

*Public Opinion Data and Political and Legal Reform Opportunities for Women in Yemen, Morocco and Lebanon*

**Contact Information of Co-Authors**

<p>Co-Author 1: <b>Lauren Serpe</b> 1850 K St, NW; Fifth Floor Washington, DC 20006; (202) 350-6789 <a href="mailto:Lserpe@ifes.org">Lserpe@ifes.org</a></p> <p><b>Brief bio:</b> Lauren Serpe is a Research Officer with the Applied Research Center at the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) in Washington, DC. Lauren manages both quantitative and qualitative research projects at IFES, including national pre-election and post-election public opinion surveys, special population surveys, focus groups, and evaluations of IFES programming. Since joining IFES in 2007, Lauren has conducted fieldwork in Kosovo, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Lebanon, Paraguay, Morocco, Tunisia, Liberia, and the United States. Lauren is involved in the entire survey process from research strategy development, to questionnaire design, fieldwork implementation, data analysis, and presentation of survey results. Prior to joining IFES, Lauren worked with the Institute for Social and Economic Development, a refugee technical assistance organization. Lauren received an MA in International Politics from American University in Washington, DC, and a BS in Journalism and Strategic Communications from the University of Kansas. She is a native English speaker and is fluent in Spanish.</p>	<p>Co-Author 2: <b>Rola Abdul-Latif;</b> 1850 K St, NW; Fifth Floor Washington, DC 20006; (202) 350-6741 <a href="mailto:Rabdullatif@ifes.org">Rabdullatif@ifes.org</a></p> <p><b>Brief bio:</b> Rola Abdul-Latif specializes in designing and implementing public opinion and Monitoring &amp; Evaluation surveys. As IFES' Senior Research Specialist, Rola supports IFES' core functions in election assistance by conducting surveys to track trends in opinions on socio-political issues, to inform election commissions about voter knowledge and readiness, to evaluate the effectiveness of civic and voter education programs, and to support gender programming aimed to enhance women's political, economic and social participation. Since joining IFES in 2007, Rola has managed a variety of research projects in different countries including Armenia, Bangladesh, DR Congo, Egypt, Georgia, Kosovo, Morocco, Malawi, Tajikistan, Tunisia, and Yemen. Rola played a lead role in implementing the fieldwork and conducting the analysis for the IFES-IWPR Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa (SWMENA) project. Before joining IFES, Rola worked as Research Manager for InterMedia, implementing complex media surveys in the MENA region. Rola is a native Arabic speaker and is fluent in French.</p>
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Abstract

Gender-focused surveys performed by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) in Yemen, Morocco and Lebanon reveal the majority of both men and women are open to certain key political and legal reforms that would likely improve the status of women in their countries. IFES will present analysis that builds on last year's paper by including data from the Yemen survey. The paper will focus on data related to political and legal reforms in light of the current political environment in the Middle East and North Africa. The key findings point to public support for several reforms that would lead to an enhancement in women's rights, yet also highlights potential barriers.

**Keywords:** Women, gender, Middle East, North Africa, political, reforms

## I. Project Overview, Survey Specifications & Paper Outline

### **Project Overview**

As people across the Middle East and North Africa continue to protest for greater freedom and equality under repressive regimes, women have an unprecedented opportunity to capture some of the newly created political space and ensure gender rights are integrated into political and legal reforms.

The Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa (SWMENA) project, funded by the Canadian International Development Agency, gathered data on 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). 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. To ensure that data collected under the SWMENA project would be most useful to local stakeholders, the project engaged local women-focused NGOs and researchers in identifying gaps in existing data and defining data needs. These women were consulted through in-person discussions and a short needs-assessment survey.

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 core comparative section 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), access to healthcare, attitudes towards the role of women in society and domestic violence. The country-specific modules cover opinions

towards different laws and rights that are debated in each country such as gender quotas, personal status laws in Lebanon, the reformed family law in Morocco, and early marriage in Yemen. Analysis of all data can be found on [www.swmena.org](http://www.swmena.org).

While women in these countries often experience similar obstacles to their advancement, each country presents a different set of challenges for women. The Moroccan Family Law, or Moudawana, that was introduced in Morocco in 2004 is often referenced as one of the most progressive laws on women's rights in the Middle East because it grants women comprehensive rights across various areas of life. Even though Lebanon does not have such a law, women in Lebanon seem to have more societal support for gender equality. In the case of Yemen, some findings confirm the traditional view of women's role in society held by men and women alike, however, some findings point to support for legal reforms that would be a positive step towards women's rights, such as support for a minimum marriage age for girls.

### **Survey Specifications**

The Lebanon survey fieldwork took place from August 7 until August 29, 2009 and included 2,000 women 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. The Yemen survey fieldwork took place from July 5 until July 25, 2010 and included 2,000 women and 500 men (see table 1). In all three countries, 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. In each country, local survey firms were selected after a competitive bidding process. They conducted fieldwork under guidance and supervision of IFES. In Yemen, women interviewers would interview

women only. In Morocco, women interviewers mostly interviewed only women and in Lebanon both male and female interviewers interviewed respondents of either gender.

