



الباروميتر العربي  
ARAB BAROMETER

# Arab Barometer VII

## Lebanon Report



September 2022

## Executive summary

Lebanon's deep political and economic crisis continues unabated. There has been no resolution to the financial crisis that has plagued the country since 2019 while the port area of Beirut remains a dangerous area two years after the explosion. The COVID-19 pandemic has further compounded the situation. In the onslaught of public health and financial disasters, Lebanon has become a country of extremes. Arab Barometer captured many record highs and lows in views of citizens compared with any previous survey in any foreign country. Among others, all-time lows are seen in satisfaction with the government, interpersonal trust, and economic outlook, while perceptions of government corruption is at an all-time high.

Lebanese ratings of the economy are abysmal. Fewer than one percent say the economy is good or very good. The timing of the pandemic is seen as a major contributing factor to this problem as citizens perceive economic challenges as the biggest issue caused by COVID-19. Meanwhile, only 15 percent reported receiving aid from any source. Of those who did, mostly it came from charities or international organizations, with only two percent saying they received aid from the national government.

The overwhelming nature of the challenges facing the country are made clear from the fact that despite the financial woes, close to half of citizens (48 percent) say the economic situation is the most important challenge facing Lebanon, followed distantly by corruption (23 percent). On a scale ranging from "very good" to "very bad", 85 percent say the current economic situation is "very bad."

Not only is the current situation very bad, but Lebanese are giving up hope in the future of their country. Citizen views of the future are not promising. When asked what the economic situation in the country will look like in two to three years, 61 percent say somewhat or much worse, and about half say the quality of their children's lives will be worse than theirs. On both accounts Lebanese citizens are the most pessimistic in the region.

The economic situation is certainly a factor in the low level of trust in political institutions. Along with the high levels of dissatisfaction and low levels of trust in political institutions comes a high level of despondence. Interest in politics is at an all-time low, and a plurality of citizens do not believe there is any action they can take to influence government.

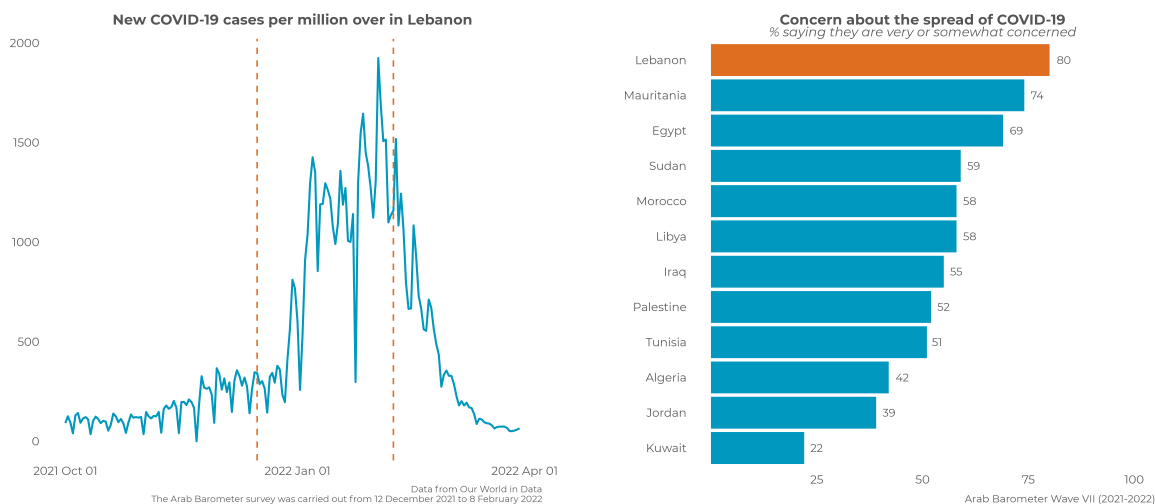
Lebanese are also inclined to voice their frustrations with the current state of affairs, albeit not through established political channels. Lebanese are among the most active protesters in the region. Moreover, despite the problems in the country that have ensued from their elected governments, Lebanese have not

given up on democracy. A vast majority of citizens agree that while democracy may have its problems, it remains the best system of government.

These are among the main findings of a nationally representative face-to-face survey conducted in Lebanon. The survey included 2,399 randomly selected citizens from across all governorates and was fielded from 16 December 2021 to 8 February 2022 using multistage clustered sample. The margin of error for the reported results is  $\pm 2$  percentage points. The surveys are part of Arab Barometer's seventh wave which is the largest publicly available survey that captures the sentiments of citizens across MENA following the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional information about the surveys can be found at [www.arabbarometer.org](http://www.arabbarometer.org).

## COVID-19

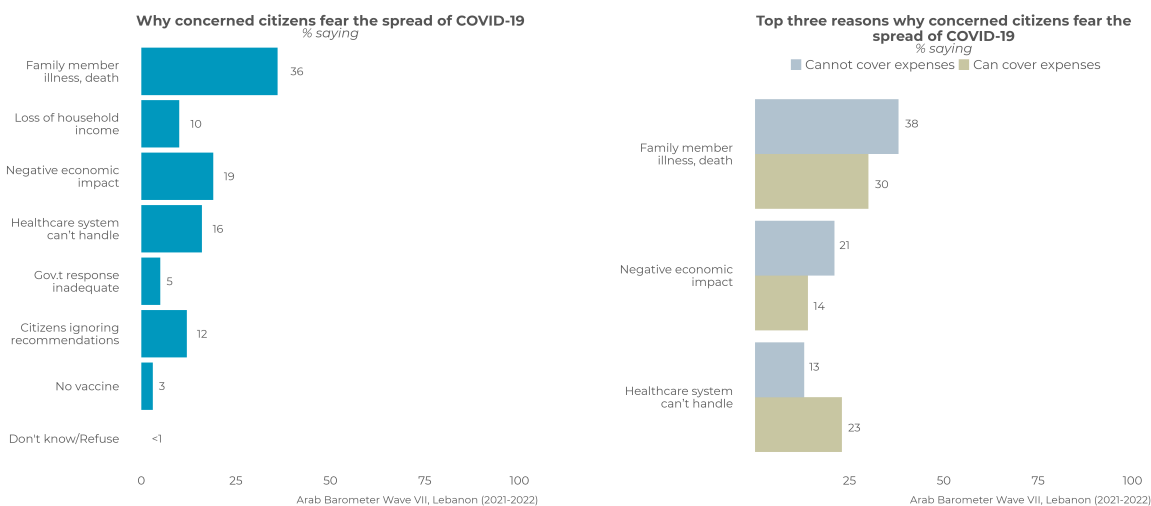
During the second half of the fielding period, Lebanon experienced a surge in COVID-19 cases due to the Omicron variant<sup>1</sup>. Attitudes towards COVID-19 at the time clearly reflect a fear of the virus; Lebanese citizens reported the highest levels of concern in the region. Overall, 80 percent of citizens say they are somewhat or very concerned about the spread of COVID-19 in the next six months.



The primary reason for concern is the illness or death of a family member (36 percent), distantly followed by the negative economic impacts (19 percent) and

<sup>1</sup>Link to WHO report on COVID-19 in Lebanon.

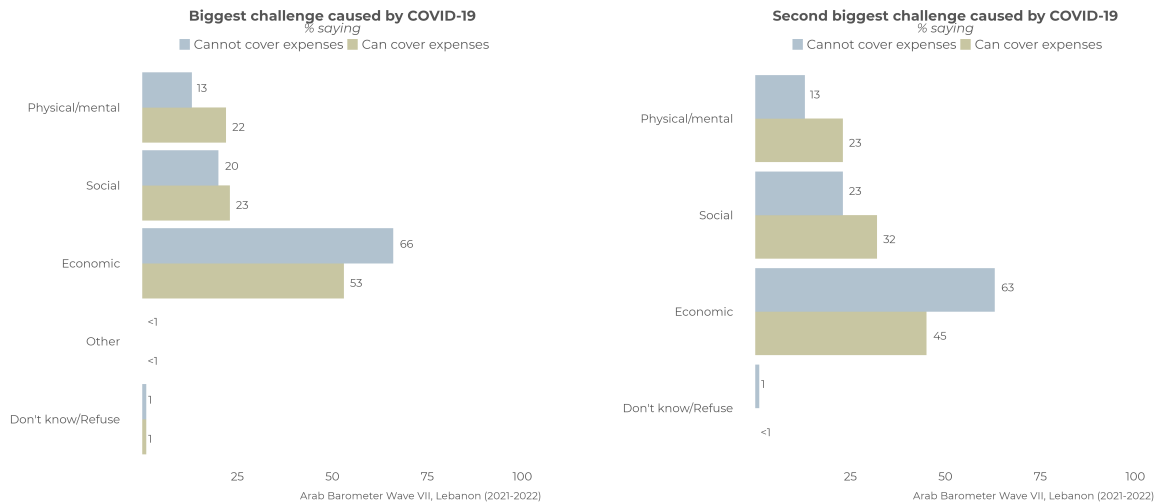
fears of the healthcare system failing (16 percent). There is a severe divide between the Lebanese who can cover their monthly expenses and those who cannot. While both groups have fear of family members falling ill as their top reason for concern, those who cannot cover expenses are more likely to worry (38 percent versus 30 percent). Further, the order of concern regarding the negative economic impacts and failing healthcare system are swapped for the two groups. Citizens who cannot cover their monthly expenses are more concerned about the negative impact on the economy than the healthcare system failing, while the reverse is true for those who can cover expenses.



