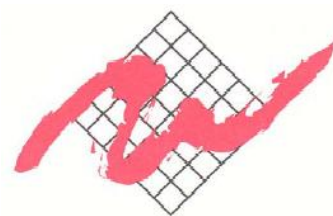


# The Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa (SWMENA) Project

Focus on Lebanon | Social Attitudes Toward Women  
Topic Brief

*A project by the International Foundation for Electoral  
Systems (IFES) and The Institute for Women's Policy  
Research (IWPR) with funding from the Canadian  
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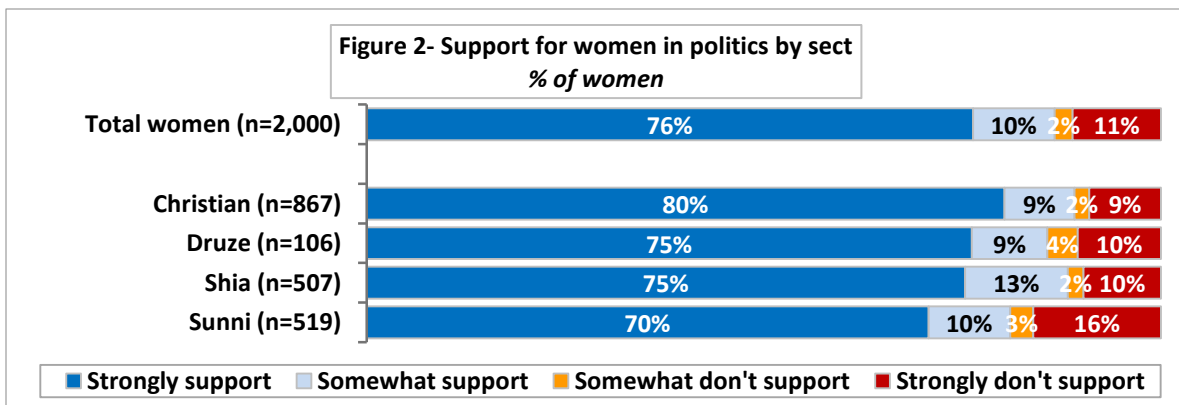
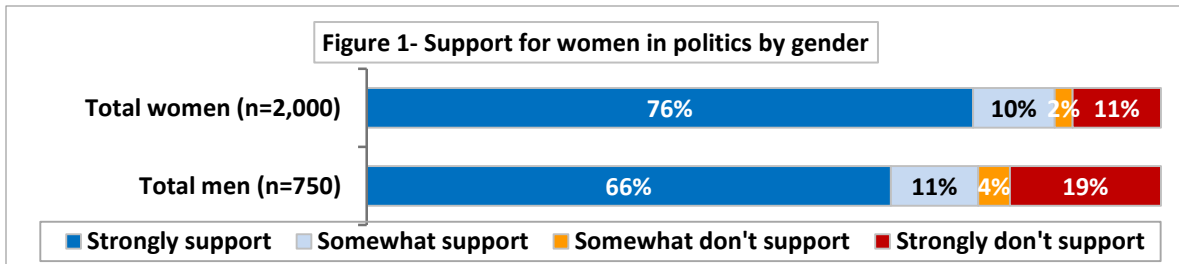


## SOCIAL ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN

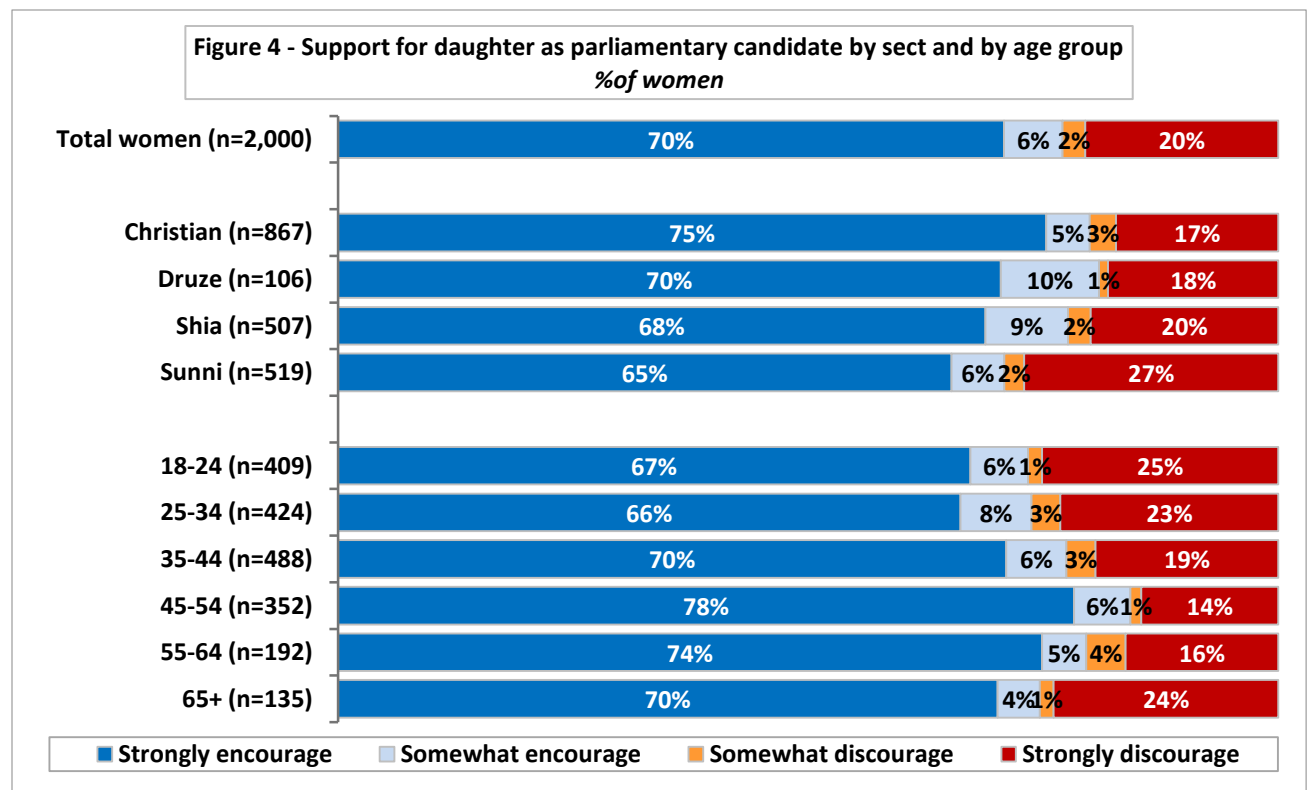
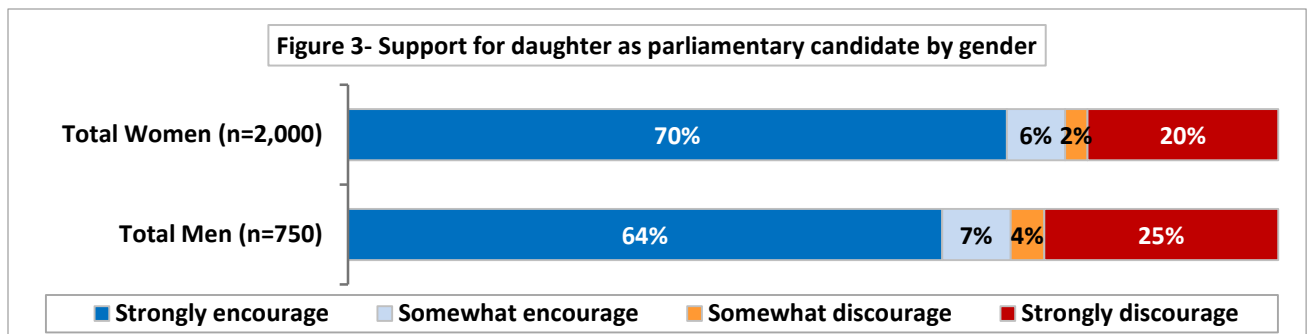
Before conducting the SWMENA survey, we designed a short survey that was completed by selected NGOs in Lebanon which work on several aspects of women’s issues. One of the main challenges identified by these groups has been the stereotypical view of women’s image in Lebanon in terms of their role in family and society. Consequently, we introduced a series of questions in the SWMENA survey to gauge social attitudes toward 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 society such as between genders and between women of different sects, education levels, and age groups.

