



الباروميتر العربي
ARAB BAROMETER

Arab Barometer VII

Mauritania Report



October 2023

Executive summary

Between November 2021 and January 2022, Arab Barometer conducted its first-ever nationally-representative public opinion survey in Mauritania. The survey was part of Arab Barometer's Seventh Wave which included surveys in 12 countries across the Middle East and North Africa. The two-month fielding period in Mauritania coincided with the spread of the Omicron variable of COVID-19, leading to the highest percentages of infections recorded in the country. Therefore, it was no surprise that the absolute majority of Mauritians expressed concern over the spread of COVID-19. The pandemic, however, ranked second on the list of challenges facing the country, with the economy being the most important challenge for Mauritania. Furthermore, the pandemic is thought to have caused several challenges, chief among which is inflation and other economy-related issues.

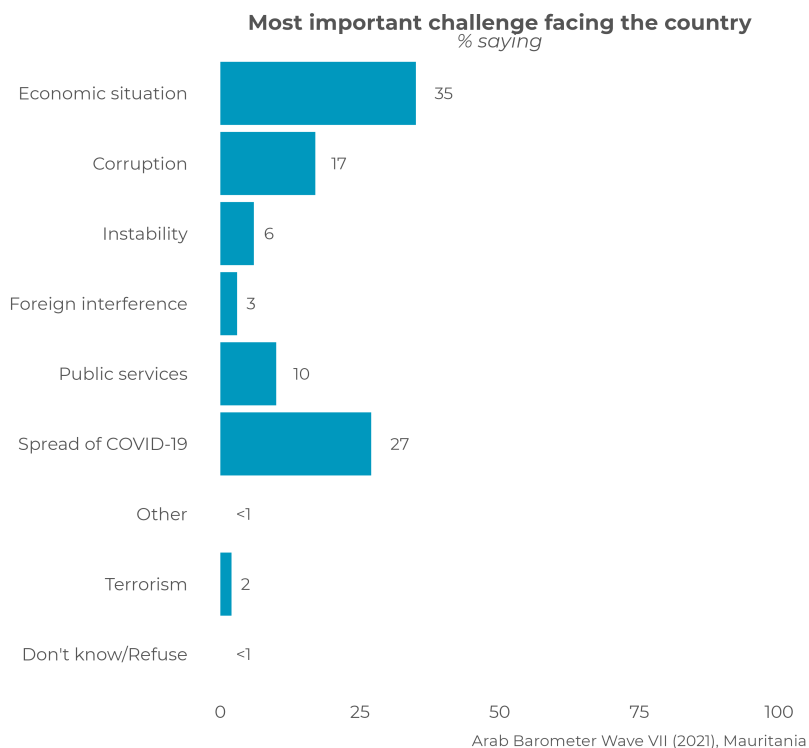
Mauritians, however, recognized the government's efforts to combat the spread of COVID-19 and to provide security and order in the country. Trust in the Mauritanian government was high as compared to other countries. Yet, people were clearly dissatisfied with public services and the government's performance on the economic front. The harsh economic conditions had taken their toll on the livelihoods of Mauritians, with large percentages of people suffering from food insecurity recently. These conditions are further exacerbated by the widespread corruption within the state apparatus. Climate change had contributed to making matters worse with the country experiencing its most severe drought in decades.

Despite the hardship, Mauritians were amongst the region's least likely people to want to emigrate. Only a small minority had expressed a desire to leave the country, with the economy being the main driver behind that desire. When it comes to views on international relations, Mauritians had shown clear toward Muslim-majority powers, namely Turkey and Saudi Arabia, with both the two states and their leaders being the favorites among regional and international powers. The opposite is true for France and Russia, the leader of which is the least popular leader among his counterparts in Mauritania.

COVID19

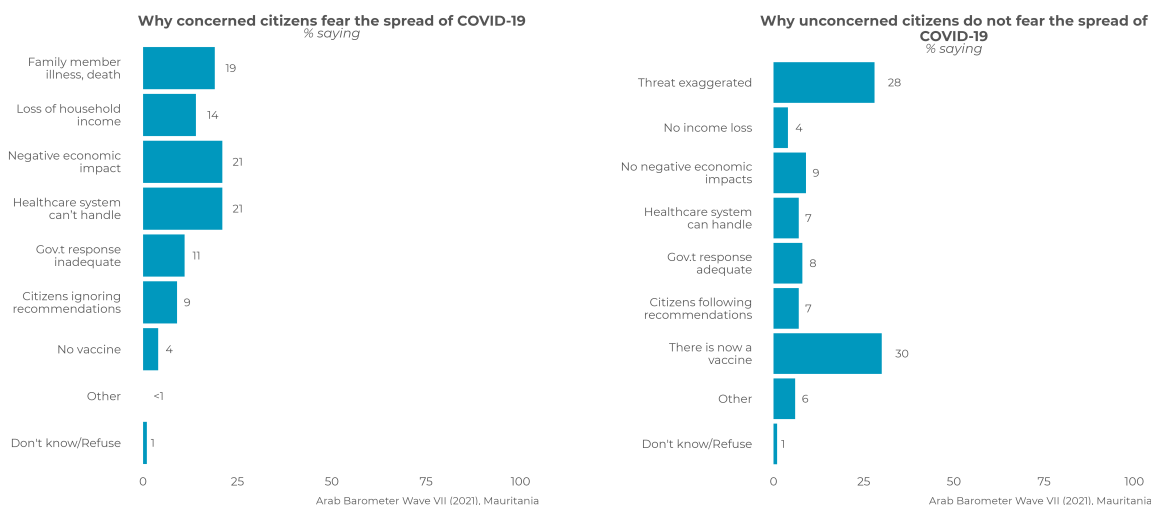
The spread of COVID-19 in Mauritania remained relatively limited compared to other North African countries, according to reported statistics. With the spread of the Omicron variant late last year, however, Mauritania went through its strongest wave of COVID-19 infections during the fielding period of the Arab Barometer survey. During the first weeks of 2022, new reported cases reached the one thousand mark for the first time ever. Only a quarter (27 percent) of Maurita-

nians cite the spread of COVID-19 as the biggest challenge facing their country. That percentage puts COVID-19 below the economic situation (35 percent) and above corruption (17 percent) on the list of challenges facing Mauritania. One-in-ten or less say that either public services or instability are the most important challenges.



Though only a quarter of Mauritians see COVID-19 as the most important challenge, three quarters (74 percent) express concern about the spread of the virus. This level of concern is among the highest in the region, second only to Lebanon. On one hand, Mauritians point to the negative impact of the pandemic on the economy (21 percent), the inability of the healthcare system to handle COVID-19 cases (21 percent), and the direct health effects on a family member (19 percent) as the main sources of concern. Other reasons are less cited, including loss of income (14 percent), the government's inadequate response (11 percent), and the behavior of citizens in failure to follow health guidelines (9 percent). On the other hand, the availability of vaccines (30 percent) and that the threat is exaggerated (28 percent) seem to be the main reason why a minority of Mauritians are not concerned at all or not concerned about the spread of COVID-19 in the country. Notably, and perhaps under-

standably, those with less educational attainment are more likely to say the COVID-19 threat is exaggerated (30 percent) compared with the better educated individuals (20 percent).

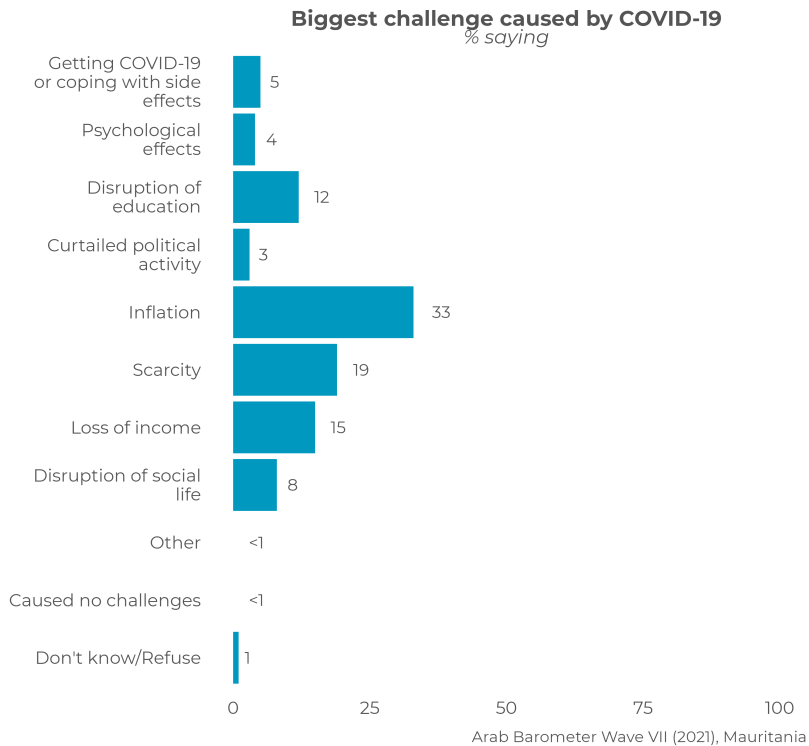


Two thirds of Mauritians say they have been vaccinated against COVID-19. Vaccination rates in the country seem to correspond with age, education, and income. Rates are higher among those who are thirty and older (76 percent) compared to those ages 18-29, of whom only half are vaccinated (51 percent). Similarly, college-educated Mauritians are more likely to be vaccinated (77 percent) than those with only a secondary degree or less (64 percent). In addition, 72 percent of those who can cover their expenses are vaccinated, compared to 64 percent of those who cannot cover their expenses.

