

Most Ghanaians support gender fairness in political leadership, but women trail men in participation, digital access, asset ownership

Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 400 | Josephine Appiah-Nyamekye Sanny and Mavis Zupork Dome

Summary

Over the past three decades, Ghana has taken a variety of steps to promote gender equity. Its 1992 Constitution guarantees equality and freedom from discrimination (Government of Ghana, 1992). In 1998, Ghana began working on – but has still not passed – an Affirmative Action Bill that seeks to promote a progressive increase in active participation of women in the public bureaucracy to a parity of 50% by 2030.

The National Gender Policy followed in 2015, aiming “to mainstream gender equality concerns into the national development processes” (Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, 2015). The government has expressed its full commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including Goal 5, which calls for ensuring women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life.

Progress has been measurable but modest. The number of female parliamentarians has grown from just one out of 140 in 1969 to 31 out of 275, or 11% (Ghana Centre for Empowering Development, 2019). In 2020, for the first time in Ghana, a major political party (the National Democratic Party) has nominated a woman as its vice presidential candidate, while a woman heads the Progressive People’s Party ticket. But these are a far cry from the kind of robust political participation and representation by women that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) describes as “key indicators of the general level of public sector effectiveness and accountability in a country” (Asuako, 2017, p. 5) and “a key driver for advancing gender equality” more broadly (United Nations Development Programme, 2016).

Analysts point to a variety of economic and cultural reasons why progress has been slow. Madsen (2019), of the Nordic Africa Institute, for example, cites among persistent barriers the majoritarian or “first-past-the-post” nature of Ghanaian politics (as opposed to proportional representation), the high monetary cost of running for office, and a political culture in which elected women are seen as either “small girls” or “iron ladies.”

Afrobarometer’s most recent survey in Ghana shows that even though there is strong popular support for women in political leadership, political and civic participation is lower among women than among men. The survey also shows persistent gender gaps in education, digital access, and ownership of key assets.

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. Seven rounds of surveys were completed in up to 38 countries between 1999 and 2018.

Round 8 surveys in 2019/2021 are planned in at least 35 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Ghana, led by the Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), interviewed 2,400 adult Ghanaians between 16 September and 3 October 2019. 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 Ghana in 1999, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014, and 2017.

Key findings

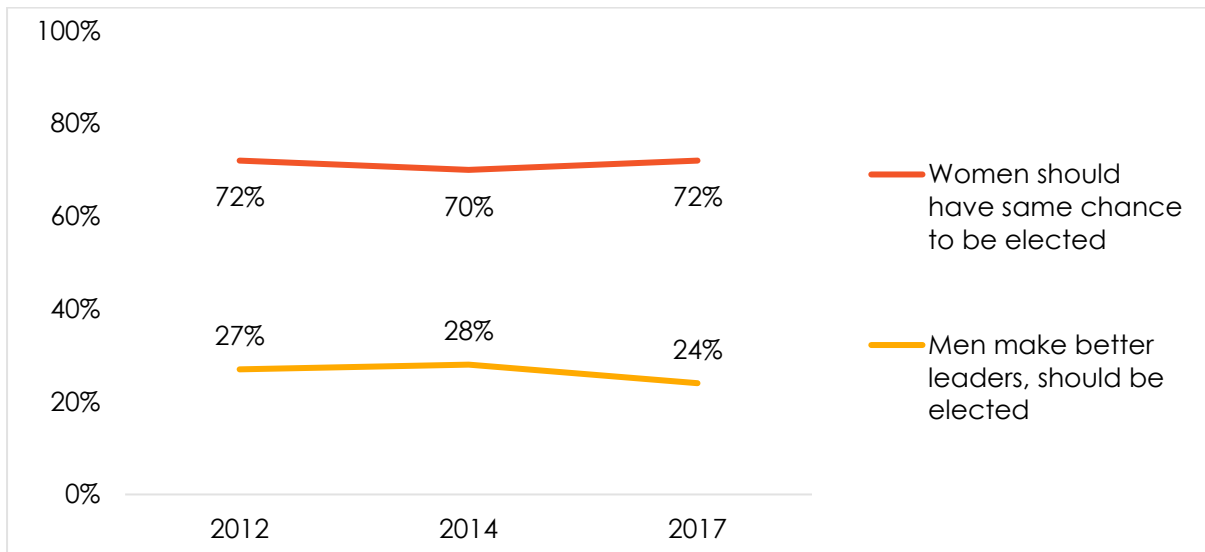
- Seven in 10 Ghanaians (72%) want women to have the same chance as men of being elected to political office, but a quarter (24%) still think men make better leaders than women.
- Women and men are equally likely to say they voted in the 2016 elections, but women lag behind men in other forms of political and civic engagement. These include an 18-percentage-point gap in joining others to raise an issue (53% of men vs. 35% of women) and 11-point gaps in discussing politics (70% vs. 59%) and attending community meetings (55% vs. 44%).
- Men are twice as likely as women to have post-secondary education, whereas women are twice as likely as men to lack formal education.
- Women trail men in the ownership of a range of key assets, including a bank account (19-percentage-point difference), motor vehicle (17 points), computer (12 points), and mobile phone (9 points).
- Since 2008, women's disadvantage in digital connection has consistently widened (from 5 to 17 percentage points) even though women's regular use of the Internet has increased.

