

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

Widespread Support for Government and UN Action to Prevent Discrimination

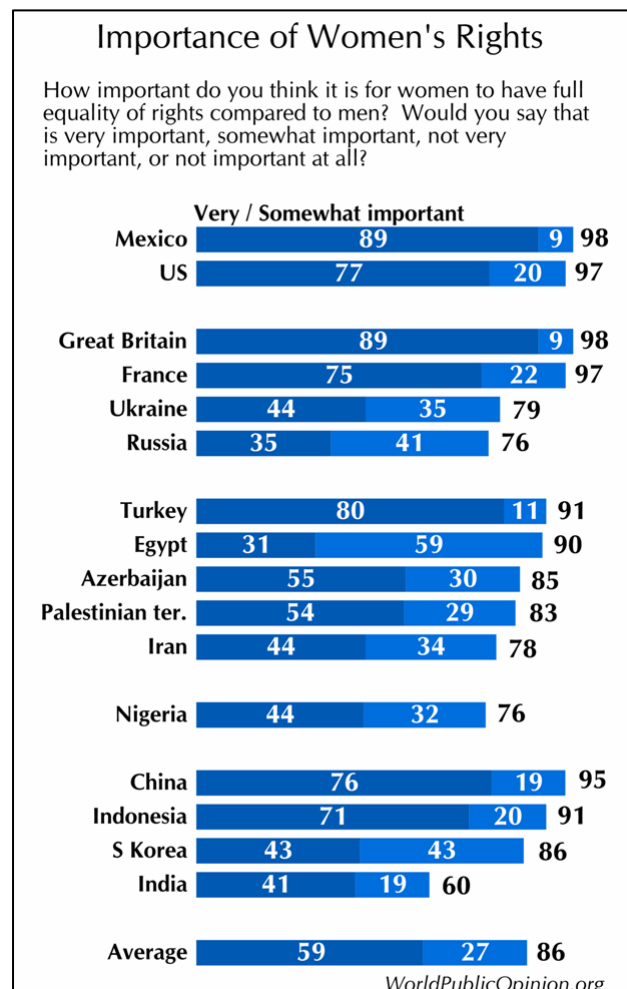
March 6, 2008

According to a new WorldPublicOpinion.org poll of 16 nations from around the world there is 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 countries as well as Western countries.

In nearly all countries 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 is being released in advance of International Woman’s Day (March 8), a date recognized by the United Nations and observed around the world. This year also marks the 60th anniversary of the UN General Assembly’s adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whose second article declares that all are entitled to the same rights and freedoms, regardless of sex as well as race, language, religion, or other status.

The poll of 14,896 respondents was conducted 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. Interviews were conducted in 16 nations including most of the largest countries: Azerbaijan, China, Egypt, France, Great Britain, India, Indonesia, Iran, Mexico, Nigeria, the Palestinian territories, Russia, South Korea, Turkey, Ukraine, and the US. The nations included represent 58 percent of the world population.



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 take this position ranging from 60 percent in India to 98 percent in Mexico and Britain. On average across the 16 nations 86 percent say 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. In seven countries large majorities say it is very important—Indonesia (71%), France (75%), China (76%), US (77%), Turkey (80%), Britain (89%), and Mexico (89%). Smaller percentages say it is very important in Egypt (31%), Russia (35%), India (41%), South Korea (43%), Ukraine (44%), and Iran (44%).

