

## For Senegalese women, advancement is real but uneven

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**Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 305 | Thomas Isbell, David Jacobs, and Christina Scheller**

### Summary

The political, economic, and social inequality of women in Africa has fueled significant international discourse since the 1950s, when the United Nations (UN) began interrogating the effects of harmful traditional practices on women across the continent. Human-rights groups have attempted to put pressure on African governments to promote women's access to education, health care, economic opportunities, and participation in governance and politics (Murungu, 2017). UN member states made the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment their Sustainable Development Goal No. 5 (United Nations, 2019). Though there is some optimism about progress toward women's equality, challenges remain abundant (United Nations, 2016).

Senegal has taken several steps to promote women's rights, such as anchoring gender equality in its Constitution (Article 7), ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), creating a "national parity observatory (Observatoire National de Parité, 2017), and developing a National Strategy for Gender Equality and Equity (UN Women, 2018; UN Human Rights, 2015). After the adoption of a parity law in 2010 designed to ensure that half of all political offices are held by women, the 2012 election saw a record 64 women elected to Parliament. But while some have pointed to the benefits of women having representatives and role models to empower them, others have said that women are being given "an easy route" into politics based on their gender and not their merit, stifling development and democracy (Hirsch, 2012).

In this paper, we use Afrobarometer survey data to explore popular attitudes and views on gender rights and equality among ordinary Senegalese. We find that Senegalese are generally supportive of equal opportunities for women. A majority believe women should have an equal chance to be elected to political office and should have the same rights as men to own or inherit land. Yet women still lag behind men in many aspects of society, particularly with regard to economic opportunity and access to resources.

### Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer, a nonprofit organization headquartered in Ghana, directs a pan-African, nonpartisan research network that conducts public attitude surveys on democracy, governance, economic conditions, and related issues in African countries. Seven rounds of surveys have been completed in up to 38 countries since 1999. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice with nationally representative samples.

The Afrobarometer team in Senegal, led by Carrefour d'Etude et de Recherche – Action pour le Développement et la Démocratie (CERADD), interviewed 1,200 adult Senegalese in December 2017. 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 Senegal in 2002, 2005, 2008, 2013, and 2014.

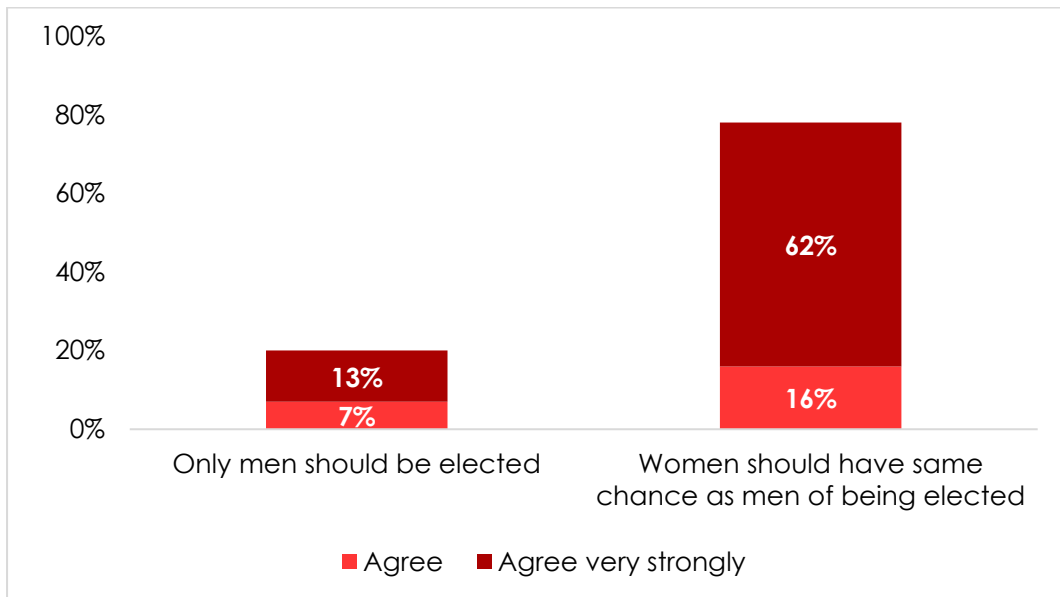
## Key findings

- Overall, Senegalese support equal opportunity and are satisfied with the government's promotion of gender equality.
  - More than three-fourths (78%) of respondents say women should have the same chance as men of being elected to public office. This support has increased by 14 percentage points since 2013.
  - A majority (59%) of Senegalese say the government is doing a good job of promoting equal rights and opportunities for women.
  - A similar majority (57%) report improvements in equal opportunities and treatment of women compared to a few years ago. Men are more likely than women to see improvement.
  - Still, 8% of women report experiencing discrimination on account of their gender during the previous year.
  
- Disparities become more apparent when we examine women's access to jobs and other resources.
  - Four in five Senegalese (82%) say women and men today have an equal chance of getting a paying job. But more than half (52%) think men should have priority when jobs are scarce.
  - Men are twice as likely as women to have paid employment (49% vs. 24%) and to claim financial decision-making power (60% vs. 31%).
  - While more than two-thirds (69%) of Senegalese say women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land, only 53% think they already enjoy these rights.
  - Men are more likely than women to personally own mobile phones, radios, televisions, computers, cars and motorcycles, and bank accounts. Women are more likely to report that others in their household own these items.
  - Women are more likely than men to report having difficulty accessing some basic public services.
  
- Despite these lingering disparities, Senegalese men and women report similar levels of political and civic participation.
  - Men and women voted at similar rates in the last election and are equally likely to feel close to a political party.
  - Women are slightly more likely than men to be part of a voluntary association or community group, though men are more likely to report holding a leadership position in such a group.

## Should women have an equal chance to be elected?

Nearly four out of five Senegalese (78%) say women should have the same chance as men to be elected to public office, including 62% who "agree very strongly" with this position (Figure 1). Support for equal opportunity at the ballot box, which is higher than the average of 71% across 34 countries surveyed in 2016/2018, has increased by 14 percentage points since 2013 (Figure 2).

