



الباروميتر العربي
ARAB BAROMETER

Gender Attitudes and Trends in MENA

September 2022



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Executive Summary

Gender equality is far from achieved in MENA. Clear majorities in most countries surveyed hold that women should not play equal roles to men in both public and private spheres. Yet, there are also signs of change. In the past decade and a half of Arab Barometer surveys, public opinion across the Middle East and North Africa has trended towards gender equality. This is not only a result of younger generations with more liberal ideas of social norms becoming older, but an actual shift in perceptions across generations. In particular, agreement with the statements that “men are better at political leadership than women” and “university education is more important for men than women” has dropped sharply across many countries Arab Barometer has surveyed.

The survey always examines perceptions of violence against women. There is a widespread perception that violence against women has been increasing in the region. This is in line with the World Bank’s assessment that gender-based violence has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic in MENA.¹ However, the gap between men and women’s perceptions of violence is significant, with women being far more likely to say the level of violence has increased. In order to appropriately address the issue of gender-based violence, conversations need to be facilitated across genders.

Another challenge for women in MENA relates to employment opportunities. Labor force participation rates for women are the lowest of any region in the world.² However, results from Arab Barometer make it clear that most citizens perceive structural barriers to have a greater impact than cultural barriers, meaning governments could more readily develop policies to address these challenges.

The Arab Barometer results and their context also provide suggestions for what governments can do to increase gender parity in both public and private life. First, promoting women in political office appears to have a positive effect. Post-Arab Spring most countries increase female representation by adopted gender quotas in their new constitutions. Since then, belief in female political leadership has increased. Governments can help continue this trend by supporting women in politics at all levels and increasing the number of women in appointed positions.

To increase female labor force participation, governments can tackle structural challenges, such as lack of transportation and childcare, along with low wages. When given the options between sets of cultural challenges (stigma, mixed workplaces, etc.) and structural challenges like those previously mentioned,

¹Link to World Bank Report.

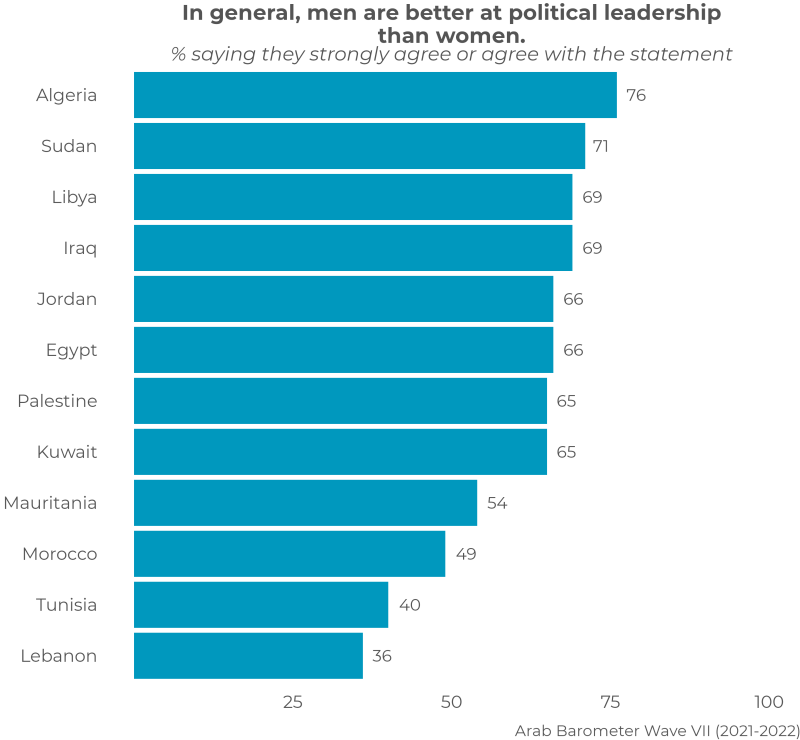
²Link to Poverty Action Lab statistics.

citizens most often said structural challenges were a greater barrier to female labor force participation than cultural challenges. This is a positive result for governments trying to engage their female citizens in the economy, as these are concrete concerns that government policies can address.

These are among the main findings of 12 nationally representative public opinion surveys conducted across the Middle East and North Africa from 2021-22 as part of Arab Barometer Wave VII. The results include over 26,000 interviews across the region and have a margin of error of approximately ± 2 points in each country. Overall, these results make clear that while MENA citizens hold largely traditional views on gender norms, minds are changing towards greater gender equality. Furthermore, governments have many tools in their arsenal to engage their underutilized female workforce.

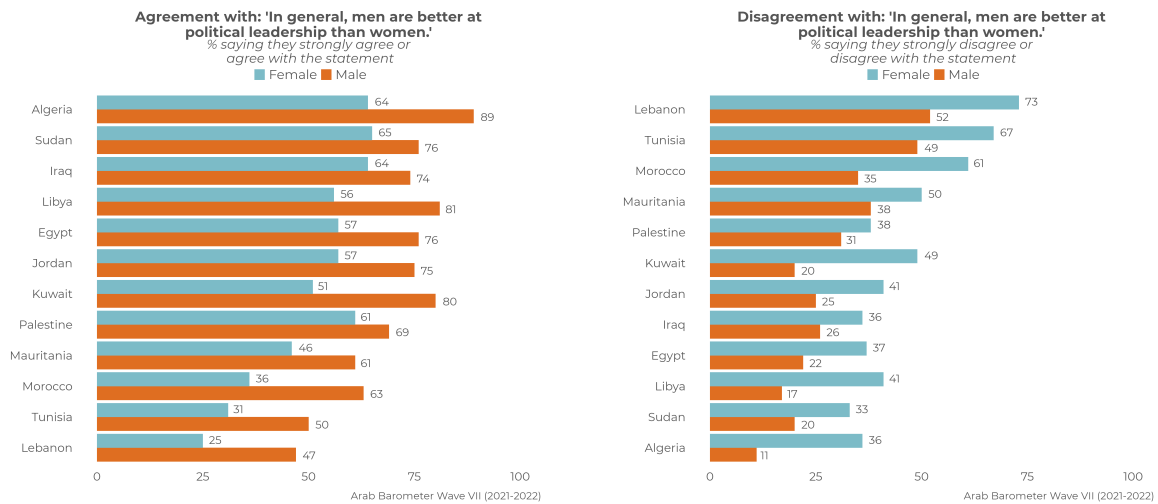
Women in Politics

Despite the recent gains made by women in the political sphere across North Africa and the Middle East, results from Arab Barometer's Wave VII make it clear that gender equality remains a distant goal. In nine out of 12 countries surveyed by Arab Barometer, a majority of citizens agree or strongly agree with the statement "In general, men are better at political leadership than women." This view is most widely held in Sudan (71 percent), Libya (69 percent), and Iraq (69 percent). Furthermore, in only two countries (Lebanon and Tunisia) does the majority of the population disagree or strongly disagree with the statement. In Morocco the population is evenly split, with 49 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing and 48 percent saying they disagree or strongly disagree.



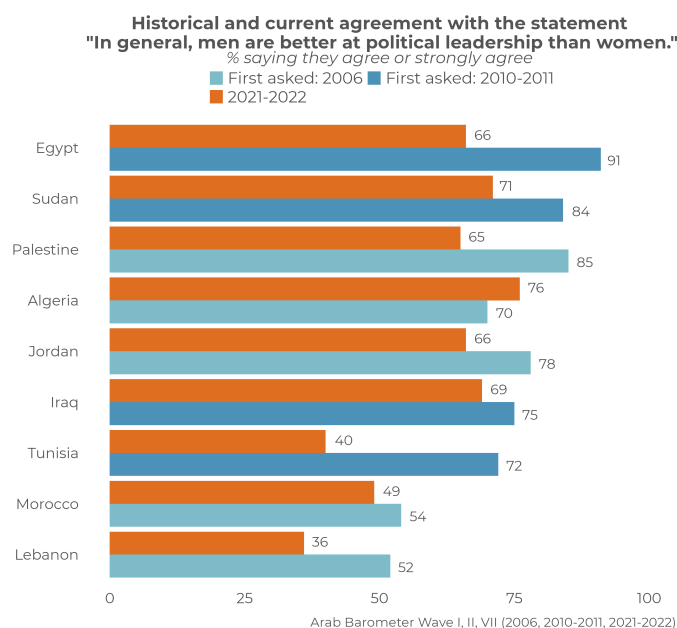
Unsurprisingly, the statement engenders vast differences between men and women. When relative agreement to the statement is broken out by gender, women are significantly less likely than men to agree or strongly agree with the statement in every country surveyed. Still, there are eight out of 12 cases where more than half of women agree or strongly agree that men are better at political leadership than women (Sudan, Algeria, Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, Jordan, Libya, Kuwait). Notably, the smallest gap between men and women is 8 points in Palestine (69 percent of men, 61 percent of women). In Lebanon, Tunisia, Morocco, and Mauritania, at least half of women disagree or strongly disagree with the statement.

Arab Barometer – Wave VII
Gender Report



Notably, the even split in attitudes in Morocco masks clear differences in views by gender. Overall, 63 percent of men in Morocco agree or strongly agree that men make better political leaders compared with 36 percent of women, while 61 of Moroccan women disagree or strongly disagree. The 27-point difference in level of agreement between men and women in Morocco is the largest gender gap of all the countries Arab Barometer surveyed this wave.

