

Views on Women's Inclusion, Justice and Security in the United States: Common Themes and Divides

By Jeni Klugman, Elena Ortiz, Anita Raj, and Tresa Udem | October 2020



In August 2020, GIWPS commissioned YouGov and PerryUdem to conduct a nationally representative survey exploring American views on women's status and opportunities and the state of gender equality in the United States. Across themes such as women's leadership, economic opportunities, and safety, we find that women and people of color are much more likely to both see and experience the barriers to full equality. Our results, against the backdrop of COVID-19, underscore the urgent need for policies that advance the security, justice, and inclusion of all women.

The Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS) commissioned YouGov and PerryUdem to conduct a nationally representative survey in August 2020 to assess public opinions on women's rights and opportunities in the United States. These data complement the development of the U.S. Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) index ranking all fifty states and the District of Columbia in terms of women's rights and opportunities.¹

The survey, supported by the Bank of America Charitable Foundation, deliberately sought to capture the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic for gender equality and racial justice. While the disparities captured by our survey are nothing new, the pandemic is worsening the gaps and placing the most marginalized individuals and communities at greater risk.

About 2,600 adults ages 18 and older were surveyed from August 7-18, 2020, using YouGov's nonprobability online panel, oversampling Black and Latinx women and residents of the two states scoring highest on the U.S. WPS Index (Massachusetts and Connecticut) and the two states scoring lowest (Mississippi and Louisiana). Participants in these four states were also asked why they felt their state ranked well or poorly in terms of women's well-being. All women were additionally asked an open-ended question about their experiences with discrimination. All respondents were asked their views on 30 multiple choice questions, on the progress of gender equality in the country, racial injustice, and women's leadership.



Beliefs about the state of gender equality in the U.S.

Most Americans say that gender inequality is persistent:

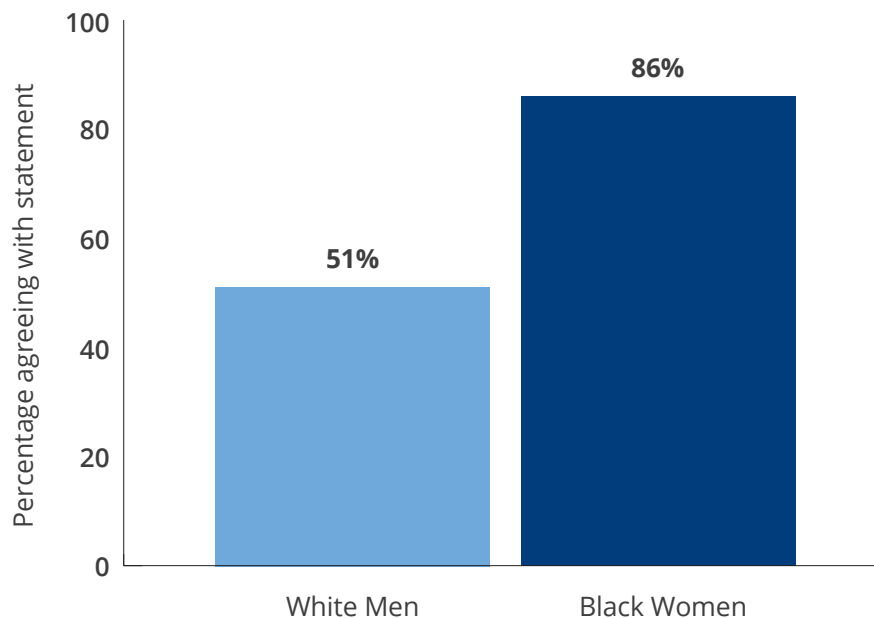
- Two thirds - **66 percent** - believe there is not full equality for women in work, life, and politics
- Only **33 percent** believe it is a good time to be a woman in America
- A solid majority - **59 percent** - believe men have more opportunities than women when it comes to getting good-paying jobs, and
- More than half - **55 percent** - believe that women in the U.S. are only sometimes or rarely/never treated with dignity and respect

Behind these national averages are major differences by both gender and race/ethnicity. Most starkly, just over half of white men recognize that there is more work to be done to achieve gender equality, compared to 86 percent of Black women (figure 1). Similarly, 73 percent of the Latinx community believes there is more work to do, compared to 62 percent of all white people.

