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The Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa: A Grassroots Research and Advocacy Approach

Preliminary findings from surveys in Lebanon and Morocco

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I. Introduction & Project Overview

Project Overview

Women of the Middle East and North Africa lag behind much of the world, and behind men in their region, in areas such as their social and economic autonomy, labor force participation, political representation and health. The paucity of accurate and comprehensive national data on these areas poses another problem that makes it difficult to adequately evaluate the status of women in these countries. It also hinders the ability of local NGOs and women's groups in effectively influencing legislators and other policy makers and advocating on behalf of women.

While the evaluation of the status of women in more developed countries would rely mainly on national census-type data that is normally gathered by differently government agencies, the Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa (SWMENA) project fills the gap through survey research tools by employing survey data as a proxy for the lacking national statistics.

Information on the status of women that is gathered by women, for women, and engages them in the strategic process, can significantly empower women in these countries in bringing about new programs and advances in their civic, economic, and domestic lives—especially when combined with capacity building specifically addressing their ability to directly influence legislators and other policy makers.

The SWMENA project is a comparative study of the status of women in three Arab countries representing the three sub-regions of the MENA region: Lebanon (the Levant), Morocco (North Africa) and Yemen (the Gulf). While women in these countries may experience similar obstacles to their advancement, each country also presents a different set of challenges for women.

The project goal is to improve women's status through research and capacity building for advocacy by encouraging different stakeholders working on women's issues to use solid data in their advocacy efforts, so as to have more credibility in their demands and build local data collection and analysis capacity.

The distinctive aspect of this project is that it engaged local NGOs and researchers on women's issues in identifying gaps in existing data and defining research and measurement concepts. Pre-survey meetings with local women advocates and researchers revealed that health is one of the best-documented categories of social indicators for women in the region. Domestic violence is probably one of the least measured but anecdotally most widely reported phenomena across all three nations. The topics of highest importance specific to Lebanon are the personal status laws and the proposed quota system. Moreover, Lebanese researchers considered any data on the status of women to be highly desirable given the absence of an official census in Lebanon since 1932. In Morocco, there has been a more consistent gathering of national data by the Higher Planning Commission but opinion data was mostly lacking. Consequently, data on social attitudes and opinions were higher on local researchers' list.

Collection of new data was done through opinion surveys. Survey instruments included a core section that is standard across the three countries and a distinct country module that dealt with country-specific gender issues.

The SWMENA survey evaluates the status of women in four key areas: political and civic participation, economic participation and well-being, social autonomy (access to education, role in household decision-making, control over household resources), and access to healthcare. The surveys also elicited opinions towards different laws and rights, violence against women, and the role of women in society.



Survey Specifications & Paper Outline

This paper is a draft of preliminary findings from the Lebanon and Morocco surveys. Fieldwork for the Yemen survey is currently in process and therefore we are not able to include any Yemen data in this preliminary report. The Lebanon survey fieldwork took place from August 7 until August 29, 2009 and included 2,000 and 750 men. The Morocco survey fieldwork took place from December 9, 2009 until January 21, 2010 and included 2,000 women and 500 men. In both Lebanon and Morocco, there is an oversample of women in order to be able to perform robust comparisons between women across various demographic groupings. The smaller sample of men is mainly used to be able to disaggregate the data by gender.

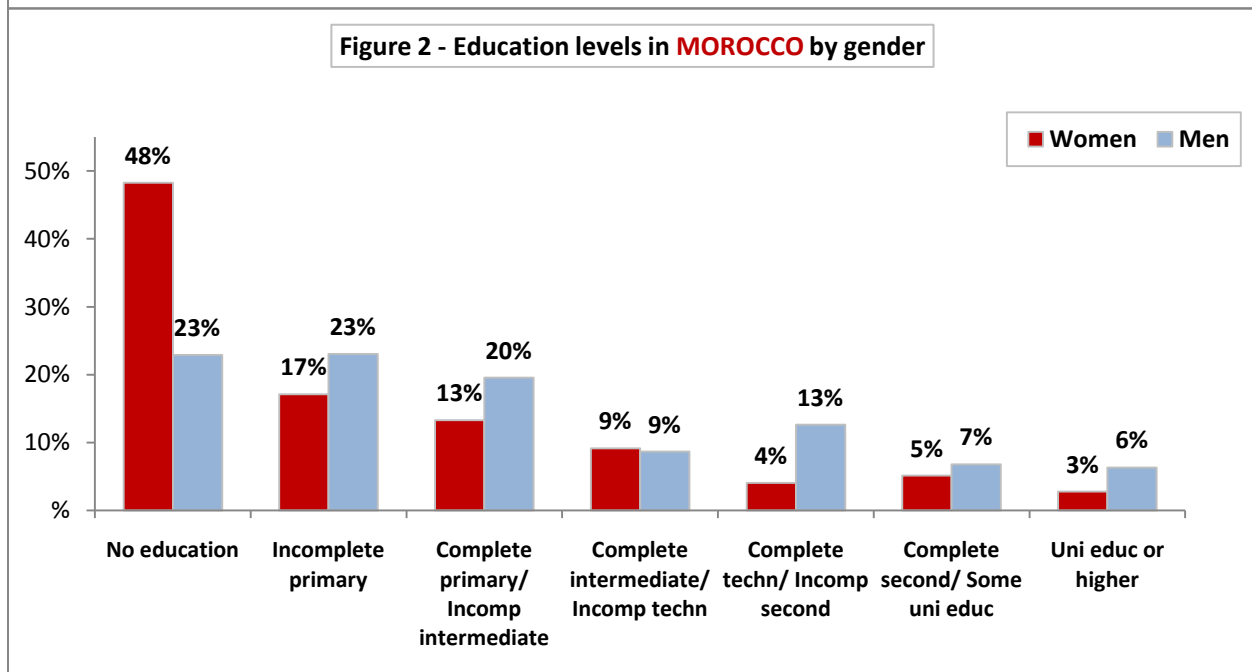
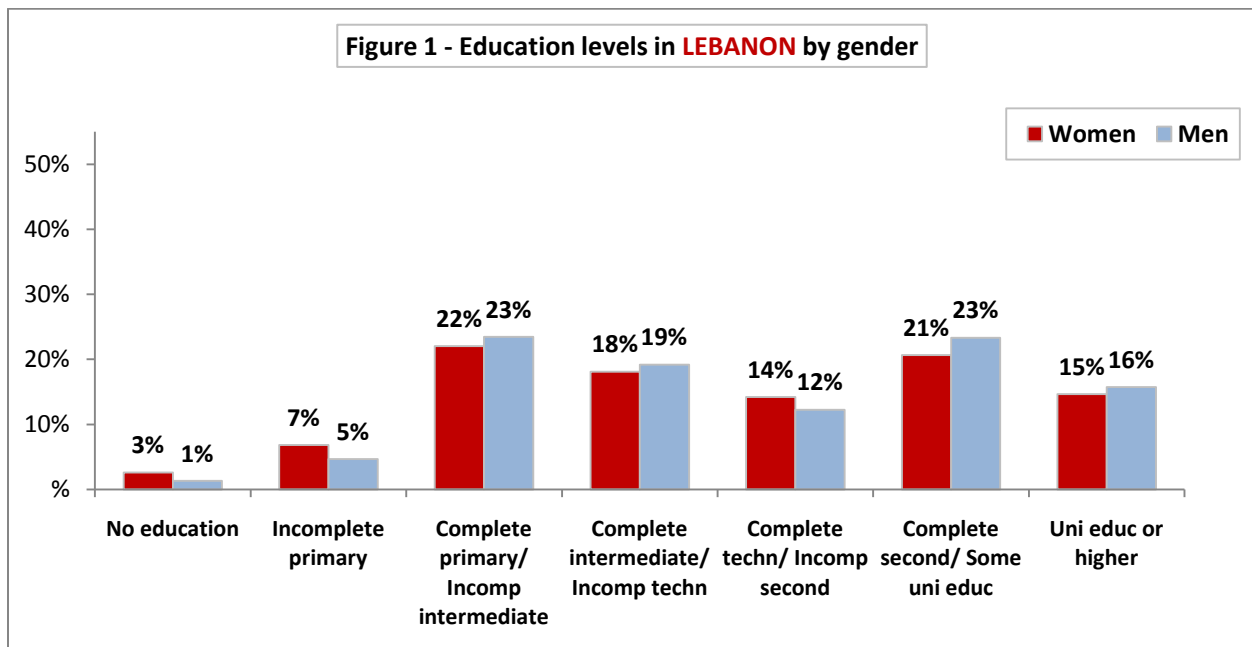
SURVEY SPECS	Women sample size	Men sample size	Target population	Fieldwork dates	Weights
LEBANON	2,000 <i>(m.o.e = ± 2.19)</i>	750 <i>(m.o.e = ± 3.58)</i>	Adult population (18+)	Aug 7-29, 2009	No weights applied
MOROCCO	2,000 <i>(m.o.e = ± 2.19)</i>	500 <i>(m.o.e = ± 4.38)</i>	Adult population (18+)	Dec 9, 2009 - Jan 21, 2010	Age & urban-rural weights applied

This preliminary draft will take a comparative approach to women's and men's opinions in Lebanon and Morocco on topics such as social attitudes towards women, civic and political participation and representation, and opinions on law reforms such as gender quotas and the Family Law in Morocco. There are some notable differences between Morocco and Lebanon in terms of the factors influencing differences of opinions. Lebanese society is divided on sectarian lines and in some cases we see differences in opinions between these religious groups. In Morocco, the society is mostly religiously homogenous, but the divisions seen are mainly gender differences and differences between residents of urban and rural areas.