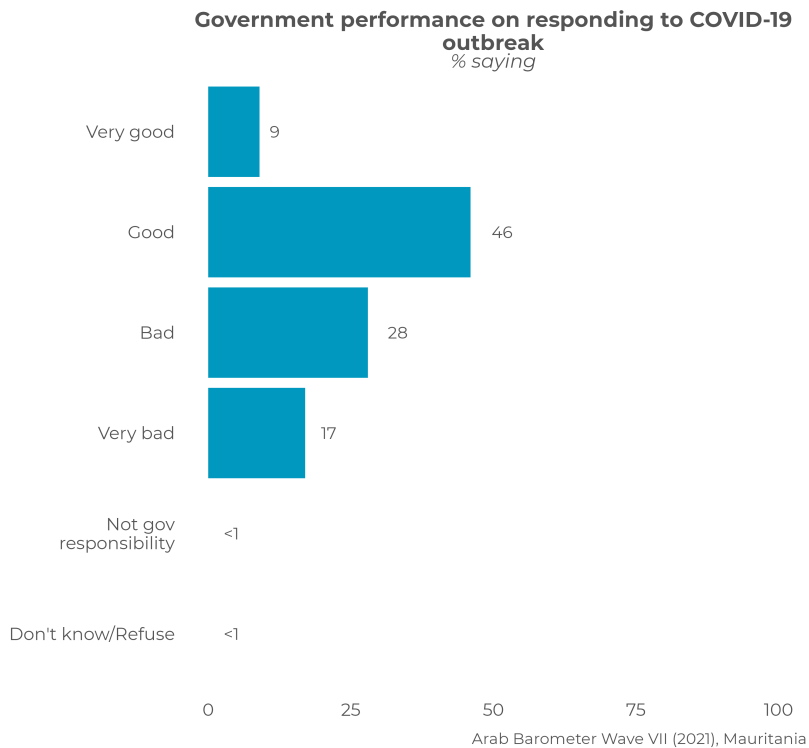
Among the unvaccinated, more than half say they are likely or very likely to get vaccinated (55 percent). Within this group, the majority have not preference for the type of vaccine (54 percent), while nearly a third prefer the Johnson & Johnson vaccine (31 percent) and 15 percent prefer the Pfizer-Biontech one. Some Mauritians, however, remain hesitant to getting vaccinated. More than half of these people (56 percent) explain that the reason of their hesitancy is that the vaccine is ineffective, while nearly a quarter (23 percent) cite negative side effects as their reason for not wanting the vaccine.

Perhaps no country was immune to challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in the past two years; Mauritania was no exception. One third of Mauritians (33 percent) say that the biggest COVID-caused challenge they faced is inflation. Notably, those with only a secondary degree or less are almost twice

more likely to mention inflation (35 percent) as the biggest challenge compared to those with a college degree or higher (18 percent). Around a fifth of the population (19 percent) point to scarcity of basic goods, while others say loss of income (15 percent) and disruption of their kids' education (12 percent) were the biggest challenges.

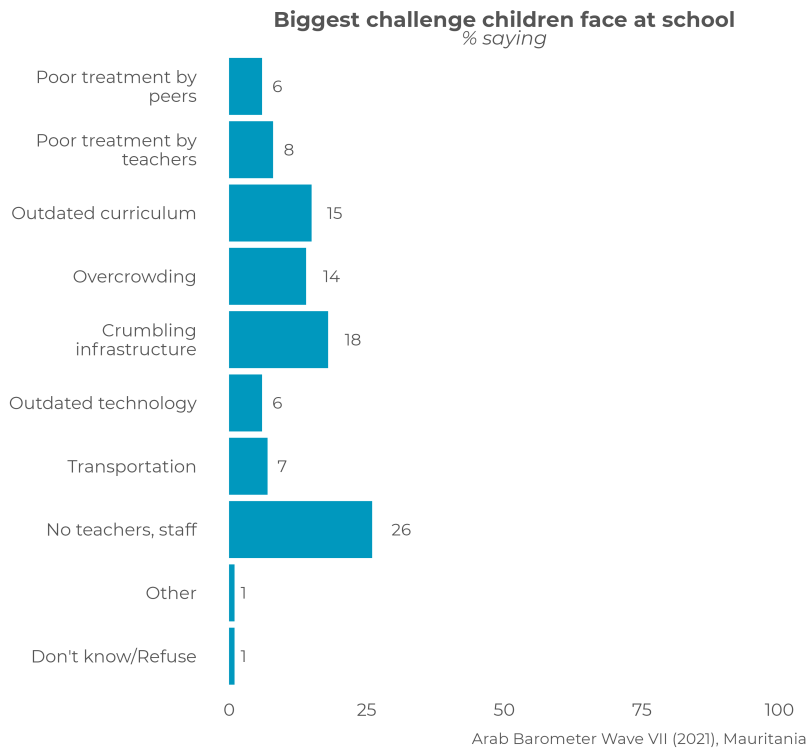


Mauritanians do not seem to place the blame on the government's shoulders when it comes to these COVID-related challenges, however. More than half (55 percent) rate the government performance in responding to COVID-19 positively. Those ages 18-29 are more likely to say the performance is good or very good than those who are thirty or older by a difference of nine-points. Similarly, those who can cover their expenses are more likely to rate the government positively than those who cannot cover their expenses.

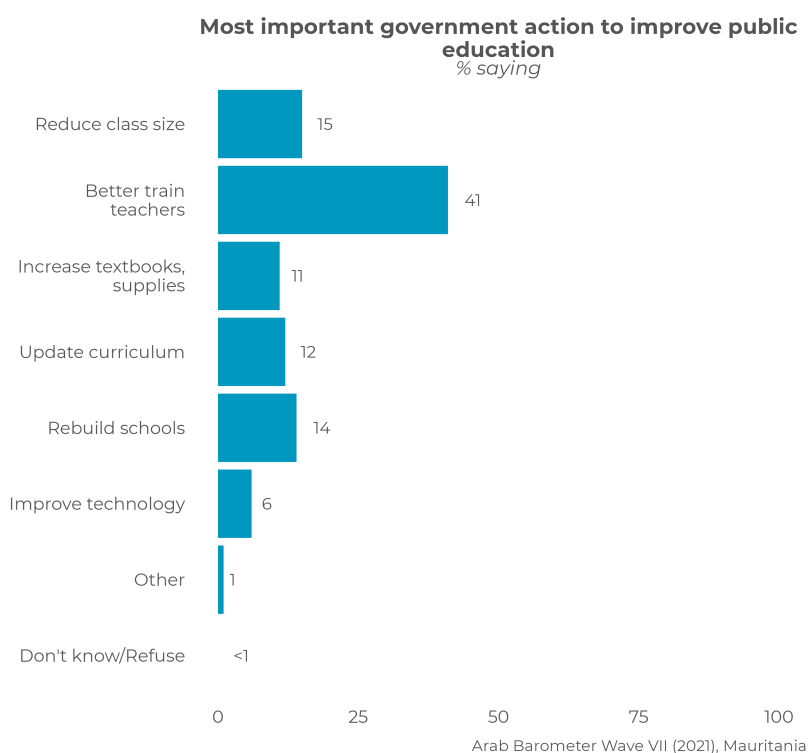


Education

Less than a quarter of Mauritians (23 percent) say they are satisfied or completely satisfied with the education system. Younger Mauritians (29 percent) are more likely to be satisfied with the system than those who are thirty or older (18 percent). Similarly, those with a secondary education or less are more likely to say they are satisfied (24 percent) than those with a college degree or higher (13 percent). This low level of satisfaction could be attributed to several factors. When asked about the biggest challenges to the education system, Mauritians point to different fronts. While a quarter (26 percent) say that lack of well-trained teachers is the biggest challenge, some others cite crumbling infrastructure (18 percent), outdated curriculum (15 percent), and class overcrowding (14 percent). Less than one-in-ten Mauritians say either poor treatment by classmates or teachers (six and eight percent, respectively), lack of transportation (seven percent), or the use of outdated technology in classrooms (six percent).



If Mauritians disagree on their diagnosis of the problem with education, they seem to share wider agreement when it comes to the solution. More than four-in-ten Mauritians say that, in order to improve education, the government must focus on providing better training for teachers. Other government actions Mauritians deem most important to improve education include reduction of class size (15 percent), rebuilding schools (14 percent), updating curriculum (12 percent), and providing more textbooks and school supplies (11 percent). Notably, Mauritania is the only country in the region where people think that education should be the government's top spending priority (tied with subsidies at 31 percent).

