

Technical note: Gender Social Norms Index

The Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI) captures social beliefs on gender equality in capabilities and rights. Introduced in the 2019 Human Development Report, it complements achievement-based objective measures of gender equality, which assess gender gaps in terms of outcomes.¹ By focusing on beliefs, biases and prejudices, it provides an in-depth explanation of the root causes of gender inequality that hinder progress for women and girls.²

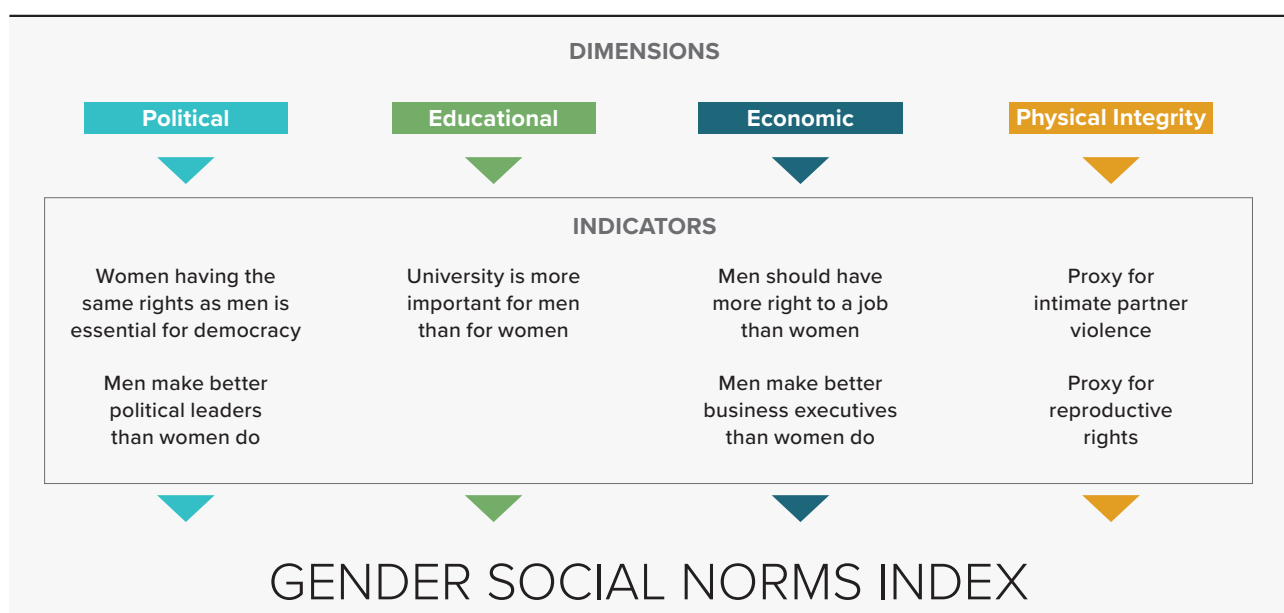
Because social beliefs can obstruct gender equality along multiple pathways, the GSNI tracks people’s attitudes across a range of dimensions that are considered fundamental for women to enlarge their choices and opportunities in order to exercise their freedoms and empower themselves. The GSNI covers four key dimensions—political, educational, economic and physical integrity—to highlight areas where women and girls face persistent disadvantages and systematic discrimination (figure 1). Each dimension is characterized by one or two indicators of the invisible barriers women face in life. In the political dimension the indicator measuring whether people think “women having the same rights as men is essential for democracy” assesses beliefs about basic political participation, and the indicator measuring whether people think “men make better political leaders than

women do” assesses beliefs about achievement in high-level political power. In the educational dimension the indicator measuring whether people think “university is more important for men than women” assesses beliefs about opportunities for advanced education. In the economic dimension the indicator of “men should have more right to a job than women” assesses beliefs about economic participation, and the indicator measuring whether people think “men make better business executives than women do” assesses beliefs about enhanced economic empowerment. The two indicators in the physical integrity dimension serve as proxies for intimate partner violence and reproductive rights.

Data source

The GSNI is calculated using data from the World Values Survey (WVS),³ which employs questionnaires that assess social, political, economic and cultural values and norms. The WVS furnishes microdata captured in different waves, which facilitates the examination of shifts in cultural values, attitudes and beliefs across countries and over time. The data for this GSNI update are the latest available to the HDRO as of 12 January 2023.

Figure 1 Dimensions and indicators of the Gender Social Norms Index



Source: Human Development Report Office.

Methodology

Indicators

Seven component indicators are constructed based on responses to selected WVS questions (table 1). Each indicator takes a value of 1 when an individual has a bias and 0 when the individual does not.

For indicators for which the answer choices are strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree (or agree, neither and disagree), individuals who answer strongly agree or agree are classified as having a bias (table 2). For example, the answer choices for the educational dimension indicator on university being more important for men than for women are strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. Individuals who respond strongly agree or agree are coded as 1 (having a bias), and individuals who respond disagree or strongly disagree are coded as 0 (having no bias).

For indicators reported on a numerical scale, the index defines individuals with a bias as those whose answers fall into a certain range, which varies by indicator (table 3). For instance, the answer choices for the political dimension indicator on equal rights of women being essential for democracy range from 0, against democracy, to 10, essential. Individuals who answer 7 or lower are coded as 1 (having a bias), and individuals who answer 8 or higher are coded as 0 (having no bias). This cutoff is in its intermediate form, indicating clear high support (allowing for some variability) for equal political rights.