However, although the majority of people in most countries surveyed by Arab Barometer agree that men are better political leaders than women, the long-term trend is one that demonstrates significant changes in favor of women’s equality over the past fifteen years. There has been a double-digit increase in the percent of citizens who disagree or strongly disagree that men are better political leaders than women in six out of nine countries since the first time Arab Barometer conducted a survey in each country.



Tunisia has witnessed the largest increase in the level of disagreement with this statement, which went up by 32 points from 26 percent in in 2011 to 58 percent in 2021. Egypt and Palestine, two places in which both a majority of men and women agree that men make better political leaders, saw the second and third largest changes in opinions. Disagreement that men are better political leaders grew by 21 points in Egypt (9 percent in 2011 to 30 percent in 2022) and 20 points in Palestine (15 percent in 2006 to 35 percent in 2021).

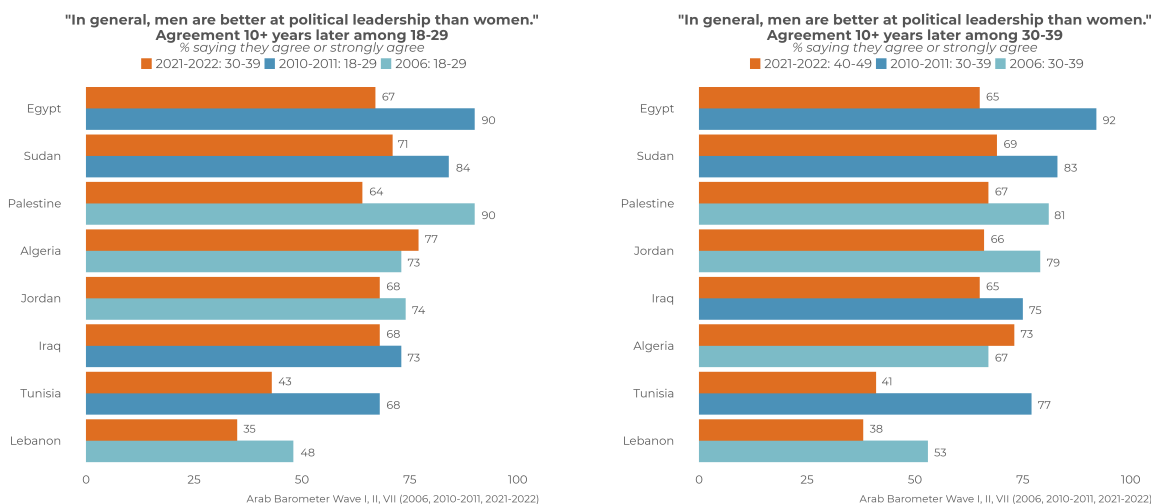
Results from Arab Barometer make clear that there have been important changes in views over time within the same age cohort. It has been at least 10 years since the first Arab Barometer survey in seven of the nine countries. This means that the cohort of people who were ages 18-29 in the first survey are now in the 30-39 age group today. In every country surveyed before 2011,³ there was at least a 5-point increase in the level of disagreement between the 18-29 age group, and the 30-39 age group in 2021-2022. In five of the seven cases, this change is greater than 10 points, including Sudan (13 points), Lebanon (13 points), Egypt (23 points), Tunisia (25 points), and Palestine (26 points).

The change in opinion is even more dramatic among those in the 30-39 age group in 2011 or earlier who are now in the 40-49 age group. Iraq saw the

³Morocco is a methodological exception. During the first survey of Morocco in 2007, ages of respondents were only given in a range, therefore Morocco is excluded from this analysis.

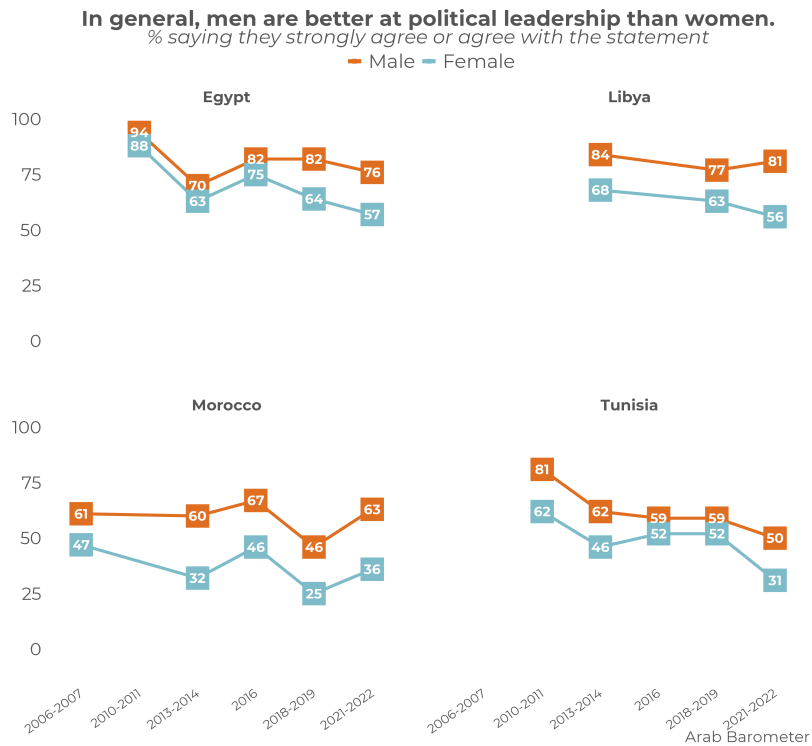
smallest change, which was 10 points. Tunisia saw the biggest change with 77 percent of Tunisians ages 30-39 in 2011 agreeing or strongly agreeing that men are better at political leadership than women, compared to only 41 percent of Tunisians ages 40-49 in 2021.

Rather than carrying their beliefs with them over time, these results suggest that as these cohorts have aged, some of their members have updated their opinions to be more in favor of female political leadership.



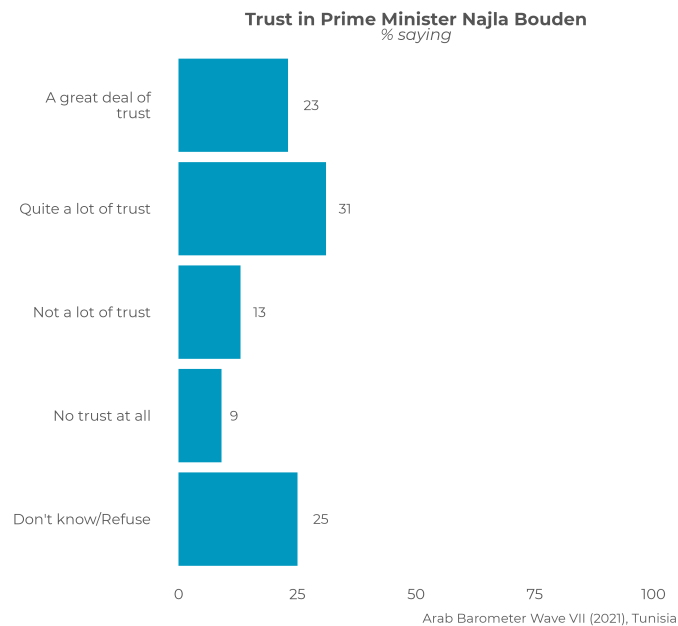
Breaking out the trends by gender, we see that women are the driving force behind the increase. In four of the nine countries, men's opinion on gendered political leadership did not significantly change (Jordan, Iraq, Libya,⁴ and Morocco). On the contrary, women in every country have increasingly disagreed with the assessment that men are better political leaders. The most modest change among women occurred in Iraq. In 2012, 28 percent of Iraqi women disagreed or strongly disagreed that men are better at political leadership compared with 36 percent in 2022, representing just an 8-point increase. Tunisia saw the biggest change in opinion for both women and men, with each gender's level of disagreement increasing by 32 points from 2011 to 2021.

⁴Libya and Kuwait were first surveyed in 2014. The trend examined is over a shorter time frame than the other countries.



The change in Tunisia is particularly striking in light of the appointment of Najla Bouden Romdhane as the Arab world’s first female prime minister. Romdhane was appointed by President Kais Saied after his suspension of parliament. Overall, 54 percent of Tunisians say they have quite a lot or a great deal of trust in Romdhane, with no significant differences between genders. Prior to the suspension of parliament, Tunisia was often referred to as the only Arab democracy.⁵ Thus, the women of Tunisian parliament had the more governmental sway compared to female parliamentarians in other Arab countries. Despite Tunisians’ frustrations with parliament (91 percent supported or strongly supported Saied’s decision to suspend it), the presence of women appears to have increased confidence in women’s political leadership.

⁵See Time, Brookings, The Atlantic Council, and Reuters.