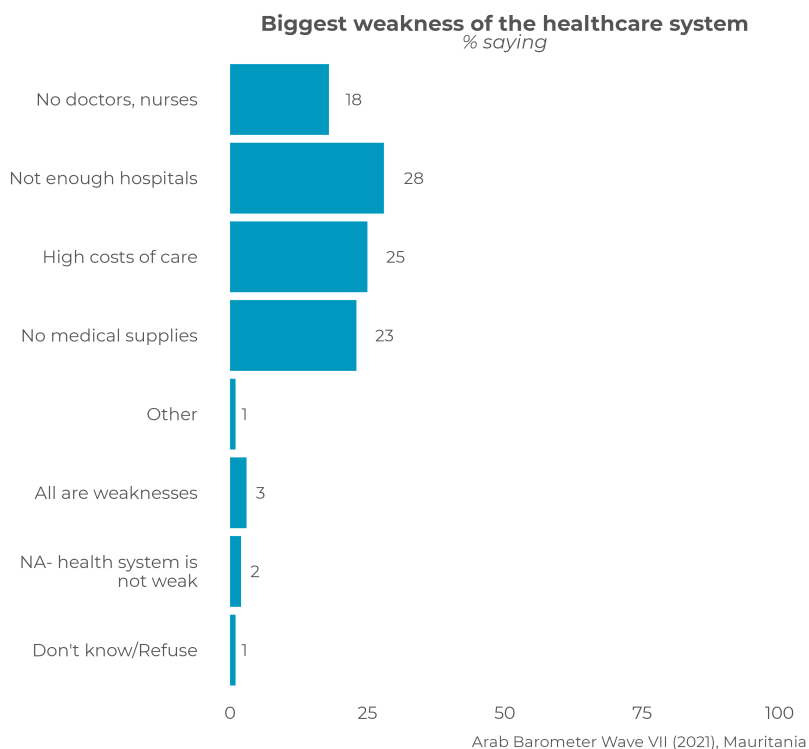


Healthcare

Similar to the education system, evaluation of the healthcare system in Mauritania remains amongst the lowest in the region. Only a quarter (26 percent) say they are satisfied or completely satisfied with the healthcare system. Those with higher income seem more likely to be satisfied (34 percent) than those with lower income (23 percent). As mentioned above, the healthcare system's inability to handle COVID-19 cases is one of the main reasons causing Mauritians to be concerned about the spread of the virus. At the same time, the pandemic has worsened the state of the healthcare system by adding pressure on the already-fragile system.

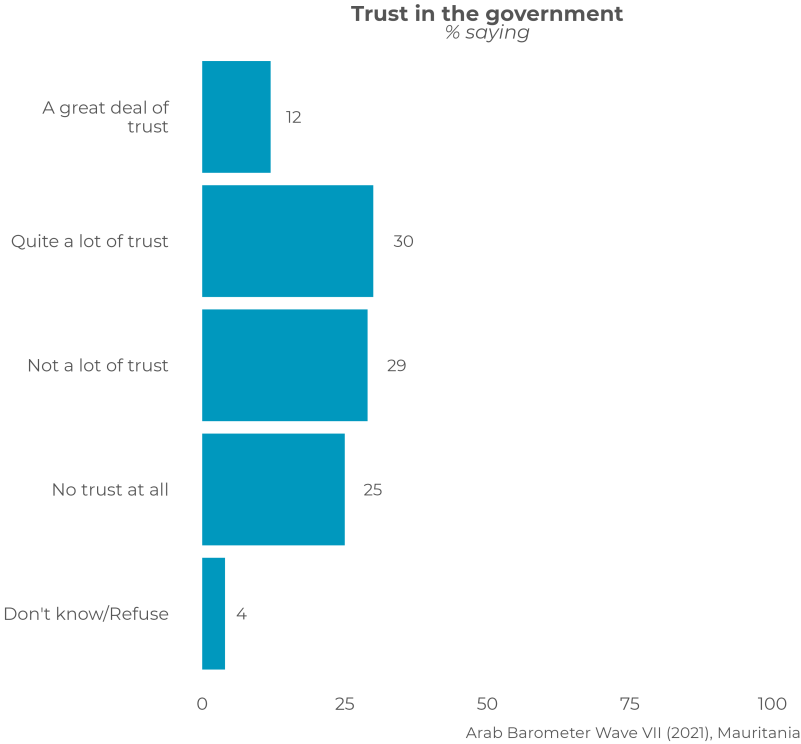
When asked about the biggest weaknesses of their healthcare system, Mauritians point to lack of hospitals (28 percent), high costs of healthcare (25 percent), lack of medical supplies (23 percent), and lack of skilled medical professionals (18 percent). Those with college degrees or higher (31 percent) are more likely to cite lack of medical supplies as the biggest weakness than those with a secondary degree or less by a margin of ten points. Inversely, the less

educated group is more likely to say that the high costs of healthcare are the biggest problem than the college-educated group by a margin of 15-points.

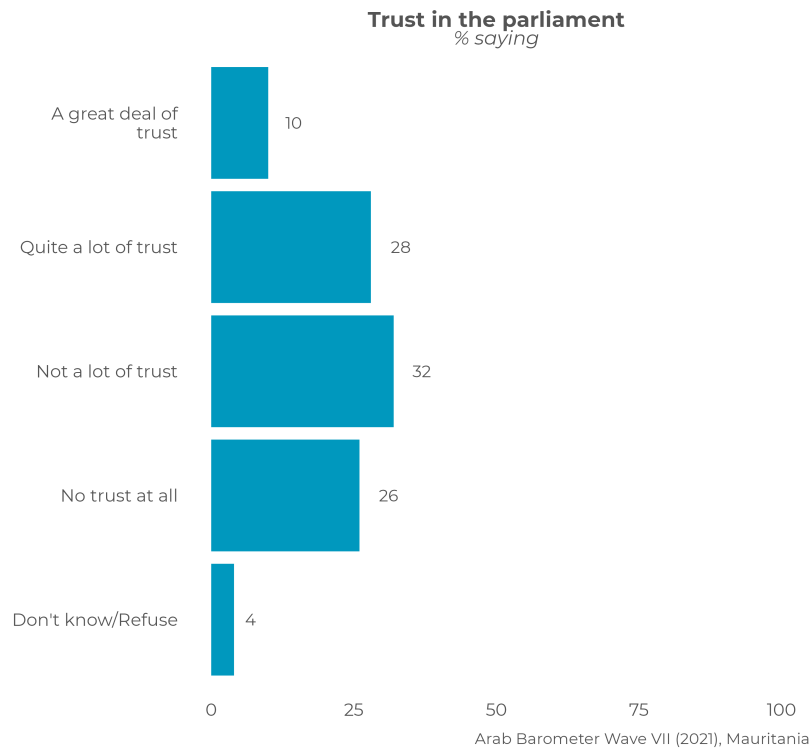


Trust in the government

The Mauritanian government has fared better than all its regional counterparts on the public trust front. More than four-in-ten (42 percent) of people say they have a great deal or quite a lot of trust in the government. Mauritians with only a secondary degree or less (44 percent) are more likely to trust the government, compared to only a quarter of those with a college degree or higher. Additionally, almost half (47 percent) of those ages 18-29 say they trust it, compared to only 39 percent of those who are thirty or older. Nearly half (48 percent) of the population express their trust in the judicial system. Moreover, a third of Mauritians express trust in their regional and local governments (34 percent and 37 percent, respectively). These levels of trust do not vary significantly across demographic groups.

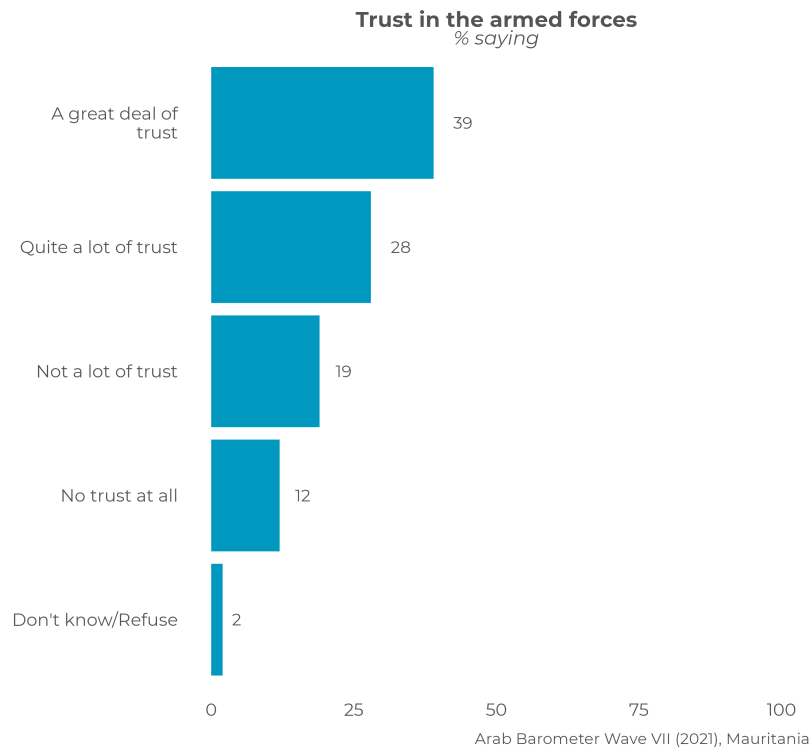


Similar to the government, the Mauritanian parliament seems to enjoy far more public trust than regional parliaments, with 38 percent saying they have a great deal or quite a lot of trust in their elected representatives. Less educated individuals are 12-points more trusting of the parliament than those who have college degrees or higher. Half of Mauritians express their trust in President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani. This level is higher than all other regional heads of state included in the survey, except for Tunisia’s Saied.