**Figure 1: Women should have equal chance to be elected | Senegal | 2017**

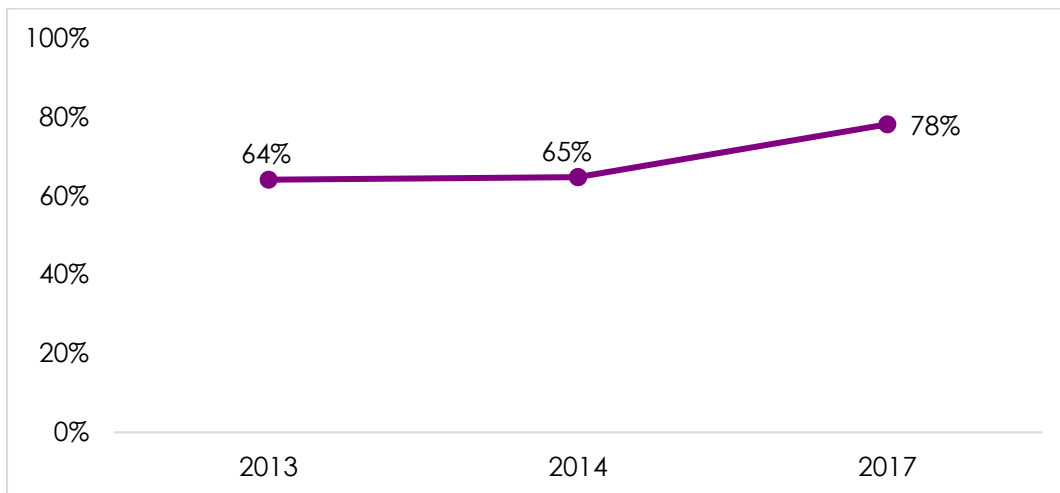


**Respondents were asked:** Which of the following statements is closest to your view?

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.

**Figure 2: Women should have equal chance to be elected | Senegal | 2013-2017**

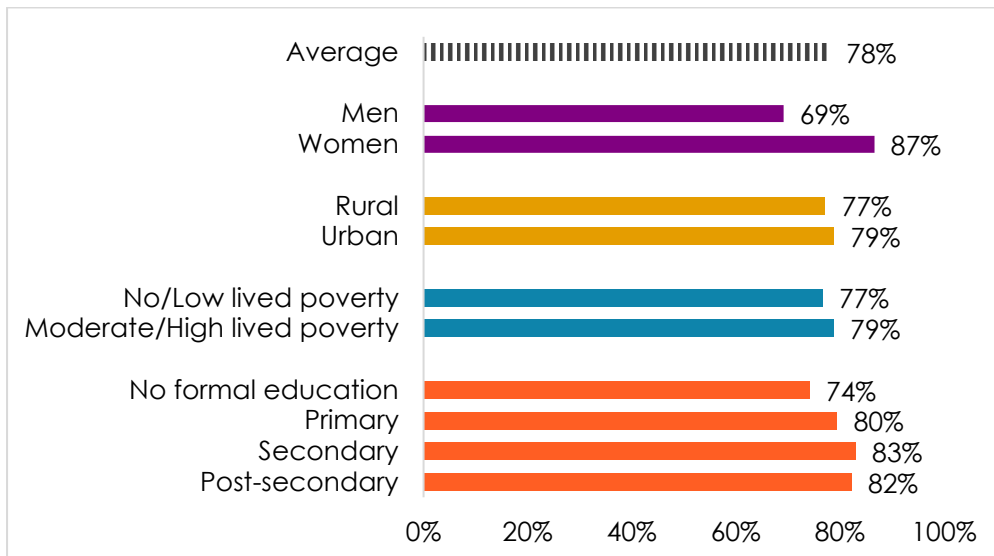


% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" that women should have the same chance as men of being elected to political office

Women are much more likely than men to support equal opportunity to be elected, 87% vs. 69%. Education increases support as well, but differences by urban-rural residence and economic status<sup>1</sup> are negligible (Figure 3).

<sup>1</sup> 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.

**Figure 3: Women should have equal chance to be elected** | by socio-demographic group | Senegal | 2017

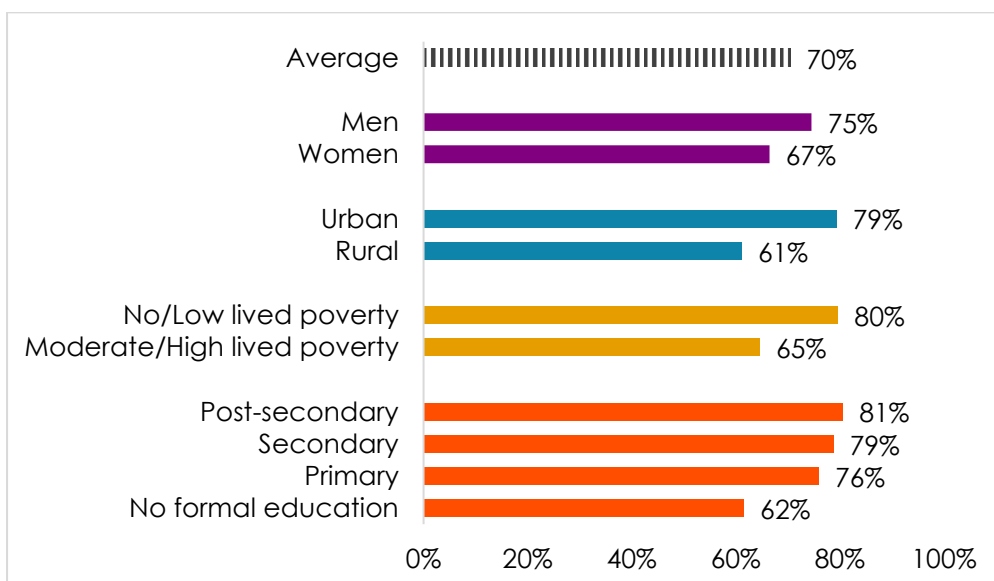


% who "agree" or "agree very strongly" that women should have the same chance as men of being elected to political office

### Government performance and experience of discrimination

Seven out of 10 Senegalese (70%) say the government is doing "fairly well" or "very well" at promoting equal rights and opportunities for women. Men are more likely than women to approve of the government's performance, 75% vs. 67%. Praise is also more widespread among urban, economically better-off, and educated citizens, which may reflect the better opportunities that women in these demographic groups enjoy (Figure 4).