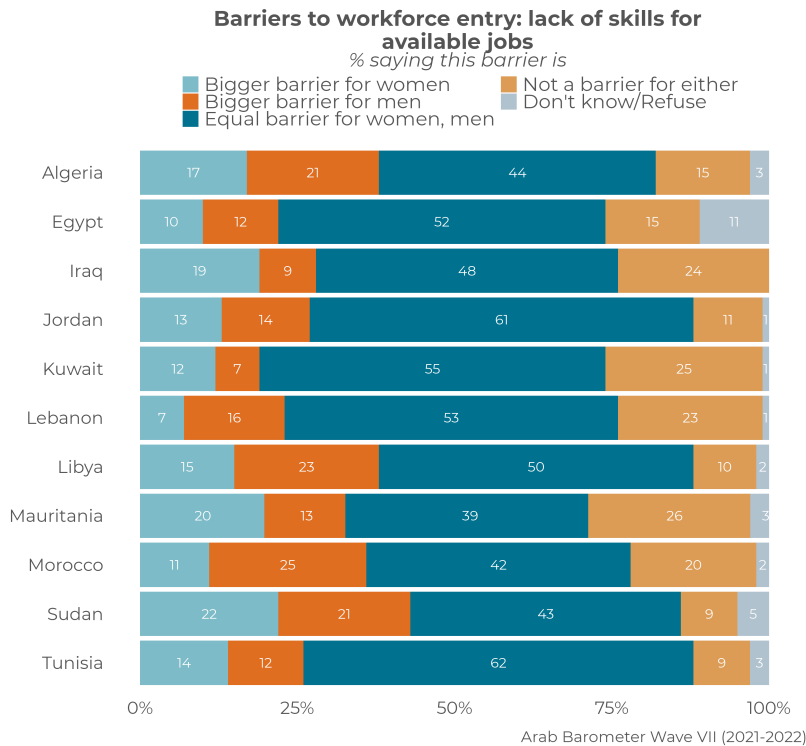


Women in the Workplace

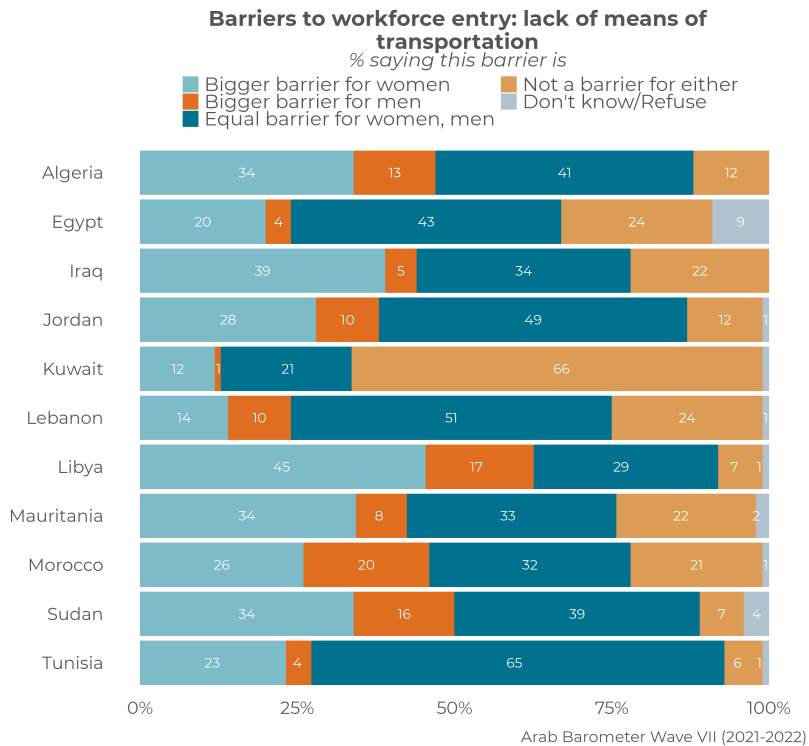
Arab Barometer asks a series of questions relating to barriers citizens could face when trying to enter the workforce. This includes battery of questions focused on whether each barrier is more of a problem for women, men, equally for both, or not a barrier for either.

Two of the proposed barriers are structural: lack of means of transportation and lack of skills for available jobs. Governments could plausibly step in with policy changes to tackle either of these issues. The third barrier is rooted in cultural concerns: men and women working together. There are fewer available policy solutions to make citizens feel more comfortable working in mixed workspaces.

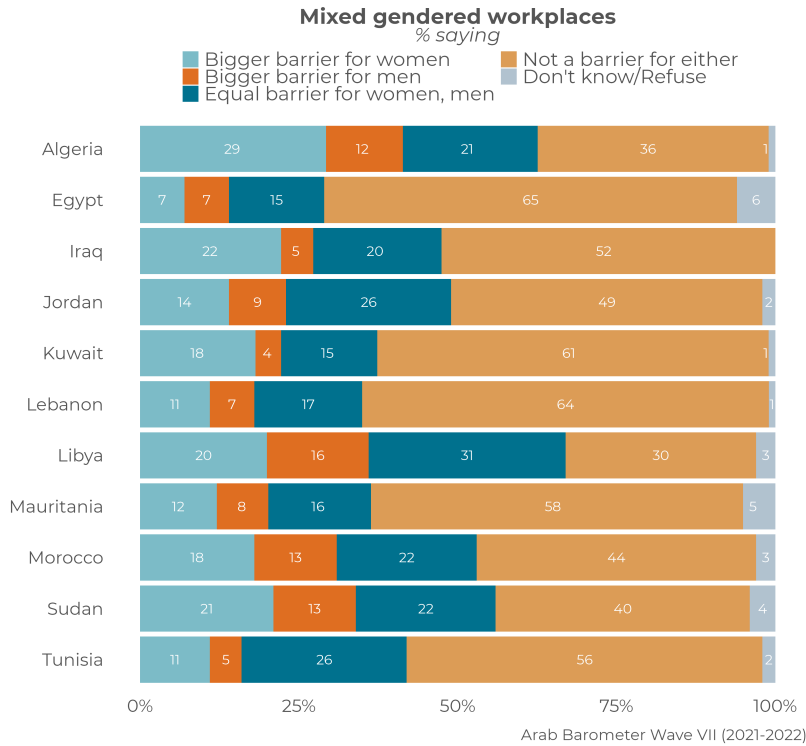
In both cases for the structural barriers, a plurality of citizens in most countries surveyed say the barrier is an equal barrier for both men and women. The most commonly agreed upon barrier is lacking skills for available jobs. The degree to which a lack of skills is viewed as an equal barrier ranges from 39 percent in Mauritania to 62 percent in Tunisia. The second most common choice in Mauritania is “not a barrier for either” at 26 percent; 13 points behind the first choice. Overall, the results make clear that MENA citizens do not see lacking skills as a gender-based barrier to workforce entry.



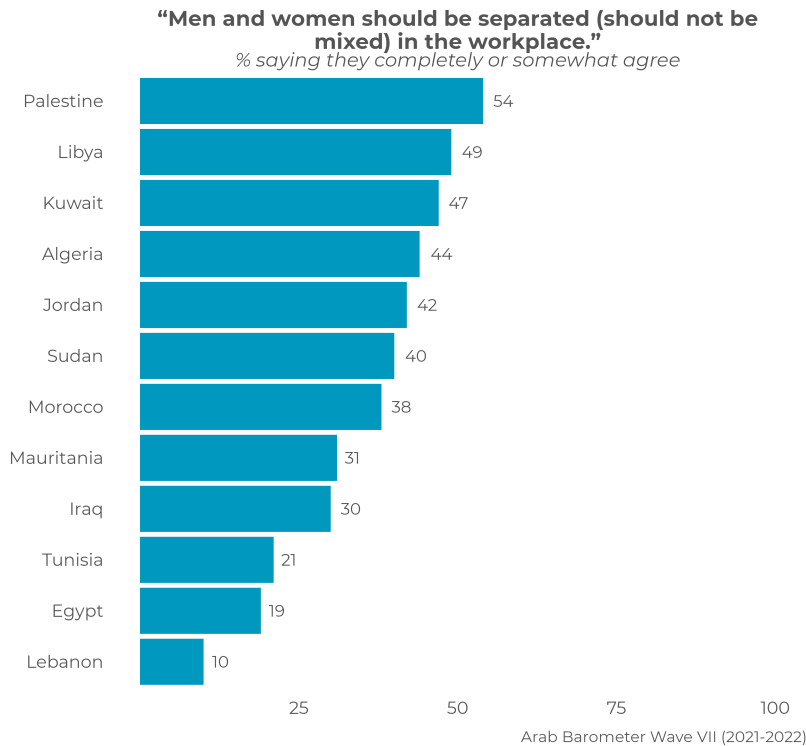
In many countries, citizens are divided between transportation being a greater barrier for women, or an equal barrier for both. In Libya and Iraq, citizens most commonly rate lack of transportation as a bigger barrier for women (45 percent and 39 percent, respectively). Meanwhile, in Mauritania transportation is perceived as a bigger barrier for women by a third (34 percent) of citizens while a third also say that it represents an equal barrier for men and women. In Jordan, Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia, the second most common perception is that transportation represents a bigger barrier for women (28 percent, 26 percent, 34 percent, and 23 percent, respectively). In no country surveyed do citizens perceive transportation to represent a bigger barrier for men than for women.