### Opinions on Women’s Involvement in Politics & Decision-Making Positions

- Survey data suggests that there is a high level of support for women becoming involved in politics as candidates for office. Figure 1 shows that while a majority of men and women support women as political candidates, women are more likely than men to strongly/somewhat support women in politics (86% and 77% respectively). Figure 2 shows that women across sects support women’s involvement in politics; however, Christian women are slightly more likely to support women as political candidates than Sunni women (89% and 81% respectively). Interestingly, women 45 to 54 are more likely to strongly/somewhat support women in politics (89%) than younger women aged 18 to 24 (86%), aged 25 to 34 (84%), and aged 35 to 44 (84%). There is widespread support amongst women across all age groups, however, the variation in age groups could be attributed to the fact that the 25 to 44 age group in Lebanon generally correspond to the time of increased family responsibility, including marriage and raising children. The fact that many of them are at this family stage of their life could explain why women in these age groups are less enthusiastic about the participation of women in politics.



- When asked whether they would encourage their daughter (if they have one or supposing they have one) to become involved in politics, there is also strong support for a daughter to become involved at both a local and national level. Women are more likely to encourage a daughter to become involved in politics as a parliamentary candidate than men (77% and 71% respectively). Again, while a majority of women across sects say they would encourage a daughter to become involved in politics, Christian women are more likely to say they would encourage a daughter as a parliamentary candidate than Sunni women (80% and 71% respectively) and as a municipal candidate (81% and 72% respectively).
- Again, there are statistically significant differences between women of different age groups. Women aged 45-54 are more likely than younger women aged 18-24 and 25-34 to say they would strongly/somewhat encourage their daughter to run as a parliamentary candidate (84%, 73% and 74% respectively).



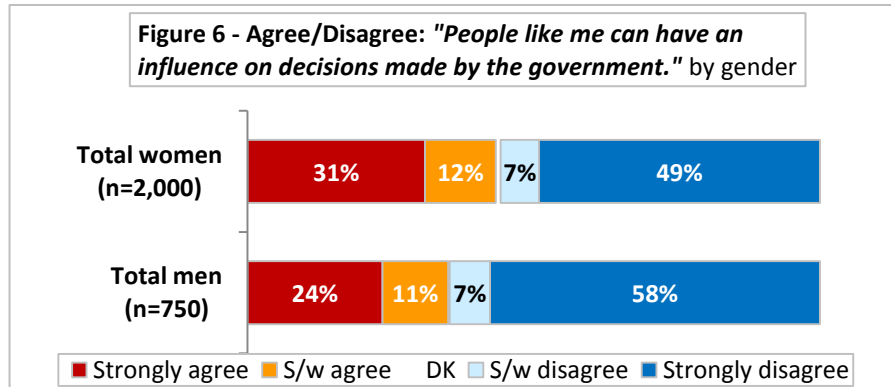
- Of those women who say they would not encourage a daughter to become involved in politics as a municipal or parliamentary candidate, reasons center more on issues they see with Lebanese politics in general and not gender-specific reasons. Reasons they would not encourage a daughter to become involved in politics include: not wanting their daughter to take part in political work (19%), fear for daughters security because politics is dangerous (13%), the belief that politics in Lebanon is full of lying/corruption/pressure/self-interest (10%), the belief that politics is only for men/men are better than women (10%), that political work is difficult/tiring/a source of anxiety (10%), that women are not qualified/educated (7%) or the belief that women must stay at home (5%).
- Of men who would discourage a daughter from becoming involved in politics, the first and third most-cited responses are based on traditional views of gender roles. The second most-cited reason, consistent with women’s third most-cited reason, is based on issues they see with Lebanese politics in general. Of men who would discourage a daughter from politics, 15% say it’s because women must stay at home, 14% say because politics in Lebanon is full of lying/corruption/pressure/self-interest, 13% say it is because politics is only for men/men are better than women, 12% say they do not want their daughter to take part in political work, 8% say it is because political work is difficult/tiring/a source of anxiety, and 7% fear for daughters security because politics is dangerous. Figure 5 shows the different order of reasons given by men and women for why they would discourage a daughter from involvement in politics.

