

1 Modern societies where women literally rule

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3 By **standard** definition, a matriarchy is a “family, group or state governed by a matriarch (a woman who is head of a family or **tribe**).” Anthropologists and feminists have since created more specific classifications for female societies, including the matrilineal system. Matrilineality **refers** not only to **tracing** one’s lineage through maternal **ancestry**, it can also refer to a civil system in which one inherits **property** through the female line. While the legendary Amazons (probably the most widely known matriarchy) are found in mythology, there are a **handful** of female-led societies that thrive in the real world today.

9 1. Mosuo

10 Living near the border of Tibet in the Yunnan and Sichuan provinces, the Mosuo are perhaps the most famous matrilineal society. The Chinese government officially classifies them as part of another ethnic **minority** known as the Naxi, but the two are **distinct** in both culture and language.

13 The Mosuo live with extended family in large **households**; at the head of each is a matriarch. Lineage is traced through the female side of the family, and property is passed down along the same matriline. Mosuo women typically **handle** business decisions and men handle politics. Children are **raised** in the mother's households and take her name.

16 The Mosuo have so called “walking marriages.” There is no institution of marriage; rather, women choose their partners by **literally** walking to the man’s home and the couples never live together. Since children always remains in the mother’s care, sometimes the father plays little role in the **upbringing**. In some cases, the father's identity is not even known. Instead, the male’s responsibilities in **bringing up** children remain in his own matrilineal household.

20 2. Minangkabau

21 At four million people, the Minangkabau of West Sumatra, Indonesia, (pictured above, during a harvest season celebration) are the largest known matrilineal society today. **In addition to** tribal law requiring all clan property to be held and handed down from mother to daughter, the Minangkabau **firmly** believe the mother to be the most important person in society.

25 In Minangkabau society, women usually **rule** the domestic sphere while the men take the political and spiritual leadership roles. However, both genders feel the **separation** of powers keeps them on an equal footing. Upon marriage, every woman **acquires** her own sleeping quarters. The husband may sleep with her, but must leave early in the morning to have breakfast at his mother’s home. At age 10, boys leave their mother’s home to stay in men's quarters and learn practical skills and religious teachings. While the clan chief is always male, women select the chief and can **remove** him from office should they feel he failed to fulfill his duties.

31 3. Akan

32 The Akan people are a **majority** in Ghana, where they **predominantly reside**. The Akan social organization is **fundamentally** built around the matrilineal, wherein one's identity, inheritance, wealth, and politics are all determined. All matrilineal founders are female, but men traditionally hold leadership positions within the society. These inherited roles, however, are **passed down** matrilineally—meaning through a man's mothers and sisters (and their children). Often, the man is expected to not only **support** his own family, but those of his female relatives.

37 4. Bribri

38 The Bribri are a small **indigenous** group of just over 13,000 people living on a reserve in the Talamanca canton in the Limón province of Costa Rica. Like many other matrilineal societies, the Bribri are organized into clans. Each clan is **made up of** an **extended** family, and the clan is determined through the mother/females. Women are the only ones who traditionally can inherit land. Women are also given the right to prepare the cacao used in sacred Bribri rituals.

42 5. Garo

43 Much like their Khasi neighbors in the North-East Indian state of Meghalaya, the Tibeto-Burman-speaking Garos pass property and political succession from mother to daughter—typically, the youngest daughter inherits her mother's property. Much like the Akan, however, the society is matrilineal but not matriarchal: the men govern the society and manage property.

47 Oftentimes, the youngest daughter's marriage is **arranged** for her. However, for non-inheriting daughters, the process can be much more complex. In Garo tradition, the groom-to-be is expected to run away from a proposal of marriage, requiring the bride-to-be's family to “capture” him and return him to his potential bride's village. This back-and-forth is repeated until the bride either gives up, or the groom accepts her **proposal** (often after she has made many promises to serve and obey him). Once married, the husband lives in his wife’s house. Should it not **work out**, the union is **dissolved** without social stigma, as marriage is not a **binding** contract.

53 6. Nagovisi

54 The Nagovisi live in South Bougainville, an island west of New Guinea. Anthropologist Jill Nash reported Nagovisi society was divided into two matrilineal moieties, which are then divided into matrilineal clans. Nagovisi women **are involved in** leadership and ceremonies, but take the most pride in working the land entitled to them. Nash **observed** that when it comes to marriage, the Nagovisi woman held gardening and shared sexuality at **equal** importance. Marriage is not institutionalized. If a couple is seen together, sleeps together, and the man **assists** the woman in her garden, **essentially** they are considered married.