Survey Specs	Women sample size	Men sample size	Target population	Fieldwork dates	Weights
LEBANON	<b>2,000</b> ( <i>m.o.e</i> = ± 2.19)	<b>750</b> ( <i>m.o.e</i> = ± 3.58)	<b>Adult population (18+)</b>	<b>Aug 7-29, 2009</b>	<b>No weights applied</b>
MOROCCO	<b>2,000</b> ( <i>m.o.e</i> = ± 2.19)	<b>500</b> ( <i>m.o.e</i> = ± 4.38)	<b>Adult population (18+)</b>	<b>Dec 9, 2009 - Jan 21, 2010</b>	<b>Age &amp; urban-rural weights applied</b>
YEMEN	<b>2,000</b> ( <i>m.o.e</i> = ± 2.19)	<b>500</b> ( <i>m.o.e</i> = ± 4.38)	<b>Adult population (18+)</b>	<b>Jul 5 – Jul 25, 2010</b>	<b>Regional weights applied</b>

## Paper Outline

For some findings, this paper takes a comparative approach, but opinion data on potential law reforms in each country will also be presented. The paper will begin by covering data on how women are perceived as political leaders in each country by men and by women of different demographic groups. Then data on civic and political participation and representation, and opinions on law reforms such as gender quotas, the Family Law in Morocco, and early marriage in Yemen will be covered.

## II. Perceptions of Women in Politics and Leadership Roles

In the pre-survey responses from women-focused NGO groups in Lebanon, Morocco and Yemen, one of the main challenges identified is the stereotypical view of women's image in their countries in terms of their role in family and society; mainly a 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 their countries. We begin this paper with attitudes on women in politics and in leadership positions to gain an understanding of attitudinal hurdles women may face.

## **Women as Political Candidates**

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. In Yemen, men and women support women as political candidates in equal measure (64%). Comparatively, men in Morocco and Yemen show less definitive support of women as political candidates than men in Lebanon. However, women in Yemen also show less definitive support for women as political candidates than the women in the other two countries (Figure 1).

In Morocco and Yemen, support increases as women's educational attainment increases. Support is also higher among younger age groups and support lessens in older age groups. Additionally, women in urban areas are more supportive of women in politics than women in small towns or rural areas. In Morocco, a majority of women across these demographic groups support women as candidates for office. In Yemen, a majority of women support women as candidates, with the exception of women age 55 and older where only a plurality express support for women in politics, but over one-third say they don't know. This uncertainty could be due to the fact that women aged 55 and older are generally less educated than younger Yemeni women. In Lebanon, strong majorities of women across demographic groups support women as candidates, but Christian women are slightly more likely to support women as political candidates than Sunni women.

## **Women in Other Political Positions**

Respondents were also asked about opinions towards women in other political 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. In Yemen, pluralities or majorities of men and women strongly/somewhat supporting women working in these political roles and this support is a positive sign. This attitudinal support show decent proportions of Yemeni men and women are amenable to women in these political roles and could eventually allow an opening for women in portions of the political landscape.

Comparing men in these countries, there is more definitive support of women's involvement in these areas in Lebanon than in Morocco and Yemen, possibly indicating a more entrenched acceptance of women in these roles in Lebanon than in Morocco or Yemen, even though Morocco has a parliamentary gender quota in place and Lebanon does not. When counting opinions in Yemen on the involvement of women in these five political roles we find that despite 26% of women and 30% of men not supporting women in any of these roles, 57% of women and 50% of men support women in three or more of these political roles (Figure 2). In terms of Morocco, 93% of women and 74% of men support women in 3 or more of these political roles and in Lebanon 84% of women and 76% of men support women in 3 or more of these roles. Support may be lower overall in Yemen than the other two countries, but just over half of both genders say they support women in at least three or more roles.

While men and women in these countries believe women should be involved in politics at various levels, men in all three countries continue to view men as better political leaders and even a sizeable share of women believe this as well. When respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree with the statement, "*On the whole, men make better political leaders than*

*women do*” the data shows a significant gender difference in opinions within Lebanon and Morocco, yet no difference in opinion between genders in Yemen. In Morocco and Lebanon, a majority of men agree that men are better political leaders (67% Morocco, 60% Lebanon) than women, whereas a majority of women disagree with this statement (55% Morocco, 53% Lebanon). Still, it must be noted that a significant share of women agree men make better political leaders than women do (35% Morocco, 46% Lebanon). In Yemen, strong majorities of both men and women alike, in similar proportions, agree men make better political leaders and business executives than women (88% of men and 84% of women) (Figure 3). In Lebanon, despite women’s higher educational attainment related to Morocco, women are more likely to agree that men make better political and business leaders. This confirms the traditional stereotype of men being better in leadership roles continues to exist throughout Moroccan, Yemeni, 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. Of course a dearth of women currently in these leadership positions is also likely to be contributing to the perception of men as better leaders. In terms of advocacy, this perception among not only men but women as well poses a huge attitudinal hurdle for women’s advocates to overcome in their societies.