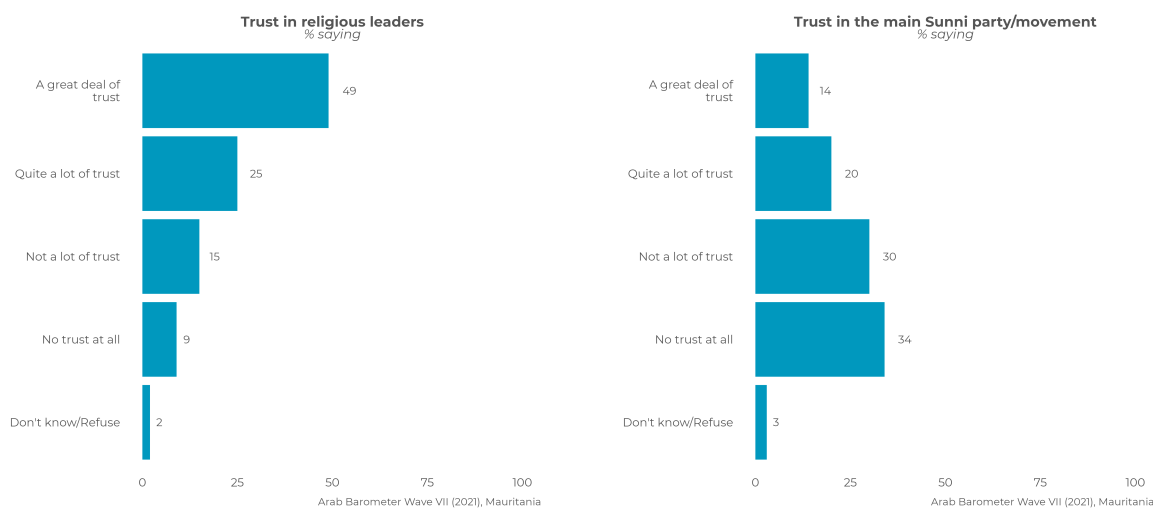


Civil society organizations (CSO) in Mauritania are among the most trusted CSOs in the region (tied at 43 percent with Sudan and Jordan, second only to Morocco's 46 percent). Mauritians with only a secondary degree or less (45 percent) are more likely to trust local CSOs than those with college degrees or higher (31 percent). Furthermore, nearly half of those ages 18-29 say they trust CSOs, compared with only four-in-ten of those thirty or older.

As for the nation's armed forces, two thirds (67 percent) say they have a great deal or quite a lot of trust. There is, however, noticeable differences of trust levels across age and income. Three-quarters of young Mauritians ages 18-29 express trust in the armed forces, compared to 61 percent of those who are thirty or older. More significantly, those with higher income are 16-points more trusting than those with lower income.



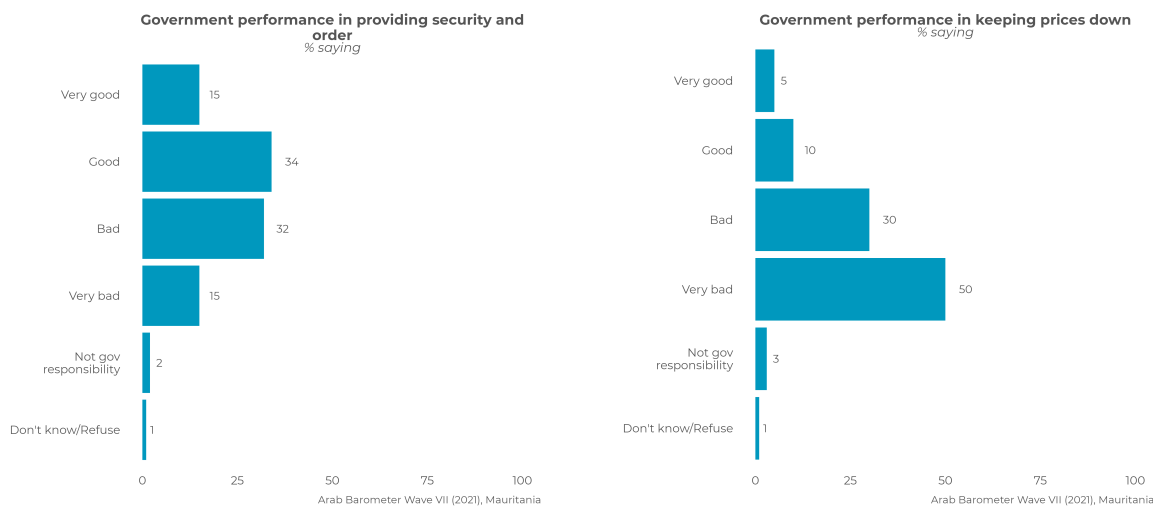
Mauritania stands out among surveyed countries in terms of trust afforded religious figures. Three quarters (74 percent) of people say they have a great deal or quite a lot of trust in religious leaders. This is especially true of the younger generations where 81 percent of those ages 18-29 say they trust religious leaders, compared to seven-in-ten of those thirty or older. Mauritians with higher income (81 percent) are also more likely to trust those leaders than their fellow countrymen with lower income (72 percent). However, the trust levels are not as high when it comes to the main political Islamist movement in the country. Only a third of Mauritians (33 percent) say they have a great deal or quite a lot of trust in the main Sunni movement in the country, namely the National Rally for Reform and Development (Tawasul). Nearly similar proportions, however, say they do not have a lot of trust (30 percent) or have no trust at all (34 percent) in Tawasul.



Government performance

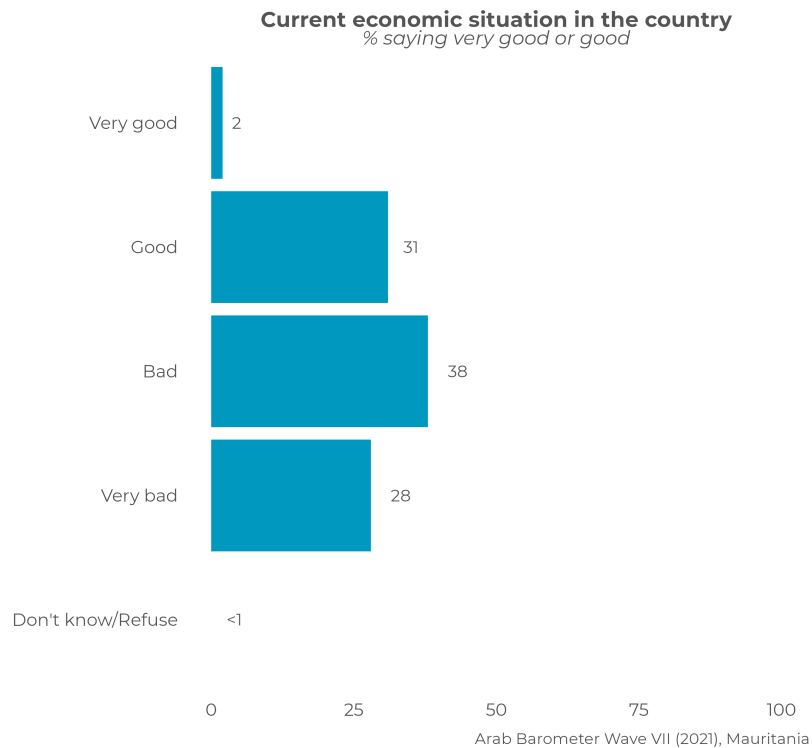
While trust in the Mauritanian government is high by regional standards, evaluation of its performance is not as positive. Only 37 percent report being satisfied or completely satisfied with the government’s overall performance. People with higher income and those ages 18-29 are more trusting than those with lower income and those thirty and older (12-points and 10-points, respectively).

Looking at some specific measures and services, evaluations seem to vary greatly. When evaluating the government’s performance in providing security, nearly half of Mauritians (49 percent) say it is good or very good. This is especially true for those with higher income (63 percent) compared to those lower income (45 percent). Similarly, younger people (54 percent) seem to evaluate the government’s performance on this front more positively than those thirty or older (46 percent). Evaluations are much harsher when it comes to economic performance, however. Less than a fifth (16 percent) say the government has done a good or very good job keeping prices down. Expectedly, those who can cover their expenses (26 percent) are more than twice as likely to rate the government’s performance in controlling prices as those who cannot cover their expenses (12 percent). Furthermore, Mauritians express dissatisfaction over the quality of streets and trash collection. Only one-in-five say they are satisfied or completely satisfied with the quality of the country’s street, while 22 percent say the same regarding the trash collection services.

