

# SO, YOU WANT TO BE A MALE ALLY FOR GENDER EQUALITY? (AND YOU SHOULD):

Results from a National Survey,  
and a Few Things You Should Know

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## Where to Start?

When it comes to supporting gender equality and women's rights, or even the #MeToo movement,<sup>1</sup> many men believe they're already doing their part, but there is a long way to go before women are fully equal to men – at work, in hiring, salary, benefits, mentoring, and promotion; at home, in the unequal division of childcare and household labor between partners; and in leadership positions.

Real, sustainable change requires men to become full partners and allies in supporting gender equality and in ending discrimination and harassment. It also requires men to understand how various identities (such as race, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and ability) impact the equation.

To make progress, there is a need to understand how men are currently responding to calls for gender equality across the domains of leadership, work, and home, as well as how women perceive these responses. What sort of actions are they taking as allies and partners? How do women perceive men's allyship? Where are men succeeding, where are they missing the mark, and why?

## About the Brief

This brief presents nationally representative survey data and insights from US focus group discussions to help answer these questions. Results from the study provide guidance for workplaces seeking to create cultures of respect, equality, and inclusivity and for men seeking to better understand what women want and need from them as allies and to learn constructive ways they can help bring other men on board with gender equality.

This brief uses the terms “men” and “women” to be largely understood as referring to individuals who agree and feel aligned with the gender they were assigned at birth (cisgender). The authors recognize that gender-based inequality and discrimination impact non-binary and transgender individuals with increased frequency and severity.

1. The #MeToo hashtag was created by activist Tarana Burke in 2006 to create community and solidarity with women of color around experiences of sexual harassment and assault. In 2017, #MeToo catapulted an issue limited to discussion behind closed doors to the front pages of every major newspaper in the world. According to The Associated Press, the hashtag was shared in more than 12 million posts and reactions in the first 24 hours.

## About the Study

Promundo-US, with its survey partner, Kantar TNS, conducted an online survey in February 2019 of 1,201 adults aged 25 to 45 to identify their perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors related to gender equality and harassment at work and at home. The sample was proportional for all regions of the country and all major ethnic groups, and it included 602 women and 599 men. Four participants self-identified as either transgender men or non-binary/third-gender. Approximately 92 percent of the sample identified as heterosexual, with the rest affirming another sexual orientation, including 3.3 percent gay/homosexual, 4.2 percent bisexual, and 1 percent “other.” Among the participants, 47.5 percent were parents. Data were analyzed with IBM SPSS Statistics; all comparison data presented are significant at a  $<.05$  value or less. Four focus groups, each with 8-10 people of the same gender, were conducted in January 2019 in Washington, DC, and New York City with same-gender groups.

## Executive Summary

Most men support women's leadership in political and professional domains, understand that barriers exist to achieving this, and express interest in being active allies and partners for gender equality. When it comes to women's leadership, more specifically, 70 percent of men believe there should be more women in positions of political power, and 60 percent of men support having more women leaders in their workplace. Two-thirds of men agreed that women continue to face "major barriers" in their chosen professions. At home, 88 percent of men affirm they are doing everything they can to support their partner's career.

However, when it comes to individual action and how far men are willing to go to advance gender equality, women report that men overstate their efforts to be allies and lack an understanding of the issues women face. **While 77 percent of men report doing "everything they can" to support gender equality at work, only 41 percent of women agree.**

**What about collective action for change, like #MeToo?** While some felt the movement was overdue and raised awareness of important issues, many men and women seem fatigued – and maybe even threatened – by these social movements. Nearly 60 percent of men and 46 percent of women feel #MeToo, #TimesUp, and all the attention to sexual harassment has "gone too far." In the same survey, 50 percent of men and 40 percent of women felt the discussion on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) rights had gone too far as well.

Even if there is some fatigue about the social movements in this space, women clearly want tangible action from men, particularly for them to call other men out when acting in sexist or discriminatory ways. Even though 48 percent of men agree that in the past year they've become more aware of discrimination faced by women in the workplace, nearly 60 percent of women and men agree **it's rare to see men speak out against discrimination against women. The good news is men say they want to do something. The bad news is they are not doing enough. It's time to turn intention into action.**

While most men say that they want to support gender equality, they are not necessarily taking steps to reduce gender discrimination and harassment. This brief focuses in on that gap, providing both insights and concrete suggestions for actions men can take to demonstrate their commitment to gender equality at home and at work.