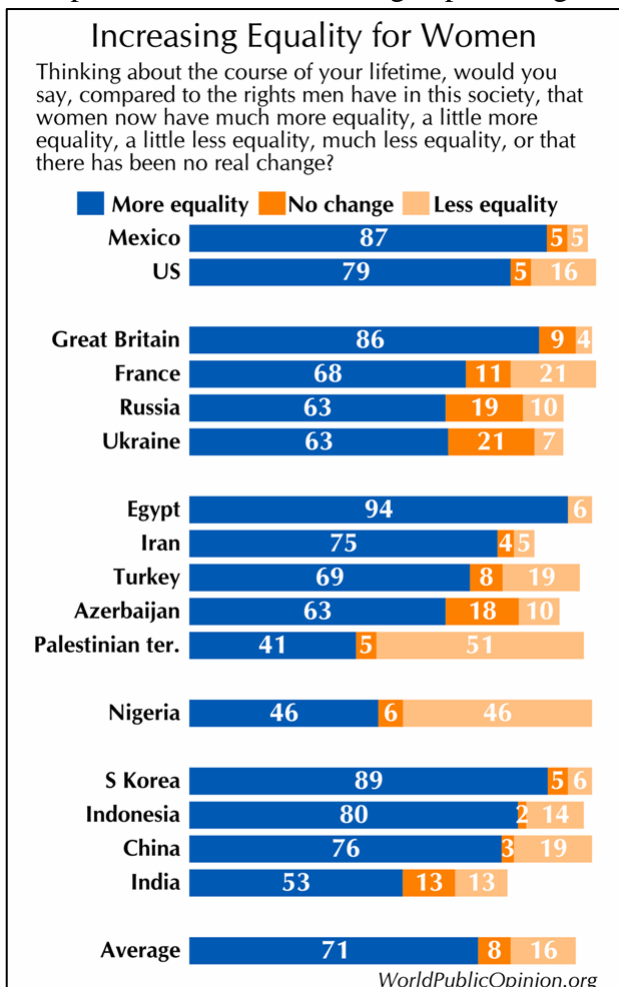
Support for equal rights is also robust in all Muslim countries. Large majorities say it is important in Iran (78%), Azerbaijan (85%), Egypt (90%), Indonesia (91%), Turkey (91%), and the Palestinian territories (93%).

Men and women differ strikingly little on this question. Across all countries 84 percent of men as well as 88 percent of women say equality is important. However a larger percentage of women say that equality is very important (women 64%, men 54%). 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 71 percent perceive that women have gained greater equality of rights with 29 percent saying that they have gained much



more equality and 42 percent saying say they have a little more equality.

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

The countries of the former Soviet Union also have relatively large numbers saying that there has been no real change or that women now have less equality, including 29 percent of Russians, 28 percent of Ukrainians, and 28 percent of Azerbaijanis.

India is unique in that only 53 percent say that women have gained greater equality, but an additional 14 percent volunteered the response that women now have more rights than men.

There is also considerable variation among countries in the numbers believing women have gained “much more” equality. Majorities in Egypt (57%) and Britain (52%) believe women have gained much more equality. In contrast, only 9 percent of Nigerians and 11 percent of Palestinians have this perception.

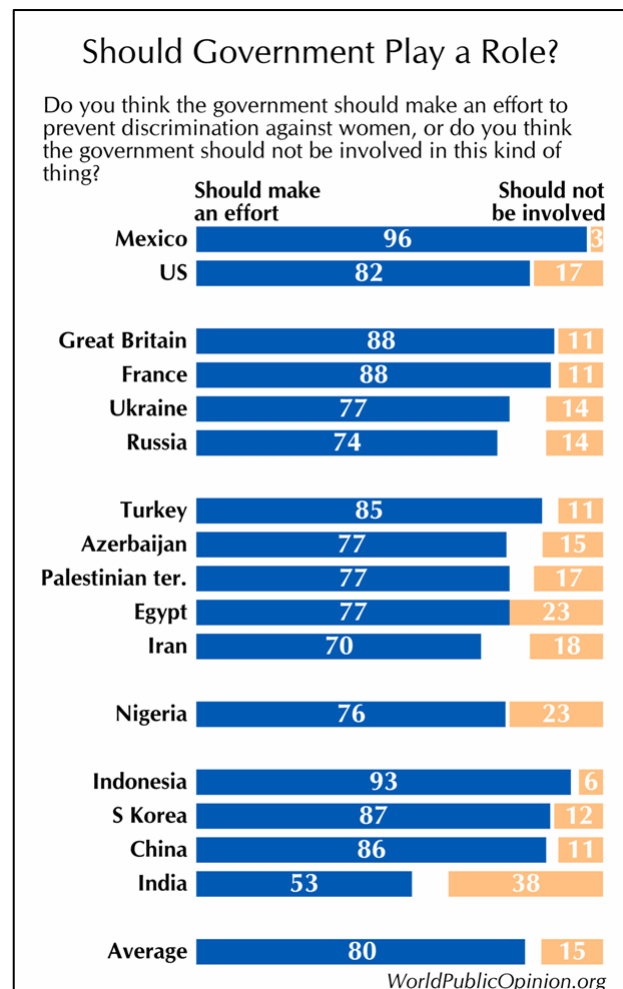
Men and women overall differ little on the question of whether women have gained greater equality—72 percent of men and 69 percent of women agree that this has occurred.