In Conclusion, women in Lebanon usually have higher support than Lebanese men for women in politics, 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. Despite advances in legal rights, the “traditional” view of women in Morocco may continue to hamper efforts to advance women’s status. Similarly in Yemen, both majorities



of men and women support women as political candidates in equal measure, however only four in ten men and women strongly support this notion. A commonality between countries is the persistent stereotype that men are better in leadership roles. In Morocco, Lebanon, and Yemen majorities of men agree, and even significant shares of women also agree (and in Yemen a majority of women agree), that men make better political leaders. This pervasive perception by both men and some women in these societies may tend to keep more men in these positions and can hinder women from attaining these types of leadership positions.

### III. Civic and Political Participation

The active engagement of women in the civic and political spheres is a prerequisite for a healthy sense of citizenship and democracy. 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. Over the spring and summer of 2011, many democracy protests have occurred in Morocco and Yemen, in which many women have participated. The levels of civic engagement would most likely be higher if the survey were fielded now rather than in 2009 and 2010, particularly because of men and women's participation in political protests and other forms of civic activism through social media. Nevertheless, this data still gives a general idea of the level of civic engagement of women in these countries and particularly in comparison to their male counterparts. Additionally, the data can serve as an interesting baseline in these countries.

To examine civic engagement, we asked whether respondents had in the past expressed opinions on social and political issues by taking part in different activities such as: participating in protests or demonstrations, contacting public officials (at any level of government), signing a petition, contributing to a blog or website, or calling in a radio or TV

show. We find that Moroccan women are less active than Moroccan men, Yemeni women are much less active than Yemeni men, and both Moroccan women and Yemeni women are much less active than Lebanese women (Figure 4). Lebanese men are slightly more likely than Lebanese women to have taken part in different activities to express their opinions, but the disparity in activism between Lebanese women and Lebanese men is much less prominent than the one seen between Moroccan men and women and Yemeni men and women.

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 and 6% of Yemeni women (Figure 4). Moroccan and Yemeni women's participation in different activities to express their views is low both in absolute terms and relative to their male counterparts. In aggregate terms, 89% of Moroccan women have never taken part in any of these activities compared to 59% of Moroccan men and a staggering 95% of Yemeni women have not taken part in any of these activities compared to 58% of Yemeni men. In all three countries, the level of engagement increases with educational attainment. For women with a primary education or less, the level of engagement is almost nonexistent.

The share of Yemeni women who report taking part in any activity is almost negligible and the sweeping majority of women are not even willing to engage in these activities in the future. This data reflects the well-known social limitations on women's movement in Yemen and their subsequent constrained ability to interact with others in the public sphere. Since women's ability to participate in society hinges on how free or restricted she feels to leave her home, another section of the survey asked how free they are to leave the house without permission: only 36% of Yemeni women say they are completely (21%) or somewhat (15%) free and 62% say

they are somewhat (15%) or completely restricted (47%) in leaving their house without permission. Married or widowed women have more freedom, as do older women and working women. In addition, asked about support/opposition for women moving about without a male companion, or mahram, 91% of women and 98% of men oppose this. This data points to a lack of freedom of movement on behalf of women and an obstacle for women in terms of being civically active, however, as some local women's advocates have been reporting this year, women have been increasingly active in the recent protests in other behind the scenes ways: actively using social media by blogging, tweeting and posting updates about political developments on Facebook or engaging in more traditional supportive activities like providing food to protesters, etc.

### **Political Participation through Voting**

While civic engagement is relatively limited, voting in the elections, which is a more direct form of political participation, is higher. In the SWMENA survey, respondents were asked about their participation in the most recent elections that took place in their country. Since we are comparing participation in parliamentary elections in Lebanon and presidential/local election in Yemen to municipal elections in Morocco, the political dynamics are quite different and we would thus not compare women across the three countries but would rather just look at participation within each country and compare women to men.

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 (Figures 5). Also interestingly, there is

no statistical difference in women's participation in elections when looking at urban vs. rural areas or when looking at voter turnout by sect.

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 5). Women in rural areas (51%) are more likely to vote than women in urban areas (40%). The same pattern is observed for men. It is also noteworthy that women's participation in the elections is higher for those with no formal education than it is for women with a primary education or higher. Indeed, while a majority (54%) of women with no education have participated in the municipal elections, only one-third of women with a primary education or higher have participated in these elections. Voter turnout is in fact at its lowest level for those with a secondary education or higher (31%). The same relationship holds for men. When consulting women in country, it is suspected that generally women in rural areas with less education are often more politically mobile because they are more easily swayed by political parties to participate, whereas educated urban women more often have a distrust of the political system.