## INSIGHT #1

**At work and in politics, men support increased female leadership and want to create a more level playing field, but may not fully understand the barriers to this.**

### The Big Picture: Inequality in the Workplace

Across 82 large companies, fewer than 5 percent of CEOs are women; in these same companies, men hold 62 percent of managerial positions to women's 38 percent (2017).<sup>2</sup>

As of March 2019, 25 women serve in the US Senate (25 percent of all seats), and 87 women serve in the US House of Representatives (23.4 percent of all seats) (2019).<sup>3</sup>

A recent report from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics found that in 2017, women who were full-time employees only made 82 percent of their male counterparts' salaries (2017).<sup>4</sup>

Across 82 large companies, entry-level women are 18 percent less likely to be promoted than their male peers (2017).<sup>5</sup>

When it comes to increasing women in positions of leadership, men are largely supportive: 70 percent of men believe there should be more women in positions of political power, and 60 percent support more female leadership in their workplace. Many men support their female partners' professional advancement as well: 88 percent of men reported doing "everything they can" to support their partner's career, and 77 percent of women believe their partner does everything they can at home to support their career.

2. Krivkovich, A., Robinson, K., Starikova, I., Valentino, R., & Yee, L. (2017). *Women in the workplace 2017*. McKinsey & Company. Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/women-in-the-workplace-2017>

3. Center for American Women in Politics. (n.d.). *Current numbers*. Retrieved February 28, 2019, from <https://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/current-numbers>

4. US Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2018, September 28). Labor force statistics from the current population survey. Retrieved February 28, 2019, from <https://www.bls.gov/cps/earnings.htm>

5. Krivkovich, A., Robinson, K., Starikova, I., Valentino, R., & Yee, L. (2017). *Women in the workplace 2017*. McKinsey & Company. Retrieved from <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/gender-equality/women-in-the-workplace-2017>

Men also acknowledge that obstacles to women's equality exist: two-thirds of men agree that women continue to face "major barriers" in their chosen professional fields, and 48 percent believe it's "easier to get your dream job if you're a man."

However, they struggle to recognize and name day-to-day acts of gender discrimination in their own workplace. While 42 percent of employed women reported experiencing some sort of workplace gender discrimination and 38 percent of employed women reported being sexually harassed at work as of 2018,<sup>6</sup> 85 percent of men surveyed didn't perceive a major problem, reporting that their workplace treats women and men equally in terms of pay, promotion, and recruitment; and 77 percent reported sexual harassment is not a problem in their workplace.

Women in the focus groups named a range of issues they face in the workplace, from equal pay to a lack of flexible hours to parental leave. Women, including those who are mothers, say they are frequently passed over for jobs and promotions and are thought to be less committed to their work.

**"If a guy [asks for what he wants] it's not going to fall back on him. If a woman does it, she's aggressive or whiny or needy."**

Woman, New York City

**"Men are still better positioned to advance. There's less stigma to men taking charge."**

Man, Washington, DC

But this awareness might be shifting. In the survey, 48 percent of men and 52 percent of women reported being more aware of discrimination women face in the workplace than they were one year earlier. Men and women in the focus groups also reported being more educated about acceptable workplace behaviors today compared to one year ago.

**48%** of men and **52%** of women reported being more aware of discrimination women face in the workplace than they were one year ago.

6. Stop Street Harassment. (2018). The facts behind the #MeToo movement: A national study on sexual harassment and assault. *Stop Street Harassment*. Retrieved from <http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/resources/2018-national-sexual-abuse-report/>

## What Does Race Have to Do With It?

In the survey, people of color\* were more likely to support women and LGBTQ+ folks ascending to leadership positions and to recognize discrimination in the workplace. Understanding how gender inequality intersects with other identities (like race, sexual orientation, religion, and ability) and forms of oppression is critical to advancing equal rights, opportunities, and protections for all people.