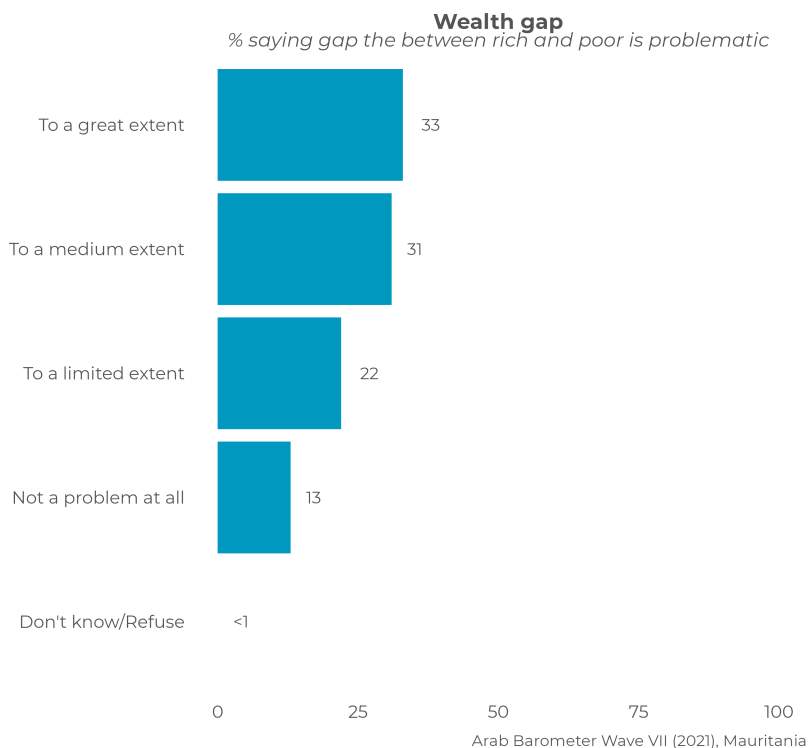


Economy

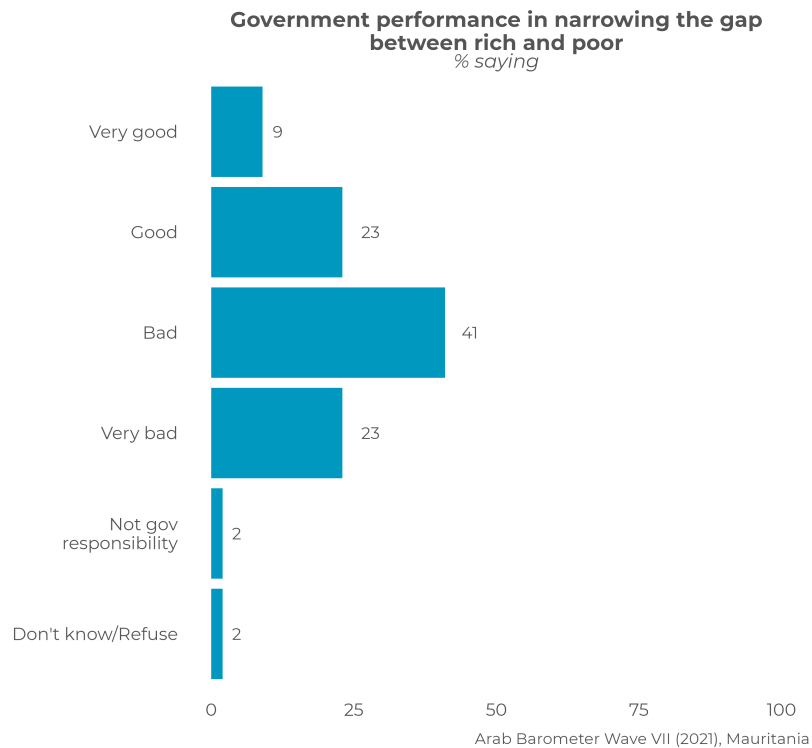
Given the economic troubles that several countries in the region are witnessing, evaluation of the current economic situation in Mauritania is relatively positive. A third of the population say the economy is good or very good (33 percent). The plurality, however, say that the economic situation is bad (38 percent). Unsurprisingly, this evaluation corresponds closely with one's level of income. Those who can cover their expenses are 18-points more likely to evaluate the economic situation positively than those who are having trouble covering their expenses. Optimism over the future economic situation seems relatively widespread in the country. Nearly a half (49 percent) say they believe the economy will be much or somewhat better in the coming few years. At the same time, hopelessness remains the dominant force in at least a fifth of the population where people say the economy will be somewhat worse (11 percent) or much worse (ten percent).



One economic issue troubling Mauritania is the rise of socioeconomic inequality. A third (32 percent) say that the wealth gap has become wider compared to last year. Though this issue is not as bad in Mauritania as it is in other parts of the region, nearly two thirds of Mauritians say it is problematic to a great or a medium extent. Unsurprisingly, those who cannot cover their expenses (67 percent) are more likely to say that inequality is problematic than those who can cover their expenses (57 percent). When thinking about factors contributing to the existing inequality, nearly six-in-ten (59 percent) point to the notion that some people work harder than others. While more than half (53 percent) of those with only a secondary degree or less hold this position, only four-in-ten of those with college degrees or higher say the same. Mauritians seem less convinced, however, that being born into a wealthy family plays a significant role in socioeconomic inequality. Only half of the population say this factor contributes to a great or medium extent to inequality. Interestingly, this seems to be largely the view of less educated Mauritians (61 percent) compared to just half of the better educated ones.

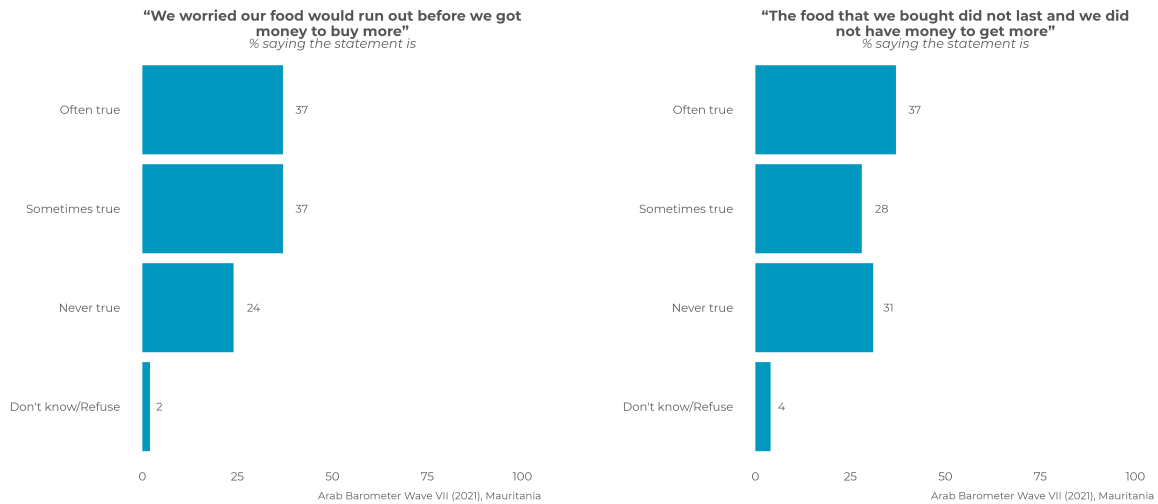


At the same time, the majority of Mauritians cite the failure of government to serve the interests of the poor as a factor to a great or medium extent (62 percent). This view differs significantly, however, across demographic groups. For example, Mauritians with lower incomes are 11-points more likely to hold this view than their fellow compatriots with higher incomes. Similarly, while two thirds (68 percent) of men hold this view, the percentage is lower for women (58 percent). Lastly, those ages 18-29 tend to blame the government for inequality more than those who are thirty or older (68 percent vs. 59 percent). Furthermore, a minority of Mauritians evaluate the government performance in combating inequality positively. Only a third (32 percent) say the government is doing a good or very good job in narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor. In fact, the plurality (41 percent) say the government has done a bad job on this front. This is especially true in the case of those who cannot cover their expenses who are 15-points less likely to evaluate the government performance positively, compared to those who can cover their expenses.

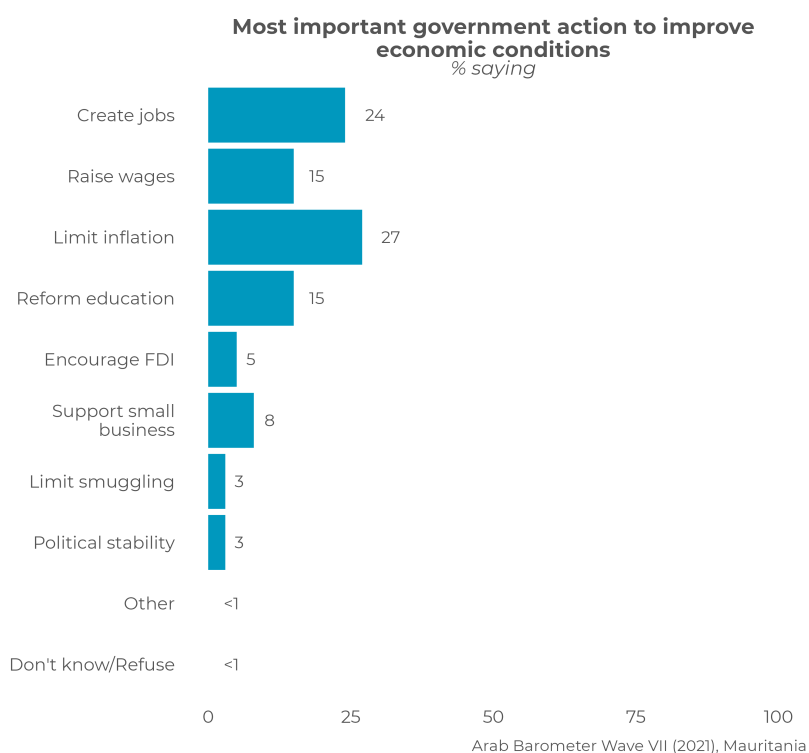


The reality of economic hardship is even harsher. More than a third (37 percent) say they either worried about their food supply running out before having the means to buy more or that their food actually ran out before they had money to get more. This is the highest percentage across the region. Unsurprisingly, this is a bigger issue for those with lower incomes, 42 percent of whom say these statements are often true compared to just a quarter or less of those with higher incomes. This is also true of those ages 18-29 who are at least 15-points more likely to say they went through these hardships than those thirty or older.