In Yemen, there is indeed a gender gap in voter participation, however, the difference is not as dramatic as the one seen in terms of civic engagement. Furthermore, the high levels of voter turnout could be attributed to the fact that the 2006 elections were for both local councils and presidential elections, meaning that the mobilization of voters was at a high capacity. A majority of 61% of women say they voted in the September 2006 presidential and local elections, with more men saying they turned out to vote (86%) (Figure 6). When looking at women's voter

turnout by residential density, we do not find differences in voter turnout between urban areas and rural areas (60%), however, voter turnout is slightly higher in small towns/large villages (67%). This could be due to the ease of mobilizing women to go vote in small towns due to the small area size, high population levels, and better road infrastructure compared to villages which tend to have harder roads and more scattered residential units.

By educational attainment, we find that Yemeni women with a secondary education or higher have higher voter turnout compared with women in other educational categories: a full 82% of women with a university education or higher have voted in the September 2006 elections and 67% of women with a secondary education reported voting as well. Less than a majority of women who have completed an intermediate education (48%) have voted in these elections whereas more women with a primary education or lower (60%) have voted in these elections. This is an opposite pattern to what was observed in Morocco. In terms of age groups, women 35-44 have the highest voter turnout with 68% saying they voted in the September 2006 elections. Women 45-54 also had a relatively high turnout (65%) while younger women 21-24 have the lowest voter turnout at 51%.

#### IV. Opinions on Legal Reforms: Gender Quotas and Country-Specific Reforms

As previously stated, 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 eliminate discrimination against women and enhance their participation in the social and political realms. This section begins with data on awareness of gender quotas in each country and support for gender quotas in each country, followed by opinions on law reforms unique to each country: a potential minimum marriage age law in Yemen, the existing Family Law in Morocco, and the civil marriage law in Lebanon.

## **Overview of Gender Quotas in Lebanon, Morocco & Yemen**

The low level of women's political representation is a well-known deficit in much of the Arab world and 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.

### **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, very few Moroccans are even aware of gender quotas. Of those aware of quotas, support is relatively high among women but is at best cautious among men. This raises questions about the top-down approach that put the quotas in place in Morocco. It also highlights the need for coupling legislative reforms with awareness campaigns that would ensure a stronger grassroots support for these much-needed reforms. In Yemen, where there is no gender quota system in place, knowledge about quotas is limited but the data

suggests that there is ample support on behalf of both men and women and that the level of support is higher among those with a higher awareness of the concept of quotas.

Very few Moroccans are familiar with the notion of gender quotas<sup>1</sup>. When asked how much they knew about gender quotas<sup>2</sup>, 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 8). 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. Findings highlight a major deficit in knowledge about gender quotas among the Moroccan population and suggest 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.

### **Knowledge of Gender Quotas in Yemen**

Currently, the level of female representation in the Yemeni parliament is extremely low, standing at a tiny 0.3% of seats (1 woman out of a total of 301 seats). Female representation on local government councils is similarly limited with women occupying less than 1% of seats. Survey results indicate that few Yemenis seem to have heard of the notion of gender quotas. And awareness is much lower among women than among men. Indeed, when respondents were asked if they had heard about "the notion of reserving a share for women in parliament and in elected bodies so that women have a specific percentage of seats," a sweeping majority of women (80%)

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<sup>1</sup> 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. In the Yemen SWMENA survey, we also included a knowledge question, but we asked all respondents about support of quotas. In Lebanon, respondents were only asked about support of quotas.

<sup>2</sup> 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?"

said no they had not heard about it versus 20% who said yes (Figure 9). Twice as many men (40%) as women said “yes” they heard about the notion of gender quotas, yet this leaves a 60% majority of Yemeni men who have not heard about gender quotas. The higher level of awareness of gender quotas among men could be explained by the wider access that men have to political debates and the media than women do.

When breaking down the data on knowledge of gender quotas by different demographic characteristics of Yemeni women, we find that women with higher educational attainment have higher-than-average awareness of gender quotas: nearly four in 10 women who have a secondary education or higher have heard about the concept of gender quotas. However, even for women who have university education or higher, the share of women who have heard of gender quotas is less than a majority (only 40%). Younger women ages 18-34 are slightly more knowledgeable of gender quotas than women in older age groups, however, only a quarter of these young women have heard of the notion of gender quotas while the remaining 75% have not heard of it. Women who are very or somewhat interested in matters of politics and government are about three times more likely to have heard of the notion of gender quotas than women who are not too interested or not at all interested in matters of politics and government (38% vs. 12% respectively) (Figure 10). These findings show there is very little knowledge of the notion of gender quotas in Yemen, however, knowledge of quotas increases with educational attainment. Perhaps by increasing knowledge of quotas, this could help the cause of women’s NGOs and activists trying to push for the introduction of quotas in elected bodies in Yemen.