Government Intervention

Despite this widespread perception that women are gaining greater equality, there is very strong support for the government taking an active role to further women’s rights. Very large majorities in nearly all nations polled say that “the government should make an effort to prevent discrimination against women.” Only small minorities endorse the view that “the government should not be involved in this kind of thing.”

On average, 80 percent say the government should try to prevent discrimination against women, while 15 percent say the government should not be involved in this kind of thing.

Mexico has the largest majority (96%) endorsing such intervention. India is the only

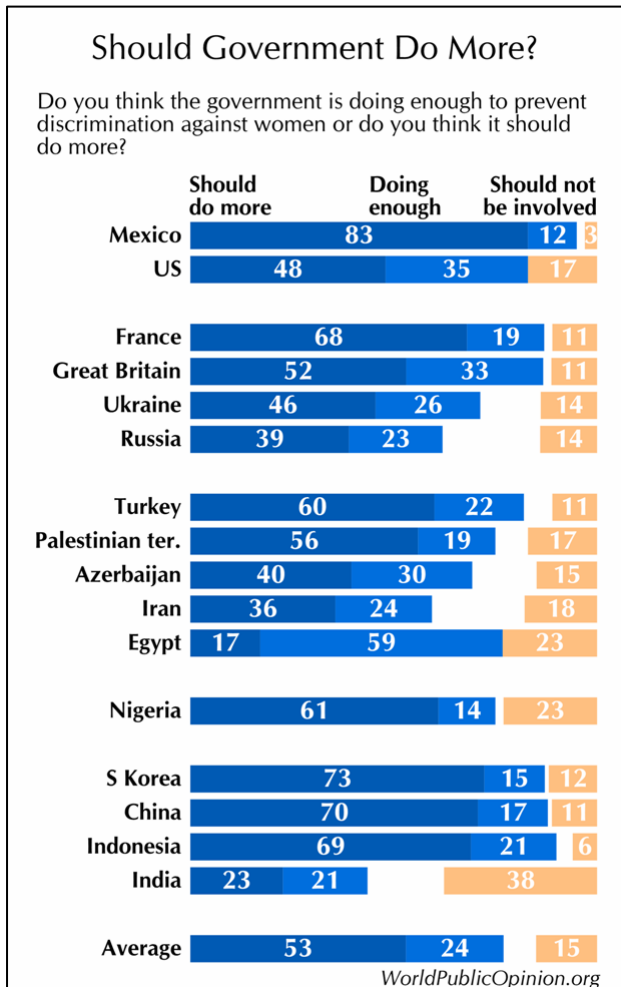


country without a large majority favoring government action (53%) and the one with the largest minority saying the government should not be involved (38%).

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 feel that the government should do more, 24 percent that the government is doing enough, and 15 percent that the government should not be involved.

However there is substantial variation between nations. In 11 nations the most common view is that the government should do more. Majorities in nine nations believe this: Mexico (83%), South Korea (73%), China (70%), Indonesia (69%), France (68%), Turkey (60%), Nigeria (61%), Palestinian territories (56%), and Britain (52%). Pluralities believe it in two countries: Ukraine (46%) and Russia (39%).

In five countries the most common view is that governments are either already doing enough to prevent discrimination or that they should not get involved. More than four out of five Egyptians (82%) say that their government is either doing enough (59%) or that it should not do anything (23%). Sixty-three percent of Indians say that the government should not be involved (38%), is doing enough (21%) or volunteer that the government is doing too much (4%). A more modest majority of Americans (52%) also think that government efforts are already sufficient (35%) or should stop (17%). Pluralities are opposed to greater intervention in Azerbaijan (30% doing enough, 15% should not be involved), and Iran (doing enough 24%, should not be involved 18%).



