

International Poll Finds Large Majorities in All Countries Favor Equal Rights for Women

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Widespread Support for Government and UN Action to Prevent Discrimination

[Full report \(PDF\)](#)

[Questionnaire/methodology\(PDF\)](#)

[Read an analysis of this poll by Peter Singer](#)

This report presents an updated analysis of a poll of 16 nations originally released in advance of International Women's Day in 2008, a year that marked the 60th anniversary of the UN General Assembly's adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



According to a WorldPublicOpinion.org poll, publics around the world express a widespread consensus that it is important for "women to have full equality of rights" and most say it is very important. This is true in Muslim nations as well as Western nations.

(Photo: Carmen Crow/ARC)

In nearly all nations most people perceive that in their lifetime women have gained greater equality. Nonetheless, large majorities would like their government and the United Nations to take an active role in preventing discrimination.

The poll of 20,227 respondents was conducted between January 10 and October 24, 2008 by WorldPublicOpinion.org, a collaborative research project involving research centers from around the world and managed by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) at the University of Maryland. The primary funder of the study was the Oak Foundation.

Interviews were conducted in 22 nations including most of the largest nations: Argentina, Azerbaijan, China, Egypt, France, Great Britain, India, Indonesia, Iran, Jordan, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, the Palestinian territories, Peru, Russia, Spain, South Korea, Thailand, Turkey, Ukraine, and the US. The public in Hong Kong was also polled. Not all questions were asked in all nations. The nations included represent 60 percent of the world population. Margins of error range from +/-2 to 4 percent.

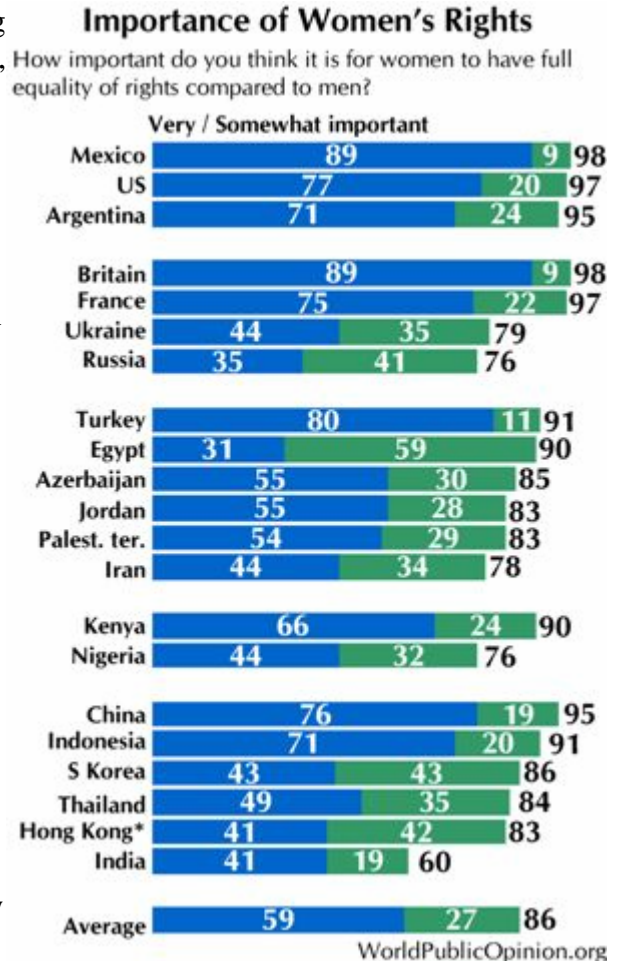
Importance of Equality for Women

An overwhelming majority of people around the world say that it is important for "women to have full equality of rights compared to men." Large majorities in all nations polled took this position, ranging from 60 percent in India to 98 percent in Mexico and Britain. On average, across the 20 nations polled, 86 percent said women's equality is important, with 59 percent saying it is very important.