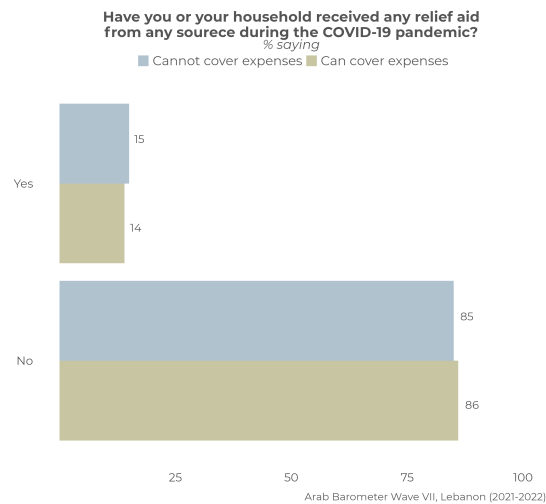
The different causes of concern by income group is consistent with the different challenges COVID-19 caused each group. Arab Barometer asked citizens what the two biggest challenges COVID-19 caused for them, by order of importance. The potential challenges citizen choose from can be classified as physical/mental (having contracted or coping with long-term side effects of COVID-19, adverse effects on psycho-emotional state), social (disruption of children’s education, constraints on political activity, disruption of social life), or economic (increased cost of living, decreased availability of basic goods, loss of income).

Citizens who cannot cover their monthly expenses are more likely to cite an economic challenge, both for the first and second biggest challenge. Economic challenges are the most common answer for both groups, but those who can cover their expenses are 13 points less likely to say an economic challenge is the biggest challenge they have faced during COVID-19 and 18 points less likely to name an economic challenge as their second reason. Naturally, citizens who can cover their monthly expenses are in a less financially precarious position

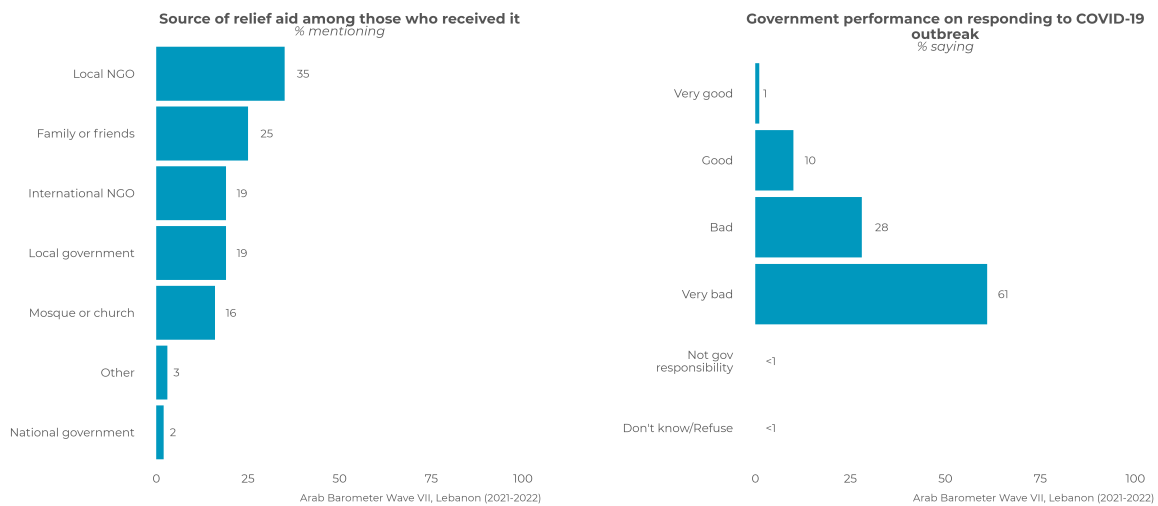
than citizens who cannot, but these results emphasize the disproportionate economic effect on lower income citizens.



The concerns of the economically disadvantaged are further justified by the lack of support they have received during the pandemic. Both those who can and cannot cover their monthly expenses report receiving aid at essentially the same rate. The degree of economic hardship faced by the average Lebanese citizens does not appear to affect the likelihood of receiving aid.

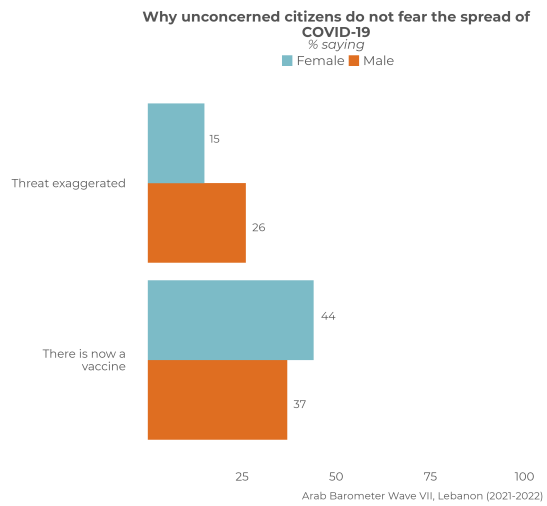
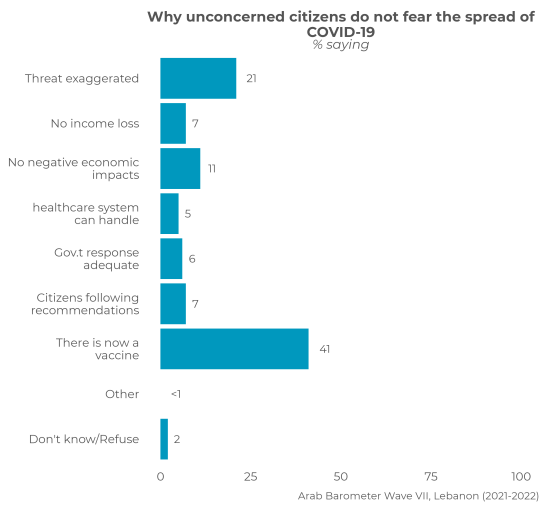


In this light, frustration with the government’s response to COVID-19 is understandable. Only 11 percent of citizens say the government is doing a good or very good job at responding to the COVID-19 outbreak. When the few recipients of pandemic relief were asked to list who they received aid from, only two percent mentioned the national government. Non-governmental organizations and family or friends were mentioned far more often. Lebanese citizens are clearly keenly aware of the government’s inability or failure to provide pandemic relief.

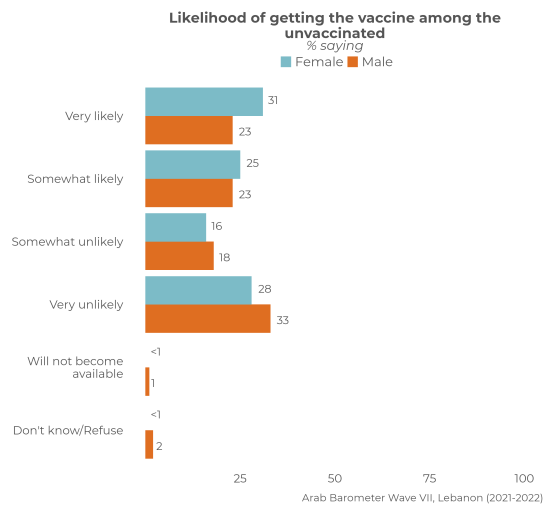
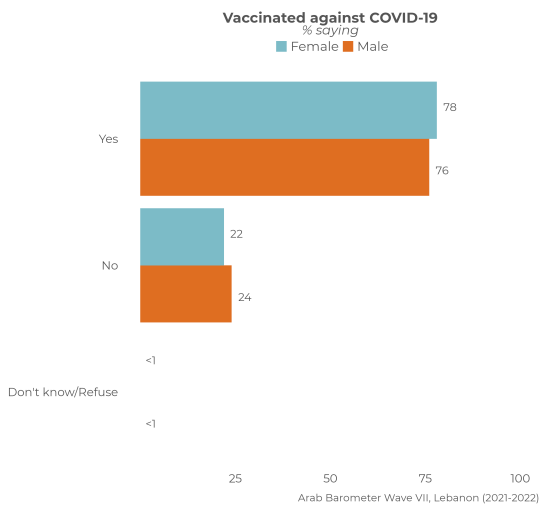


Among the 20 percent of citizens who are not worried about the spread of COVID-19, the availability of a vaccine is the primary reason (41 percent), followed by a belief that the threat is exaggerated (21 percent). Unlike among concerned citizens, top reasons for a lack of concern do not appear to vary much according to income level; however, there is a stark gender divide. Women are more likely to not worry because of the vaccine (44 percent versus 37 percent) while men are more likely to believe the threat is overblown (26 percent versus 15 percent).