## **Support for Gender Quotas in Lebanon, Morocco & Yemen**

Respondents in all three countries 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 and Yemeni women. Again we see a slight gender split in opinions in Morocco, whereas in Lebanon and Yemen 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 11). 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 10). Again, this highlights the lack of knowledge on the gender quotas. 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.

In Yemen, respondents were asked if they personally support or oppose “a system that would reserve seats for women in parliament and in local councils in Yemen.” Majorities of both men (57%) and women (58%) said they strongly or somewhat support gender quotas in Yemen. Meanwhile, 39% of men said they strongly or somewhat oppose gender quotas versus 24% of women. It must be noted that nearly one in five women did not know or refused to answer the question. When excluding those who have not heard of the notion of gender quotas and comparing men and women’s responses again, we observe a wide gender discrepancy in the levels of support for gender quotas. Among women who are aware of gender quotas, a sweeping 89% majority say they strongly (65%) or somewhat (24%) support a system of quotas in Yemen. This is higher by 22 percentage points than the share of men aware of quotas who strongly (43%) or somewhat (24%) support the quota system. More than three times as many men (32%) as women (9%) oppose the system of gender quotas in Yemen (Figure 11).

These findings in Yemen suggest that there is no substantial opposition to gender quotas on behalf of either men or women. It is also noteworthy that opinions of quotas are much more favorable when women have knowledge of the notion of quotas: support for quotas goes from 58% for women as a whole to 89% for women with knowledge of quotas. This shows that increasing awareness of gender quotas might go a long way in rallying Yemeni women around this cause. Among men, support for gender quotas also increases as knowledge levels increase: the level of support grows from 57% for men as a whole to 67% for men aware of quotas, but the difference is not as notable as the one seen for female respondents. The data also shows that as women’s educational attainment increases, the intensity of support for gender quotas increases as well. Indeed, a 51% majority of women with a secondary education or higher say

they strongly support gender quotas. This compares to just 32% of women with an intermediate education or lower who say they strongly support gender quotas.

### **Yemen Opinions on Introducing a Minimum Marriage Law**

The problem of early marriage and forced marriage remains a hotly debated issue in Yemen. Early marriage remains a widespread phenomenon in Yemen and is believed to be one of the main causes leading to high maternal mortality rates. Both girls and boys tend to marry young in Yemen, however, the implications of early marriage for women is understandably more serious due to the prevalence of teenage pregnancies which are most often coupled with short birth intervals, high fertility rates, and inadequate reproductive healthcare. Numerous women's NGOs are trying to push for the introduction of a minimum marriage age at 17. In the SWMENA survey, respondents were asked a series of questions about their opinions of the minimum acceptable marriage age for girls and boys and whether they supported a law that would set a minimum legal marriage age.

Given the prevalence of early marriage in Yemen, we used survey findings to examine whether Yemeni women believe they got married too young (relative to what they believe is the minimum acceptable marriage age) or whether their opinions on minimum marriage ages correspond more or less with their own experiences. Consequently, we looked at married women and calculated a "marriage age differential"<sup>3</sup> by subtracting their actual marriage age (the age at which they got married the first time) from the age they gave as the minimum acceptable marriage age for girls. The data suggests that a relatively large proportion of women (64%) were actually married at an age younger than what is in their view the minimum acceptable marriage

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<sup>3</sup> The "marriage age differential" is defined here as being the woman's actual marriage age on her first marriage minus the minimum acceptable marriage age for girls that she gave in answer to the following question: "What is the minimum acceptable age for a girl to get married?"

age for girls. In fact, 23% of married women were married at an age that is at least five years younger than what is in their view the minimum acceptable marriage age for girls. Nearly 16% of married women in our sample were married at the age that corresponds to what they believe is the minimum acceptable marriage age for girls and 20% of women have been married at an age older than what is in their view the minimum acceptable age for marriage. However, only 5% have been married at an age that is five years or older than the minimum acceptable marriage age for girls (Figure 13).

Respondents were next asked specifically about whether they supported the adoption of “a law that would set a minimum age for a girl’s marriage in Yemen so that girls would not be allowed to get married if they are under this minimum age.” Survey findings are rather positive since large majorities of both men and women say that they support the adoption of a minimum marriage age law in Yemen. Indeed, a full 73% of men report strongly (51%) or somewhat (21%) supporting such a law and 72% of women strongly (58%) or somewhat (14%) supporting it. Meanwhile, 27% of men and 23% of women oppose a minimum marriage age law and 5% of women don’t know or refuse to answer (Figure 14). While these results are encouraging for groups in Yemen pushing for the adoption of this law, it is somewhat perplexing to see that the share of women supporting the law is not higher but rather similar to the share of men for a proposed reform that is expected to improve women’s marriage rights. It is also noteworthy that support for the law among women does not systematically increase with educational attainment. In fact, women with a primary education or lower show slightly higher support for the law (72%) than women with a secondary education or higher (70%). When looking at support levels for the law by women’s age groups, we observe that younger women under 34 tend to be more supportive of the law than older women yet there is a majority support for all age groups.