Arab Barometer – Wave VII
Mauritania Report

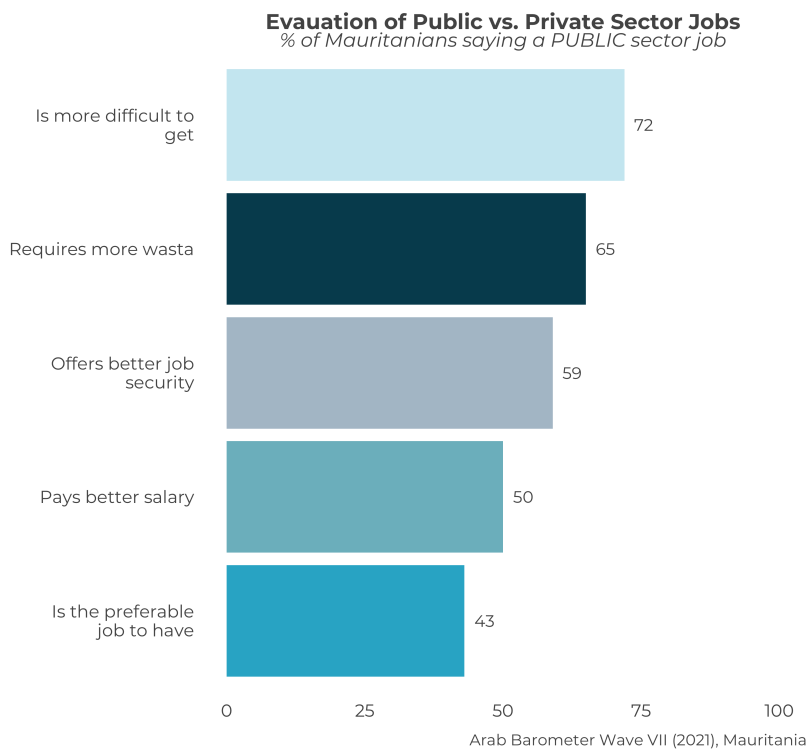


Mauritanians say that, to improve economic conditions, the government should focus on limiting inflation (27 percent) and creating jobs (24 percent). Other less common responses include raising wages and reforming education (15 percent for each). Less than one-in-ten cite supporting small businesses (eight percent) and encouraging foreign direct investments (five percent) as the most important government actions to improve economic conditions. Notably, those with only a secondary education or less are 18-points more likely to advocate limiting inflation than those with college degrees or higher. Similarly, youth ages 18-29 are nine-points more likely to want job creation than those 30 and older.



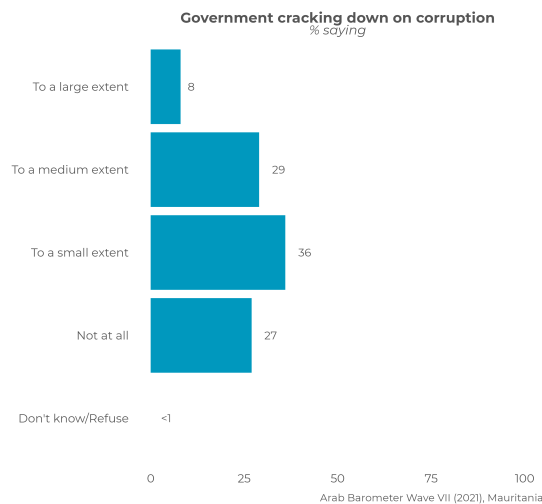
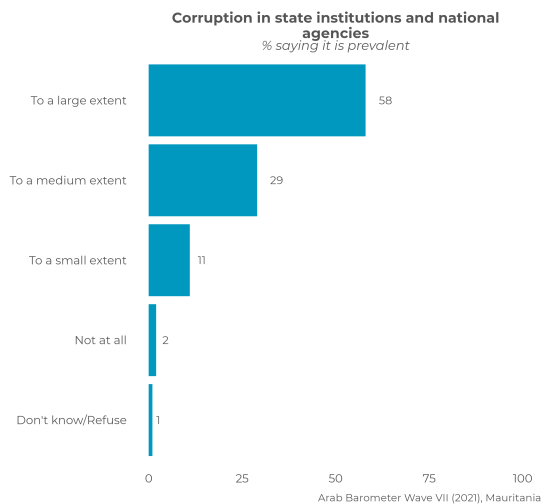
When asked about the preferred sector for the government to focus on job creation in, Mauritians are twice as likely to want jobs to be created in the public sector (38 percent) than in the private sector (19 percent). The plurality, however, say that jobs are wanted in both sectors equally (43 percent). The public sector is perceived to be the more difficult sector to get a job in (72 percent) compared to the private sector (15 percent). Half of Mauritians think that the public sector pays better salaries than the private sector, while only a third (35 percent) think the opposite. Moreover, the majority (59 percent) see public sector jobs as more secure, compared to only 28 percent for private sector jobs. This is especially the view of those with lower incomes, 62 percent of whom say public jobs are safer, compared to those with higher incomes, only half of whom say the same. Inversely, higher-income individuals are 13-points more likely to say private jobs are safer. Two thirds (65 percent) of Mauritians, however, believe that the public sector requires more wasta. This is especially true for youth ages 18-29, three-quarters of whom hold this view, compared to just 58 percent of those 30 or older. Only a fifth, on the other hand, believes more wasta is required to get a private sector job. Overall, the plurality (43 percent) prefer a public sector job, compared to just 18 percent preferring a private sector job. Youth ages 18-29 seem more inclined to preferring a public sector job

than those 30 or older by a margin of 10-points.



Corruption

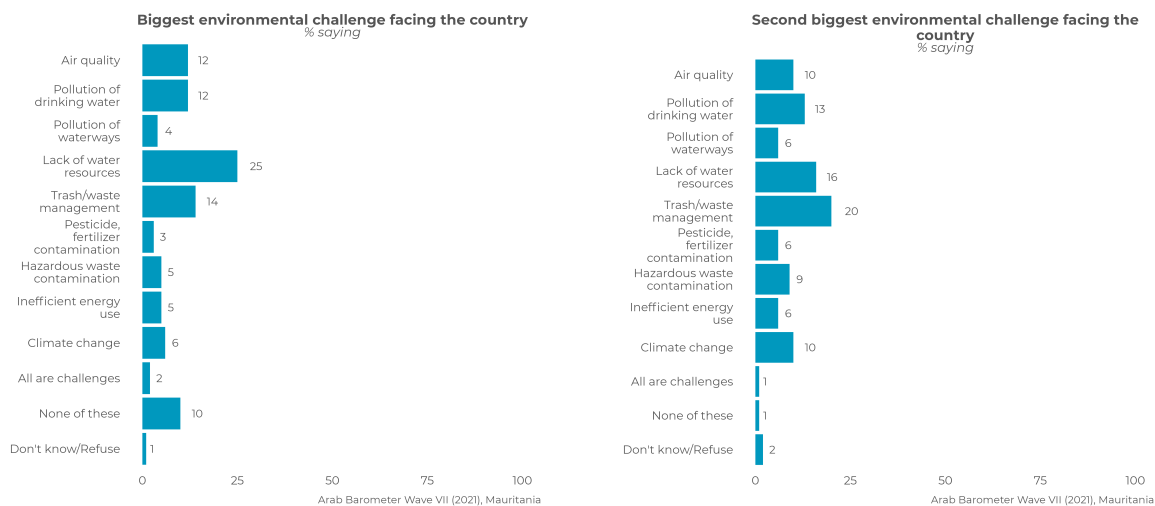
Corruption remains a major issue in Mauritania. The overwhelming majority (87 percent) perceive corruption to be prevalent to a large or medium extent in national agencies and institutions. Six-in-ten of those with lower incomes say corruption is prevalent to a large extent, compared to just half of those with higher incomes (52 percent). Mauritians seem unconvinced that the government is doing enough to tackle this issue. Only 37 percent say the government is cracking down on corruption to a large or a medium extent. Around a quarter (27 percent) say the government is not doing anything at all on this front. At the state level, views are just as negative. More than half (52 percent) say that most state officials are corrupt, while a fifth (21 percent) say “almost everyone is corrupt.”



