

A Ms. Foundation for Women Survey

A Fresh Look at the Public's View toward Issues and Solutions

August 2015

In a new survey, the Ms. Foundation for Women takes a fresh look at how the public thinks about community problems and solutions, including the intersections of race, gender equality, and income inequality. The findings offer a glimpse into what the public may want when candidates for office, elected officials, and non-profit organizations address our most difficult issues. PerryUndem Research/Communication conducted the survey among a nationally representative sample of 1,051 adults. The survey was conducted online using GfK's Knowledge Panel, from May 19 through 26, 2015. The margin of error for the total results is ± 3.0 percentage points. Detailed methods can be found at the end of the memo.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- A majority of the public sees issues in their community as linked – not as siloed problems – and they want elected officials to propose solutions from that approach. They may dismiss easy answers or platitudes.
- Presidential candidates may be missing the point by referring to "women's issues," which a majority of the public hears narrowly as "equal pay" and "abortion." In reality, most see issues affecting women much more broadly.
- A large majority of the public believes there is more work to do around gender equality. Many recognize that women of color have fewer opportunities than white women. A majority also sees unequal opportunities when it comes to income.
- The public sees women and men as having different views on policy solutions as well as different strengths when it comes to solving problems. Men and women agree on these points – as do individuals across political party affiliations.

- That said, many see a deficit of women in positions of power at both the community and national levels.
- Most people, while initially rejecting the title “feminist,” believe in the core principles of feminism.
- After a very simple definition of feminism, the proportion that identifies with the label jumps from 16 percent to 52 percent.

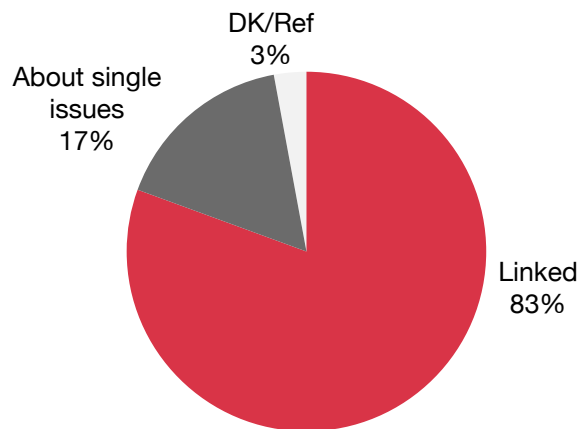
Following are more detailed findings.

DETAILED FINDINGS

The public sees community problems as interconnected.

Most survey respondents think issues facing their communities are interconnected rather than isolated concerns. More than eight in ten (83 percent) say problems tend to be linked and 17 percent say problems tend to be about single issues. (See Figure 1.) Majorities across every demographic and geographic group see issues as linked.

Fig. 1: Do you think problems in communities tend to be ...

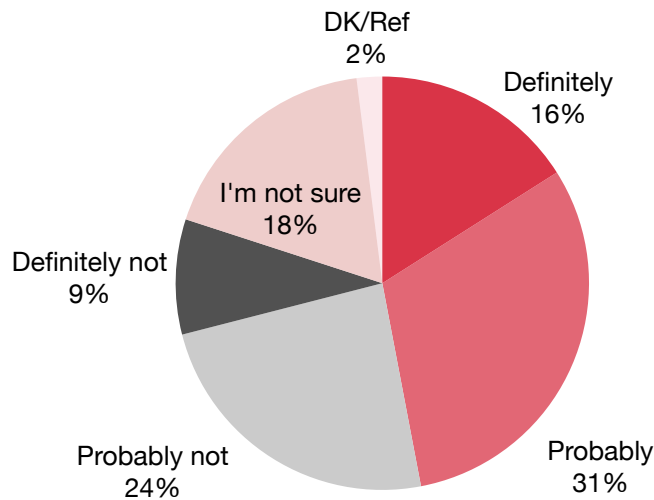


Q Do you think problems in communities tend to be about single issues or do problems tend to be linked? Note: respondents could select multiple responses.

N = 1051

Many see links between racial inequality and community issues. Close to half of the public (47 percent) sees a connection between racial inequality and problems in their community. (See Figure 2.)

Fig. 2: Is racial inequality linked to problems in your community?



Q Do you think racial inequality is linked to any problems in your community?
N = 1051

People of color, particularly African Americans, are more likely than white individuals to see connections between racial inequality and problems. Democrats and those living in metro areas are also more likely than others to see connections. (See Table 1.)