II. Education and Employment Profile

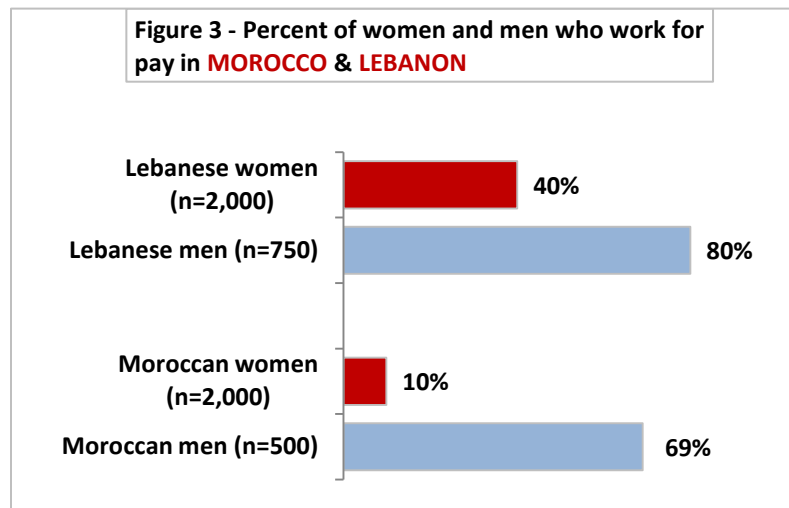
When looking at the education and employment profile of Lebanese and Moroccan women, we find large differences between men and women in Morocco, and between women in Morocco and Lebanon. Lebanese women tend to have educational profiles similar to men in Lebanon, while Moroccan women are much less likely to be as educated as men. Education and workforce participation are key drivers for socio-political attitudes and experiences and the large differences between Lebanese and Moroccan women on these factors is crucial to understanding the differences between women in the two countries.

Educational attainment is higher for Lebanese men and women and there is no gender gap in education. In Morocco, the incidence of illiteracy is much higher among Moroccan women (48%) than men (23%). Meanwhile, 35% of Lebanese women and 39% of Lebanese men have a secondary education or higher vs. only 9% of Moroccan women and 14% of Moroccan men (Figures 1&2).





In both Lebanon and Morocco, there is a large gender disparity in employment. Twice as many Lebanese men (80%) than Lebanese women (40%) work for pay (Figure 3). In Morocco, the gender discrepancy is much wider: the ratio of working men to working women is seven to one: 69% of Moroccan men work for pay compared with only 10% of Moroccan women. For both Lebanon and Morocco, higher education levels for women are correlated with higher levels of employment. The high level of illiteracy among Moroccan women explains the low level of women in the Moroccan workforce.





III. Social Attitudes towards Women

It is widely recognized that women in the Arab World face gender inequality in several ways and stereotypical gender roles are deeply ingrained in many of these societies. Indeed, the United Nations Development Programme takes the following stance based on their extensive research: *“The 2005 Arab Human Development Report (AHDR): “Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World,”¹ identified gender inequality as one of the most significant obstacles to human development in the Arab region. Despite legal guarantees for women’s right for political and economic participation in some countries such as Morocco, stereotypical gender roles are deeply entrenched, limiting women’s employment and decision-making opportunities, which are still the lowest in the world. And despite substantial efforts by Civil Society Organizations advocating for women’s political rights, women still lag far behind men in terms of representation.”*

Likewise, one of the main challenges identified by the pre-survey responses from women-focused NGO groups in Lebanon and Morocco is the stereotypical view of women’s image in their countries in terms of their role in family and society. The Moroccan groups specifically identified the conservative or male-dominated mentality that restricts women’s role to marriage, child-bearing, and servicing the husband and the family as one of the main issues facing women in Morocco. These women also mentioned the weak presence of women in decision-making positions as an obstacle facing Moroccan women. Women in both political and private sector institutions, including women in political parties and parliament, don’t have significant decision-making weight and some NGOs believe that women in political parties tend to be exploited for political marketing and remain marginalized within these parties.

We therefore introduced a series of questions in the SWMENA surveys to gauge social attitudes towards women. To get a sense of these attitudes, we asked questions such as support for women in politics, support for daughters in politics, allowing women to work outside the home, support/opposition for women involved in decision-making positions, and others. These questions give a sense of mentalities between groups in each country such as between genders, between women of urban/rural areas, education levels, and age groups. This set of questions also allows us to compare attitudes towards women between countries.

Overall, when comparing the social attitudes towards women in Lebanon to Morocco, the data shows both men and women in Lebanon have more definitive support for women in politics, political leadership roles, and women’s ability to make their own voting decisions than men and women in Morocco. The most pronounced comparative trend seen in the data is men in Lebanon are much more likely to be supportive of women in these roles than men in Morocco. In Lebanon, women usually have higher support than Lebanese men on questions dealing with gender equality and women’s autonomy, but men have high support as well. In Morocco, we often see a gender split with women showing strong support for women’s rights, but men showing lukewarm or uncertain support. This disparity in opinions between women and men in Morocco illuminate the potential hurdles in advancing women’s status in the country. Despite advances in legal rights, the “traditional” view of women in Morocco will continue to hamper efforts to advance women’s status. Furthermore, a very troubling finding in Morocco is the level of men who find it personally acceptable for a husband to beat a wife. Thirty percent of Moroccan men, compared to 10% of Lebanese men and 9% of Moroccan women, find it acceptable for a husband to beat a wife and this opinion undoubtedly has implications for women’s safety in Morocco.

A commonality between countries is the persistent stereotype that men are better in leadership roles. In Morocco and Lebanon, majorities of men agree, and even significant shares of women also agree, that men make better political and business leaders. This pervasive perception by both men and some women in these

¹ <http://www.arab-hdr.org/publications/other/ahdr/ahdr2005e.pdf>

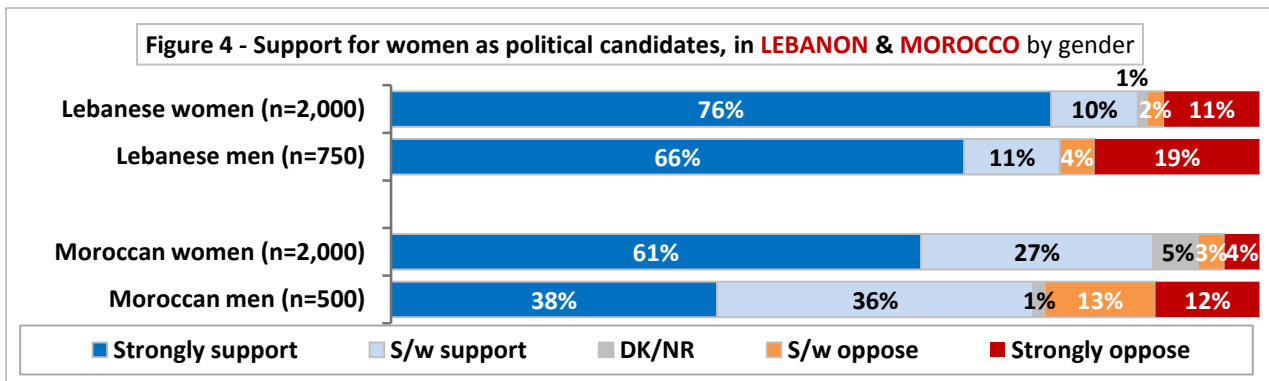


societies may tend to keep more men in these positions and can hinder women from attaining these types of leadership positions.