Respondents who said they were very or somewhat opposed to the adoption of a minimum marriage age law in Yemen were asked to explain the reasons why they are against it. The top reasons given by female respondents were different from those voiced by men. For women, the first reason why they oppose the law is due to their belief that marriage is a matter of chance/luck (35%), followed by the need to respect traditions and conventions (11%), the belief that reaching puberty for girls is sufficient for her to get married (10%), and the belief that if the husband is financially capable and can support his wife, then it doesn't matter what age the girl is (10%). For men, the top reason for opposing a minimum marriage age law is because it is against Sharia' and against religion (27%), followed by religious reasons (15%), the belief that it is sufficient for the girl to reach puberty to get married (13%), and the belief that early marriage protects youth from deviation.

### **Morocco: Opinions on the Family Law (Moudawana)**

The Moudawana, or Family Law, is a decree of Majesty King Mohamed VI that was adopted by Parliament in 2004 and establishes guarantees for women such as setting a minimum marriage age of 18, allowing for easier divorce, granting the ability of mothers to pass citizenship to their children, and providing other assurances for women in Morocco. The Moudawana continues to draw much debate among the Moroccan populace and advocacy groups. For example, it is sometimes argued that the law was implemented in a top-down approach from the King without solid backing from the people themselves. Therefore, a series of questions were asked of men and women who have heard at least a little about the Moudawana to gauge opinions on the law and support for it. The findings show there is a gender gap regarding support of the Moudawana. Of those women who had heard at least a little about the Moudawana, a strong 85% of Moroccan women support the Moudawana either strongly

(48%) or somewhat (37%) support the decree. Only 5% of women who had heard of the Moudawana strongly (2%) or somewhat (3%) oppose it (Figure 15). Men, on the other hand, are less enthusiastic about the Moudawana. While still a majority 59% of men somewhat (45%) or strongly (14%) support the Moudawana, one third of men (30%) say they somewhat (18%) or strongly (12%) oppose it and 11% say they don't know (Figure 16). This means three in ten men (30%), compared to less than one in ten women (5%), are opposed to the Moudawana.

There is also a gender difference in reasons for opposition to the Moudawana. Of those women who say they oppose the Moudawana, 23% say it is because it is just a theory and there have been no concrete actions, 17% say it adds nothing new to the women's issue, 11% say it creates problems between couples, 10% believe there are some rules that are not beneficial for women, 8% say it is opposed to their religion, 6% say some women became arrogant, and 5% say the percentage of divorce has increased. Of men who oppose the Moudawana, 34% say it is because spouse demands are exaggerated, 17% say it is because the Moudawana requires the equal division of possessions between spouses after divorce and that this is against Islam, 15% say it is opposed to their religion, 12% say it is because some women have become arrogant, 10% say after divorce the financial maintenance of the wife and children is imposed on man, 9% say it increases the reluctance to marry, and 9% say it creates problems between couples. Hence, the top two reasons women state for opposition to the Moudawana are completely different than those cited by men against the law. The top two reasons women are against the law involve dissatisfaction with the law in practice/enforcement of the law and the feeling the code doesn't do enough for the rights of women. Women seem to have much higher expectations vis-à-vis the Family Law than men do. The disappointment of surveyed women stems mainly from the slow implementation of the new law reforms and the resistance to the enforcement of these reforms on

behalf of different conservative institutions. The top two reasons cited by men for opposing the Family Law center on dissatisfaction with the way they believe the law negatively impacts them. Men seem essentially worried about losing their long-held privileges as the heads of the family and the main decision-makers in the household

When women aware of the Moudawana were asked how satisfied they are with the rights it gives to women, a majority of women say they are mostly satisfied. Sixty-two percent of women aware of the Moudawana say it gives sufficient rights to women and should not give any more, 18% of women believe the Moudawana needs to give more rights to women, 7% say the Moudawana gave too many rights to women, and 13% say they don't know (Figure 17). Over half of men (52%), on the other hand, believe the Moudawana gave too many rights to women, 35% believe it gave women sufficient rights and only 2% believe it should give more rights to women (Figure 18).

When looking at satisfaction with the law by those women who said they support or oppose the law, the data shows 71% of women who previously said they were opposed to the Moudawana say it needs to give more rights to women and only 19% of women opposed to the Moudawana say it gave too many rights to women. This highlights, again, most women's opposition to the law has to do with disappointment with the current law rather than opposition to the tenets the law attempts to put forward. Seventy-two percent of women who previously said they support the law believe the law gives enough rights to women.