Figure 5- “Why would you discourage your daughter to become involved in politics as a candidate?” % of cases by gender	Women (n=479)	Men (n=226)	Shows ranks according to citations by men
1) Do not want daughter to take part in political work	19%	12%	(4)
2) Fear for daughters security because politics is dangerous	13%	7%	(6)
3) Politics in Lebanon is full of lying/corruption/pressure/self-interest	10%	14%	(2)
4) Belief that politics is only for men/men are better than women	10%	13%	(3)
5) Political work is difficult/tiring/a source of anxiety	10%	8%	(5)
6) Women not qualified/educated	7%	6%	(7)
7) Women must stay home	5%	15%	(1)
8) Don’t know/Refused	21%	12%	

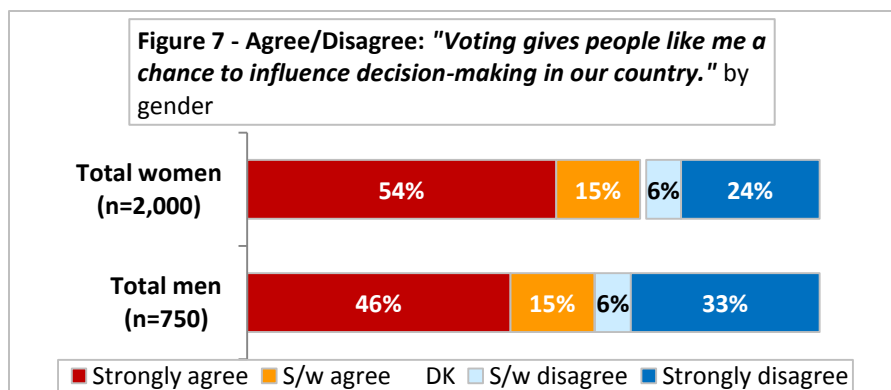
## Opinions on Voting, Influence & Decision-Making

Respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree with a series of statements about perceived influence of voting and decision-making in the government and women’s autonomy in decision-making.

- Women and men both disagree that, “People like me can have an influence on decisions made by the government.” Fifty-six percent of women strongly/somewhat disagree and 65% of men strongly/somewhat disagree (Figure 6). There is little variation in opinions across sects, age groups and education levels. This sentiment could be a manifestation of the dominant feeling amongst Lebanese that they have always been victims of foreign designs and corrupt politicians.

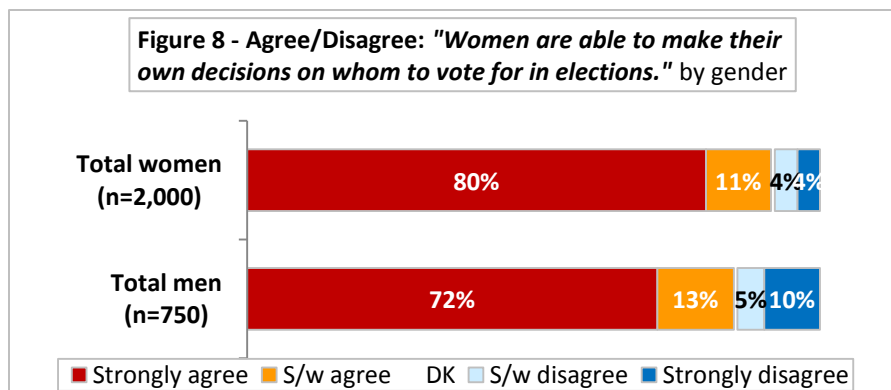


- But when framed in a way that asks specifically about whether they think voting gives them a chance to influence decision-making in their country respondents are more optimistic. More women than men agree that “Voting gives them a chance to influence decision-making” (69% and 61% respectively) (Figure 7). There is little variation in opinions across sects and education levels, with the exception of comparing opinions between women respondents with the lowest



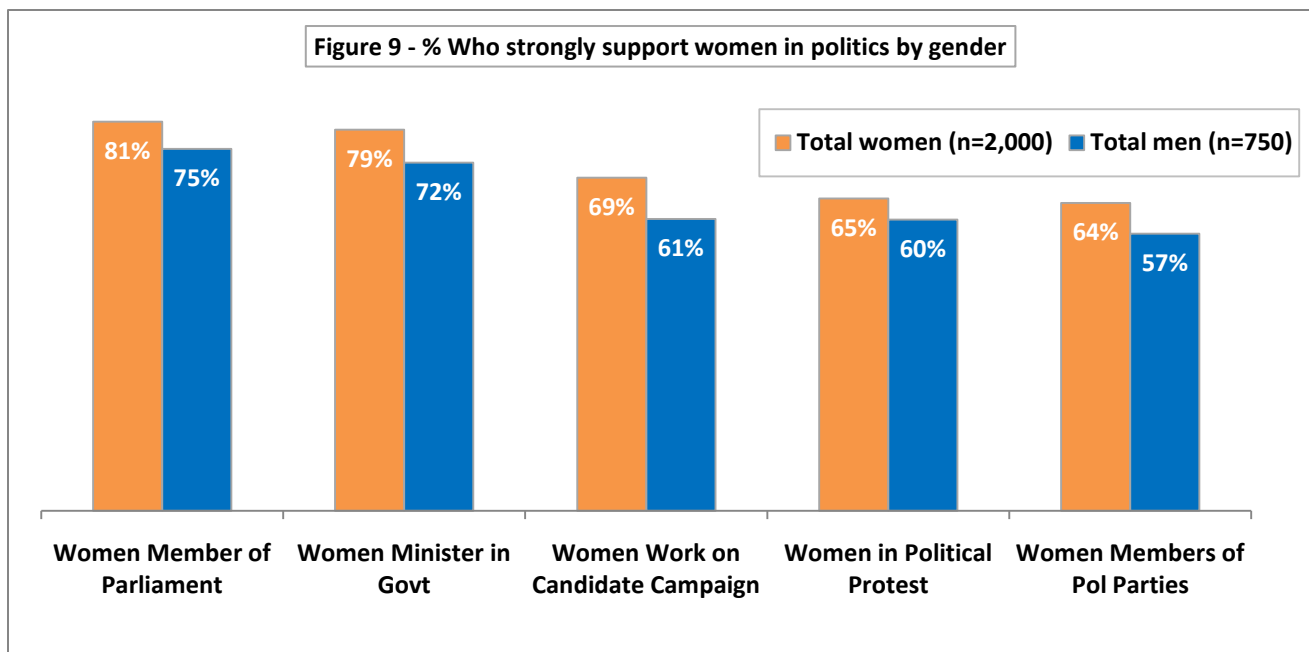
education levels and women with the highest education levels. Women with no formal education/incomplete primary education are less likely to strongly/somewhat agree that voting gives them influence than women with university degrees (55% and 71% respectively).