The racial/ethnic divide emerges as larger than the gender on whether we have achieved gender equality in the U.S. These findings highlight how gender and race/ethnicity are connected beliefs related to social equality. (Unfortunately, numbers were too small for other racial/ethnic groups to allow for their inclusion in these analyses.)

FIGURE 1

“There is more work to be done in order to achieve gender equality in the U.S.”



What shapes gender equality in the U.S.

When asked which factors most affect gender equality in the U.S., several drivers were frequently cited, by at least 60 percent of participants, specifically:

- Sexual harassment: **74 percent**
- Domestic violence: **70 percent**
- Equal opportunities in the workplace: **70 percent**
- Unequal pay: **67 percent**
- Equal protection under the constitution: **63 percent**
- Women still doing more caregiving and household than men: **62 percent**
- Access to affordable childcare: **60 percent**

Nearly two thirds (65 percent) of respondents also believe that access to abortion is important to women's rights. Support was especially strong from Black women at 84 percent, and support was lowest from white men at 58 percent.

FIGURE 2

“What would gender equality look like to you?”



Note: Larger text corresponds to more frequent responses

Participants were also asked an open-ended question about what gender equality would look like to them, with word frequencies shown in figure 2. The words in white represent the positive changes respondents want to see, and the words in blue reflect harmful practices that need to end. Equal rights and safety received the most focus, though female political representation and reproductive rights were also prominent.

Box 1 highlights some selected responses.

BOX 1

“What would gender equality look like to you?”

- “ When everyone is treated with dignity and respect. When laws are enforced equally between genders. When people doing the same job get the same pay. When parental leave is mandatory for all businesses. When politicians stop attacking women’s family planning rights. —Black woman, age 59, Maryland**

- “ Equal pay. Equal opportunity. Equal respect. Equal protection under the law. —White man, age 54, Wisconsin**

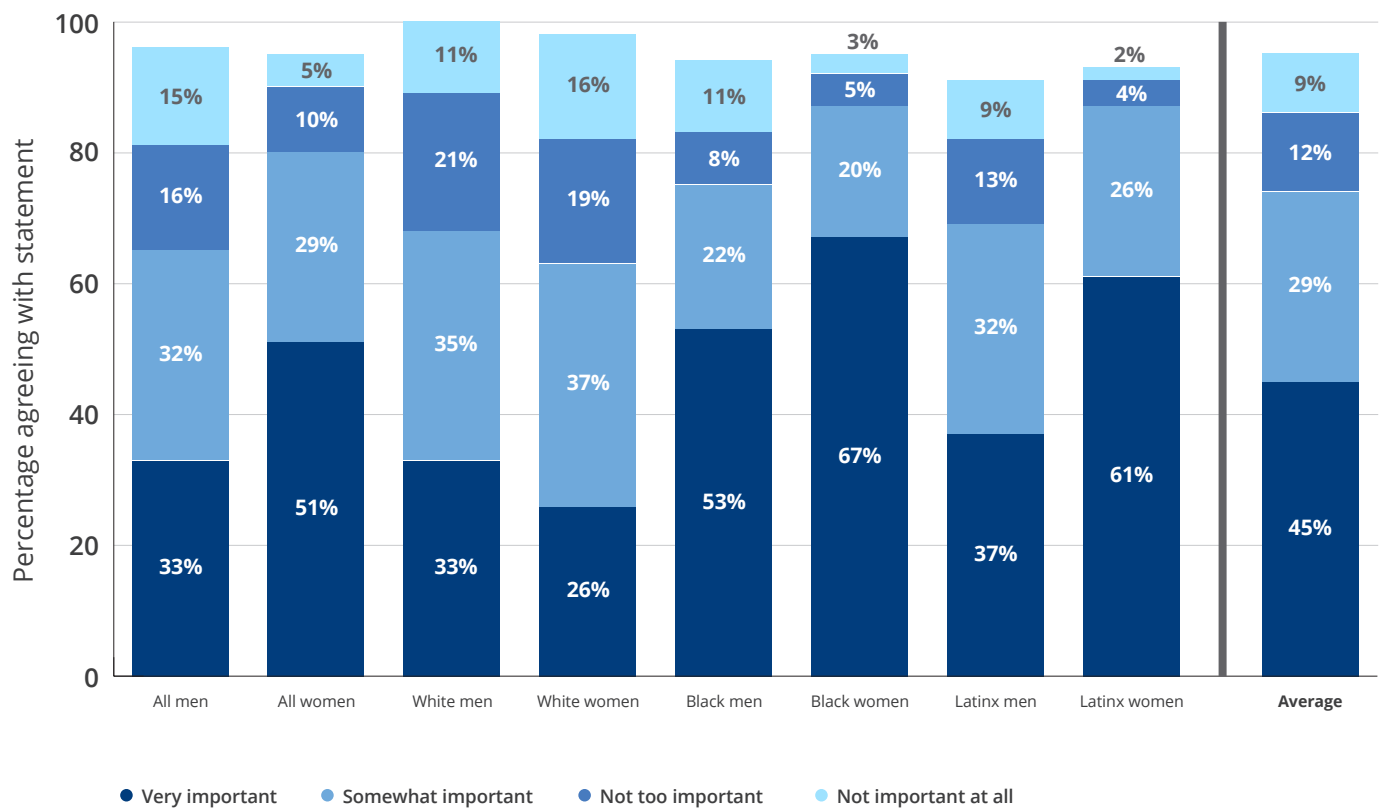
- “ Equal pay and benefits, end of battered women, access to childcare and abortion, equal costs of goods and services. —White woman, age 62, Ohio**