Overall women are only slightly more likely than men to say that the government should make an effort to prevent discrimination (83% to 78%). However, they are substantially more likely to say that the government should do more than it is to prevent discrimination against women (57% to 48%).

The Role of the United Nations

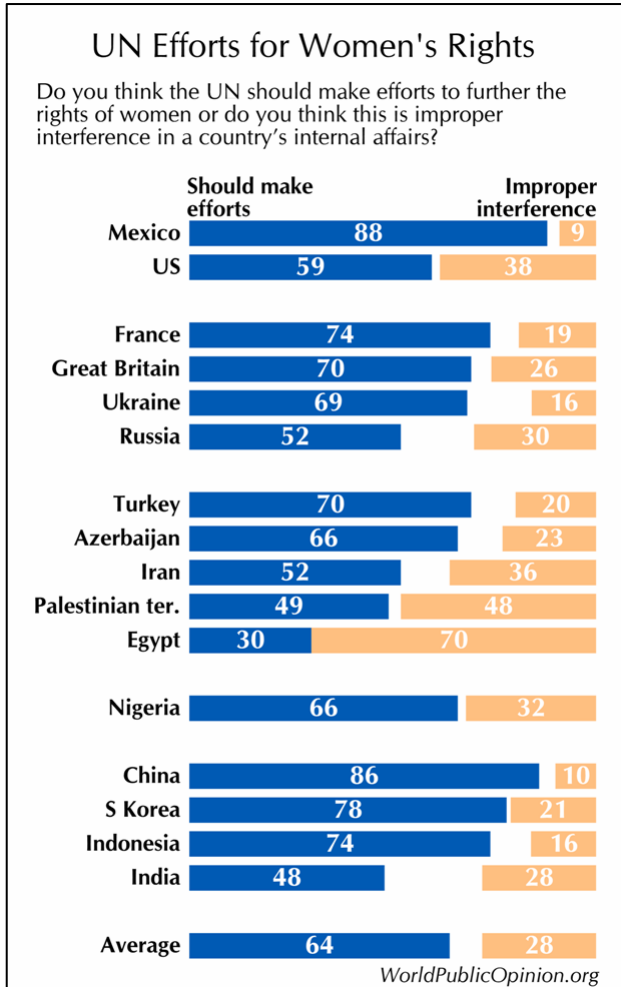
Very large majorities in nearly every nation say that the United Nations should try to further women's rights even when presented the argument that this would conflict with national

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 14 out of the 16 publics polled most favor UN efforts, including large majorities in Mexico (88%), China (86%), South Korea (78%), Indonesia (74%), France (74%), Turkey (70%) and Great Britain (70%) as do substantial majorities in the Ukraine (69%), Azerbaijan (66%), Nigeria (66%) and the United States (59%). In three support is more modest: Iran (52%), Russia (52%) and India (48% favor, 28% opposed and 24% uncertain).

However in Egypt most of those polled (70%) think the United Nations should not get involved in efforts to improve women’s rights and among the Palestinians views are evenly divided.

On average, 64 percent approve of UN efforts to further the rights of women, while 28 percent say this would be improper interference.



COUNTRY-BY-COUNTRY RESULTS:

AMERICAS:

MEXICO

[Reforma](#)

Mexico stands out as the country most enthusiastic about promoting women's rights. It has the largest majorities saying that women should have full equality of rights, that the government should make efforts to further women's rights, that the government should do more in this regard, and that the United Nations should play a role.

- An overwhelming majority (98%) believes that full equality for women is important, including 89% who say it is very important. Only Britain equals Mexico on this question.
- 87% of Mexicans say that their generation has seen women achieve greater equality: 29% say they have achieved "much more" and 58 percent say "a little more."
- Mexicans have the largest majority (96%) saying that the government should try to prevent discrimination against women. Eighty-three percent believe it "should do more" while only 12% say it is "doing enough."
- 88% feel that the UN should further the rights of women, while merely 9% say this would be "improper interference in a country's internal affairs." This is the highest number of all countries polled.

