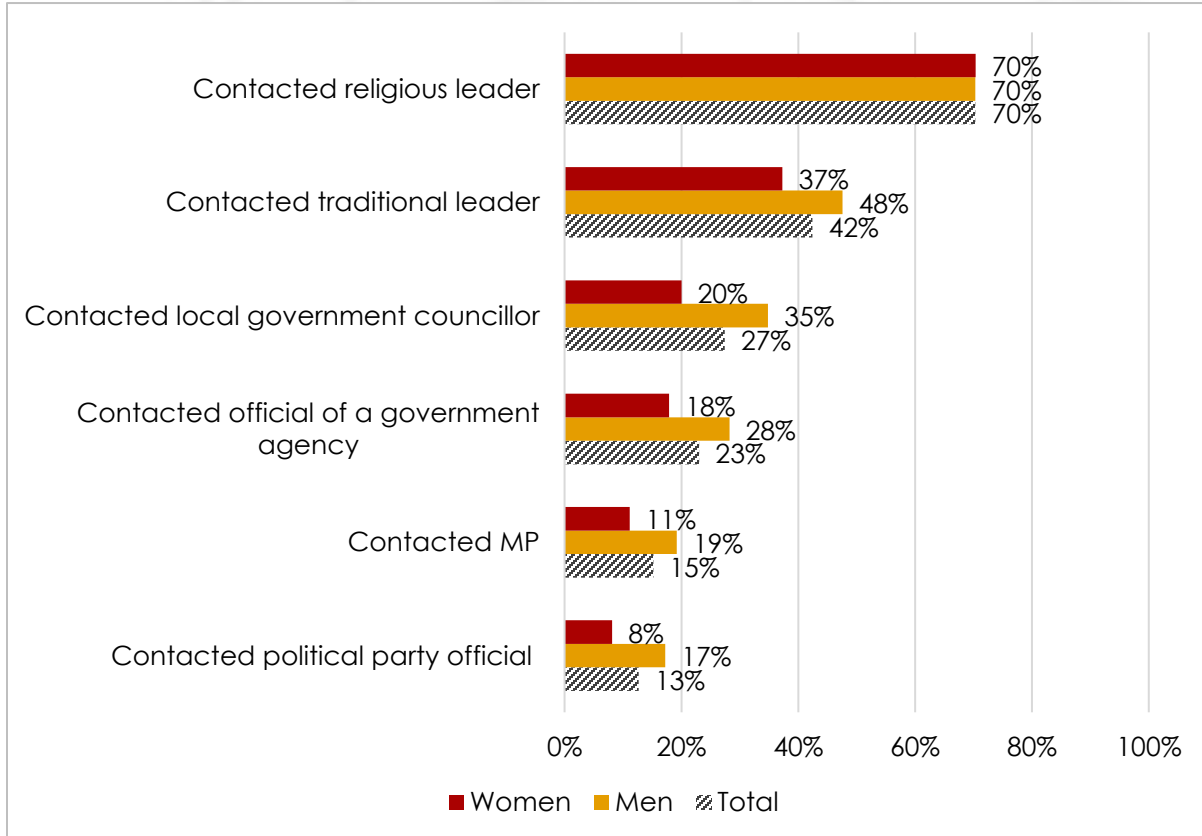
**Respondents were asked:** When you get together with your friends or family, would you say you discuss political matters: Never? Occasionally? Frequently?

### Contacting leaders

Participation is embedded in the Kenya constitution, which mandates that county governments organize quarterly forums for citizen engagement in development issues, including the budget process. Most participatory forums in Kenya are prompted by the leadership, rather than initiated by citizens. As shown in Figure 16, most citizens did not contact political leaders during the year preceding the survey, and women were only about half as likely as men to do so.

Relatively few citizens contacted leaders who hold power over budgetary and other development decisions: a local government councillor (27%), an official of a government agency (23%), or a member of Parliament (15%). The most frequent contact was with religious and traditional leaders, who are not directly charged with planning, budgeting, and implementation of development activities.

**Figure 16: Contacted leaders in past year | by gender | Kenya | 2016**



**Respondents were asked:** *During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views? (% who say “only once,” “a few times,” or “often”)*