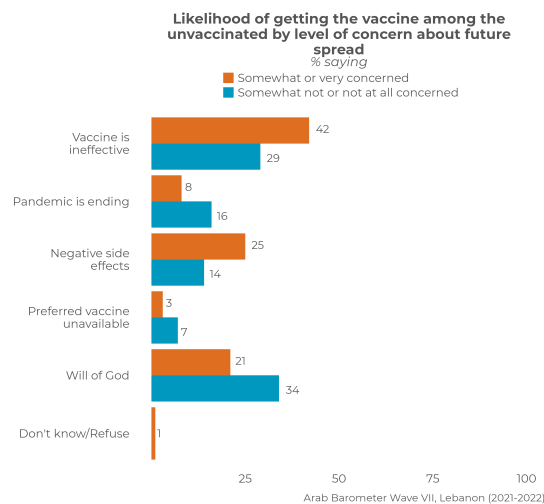
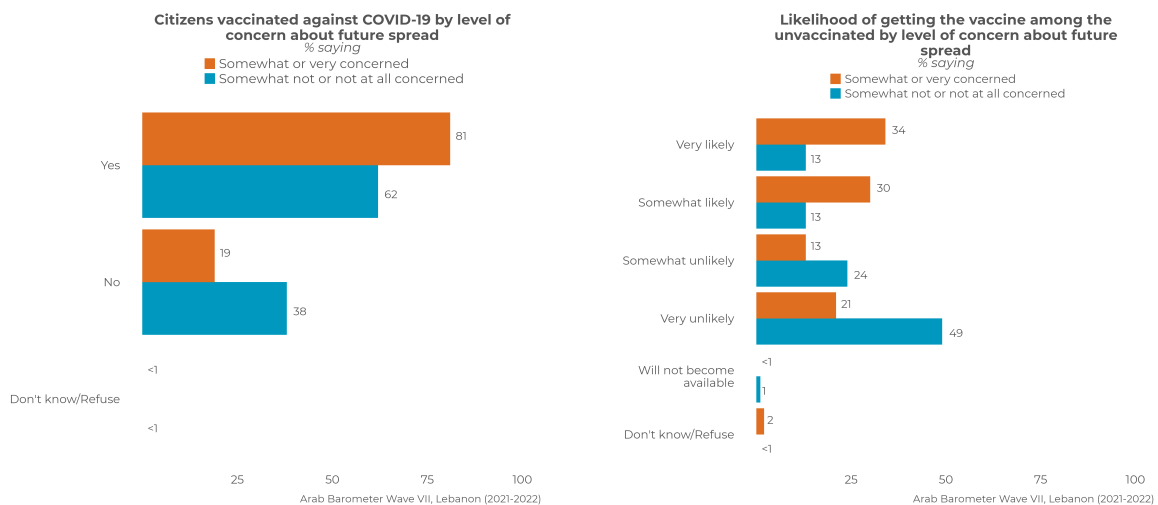
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The gendered difference in motivations behind a lack of COVID-19 concern are born out not only in vaccination status, but also in vaccination intention. While men and women report being vaccinated at the same rate, unvaccinated women are more likely than unvaccinated men to say they are somewhat or very likely to get vaccinated. Given the high self-reported rate among women of vaccinations and intention to become vaccinated, it is understandable that the existence of vaccines relieves women of COVID-19 concerns.



Despite the existence of a vaccine being the top reason overall that citizens unconcerned about the spread of COVID-19 remain unconcerned, there is a significant difference in the portion of concerned and unconcerned citizens who report being vaccinated. Although majorities of both groups say they are vaccinated, those who are less concerned about the spread of COVID-19 are 19 points less likely to be vaccinated. Furthermore, among the unvaccinated, those who are unconcerned about future spread are less likely to say they intend to become vaccinated. This suggests that the apprehension among those who are unvaccinated and unconcerned does not necessarily signal distrust the vaccine, but rather people trust the vaccine enough to believe other people receiving the vaccine will protect them.



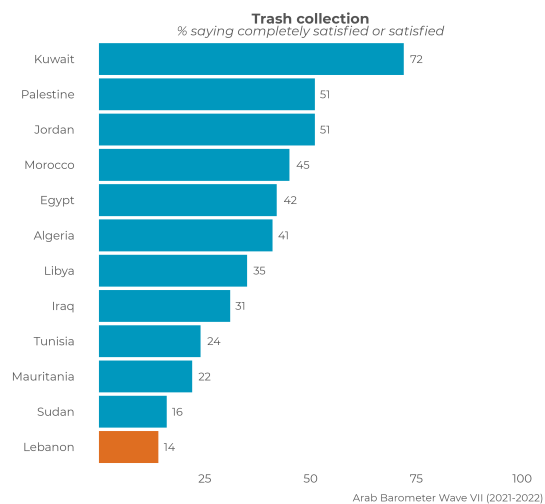
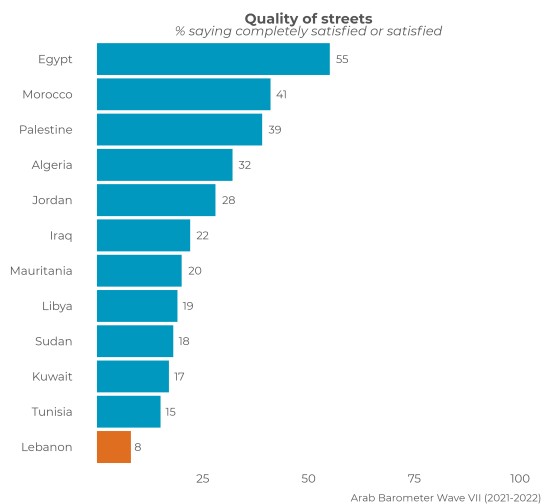
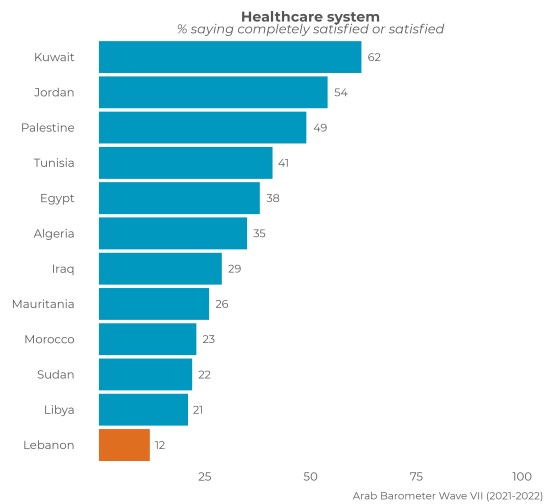
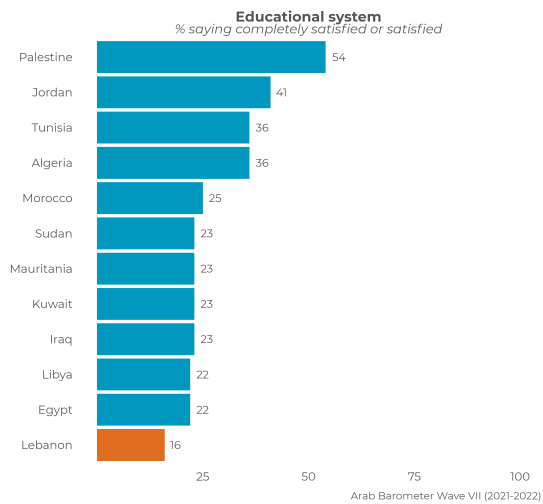


Among people who do not plan on being vaccinated, the biggest reasons are either the belief that the vaccine is ineffective or that getting sick is up to the will of God. Those who are young, have a higher education, and live in an urban area are more likely than their counterparts to say they will not get the vaccine because it is ineffective. Those who are older, have at most a secondary education, and live in a rural area are more likely than their counterparts to say whether or not they get sick comes down to God's will. Notably, among those who are unlikely to get the vaccine, those who say they are unconcerned about the spread of COVID-19 are *less* likely to say they think the vaccine is ineffective compared to people who are concerned about the spread of COVID-19. Those who are unconcerned about the spread of COVID-19 and unlikely to get vaccinated are more likely to say it is the will of God than cite ineffective vaccines.

## **Politics and the Economy**

The dissatisfaction Lebanese citizens report with their government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic is just a small part of their dissatisfaction with their government overall. Given the current state of affairs in Lebanon, this is entirely unsurprising. Since 2019, Lebanon has been experiencing one of the world's worst financial crises in recent history. The Beirut port explosion and coronavirus pandemic have only added to the country's woes. Beyond these measures, Lebanese citizens have the lowest level of satisfaction with their street quality, trash collection, healthcare, and quality of education in the region. Unsurprisingly, most point to government mismanagement as the cause.

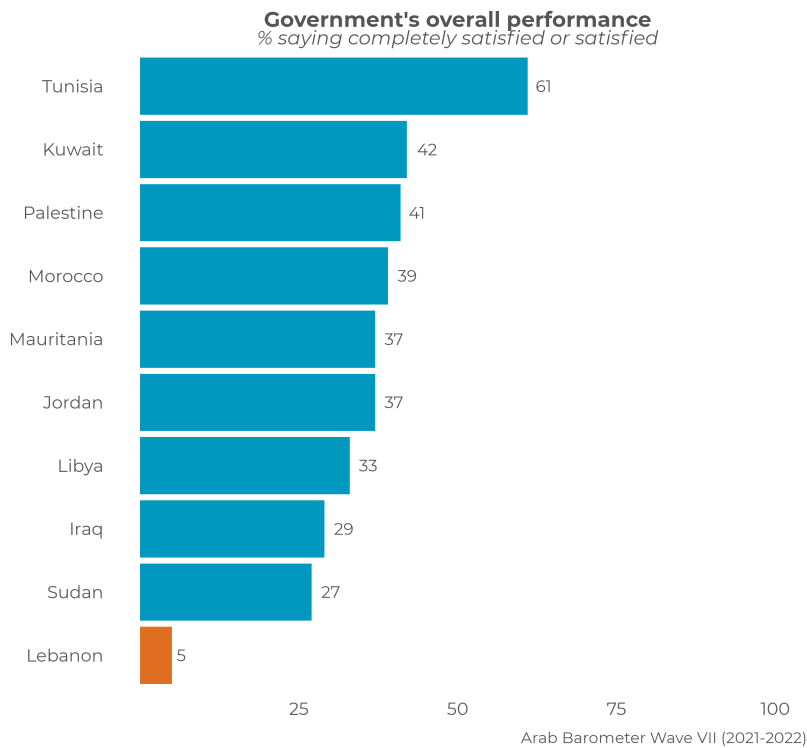
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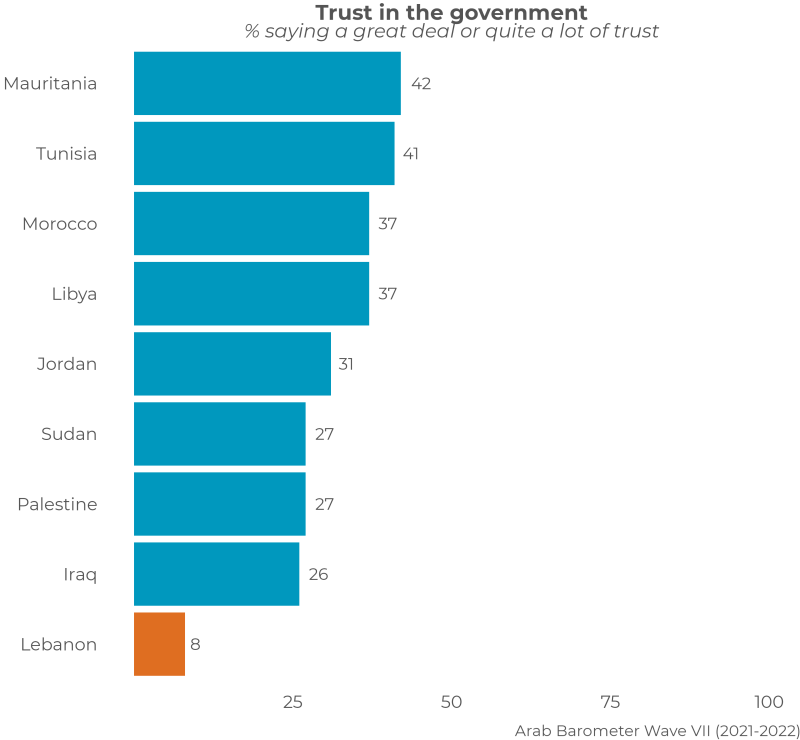
The ongoing garbage crisis is a prime example. Lebanon has struggled with waste management for decades. The government passed its first law relating explicitly to waste management in 2018, but has yet to implement it. With the financial crisis ramping up in 2019, the government elected to pay waste management contractors with the Lebanese pound instead of its dwindling supply of American dollars. In early 2021, two Lebanese businessmen with waste management contracts were sanctioned by the United States for corruption related to those contracts.