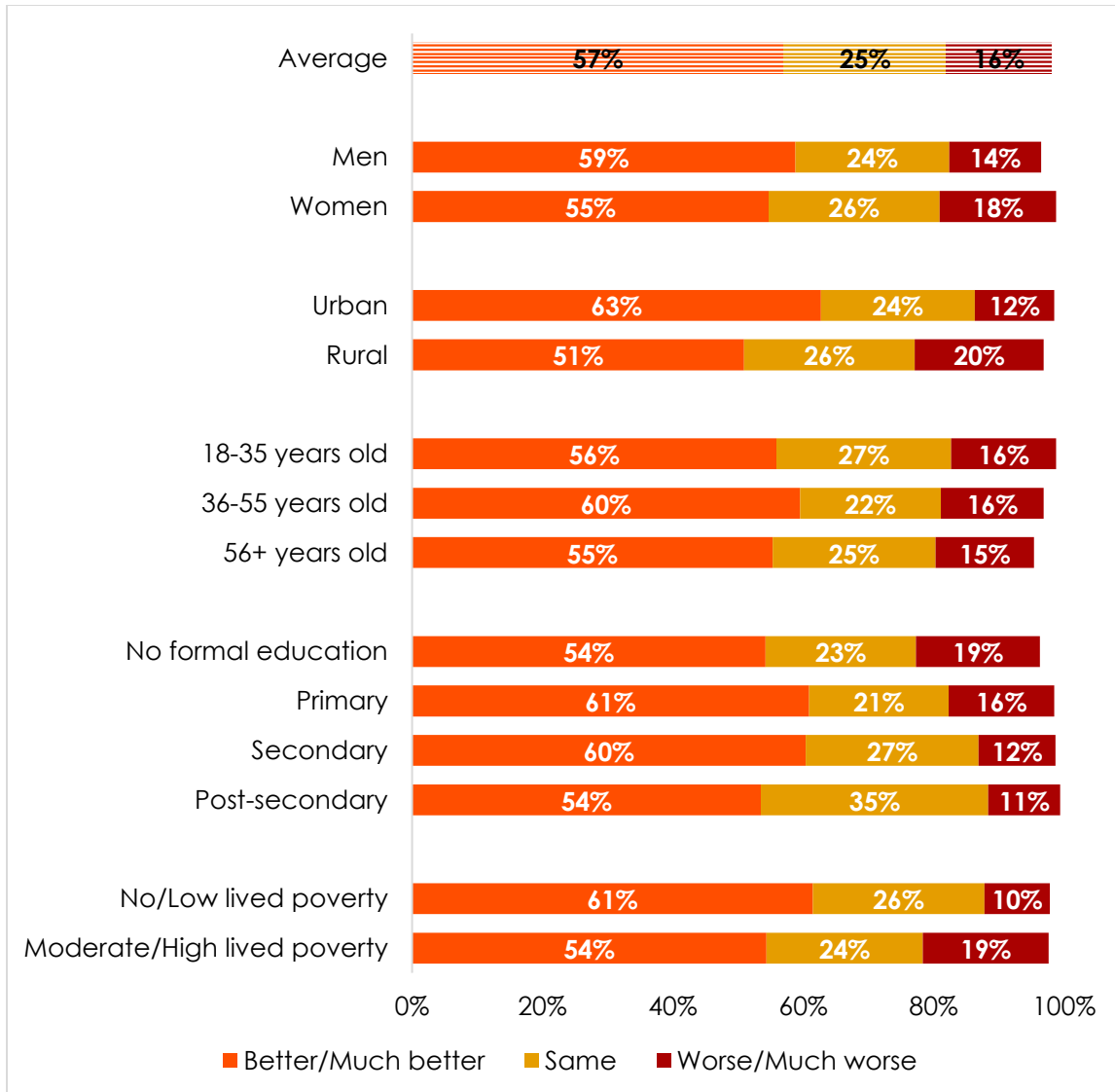
**Figure 4: Government doing well at promoting equal rights and opportunities for women** | by socio-demographic group | Senegal | 2017



**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")

A majority of Senegalese also see progress: 57% say that equal opportunities and treatment of women has gotten “better” or “much better” compared to “a few years ago,” while 25% say things have stayed the same and 16% feel the situation has gotten worse. Again, urban respondents (63%), men (59%), and the better-off (61%) are more likely to think things have improved than rural residents (51%), women (55%), and poorer respondents (54%) (Figure 5).

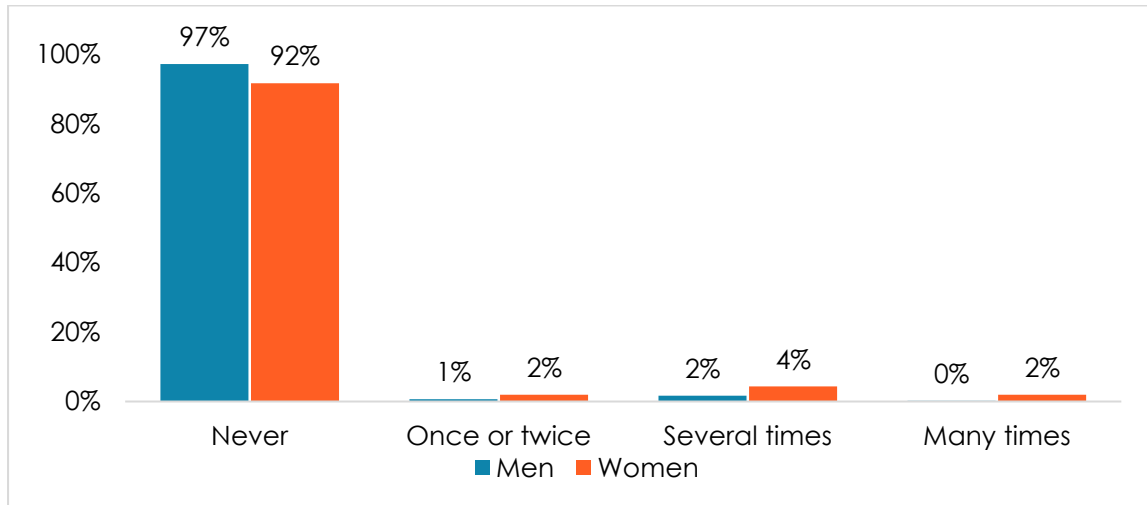
**Figure 5: Better or worse: equal opportunities and treatment for women**  
 | by socio-demographic group | Senegal | 2017



**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?

Encouragingly, the vast majority of Senegalese say they did not experience gender-based discrimination during the year preceding the survey. But women were almost three times as likely as men to be victims of discrimination (8% vs. 3%) (Figure 6).