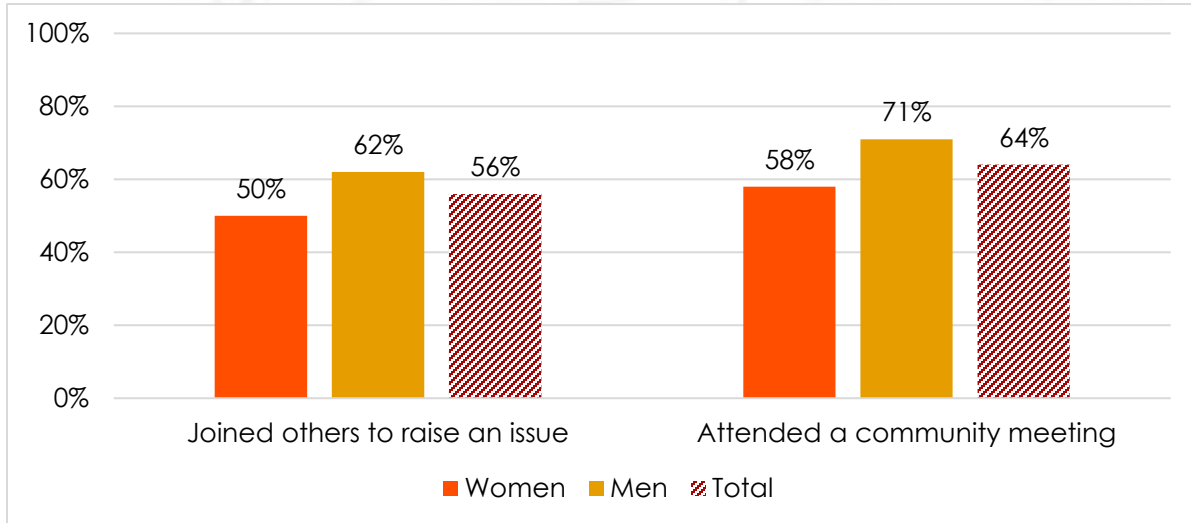
### *Raising issues and attending community meetings*

While not likely to contact political leaders, Kenyans are more active in joining others to raise an issue and attending community meetings (Figure 17) – important connections that might also stimulate interest in discussing politics, contacting leaders, and other forms of engagement.

A majority (56%) of respondents say they joined others to raise an issue (56%) at least once during the year preceding the survey. But here again, women lag behind men in their participation: While 62% of men say they joined others to raise an issue, only 50% of women did so.

Similarly, while almost two-thirds (64%) of all respondents say they attended at least one community meeting during the previous year, this includes only 58% of women compared to 71% of men. Community meetings, especially chiefs' barazas, date back to the colonial period as important avenues for getting information, and as re-conceptualized under the country's devolved system serve as important forums for participatory governance.

**Figure 17: Participation in civic activities** | Kenya | 2016



**Respondents were asked:** Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year:

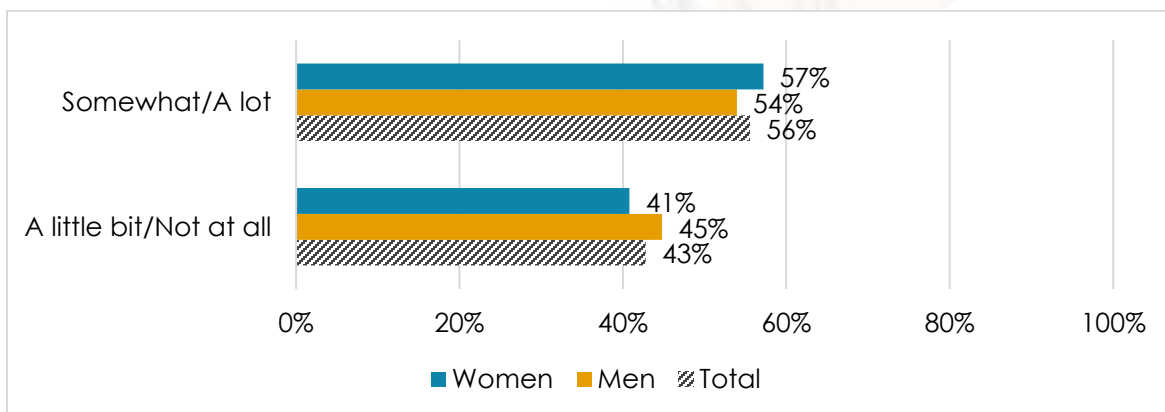
- Got together with others to raise an issue?
- Attended a community meeting?

(% who say "once or twice," "several times," or "often")

### Fear of political violence and intimidation

Fear of violence can represent a significant barrier to political participation. In survey responses collected in September-October 2016 – well before the troubled 2017 election – a majority (56%) of Kenyans said they fear political violence or intimidation "somewhat" or "a lot," while 43% say they fear them "a little bit" or "not at all" (Figure 18). Differences between women and men were minimal.

**Figure 18: Fear of political violence or intimidation** | by gender | Kenya | 2016



**Respondents were asked:** During election campaigns in this country, how much do you personally fear becoming a victim of political intimidation or violence?

## Conclusion

A majority of Kenyans applaud the government's performance on promoting women's equality and opportunities, and say things have in fact improved. Most citizens believe that gender equality is already a reality when it comes to educational and job opportunities. But fewer would claim equality with regard to women's right to own and inherit land. In fact, four in 10 men don't agree that women *should* have this right.

Substantial minorities of men also dispute women's right to a fair chance at being elected, affirm that men should receive preferential treatment when it comes to getting a job, and believe that wife beating is sometimes or always justified.

If some men's attitudes represent barriers to equality, so might women's deficits in political engagement. If women were more active in discussing politics, contacting leaders, joining others to raise an issue, attending community meetings, and running for office, might they help bring Kenya closer to gender equality?

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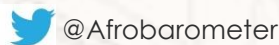
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