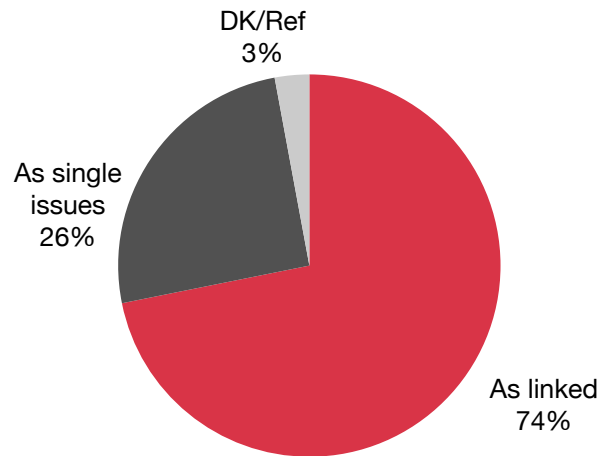
TABLE 1: Is racial inequality linked to problems in your community?

	Definitely / probably yes	Definitely / probably no
Total	47	33
White	43	36
African Americans	67	11
Latinos	55	23
Asian Americans	57	25
Democrats	60	21
Independents	45	34
Republicans	32	49
Metro	49	31
Non-metro	39	41

When politicians approach problems, the public wants them to be thinking about how issues are connected.

Three in four respondents (74 percent) want politicians to think about problems as linked, compared to 26 percent who want officials to approach issues as isolated problems. (See Figure 3.) Majorities across demographic groups express this view, including most adults 65 and older (82 percent).

Fig. 3: When your elected officials try to solve problems, do you want them to think about problems....

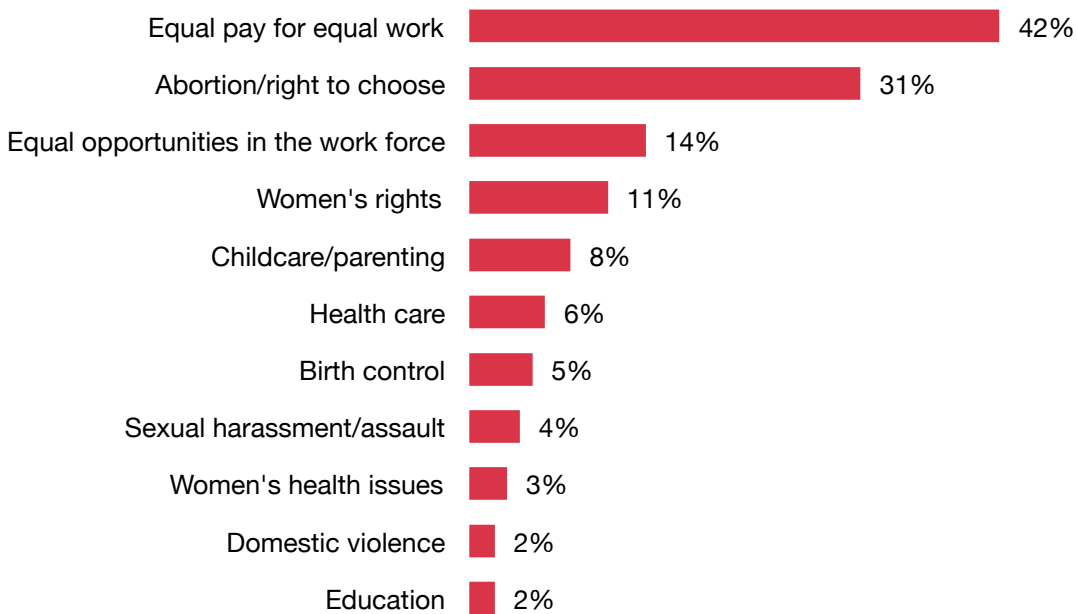


*Q When your elected officials try to solve problems, do you want them to think about problems as linked or as single issues? Note: respondents could select multiple responses.
N = 1051*

Are candidates missing the point by referring to "women's issues"?

Candidates may be under-cutting themselves when they use vague terms like "women's issues." In an open-ended question, the survey asked respondents what issues a candidate refers to when he or she talks about "women's issues." The public hears this primarily as equal pay for equal work (42 percent) and abortion (31 percent). (See Figure 4.)

Fig. 4: Let's say a candidate for president is talking about "women's issues." What issues is he or she talking about?