The two physical integrity dimension indicators are based on responses to two questions that are proxies for beliefs about intimate partner violence and reproductive rights. For the intimate partner violence indicator, individuals who answer 2 or higher are coded as 1 (having a bias), and individuals who answer 1 are coded as 0 (having no bias). This cutoff is in its strongest form, indicating that people who have any level of agreement that it is justifiable for a man to beat his wife are counted as biased. For the reproductive rights indicator, individuals who answer 1 are coded as 1 (having a bias), and individuals who answer 2 or higher are coded as 0 (having no bias). This is a cutoff in its weakest form, indicating that only people who answer abortion is never justifiable are counted as biased).

Aggregation

Two GSNI values are computed using different methods of aggregation. The first—the core GSNI value—measures the percentage of people with at least one bias. This aggregation is flexible, combining all unions and intersections of biases, such that it even accounts for situations where only one bias from one person could block a woman’s progress in society. The second—the GSNI2 value—measures the percentage of people with at least two biases, reporting the share of people with moderate to intense bias. Both indexes range from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating higher bias against gender equality and women’s empowerment. Recording the share of people with no bias

Table 1 Definition of bias, by indicator

Dimension	Indicator	Choices	Definition of bias
Political	Women having the same rights as men is essential for democracy	0, it is against democracy, 1, not essential, to 10, “essential”	Values from 0 to 7
	Men make better political leaders than women do	Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree	Strongly agree and agree
Educational	University is more important for men than for women	Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree	Strongly agree and agree
Economic	Men should have more right to a job than women	Agree, disagree, neither	Agree
	Men make better business executives than women do	Strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree	Strongly agree and agree
Physical integrity	Proxy for intimate partner violence	1, never, to 10, always	Values from 2 to 10
	Proxy for reproductive rights	1, never, to 10, always	Value of 1

Source: Mukhopadhyay, Rivera-Vazquez and Tapia 2019.

Table 2 Indicators with answer choices on an agree/disagree scale

Indicator	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Men make better political leaders than women do	Bias		na	No bias	
University is more important for men than for women	Bias		na	No bias	
Men should have more right to a job than women	na	Bias	No bias		na
Men make better business executives than women do	Bias		na	No bias	

na is not applicable because the response indicated is not an answer choice.

Source: Mukhopadhyay, Rivera-Vazquez and Tapia 2019.

Table 3 Indicators with answer choices on a numerical scale

Indicator	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Women having the same rights as men is essential for democracy	Bias								No bias		
Proxy for intimate partner violence (it is justifiable for a man to beat his wife)	na	No bias	Bias								
Proxy for reproductive rights (abortion is never justifiable)	na	Bias	No bias								

na is not applicable because 0 is not an answer choice.

Source: Mukhopadhyay, Rivera-Vazquez and Tapia 2019.

(among the seven indicators) is also informative for tracking progress.

Missing values

In calculating GSNI values, missing responses (“missing,” “not asked,” “no answer” and “don’t know”) were dropped based on the assumption that no further information could be obtained from these respondents.⁴

In general, GSNI values were calculated only if there were valid observations for all seven component indicators. However, this rule was relaxed in two cases where only one variable was missing in data from the latest available survey wave: the United Kingdom (missing the indicator “proxy for intimate partner violence” from wave 7) and Italy (missing the indicator “women having the same rights as men is

essential for democracy” from wave 5). In these cases it was assumed that there was no bias in the missing indicator. Therefore, results for these countries should be interpreted with caution.

Coverage

Table A1 presents core GSNI and GSNI 2 values, the share of people with no bias and the share of people biased by dimension for 80 countries and territories (accounting for 85 percent of the world population) with data from either wave 6 or wave 7, and table A2 disaggregates those results by gender. Table A3a presents the same indicators for 38 countries and territories (accounting for 47 percent of the world population) with data for both wave 6 and wave 7, allowing comparison over time, and table A3b disaggregates those results by gender.

Notes

- 1 One example is the Gender Development Index, which is a direct measure of gender gap on the Human Development Index. It indicates the difference in achievements between women and men in three basic human development dimensions: health, education and standard of living.
- 2 Other efforts to look beyond achievement-based measures include the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD 2023) Social Institutions and Gender Index, which examines the underlying drivers of discriminatory social institutions and practices that lead to gender gaps.
- 3 Inglehart and others 2022.
- 4 These missing responses were assumed to have no gender bias (UNDP 2019). The results do not change significantly, given the small percentage of missing values.

References

- Inglehart, R., Haerpfer, C., Moreno, A., Welzel, C., Kizilova, K., Diez-Medrano J., Lagos, M., Norris, P., Ponarin, E., and Puranen, B. (eds.). 2022.** World Values Survey: All Rounds – Country-Pooled Datafile Version 4.0. JD Systems Institute, Madrid; WVSA Secretariat, Vienna.
- Mukhopadhyay, T., Rivera, C., and Tapia., 2019.** “Gender Inequality and Multidimensional Social Norms.” Working Paper. United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report Office, New York.
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- UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). 2019.** *Human Development Report 2019: Beyond Income, Beyond Averages, Beyond Today: Inequalities in Human Development in the 21st Century.* New York.