Women in Politics and Women’s Decision-Making Autonomy

The Moroccan Family Law, or Moudawana, that was introduced in 2004 is often referenced as one of the most progressive laws on women’s rights in the Middle East. Yet, some believe implementation of the law varies throughout Morocco and that it has been met with resistance in some areas.² Our survey finds majorities of men and women in Morocco have heard at least a little about the Moudawana (88% of women have heard a little/have heard a lot, 94% of men) and somewhat or strongly support it (85% of women strongly/somewhat support, 63% of men). Despite apparent support for this law which guarantees various aspects of women’s rights, data from attitudinal survey questions verify the persistence of traditional stereotypes about women and women’s roles in Morocco, often more so than Lebanon. Even though Lebanon does not have such a law, women in Lebanon seem to have more societal support for gender equality as elucidated in the following data points.

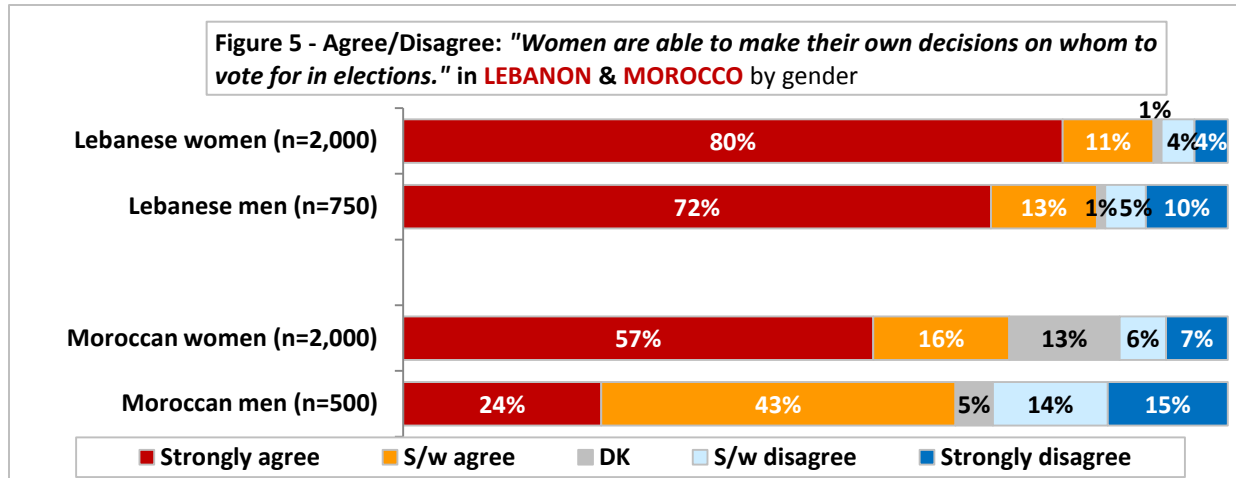
In Lebanon, both men and women, but more women than men, support women in politics as candidates for office (86% women, 77% men). In Morocco, both men and women also support women in politics as parliamentary candidates (88% women, 74% men), but women are much more likely to strongly support women as political candidates. The difference between the two countries is men show less definitive support of women as political candidates than in Lebanon (Figure 4).



Assessing perceptions on whether voting gives people like them a chance to influence decision-making in their country, we see that there is no gender divide within Lebanon or Morocco, but there is a difference in opinions between the two countries. In Lebanon, over six in ten women and men believe in the power of their vote (69% women strongly/somewhat agree and 61% of men). In Morocco, on the other hand, both men and women have low levels of belief in voting as a way to influence decision-making in the country with only a third of women (38%) and men (31%) agreeing with this statement. The low percentages of Moroccans who believe they are not able to influence government decision-making through voting seems to be impacted by education levels. One common trend we see in Morocco for both women and men is that men and women at the highest levels of education are more likely to believe in their ability to influence decision-making by the government. In Lebanon, this holds true for women as well, but for Lebanese men there is no statistically significant difference in opinion by education levels.

² According to Freedom House’s *Women’s Rights in the Middle East and North Africa* report on Morocco, by Fatima Sadiqi.

Regarding autonomy in decision-making, majorities of men and women in Morocco believe women are able to make their own decisions on whom to vote for in elections, but more women than men agree (73%, 67%). Again, we see men in Morocco less likely to strongly agree on this issue of women’s autonomy in decision-making. Men are half as likely to strongly agree as women (24% and 57%) and more likely to only somewhat agree that women are able to make their own decisions on whom to vote for in elections (43% and 16%). This highlights less certainty on behalf of Moroccan men on women’s autonomy in decision-making when voting (Figure 5).



Women in Leadership Positions

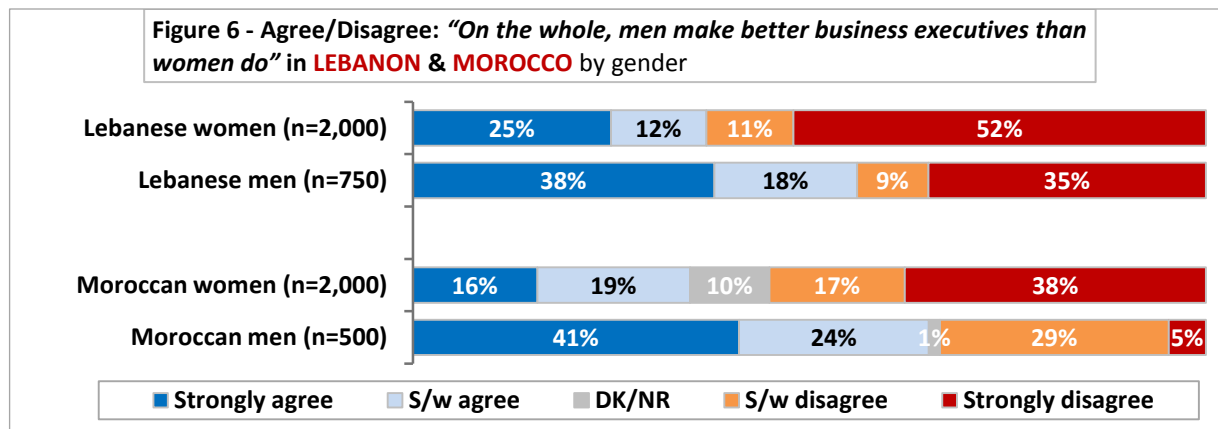
In Lebanon, strong majorities of both men and women strongly agree women should be able to be involved in politics at various levels such as members of parliament, minister in government, work on candidate campaigns, participate in political protests, and being members of political parties. In Morocco, majorities of women strongly agree women should be involved at a variety of levels, but less than half of men strongly agree. Comparatively, there is more definitive support of women’s involvement in these areas in Lebanon than in Morocco on behalf of men, possibly indicating a more entrenched acceptance of women in these roles in Lebanon than in Morocco, despite Morocco’s so-called advancement due to the existence of gender quotas.

In Lebanon and Morocco, men and women may believe women should be involved in politics and in political leadership positions, but men are still viewed as better business executives and political leaders. When respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree with the statements “On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do” and “On the whole, men make better business executives than women do,” the data shows a significant gender difference in opinions within Lebanon and Morocco and also between the two countries.

In Morocco and Lebanon, a majority of men agree that men are better political leaders (67% Morocco, 60% Lebanon) and business executives (65% and 56%) than women, whereas a majority of women disagree with these statements that men are better political leaders (55% Morocco, 53% Lebanon) or better business executives (55% and 63%). Still, it must be noted that a significant share of women agree men make better political leaders than women do (35% Morocco, 46% Lebanon) and men make better business executives than women do (35% Morocco and 37% Lebanon). In Lebanon, despite more gender equality in educational opportunities than Morocco, women are more likely to agree that men make better political and business leaders. This highlights the fact that this traditional stereotype of men being better in leadership roles continues to exist throughout Moroccan and Lebanese society, not just among men but among some women



as well. This pervasive perception in society by both men and some women may tend to keep more men in these positions and can hinder women from attaining these types of leadership positions (Figures 6).



Dynamics between Men and Women

Respondents were also read a series of statements about different dynamics between women and men and husbands and wives and asked to what extent they agree or disagree. Aggregating responses on these statements into a scale rating 'progressiveness' on questions of dynamics between men and women shows that: 1) women in Lebanon are much more likely to be uniformly 'progressive' on these issues, and 2) that women in both countries are more likely to be 'progressive' than men in the country. Overall, these findings seem to indicate that women may agree to the concept of equal work opportunities, but not if it means being above a man in status or social/professional prestige and not if it means shifting the power balance in the household between husbands and wives. Between women of different education levels in Morocco, we do not see statistically significant differences in opinions on these statements except for the issue of wives obeying husbands. In this case, as education levels increase the percentage of women who disagree with this statement increases. We also see this trend in Lebanon, but we also see that women with more education are less likely to agree that when jobs are scarce men should have more right to a job than women.