- When asked if they agree or disagree that “Women are able to make their own decision on whom to vote for in elections,” a majority of men and women, with more women than men, said they agree with this statement (91%



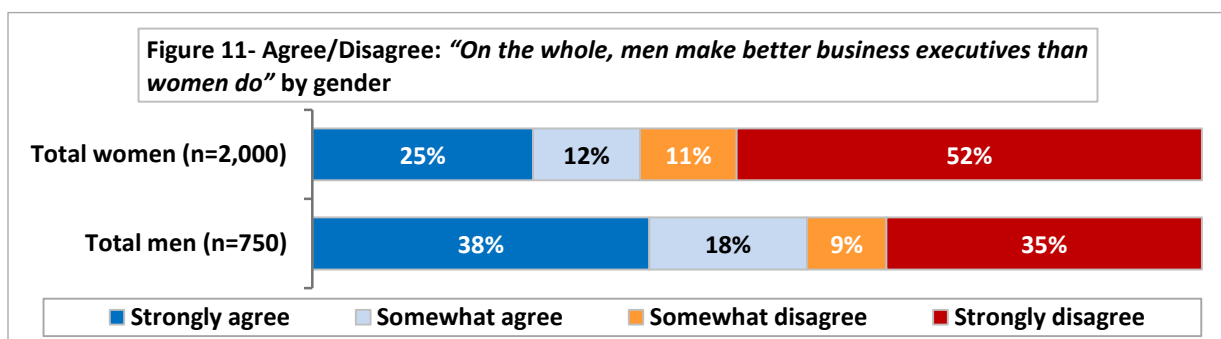
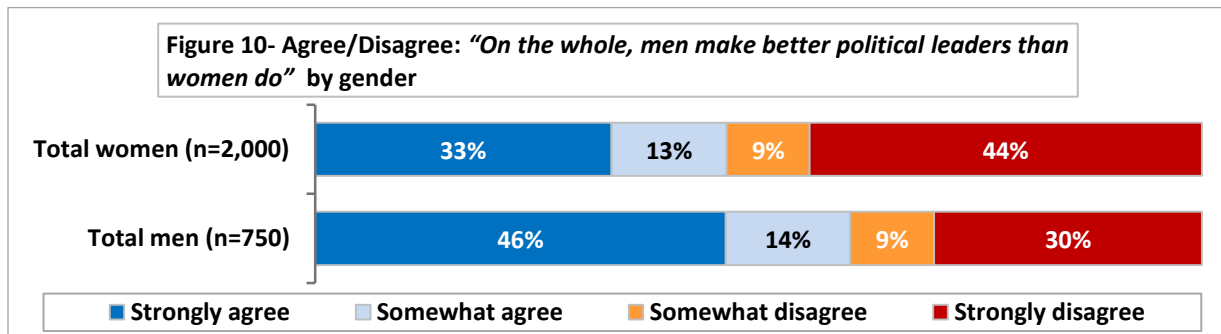
and 85% respectively) (Figure 8). A majority of women in each sect strongly agree that women make their own decisions when voting, with little variation in the percentages.

- When asked about women’s involvement in various aspects of politics, a majority of both men and women strongly agree that women should be involved in politics at a variety of levels (Figure 9). There are statistically significant differences, though, between the percentage of men who strongly agree and women who strongly agree with women in these roles. There are also statistically significant differences between men and women who strongly oppose that women should be members of parliament (18% men strongly oppose, 11% women strongly oppose), ministers in government (19% men, 11% women), work on candidate campaigns (25% men, 17% women), participate in political protests (28% men, 23% women), and be members of political parties (27% men, 21% women). While these percentages are fairly small, the difference between genders is significant when examining potential barriers to women’s participation in these types of activities.

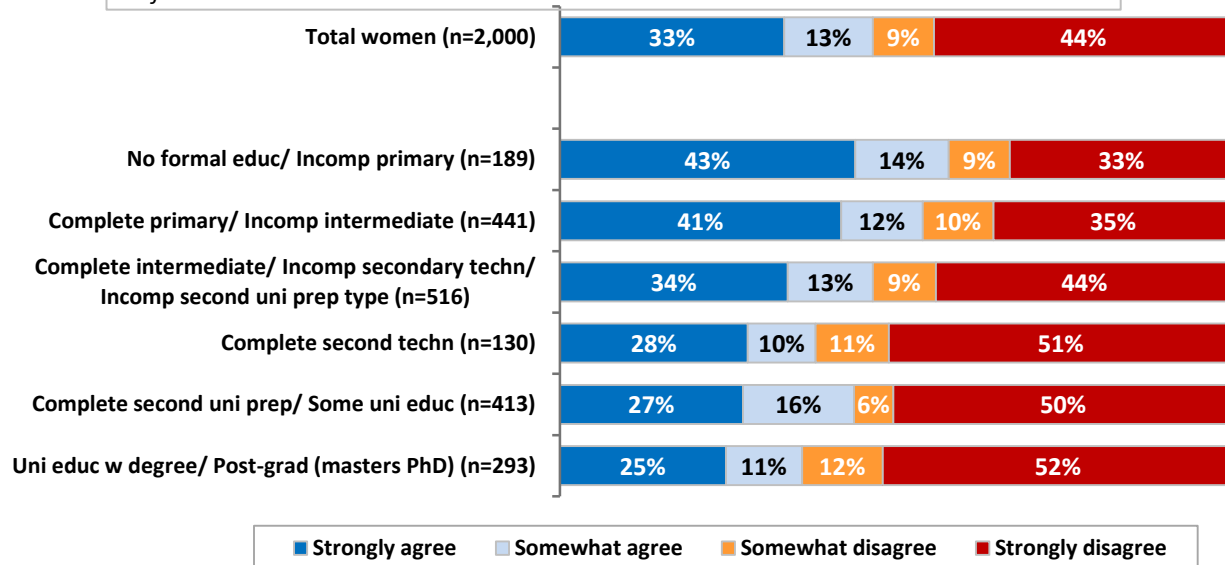


- When aggregating opinions on the involvement of women in different aspects of the political process, regardless of the type of process, we find that 61% of women support women’s involvement in all five of these political roles, 15% support women in four of these roles, 8% support women in three of these roles, 5% support women in two of these roles and 2% only support women in one of these roles. Meanwhile, 9% of women oppose the participation of women in all five roles. However, as seen below, opinions on women as political leaders differ when placed in the context of whether women or men make better political better leaders.