Attitudes vary about whether such equality is very important or somewhat important. Large majorities said it is very important in Mexico (89%), Britain (89%), Turkey (80%), US (77%), China (76%), France (75%), Indonesia (71%), and Argentina (71%). Smaller percentages said it is very important in Egypt (31%), Russia (35%), India (41%), South Korea (43%), Ukraine (44%), and Iran (44%).

Support for equal rights is also robust in all Muslim nations. Large majorities said it is important in Iran (78%), Jordan (83%), Azerbaijan (85%), Egypt (90%), Indonesia (91%), Turkey (91%), and the Palestinian territories (93%).

Men and women differ strikingly little on this question. On average, across all nations, 84 percent of men as well as 89 percent of women said equality is important. However a substantially larger percentage of women said that equality is very important (women 65%, men 53%). This pattern--women slightly more likely to say that equality is important, but substantially more likely to say it is very important--appears in nearly every country.



"The idea that women should have equal rights is fairly new in the context of human history." said Steven Kull, director of WorldPublicOpinion.org. "It is quite extraordinary that there is now such a global consensus across cultures not only that women should have equal rights but also that it is the responsibility of the government to prevent discrimination."

Perceived Changes in Women's Rights

Very large majorities in nearly all nations polled perceive that over the course of their own lifetime women have gained more equality of rights as compared to men. On average 72 percent perceived that women have gained greater equality of rights with 31 percent saying that they have gained much more equality and 41 percent saying they have a little more equality.

The two exceptions were the Palestinian territories and Nigeria. Among Palestinians a slight majority (51%) said that women's rights have become less equal, while 41 percent said they have grown more equal. Nigeria was divided, with 46 percent perceiving greater equality and 46 percent perceiving less equality.

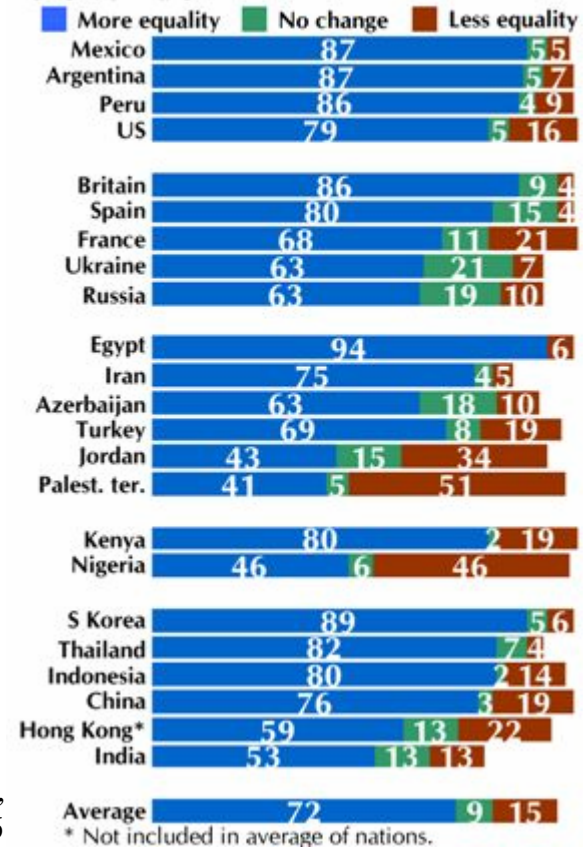
While the countries of the former Soviet Union had majorities saying that women's rights had improved, relatively large numbers said that there has been no real change or that women now have less equality, including 29 percent of Russians, and 28 percent of Ukrainians and Azerbaijanis. This may be due to the declining influence of Marxist-Leninist ideology that called for women's rights.

India is unique in that only 53 percent said that women have gained greater equality, but an additional 14 percent volunteered the response that women now have more rights than men, implying that a significant change has occurred.

There is also considerable variation among nations in the belief that women have gained "much more" equality. Majorities in Egypt (57%), Britain (52%), and Thailand (52%) said women have gained much more equality. In contrast, only 9 percent of Nigerians, 11 percent of Palestinians, and 15 percent of Jordanians had this perception.