Political and civic engagement

Since Afrobarometer began asking respondents about their views on women in political leadership in 2012, about seven in 10 Ghanaians (70%-72%) have supported the idea that women should have the same chance as men of being elected to political office (Figure 1). But about a quarter (24%) of Ghanaians still think "men make better political leaders than women, and should be elected rather than women."

Men are almost twice as likely as women to say that men make better leaders than women (31% vs. 17%) (Figure 2). So are young adults (27%) compared to older citizens (15% of those aged 56 and above). The view that men make better leaders is slightly more common among uneducated citizens (28%) than among those with at least primary education (23%-24%).

Figure 1: Support for women in political leadership | Ghana | 2012-2017

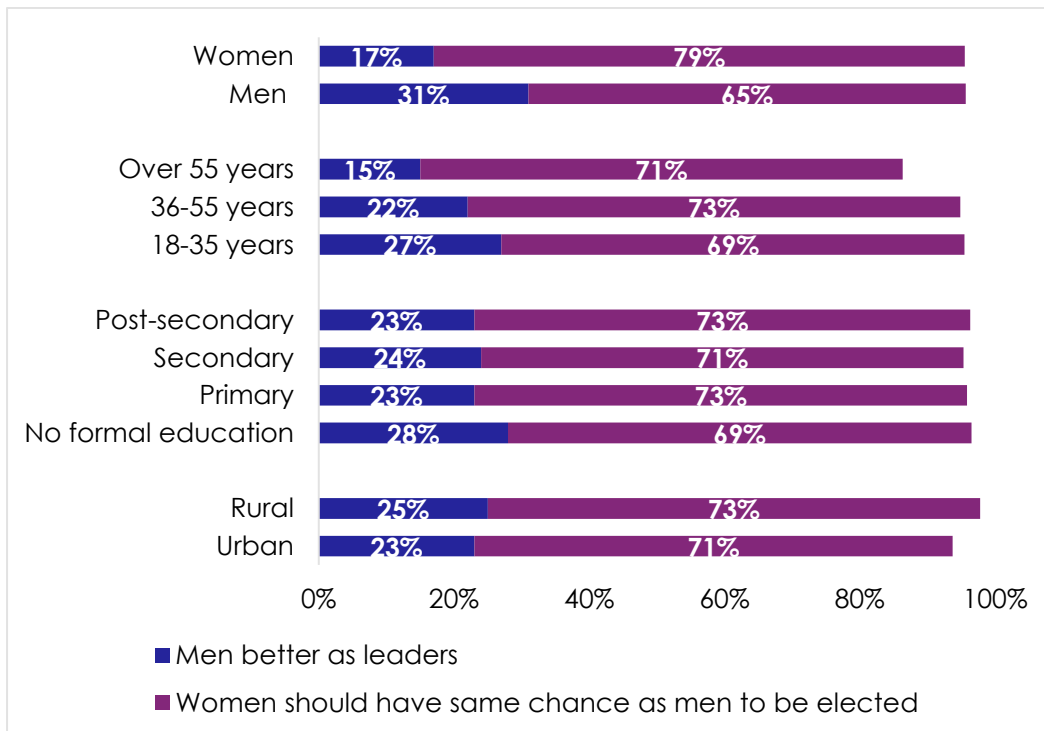


Respondents were asked: Which of these statements is closest to your view?

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 2: Support for women in political leadership | by socio-demographic group | Ghana | 2017



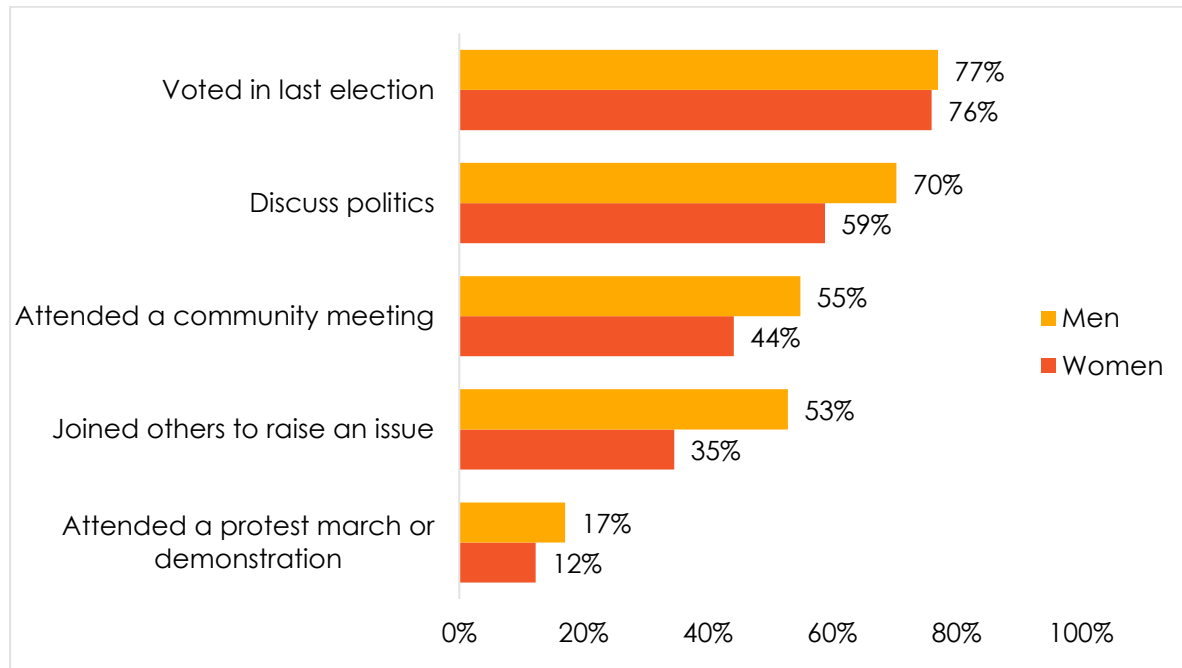
Respondents were asked: Which of these statements is closest to your view?