When aggregating opinions on these five statements related to gender equality and classifying the more equality-based, or "progressive," responses, we see women in both countries give more progressive responses to more of these statements than men. Still, women in Lebanon are much more likely to be uniformly "progressive," with their responses to 4 out of 5 statements (38%) than women in Morocco (17%). Men in Lebanon are more likely to give "progressive" responses to more of these statements than men in Morocco (Figure 7).

Figure 7 - Percentage of "progressive" responses to statements on gender equality % by gender	MOROCCO Women (n=2000)	MOROCCO Men (n=500)	LEBANON Women (n=2000)	LEBANON Men (n=750)
Gave "progressive" responses to 0 statement	0.4%	3%	0.2%	0.3%
Gave "progressive" responses to 1 statement	2%	30%	0.3%	3%
Gave "progressive" responses to 2 statements	33%	44%	6%	24%
Gave "progressive" responses to 3 statements	46%	20%	28%	32%
Gave "progressive" responses to 4 statements	17%	3%	38%	26%
Gave "progressive" responses to 5 statements	2%	.02%	28%	15%



The specific responses to these statements are as follows. In Lebanon and Morocco there is strong support that women and girls should have equal access to education as men and boys (98% men, 95% women in Morocco and 99% men, 98% women in Lebanon). In Lebanon and Morocco there is also support for women having equal work opportunities as men, but the support is more than 30 percentage points lower in Morocco amongst men (98% men support, 94% women in Lebanon; 63% men and 97% women in Morocco).

In both Lebanon and Morocco, men and women believe women should have equal opportunities for education and work, but not at the expense of men. When asked to agree or disagree that *“When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women”* we see that majorities of men and women in both countries agree with this statement (92% men, 91% women in Morocco and 67% men, 49% women in Lebanon). Still, you’ll notice the percentage of men and women who agree with this statement is much lower in Lebanon, though still a majority of men and nearly half of women agree.

Men and women were then asked to agree or disagree with the statement *“A good wife should obey her husband even if she disagrees.”* In Lebanon, women are split on this question (51% disagree, 49% agree) while a large majority of men agrees (68%). In Morocco, even more women agree (71%) and men agree (85%). A similar trend we see amongst women in both Lebanon and Morocco is that as education levels increase, the percentage of women who disagree with this statement increases. Given the much higher education levels among women in Lebanon, it is thus not surprising that women in Lebanon are much more likely to disagree with the statement than women in Morocco.

Regarding polygamy, or the acceptability of men to have more than one wife, there is a difference of opinion on this issue between men and women in Morocco and men and women in Lebanon. In Morocco, a strong 91% of men strongly/somewhat agree it is acceptable for men to have more than one wife, while less than half that percentage of women agree (45%) and half of Moroccan women (52%) strongly/somewhat disagree that it is acceptable for men to have more than one wife. In contrast, both a majority of women and men in Lebanon (but more women than men) strongly/somewhat disagree that it is acceptable for men to have more than one wife (91% and 69% respectively).

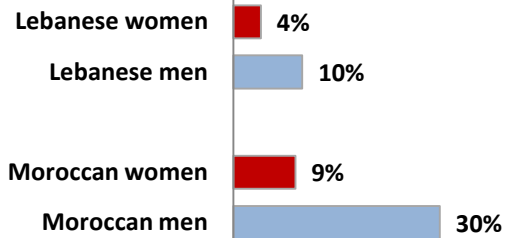
Violence against Women

As previously stated, violence against women in the Middle East and North Africa is often considered a major problem facing women, yet much of it goes unreported and it is suspected that incidents that are reported are rarely adjudicated fairly. While other surveys in the region have attempted to measure the prevalence with which women experience domestic violence, the SWMENA surveys examine general attitudes towards violence against women and whether domestic violence, in particular, is tolerated or rejected by society.

In Lebanon, when asked to generally assess how accepted or rejected domestic violence is in their communities, we see 93% of Lebanese women and 91% of men feel domestic violence is completely rejected in their communities. We see a similar 91% of Moroccan women who believe domestic violence is completely rejected in their communities and 5% who believe it is somewhat rejected, but Moroccan men have widely differing opinions on this topic compared to Moroccan women and Lebanese men and women. Only 42% of Moroccan men feel domestic violence is completely rejected and 45% believe it is only somewhat rejected. While one could expect a difference in opinions between rural and urban male respondents or men of different education levels, there are none.

Regarding whether they personally find it acceptable for a husband to beat his wife, very few Lebanese women (4%) and men (10%) say they personally find it acceptable. Among Lebanese women, accepting domestic violence declines with educational attainment, but among Lebanese men there is no systematic change in attitudes by education. In contrast, nearly one in ten (9%)

Figure 8 - "Do you personally believe it is acceptable for women to be beaten by their husbands in certain situations?" in LEBANON & MOROCCO by gender % responding "Yes"



Moroccan women say yes they personally find it acceptable for women to be beaten by their husbands in certain situations, and a staggering one-third of Moroccan men agree (30%) (Figure 8). This finding also does not vary by men of different education levels or urban or rural male respondents. This highlights a troubling level of acceptance for domestic violence amongst men across Morocco.

In addition to asking a general question about whether respondents find it personally acceptable for a husband to beat his wife, the survey asked if respondents find such behaviors justified when framed in terms of six specific situations: if she neglected household responsibilities; if she was disobedient or did not follow his orders; if she neglected the children; if she tried to impose her views; if she went out without telling her husband; and if she refused sex.

When framed in this way, 83% of Lebanese women and 79% of Lebanese men say domestic violence against women is never justified in all five of these situations. In contrast, men and women in Morocco are less likely to say it is never justified for a husband to beat a wife in all five of these situations. Fifty-three percent of Moroccan women and 48% of Moroccan men say domestic violence against women is never justified in all five of these situations, demonstrating more of a willingness on behalf of men and women to accept domestic violence in certain situations.

IV. Civic and Political Participation and Representation

The active engagement of women in the civic and political spheres is a prerequisite for a healthy sense of citizenship and for successful democratization. In addition to eliciting opinions and attitudes towards women’s political participation and women in leadership positions, the SWMENA survey also aimed to measure actual levels of women’s political and civic engagement. In order to examine the extent of civic engagement, respondents were asked if they are currently or had been members of different types of organizations and if they had taken part in different activities to express their opinions on political and social issues. This shows the level of association of women with others outside their house and can be a reflection of how active and informed they are as citizens. Respondents were also asked about their participation in the most recent elections to be able to measure voter turnout and understand voting behavior. In Lebanon, we asked respondents about the June 2009 Parliamentary Elections and in Morocco about the June 2009 Municipal Elections.

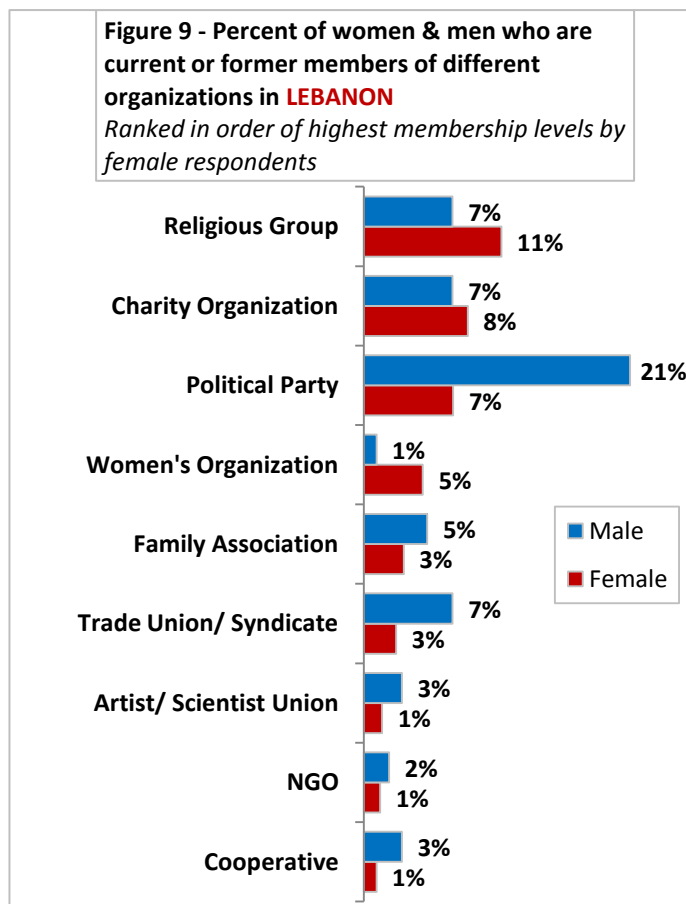
Survey findings suggest that Lebanese women are much more civically and politically active than Moroccan women. But Lebanese women lag slightly behind men in their civic engagement. In terms of their direct political participation, there is no gender gap between Lebanese women and men as both had a high voter turnout in the most recent parliamentary election. Moroccan women clearly trail Moroccan men in terms of their civic engagement and their political participation. Again this shows that while Morocco has made important advances at the legislative level by enacting reforms that ensure a higher level of women’s representation, ordinary women are still much less engaged than men, which could be a reflection of the prevailing stereotype views of what a women’s role should be in society as well as structural factors (education, employment) that impact civic and political engagement.