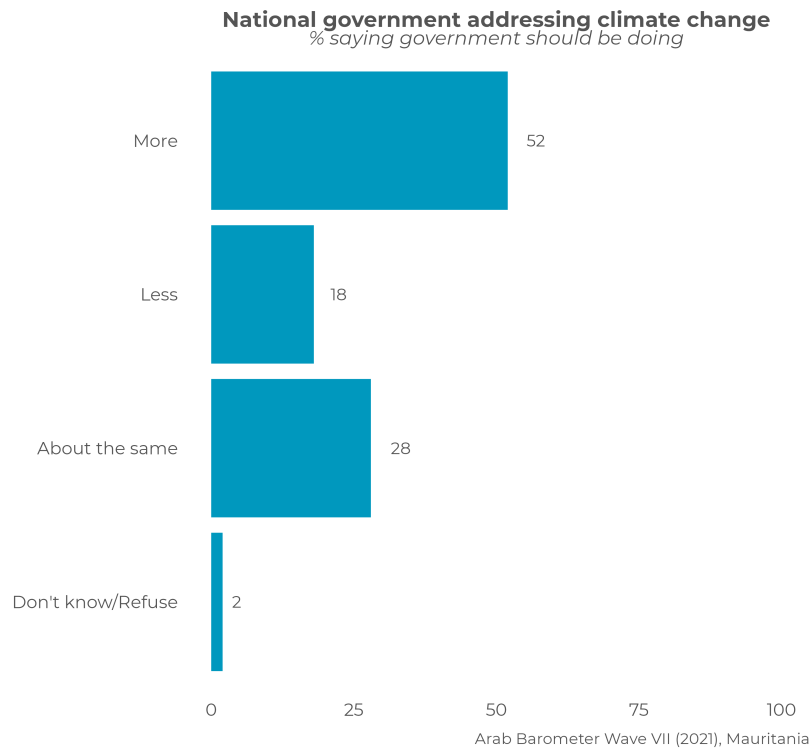
Environment

Mauritania has recently experienced one of its worst drought years in decades. Drought had a toll on farmers and livestock breeders. Therefore, it is no surprise that a quarter of Mauritians point to lack of water resources as the biggest environmental challenge facing their country. This view is more common among rural Mauritians (34 percent) compared to their urban compatriots (20 percent). Those 30 or older are also more likely to hold this view compared to those ages 18-29 by a 13-point margin. Other challenges are less common, including waste management (14 percent), air quality (12 percent), and pollution of drinking water (12 percent).

Arab Barometer – Wave VII
Mauritania Report

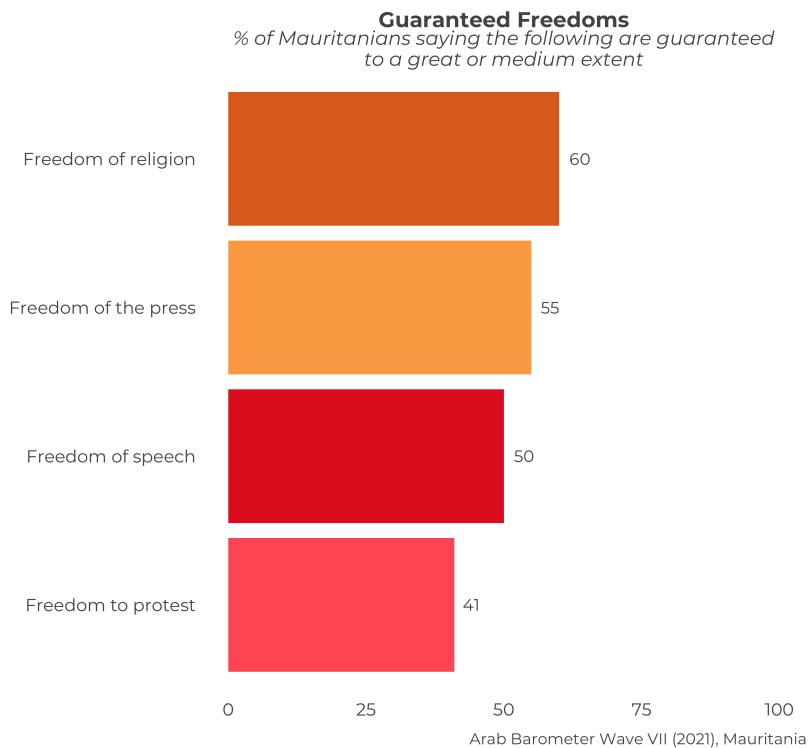


When asked about possible factors contributing to environmental challenges, the majority say that lack of government spending on the environment (59 percent) and lack of citizens' environmental awareness contribute to a large or a medium extent. Half of Mauritians (52 percent), thus, want to see their government doing more to address climate change. Youth ages 18-29 are more likely to hold this position (68 percent) compared to those 30 or older (41 percent). Similarly, those with higher incomes are 12-points more likely to want more government action addressing climate change than those with lower incomes. While only a minority (28 percent) of people say they want the government to keep the same level of commitment to combating climate change, it is noteworthy that those 30 or older are almost twice as likely to hold this view (35 percent) compared to youth ages 18-29 (18 percent). This stark difference across age groups suggests that Mauritians youth may be more concerned with climate change and less convinced with their government's action to combat it than their older counterparts.

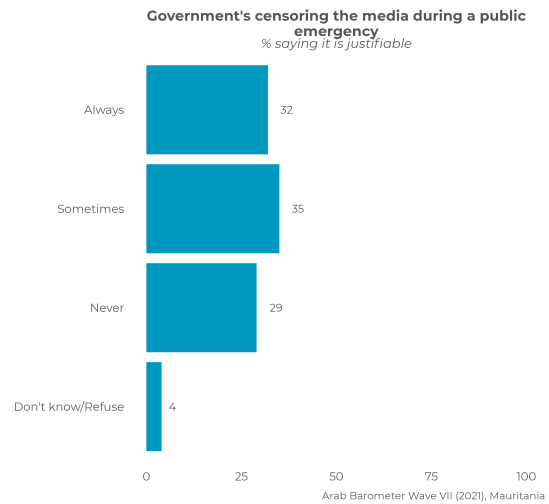
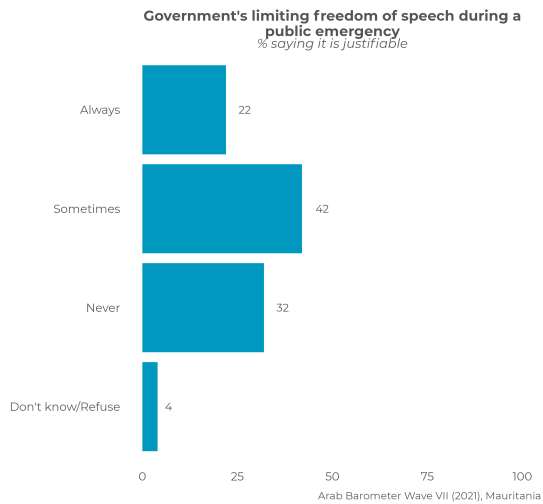


Civil rights

Mauritians are divided when it comes to questions of civil liberties in the country. While six-in-ten say the freedom of religion is guaranteed to a large or a medium extent, this view differs significantly across age groups. While nearly three-quarters (72 percent) of youth ages 18-29 hold this view, only half (51 percent) of those 30 or older do the same. As for freedom of the press, 55 percent say it is guaranteed to a large or a medium extent. The percentage is lower, however, when it comes to the press's freedom to criticize the government (48 percent). Half of Mauritians say that freedom of speech is guaranteed. That is not the case, however, for the freedom to participate in protests. Only 41 percent say that freedom of protest is guaranteed to a large or a medium extent.

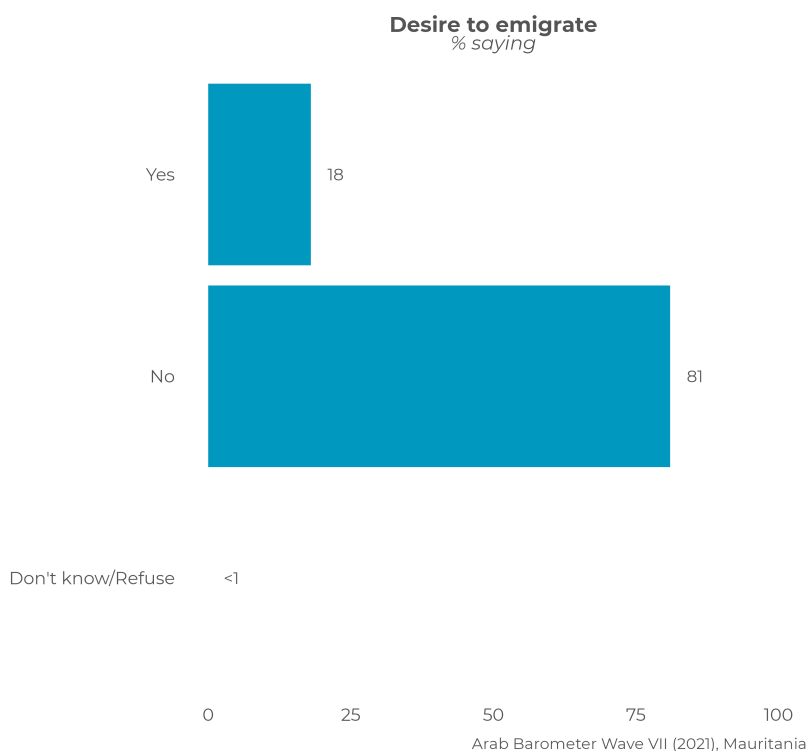


While significant proportions, often majority, of Mauritians believe their freedoms are guaranteed, only a minority says it is always justifiable for the government to limit those freedoms during a public emergency. Less than a quarter (22 percent) say it is always justifiable for the government during an emergency to limit freedom of speech, while a third (32 percent) say it is actually never justifiable for the government to do so. This difference in views shrinks in the case of censoring the media during an emergency. Only a third (32 percent) say it is always justifiable, compared to an insignificantly smaller proportion of 29 percent saying it is never justifiable. Notably, youth ages 18-29 seem more willing to say it is always justifiable for the government during an emergency to limit these liberties compared to those 30 or older by an eight-points margin in the case of freedom of speech and an 11-points margin in the case of censoring the media.