UNITED STATES

[Program on International Policy Attitudes](#) / [Knowledge Networks](#)

While Americans are one of the publics that most strongly endorse the importance of gender equality and strongly favor government action to prevent discrimination, they are one of a few countries who do not favor greater government efforts. Though a majority also believes the United Nations should promote women's rights, there is a significant minority saying that that this would constitute improper interference.

- Nearly all of those polled (97%) say that equal rights for women is important and three-fourths (77%) call it very important.
- 79% say that over their lifetimes women have gained greater equality, with 37% saying much more and 42% saying a little more.
- Four out of five (82%) believe that their government should make an effort to prevent discrimination against women. About half (48%) think the government should do more in this regard. A slight majority (52%) says that it is already doing enough (35%) or that it should not be involved in this kind of thing (17%).
- 59% of Americans say that the United Nations should "make efforts to further the rights of women," though 38% think this would be "improper interference in a country's internal affairs."

EUROPE:

FRANCE

[Efficiencia 3](#)

France is among the countries with the largest majorities saying equality for women is very important and that the government should do more to prevent discrimination. However, the French are unusually low in their perception that women's rights have improved a great deal during their lifetimes.

- An overwhelming 97% of the French public believes that it is very (77%) or somewhat important (20%) for women to have the same rights as men.
- More than two-thirds (68%) say that women have become more equal during their lifetimes, including 50% saying women's rights have improved a little and 18% saying they have improved a lot. A significant minority (21%) believes women now have less equality.
- 88% say the government should act to prevent discrimination against women; only 11% say it should not. About two-thirds (68%) say the government should do more, while 19% feel it is doing enough.
- Three-quarters of French respondents (74%) say the United Nations should promote women's rights. Only 19% consider this "improper interference."

GREAT BRITAIN

[Chatham House \(Royal Institute of International Affairs\)](#) / [GlobeScan](#)

The British public, together with Mexico, has the largest majority endorsing the importance of equality and is the second-highest in the perception that women have gained much more equality in their lifetime.

- A virtually-unanimous 98% of Britons say that it is important for women to have equality of rights compared to men (89% say very important).
- A very large majority (86%) also feel women have become more equal in their lifetimes, with 52% saying women have gained much more equality.
- Nearly nine in 10 (88%) say the government should try to prevent discrimination against women, with 52% saying it should do more and one-third (33%) feeling it already does enough, the most out of any European public polled.
- 70% of Britons agree that the UN should make efforts to further the rights of women, while only 26% reject this as "improper interference."

RUSSIA

[Levada Center](#)

Although a large majority of Russians believe in the importance of equal rights for women, support is not as strong as in most countries polled. Majorities favoring government and UN action to prevent discrimination against women are also smaller than in other publics.

- 76% in Russia say that equality of rights for women compared to men is important, although only 35% say “very important,” and 41% say “somewhat important.”
- A majority (63%) believes women have gained more equality of rights compared to men (24% much more, 39% a little more), although 19% believe there has been no real change over their lifetimes.
- Three in four Russians (74%) agree that the government should act to prevent discrimination against women, with 39% saying it should do more and 23 percent feeling it does enough.
- Only a slight majority (52%) feels that the UN should make efforts to promote women’s rights, while 30 percent feel this would be “improper interference.”

UKRAINE

[Kiev International Institute of Sociology](#)

While a majority of Ukrainians believe that women’s rights have improved in their country, Ukraine has a significant minority that disagrees. However, Ukrainians widely favor government and UN action to promote the rights of women.

- Eight in 10 (79%) Ukrainians say that equality of rights for women is very (44%) or somewhat important (35%).
- 63% say that women have gained either much (31%) or a little more (32%) equality compared to men in their lifetimes; however, 21% believe there has been no real change.
- More than three in four Ukrainians say (77%) the government should try to prevent discrimination against women, with a plurality (46%) saying it should do more and 26% saying it already does enough.
- 69% feel that the UN should act to further the rights of women, while just 16% reject this as “improper” intervention.