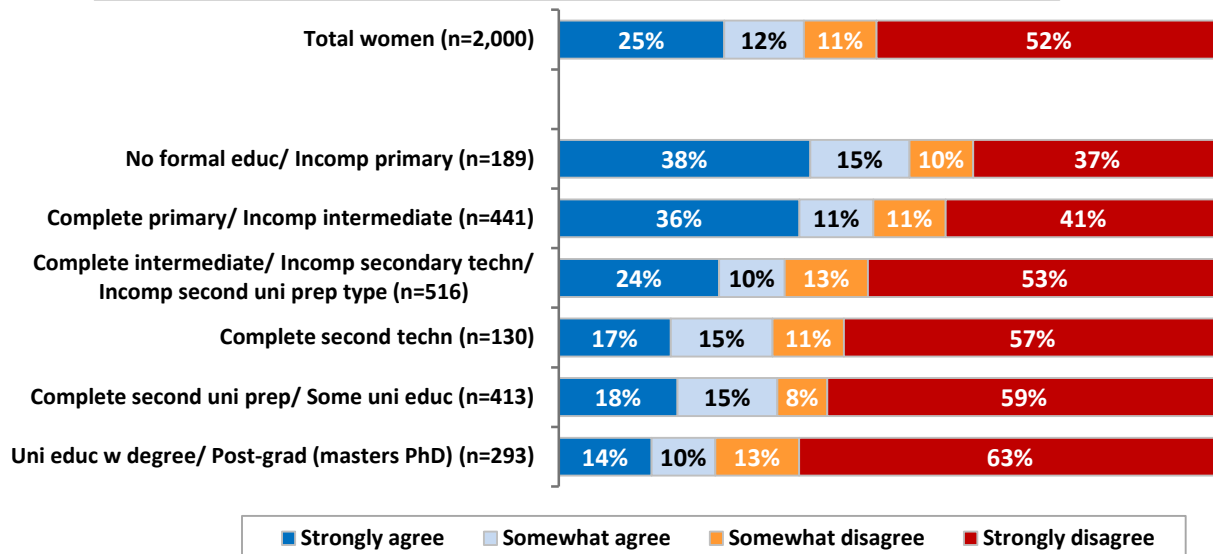
- When respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree with the statements “On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do” and “On the whole, men make better business executives than women do,” the data shows a significant gender difference in opinions on these questions (Figure 10 and 11). A majority of men agree that men are better political leaders (60%) and business executives (56%) than women whereas a majority of women disagree with these statements that men are better political leaders (53%) or better business executives (63%). Still, it must be noted that a significant share of women (46%) agree, “On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do” and “On the whole, men make better business executives than women do” (37%). This highlights the fact that this traditional stereotype of men being better in leadership roles continues to exist throughout Lebanese society, not just among men but among some women as well. Despite gender equality in educational opportunities, 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.
- By sect, Sunni and Shia women are more likely than Christian women to agree that men make better political leaders (56%, 53% and 36% respectively) or better business executives (44%, 41% and 31% respectively). By age, women age 25-34 are more likely to agree that men make better political leaders than women age 45-54 (51% and 39% respectively). There is little variation in opinions between other age groups on women as political leaders or as business executives. As we see in Figures 12 and 13, the percentage of women who disagree with both statements increases with education levels.



**Figure 12 - Agree/Disagree: “On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do” by education levels**  
% of women



**Figure 13 - Agree/Disagree: “On the whole, men make better business executives than women do” by education levels**  
% of women

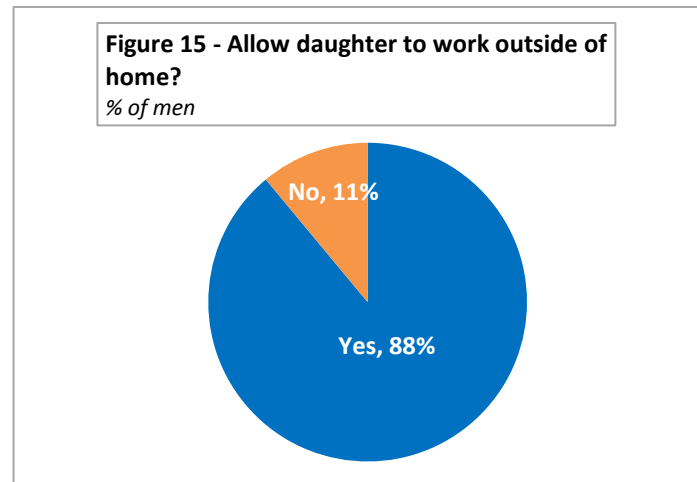
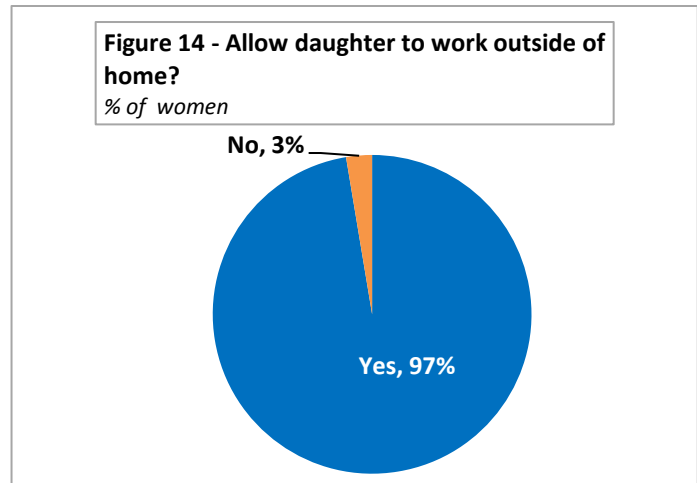