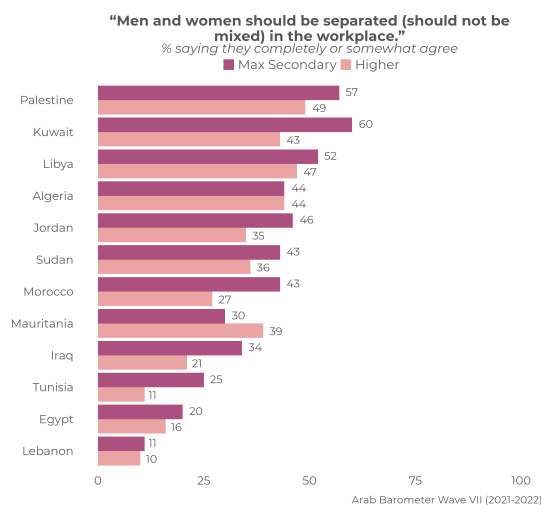
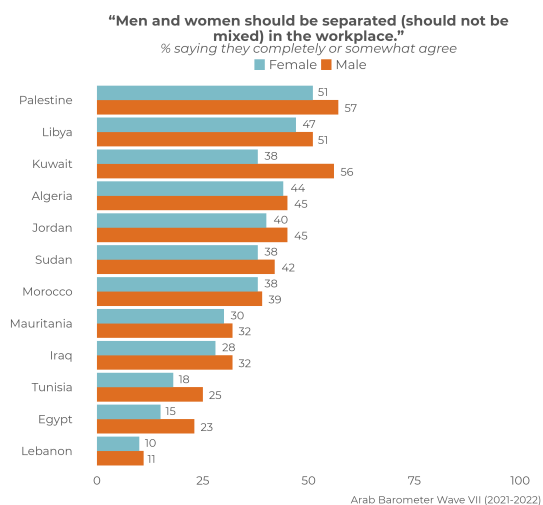
Regarding men and women working together serving as barrier to increasing women’s labor force participation, a plurality of citizens in every country say it is not a barrier for either men or women. Libya is the only country in which a roughly equal percent of citizens say mixed workspaces are not an issue for both men and women (30 percent) and that mixed workspaces represent an equal barrier for men and women (31 percent). In every other country surveyed, the most common response is that mixed workplaces are not a barrier for either men or women.



The lack of concern towards mixed gendered workplaces is borne out again when citizens are asked whether they agree with the statement “Men and women should be separated (should not be mixed) in the workplace.” In 11 out of 12 countries surveyed, at least half of the population disagrees or strongly disagrees. Lebanese citizens dissent the most with 89 percent disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

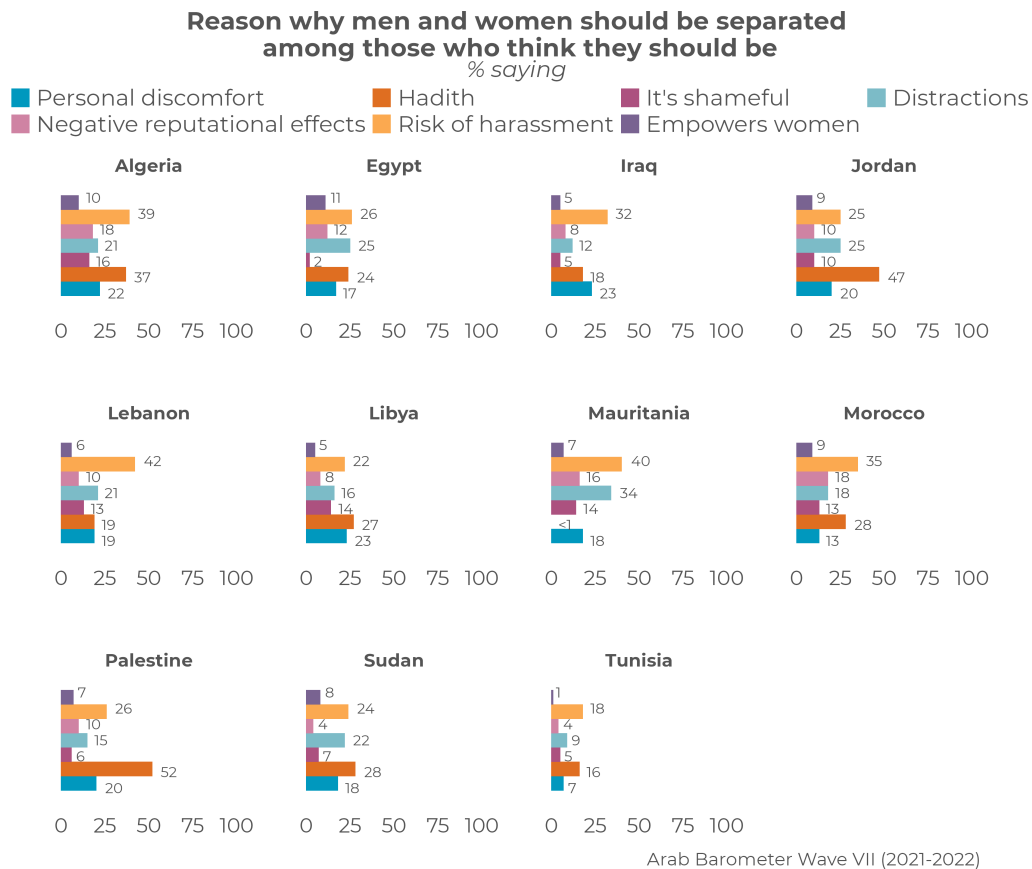


Further, there is not a large difference in views between men and women. Although women are less likely to agree, differences in opinion by gender are within 10 points in 11 out of 12 countries surveyed. There are much larger gaps, however, when populations are broken out by levels of education. In Morocco, 43 of citizens with a secondary education or less agree that men and women should not mix in the workplace, compared to 27 of those with university education or above. Tunisia, Iraq, and Jordan also have double-digit differences (14 points, 13 points, and 11 points, respectively). Mauritania is the only country in which those with a higher education are more likely to agree than those with at most a secondary education (39 percent compared to 30 percent).

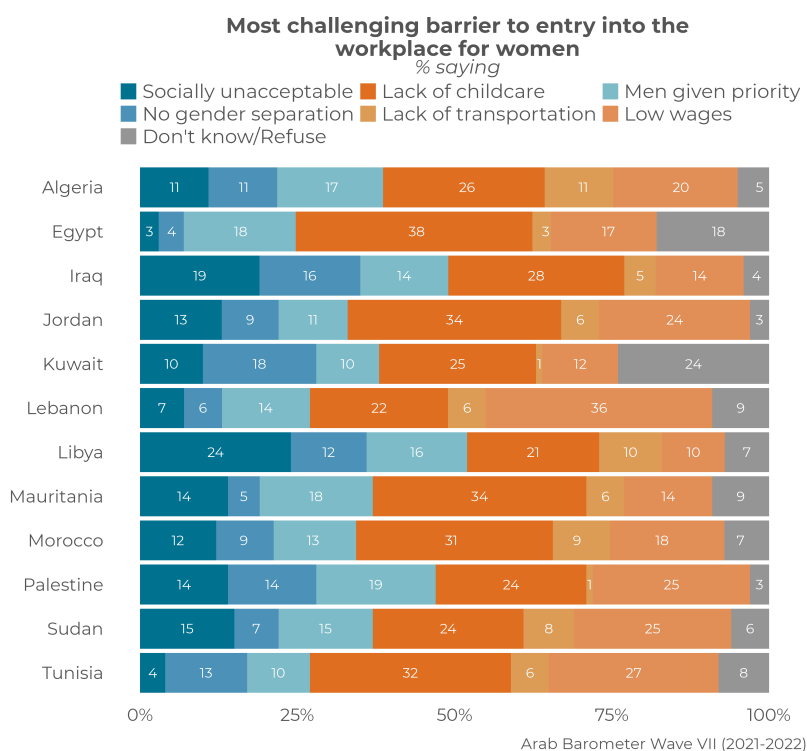


When asked to provide a few reasons why they thought men and women should be separated at work, the risk of harassment and religious reasons are the two most commonly provided, usually followed by the argument that men and women will become distracted at work. The four cases with the highest level of agreement among all citizens – Palestine (54 percent), Libya (49 percent), Jordan (42 percent), and Sudan (40 percent) – also cite religious reasons most frequently as a reason as to why they think men and women should be kept separate at work among citizens who think the two genders should not work in the same space (52 percent in Palestine, 27 percent in Libya, 47 percent in Jordan, and 28 percent in Sudan). This likely explains the differences seen in levels of education. In most countries,⁶ those with a secondary education or less are more likely to say they are religious compared to those with a higher level of education.

⁶The exceptions being Mauritania and Libya.



In addition to rating the challenges associated with each potential barrier, the questionnaire included an item asking about the biggest barrier women face when trying to enter the workforce from a list of three potential structural and three potential cultural barriers. At least half of citizens in nine out of the 12 countries name a structural issue as the biggest barrier women face to entering the workforce. Men and women tend to choose structural barriers at the same rate, with the exceptions of Tunisia (68 percent of women versus 60 percent of men) and Jordan (73 percent of women versus 55 percent of men).