**Figure 6: Experienced discrimination based on gender | by gender | Senegal | 2017**



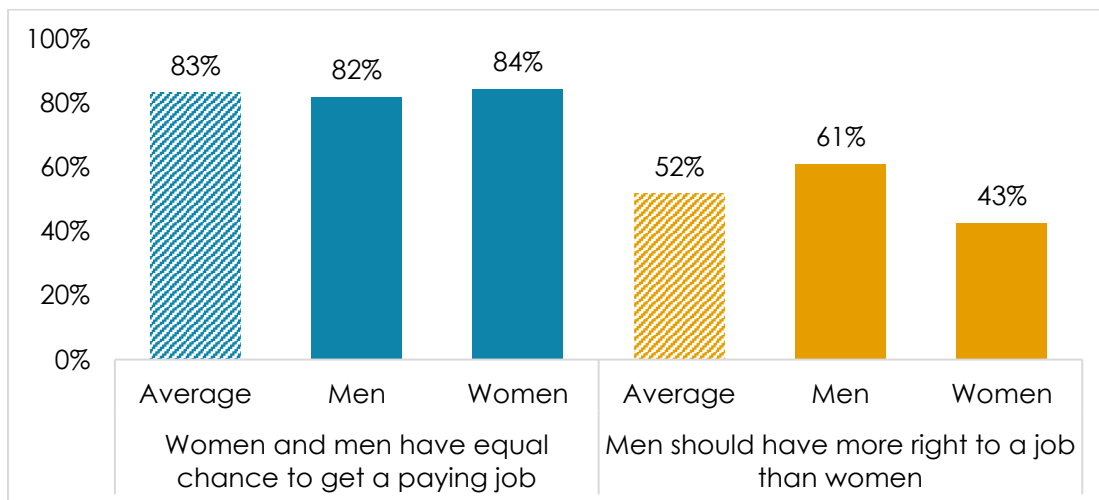
**Respondents were asked:** In the past year, how often, if at all, have you personally been discriminated against based on your gender?

### Employment and access to resources

While many Senegalese support women's participation in politics and believe the government is doing a good job of promoting equality, women still lag behind men in access to employment, land, and other resources.

On the one hand, more than eight in 10 men (82%) and women (84%) agree that both genders have an equal chance to get a paying job. However, a majority (52%) of respondents also agree that when jobs are scarce, men should have more of a right to a job than women. Women (43%) are considerably less likely to agree with this position than men (61%) (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: Equal chance of job for women | by gender | Senegal | 2017**



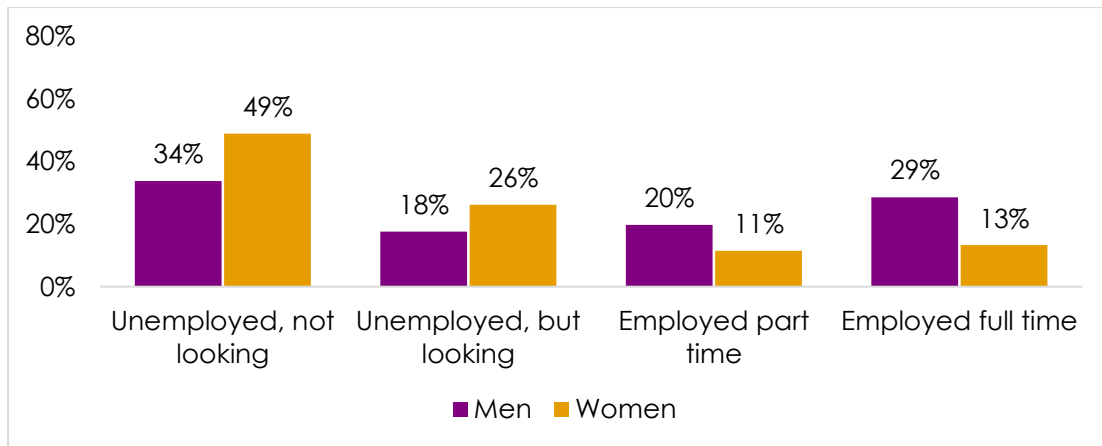
**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree, or haven't you heard enough to say? (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")

In our country today, women and men have equal opportunities to get a job that pays a wage or salary.

When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women.

And in fact, men are twice as likely as women to have a paying job. Half (49%) of men are employed either part time or full time, while only 24% of women report the same. Meanwhile, one-fourth (26%) of women report being unemployed and searching for employment, while only 18% of men say the same (Figure 8). This suggests that even though many Senegalese perceive gender equality in the job market, things may not be equal in reality.

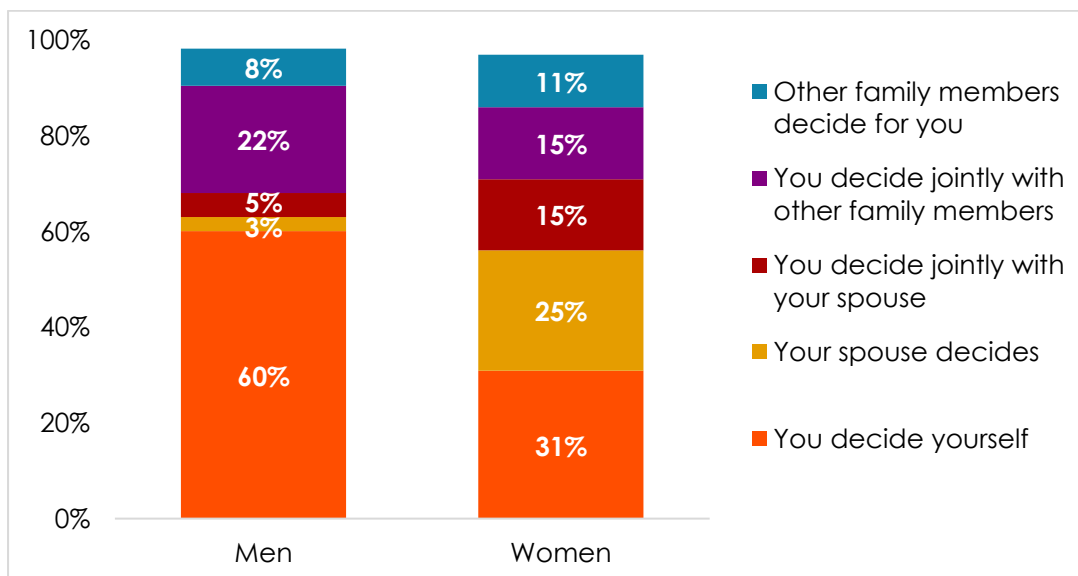
**Figure 8: Employment status | by gender | Senegal | 2017**



**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?

Men are also twice as likely as women (60% vs. 31%) to say they decide how to spend money that they have or earn. More than one-third of women (36%) say either their spouse or another family member makes financial decisions for them, while 30% say they make decisions jointly with their spouse or other family members. In comparison, only 11% of men say their spouse or other family members make financial decisions for them, while 27% say they make decisions jointly with their family (Figure 9).