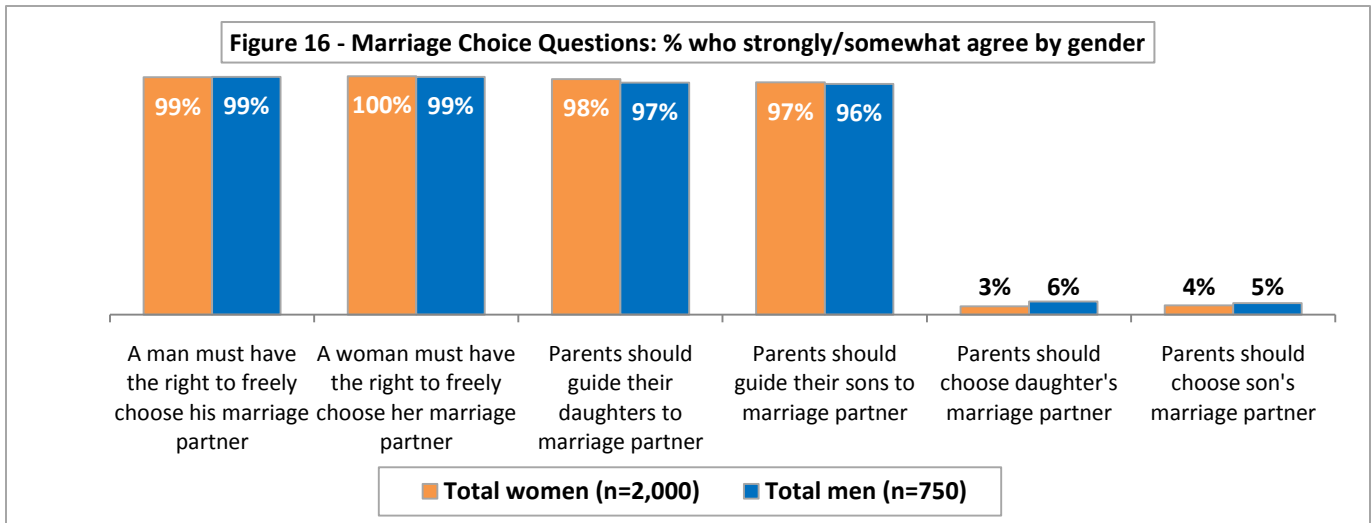
## Opinions on Rights and Autonomy of Women

*SWMENA survey respondents were also asked a series of questions aimed at understanding dynamics between women and men, husbands and wives, and parents and daughters in areas such as economic equality, women’s autonomy in decision-making and women’s freedom of movement.*

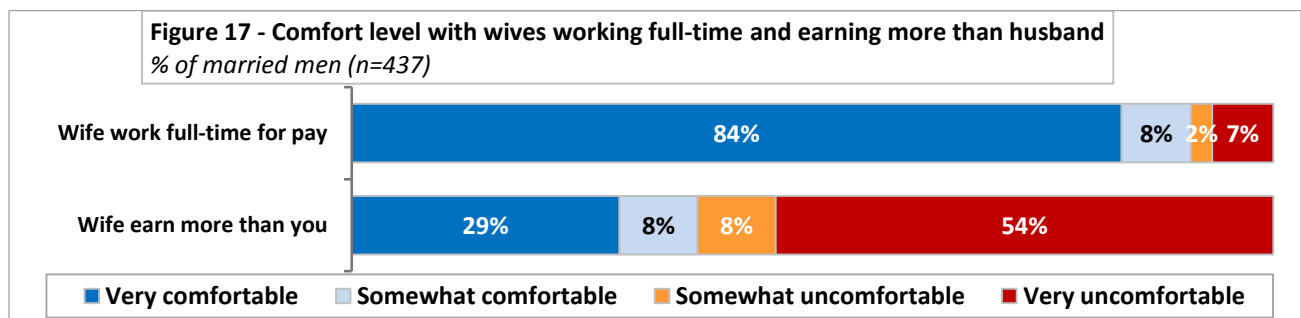
- Respondents were asked how they feel about a daughter working outside of the home. Figures 14 and 15 show that both a majority of women and men say they would allow their daughter to work outside the home if she chose to do so, but more women are more likely to say yes than men (88% and 97% respectively). Of the few women who say they would not allow their daughter work outside the home, 46% say it’s because women should tend to the home and children, 29% say it’s because it could be dangerous for them, 10% say there are no appropriate jobs for women and 4% say she should focus on getting married. Interestingly, men are more likely to say it’s because women should tend to the children (71% of men) and less likely to cite security as a concern (11% of men). This highlights the difference between men and women on the perception of gender roles.