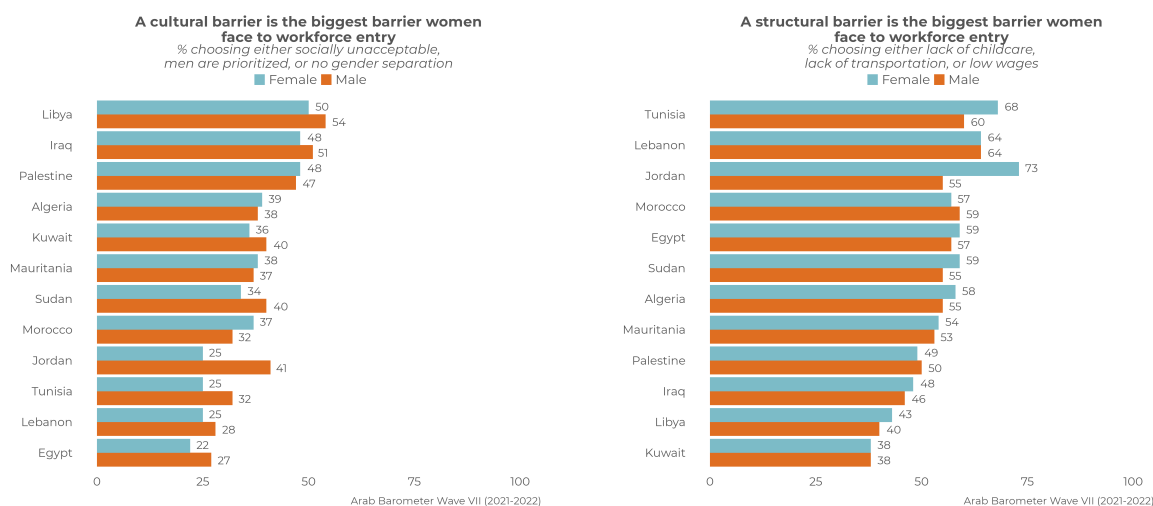


The structural choices offered are lack of childcare, lack of transportation, and low wages. In 11 out of 12 countries, “lack of childcare options” is the most commonly cited barrier (or tied for first) when women are asked about the most challenging barrier to workforce entry. Only in Lebanon, suffering a total financial collapse in 2019, did more women say low wages are the biggest challenge followed by a lack of childcare. Results from men are similar regarding the importance of childcare in the countries surveyed. However, Jordan and Tunisia represent key exceptions. Overall, 40 percent of Jordanian women and 37 percent of Tunisian women say childcare is the primary challenge compared to only 27 percent of Jordanian men and 27 percent of Tunisian men. Across the region, a lack of transportation nearly always falls below lack of childcare and low wages. Libya is the only country in which lack of transportation is tied with low wages at 10 percent.

Iraq and Libya are the only two countries in which a majority of citizens do not choose a structural barrier. Citizens in Iraq are essentially evenly divided between structural and cultural barriers (47 percent versus 49 percent, respectively). In Libya, 41 percent of citizens choose a structural barrier compared to 52 percent who chose a cultural barrier, making it a key exception to the

broader regional trend.

Regardless of how many citizens chose a cultural issue over a structural issue in a given country, men tend to be more likely than women to think cultural reasons represent a bigger barrier to women’s workforce entry than structural ones. The difference is especially striking in Jordan, where 41 percent of men believe a cultural issue is the biggest barrier to workforce entry women face compared to only 25 percent of women.



The potential cultural barriers provided are the lack of gender separation, men being given priority for jobs, and being socially unacceptable. In both Iraq and Libya, the belief that women working outside the home is socially unacceptable is the most commonly perceived cultural barrier. In Egypt, Lebanon, Mauritania, and Palestine, men being given priority for jobs is the most frequently chosen cultural barrier, and it is tied for first (along with socially unacceptable) in Sudan and Morocco.

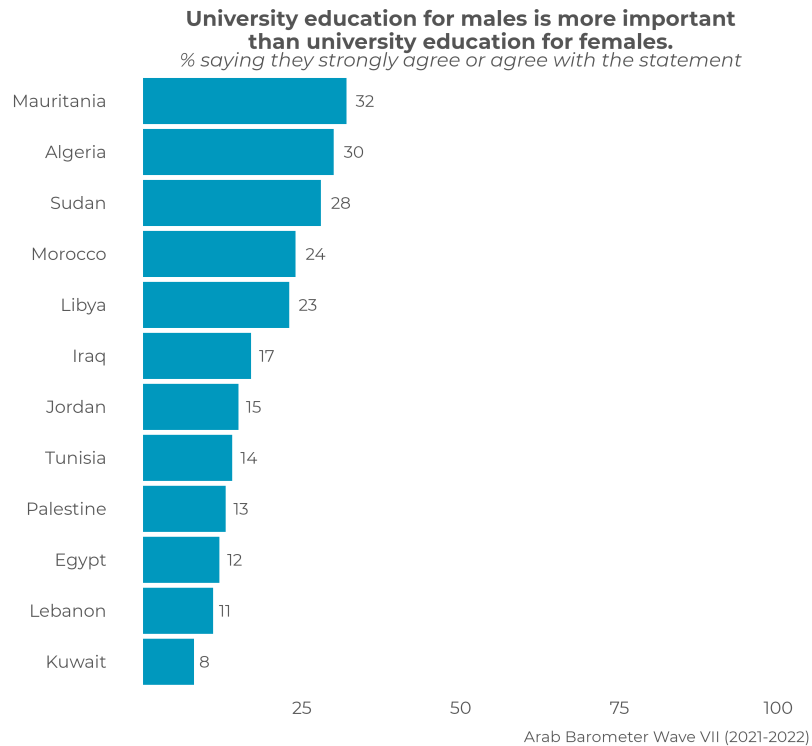
A lack of gender separation in the workplace is infrequently cited in all countries surveyed. Iraq has the highest proportion of citizens identifying mixed workspaces as the biggest challenge women face to workforce entry at 16 percent. Egypt has the smallest proportion at 3 percent. In every country, the differences in perception across genders regarding the importance of gender separation is little to none.

There are several important takeaways from these findings. First, structural barriers are clearly considered greater barriers to women entering the work-

force than cultural barriers. This means that governments across the region could take steps to help increase women's labor force participation in the region by developing policies to address these challenges. Improving options for childcare, raising wages, and even improving transportation could greatly increase women's ability to participate in the workforce. Meanwhile, changing personal attitudes and comfort levels generally takes time, meaning these barriers may be longer-lasting. With respect to cultural barriers, while personal beliefs and preferences may be largely outside the government's control, governments may be able to combat the prioritization of men over women when hiring by offering incentives for hiring more women. Finally, in all countries surveyed, men hold a vast majority of decision-making power in government. If governments want to increase women's access to the workforce, there must be a cross-gender dialog to assess the roots of the issues. Without such a dialog, resources may be misallocated to issues of less importance or towards issues that are in fact not issues at all.

Women in Education

Fewer than a third of citizens in any country surveyed in Arab Barometer's Wave VII agree or strongly agree that a university education is more important for males than females. Mauritania (32 percent) and Sudan (28 percent) are the only two countries in which more than a quarter of citizens agree. Kuwait has the lowest overall level of agreement at 8 percent.

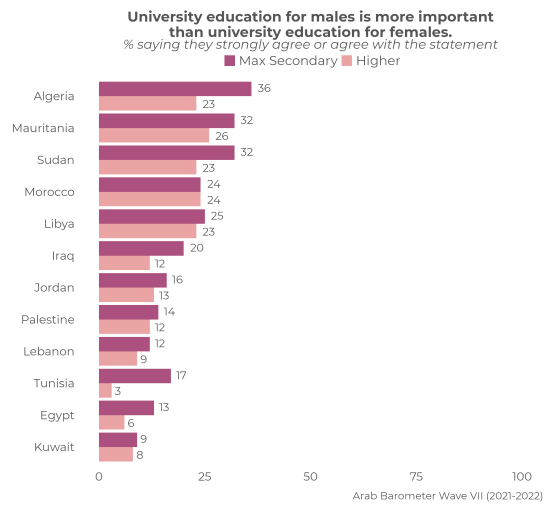
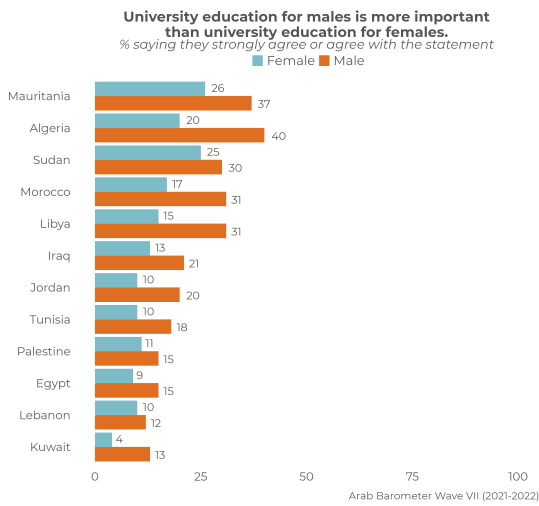


There exists a significant difference in opinions between men and women on the issue. In five out of 12 countries surveyed, there is at least a 10-point difference in levels of agreement. The biggest difference exists in Algeria, where only 20 percent of women agree or strongly agree compared to 40 percent of men.