Given the extremely low satisfaction with systems and services meant to be supported by the government, it comes as no surprise Lebanese citizens also have the lowest levels of satisfaction with the overall performance of their govern-

ment in the region.

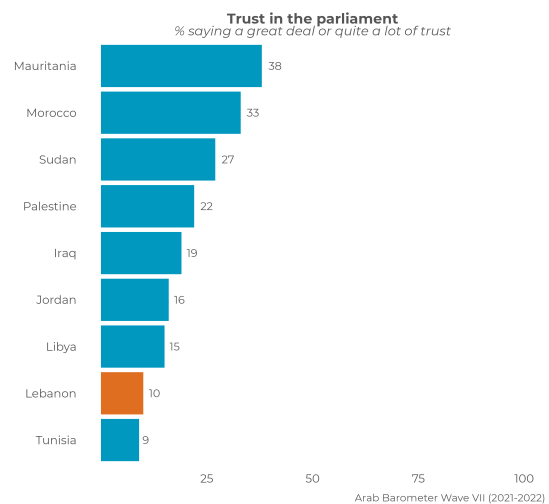
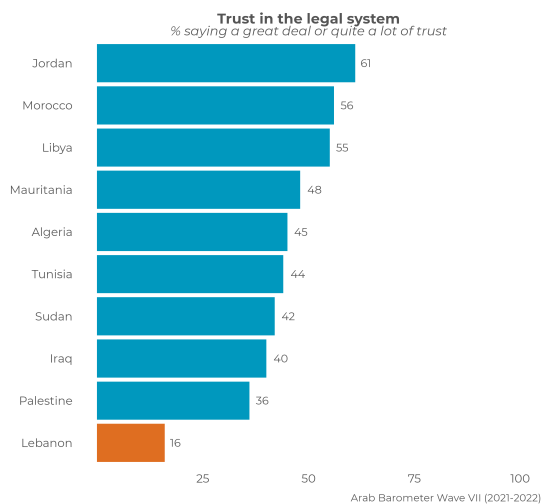
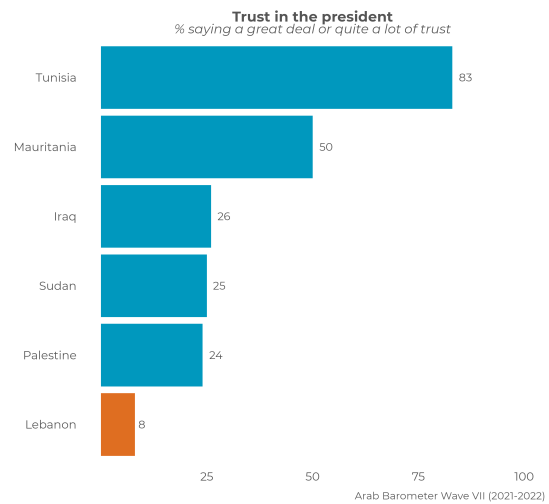
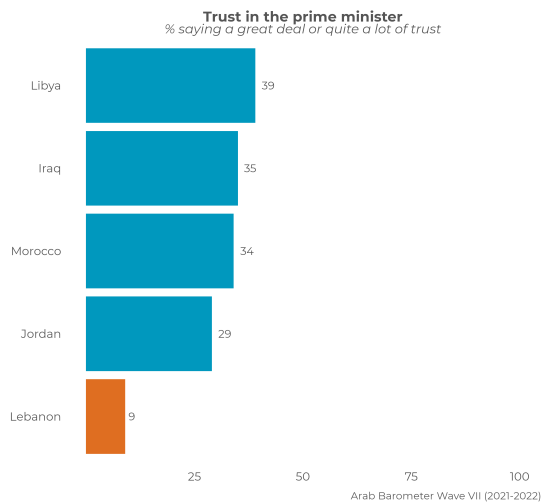


Similarly, Lebanese citizens have the lowest level of confidence in most of their political institutions of any country surveyed by Arab Barometer. Only eight percent of citizens say they have a great deal or quite a lot of trust in the government. By comparison, the country whose citizens had the next lowest level of trust in their government is Iraq, with 26 percent of Iraqis saying they had a great deal or quite a lot of trust in the government. The striking difference between the levels of trust in Lebanon and the second lowest level of trust emphasizes just how frustrated Lebanese citizens are with their government.



The pattern repeats when Arab Barometer asks about trust in the president and prime minister specifically. Fewer than one in ten citizens say they have a great deal or quite a lot of trust in either political leader. Both levels of trust are the lowest in the region by double digits. The legal system and parliament do not fare much better.

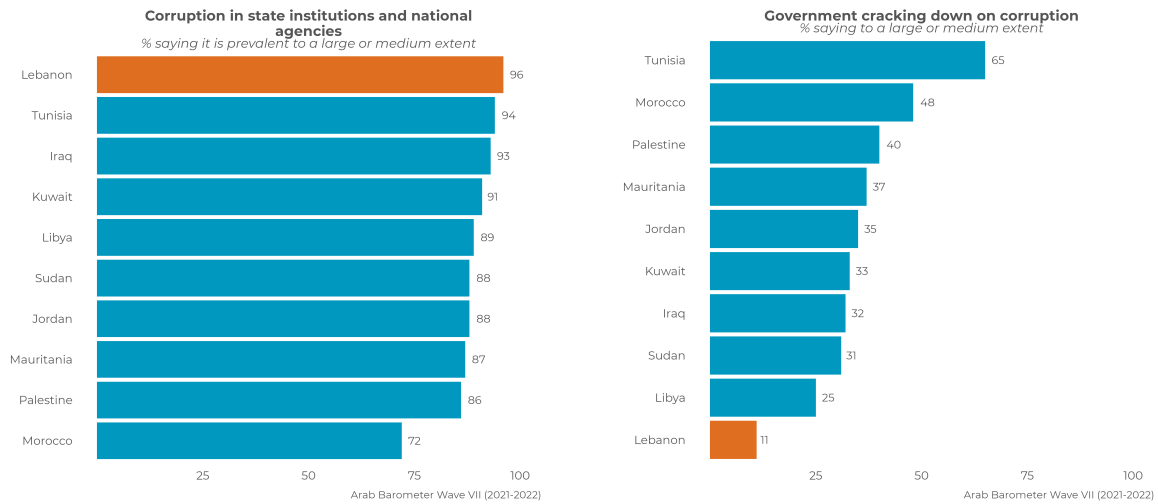
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Citizen’s lack of trust in their government is undoubtedly tied to perceptions of corruption. Nearly all Lebanese citizens (96 percent) believe corruption is prevalent in government to a large or medium extent, and very few (11 percent) believe the government is cracking down on it. Again, these views are the most extreme in the region. Perceptions of corruption have risen in recent years while the perception the government is tackling it have fallen. This is undoubtedly linked with the financial crisis and its effects. The Economist described the Lebanese central bank’s financial system as a ‘Ponzi scheme’ in 2020. The Pandora Papers<sup>2</sup> show several members of the Lebanese govern-