- “ Women having the right to choose for themselves and achieve their goals socially economically and without living in fear that her gender affects her choices. —Black woman, age 37, Colorado**

Almost three quarters (73 percent) report that gender equality issues are important factors in deciding who to vote for in state-level elections (figure 3). However, views vary greatly – with 87 percent of Black and Latinx women believing women’s rights and well-being are important when considering who to vote for in state-level elections, compared to 68 percent of white men.

FIGURE 3

“How important are women’s rights and well-being when making decisions about who to vote for in state elections?”



Note: Figures exclude those who did not vote, and thus do not sum to 100.

Women’s safety and experiences with discrimination

Almost half -- 46 percent -- of women report feeling unsafe sometimes or often in their daily life because of their gender. This rate increases to 53 percent for Black women and 59 percent for Latinx women. In response to an open-ended question asking about their experiences of discrimination or abuse, women most commonly cited harassment and discrimination at work, and abuse broadly. Box 2 captures some of these responses.

BOX 2

“Do you have a story about a time when you felt discriminated against or unsafe because you are a woman?”

- “ Yes, when the higher up makes sexual advances, and I don’t say a thing because I need to keep my job. —Black woman, age 43, New York**

- “ Any time I walk outside alone, not feeling safe going out for a jog or walking anywhere at night. —White woman, age 30, Washington**

- “ Men not listening to me in the workplace or directing questions to my male colleagues when I’m their superior. —White woman, age 37, Wisconsin**

- “ Raped. Physically threatened with a gun. Abused. These are all at different times. So, my answer is yes! — White woman, age 43, Indiana**

- “ I applied for a different position and one of the managers told me that he’d never seen a black woman manager before so not to bother applying. —Black woman, age 59, Texas**