Men and women overall differ little on the question of whether women have gained greater equality--74 percent of men and 70 percent of women agreed that this has occurred.

Increasing Equality for Women
Thinking about the course of your lifetime, would you say, compared to the rights men have in this society, that women now have:



Considering the advances in women's rights in recent history, one might expect older respondents to more widely perceive women having much greater equality. Indeed among those over 60, 39 percent said women have much more equality, while only 28 percent said this among respondents from 18 - 29 years old.

Government Intervention

There is very strong support for the government taking an active role to further women's rights. Majorities in all nations--with very large majorities in nearly all cases--said that "the government should make an effort to prevent discrimination against women." Only small minorities endorsed the view that "the government should not be involved in this kind of thing."

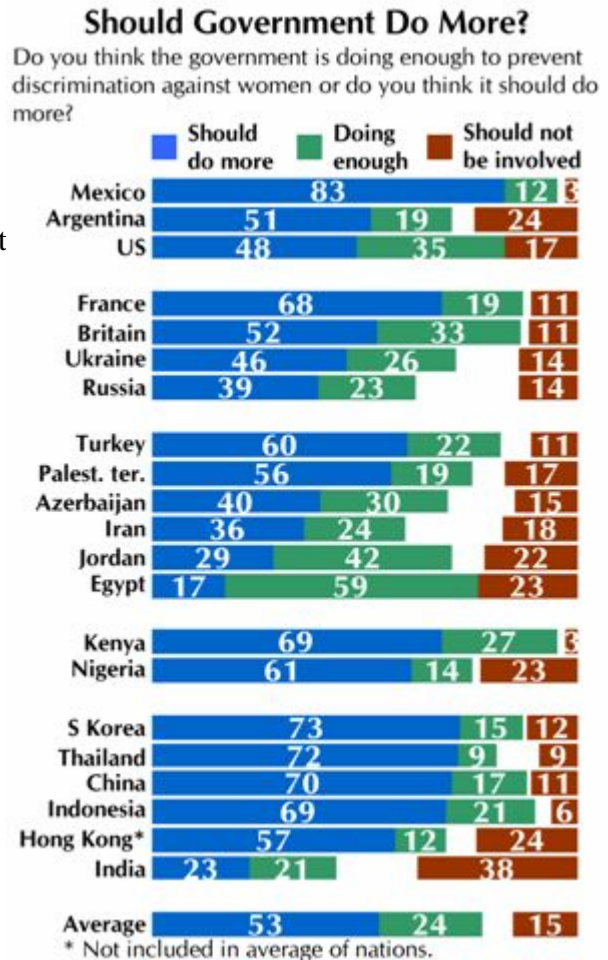
On average, 81 percent said the government should try to prevent discrimination against women, while 15 percent said the government should not be involved in this kind of thing.

Kenya and Mexico had the largest majorities (97% and 96%, respectively) endorsing such intervention. India was the only country without a large majority favoring government action (53%) and the one with the largest minority saying the government should not be involved (38%).

Respondents who said their government should try to prevent discrimination were then asked whether it was doing enough in this regard. On average, 53 percent (of the full sample) felt that the government should do more, while 24 percent that the government is doing enough.

However there is substantial variation between nations. In 14 nations the most common view was that the government should do more. Majorities in 12 nations believed this: Mexico (83%), South Korea (73%), Thailand (72%), China (70%; Hong Kong, 57%), Indonesia (69%), Kenya (69%), France (68%), Turkey (60%), Nigeria (61%), Palestinian territories (56%), Britain (52%), and Argentina (51%). Pluralities believed it in two countries: Ukraine (46%) and Russia (39%).

In six countries the most common view was that governments are either already doing enough to prevent discrimination or that they should not get involved; four of these were predominantly Muslim. More than four out of five Egyptians (82%) said that their government is either doing enough (59%) or that it should not do anything (23%). Sixty-four percent of Jordanians said that the government is doing enough (42%) or that it should not make an effort (22%). Pluralities



were also opposed to greater intervention in Azerbaijan (30% doing enough, 15% should not be involved), and Iran (doing enough 24%, should not be involved 18%).