***Percentage who “strongly agreed” or “agreed” with the following statements:***

**“Women still face major barriers to becoming leaders in their fields”**

- 90 percent women of color vs. 79 percent non-women of color
- 77 percent men of color vs. 63 percent non-men of color

**“There should be more women in positions of political power”**

- 90 percent women of color vs. 82 percent non-women of color
- 80 percent men of color vs. 67 percent non-men of color

**“There should be more LGBTQ people in positions of leadership in my workplace”**

- 66 percent women of color vs. 60 percent non-women of color
- 52 percent men of color vs. 47 percent non-men of color

**“There should be more women in positions of leadership in my workplace”**

- 84 percent women of color vs. 71 percent non-women of color
- 70 percent men of color vs. 57 percent non-men of color

\* In this analysis, people of color include survey respondents who self-identified as African-American/Black, Hispanic/Spanish/Latinx, or American Indian/Alaskan Native.

## INSIGHT #2

### Women want men to recognize and support gender equality at home and work, but men are still taking on less than their fair share at home.

The division of household labor is a source of frustration for many women. In households where both partners are working full-time, most women agree they are still disproportionately responsible for household chores. Women reported wanting more support from their male partners in the form of childcare help (48 percent of women who are parents), household chores (58 percent of women living with a male partner), and emotional support (55 percent, same). In focus groups, women also expressed frustration at having to assume the role of project manager and explicitly delegate tasks to their male partners.

#### The Big Picture: Inequality in the Home

Women continue to bear the burden of household labor. According to data from the 2016 American Time Use Survey, women spend 50 minutes a day more than men doing household labor, and in any given day, women do household labor 50 percent of the time compared to men doing household labor 22 percent of the time.<sup>7</sup>

Women also reported that men don't fully appreciate the physical and mental labor and "all the things that go on in the background" to keep a household running smoothly, such as coordinating household labor and tasks and managing children's schedules.

**"Guys don't have a clue about how many balls we're juggling."**

Woman, Washington, DC

**"I just had this conversation two nights ago with my husband because I'm really irritated that I do so much more in the house than him. We have a small apartment so it's not like you can't see all the stuff that has to be done."**

Woman, New York City

7. US Bureau of Labor Statistics. (n.d.). *American Time Use Survey*. Retrieved February 28, 2019, from <http://www.bls.gov/tus>

Millennial men (aged 25 to 34) were more likely than Generation X men (aged 35 to 45) to report their wife/partner wants too much from them in terms of childcare (43 percent versus 30 percent) or household labor (40 percent versus 28 percent). Fifty-four percent of millennial men also reported doing more household work than they get credit for, yet 45 percent of millennial women believe their partner gets more credit than they deserve. **This suggests that younger women expect more equality from their male partners when it comes to caring for the home than older generations, and that men have perhaps not gotten that memo.**

Men and women who are parents also reported some striking disconnects between their perceptions. Forty-eight percent of women who are parents reported the amount of household chores their partner does is unfair to them, and 40 percent reported the same on childcare, while only 24 percent and 22 percent of men who are parents reported that the amount of household work and childcare they do, respectively, is unfair to their partner.

**48%** of women who are parents reported the amount of household work their partner does is unfair to them, but only...

**24%** of men who are parents said that the amount of household work they do is unfair to their partner.

On a positive note, men in the focus groups reported a willingness to be more involved in their children's lives, and may be taking some strides in doing so. In the survey, one in three fathers reported turning down opportunities to take on more leadership in the workplace because of family responsibilities, indicating there may be a shift around men's ideas of their roles as fathers and caregivers.

**“I want to play more active role in my kids’ lives. I want to take my kids to T-ball and go to my daughter’s kindergarten class.”**

Man, New York City

## INSIGHT #3

**While men and women support efforts to end sexual harassment and assault, there is still confusion about what exactly constitutes sexual harassment.**

### The Big Picture: Harassment

A survey of 27 institutions of higher education revealed that 28 percent of college-aged women and 5.4 percent of college-aged males were targets of attempted or completed sexual assault between 2012 and 2015.<sup>8</sup>

Twenty-two percent of women report being sexually harassed at work compared to 7 percent of men (2017).<sup>9</sup>

Importantly, experiences of sexual harassment and assault often have serious mental health consequences that linger for years. A 2015 study found experiences of harassment were linked with poor sleep quality and hypertension, whereas experiences of assault were highly correlated with depression and poor sleep quality (2019).<sup>10</sup>

In focus groups, men reported feeling generally positive about the conversation started around #MeToo, a social media-driven movement through which many women have publicly shared their own experiences of sexual harassment and assault; some said it increased their awareness of how prevalent harassment is in women's lives. Women in the focus groups felt the #MeToo movement was long overdue and that they were finally being heard. Several said #MeToo opened their eyes to some of the subtler forms of sexual harassment they had been experiencing – and in some cases had normalized, or even had begun to blame themselves for – for years.