While it may be somewhat premature to judge the effectiveness of the Family Law only seven years after its adoption and given the slow implementation of the different associated reforms, survey respondents were nevertheless asked whether they thought the Moudawana has improved or not the status of women in Morocco. Overall, two-thirds of Moroccan women said

the adoption of the Moudawana has improved the status of women in Morocco (66%), while 18% said women's status has stayed the same, 7% said it has worsened, and 9% said they don't know. This sentiment is consistent amongst women of varying education levels, ages, and women in rural and urban areas. There is some speculation that the implementation of the Moudawana has varied from region to region. Our data shows that more women in North Morocco believe it has improved the status of women (72%) than in other regions: Central Morocco (65%), Greater Tensift (62%), and North Central Morocco (64%). Women in North Morocco are also the most likely to say they support the Moudawana compared to the other regions. This may be because more tribunals in North Morocco than in other regions have been recognizing divorced women's rights to the accumulated assets during the marriage period which means that they have been respecting Article 49 of the Moudawana. Meanwhile, half of men aware of the Moudawana say it has improved women's status in Morocco (50%), 22% say it has worsened it, 17% say it has stayed the same and 10% do not know (Figure 19).

### **Lebanon: Opinions on Introducing the Option of Civil Marriage**

The introduction of a civil marriage law in Lebanon is considered to be a reform that would make laws governing marriage and family more favorable towards women. Currently, personal status laws in Lebanon are governed by different religious provisions, with each sectarian group having its own set of laws that are mostly patriarchal in nature. Survey data shows that majorities of both men and women are opposed to the introduction of civil marriage in Lebanon. When asked if they supported the introduction of an optional civil marriage law in Lebanon, more women (64%) than men (56%) said they opposed it (Figure 20).

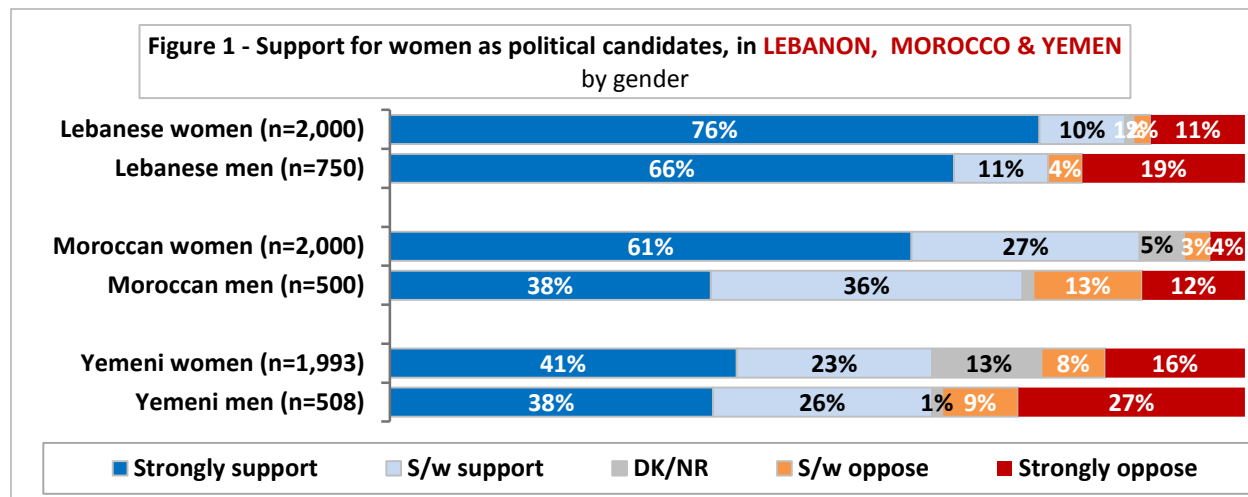
The gender split on this issue is not as significant as differences in opinions that are due to respondents' sectarian identities. Certain religious sects in Lebanon oppose civil marriage more



than others: at least seven in 10 Muslim Sunnis and Muslim Shias oppose civil marriage regardless of gender. Christians are more in favor of adopting an optional civil marriage law with a slim majority of women (55%) supporting it and 63% of men also in favor. This may be due to the difficulty of obtaining a divorce especially among Catholics who tend to change their sect to be able to get an easy divorce. Among the Druze sect, a majority of women oppose the law, and men are split 50-50 (however, the sample of Druze men is too small to draw statistically reliable conclusions).

The data suggests that as women's education levels increase, support for civil marriage increases as well. In fact, only those who have completed a university education or post-graduate studies have a majority support (54%) for the introduction of a civil marriage law. All those who have less than a university education oppose the introduction of a civil marriage law thinking that Lebanon should not introduce any form of civil marriage and must maintain marriage laws as they are (Figure 22). For those with no formal education or incomplete primary education, support for civil marriage is lowest (18%). This may be showing that as education levels increase, women become more aware of what rights a civil marriage guarantees for women and thus become more supportive of such a law. Still, these findings highlight the sectarian divide. It seems support for the civil marriage law is viewed less as a human rights issue for women and more as an issue of sectarian identity.