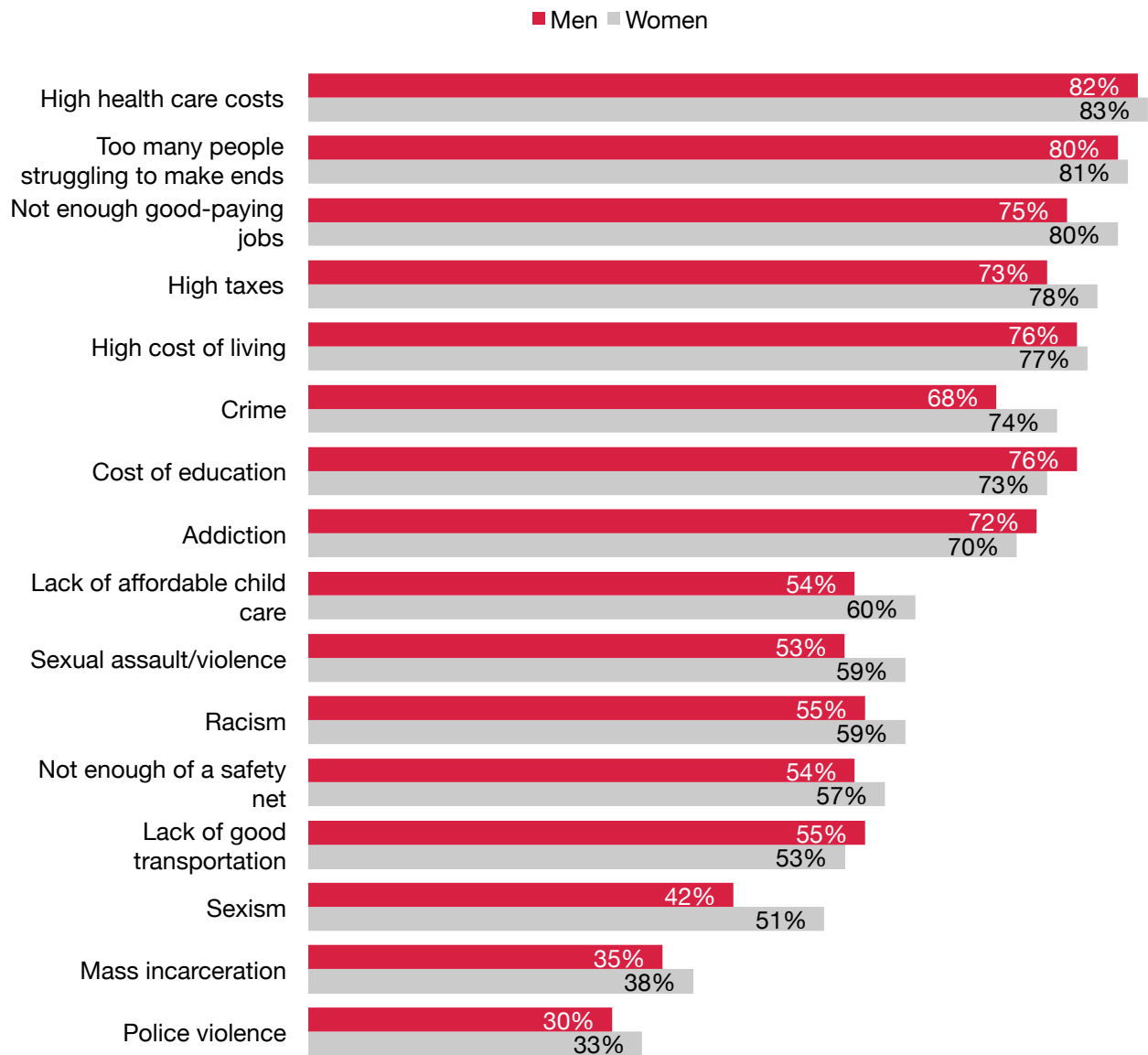


*Q Think about the 2016 Presidential election. Let's say a candidate for president is talking about "women's issues." What issues do you think he or she is talking about?
N =1051*

The big issues women (and men) see in their community are related to economic problems.

The most common problems cited by both women and men relate to economic issues: health care costs, too many people struggling to make ends meet, not enough good paying jobs, and the high cost of living. (See Figure 5.)

**Fig. 5: Problems facing local community
% "Major" or "minor" problem**



Q Do you see any of these problems in your local community?
N = 1051

Many see some issues as disproportionately affecting women.

While respondents see several issues affecting men and women in equal proportions, one in four says a lack of good paying jobs affects more women than men (26 percent). Slightly more than half of the public (55 percent) says a lack of affordable childcare affects women disproportionately. Respondents say mass incarceration and police violence disproportionately affect men (57 percent and 52 percent). (See Table 2.)

TABLE 2: Does each issue affect more women or men in the country?