**“As a female, you have to question, ‘Was I flirting?’ You know you weren’t. But society has made it so you have to question things like, ‘Was I flirting because I looked at him for two seconds longer?’ That kind of stuff in the workplace still exists.”**

Woman, New York City

8. Cantor, D., Fisher, B., Chibnall, S., Bruce, C., Townsend, R., Thomas, G., & Lee, H. (2015). *Report on the AAU campus climate survey on sexual assault and sexual misconduct*. Westat. Retrieved from <https://www.aau.edu/sites/default/files/AAU-Files/Key-Issues/Campus-Safety/AAU-Campus-Climate-Survey-FINAL-10-20-17.pdf>
9. Gramlich, J. (2017, December 28). 10 things we learned about gender issues in the U.S. in 2017. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/12/28/10-things-we-learned-about-gender-issues-in-the-u-s-in-2017/>
10. Thurston, R. C., Chang, Y., Matthews, K. A., von Känel, R., & Koenen, K. (2019). Association of sexual harassment and sexual assault with midlife women's mental and physical health. *JAMA Internal Medicine*, 179(1), 48–53.

However, in the survey, 59 percent of men felt that “#MeToo, #TimesUp, and all the attention to sexual harassment has gone too far,” compared to 46 percent of women. Some men and women in the focus groups felt that social media had taken the movement to an extreme and turned it into something that discredits “real” victims of sexual harassment. Additionally, both men and women in the focus groups voiced concerns about gray areas and misunderstandings when it comes to knowing what constitutes sexual harassment, with some participants voicing concerns that, now, “anything” could be considered sexual harassment.

**“I thought [sexual harassment] was just about someone saying something about your looks, but now it’s about saying, ‘Good morning.’”**

Woman, New York City

**“There’s a level of hysteria about it in general. It’s getting to a point where people are just looking to be offended.”**

Man, New York City

While this is troubling, and highlights a potential backlash and fatigue related to the #MeToo movement, there is some indication that men are more aware of discrimination and more likely to speak out against harassment than they were previously (see Insight #4).

## INSIGHT #4

**In the past year, men say they have begun to become aware of and act against discrimination against women in many forms. However, many overstate their allyship.**

In the survey, 48 percent of men reported being more aware of the discrimination women face in the workplace than they were one year earlier. Furthermore, 58 percent of men and 55 percent of women agree that they are more likely to (men) or that men they know are more likely to (women) speak out against sexual harassment now than they were one year ago, and 34 percent of men reported having spoken to a male friend or colleague about gender equality in the last six months.

More specifically, 44 percent of millennial men (aged 25 to 34) and 33 percent of Generation X men (aged 35 to 45) reported having done at least one of the following three actions when having witnessed an instance of 'teasing' or harassing a woman in the last year: "I told the person to stop immediately," "I talked to the woman to provide support afterward," and "I talked to the teaser/harasser afterward."

Out of 12 actions shared in the focus groups on how men can help advance gender equality at work, those with the most agreement among women and men included:

- Let other men know when what they are saying is inappropriate for a work setting
- Point out when credit for an idea or project is due to your female coworker
- Openly defend women who are targets of sexual harassment by male associates
- Advocate for equal pay

Despite this list of steps to take, many men acknowledged that it can be difficult to take action: 35 percent of agree that it's really hard to step in or speak up when they see someone harassing or bullying someone else. Many are also worried about the potential reaction if they try to intervene (and women agree it can be risky): 47 percent of men and 48 percent of women said men who support women's leadership often face a lot of criticism.

Furthermore, the research shows that men may be exaggerating the extent of the action they are taking. While 77 percent of men reported doing “everything they can” to support gender equality at work, only 41 percent of women agreed men are doing so. Similarly, when men were asked if they would be a good listener to a woman reaching out about experiences of workplace harassment, 89 percent of men said they would be, but only 58 percent of women agreed that men they work with would be good listeners if they shared an experience of harassment.