**Figure 9: Who decides how to use any money that you have or earn? | by gender | Senegal | 2017**

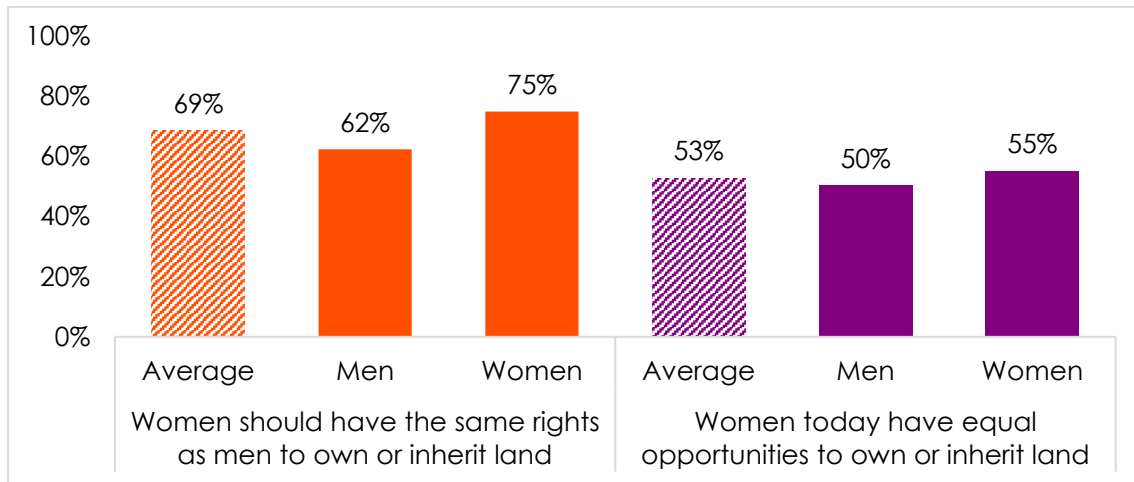


**Respondents were asked:** What is the main way that decisions are made about how to use any money that you have or earn, for example, from a job, a business, selling things, or other activities?

Regarding land ownership, more than two-thirds (69%) of Senegalese agree that women and men should have the same rights to own or inherit land. Men, however, are less likely than women to agree (62% vs. 75%) (Figure 10).

Moreover, only 55% of women and 50% of men agree that women actually have equal opportunities to own or inherit land. This suggests that while a majority of people support the idea of equal access to land, for many women, this is still out of reach.

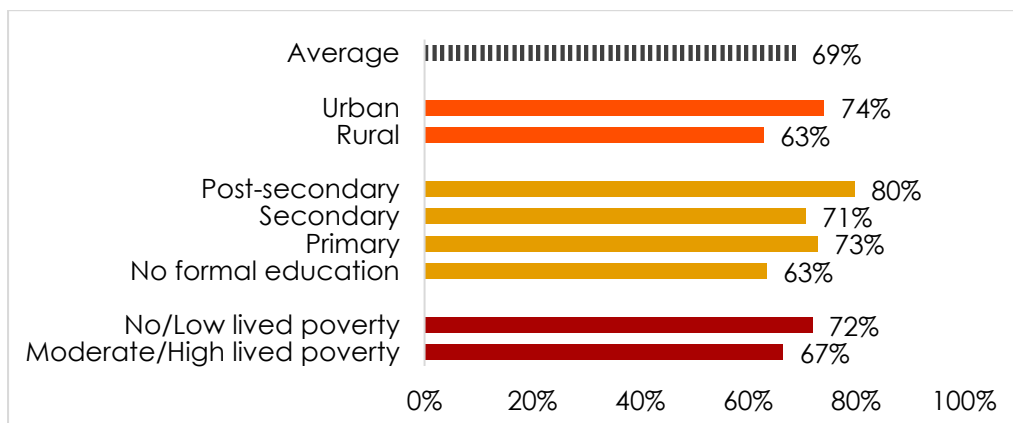
**Figure 10: Equal right to own and inherit land | by gender | Senegal | 2017**



**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? (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")  
 Women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land.  
 In our country today, women and men have equal opportunities to own and inherit land.

Support for women's land ownership also varies across socio-demographic groups (Figure 11). While nearly three-quarters (74%) of urban Senegalese support equal opportunities for women, only 63% of rural residents say the same. Similarly, 80% of those with post-secondary education agree that women should have the same rights as men regarding land ownership, but only 63% of those with no formal education agree.

**Figure 11: Women should have same rights to own or inherit land | by socio-demographic group | Senegal | 2017**



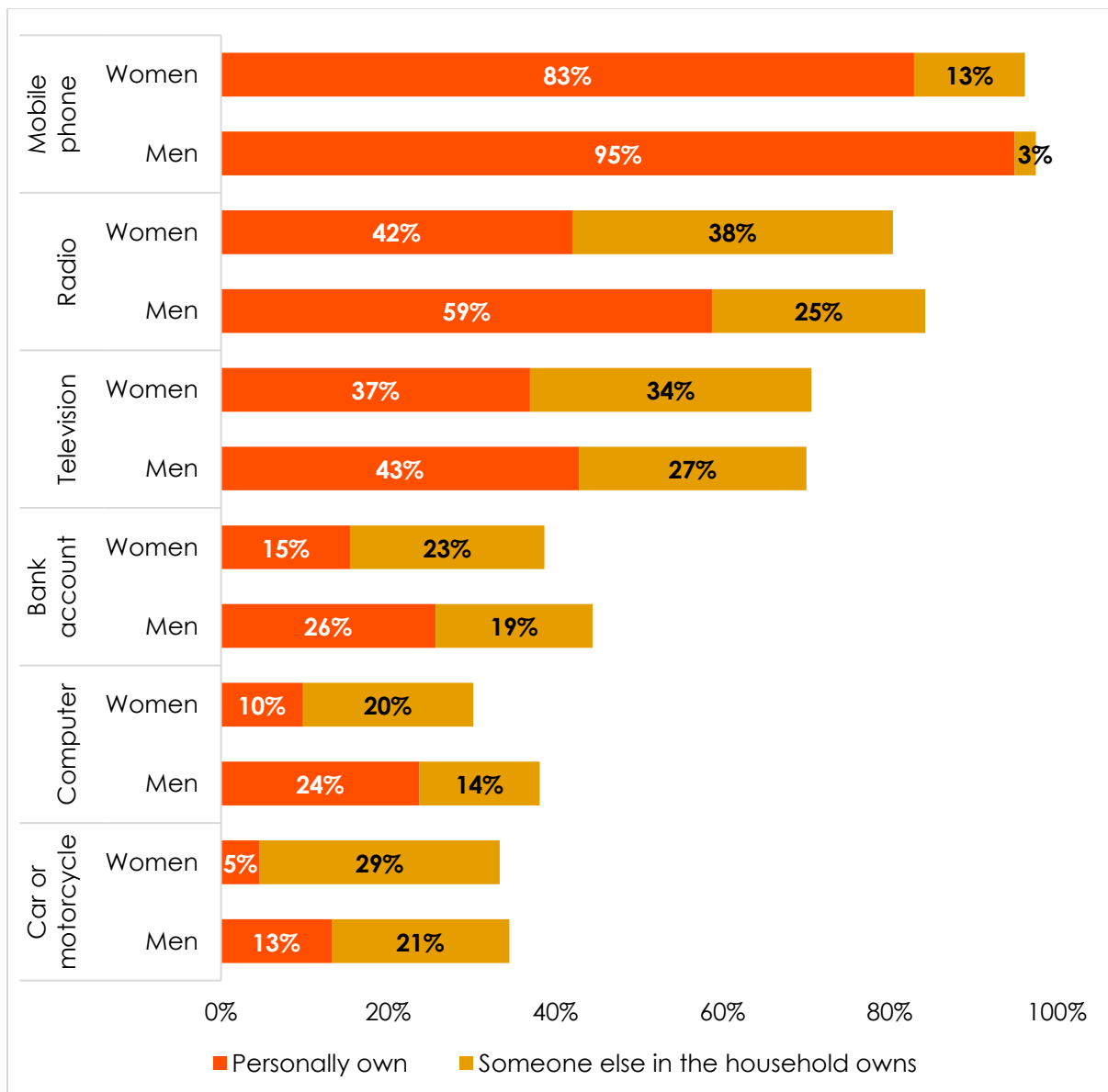
**Respondents were asked:** For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree, or haven't you heard enough to say: Women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land. (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")