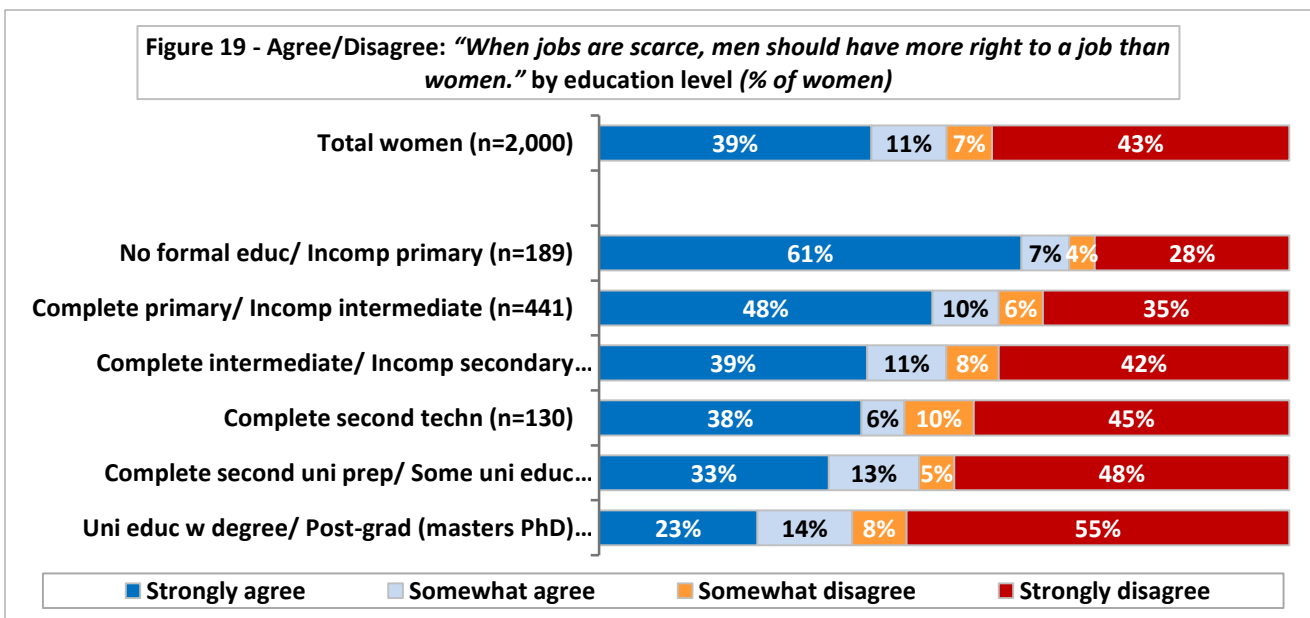
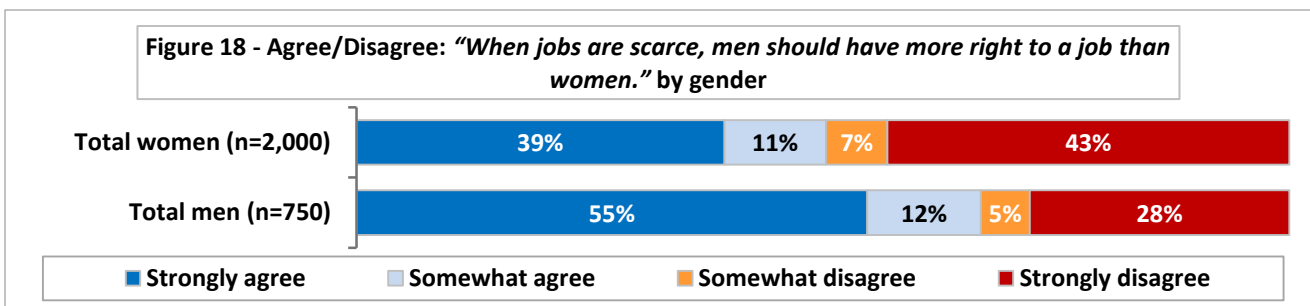
- When respondents were asked about women’s freedom in choosing marriage partners and parents involvement in that process, there is a sense from both men and women that women and men should freely choose their marriage partners with guidance from their parents, but not chosen by their parents (Figure 16). This shows the respect for women’s and men’s ability to make free decisions in regards to marriage, however, the strong family structure is reflected in the high majorities of both men and women who say that parents of both sons and daughters should have a role in at least guiding their children.



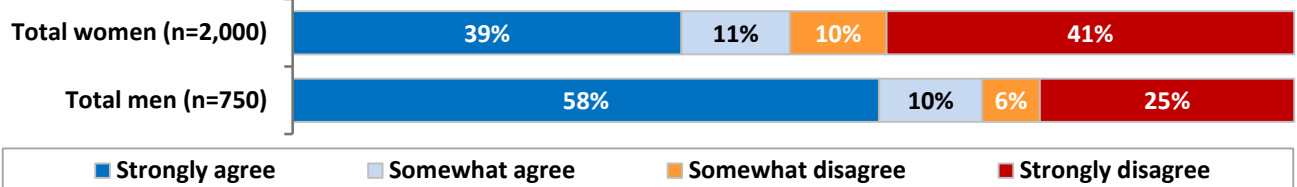
- Married men were asked about their comfort level with their wife working full-time with pay and with their wife earning more than them. A majority of married men say they would be very comfortable (84%) or somewhat comfortable (8%) with their wives working full-time for pay. However, 54% of married men say they would be very uncomfortable if their wife earns more than them. Still, 29% of married men say they would be very comfortable if their wife earned more than them (Figure 17).



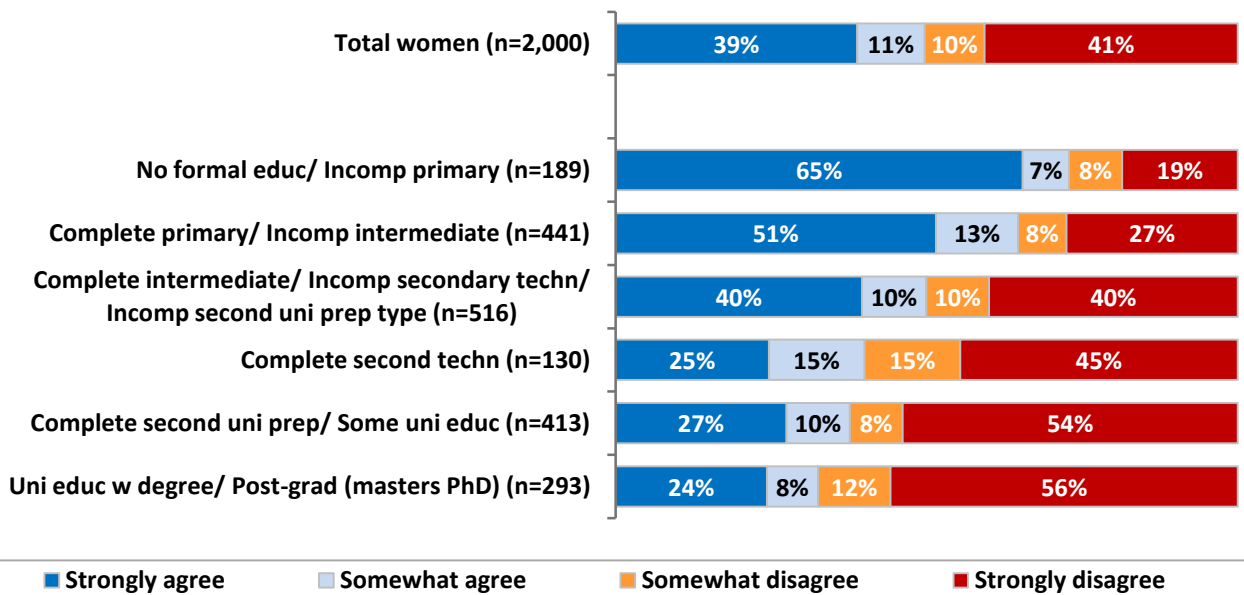
- Respondents were then asked a series of statements about different dynamics between women and men and husbands and wives and asked to what extent they agree or disagree. Both a majority of women and men (but more women than men) strongly/somewhat disagree that it is acceptable for men to have more than one wife (91% and 69% respectively). However, when looking at the percentage of women who agree it is acceptable for men to have more than one wife Sunni and Shia women are more likely to agree (17% and 14%) than Christian and Druze women (2% and 3%).
- On issues related to equal work opportunities and equal access to education as men and boys, a majority of both men and women agree that “Women and girls should have equal access to education as men and boys” (99% and 98% respectively) and “Women should have equal work opportunities as men” (98% and 94% respectively). However, when asked if men should have more right to jobs than women when jobs are scarce (Figures 18 and 19) and if a good wife should obey her husband even if she disagrees (Figures 20 and 21), a majority of men agree, but women are split between agreeing and disagreeing (Figures 18 and 20). The difference between men and women on these issues may be because men accept equal opportunities for women, but not if it means being above him in status or social/professional prestige and not if it means shifting the power balance in the household between husbands and wives. Also seen in Figures 19 and 21, there are variations in opinions amongst women of different education levels on whether they agree or disagree with these two statements. The higher the education level of the woman respondent, the less likely they are to agree with either of these statements.