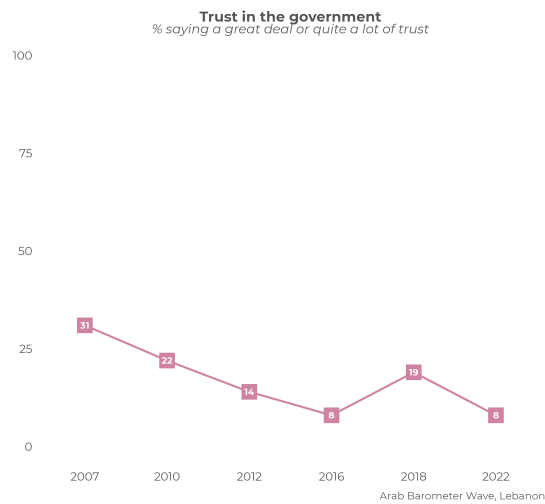
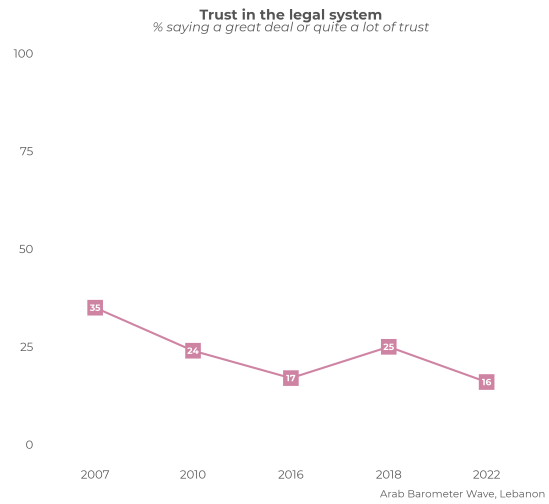
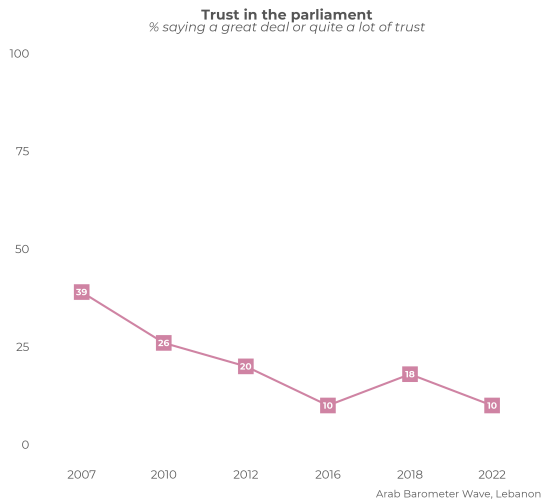
<sup>2</sup>The Pandora Papers refer to the leaked 11.9 million financial records from 14 different offshore services firms.

ment and banking system owning offshore shell companies, including current prime minister Najib Mikati (who has held the position twice before) and long-time central bank governor Riad Salameh.

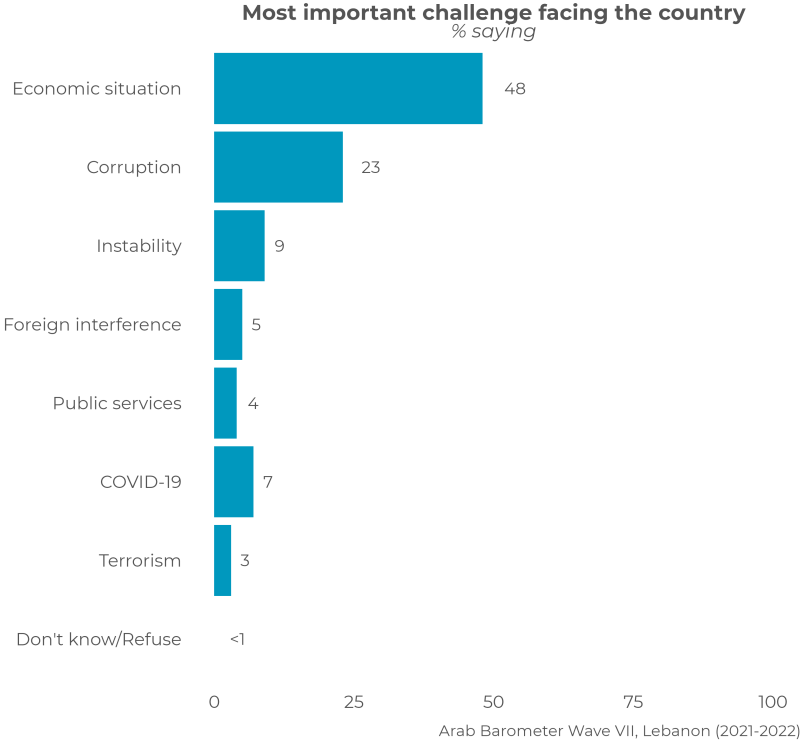


These levels of trust and satisfaction in political institutions are not only the lowest in the region, but also the lowest historically in Lebanon. After levels of trust in the government reached an all-time low in 2016, Lebanon saw an increase of trust in 2018, only for trust to fall to the same all-time low level once again in 2022.

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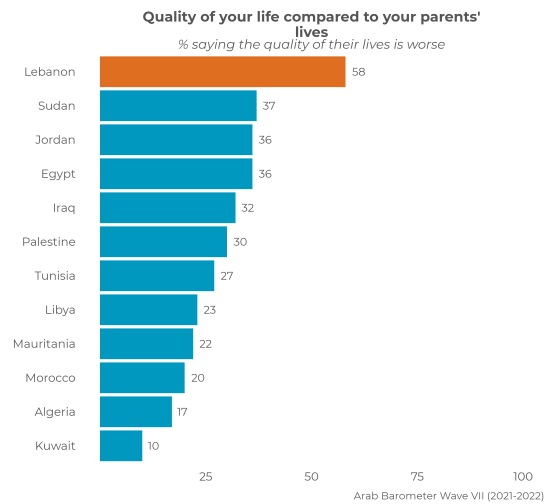
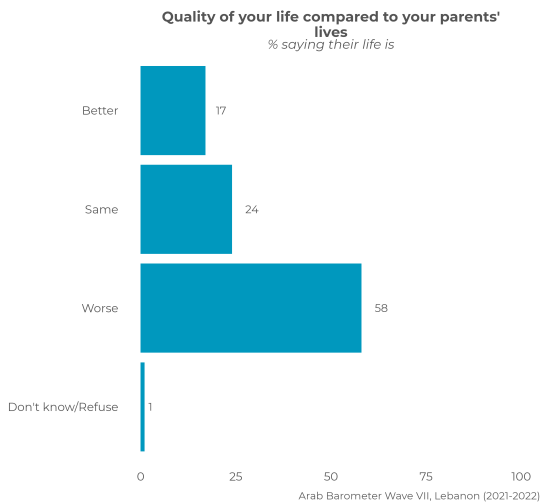


Lebanon’s dire economic situation is doubtless the cause of the citizens’ distrust and dissatisfaction with the government. Overall, 48 percent of the population say the economy is the biggest issue facing the country. Lebanon is in the fourth year of the worst financial crisis it has faced since the early days of its civil war. The World Bank has called it one of the worst financial crises of the past 150 years.

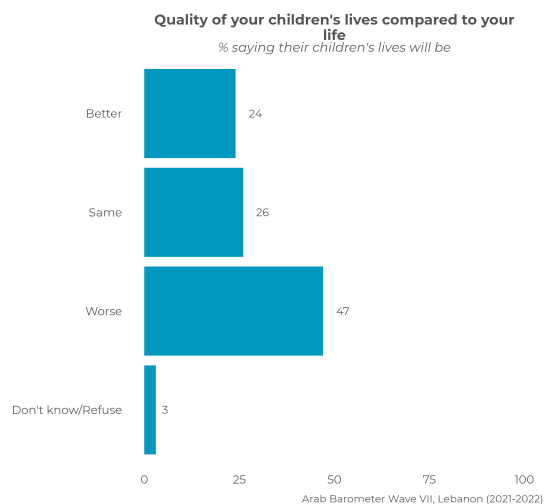
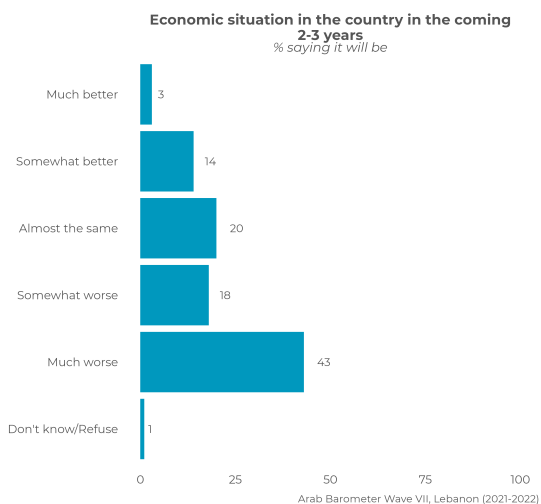


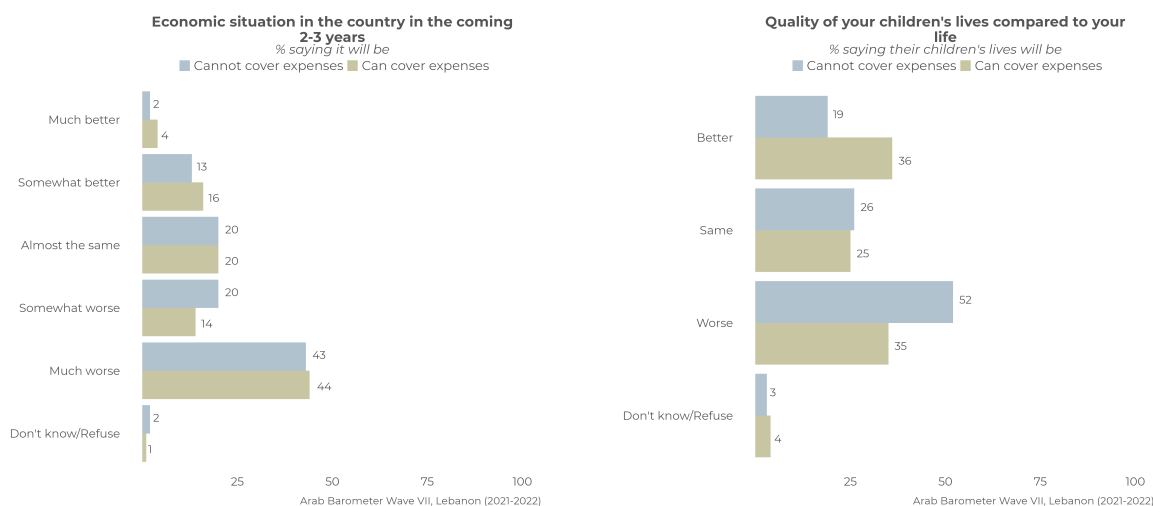
Given the current circumstances, it follows that a majority of Lebanese citizens say their quality of life is worse than that of their parents. Comparatively, Lebanese citizens are more likely than citizens from any other country surveyed to say their quality of life is worse than their parents, by 21 points.