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)

In spite of popular support for women in political leadership, political and civic participation remains less common among women than among men (Figure 3). Although the two genders are equally likely to say they voted in the 2016 elections, only six in 10 women (59%) say they discuss political matters “occasionally” or “frequently,” compared to 70% of men. Women are also less likely than men to have joined others to raise an issue during the previous year (35% of women vs. 53% of men) and to have attended a community meeting (44% vs. 55%) or protest march (12% vs. 17%).

Figure 3: Political participation and civic engagement | by gender | Ghana | 2019



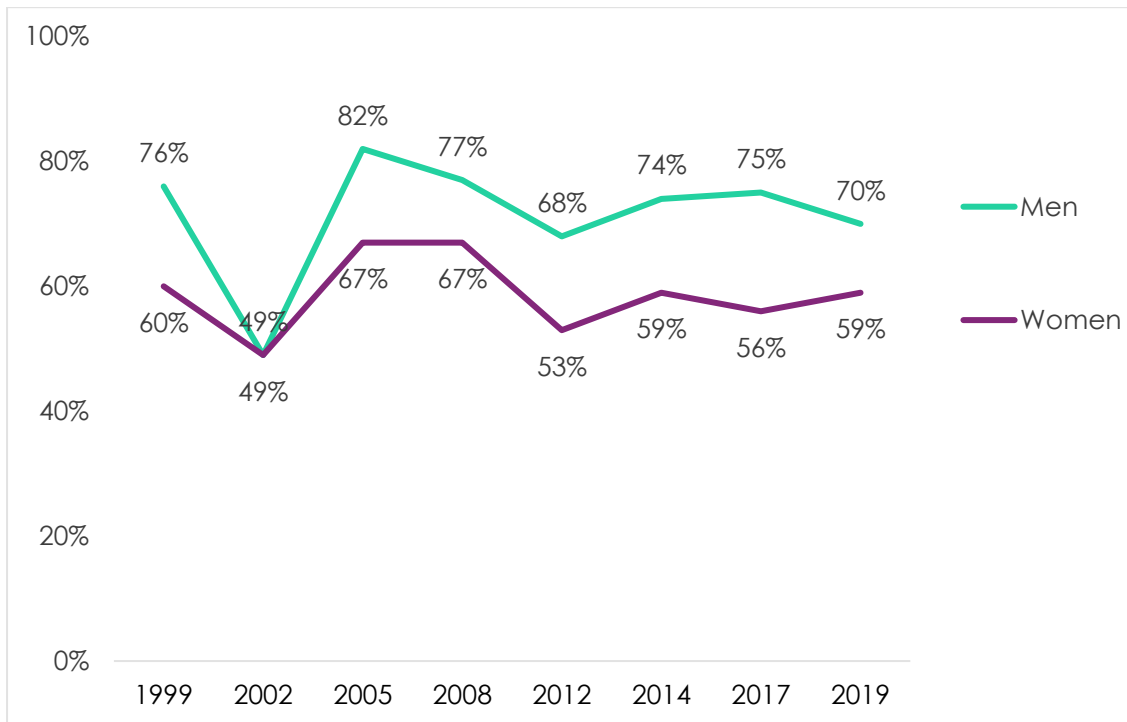
Respondents were asked:

*In the last national election, held in 2016, did you vote, or not, or were you too young to vote?
 When you get together with your friends or family, would you say you discuss political matters:
 Frequently? Occasionally? Never? (% who say “frequently” or “occasionally”)
 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.
 Attended a community meeting?
 Got together with others to raise an issue?
 Participated in a demonstration or protest march?
 (% who say at least once or twice)*

Since Afrobarometer's first survey in 1999, women have consistently expressed less interest than men in politics, although the gap has declined from 16 percentage points in 1999 to 11 points in 2019 (Figure 4). Similarly, women have consistently lagged behind men when it comes to attending community meetings. Both genders are less likely to attend such meetings than they were two decades ago, preserving a double-digit gap (55% vs. 44% in 2019) (Figure 5). The pattern is similar for joining others to raise an issue (Figure 6).

