

Feminist mobilizations defying gender social norms

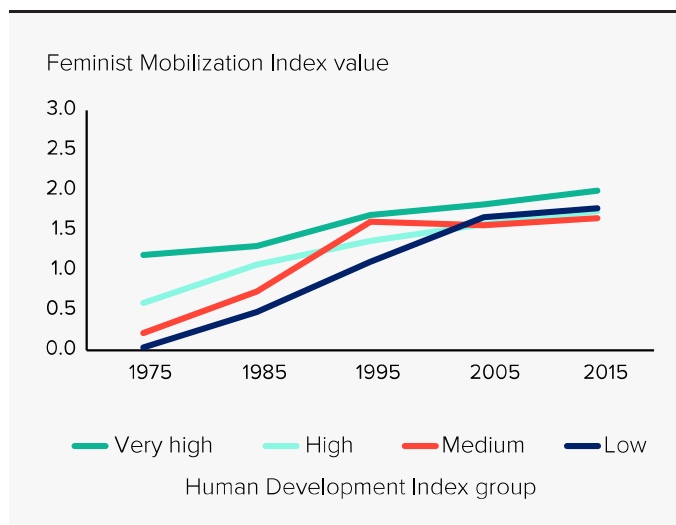
Women's and feminist movements have advanced women's rights across a variety of issues, both nationally and globally. Feminist mobilizations are associated with better legal rights to participate in economic life, greater representation in politics, better support for paid and unpaid domestic care work, better protection from sexual harassment, better access to land tenure, financial inclusion,¹ overcoming stigma and raising awareness around violence against women and girls.² Feminist mobilizations have grown across every Human Development Index (HDI) group. Low and medium HDI countries have seen the greatest increases in autonomy and strength of feminist movements (figure S6.7.1). Low HDI countries that have seen a greater increase in feminist movements

include Burkina Faso, Haiti, Liberia, Rwanda, Senegal and Uganda. Among medium HDI countries, Bangladesh, Cameroon, India and Morocco, among others, have. South Asia and Latin America have had the highest Feminist Mobilization Index scores on average since 1995, while the Arab States have had the lowest.

Feminist mobilizations defy stereotypes, redefine boundaries and expand agency for women and girls. They can open pathways to enhanced wellbeing and agency for women occupying spaces in all spheres of life, using their voices to bring new perspectives, participate equally in society and hold governments and others in positions of power accountable. Countries with powerful feminist movements or higher women's representation in parliaments adopted an average of five more gender-sensitive measures in response to the Covid-19 pandemic than countries without these features.³ Activists in these countries developed feminist plans and gender budget assessments in addition to demanding action to address violence against women and girls and to improve access to public services. Two examples are the Gender and Covid-19 Roundtable with 79 civil society organizations in Chile⁴ and the Women's Caucus in Brazil's legislature⁵ (Bancada Feminina) advocating for facilities that aid women and girls who are subject to violence to be declared essential public services.

Women's participation in social movements has promoted changes in traditional gender norms through two main pathways: policy reforms and reframing gender roles and power relations.⁶ Countries with a lower presence of women's movements or protests (as measured by the Feminist Mobilization Index) have the highest biases against gender equality and women's empowerment (as measured by the Gender Social Norms Index; figure S6.7.2; see also box S6.7.1). The elevated risks and costs of women mobilizing in these contexts are probably