The duration of the financial crisis has increased pessimism about Lebanon's future. Only 17 percent of citizens think the economic situation will become somewhat or much better in the next two to three years. Conversely, 61 percent think it will become somewhat or much worse. In a longer term view, 47 percent of citizens think their children's quality of life will be worse than theirs. Notably, while income level does not affect a citizen's economic prediction for the next two to three years, it does affect a citizen's beliefs about their children's quality of life. Those who cannot cover their monthly expenses are much more likely to say their children's quality of life will be worse than theirs, while those who can cover their monthly expenses are split on whether their children will be better or worse off.





Concerns about the economic situation can be seen in responses to questions that are not explicitly about the economy, highlighting the pervasiveness of economic stress. Inflation is named the biggest issue caused by COVID. Lebanon is the only country in which most citizens list the high costs of care as the biggest healthcare system weakness. Meanwhile, Lebanon is one of only two countries where citizens say low wages are the biggest barrier to workforce entry for both men and women. Furthermore, only Lebanese and Palestinian women say low wages are the biggest barrier women face entering the workforce; women in every other country cite the lack of childcare. Among those who considered emigrating, economic reasons were the most commonly cited motivator for leaving Lebanon.

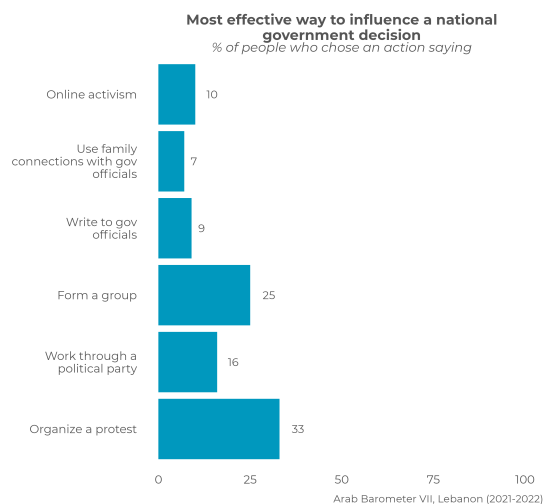
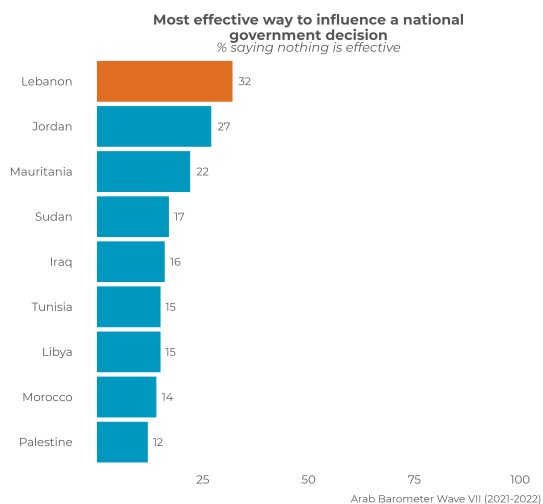
Lebanon also has the highest level of agreement among citizens on where foreign aid should go: economic development. While it is exceedingly common for citizens in the region at large to say foreign aid should be invested in economic development, pluralities are not as strong as in Lebanon. This indicates that citizens in other countries have a wider variety of opinions on where foreign aid should be directed. In Lebanon, citizens are more likely than citizens of other countries to agree that foreign aid should prioritize economic development.

<sup>2</sup>The other country is Sudan.

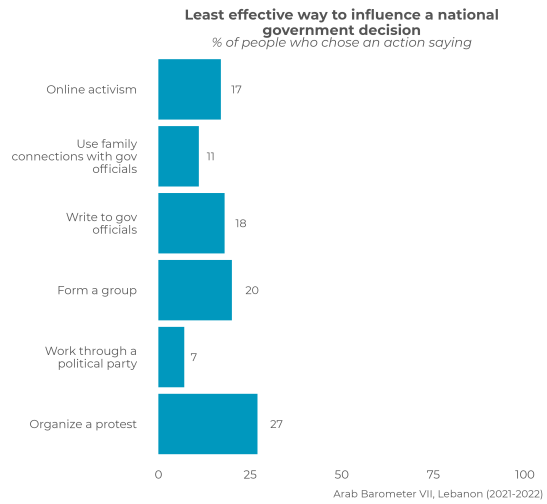
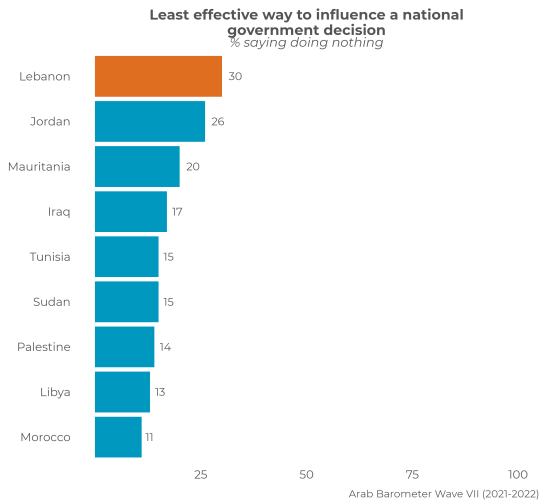
## Activism and Democracy

The conspicuous lack of trust in institutions and dire economic environment naturally lead to questions on how Lebanese citizens will deal with their situation. Vast majorities agree the status quo is untenable, so what does reform look like? How can citizens make their voices heard?

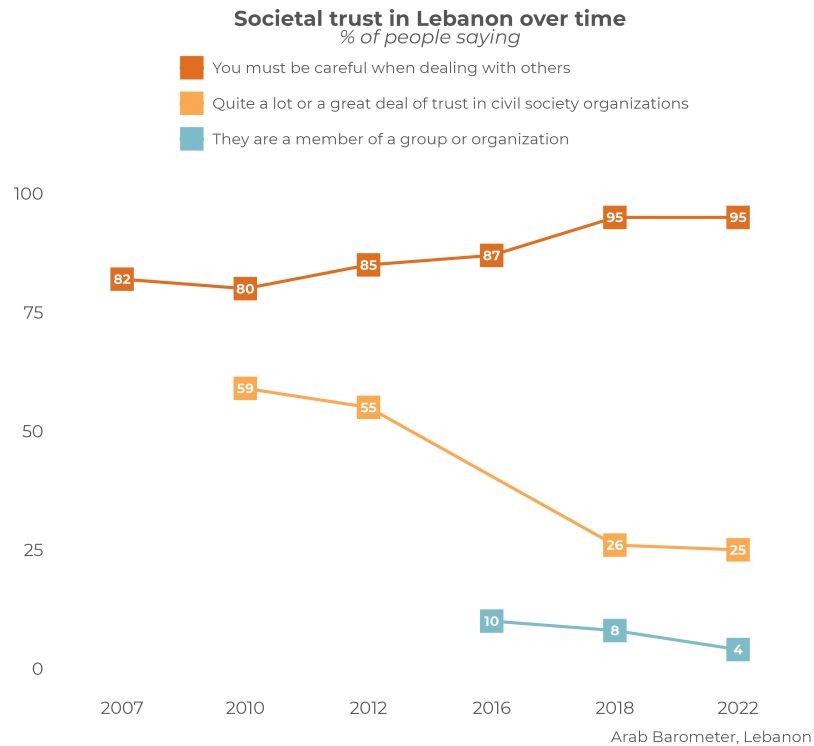
Despondence is evident. Nearly a third of citizens say there is no effective way to influence government decisions, which is the highest share of citizens in the region. Of the people who do believe citizen actions can affect the government, 33 percent say protesting and 25 percent say organizing a group is the most effective way to do so. However, among people who choose an action as the least effective way to influence government, the top two responses were the same: 27 percent said protesting and 20 percent said forming a group, implying that many who have tried these methods have not felt their voices to be heard.



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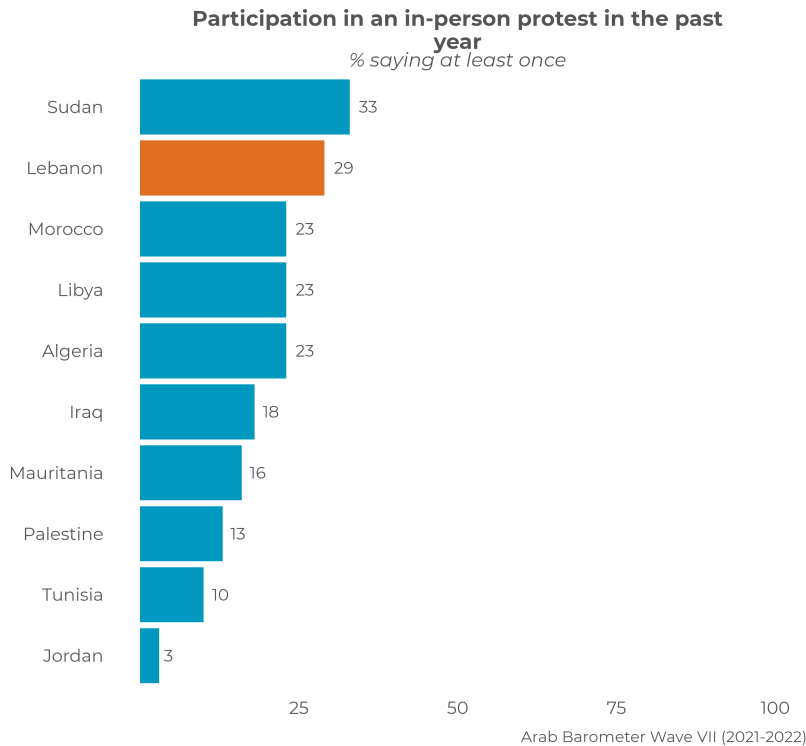


The disagreement on whether protesting or forming a group can influence the government may stem from a lack of societal trust. The percent of citizens saying you must be careful when dealing with others has stayed at an all-time high, while trust in civil society organizations has dropped to an all-time low. Membership in groups or organizations has never been particularly high in Lebanon, but has steadily decreased in every wave Arab Barometer has asked about it.