Beyond land ownership, women also lag behind men in ownership of technology, vehicles, and bank accounts (Figure 12). While 95% of Senegalese men say they own a mobile phone, only 83% of women say the same. Likewise, 59% of men own radios, while only 42% of women do. The pattern is the same for ownership of televisions, bank accounts, computers, and cars or motorcycles.

These disparities lessen when we consider household ownership: Women are more likely than men to say someone else in their household owns these items. For example, while more men than women say they personally own a television (43% vs. 37%), men and women are about equally likely to say that someone in their household – either they or someone else – owns a television (71% and 70%). That said, even if someone else in the household owns an item, it's unclear to what extent respondents themselves have access to that item – particularly, perhaps, items such as vehicles, computers, and bank accounts.

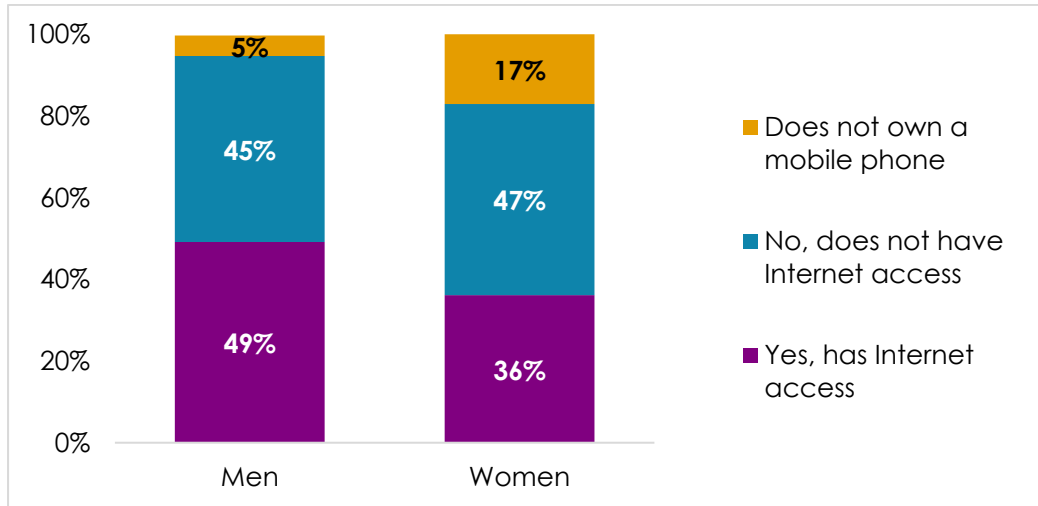
**Figure 12: Material possessions** | by gender | Senegal | 2017



**Respondents were asked:** Which of these things do you personally own? [If no:] Does anyone in your household own one?

Even if women own mobile phones, they are less likely than men to have phones that can access the Internet (36% of women compared to 49% of men) (Figure 13).

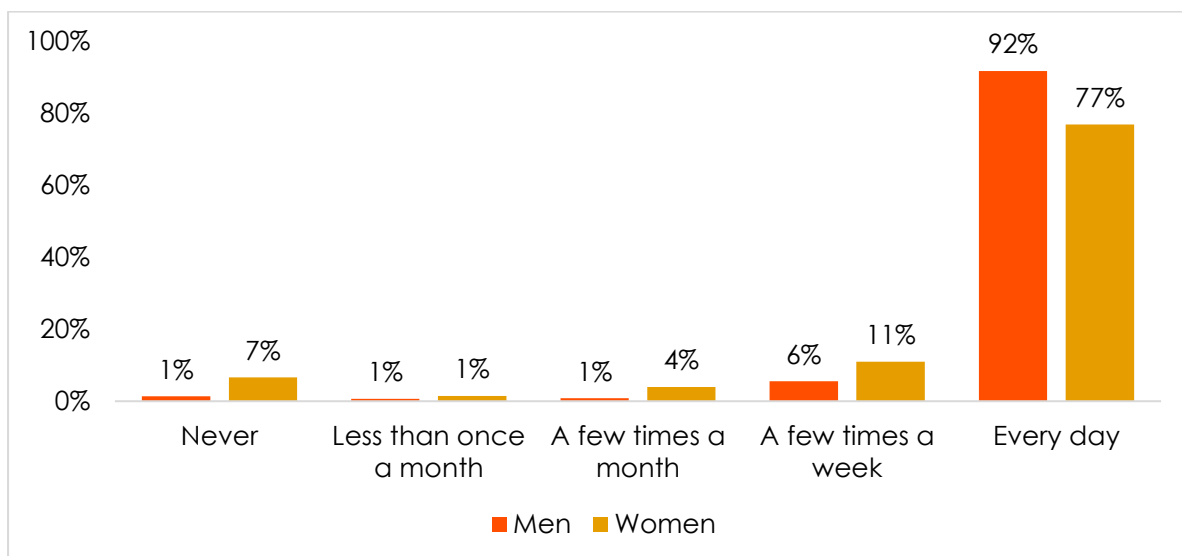
**Figure 13: Does your mobile phone have access to the Internet? | by gender | Senegal | 2017**



**Respondents who said they personally own a mobile phone were asked:** Does your phone have access to the Internet?

Men are also more likely to use a mobile phone frequently. While 92% of men use a mobile phone every day, only 77% of women do the same. Meanwhile, 7% of women never use a mobile phone, compared to only 1% of men (Figure 14).