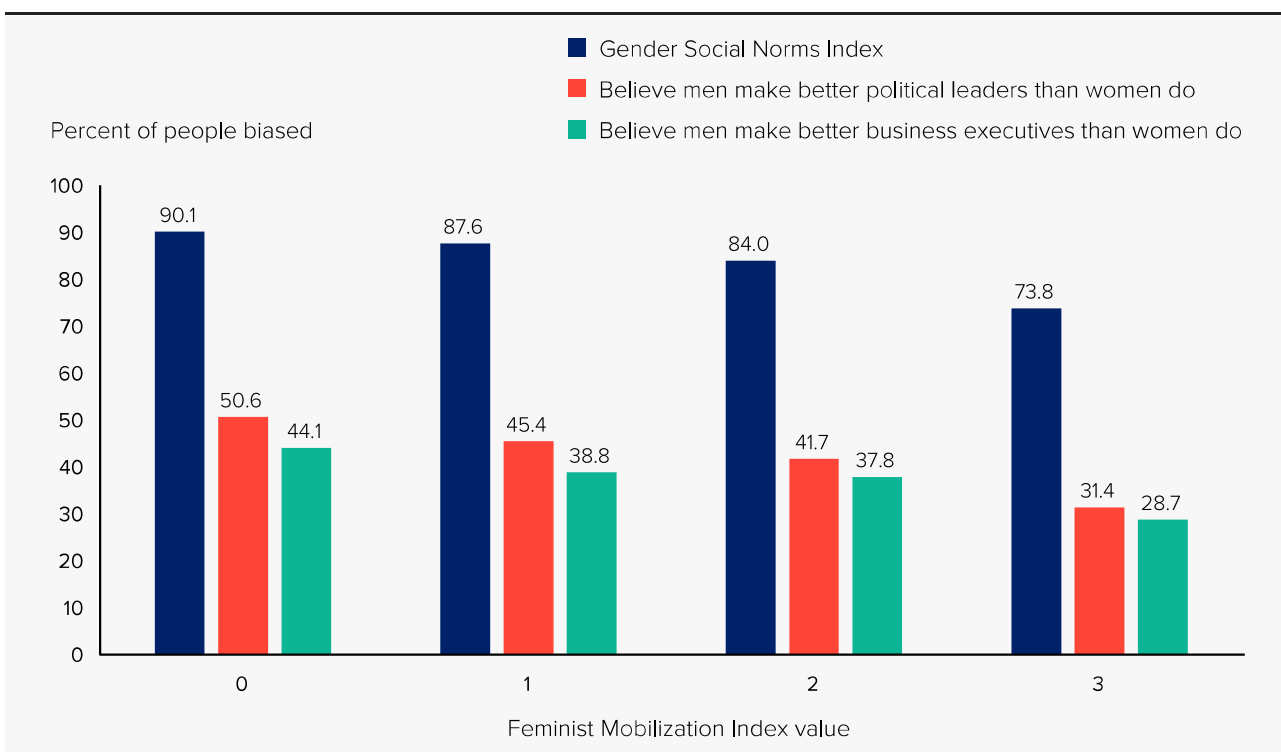
Figure S6.7.1 Feminist mobilizations have grown in autonomy and strength across every Human Development Index group



Note: The Feminist Mobilization Index combines autonomy and strength of movements using a dichotomous coding: $FMI = Existence + (Strength \times Autonomy)$. A country without a feminist movement at all is scored a 0 ($FMI = 0 + [0 \times 0] = 0$). The index awards 1 point for the existence of a movement, so a country with a feminist movement of some variety that is either not strong or not autonomous is scored a 1 ($1 + [1 \times 0]$ or $1 + [0 \times 1]$). A country with a strong and autonomous feminist movement is scored a 2 ($1 + [1 \times 1]$). The countries with the strongest autonomous movements are scored a 3 ($1 + [2 \times 1] = 3$).

Source: Forester and others 2022.

Figure S6.7.2 Countries with less feminist movements have higher biases against gender equality and women's empowerment



Source: UNDP 2020b; Forester and others 2022.

much higher, feeding into a vicious cycle. The association between the presence of biases and lower feminist mobilization appears in political and economic dimensions: in countries with lower feminist mobilizations, almost 50 percent of people think men make better political leaders and more than 40 percent think they make better business executives than women.