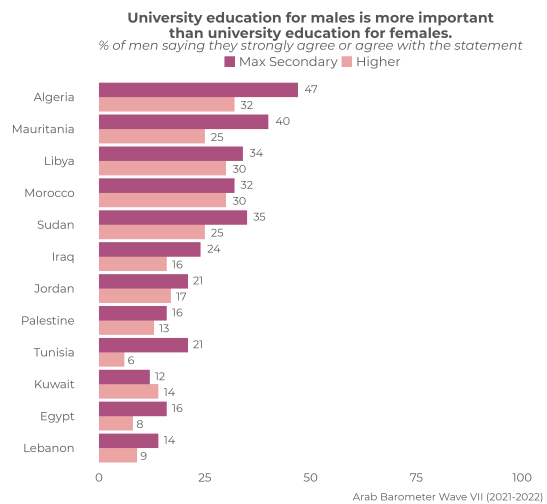
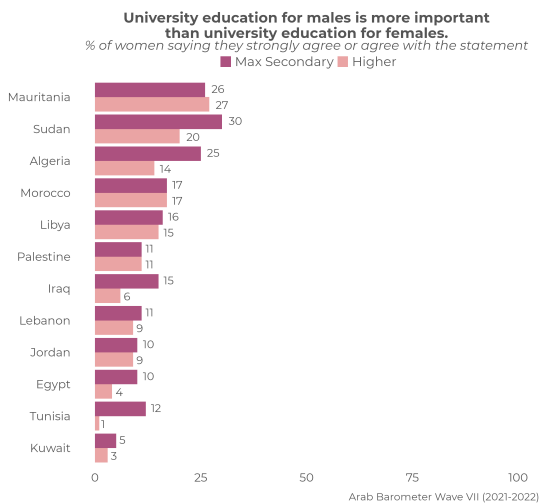
Levels of agreement typically do not depend on their own level of education. While half of the countries surveyed do see a difference in agreement of over 5 points, only in Tunisia and Algeria is the difference greater than 10 points (17 percent of those with a maximum of secondary education agree or strongly agree compared to only 3 percent of those with a university degree or above in Tunisia; the difference is 36 percent versus 23 percent in Algeria).

Arab Barometer – Wave VII

Gender Report



Looking at the intersection of gender and education, perhaps unsurprisingly women are more likely to support gender equality in education. Further, there is greater variance by level of education among men than among women. The difference in opinions between men who have at least a secondary education and those with a secondary degree or less is always the same or greater than the difference in opinion between more and less educated women. In Mauritania, Morocco, Libya, and Palestine, there was essentially no difference in women’s opinion regardless of level of educational attainment. In other words, women do not appear to differ greatly in their views of gender equality regardless of level of education, while men change their minds with increased education.



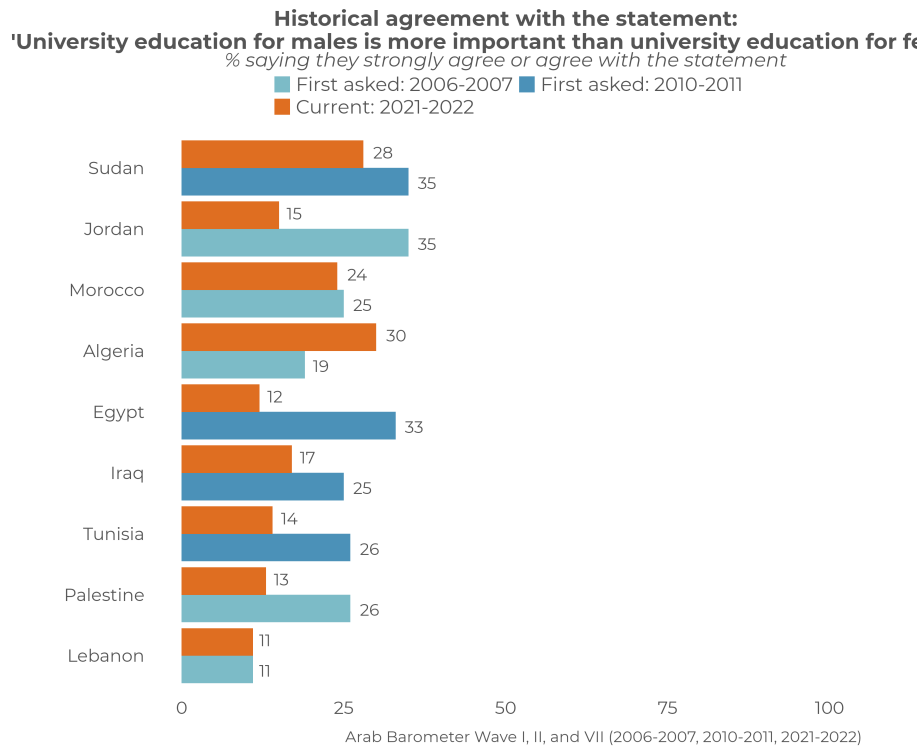
Views of the degree to which men and women should have equal rights to a university education have been tracked by Arab Barometer for more than 15 years. Although few citizens in any country agree that university education is more important for men than women, the trends over time are more mixed.

In three countries, there has been little to no change over time: Lebanon, Morocco, and Libya. Few in Lebanon have ever agreed with this statement, with just one-in-ten saying men should be given preference in both 2006 and 2021-2022 (11 percent in both years). Similarly, views in Morocco and Libya have remained relatively unchanged with about a quarter of citizens agreeing or strongly agreeing in each wave of Arab Barometer surveys.

Changes have been somewhat greater in Iraq and Sudan. In the former, the perception that men should be given priority in university education has dropped by 8 points from 2011 to 2021-2022 while it has fallen by 7 points in Sudan from 2011 to 2022.

Meanwhile, substantial changes are observed in Palestine and Tunisia, with citizens being half as likely to hold this view now compared with the first Arab Barometer survey in each country. In 2006, 26 percent of citizens in Palestine agreed with this statement and the same percentage held this view in Tunisia in 2011. By 2021-2022, this level dropped to 14 percent in Tunisia and 13 percent in Palestine.

The biggest changes are seen in Egypt and Jordan, where the percent of citizens who agree or strongly agree that university education is more important for males than females dropped by 21 points and 20 points, respectively.



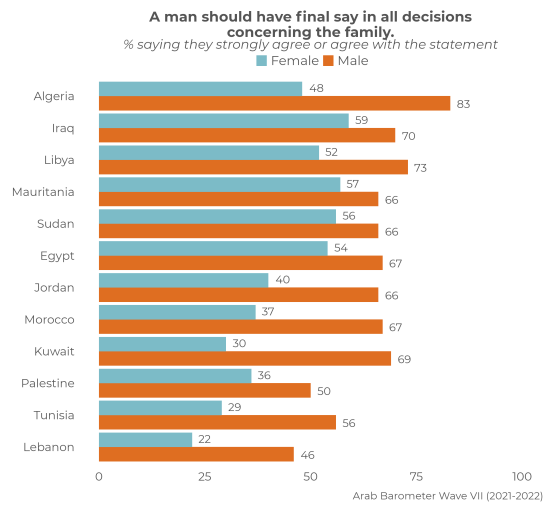
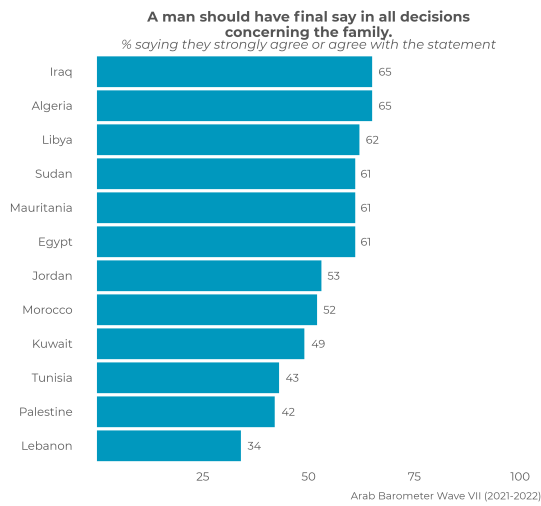
Women in the Home

Additionally, Arab Barometer examines views of women’s roles within the home. In half the countries surveyed in 2021-2022 (Iraq, Algeria, Libya, Sudan, Mauritania, and Egypt), at least six-in-ten agree or strongly agree with the statement “A man should have final say in all decisions concerning the family.” Meanwhile, only in three countries does less than half of the population agree (Tunisia, Palestine, and Lebanon).

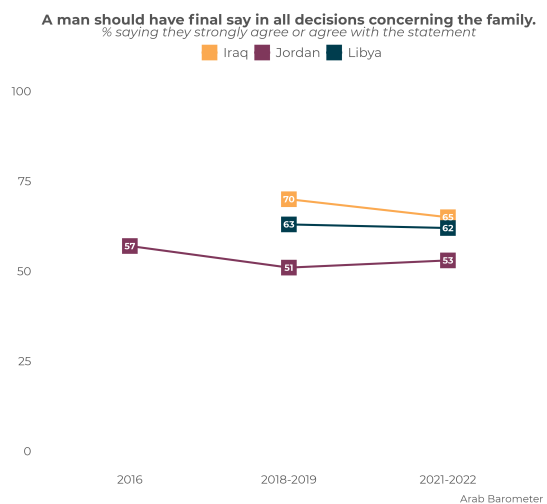
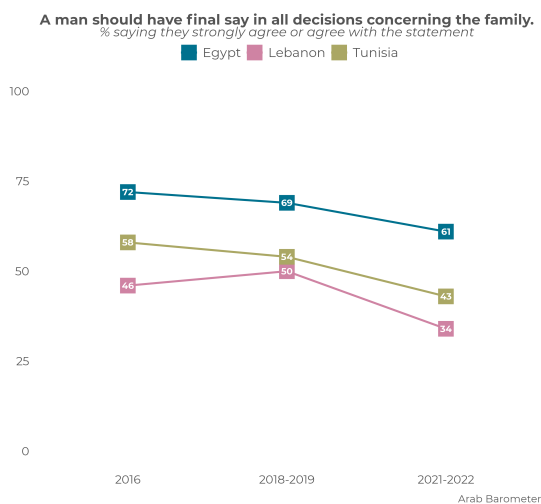
Perhaps unsurprisingly, men are more likely to hold this view than are women. In every country surveyed, fewer than six-in-ten women agree or strongly agree with this statement and in half the countries surveyed less than half of women agree. By comparison, Lebanon is the only country in which less than half of the male citizens agree that a man should have the final say in family decisions (46 percent). In all other countries, at least half of men agree, and at least six-in-ten men agree in nine out of 12 countries.