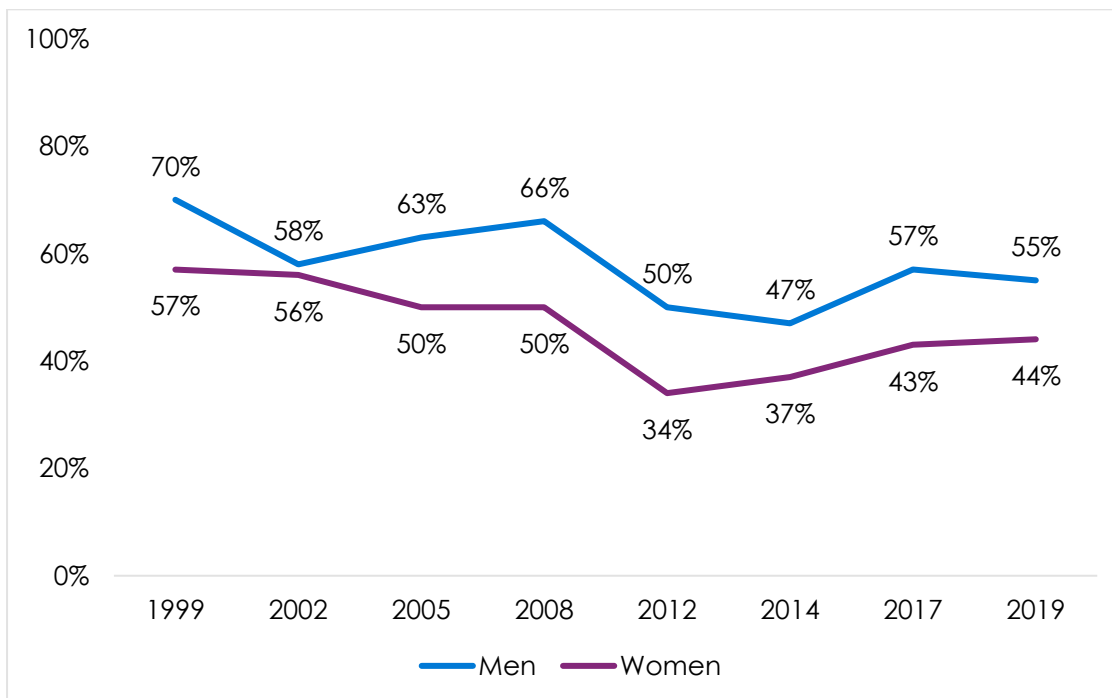
Women also trail men when it comes to engaging political figures. In 2019, women were about half as likely as men to say they contacted their local government councillors (20% vs. 38%), a political party official (12% vs. 28%), or a member of Parliament (9% vs. 20%) about important problems or to share their views during the previous year (Figure 7).

Figure 4: Discuss politics | by gender | Ghana | 1999-2019



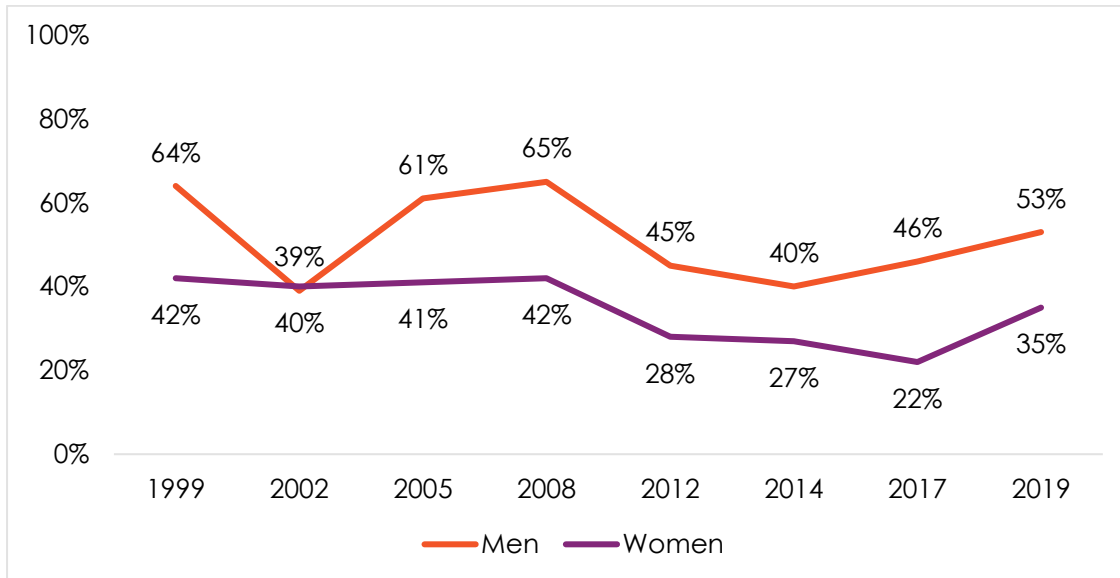
Respondents were asked: When you get together with your friends or family, would you say you discuss political matters: Frequently? Occasionally? Never? (% who say "frequently" or "occasionally")

Figure 5: Attended a community meeting | by gender | Ghana | 1999-2019



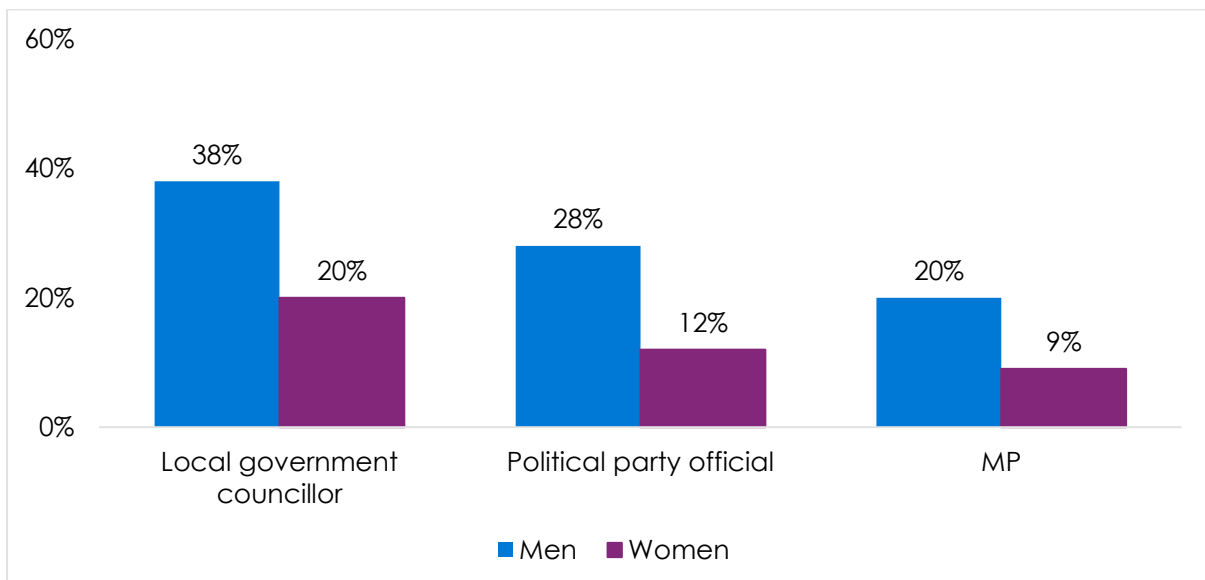
Respondents were asked: For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year: Attended a community meeting? (% who say "once or twice," "several times," or "often")