How are biases against gender equality and women's empowerment changing? The 2022 Gender Social Norms Index

Gender inequalities persist, and recent shocks, including planetary imbalances, the Covid-19 pandemic and economic crises, are aggravating the current scenario for women all over the world. The Gender Inequality Index (GII) reveals a lack of global improvement in its dimensions, with the world value stagnating at 0.465 for the past three years. Alarming, all regions experienced a decline in GII value from 2019 to 2020 except South Asia, which

experienced an increase; from 2020 to 2021 all regions except the Arab States and East Asia and the Pacific registered a decline.⁷ While women have seen some progress in basic capabilities, there are still challenges in areas that involve greater agency and power. In 59 countries adult women are more educated than adult men. In those same countries the income gender gap is 39 percent.⁸ Behind these calculations social norms help us understand these dynamics of power imbalances.

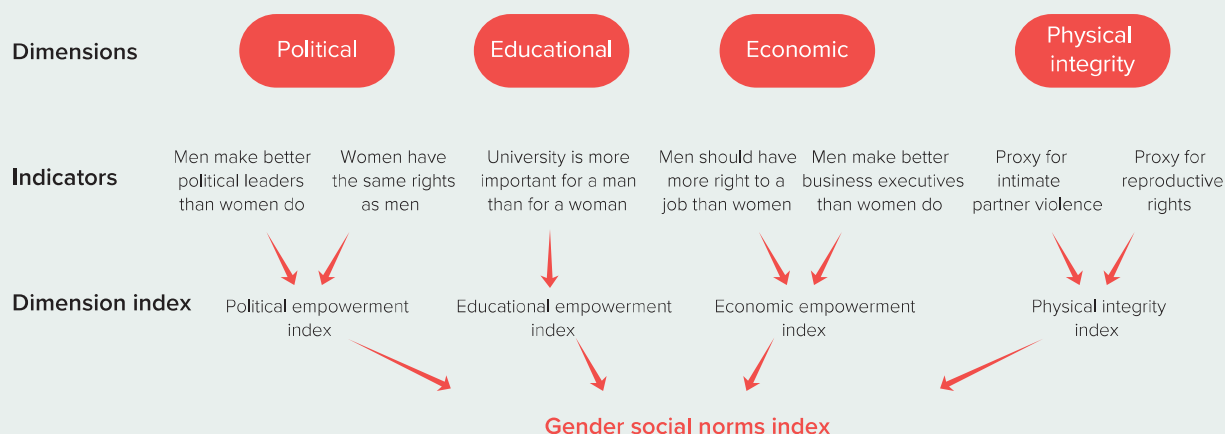
According to the Gender Social Norms Index, 91 percent of men and 88 percent of women show at least one clear bias against gender equality in areas such as politics, economics, education, intimate partner violence and women's reproductive rights (figure S6.7.3; see also box S6.7.1). Men have high biases in thinking that men make better political leaders than women do (52.8 percent) and that men should have more right to a job than women (50.2 percent). Women present fewer biases across all dimensions.

This year's Gender Social Norms Index results provide hope, showing an improvement from the first

Box S6.7.1 The Gender Social Norms Index—measuring biases, prejudices and beliefs

The Gender Social Norms Index, introduced in the 2019 Human Development Report, comprises four dimensions—political, educational, economic and physical integrity. It is constructed based on responses to seven questions from the World Values Survey, which are used to create seven indicators (box figure 1).

Box figure 1 How social beliefs can obstruct gender and women’s empowerment



Note: For more information, see <https://hdr.undp.org/content/2020-gender-social-norms-index-gsni>.

Source: Mukhopadhyay, Rivera and Tapia 2019.

For each indicator a variable takes the value of 1 when an individual has a bias and 0 when the individual does not. The core index value is an aggregation based on the “union approach,” which measures the percentage of people with biases, independent of the number of biases. In many instances it might take only one bias from one person to block a woman’s progress in society.

This year’s index covers two sets of countries and territories. The first set consists of countries and territories with data for wave 5 (2005–2009), wave 6 (2010–2014) or wave 7 (2017–2022) of the World Values Survey (accessed April 2022) and uses the latest data available. This set includes 76 countries and territories, accounting for more than 84 percent of the global population. The second set consists of only countries and territories with data for wave 6 and wave 7. This set includes 37 countries and territories, accounting for 48 percent of the global population.