	Affects more women	Affects more men	The same number of each	DK/REF
Sexual assault/violence	74	3	21	2
Sexism	63	4	31	3
Lack of affordable childcare	55	2	41	2
Not enough good paying jobs	26	8	64	2
Not enough of a safety net	19	3	76	2
Too many people struggling to make ends meet	18	3	76	2
High health care costs	14	3	81	3
High cost of living	9	3	86	2
Lack of good transportation	7	2	88	2
Cost of education	5	3	89	2
High taxes	4	4	90	2
Crime	11	26	61	2
Racism	5	18	75	3
Addiction	3	21	74	3
Police violence	2	52	43	3
Mass incarceration	2	57	39	2

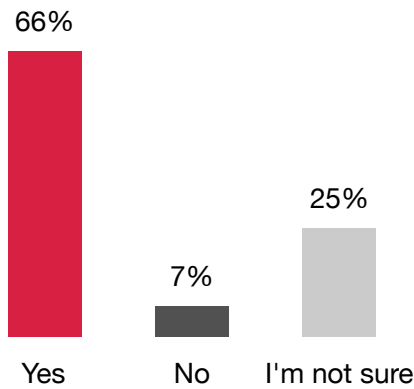
Q These issues affect both men and women. That said, do you think each problem affects more women or more men in the country?

N =1051

The public sees women and men as having different views and different strengths when it comes to solving problems.

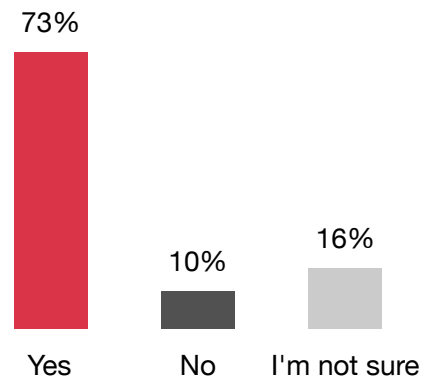
Interestingly, two-thirds of adults (66 percent) think women and men have different views when it comes to solutions to problems. Nearly three in four (73 percent) say women and men have different strengths when it comes to solving problems. (See Figures 6 and 7.) Men and women agree on both of these points. (See Table 3.) Additionally, individuals across the political spectrum agree.

Fig. 6: Do men and women have different views on solutions to problems, or not?



Q Do you think men and women have different views when it comes to solutions for problems, or not?
N = 1051

Fig. 7: Do men and women have different strengths in solving problems, or not?



Q Do you think men and women have different strengths when it comes to solving problems, or not?
N = 1051

TABLE 3: When it comes to solving problems...

Percent "yes"	Men and women have different views	Men and women have different strengths
Total	66	73
Women	68	75
Men	67	73
Democrats	69	75
Independents	64	69
Republicans	65	77

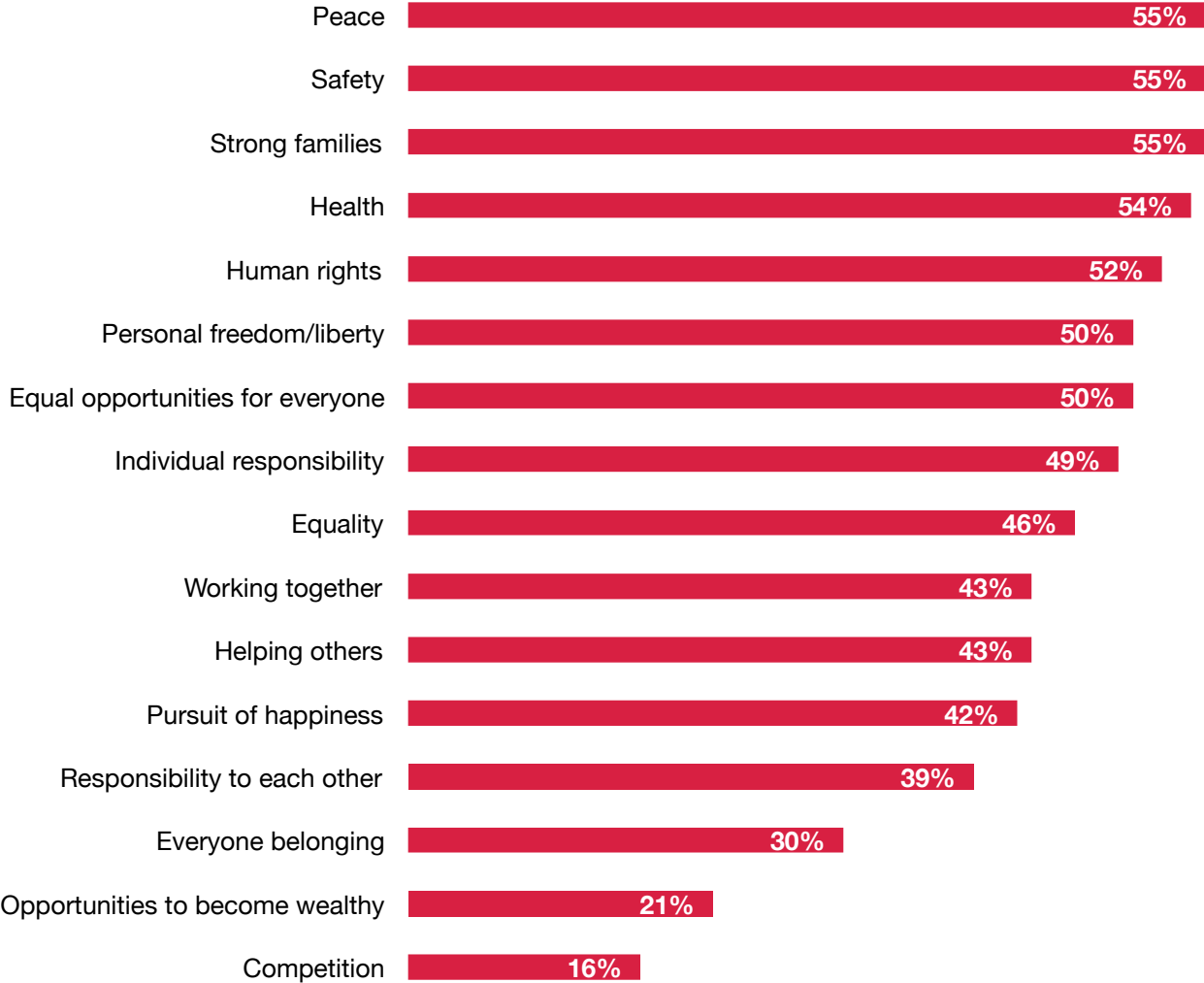
Several values emerge as important when approaching solutions to problems.