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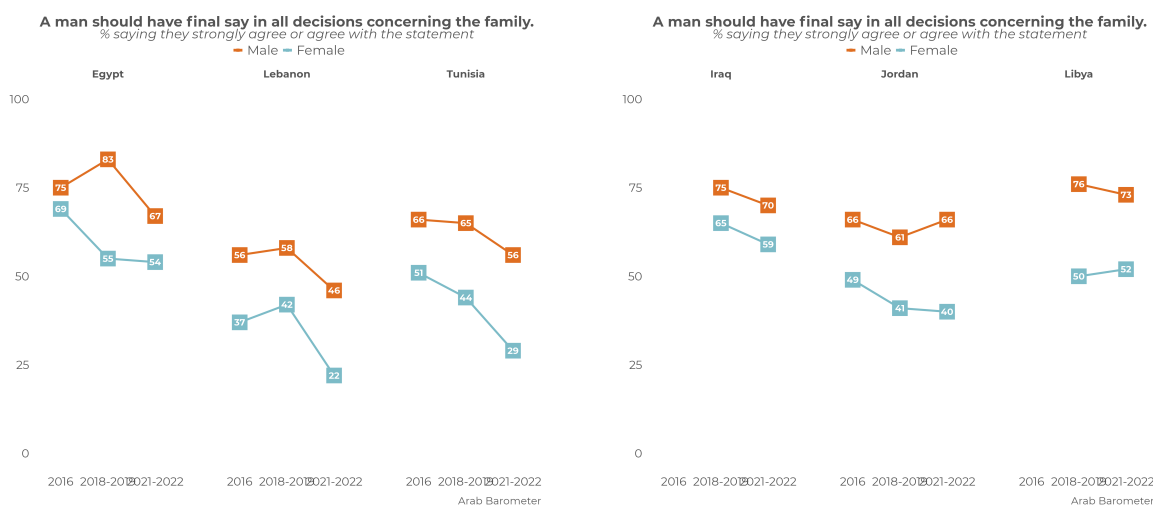
Gender Report



Much like examining the reaction towards women in the political sphere, when looking at the role of women in the family, the attitudinal trends captured since Arab Barometer first asked the question in 2016 reveal that views are changing in favor of women’s equality. Five of the nine countries Arab Barometer surveyed where trend data are available have seen at least a 10-point decrease in the level of agreement since the earliest instance the question was included in the survey. In particular, Tunisia has exhibited a 15-point drop in agreement; from 58 percent of citizens agreeing or strongly agreeing in 2016 to 43 percent in 2021. However, there has been relatively little change in Morocco (-6 points), Iraq (-5 points), and Jordan (-4 points) during the same period and no significant change in Libya (-1 point) since 2019.



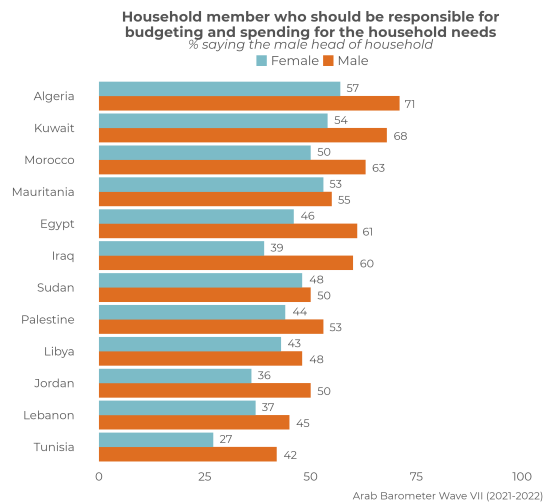
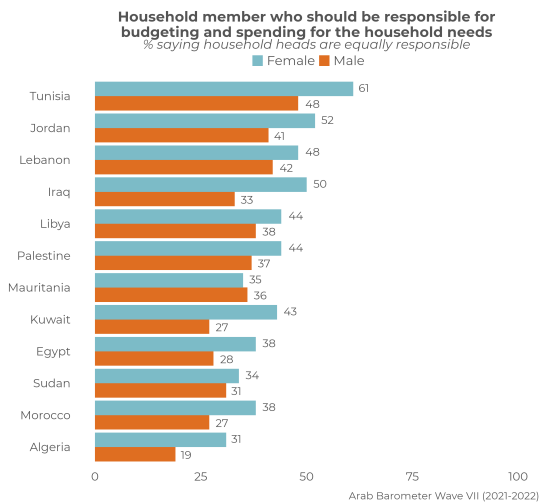
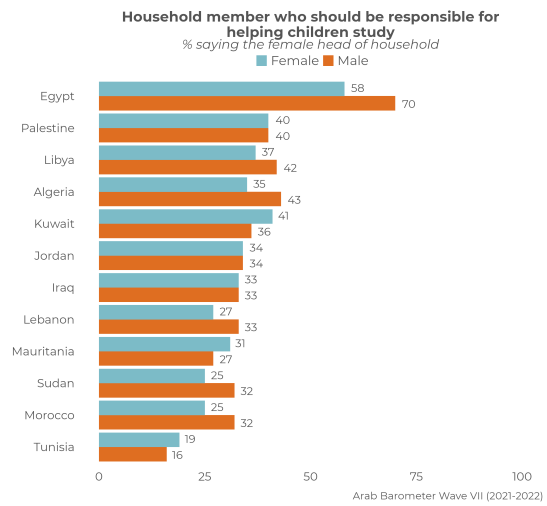
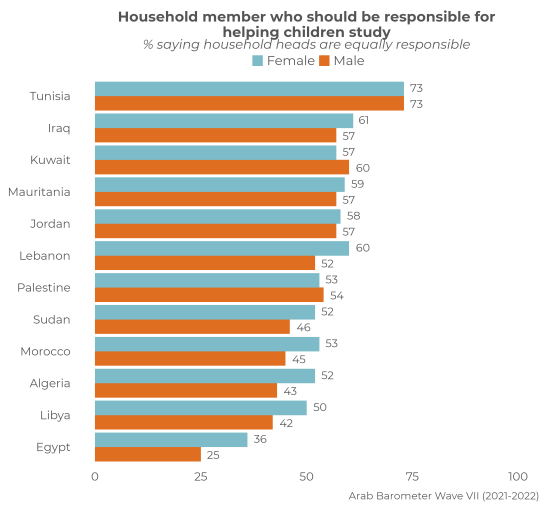
When breaking out trends by gender, we see not only are women always less likely to agree that men should have the final say, but women also drive the downward trend. That is, women have changed their minds more drastically than men. In six out of nine countries with trend data, the change in levels of agreement among women is greater than the change in men. Women’s levels of agreement have dropped by double digits in six out of nine countries. Tunisian women have exhibited the most drastic change with a 22-point drop. Meanwhile, men’s level of agreement only saw double digit drops in three countries, the highest being in Sudan with a 14-point change. Women in Jordan and Morocco drove the country’s change entirely. Jordanian women’s level of agreement dropped 9 points while Jordanian men did not change their opinion at all. Similarly, Moroccan women’s level of agreement dropped 13 points, while Moroccan men saw an increase of 2 points.



Specific roles within the household still have a gendered element to them as well. When asked who should be responsible for helping children study, the two most common answers in every country are that the household heads are equally responsible and the female household head. When asked who should be responsible for household budgeting, the two most common answers are that the household heads are equally responsible and the male household head. In both cases, men tend to take more gendered views of responsibilities, meaning they are more likely to say women should help children study and that men should be in charge of budgeting, while women tend to be more likely to say the responsibilities should be shared equally.

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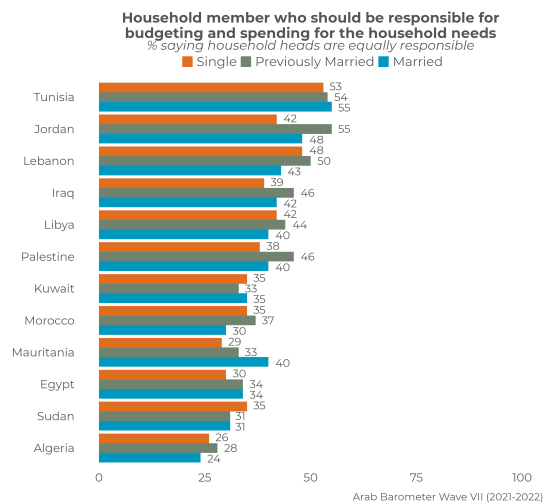
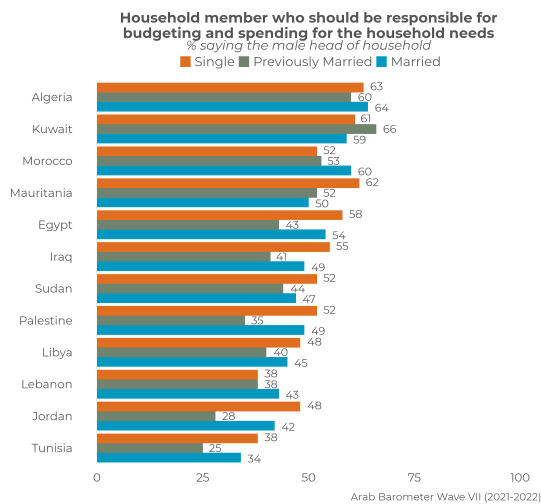
Gender Report



The fact that women believe more responsibilities should be shared equally likely follows from their greater share of domestic responsibilities. In eight out of 12 countries, over half of housewives said the amount of housework they do has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is especially true for women who say they cannot cover monthly expenses in Algeria, Palestine, and Egypt, where women who cannot cover their monthly expenses are at least 10 points more likely to say the amount of housework increased.