Figure 6: Joined others to raise an issue | by gender | Ghana | 1999-2019



Respondents were asked: For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year: Joined others to raise an issue? (% who say “once or twice,” “several times,” or “often”)

Figure 7: Contact with key political actors | by gender | Ghana | 2019



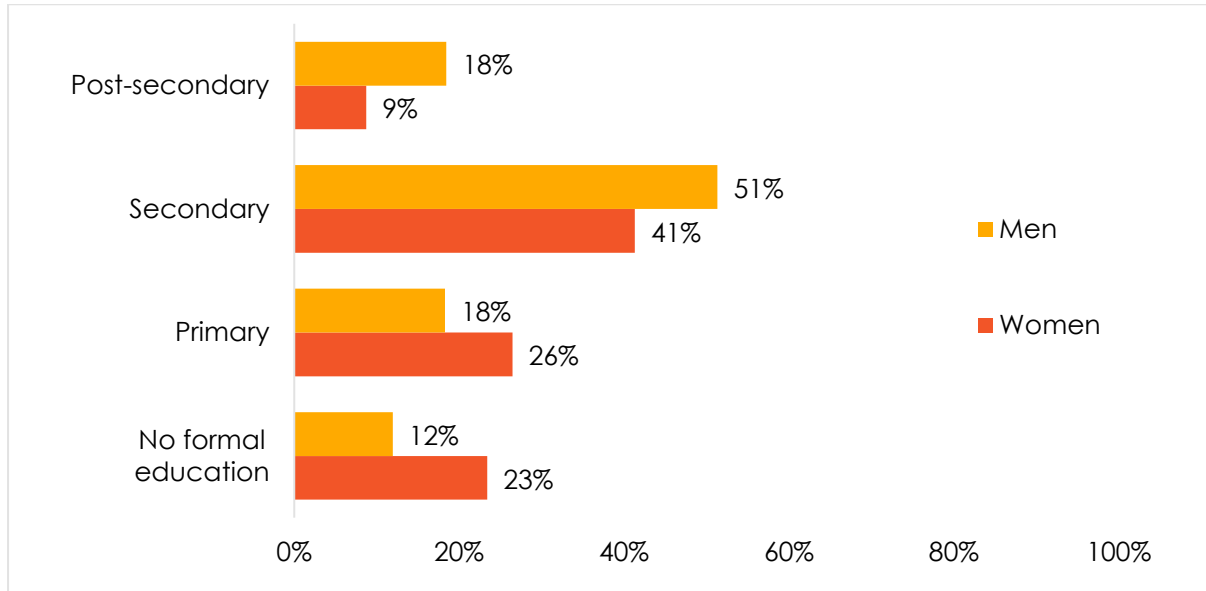
Respondents were asked: During the past year, how often have you contacted any of the following persons about some important problem or to give them your views? (% who say “only once,” “a few times,” or “often”)

Educational gaps

In spite of efforts by government and non-governmental organizations to promote girl-child education in Ghana, men are twice as likely as women to have post-secondary education (18% vs 9%), whereas women are twice as likely as men to lack formal education (23% vs. 12%) (Figure 8). Although the lack of formal education has decreased since 2005, the gap