Women were interested in men’s involvement in promoting gender equality both individually and in terms of workplace policies, but they were skeptical that men would call other men out by speaking up or questioning sexist actions. Female focus group participants, perhaps reflecting the lack of effort and support seen at home, seemed resigned that men wouldn’t effectively call out each other’s actions and behaviors.

**“I want men to call out other men, but it’s not realistic.”**  
Woman, New York City

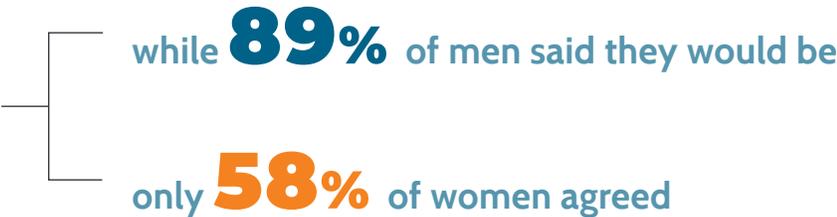
**“Men always stick together—other men will back them up.”**  
Woman, New York City

## The Allyship Gap: Diverging Opinions

Men are doing everything they can to advance gender equality in the workplace



Men at my work would be good listeners to a woman reaching out about an experience of workplace harassment



While men are taking steps to prevent discrimination and harassment, there are still perceived barriers to doing so, and more work is needed to close the gap between men's intentions around being allies and partners for gender equality and what women are asking of them when it comes to taking action.

## Summary and Recommended Action

**Most men want to be allies for gender equality, and many think they already are – but women aren't convinced. It's time for men to close this “allyship gap” and move from intention to thoughtful action.**

Most men surveyed support women's increased participation and leadership in politics and at work and are interested in being active allies for gender equality. However, what this allyship looks like – and how far men are willing to go to be allies – remain unanswered. **It is concerning that many men understate barriers for women and overstate their current support as allies for gender equality, suggesting the need for and importance of closing the gap between what men think they're doing and what women want them to do.**

Workplace and government policies and education, health, and justice or legal systems that support equality, do not allow for discrimination, and protect all individuals are needed to make national progress. Individual action in public and private spaces is also needed. These efforts must also include men's introspection, listening, and learning to inform thoughtful and effective action, including speaking out to men when they witness discrimination and harassment.

# ROAD MAP FOR MALE ALLYSHIP

Based on the focus group and survey data and drawing on Promundo's global experience engaging men and boys as full partners with women to advance gender equality, Promundo developed a "Road Map for Male Allyship." This list is intended to speak directly to men and boys seeking to become better allies, partners, friends, and people. Promundo invites men, boys, and all individuals to join the conversation, learn, reflect, listen, and ultimately, take action for women's rights and gender equality.

*Here's how men can become better allies for gender equality at work and at home. Women in the study were clear that they want men to:*



**Listen better. Seek opportunities to hear women's stories, acknowledge their experiences, and inform other men.**

**How?** Practice active listening ("What I think I hear you saying is..." and "I can only imagine what that must have been like ..."). Speak from your own experience. Ask questions, and don't interrupt. Acknowledge the limits of your ability to understand what women or individuals of other gender identities may experience.

**Why?** Eighty-nine percent of men think they'd be a good listener if a woman told them about an experience of harassment. When women were asked if men they work with would be a good listener in this case, only 58 percent agreed. It's time to hone those listening skills, men.

## 2

### **Reflect on your own power and privilege as a man.**

**How?** Educate yourself on how gender inequality intersects with other identities (like race, sexual orientation, religion, and ability) and forms of oppression. Challenge sexist, homophobic, and transphobic attitudes in the workplace and support equal rights, opportunities, and protections for all people. Listen to individuals with different identities from your own and use respectful language in all interactions. Read, watch, and discuss stories of individuals who have faced multiple forms of discrimination, and take them seriously without becoming defensive.

**Why?** All of our identities have implications on our lived experience and on the discrimination and harassment we may face. It's important to recognize this and take thoughtful action, as well as to use the privilege and power you have to create space for others.