Source: Mukhopadhyay, Rivera-Vazquez and Tapia 2019; UNDP 2020b.

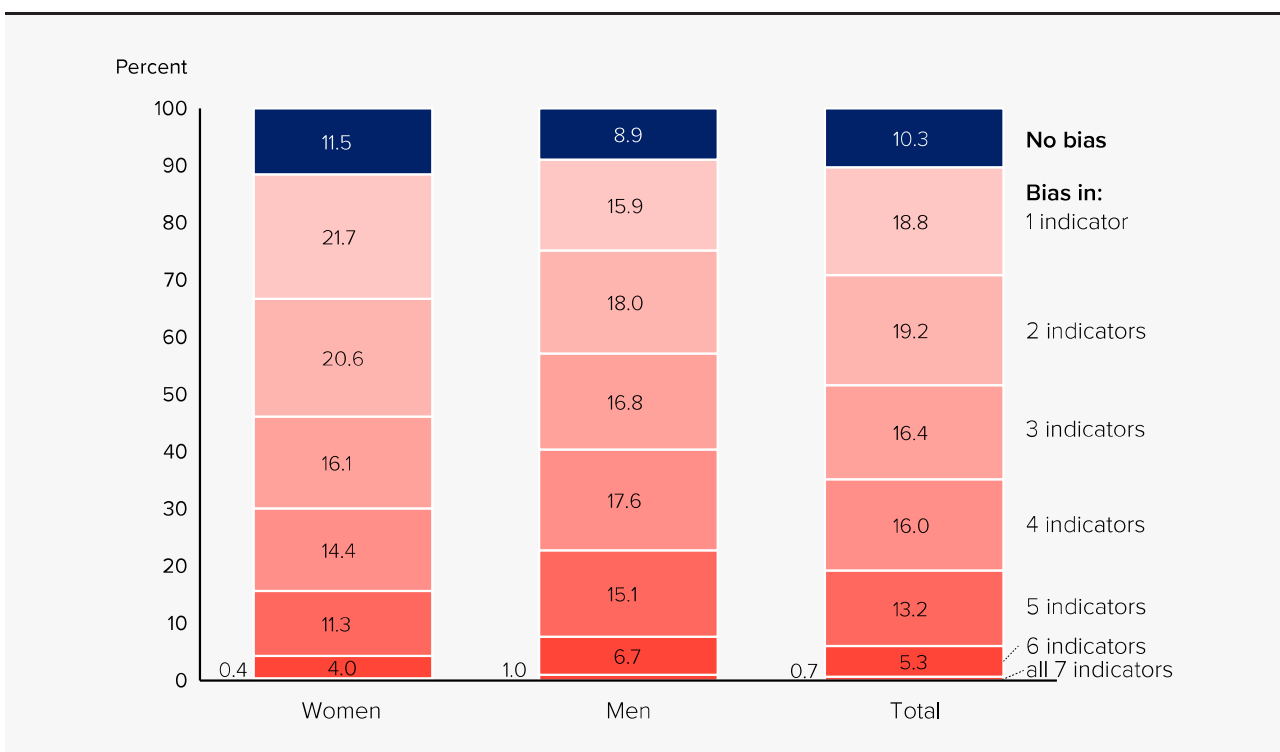
time it was calculated. On average, biases against gender equality and women’s empowerment declined from 2010–2014 to 2017–2022 (table S6.7.1).

Most countries and territories with time-series data showed progress: women in 23 countries and territories and men in 26 countries and territories showed reduced biases against gender equality and women’s empowerment (figure S6.7.4). Progress in the share of people with no bias was greater in Germany, New Zealand, Singapore and Japan. But there were reversals in several countries, among women in 14 countries and men in 11 countries. The greatest reversals took place in the Republic of Korea, Mexico, Chile and Iraq.