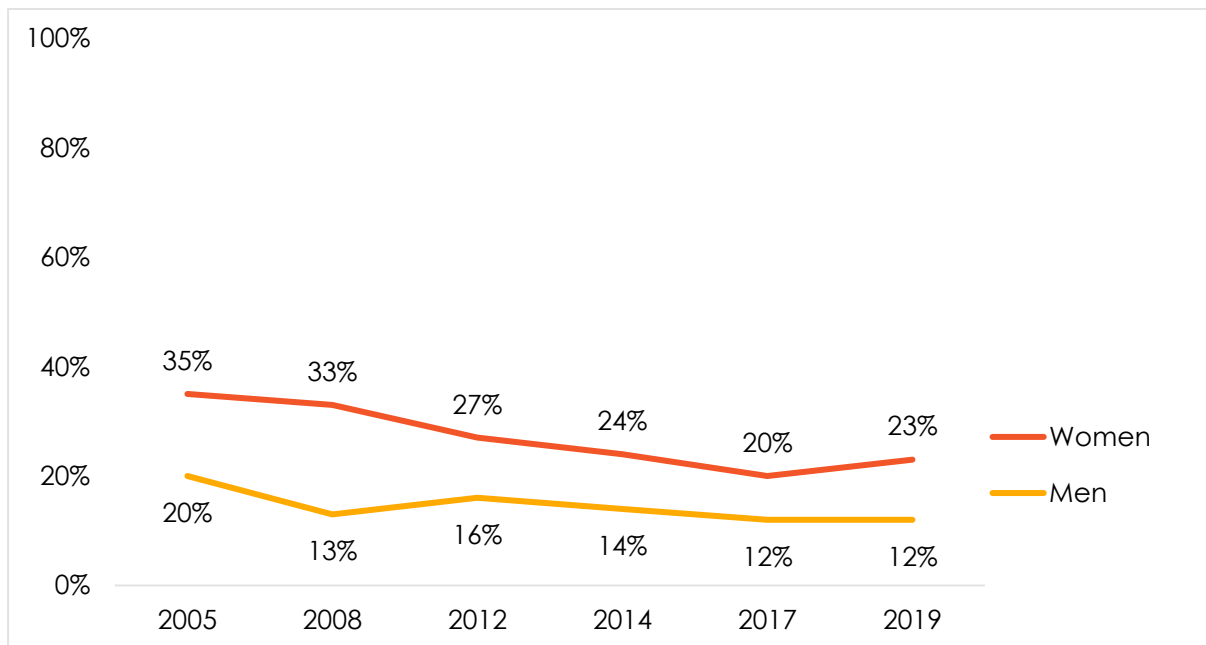
between men and women with no formal education has only declined marginally (15 percentage points in 2005 vs. 11 percentage points in 2019) (Figure 9).

Figure 8: Educational levels | by gender | Ghana | 2019



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

Figure 9: Lack of formal education | by gender | Ghana | 2005-2019



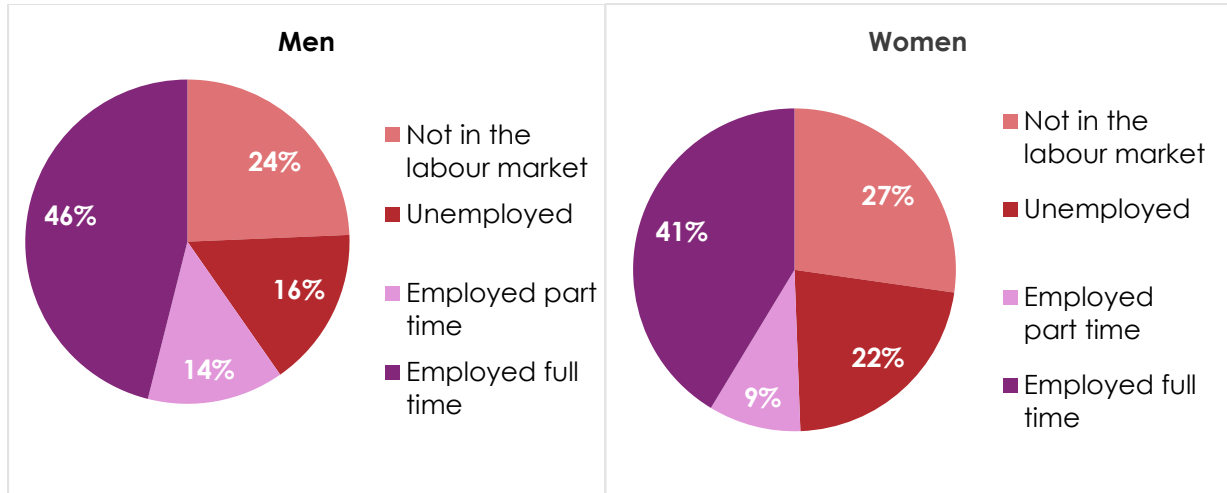
Respondents were asked: What is your highest level of education? (% with no formal education)

Employment, asset ownership, and financial autonomy

In Ghana, men are 10 percentage points more likely than women to have full-time or part-time employment (60% vs. 50%), while women are more likely than men to be unemployed or not in the labour market (49% vs. 40%) (Figure 10).