## 3

### **Credit ideas to those who came up with them, especially to female coworkers who are often overlooked. It's not about special treatment – it's about fairness.**

**How?** Name names of colleagues who worked on a project or came up with an idea. Emphasize a good idea when you hear it, mention it in front of those in charge, and correct them when they misattribute credit ("I want to build on [name's] idea and affirm that..." or "[Name] had a really good idea and I'd like to acknowledge that.>").

**Why?** Eighty-five percent of men agreed their workplaces treat men and women equally in terms of recruitment, pay, and promotion, but we know that women are still under-represented and paid less than their male colleagues. It's time to step up to close that gap.

## 4

### **Advocate for women's leadership and equality in the workplace and for pay equality, even if it's unpopular.**

**How?** Challenge obstacles and stereotypes that limit women's advancement. Schedule a meeting with your human resources department or your supervisor about pay transparency and employee review procedures. Encourage adjustments to remove bias and advance equality and safe, supportive workplaces (which includes parental leave and confidential reporting structures for sexual harassment).

**Why?** Sixty percent of men think there should be more women in positions of leadership at work, and nearly half of men and women agree that men who support women's leadership often face criticism. It's time to do your part to help make this a reality, even if it's unpopular.

# 5

## **Speak up when you hear sexist language, and call other men out when they use it.**

**How?** Step in and make it clear that you don't support sexist language or jokes. Call it out as sexist (or racist, homophobic, etc.), ask the person to explain the "joke" and tell them why it's inappropriate, or use another strategy to let other men know when what they are saying is inappropriate (for example, "Hey, [name], I don't think that's cool to call her that...").

**Why?** Even though 48 percent of men agree they have become more aware in the past year of discrimination faced by women in the workplace, nearly 60 percent of women and men agree it's rare to see men speak out against discrimination against women. It's time to put intention into action.

# 6

## **Learn to live with discomfort. Being an ally is about making change, not being comfortable.**

**How?** Remind yourself that it's not about you, and your discomfort in stepping in or speaking up is not greater than the experience of being harassed or discriminated against. Being an ally requires men to listen and to not take it personally when they hear the behaviors of other men being criticized.

**Why?** Thirty-five percent of men agree that it's really hard to step in or speak up when they see someone harassing or bullying someone else. Just because something is difficult, though, doesn't mean it's not worthwhile.

# 7

## **Step up at home. Advocate for work-life balance and paid leave for all caregivers. Men need to be full partners in childcare and chores.**

**How?** Ask your partner what you can do to have an equal partnership at home. Have a discussion about what you both spend your time on and how to create a plan that works for you both to thrive. Remember: pay attention not only to the chores themselves but also to who's responsible for remembering appointments, paying the bills, making the grocery list, and more. Advocate for paid leave for all workers for the care of young children and the care of ill or elderly family members. Ask for on-site child care where appropriate, teleworking, and other flexible arrangements that allow better work-life balance.

**Why?** Nearly half of women (48 percent) say they need more from their partner when it comes to childcare, and 44 percent say the amount of household work their partner does is unfair (and 26 percent of men agree). We know that women still take on well more than their share. It's time to change that.



## **Volunteer for nonprofit organizations that do good work and support gender equity.**

**How?** Ask friends and colleagues about nonprofits they love, and search online for local groups that do work you support. Be sure they have organizational values that promote increasing gender equity, ending homophobia and transphobia, ending racism, and reducing male violence.

**Why?** Almost every nonprofit organization – especially those providing services for underserved people in your community – has limited resources to meet its mission. They value volunteers like you who can help. Be sure to ask in advance what type of volunteer activities work best for them – they are not equipped to handle drop-ins.



## **Support diverse female leaders you believe in.**

**How?** Learn more about political candidates in local and national elections, and show your support, volunteer, and vote for female candidates who align with your values.

**Why?** Seventy percent of men think there should be more women in positions of political power, yet women represent only 25 percent of the US Senate, 23.4 percent of the House of Representatives, 18 percent of state governors, and 22 percent of mayors in cities with over 30,000 residents.<sup>11</sup> It's time to take action.

For more information on what you can do to support gender equality, visit:

[www.promundoglobal.org](http://www.promundoglobal.org) and [www.futureofmanhood.org](http://www.futureofmanhood.org)

11. Center for American Women in Politics. (n.d.). *Current numbers*. Retrieved February 28, 2019, from <https://www.cawp.rutgers.edu/current-numbers>