Protesting and forming a group are inherently social activities. The more people who participate, the stronger signal it sends to politicians that citizens are passionate about the issue at hand. Organizing may feel like a risky option with levels of trust in others and groups at an all-time low. Only half of Lebanese citizens feel their right to participate in peaceful protest is guaranteed to a medium or great extent. With low levels of trust in others, low levels of trust in civic organizations, and split options on whether the right to protest is protected, it is no wonder citizens are split on whether protesting is effective.

Despite their skepticism, nearly three in 10 (29 percent) Lebanese citizens report having attending an in-person protest at least once in the past year. This participation is among the highest in the region. Even 34 percent of citizens who say protesting is the least effective method to influence the government have participated in a protest at least once.



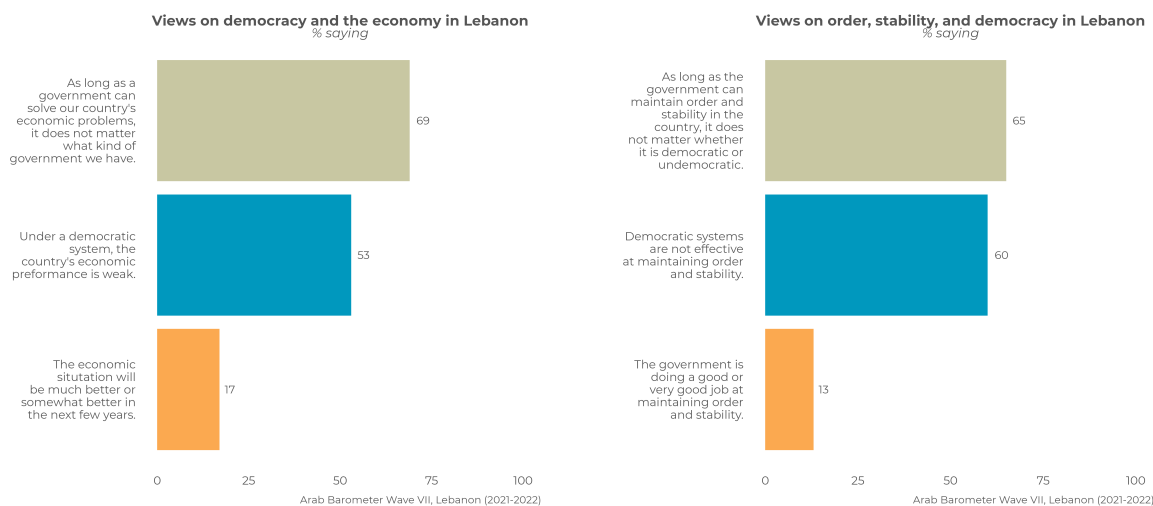
Contrary to the disagreement on in-person organizing, attitudes and beliefs about online activism are more clear. Of people who chose an action that is ineffective at affecting government, online activism was among the top choices. It was also among the least popular choices for the most effective action. In sum, few people think online activism can be particularly effective at influencing government, *and* many people think online activism is the least effective way to influence the government. Unlike protesting or forming a group, Lebanese citizens agree that online activism is not an especially effective method of lobbying the government. Nearly everyone (96 percent) says they do not participate in online activism, which may reflect views on its effectiveness.

Despondency is seen again when asked about types of government and views of democracy. Acknowledging that the economic situation is foremost in the minds of Lebanese citizens, we can look at how people view the interaction of democracy and the economy.

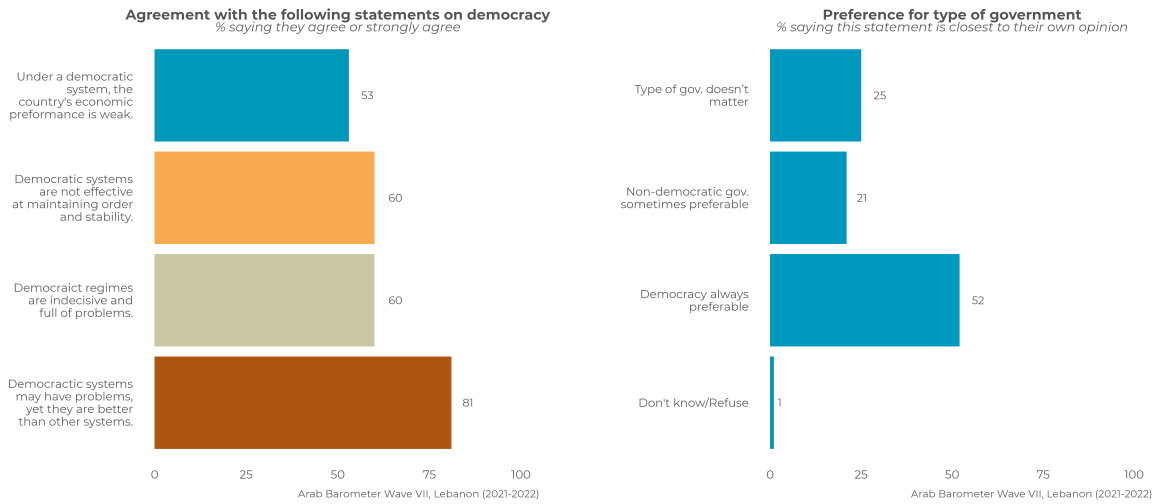
While 52 percent say democracy is always preferable, the portion of people who say the type of government does not matter for people like them is at an all-time high. This is reinforced by the 69 percent of citizens who agree or strongly agree

that it does not matter what kind of government there is, as long as it can solve the economic problems facing the country.

Furthermore, 65 percent of citizens agree or strongly agree that having a democratic or non-democratic government does not matter as long as the government can maintain order and stability. A majority of people agree or strongly agree with the statements: “Under democracy, economic performance is weak,” “Democracies are indecisive and full of problems,” and “Democracies are not effective at maintaining order and stability.” Despite their apparently negative overall outlook on democracy, 81 percent of Lebanese still agree or strongly agree that despite its potential problems, democracy is still the best system of governance. This high level of commitment to democracy has been consistent throughout Arab Barometer’s surveys of Lebanon over the past 15 years, and remains among the highest of the countries surveyed in the region.



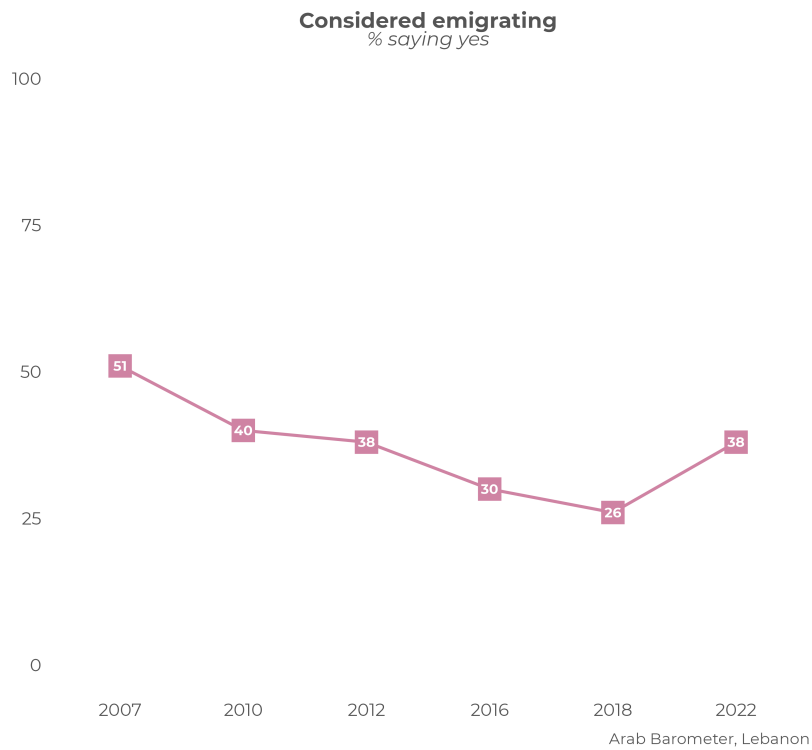
Lebanon also has the highest percentage of citizens saying political reform needs to happen all at once at 60 percent. Given that citizens perceive a high level of corruption and very little being done about it, the perceived need for reform now comes as little surprise. What may be more surprising is that those who want political reform all at once are also more likely to say democracy is always preferable and less likely to say the type of government does not matter. Pro-reformers are also less likely to agree with the negative statements about democracy. Citizens not only want reform, but they want *democratic* reform.