Widespread support for more women in politics

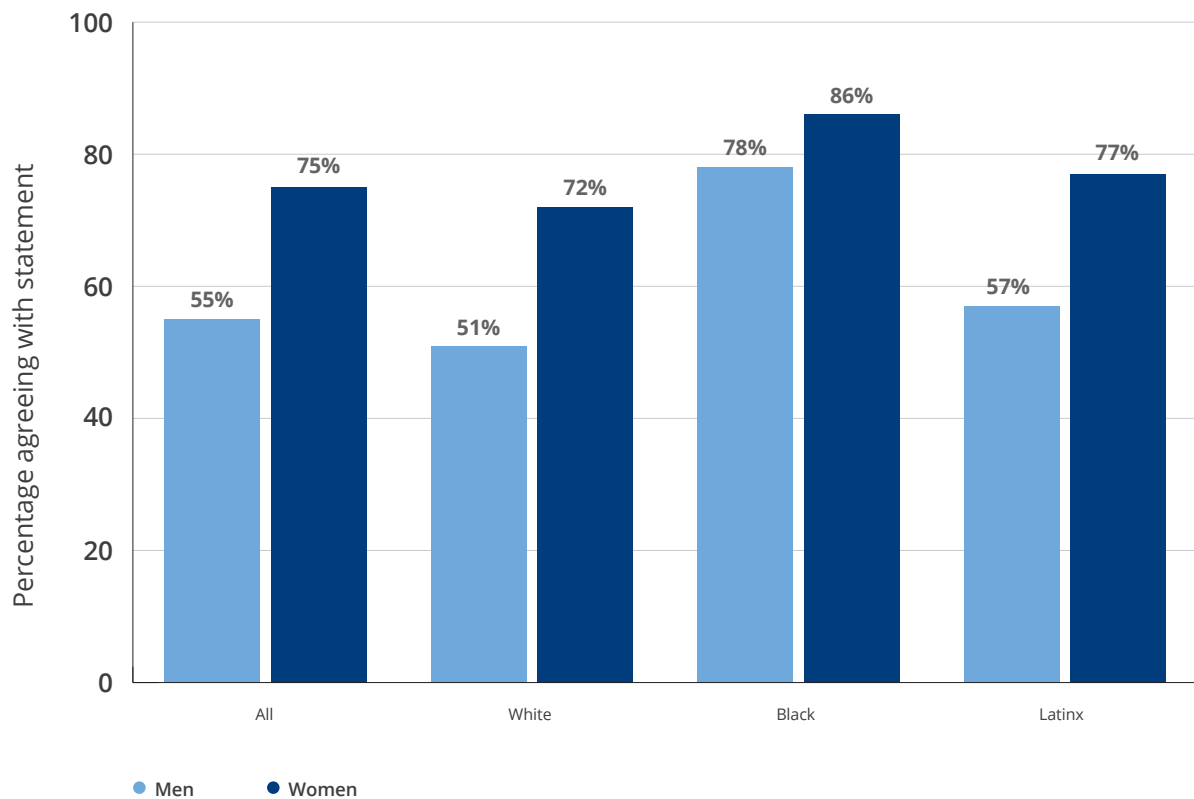
Almost two thirds of U.S. adults (65 percent) agree that the country would be better off if we had more women in political office. Americans generally believe that female rather than male politicians will be better at addressing gender equality (50 vs. 5 percent), although 45 percent did not think politicians would differ on this by sex.

While majorities of all sex and racial/ethnic groups believe there should be more women in political office, gender and racial/ethnic differences are again evident (figure 4):

- Overall, 75 percent of women and 55 percent of men endorsed more women in political office.
- The gender gap is least among Black respondents, with 86 versus 78 percent of Black women and men supporting more women in public office.
- The largest gap is evident between Black women and white men, with 86 percent and 51 percent, respectively supporting more women in office.

FIGURE 4

“There should be more women in political office,” by sex and race/ethnicity



Economic security

The coronavirus pandemic has both exposed and worsened the injustices faced by women, who are more likely to work in frontline jobs and face harsher economic impacts. At the time of the survey in August 2020, a third of respondents reported not having enough money to pay for all bills and basic needs such as food and housing. Half of Black and Latinx women said the same, highlighting worse economic insecurity among these groups. Less than a third of Black and Latinx women had more than \$1,000 in savings, compared to over 60 percent of white men.

A strong majority (59 percent) of all respondents believe men have more opportunities than women when it comes to getting good-paying jobs with benefits. Similarly, 56 percent of respondents believe white women have more economic opportunities than women of color. 86 percent of Black women agreed that white women have access to better economic opportunities, compared with just over half of white women. These findings underline that disparities in economic security are both gendered and racially driven, speaking to the harmful intersection of systemic sexism and systemic racism that is especially pronounced in the time of COVID-19.

Concluding note

Our survey shines important light on some major differences in how gender and race affect people's view of gender equality in the U.S. The top-line results show that while many people believe that there is still more work to be done, women and people of color are more likely to see and experience the gaps and barriers to full equality. Black people in particular showed less of a gender gap and more support for gender equality. White men were least likely to report gender equality as a priority for the U.S. and as a personal priority for them in their voting behavior, and were least likely support more female representation in political office.

The results, against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, underscore the urgent need for policies that prioritize advancing the inclusion, justice, and security of all women. More focus is needed to boost women's political representation and combat discrimination, harassment, and violence against women in the workplace, at home, and in the community. Amplifying marginalized and underrepresented voices throughout the process is key, given the intersection of systemic sexism and systemic racism. We hope that these results help to inform conversations about racial and gender injustice, and serve to motivate leadership for reform.

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¹ For the full report, visit: <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/usa-index/>