Respondents were asked the following question:

One way to think about solving problems is looking at what we value. For you, how important is each of these values when it comes to working on problems in your community?

A number of values rise to the top: peace, safety, strong families, health, human rights, personal freedom/liberty, equal opportunities for everyone, and individual responsibility. (See Figure 8.)

Fig. 8: Importance of values when solving problems
% "Extremely important"



Q One way to think about solving problems is looking at what we value. For you, how important is each of these values when it comes to working on problems in your community?
N =1051

Women are slightly more likely than men to find a number of values important. There are not huge differences across party affiliation. That said, Republicans are slightly more likely to say “strong families” and “individual responsibility” are extremely important values to consider in community solutions. Democrats are slightly more likely to say peace, safety, health, human rights, and equal opportunities are extremely important. Equal proportions across party affiliation agree on the value of personal freedom. (See Table 4.)

TABLE 4: How important is each value... % Extremely important

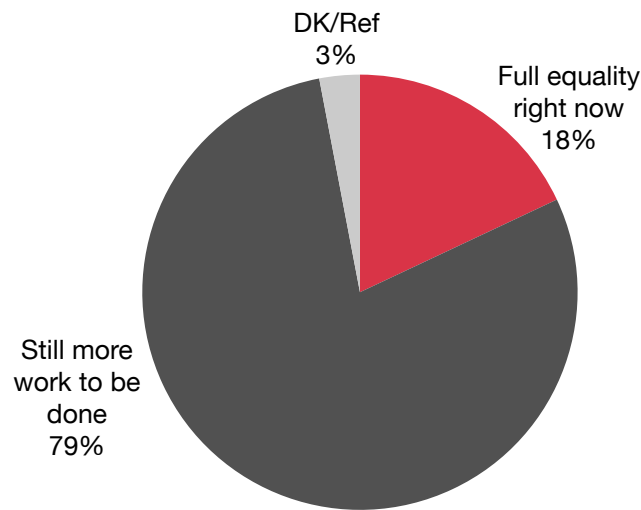
	Strong families	Safety	Peace	Health	Human rights	Personal freedom	Equal opportunities	Individual responsibility
Total	55	55	55	54	52	50	50	49
Women	62	62	58	59	55	50	55	52
Men	50	50	52	50	51	52	47	48
Democrats	54	62	63	62	63	53	58	45
Independents	53	52	51	51	48	49	49	50
Republicans	61	53	48	47	45	50	41	53

Majorities see gender, race, and income inequalities persist.

Nearly everyone – 94 percent of respondents – say “equal opportunities for everyone” is an important value to keep in mind when working on problems in their community.