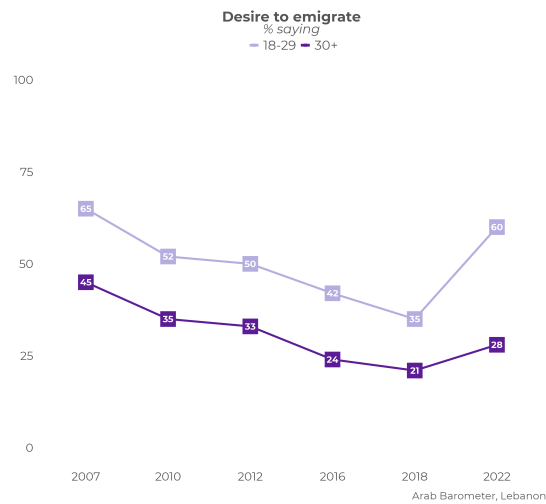
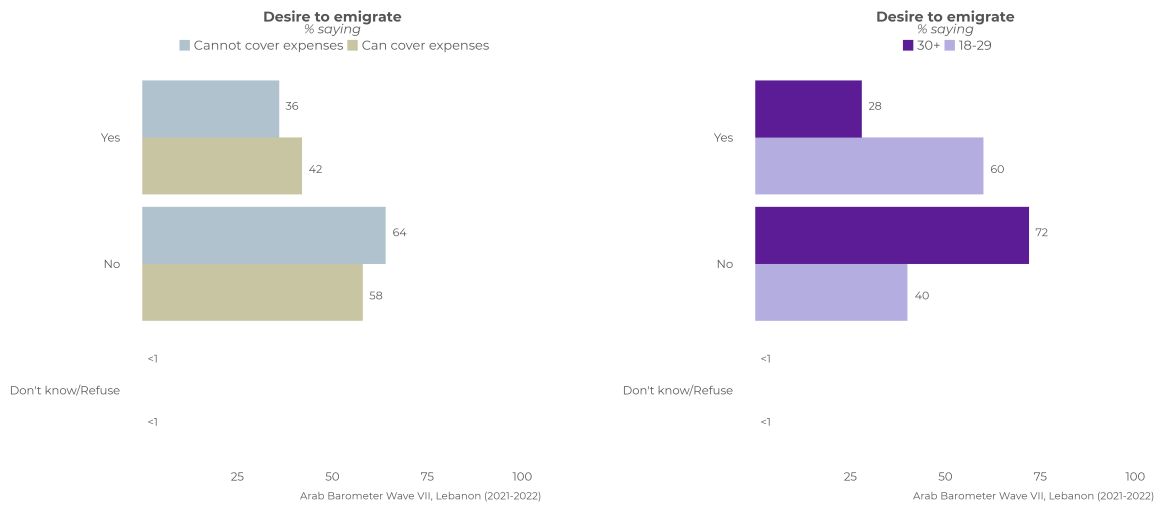
## Migration

After years of declining desire to emigrate, there has been a sharp uptick of citizens saying they are considering this possibility. In the current Arab Barometer survey, 38 percent of Lebanese citizens say they have considered emigrating, the highest portion of citizens in a decade.



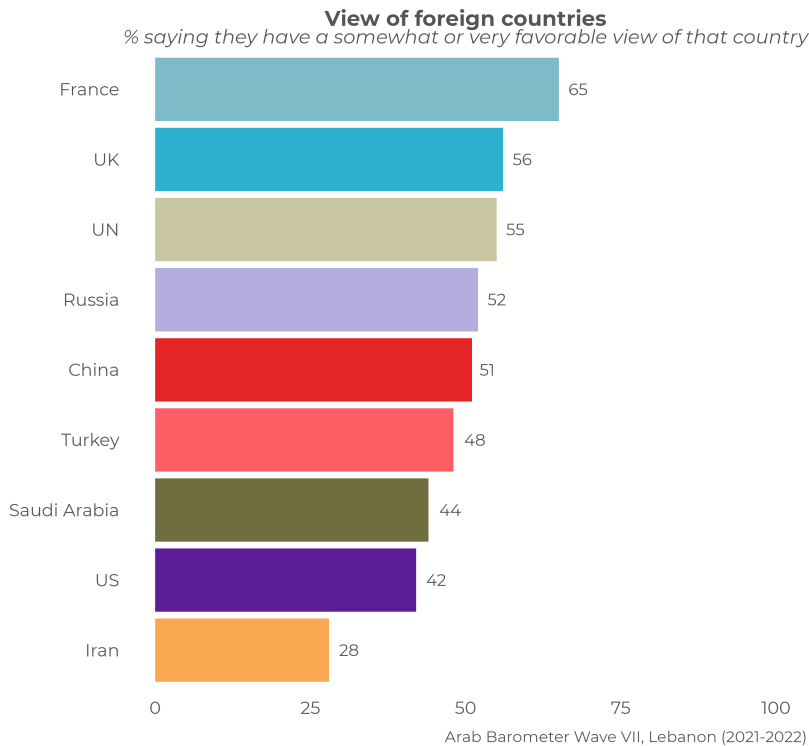


Despite the country's financial woes, a citizen's level of income does not necessarily correlate with their desire to emigrate. Age is a much stronger indication. While a majority of citizens are not thinking about emigrating regardless of demographics, citizens ages 18-29 are the exception. Compared to citizens ages 30 and above, young Lebanese are 32 points more likely to say they have considered emigrating. Overall, 60 percent of citizens ages 18-29 have considered emigrating. This demographic is the primary force behind the uptick in the emigration trend.



## International Relations

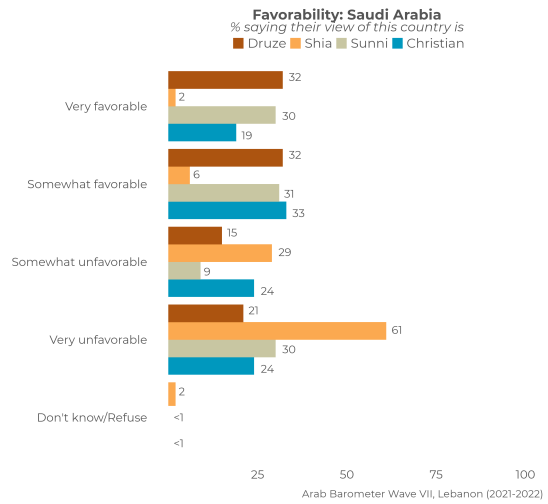
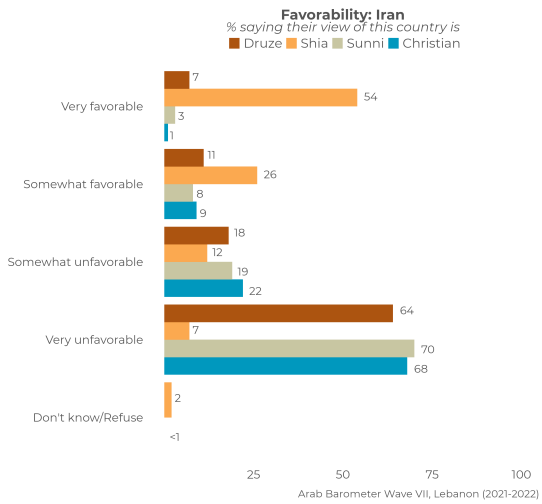
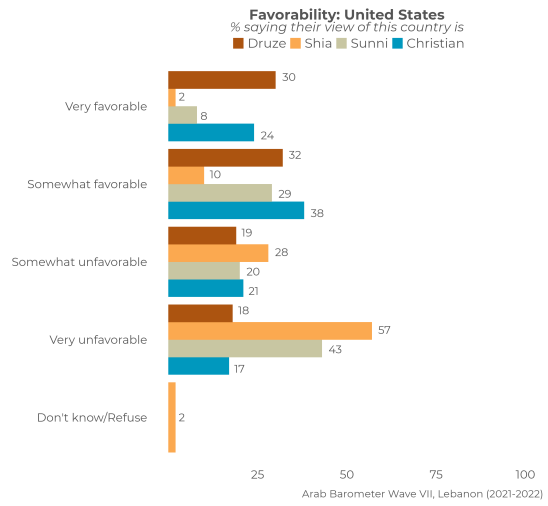
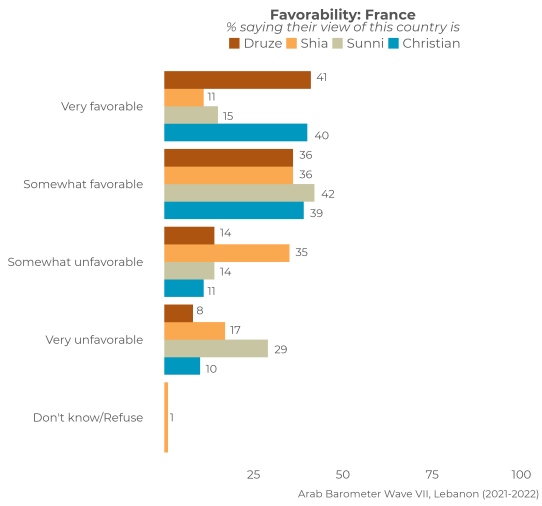
France, Lebanon’s former colonizer, tops the charts for favorability among foreign powers. Overall, 65 percent of Lebanese citizens say they have a somewhat or very favorable view of France. Citizens are not quite a unified as the high rating may suggest, however. While strong Christian and Druze majorities have favorable views of France (79 percent and 78 percent, respectively), Sunni and Shia citizens are more split in their views (57 percent and 47 percent, respectively).



A citizen's sect plays an important role in their views of foreign powers, especially concerning the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. Similar to France, both Christian and Druze tend to have a somewhat or very favorable view of the United States (62 percent for Christians, 63 percent for Druze). On the contrary, Shias and Sunnis have a very negative view. Only 36 percent of Sunnis and 13 percent of Shias have a favorable view of the United States.

For Iran and Saudi Arabia, the views of Lebanese Muslims are as expected. Shia citizens are the only sect in which a majority of members (79 percent) have a somewhat or very favorable view of Iran. In stark contrast, 70 percent of Sunnis have a very unfavorable view. The pattern reverses, albeit less dramatically, for views on Saudi Arabia. Overall, 61 percent of Sunnis have somewhat or very favorable views of Saudi Arabia, while 61 percent of Shias have very unfavorable views.

# Arab Barometer – Wave VII Lebanon Report





## 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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