Civic Engagement

When looking at Lebanese respondents’ membership levels in different organizations, the data shows that men are generally more likely to be members of different types of organizations than women: there are three times as many men than women members of political parties (21% of men vs. 7% of women). This is also the case for membership in trade unions and professional syndicates: 7% of men are members vs. 3% of women. Women are however more active than men in certain organizations such as religious groups, charity organizations and women’s organizations: indeed more women are likely to be members of these organizations than men (Figure 9).

For Moroccan respondents, overall levels of membership in different organizations are extremely low for women and relatively low for men as well.

No more than 2% of Moroccan women say

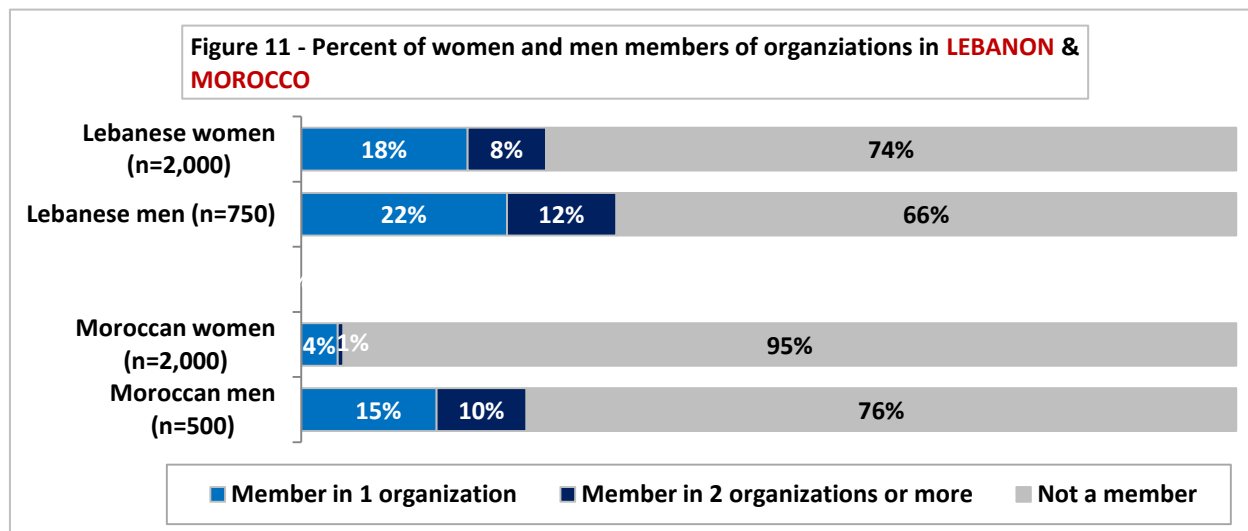
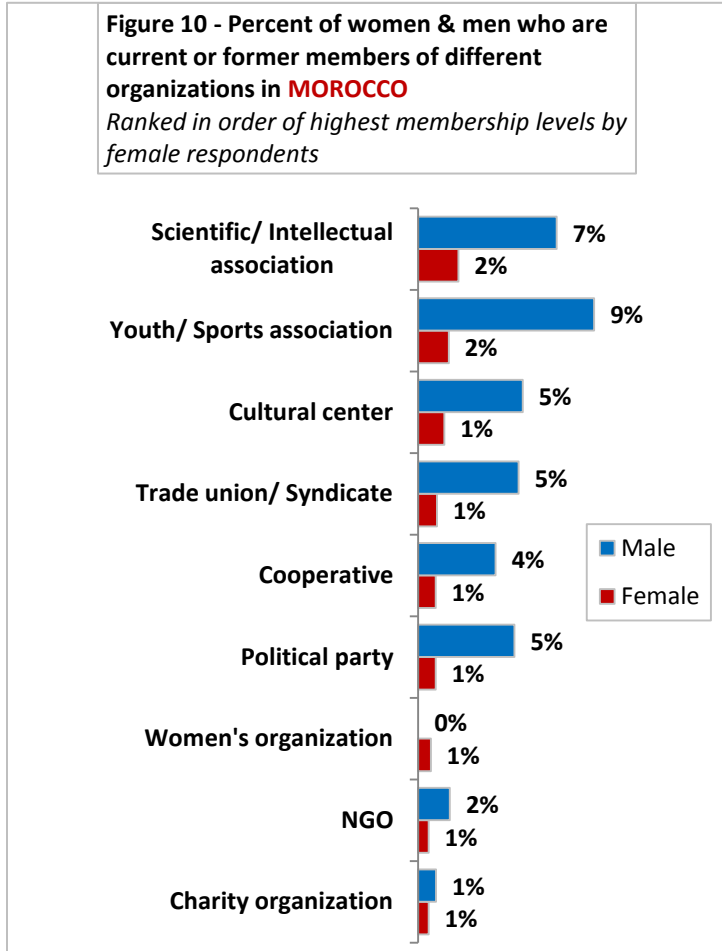




they are members of any type of organization. Moroccan men are generally more likely to be members of different types of organizations than women: 9% of surveyed men are members of youth or sports associations, 7% are members of scientific or intellectual associations, and 5% are members of cultural centers, trade unions, or political parties (Figure 10).

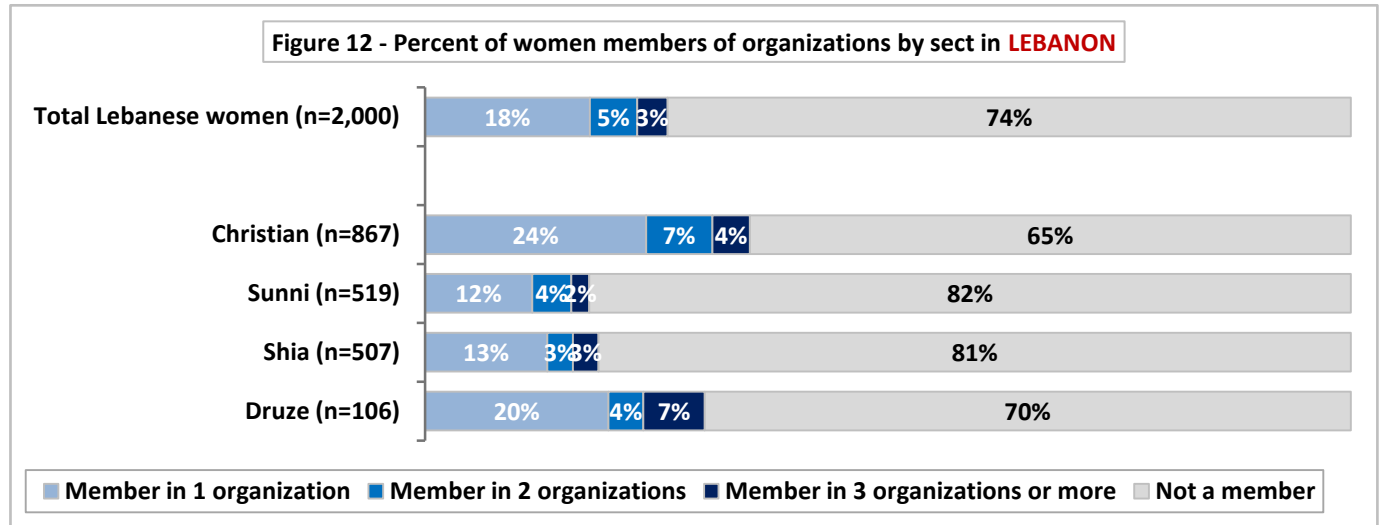
When aggregating memberships in organizations regardless of organization type, we find that Moroccan women differ significantly from Lebanese women: 4% of Moroccan women are members of one organization and another 1% are members of two organizations or more. This leaves 95% of Moroccan women who are not members of any organization (Figure 11). Meanwhile, 18% of Lebanese women are members of one organization and 8% are members of two organizations or more. Nearly three quarters of Lebanese women (74%) are not members of any organization compared with a smaller percentage of Lebanese men (66%). While we see gender disparities in both countries, the level of

civic engagement of Moroccan women is much lower than Moroccan men: the proportion of Moroccan women who are not members of any organization (95%) is higher by 19 percentage points relative to Moroccan men (76%).