Interestingly two of the largest democracies also showed low support for greater efforts. Sixty-three percent of Indians said that the government should not be involved (38%), is doing enough (21%), or volunteered that the government is doing too much (4%). A more modest majority of Americans (52%) also thought that government efforts are already sufficient (35%) or should stop (17%).

Overall, women were only slightly more likely than men to say that the government should make an effort to prevent discrimination (83% to 78%). However, they were substantially more likely to say that the government should do more than it is to prevent discrimination against women (58% to 48%).

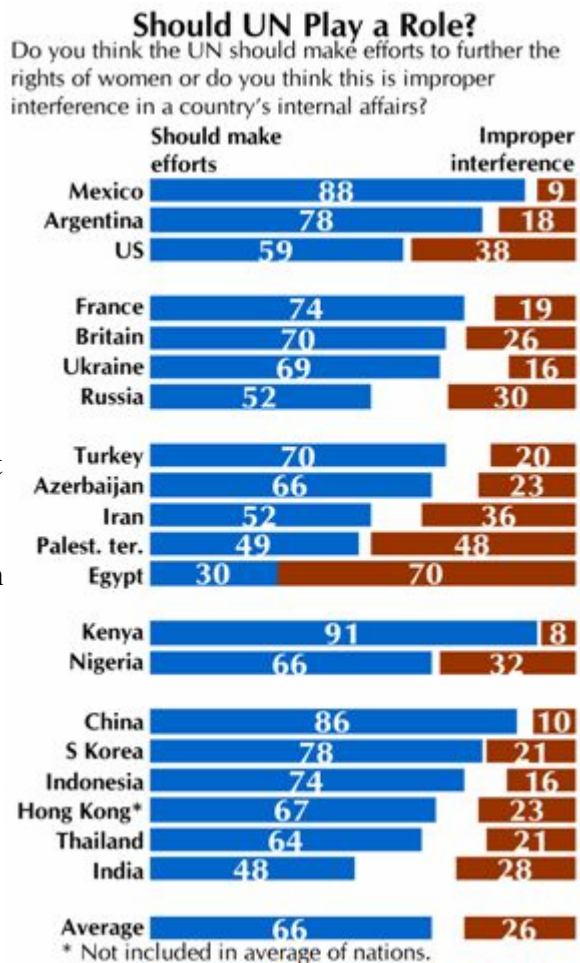
The Role of the United Nations

Very large majorities in nearly every nation said that the United Nations should try to further women's rights even when presented the argument that this would conflict with national sovereignty. Respondents were asked, "Do you think the UN should make efforts to further the rights of women or do you think this is improper interference in a country's internal affairs?"

In 17 out of the 19 publics polled most favored UN efforts, including large majorities in Kenya (91%), Mexico (88%), China (86%; Hong Kong, 67%), Argentina (78%), South Korea (78%), France (74%), and Great Britain (70%) as did substantial majorities in the Ukraine (69%), Nigeria (66%), Thailand (64%) and the United States (59%). Support was more modest in Russia (52%) and India (48% favor, 28% opposed and 24% uncertain).

The two exceptions were Egypt, where most of those polled (70%) thought the United Nations should not get involved in efforts to improve women's rights, and the Palestinian territories where views were evenly divided.

In the other predominantly Muslim nations most supported UN efforts on women's rights, including Indonesia (74%), Turkey (70%), Azerbaijan (66%), and Iran (52%).



Overall on average, 66 percent approved of UN efforts to further the rights of women, while 26 percent said this would be improper interference.

Respondents with a bachelor's degree equivalent or higher tended to more widely support UN efforts in this area (70%) compared to those with less than a high school education (64%).

To read more about opinion in the individual countries surveyed, click [here](#) to view the full report (PDF).

These findings were also published in the December 2008 report [World Public Opinion and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#).