Expanding human development and drawing cultural change in a patriarchal society

In line with the two-tier framework presented in chapter 6, the different policy blocks can support the task of defying gender social norms. Investing in gender-sensitive responses to shocks, especially initiatives that build partnerships between governments and civil society,⁹ can help women better cope with uncertainty. Strengthening and expanding social protection systems to cover women can work as insurance, increasing their bargaining power at the household level, promoting financial inclusion, supporting long-term income generation and building

Figure S6.7.3 Only 10.3 percent of people worldwide have no gender social norms biases, including 11.5 percent of women and 8.9 percent of men



Note: Based on 76 countries and territories with data from wave 6 (2010–2014) or wave 7 (2017–2022) of the World Values Survey, accounting for 84 percent of the global population. Averages are weighted based on the population age 15 and older from United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs population data.

Source: Human Development Report Office based on data from the World Values Survey, accessed April 2022.

Table S6.7.1 Percentage of people with at least one bias against gender equality, 2010–2014 and 2017–2022

Group	Percent of people		Change (percentage points)
	2010–2014	2017–2022	
Women	86.5	84.3	–2.2
Men	90.5	87.5	–3.1
Total	88.5	85.7	–2.7

Note: Based on 37 countries and territories with data from wave 6 (2010–2014) and wave 7 (2017–2022) of the World Values Survey, accounting for 48 percent of the global population. Averages are weighted based on the population age 15 and older from United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs population data.

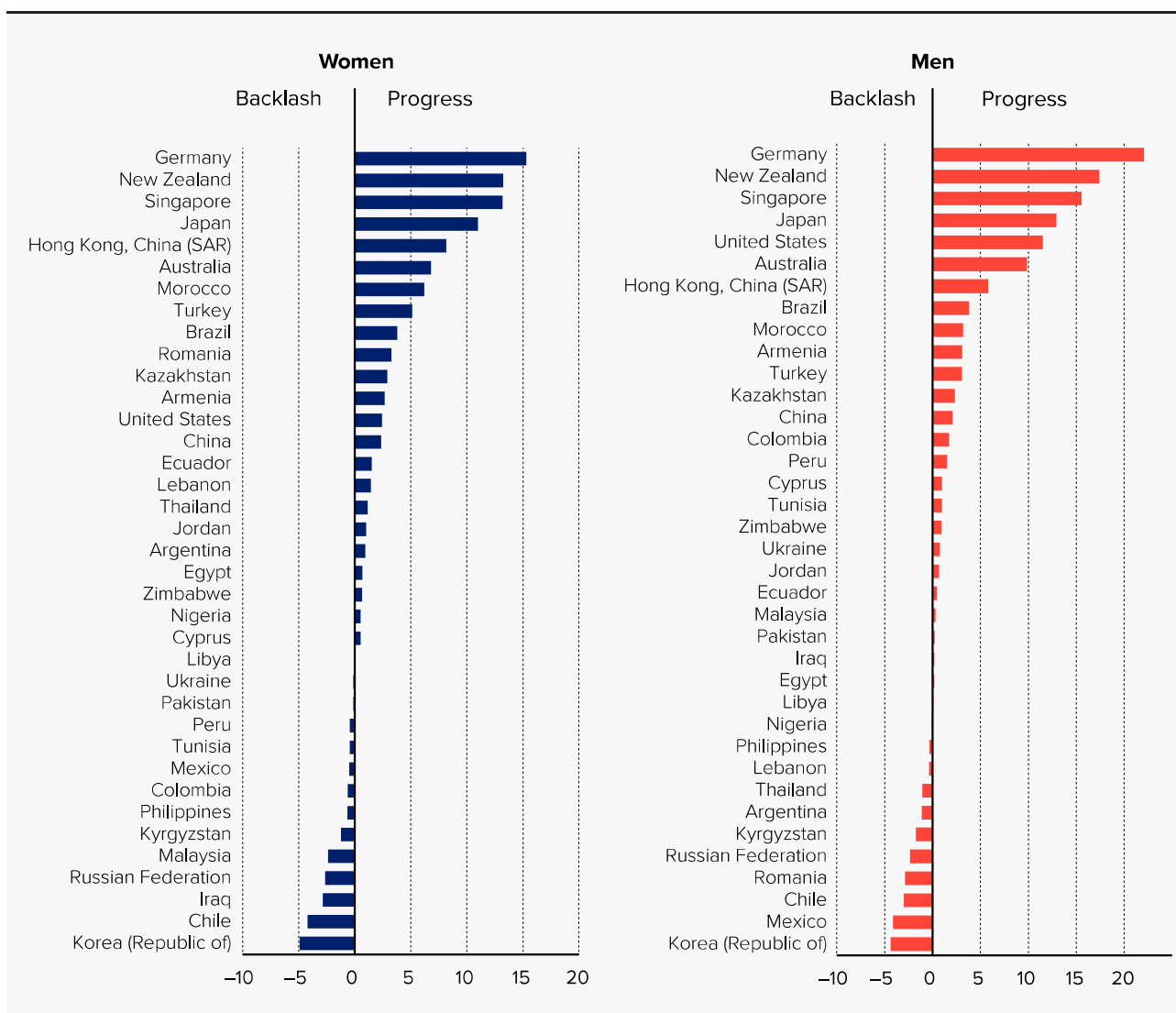
Source: Human Development Report Office based on data from the World Values Survey, accessed April 2022.