MIDDLE EAST/EURASIA:

AZERBAIJAN

International Center for Social Research

Azerbaijanis largely share the view of most publics about the importance of women’s rights and that improvements have been made, although a significant number believes that no real changes have occurred in their lifetime. Majorities also support government and UN action to promote women’s rights.

- 85% of Azerbaijanis say that equality of rights for women is important (55% very important).
- A significant majority (63%) feels that women have gained more equality of rights (29% much more, 34% a little more), yet 18% say that “no real change” has occurred during in their lifetime.

- More than three-quarters (77%) believe that the government should make efforts to protect women from discrimination, with 40% saying the government should do more and 30% feeling it already does enough.
- Two-thirds (66%) say that the UN should make efforts to promote women’s rights, and just 23% reject this as “improper interference” in a country’s internal affairs.

EGYPT

Attitude Market Research

Egypt has the largest majority of all countries polled believing that women have gained much more equality. While a large majority supports their government taking action to prevent discrimination against women, Egypt, has by far the smallest percentage saying that the government should do more, and is the only country where a majority opposes the United Nations making efforts to promote women’s rights.

- Nine out of 10 (90%) say that gender equality is important, although only 31% think it is very important.
- 94% of Egyptians believe that women have gained more equality during their lifetimes, including 57% saying much more.
- A large majority (77%) wants the government to be involved in protecting women from discrimination, but only 17% say it should do more and 59% feel it is already doing enough.
- 70% of Egyptians see the United Nations making efforts to further women’s rights is “improper interference in a country’s internal affairs,” while just 30% are in favor of the UN making these efforts to further women’s rights.

IRAN

WorldPublicOpinion.org

Iranians consider gender equality to be important and also think that women have gained more rights in recent years. Although a majority does believe their government should make an effort to prevent discrimination, Iranians are less supportive of increased efforts than most countries polled. A modest majority supports the United Nations working to further women’s rights.

- 78% of Iranians say women having equal rights compared to men is important, with 44% saying it is “very important.”
- Three out of four Iranians (75%) believe women have gained more rights in their lifetimes, with roughly equal numbers saying they have gained “much more” equality (39%) and “a little more” equality (36%).
- A significant majority (70%) says the government should act to prevent discrimination against women, while 36% think it should do more and 24% say it already does enough; a further 18% say it should not be involved.
- 52% want the UN to work in favor of women’s rights, although 36% would see this as improper interference in a country’s internal affairs.

PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

[Palestinian Center for Public Opinion](#)

A slight majority of Palestinians say they have seen women's rights become less equal—only one other nation (Nigeria) approaches this level. However, majorities believe women having equal rights compared to men is important and want their government to do more to prevent discrimination. Palestinians are divided on whether the UN should take action to further women's rights—only one other nation (Egypt) does not favor such UN efforts.

- A large majority of Palestinians (83%) considers gender equality important, including 54% saying it is “very important.”
- 51% say women have less equality now when compared to the rest of their lifetimes, 15% saying much less and 36% saying a little less. Only 41% say that women have gained more equality (30% a little more, 11% much more).
- 77% of Palestinians believe the government should protect women from discrimination and 56% think the government should do more, while 19% say it is already doing enough.
- Palestinians have mixed views on whether the UN should make efforts to further the rights of women: 49% favor such efforts and 48% consider them “improper interference in a country's internal affairs.”

TURKEY

[ARI Foundation](#) / [Infakto Research Workshop](#)

Among all Muslim countries polled, Turkey stands out with the largest majority saying equal rights for women is very important. Turks are among the largest majorities in Muslim countries that feel the government should make greater efforts to prevent discrimination and the United Nations should play a role.

- More than nine in 10 (91%) Turks think it is important for women to have equal rights compared to men, including 80% that say it very important.
- A majority (69%) says women have gained greater equality of rights during their lifetime: 21% say they have gained much more and 48% say a little more.
- Turks overwhelmingly (85%) believe the government should make efforts to prevent discrimination against women, with a significant majority (60%) saying the government should do more and 22% saying it already does enough.
- Seven in 10 (70%) support the United Nations acting to advance women's rights, while just 20% would see this as improper interference in a country's affairs.