**Figure 20 - Agree/Disagree: "A good wife should obey her husband even if she disagrees." by gender**



**Figure 21 - Agree/Disagree: "A good wife should obey her husband even if she disagrees." by education levels (% of women)**



- Finally, in order to examine the level of control women feel they have over their destiny, we read respondents the statement, "Some people believe that individuals can decide their own destiny, while others think that it is impossible to escape a predetermined fate. Please tell me which comes closest to your view on this scale." Respondents then ranked their viewpoint on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means "everything is determined by fate" and 10 means "people shape their fate themselves." We found that more women fall on the self-determination side of the scale (61%) rather than the fate side (39%) (Figure 22). There is a statistically significant difference showing that more men than women rank themselves at the highest two levels on the self-determination side of the scale, as illustrated in Figures 22 and 23. Still, the average rank of both men and women are similar, indicating a similar outlook between genders. It is interesting to note when comparing average ranks on this scale there are variations between women of different sects (Figure 24).

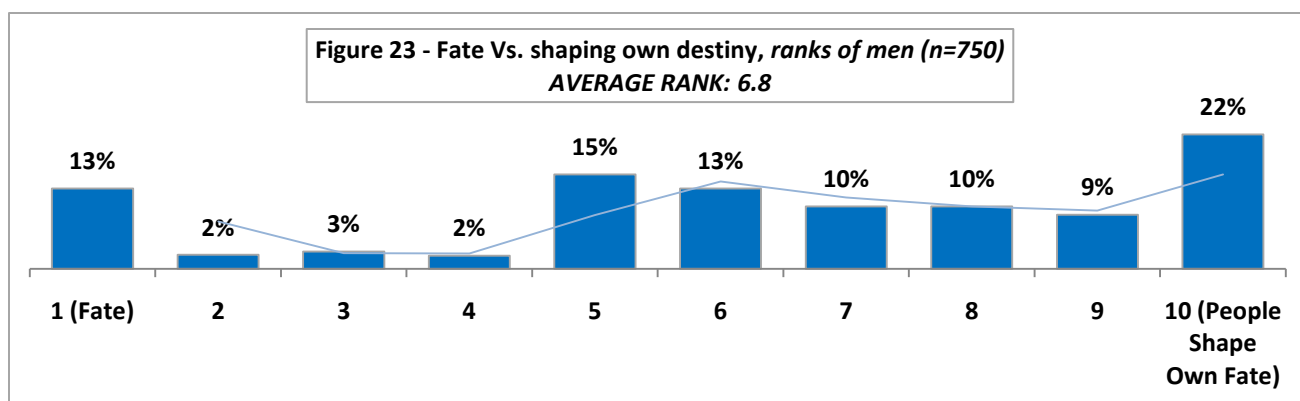
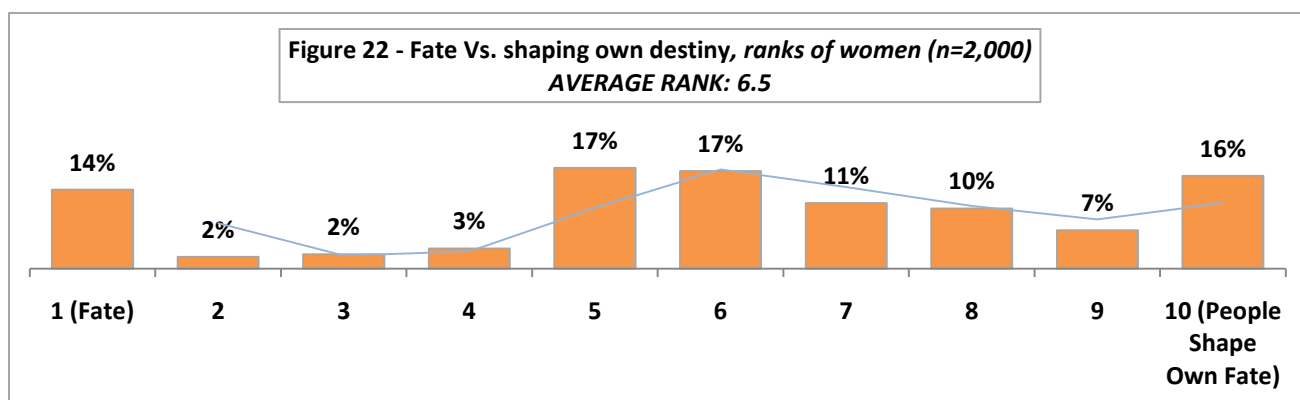


Figure 24 - Fate Vs. Shaping Own Destiny Average Ranks of Women by Sect	Average Rank
1) Shia (n=507)	7.08
2) Christian (n=867)	6.62
3) Druze (n=106)	5.95
4) Sunni (n=519)	5.84