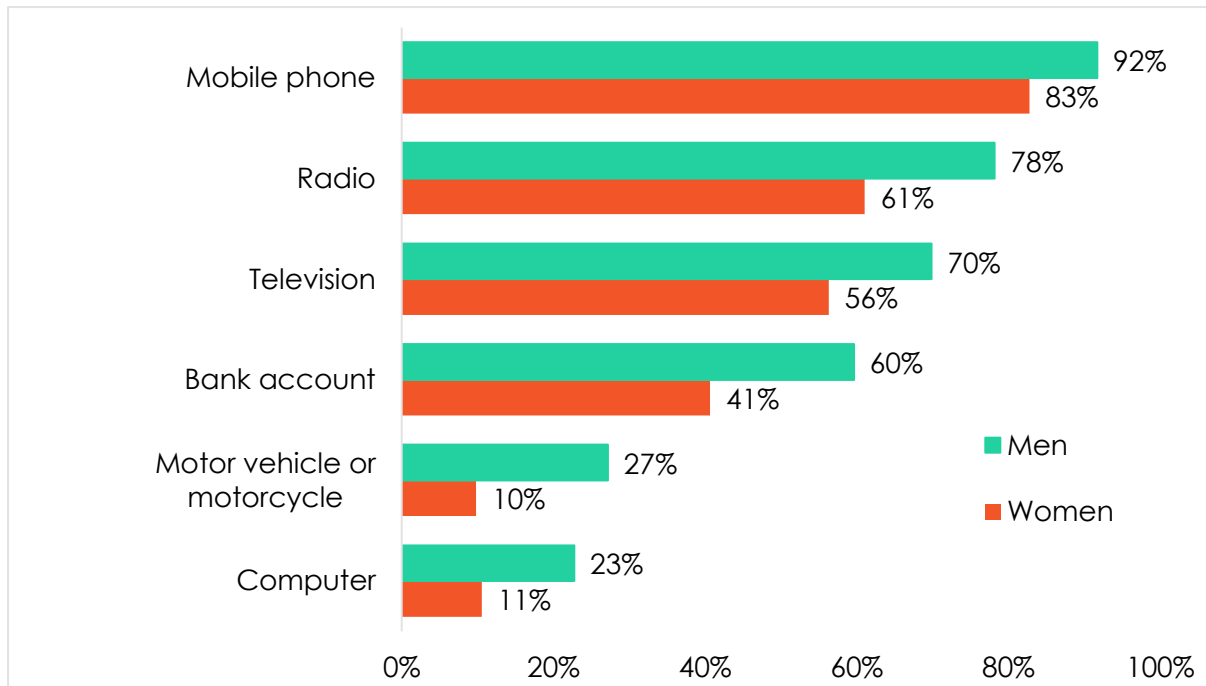
Women also trail men in the ownership of a range of key assets, including a bank account (41% vs. 60%, a 19-percentage-point difference), motor vehicle (10% vs. 27%), computer (11% vs. 23%), and mobile phone (83% vs. 92%) (Figure 11).

Figure 10: Employment status | by gender | Ghana | 2019



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?

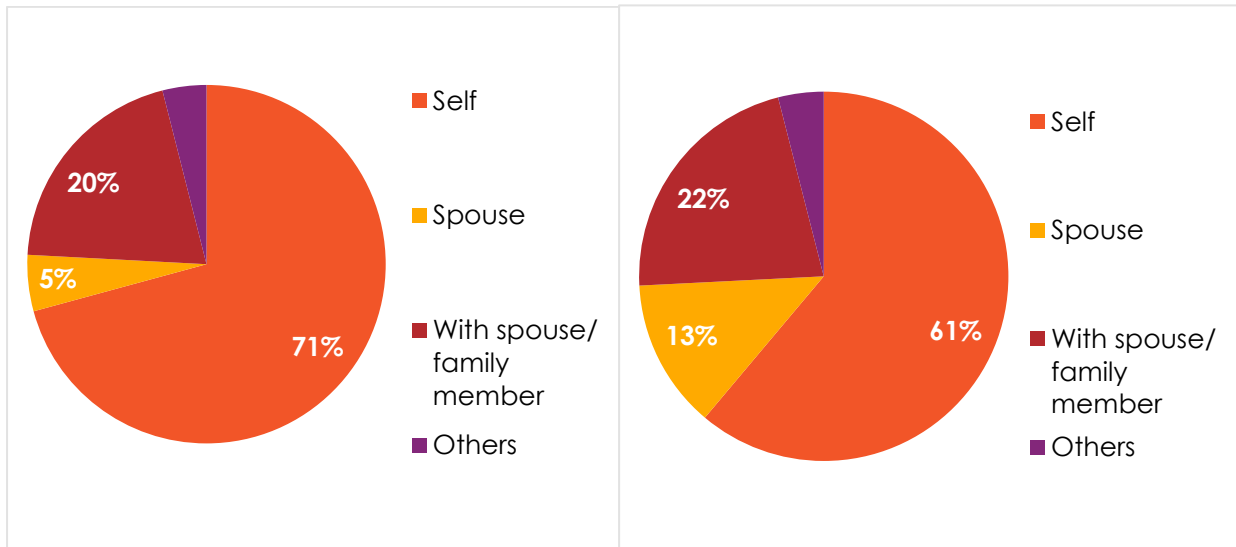
Figure 11: Asset ownership | by gender | Ghana | 2019



Respondents were asked: Which of these things do you personally own? Does anyone else in your household own one? (% who say they personally own these assets)

Men are 10 percentage points more likely than women to say they make decisions themselves about how household money is spent (71% vs. 61%), while women are more than twice as likely as men to defer that responsibility to their spouses (13% vs. 5%) (Figure 12). Equal proportions say they take such decisions with their spouses or other family members.