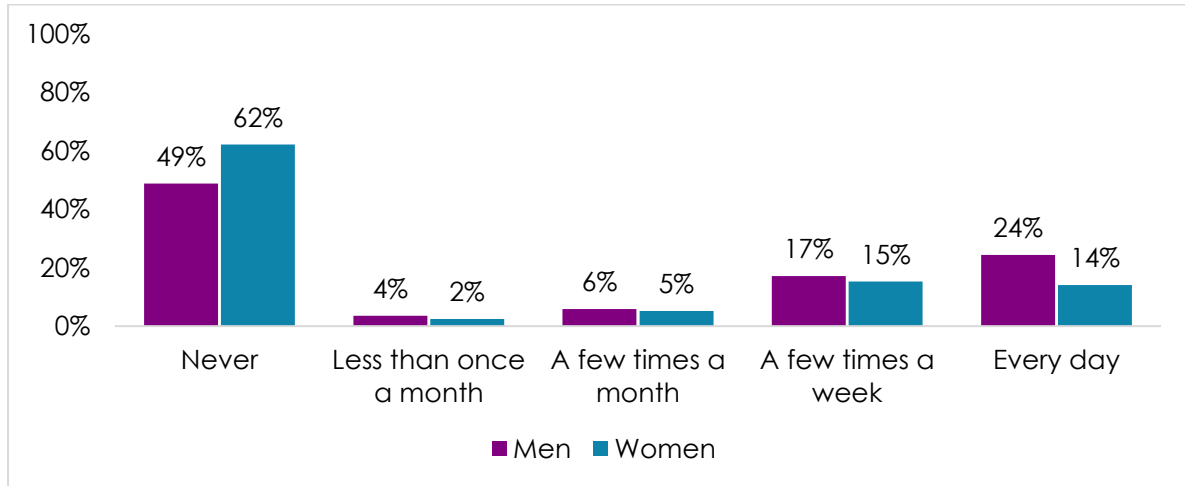
**Figure 14: Frequency of mobile-phone use | by gender | Senegal | 2017**



**Respondents were asked:** How often do you use a mobile phone?

Fewer Senegalese use the Internet frequently, but there are similar gaps in use between men and women. Nearly a quarter (24%) of Senegalese men use the Internet every day, while only 14% of women do so. More than three in five women (62%) never use the Internet, compared to about half of men (49%) (Figure 15).

**Figure 15: Frequency of Internet use | by gender | Senegal | 2017**

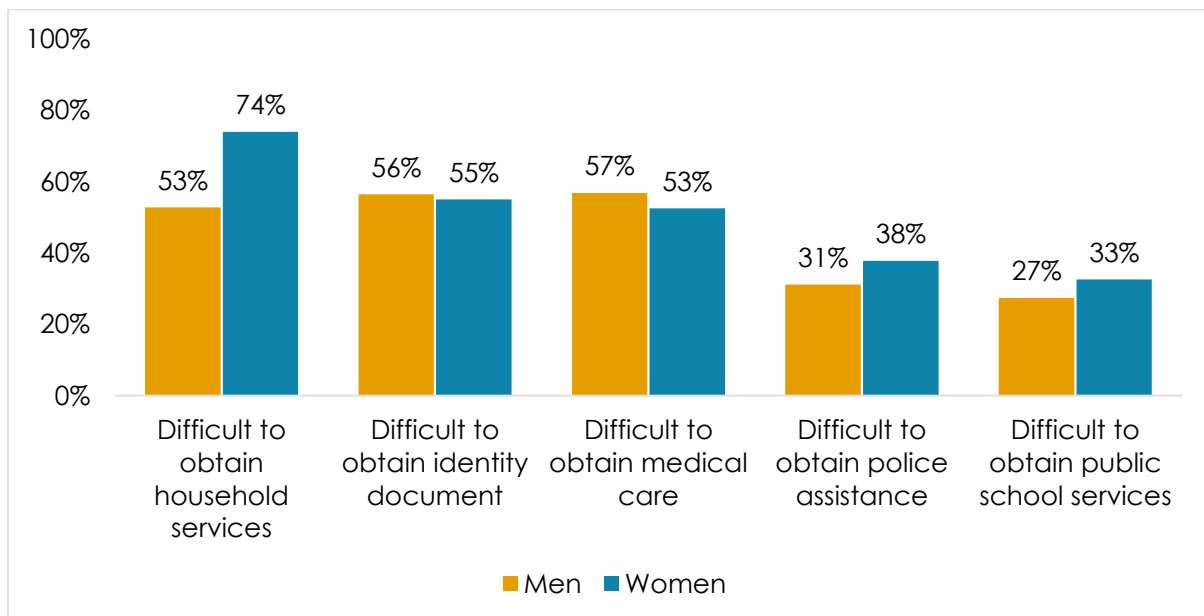


**Respondents were asked:** How often do you use the Internet?

Women also report more difficulty than men in accessing some government services. All respondents were asked whether they had tried to obtain certain public services during the previous 12 months, including assistance at a public school, care at a public hospital or clinic, a government identity document, police assistance, and water, sanitation, or electricity services. Among those who had sought household utility services, nearly three-quarters (74%) of women found it “difficult” or “very difficult” to obtain them, compared to 53% of men. Almost four in 10 women report difficulty obtaining police assistance (38%), compared to three in 10 men (31%). One-third (33%) of women say they had trouble getting public school services, compared to 27% of men (Figure 16).

More men (57%) than women (53%) say it was difficult to get medical care, while obtaining identity documents was about equally difficult for men and women.