Most see current disparities in opportunities. Eight in ten adults (79 percent) say more work needs to be done to achieve equality for women in work, life, and politics. Eighteen percent say full gender equality has been achieved. (See Figure 9.)

Fig. 9: Do you think there is full equality for women or is there still more work to be done?



Q Do you think there is full equality for women in work, life, and politics or is there still more work to be done?
N = 1051

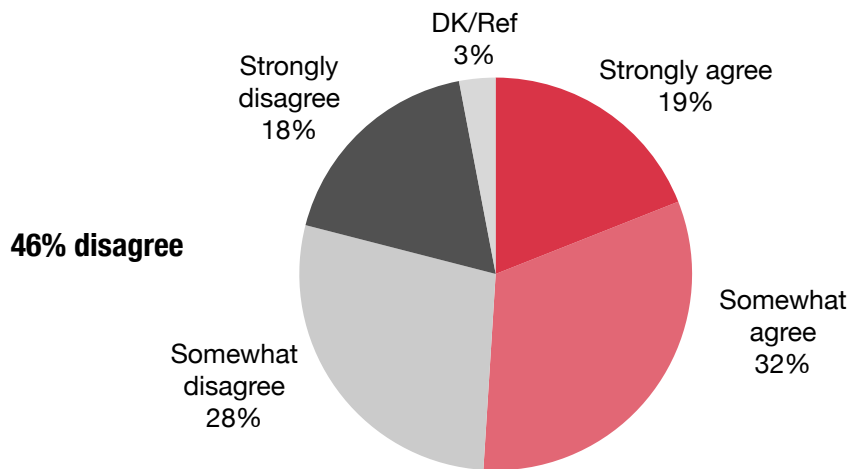
Women, older adults, and Democrats are among the most likely to say more work needs to be done to achieve full equality for women – although majorities across segments agree. (See Table 5.)

TABLE 5: Do you think there is...

	More work to be done	Full equality now
Total	79	18
Women	85	14
Men	75	23
Age 18 to 29	74	22
30 to 39	70	26
40 to 49	81	16
50 to 64	85	14
65+	85	14
Democrats	88	11
Independents	78	18
Republicans	71	26

Women of color face additional barriers around inequality – and many adults recognize these challenges. Close to half (46 percent) disagrees with the statement “women of color have equal opportunities in work, life, and politics as white women.” One in five (19 percent) strongly agrees with the statement. (See Figure 10.)

Fig. 10: Agree or disagree: Women of color have equal opportunities in work, life, and politics as white women.



Q Do you agree or disagree: women of color have equal opportunities in work, life, and politics as white women.
N = 1051

Both African-American women (70 percent) and men (68 percent) are likely to disagree that women of color have opportunities equal to white women. A majority of Republicans (70 percent), on the other hand, agree that women of color have equal opportunities to white women. (See Table 6.)

TABLE 6: “Women of color have equal opportunities as white women”

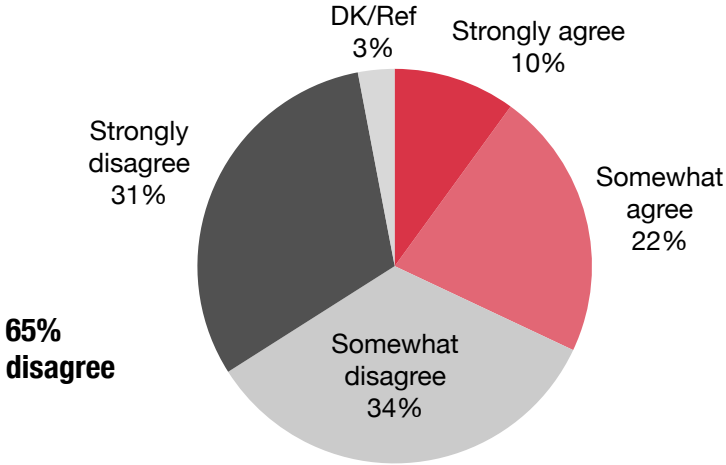
	Agree	Disagree
Total	51	46
White women	58	41
White men	56	43
AA women	30	70
AA men*	27	68
Latinas	52	47
Latino men**	47	51
Democrats	38	61
Independents	52	44
Republicans	70	27

*Small sample size, n=79 African American men

** Small sample size, n=88 Latino men

Two-thirds of adults (65 percent) disagree that low-income and high-income individuals have equal opportunities in work, life, and politics. One in three agrees (32 percent), with ten percent agreeing strongly. (See Figure 11.)

Fig. 11: Agree or disagree: Low-income individual have equal opportunities as high-income individuals.