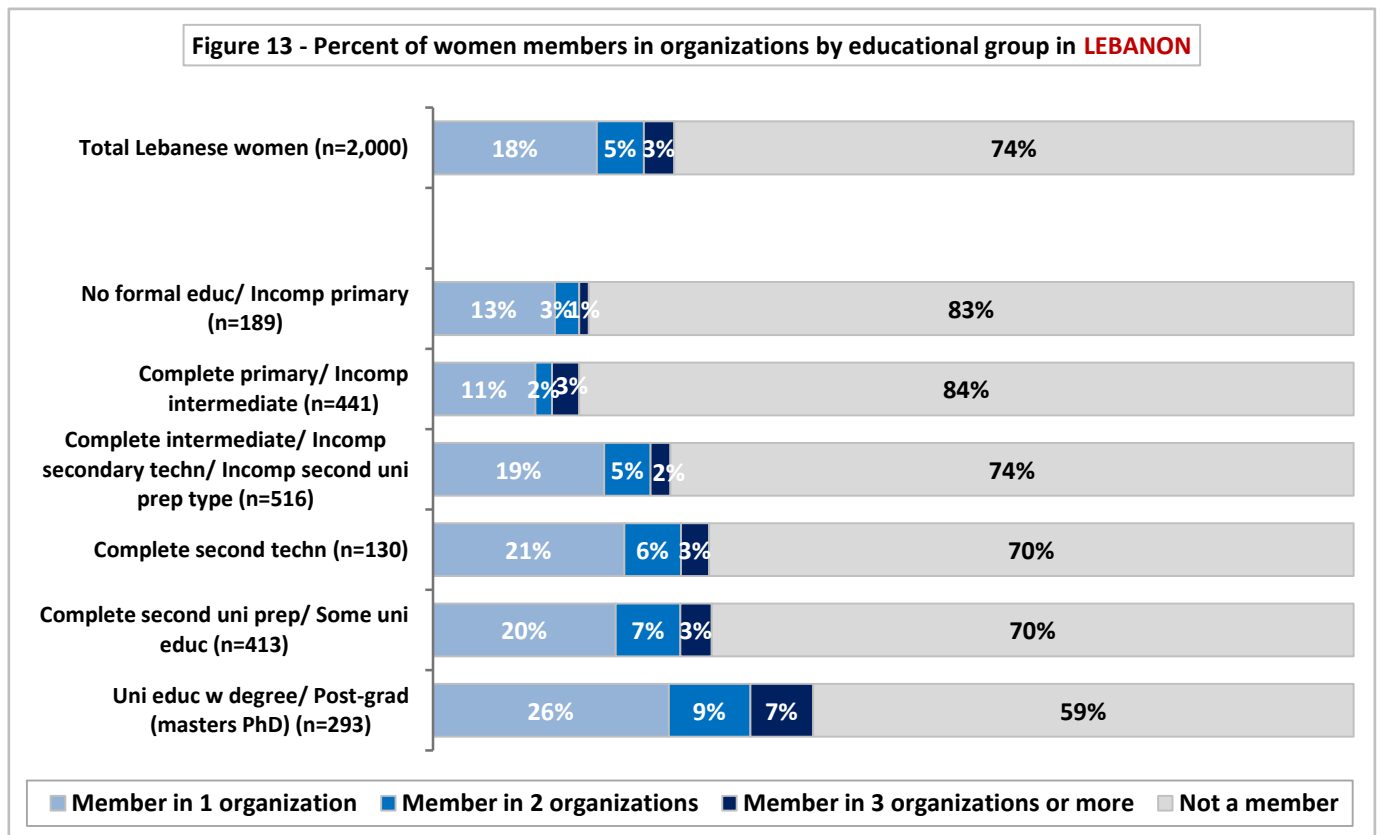




In Lebanon, women’s membership in organizations is influenced by women’s sectarian identity and their education levels. Lebanese women belonging to the Christian and Druze religious sects are more likely to engage in different organizations than Sunni and Shia women: 35% of Christian women and 31% of Druze women are members in one organization or more compared with only 18% of Sunni women and 19% of Shia women (Figure 12).

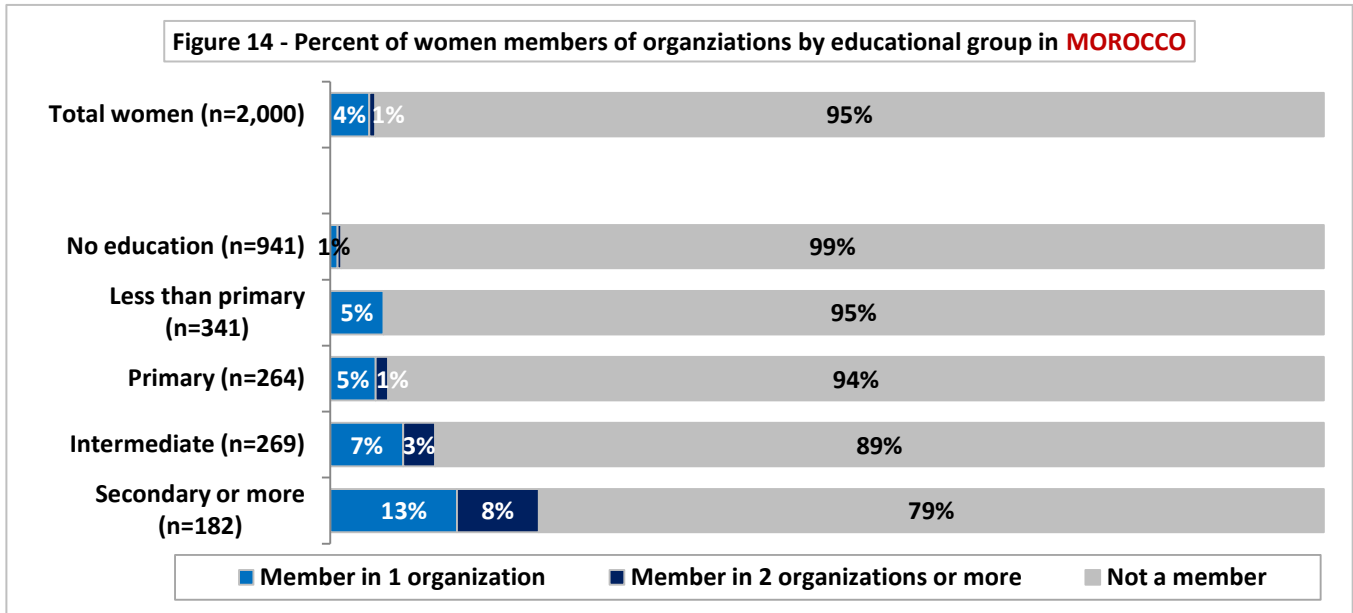


As education levels increase, the likelihood of Lebanese women being members of different organizations increases as well. Membership is highest for those with a university education or higher as 41% are members of at least one organization (Figure 13).





In Morocco, women’s membership in different organizations increases with educational attainment, just like in Lebanon (Figure 14). For women with no education, membership in organizations is almost negligible. For those with less than a primary education, only 5% are members of one organization, the remaining 95% are not members of any organization. Those with a secondary education or higher exhibit higher levels of civic engagement: 13% are members of one organization and 8% are members of two organizations or more. This analysis seems to indicate that much of the difference in organizational civic engagement between women in Lebanon and Morocco can be attributed to differences in educational levels among women in the two countries.