Marital status also seems to play a role in views on household responsibilities. Single and married people are more likely to say the male head of household should be in charge of budgeting while people who were previously married (e.g., divorced or widowed) are more likely than their counterparts to say bud-

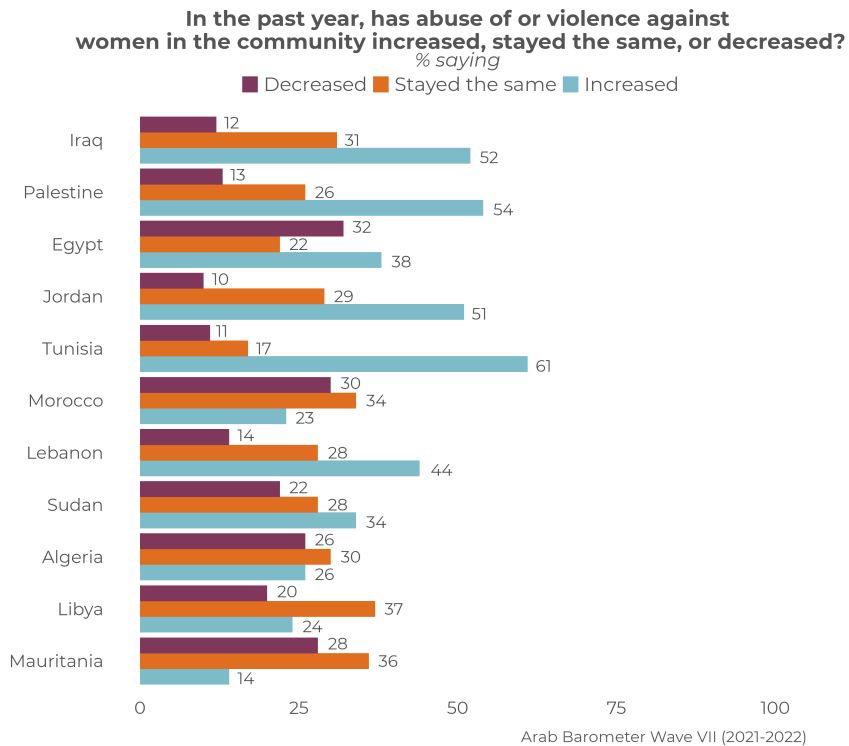
getting should be shared equally in most cases.



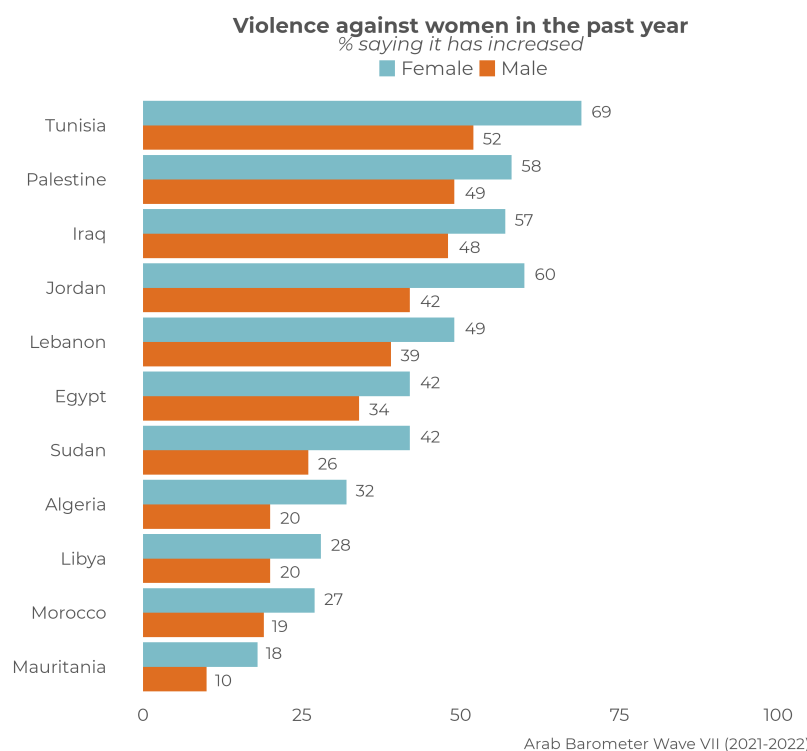
Gender Based Violence

Finally, Arab Barometer asked about violence against women in the community. When asked if violence increased, stayed the same, or decreased, increased was the most common answer in seven out of 11 countries. In four countries, over half of citizens said violence increased. In the three countries where increased was not the most common answer, most citizens said they thought violence against women in the community stayed the same. At most, only a third of citizens in any country say that violence has decreased. These results are consistent with findings by the World Bank in their latest report on gender-based violence in MENA.⁷

⁷See report here.

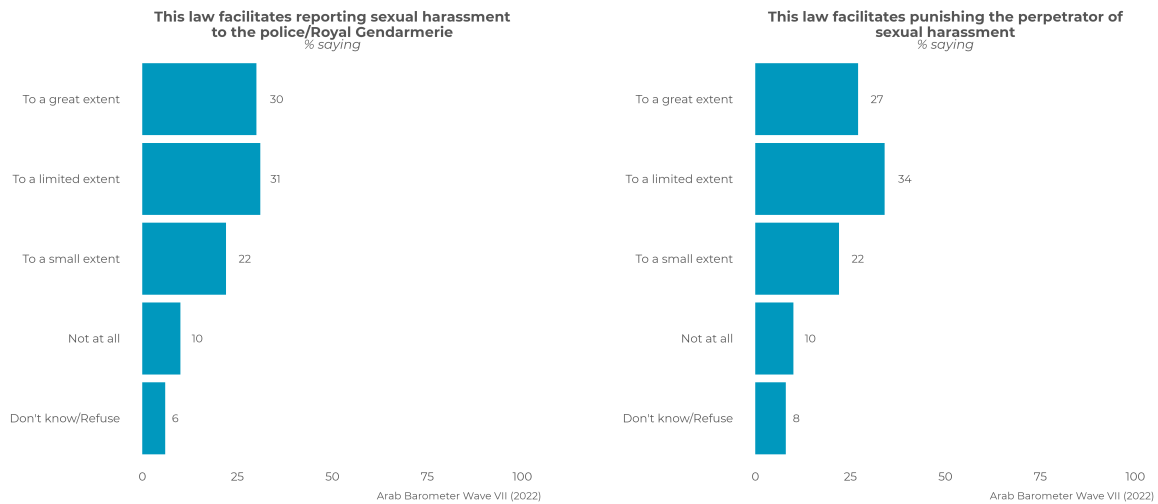


In every country surveyed, women are significantly more likely than men to report that violence has increased. Jordan, Tunisia, and Sudan have especially large gaps, at 18 points, 17 points, and 16 points, respectively. We also see that in most cases, men are more likely than women to say violence has decreased over the past year. The gap in perceptions of violence against women is concerning, if unsurprising. As stated in the section on women in the workplace, men control most government decisions. If men underestimate the importance or prevalence of violence against women in the community, it is unlikely to be appropriately addressed.



Additionally, Arab Barometer delved deeper into the issue of gender-based violence in Morocco, asking about Law 103-13. The law, which defines and criminalizes sexual harassment, was passed in 2018. In December 2021, Oxfam in Morocco carried out 16 days of activism to raise awareness of the law.⁸ Arab Barometer read the definition of sexual harassment according to the law and then asked citizens both how well the law facilitates reporting sexual harassment to the police and the punishment of the perpetrator. In both cases women were slightly more optimistic than men, although opinions did not drastically vary by gender. Overall, 32 percent of women and 28 percent of men say the law facilitates reporting sexual harassment to the police to a great extent. With respect to punishing the perpetrator, 28 percent of women and 26 percent of men say the law facilitates punishment to a great extent. Notably, the most common response among Moroccan women about the trend in violence against women is that it stayed the same over the past year, while men were split between saying violence stayed the same or decreased. As awareness about Law 103-13 grows, Morocco will be an interesting case study on the effectiveness of legislation against sexual harassment and gender-based violence.

⁸Link to Oxfam awareness schedule.



Conclusion

Overall, the opinions of citizens in most countries in the region appear to be trending towards gender equality, despite many ongoing disparities. Views on traditional gender roles within the household persist, even when traditional cultural belief are less relevant to women entering the workforce. Governments have many tools in their arsenal to continue to shrink these inequalities. Increasing access to childcare and public transportation can increase the number of women in the labor force. Additionally, continuing to promote women in public office will likely continue to increase citizen’s confidence in women as political leaders.



ABOUT ARAB BAROMETER

Arab Barometer is a nonpartisan research network that provides insight 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 across 15 countries.

We are the longest-standing and 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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