Q Do you agree or disagree: low-income individuals have equal opportunities in work, life, and politics as high-income individuals.
N =1051

Older individuals, Democrats, and non-metro residents are most inclined to say that low-income individuals lack equal opportunities. Interestingly, adults in the highest income bracket are most likely to acknowledge unequal opportunities. (See Table 7.)

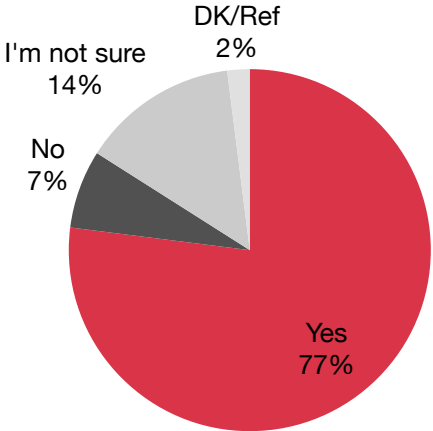
TABLE 7: “Low-income have equal opportunities as high income”

	Agree	Disagree
Total	32	65
Women	31	68
Men	35	63
Age 18 to 29	38	60
30 to 39	34	62
40 to 49	33	62
50 to 64	32	67
65+	26	72
White women	31	68
White men	38	61
AA women	31	68
AA men	30	66
Latinas	32	66
Latino men	41	57
Democrats	28	71
Independents	32	65
Republicans	41	56
Under \$50K HH income	31	66
\$50K to \$100K	36	63
\$100K to \$150K	34	62
\$150K+	24	74

A majority of adults think women should have equal positions of power in solving problems, and many see women as underrepresented.

More than three in four adults (77 percent) think that women should have equal positions of power in solving community and national problems. (See Figure 12.)

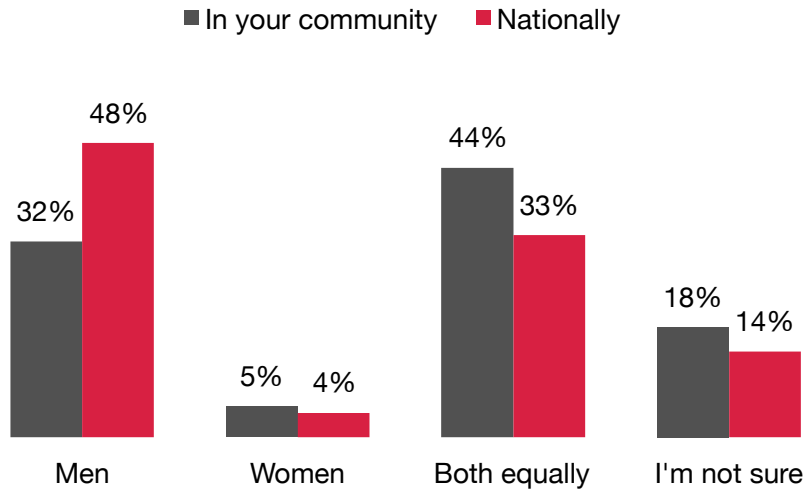
Fig. 12: Should women have equal positions of power in solving community and national problems?



Q Do you think women should have equal positions of power in solving community and national problems, or not?
N = 1051

One in three adults (32 percent) feels men are disproportionately in positions of power at the community level. About half (48 percent) perceives more men in leadership positions at the national level. (See Figure 13.)

Fig. 13: Who do you feel is in more positions of power to fix problems?



Q Right now, who do you feel is in more positions of power to fix problems in your community?

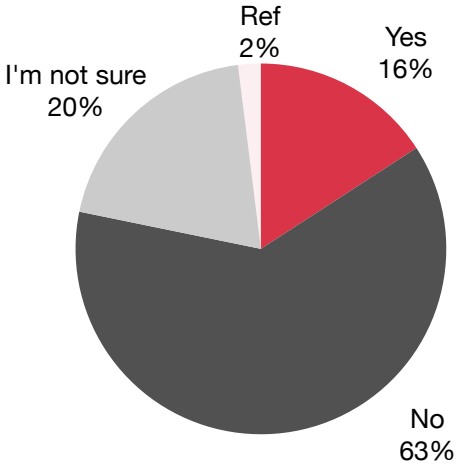
Q Who do you feel is in more positions of power to fix problems at the national level?

N = 1051

While most do not adopt the “feminist” label at first, a large majority believes in equality across genders.