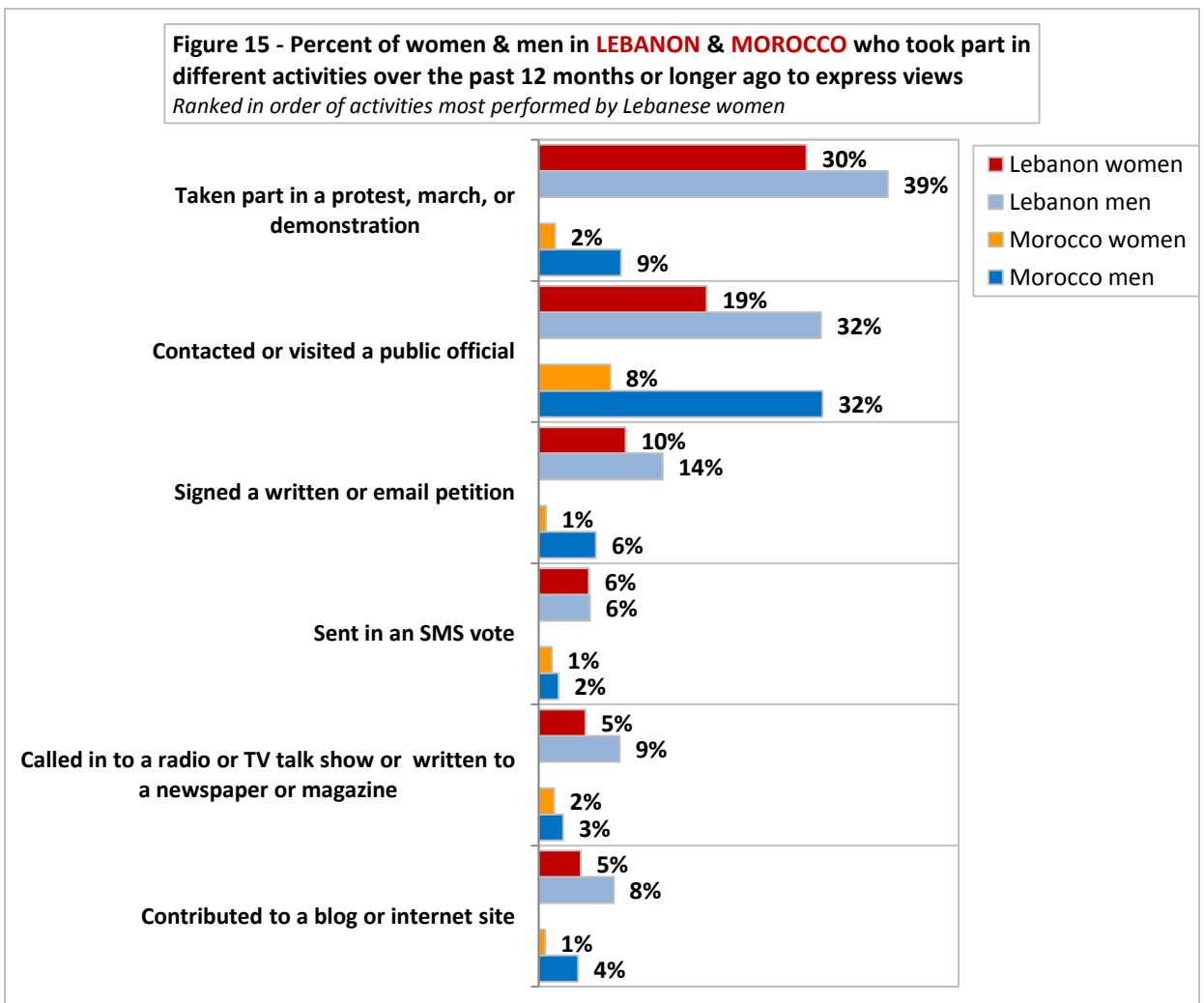


When examining civic engagement through taking part in different activities, we find again that Moroccan women are less active than Moroccan men and much less active than Lebanese women (Figure 15).

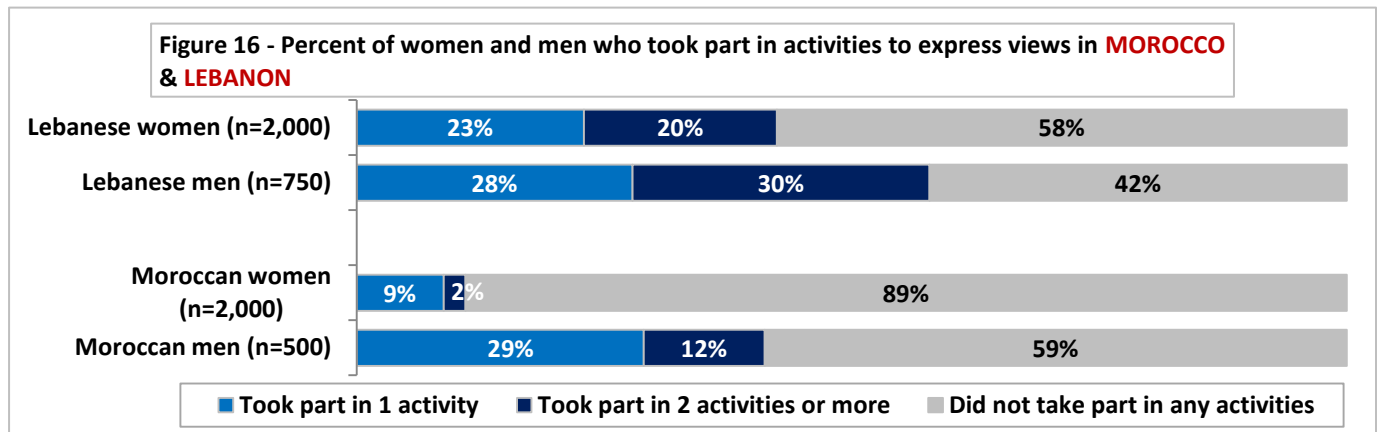
The activities that Lebanese women mostly do to express their opinions on social and political issues are protests or demonstrations and contacting public officials (at any level of government). Three in 10 Lebanese women participated in a protest or demonstration over the past 12 months or longer ago. Few Lebanese women, however, take part in other types of activities that perhaps require a higher level of individual initiative. Contributing to a blog or website is the least common. Similarly, only 5% of Lebanese women have called in a radio or TV show to express their opinions in the past.

Lebanese men are slightly more likely than Lebanese women to have taken part in different activities to express their opinions. In particular, many more Lebanese men (32%) than Lebanese women (19%) have contacted or visited a public official over the past year or longer ago.

Moroccan women’s participation in different activities to express their views is low both in absolute terms and relative to their male counterparts. Moroccan men are four times more likely (32%) than Moroccan women (8%) to have contacted or visited a public official to express their views. Similarly, 9% of Moroccan men say that they have taken part in a protest, march or demonstration to express their views while only 2% of women have done the same. Six percent of Moroccan men have signed a petition over the past year or longer ago compared with just 1% of women.

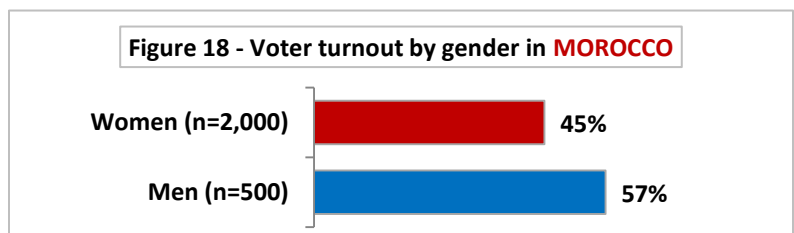
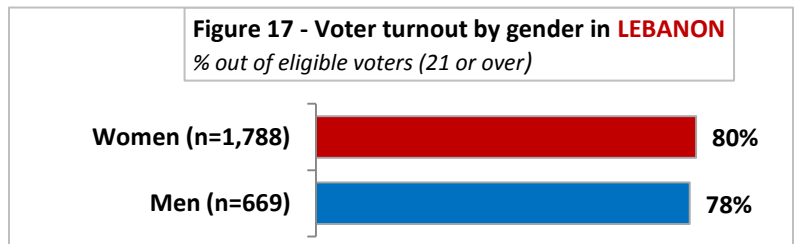


When aggregating activities regardless of the type of activity, we see that 43% of Lebanese women took part in one activity or more over the past 12 months or longer ago to express their views compared to just 11% of Moroccan women (Figure 16). The difference in the level of engagement in activities between Moroccan women and Moroccan men is equally pronounced: 41% of Moroccan men have taken part in one activity or more to express their views. This leaves 59% of men who have not taken part in any activities to express their views. Meanwhile, the percent of women who have not taken part in any activity stands at a much higher 89%. The disparity in activism between Lebanese women and Lebanese men is much less prominent than the one seen between Moroccan men and women.