**Figure 16: Difficult to access government services | by gender | Senegal | 2017**



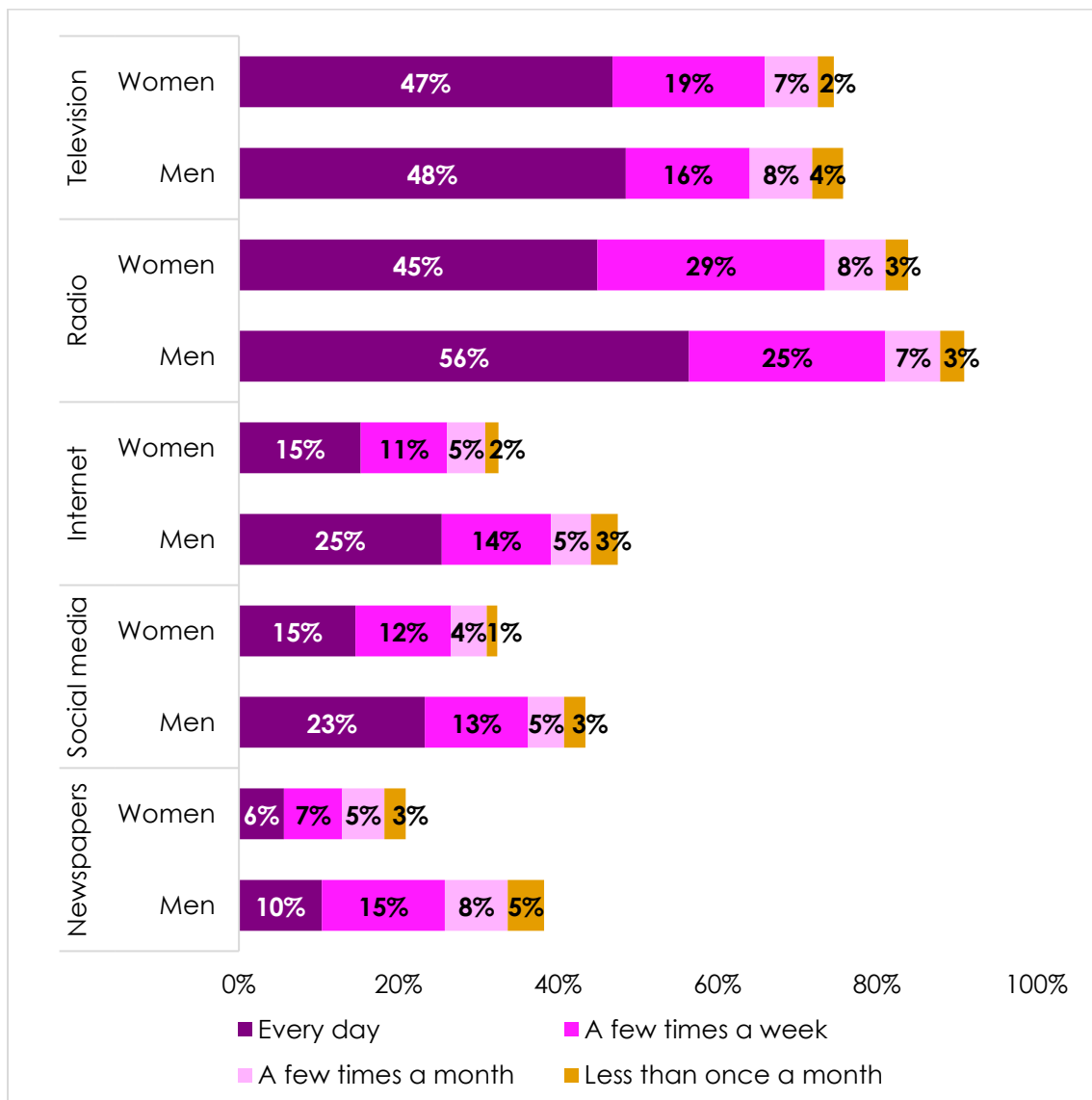
**Respondents who said they had tried to obtain key government services during the previous 12 months were asked:** How easy or difficult was it to obtain [the service]? (% who say “difficult” or “very difficult”)

### Political and civic participation

Even though women lag behind men in access to employment, land, and economic resources, they participate in politics at similar levels to men. In the legislative elections of 2017, women were almost as likely as men to vote (56% vs. 60%), according to survey responses. And there is no difference in the proportion of Senegalese men and women who say they feel close to a political party (46% each) (not shown).

Some disparities exist in news media consumption (Figure 17). The gap is most pronounced with regard to radio news: A majority of men (56%) say they get news from the radio every day, compared to 45% of women. Men are considerably more likely than women to use the Internet and social media for news. And they are twice as likely as women to read a newspaper at least a few times a week (25% vs. 13%). The one exception is television, a daily news source for 48% of men and 47% of women.

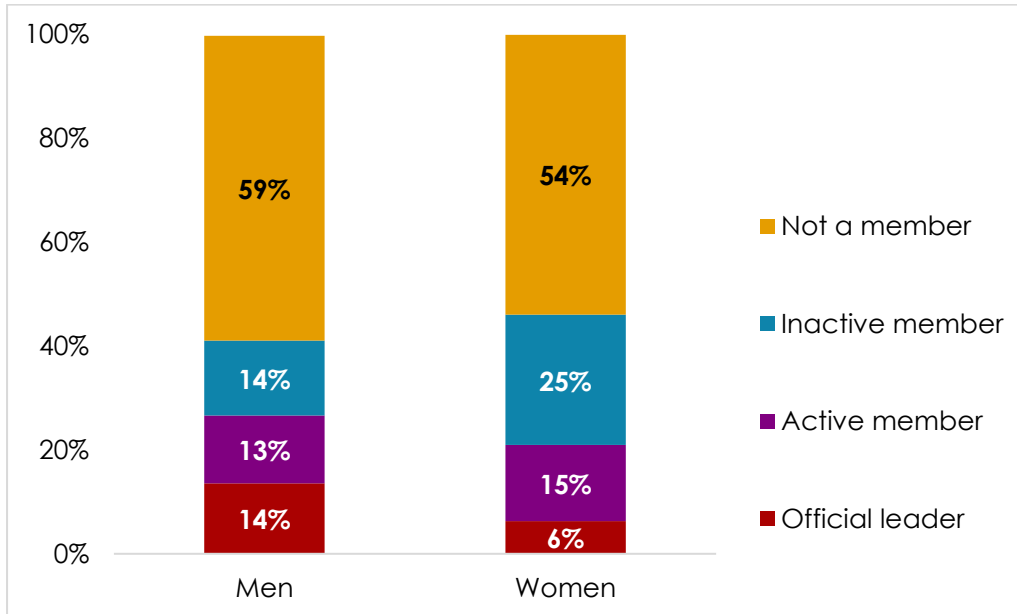
**Figure 17: News media consumption | by gender | Senegal | 2017**



**Respondents were asked:** How often do you get news from the following sources?

Lastly, women are somewhat more likely than men to belong to a community group or voluntary association (46% vs. 41%). But within these groups, men are more likely than women to hold an official leadership position (14% vs. 6%) (Figure 18).

**Figure 18: Member of voluntary association or community group | by gender**  
 | Senegal | 2017



**Respondents were asked:** *Could you tell me whether you are an official leader, an active member, an inactive member, or not a member of a voluntary association or community group?*

### Conclusion

Across Senegal, there is strong support for gender equality in many respects. Most Senegalese think women should have an equal chance to hold political office and to own or inherit land. Yet women still lag behind men in access to employment and other resources. Men are more likely to have a job, to own a mobile phone, and to access the Internet. While it is encouraging that support for equality is high and that women are active participants in politics, more can be done to level the economic playing field for Senegalese women.

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