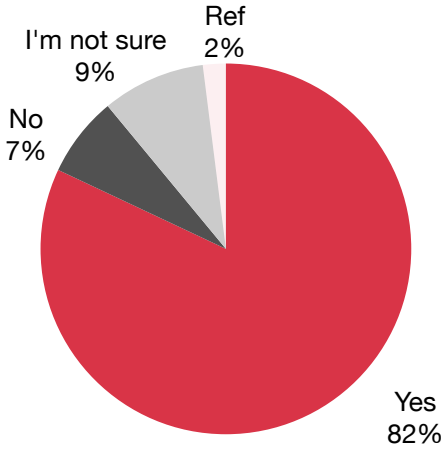
Most adults say they are not a feminist (63 percent) or are not sure (20 percent), with 16 percent adopting the label. A large majority (82 percent), however, believes in equality across genders. (See Figures 14 and 15.)

Fig. 14: Do you consider yourself a feminist, or not?



Q Do you consider yourself a feminist, or not?
N = 1051

Fig. 15: Do you believe in equality across genders?



Q Do you believe in equality across genders?
N = 1051

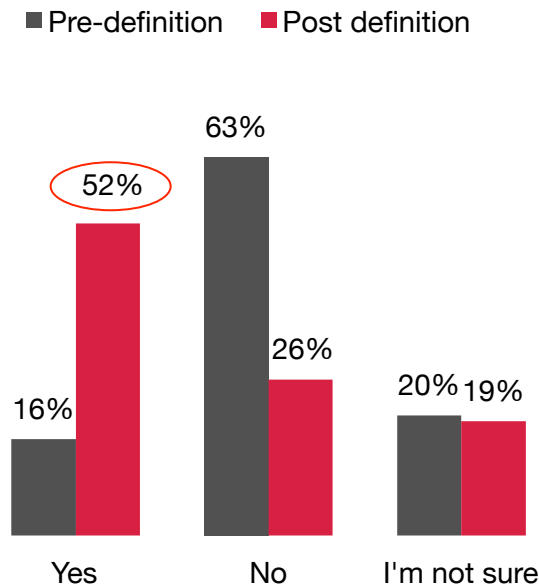
Slightly more than half of the public adopts the feminist label after hearing a definition of the term.

After asking about identification with the label “feminist,” respondents were presented with the following definition of the term:

The definition of feminism is a belief in political, economic, and social equality across genders. After hearing this definition, would you consider yourself a feminist?

After a simple definition, the proportion of respondents who identify as a feminist jumps 36 percentage points to slightly more than half of the public (52 percent). (See Figure 16.)

Fig. 16: Do you consider yourself a feminist?



Latinas (25 percent) and white women (23 percent) are more likely than African-American women (15 percent) to embrace the “feminist” label prior to a definition. After a definition, more than half of African-American women (54 percent) adopt the label – similar to Latinas (58 percent) and white women (62 percent). (See Table 8.)

Republicans are least likely to consider themselves a feminist – although the proportion increases from three percent to 32 percent after a definition.

TABLE 8: Belief in gender equality and identifying as feminist

	Believe in equality	Feminist (before definition)	Feminist (after definition)	Difference
Total	82	16	52	+36
Women	83	22	60	+38
Men	84	9	44	+35
Age 18 to 29	76	22	51	+29
30 to 39	78	18	49	+31
40 to 49	82	7	46	+39
50 to 64	86	15	55	+40
65+	87	14	54	+40
White	85	16	53	+37
AA	72	12	47	+35
Latino	79	17	55	+38
API	68	17	46	+29
White women	85	23	62	+39
White men	86	9	44	+35
AA women	77	15	54	+39
AA men	75	7	43	+36
Latinas	76	25	58	+33
Latino men	85	8	53	+45
Democrats	88	27	65	+38
Independents	80	13	51	+38
Republicans	77	3	32	+29

CONCLUSIONS

The survey shows that people see issues in their community as interconnected and would rather hear candidates and elected officials propose solutions with this in mind.

When it comes to community problems, issues around economic security rise to the top – not necessarily a new polling finding. What is new, however, is that the survey reveals which issues the public sees as having disproportionate effects between genders.

While most feel that women and men approach problems differently and have different strengths, they are much more likely to feel that men – rather than women – are in positions to fix problems.

Finally, the survey shows the term “feminist” may have lost some of its meaning. After hearing a very simple definition, the percentage of the public who adopts the label triples.

METHODS

The survey was a nationally representative sample of 1,051 U.S. adults. It was fielded from May 19 through 26, 2015, and the margin of error for the total results is ± 3.0 percentage points.

The survey was conducted online using GfK’s Knowledge Panel. The panel is constructed with probability-based sampling from the U.S. Postal Service’s Delivery Sequence File, which allows for an estimated 97% of households to be covered. Respondents without Internet access or a computer are provided with both for participation.