Figure 12: Deciding how money is used | by gender | Ghana | 2019

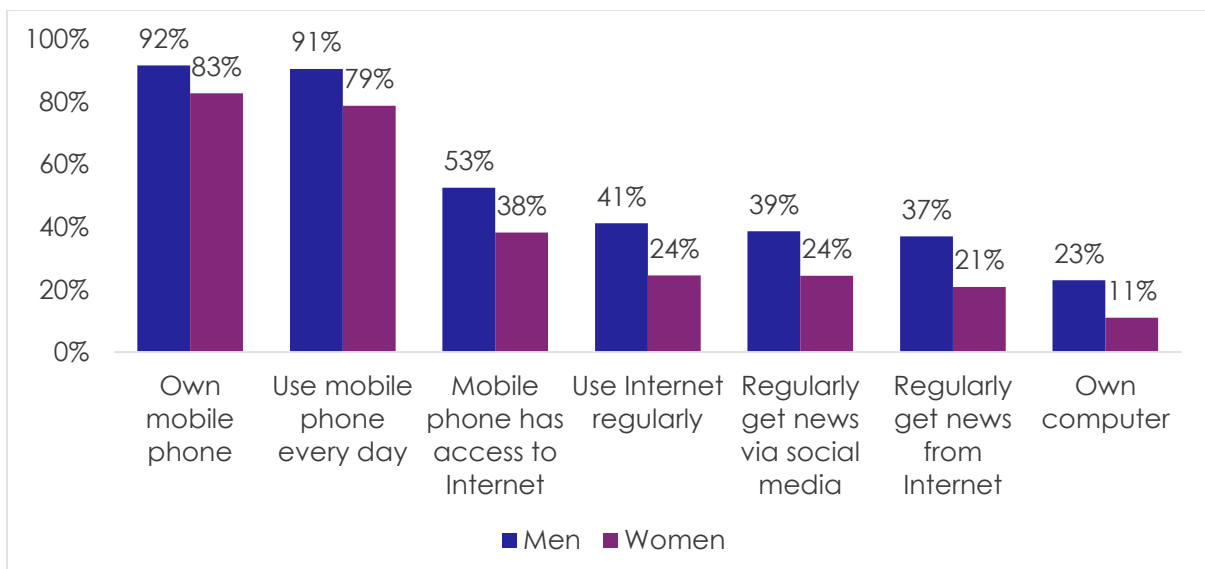


Respondents were asked: What is the main way that decisions are made about how to use any money that you have or earn, for example from a job, a business, selling things, or other activities?

Digital gaps

Disadvantages in mobile-phone and computer ownership are not the only indicators of a digital gender gap. Women are also less likely than men to use a mobile phone every day (79% vs. 91%), to have a phone with access to the Internet (38% vs. 53%), to access the Internet regularly (24% vs. 41%), and to get news from the Internet or social media (Figure 13).

Figure 13: Evidence of the digital divide | by gender | Ghana | 2019

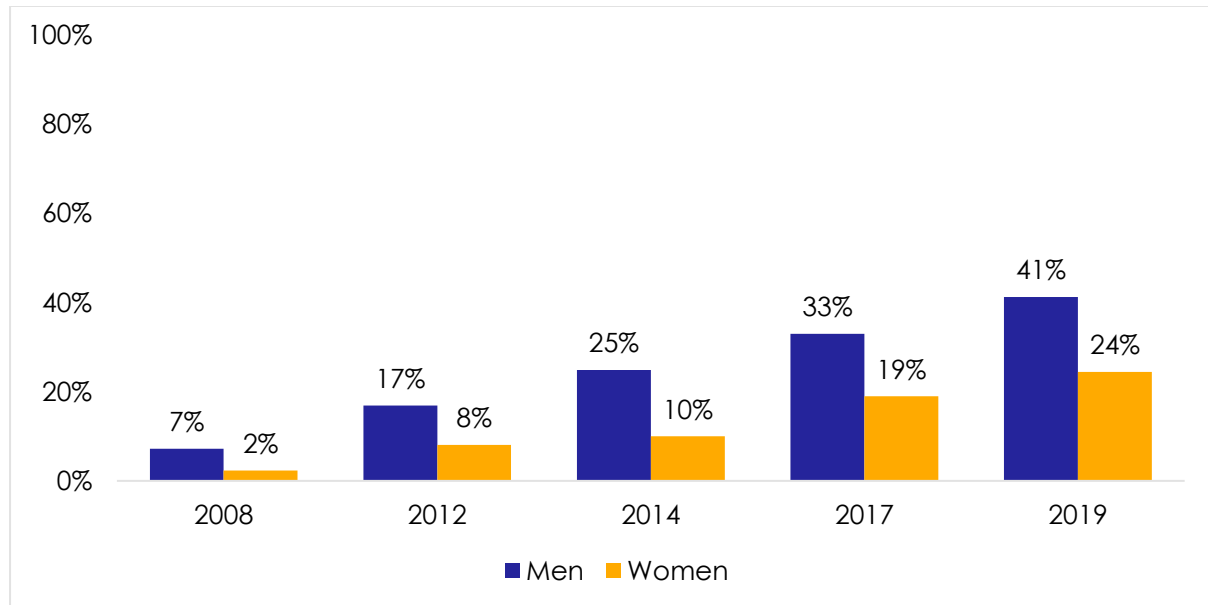


Respondents were asked:

- Which of these things do you personally own: Mobile phone? Computer? (% "yes")
- Does your phone have access to the Internet? (% "yes" among those who personally own a phone)
- How often do you use a mobile phone? (% "a few times a week" or "every day")
- How often do you use the Internet? (% "a few times a week" or "every day")
- How often do you get news from the following sources: Internet? Social media? (% "a few times a week" or "every day")

Since 2008, the gap in regular Internet usage between men and women has consistently widened (from 5 to 17 percentage points), even though women's regular use of the Internet has increased (Figure 14).

Figure 14: Gender gap in regular Internet usage | by gender | Ghana | 2008-2019



Respondents were asked: How often do you use the Internet? (% "a few times a week" or "every day")

Conclusion

In spite of consistently strong support for equal opportunity for women to be elected to political office, wide gender gaps persist in terms of political and civic participation. Compared to men, women are less interested in politics and less likely to participate in political and civic activities or engage with political actors. While women's-rights advocates continue to push for parity in political leadership, there is also a need to sensitize women about the importance of participating in political and civic activities, and to ensure that fair opportunities and rewards await them if they do.

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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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