Migration

Mauritanians are among the least likely to express their interest in migrating across the region. Less than a fifth (18 percent) say they have a desire to emigrate. Unsurprisingly, men are four times more likely to say they want to emigrate than women (29 percent vs. seven percent). Though with a smaller difference, people with college degrees or higher and youth ages 18-29 are also more interested in migrating than their counterparts with margins of seven points and six points, respectively. Within the small minority wanting to emigrate, only a fifth (22 percent) say they would emigrate even if they lacked all the official documents required for emigrating legally.

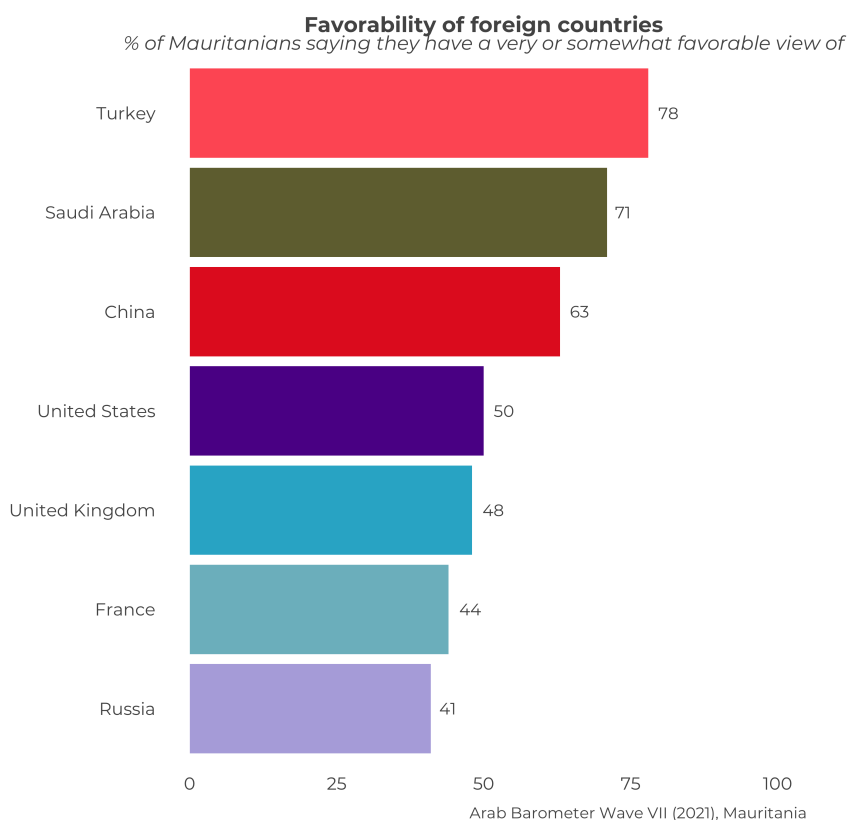


Similar to their counterparts in most countries surveyed in the seventh wave of Arab Barometer, the majority of potential Mauritanian migrants say their main reason for wanting to leave their country is the economy (71 percent). This is especially true for people with secondary degrees or less as they are 15 points more likely to cite economic reasons for migration than those with higher educational attainment. Pursuit of educational opportunities ranks second on the list of reasons for wanting to emigrate as stated by one-in-ten (11 percent) Mauritanians considering emigration. Potential migrants who are better off financially are 14 points more likely to cite educational reasons as compared to their compatriots who are less fortunate (22 percent vs. 6 percent). Similarly, those with higher education are more likely to want to emigrate to pursue educational opportunities than those with lesser qualifications by a margin of ten points.

International relations

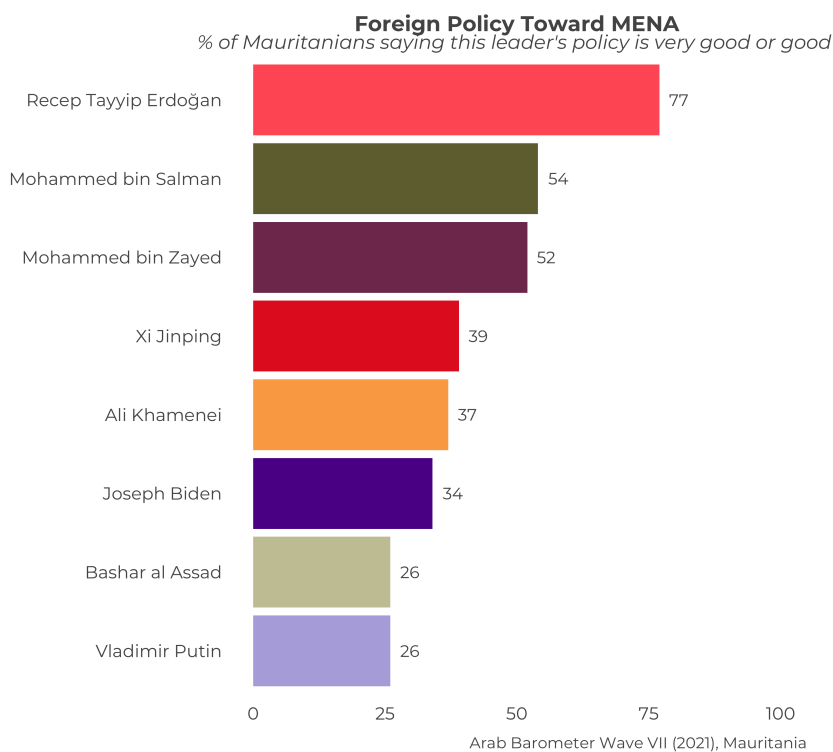
When it comes to views of foreign powers, Mauritians are clearly fond of regional powers such as Turkey and Saudi Arabia. While more than three quarters of people (78 percent) say they have a very or somewhat favorable view of

Turkey, seven-in-ten (71 percent) say the same about Saudi Arabia. Global powers are less fortunate, though China is favored by a majority of Mauritians (63 percent). Half of the population say they have a very or somewhat favorable view of the United States and the United Kingdom (48 percent), while 44 percent and 41 percent say the same about France and Russia, respectively. It is quite possible that support for Turkey and Saudi Arabia, the two countries that have been at odds with each other on several occasions, is driven by the fact that both are Muslim-majority countries. At the same time, both France and Russia, the two least favorable powers, have been meddling in the Sahel region which is leading more Mauritians to be wary of the two states.



The same is true in regards to views of foreign leaders. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is widely popular in Mauritania as three-quarters (77 percent) of the population express support for his policies. The two Gulf leaders, Mohammed bin Salman and Mohammed bin Zayed, are trailing Erdogan as a few more than half of Mauritians express their support for the two Arab leaders (MBS with 54 percent; MBZ with 52 percent). No other leader enjoys the sup-

port of a majority in Mauritania. Four-in-ten (39 percent) Mauritians say the policies of China’s Xi Jinping are very good or good, while 37 percent say the same for Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and a third (34 percent) for US President Joe Biden. Vladimir Putin is the least popular among foreign leaders as only a quarter of Mauritians (26 percent) believe his policies are very good or good.



This phenomenon extends to views on economic relations with foreign powers. The majority of Mauritians want stronger economic ties with Turkey (59 percent) and Saudi Arabia (58 percent). Just like with favorability, China ranks third as roughly half (48 percent) of the population want to strengthen their country’s economic relations with China. Less than half (46 percent) say the same about the United States. Nearly four-in-ten want stronger economic ties with France (42 percent) and the United Kingdom (41 percent), while roughly a third (36 percent) want the same with Russia.

Some Western countries, however, maintain a good reputation when it comes to infrastructure projects in Mauritania. Asked about their preferred companies to carry out such projects, a third (32 percent) of Mauritians say they prefer

American companies, followed by a fifth (21 percent) saying German companies and 18 percent for Turkish companies. France and China ranked lowest with eight percent and seven percent, respectively.



About Arab Barometer

The Arab Barometer is a nonpartisan research network that provides insights into the social, political, and economic attitudes and values of ordinary citizens across the Arab world.

We have been conducting rigorous and nationally representative public opinion surveys on probability samples of the adult populations across the Arab world since 2006. The margin of error is ± 2 percent.

The Arab Barometer is the largest repository of publicly available data on the views of men and women in the MENA region. Our findings give a voice to the needs and concerns of Arab publics.



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