AFRICA

NIGERIA

Market Trends Research International

Nigerians are one of only two publics polled that do not clearly perceive improvement in women's rights. A relatively large minority also says that women's equality is not important. However, Nigeria has a relatively large majority saying that the government should do more to prevent discrimination, and support for UN efforts to improve women's rights is strong.

- Three-quarters (76%) of Nigerians agree that equality of rights for women is important, with slightly more saying this is very important (44%) than somewhat important (32%). However 24% say it is not very important (15%) or not important at all (9%).
- Nigerians are divided on whether women have gained more equality of rights compared to men in their lifetimes, with 46% saying they have gained more equality and 46% feeling they now have less; 6% say there has been no real change.
- A large majority (76%) says the government should act to prevent discrimination against women, including 61% that feel the government should go further, while just 14% say it does enough and 23% say it should not be involved.
- Two-thirds (66%) feel the UN should make efforts to promote women's rights, while nearly one-third (32%) believes this would be "improper interference" in a country's internal affairs.

ASIA/PACIFIC

CHINA

WorldPublicOpinion.org

The Chinese have the largest majority among Asian publics saying that equality of women's rights is very important. Worldwide, they have the third-largest majority calling for greater government action to prevent discrimination, and the second-highest calling for UN action.

- 95% of Chinese respondents say gender equality is important and 76% say it is very important.
- Three out of four (76%) say they have seen women's rights improve: 32% say much more and 44% say a little more.
- A large 86% majority believes the Chinese government should act to prevent discrimination and 70% say it needs to do more.
- 86% want the United Nations to work in favor of women's rights. Just 10% say that this would be improper interference in a country's internal affairs.

INDIA

[Team CVoter](#)

Indians share majority support for the importance of equal rights for women with other countries polled, although this majority is more modest than in other countries. A slight majority says that women's rights have improved over time, along with a significant number who feel women's rights have now exceeded those of men. Indians also favor government action to prevent discrimination against women, although they have the largest number opposed to government involvement among all countries polled.

- Six in 10 (60%) Indians say that equality of rights for women is very (41%) or somewhat important (19%).
- A modest majority (53%) in India say that women have gained more equality of rights compared to men during their lifetimes, and an additional 14% go further to volunteer that "women now have more rights than men."
- 53% believe that the government should take action to prevent discrimination against women, including 23% that feel the government should do more and 21% who feel the government already does enough. A significant minority (38%) says that the government should not be involved.
- A plurality (48%) feels that the UN should make efforts to further women's rights, while 28% reject this as "improper interference in a country's internal affairs" and nearly one in four (24%) decline to offer an opinion.

INDONESIA

[Synovate](#)

Indonesia has the second-largest majority favoring government action to prevent discrimination, and one of the largest favoring increased government efforts. Very large numbers also believe in the importance of equality of rights for women and that the United Nations should make efforts to further these rights.

- 91% say it is important for women to have equal rights, including 71% who call this very important.
- Four out of five (80%) say their generation has seen women win more rights, though only 25% say they have won much more.
- 93% think the government should make an effort to prevent discrimination and 69% think it should be doing more.
- Three in four Indonesians (74%) think the United Nations should act to advance women's rights.

SOUTH KOREA

[East Asia Institute](#)

A very large majority of South Koreans believes equal rights for women is important, although a relatively smaller number says it is very important. Nonetheless, it has the second-largest majority calling for greater government action to prevent discrimination and the third-largest

calling for UN efforts. Among other Asian publics polled it has the highest percentage saying that women's rights have improved.

- 86% call equal rights for women important, though only 43% consider it very important.
- Nearly nine out of ten (89%) say that over their lifetime women's rights have improved, though two out of three (66%) say they have gained only a "little more equality."
- South Koreans (87%) want their government to try to prevent discrimination and do not think it is doing enough (73%) in this regard.
- Three in four (78%) believe the United Nations should further women's rights.