Political Participation through Voting

SWMENA survey respondents were also asked a series of questions about their participation in the most recent elections as a measure of a more direct form of political participation. Since we are comparing participation in parliamentary elections in Lebanon to municipal elections in Morocco, the political dynamics are quite different and we would thus not compare Lebanese women to Moroccan women but would rather just look at participation within each country and compare women to men and women.



Voting in the June 2009 Lebanese parliamentary elections was high for both men and women in a closely contested election. In fact, women report slightly higher voter turnout than men: 80% said they voted vs. 78% of men, but the difference is not statistically significant. This shows that there is no gender gap in voter participation in Lebanon (Figure 17).

When looking at the Moroccan municipal elections of June 2009, we find that women's participation was lower than men's: 45% of Moroccan women report having cast a vote versus a higher proportion of men (57%). This means that the majority of Moroccan women (54%) did not participate in the June 2009 municipal elections and that there is a gender gap in voter participation in Morocco (Figure 18).



Overview of Gender Quotas in Lebanon and Morocco

One of the principal objectives of the SWMENA survey was to examine the level of popular support for law reforms that have the potential to enhance women's participation in decision-making. The low level of women's political representation is a well-known deficit in much of the Arab world. The debate over the need to increase women's political participation is an ongoing one in several Arab countries. Many believe that the prevailing patriarchal mentality is the main obstacle to a more active involvement of women in decision-making positions. Yet very few Arab countries have so far adopted a form of gender quotas to improve the level of representation of women in legislative and executive bodies.

According to data from the Quota Project - Global Database of Quotas for Women³, only four Arab countries have legislated gender quotas in the electoral law (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Sudan). Iraq is the only Arab country with a gender quota system that is stipulated in the constitution. Morocco and Tunisia have a quota system that is based on voluntary political party quotas. Lebanon, like most Arab countries, does not have any form of gender quota in place.

Morocco and Lebanon have different experiences in terms of women's political representation. Morocco has instituted a system of gender quotas in 2002, when political parties agreed on a charter to reserve 30 seats for female candidates on a special national list out of the 325 seats in the Chamber of Representatives. Morocco also employs a quota system for local councils. According to Freedom House's Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa, the number of women in the Moroccan Parliament rose from two in 1997 to 34 after the 2007 elections, and many women have since been appointed as cabinet ministers, diplomats and judges. However, according to the same report, women still experience difficulties in political participation stemming primarily from societal and cultural constraints. The character of their engagement remains heavily influenced by traditionalist and Islamist political trends.

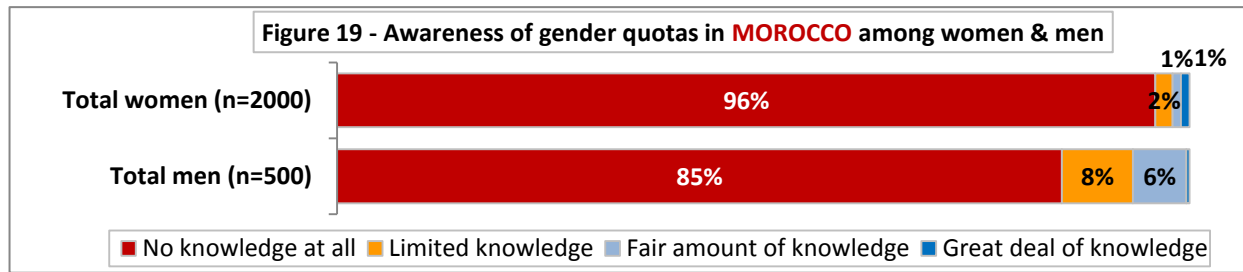
As for Lebanon, despite efforts on behalf of women's groups that have been vigorously pushing for reform in the area of women's political participation, there is still no gender quota system in place. The Lebanese Cabinet recently proposed the introduction of a 20% quota for women on municipal councils as part of a set of reforms. The proposed law was sent for discussion to Parliament but it failed to pass the law before the 2010 municipal elections were called. Current levels of female political representation in Lebanon remain among the lowest in the Arab region despite Lebanese women's very high standing in health and education and a great sense of social mobility and personal freedom relative to women in other Arab countries. The representation of women in the newly elected 2009 parliament is at an abysmal rate of 3.25%, this is down from an already low rate of 4.68% in 2005. The representation of women in local municipalities is even more limited, standing at a tiny 2%.

Knowledge of Gender Quotas in Morocco

The SWMENA survey findings suggest that while Morocco has been using gender quotas in Parliament since 2002, awareness levels of the system of gender quotas is alarmingly low and there is a gender split in terms of support for this system of quotas. In Lebanon, where such a system does not exist, support for the introduction of gender quotas is high among both men and women. Yet the rigid political and electoral systems that are carefully fashioned along sectarian lines seem to be the main obstacle for the passing of the gender quota law. In Lebanon, the ground seems fertile for the introduction of gender quotas as majorities of both men and women are "strongly supportive" of this system but political and legislative hurdles prevail. In Morocco, however, where the system is already in place, support for quotas is relatively high among women but is at best cautious among men. This raises questions about the top-down approach that was taken to

³ <http://www.quotaproject.org/>

adopt quotas. It also highlights the need for coupling legislative reforms with awareness campaigns that would ensure a stronger grassroots support for these much-needed reforms.



As the figure above shows, very few Moroccans are familiar with the notion of gender quotas⁴. When asked how much they knew about the concept of gender quotas⁵, a sweeping majority of Moroccan women (96%) said they have no knowledge at all about it. Knowledge of gender quotas is also very limited among Moroccan men but slightly higher than among women. Eighty-five percent of men also say they have no knowledge at all about gender quotas (Figure 19).

Knowledge of gender quotas in Morocco increases with educational attainment but it remains relatively low even for those who have a secondary education or higher. In fact, 78% of women with a secondary school education or higher say they have no knowledge at all about gender quotas. This compares to 12% who say they have at least a fair amount of knowledge and 10% who say they have limited knowledge about the concept. Among those with less than a secondary school education, at least nine in 10 women say they have no knowledge at all about gender quotas.

When comparing Moroccan women who voted in the local elections of June 2009 to those who did not vote, we still do not find any statistically significant differences in knowledge between these two groups.

This highlights a major deficit in knowledge about gender quotas among the Moroccan population and suggests that women's groups should perhaps be doing more efforts to spread awareness about this concept and its importance in ensuring a more active role for women in political life.

⁴ In the Morocco SWMENA survey, we included a filter question before the series of questions on quotas asking about knowledge of gender quotas. This is because the survey pretest showed that many respondents were unaware of this phenomenon. In the Lebanon survey, this question was not needed because familiarity with the concept is high.

⁵ Question wording: "As you may know, there is a concept called gender quota that is aimed to guarantee a specific number of seats for women in parliament and in municipalities. Political parties in Morocco have signed an agreement in 2002 where they decided to reserve 30 seats for women on a national list in parliament. How much do you know about this concept of gender quotas?"



Support for Gender Quotas in Lebanon & Morocco

In both the Lebanon and the Morocco surveys, respondents were asked whether they supported gender quotas or opposed them. In Morocco, only those with at least a limited knowledge of gender quotas were asked the question.

Survey findings suggest that while the support for gender quotas is higher among Moroccan women than among Lebanese women, there is a gender split in opinions in Morocco whereas in Lebanon, men’s support for gender quotas is statistically equivalent to women’s support for quotas.

Fifty-nine percent of Lebanese women strongly support the introduction of gender quotas in Parliament. Slightly fewer men (54%) strongly support them but the proportions of general support (strongly or somewhat support) are statistically similar (Figure 20).

In Morocco, while majorities of both women (71%) and men (60%) strongly or somewhat support gender quotas, the proportion of men who strongly or somewhat oppose it (37%) is higher by 20 percentage points than the proportion of women who oppose it (17%). It must be noted too that three times as many Moroccan women (12%) than men (4%) say they don’t know if they support or oppose the system of gender quotas in Morocco (Figure 21). Again, this highlights the lack of knowledge on the gender quotas. There are no significant differences in opinions on gender quotas when breaking down results by age, education, or urban/rural settlement.

When comparing Moroccan women to Lebanese women, we find that slightly more Moroccan women (71%) than Lebanese women (67%) say they support gender quotas. However, the intensity of support among Lebanese women is higher: 59% say they strongly support gender quotas compared with 41% of Moroccan women. Lebanese men’s general support for quotas is similar to Moroccan men but when looking at those who answered “strongly support”, we find a large difference in responses: 54% of Lebanese men strongly support gender quotas compared with only 12% of Moroccan men.