agency.¹⁰ Encouraging innovative interventions can be a tipping point for traditional norms—for instance, taking advantage of social media to amplify the messages of feminist movements or incorporating new narratives in daily practices or cultural or artistic activities.

The second tier that targets cultural mismatches can go a long way in shifting gender traditional norms—for example, through gender transformative education.¹¹ This approach uses the whole education system (policies, pedagogies and community engagement) to transform stereotypes, attitudes and practices regarding power relations and gender binaries by raising critical consciousness about the root cause of inequalities. Increasing women’s representation in public spaces, institutions, governance processes and leadership positions can change stereotypes and support changes in laws and policies defending women’s rights. Recognizing the relevance of shifting social norms for gender equality or of women’s right to body and physical integrity can help change scripts and narratives to portray women in a certain way and to build hope.

Feminist movements and women’s different forms of resistance and action have come a long way, so amid uncertainty, we can imagine and build a feminist future. In the face of uncertainty and shocks,

Figure S6.7.4 Most countries saw progress on bias against gender equality and women’s empowerment between 2010–2014 and 2017–2022—but several countries saw reversals



Note: Based on 37 countries and territories with data from wave 6 (2010–2014) and wave 7 (2017–2022) of the World Values Survey, accounting for 48 percent of the global population.

Source: Human Development Report Office based on data from the World Values Survey, accessed April 2022.

advocates and social movements can demand governments and institutions act to prevent disproportionate increases in and intensity of inequalities. Grassroots and community-level organizations and feminist collectives, as relevant actors within broader

movements, can be vital sources of knowledge, experience and perspectives to enable transformation. There is great potential in community-based interventions—apart from institutional reforms—that could be leveraged to move the needle on social norms.

NOTES

1 Weldon and others 2018.

2 Sahay 2021; UN Women and UNDP 2022.

3 UN Women and UNDP 2022, p. 10.

4 Senate of the Republic of Chile 2020.

5 Prange de Oliveira 2021.

6 Jimenez, Harper and George 2021.

7 The GII is a composite metric of gender inequality using three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. A low GII value indicates low inequality between women and men, and a high GII value indicates high inequality between women and men.

8 Calculations based on data from table 4 in the *Statistical Annex*.

9 UN Women and UNDP 2022.

10 Plank, Marcus and Jones 2018.

11 UNICEF 2021b. Argentina, India, Nepal, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Zimbabwe are already implementing models based on this approach.