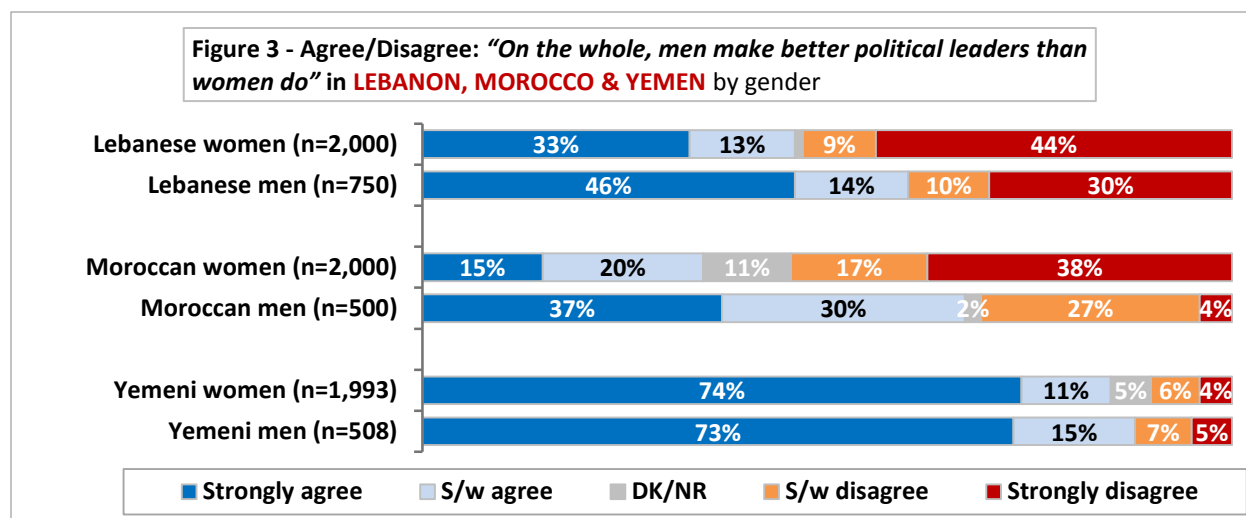
### Appendix 1: Charts and Tables



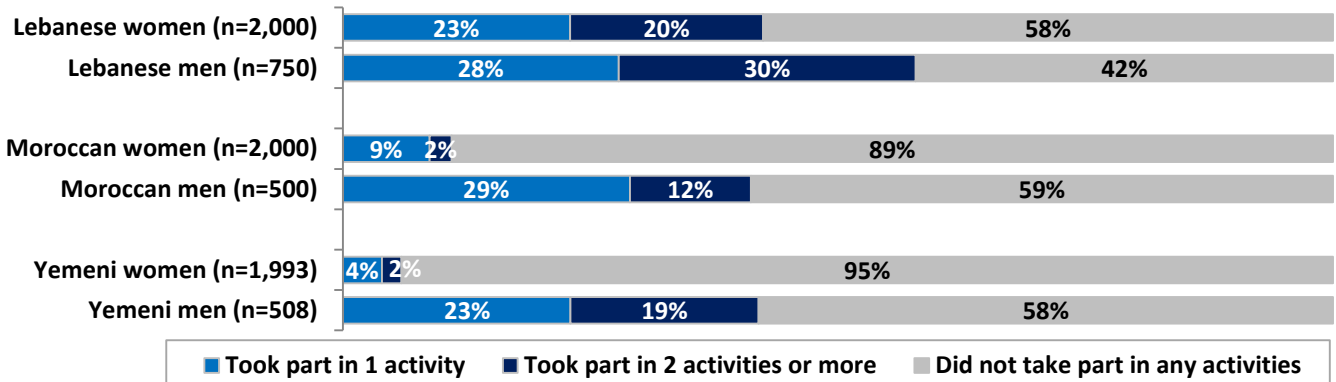
**Figure 2– Aggregated support for women in political roles, by gender**

- Women in political protests
- Women work on candidate campaign
- Women as gov't ministers
- Women members of parliament
- Women member of political party

	Lebanon Women (n=2,000)	Lebanon Men (n=750)	Morocco Women (n=2,000)	Morocco Men (n=500)	Yemen Women (n=1,993)	Yemen Men (n=508)
Support for women in <b>none</b> of the political roles	9%	15%	6%	20%	26%	30%
Support for women in <b>1-2</b> political roles	7%	9%	1%	6%	17%	20%
Support for women in <b>3-4</b> political roles	23%	20%	16%	23%	35%	27%
Support for women in <b>all 5</b> political roles	61%	56%	77%	51%	22%	23%



**Figure 4 - Percent of women and men who took part in activities to express views in **LEBANON, MOROCCO & YEMEN****



**Figure 5 - Voter turnout in June 2009 parliamentary elections by gender in **LEBANON****  
 % out of respondents age 21 or over



**Figure 6 - Voter turnout in June 2009 municipal elections by gender in **MOROCCO****  
 % out of respondents 18 years or older



**Figure 7 - Voter turnout in Sept 2006 presidential/local elections by gender in **YEMEN****  
 % out of respondents 21 years or older (filtering respondents who were not eligible in 2006)



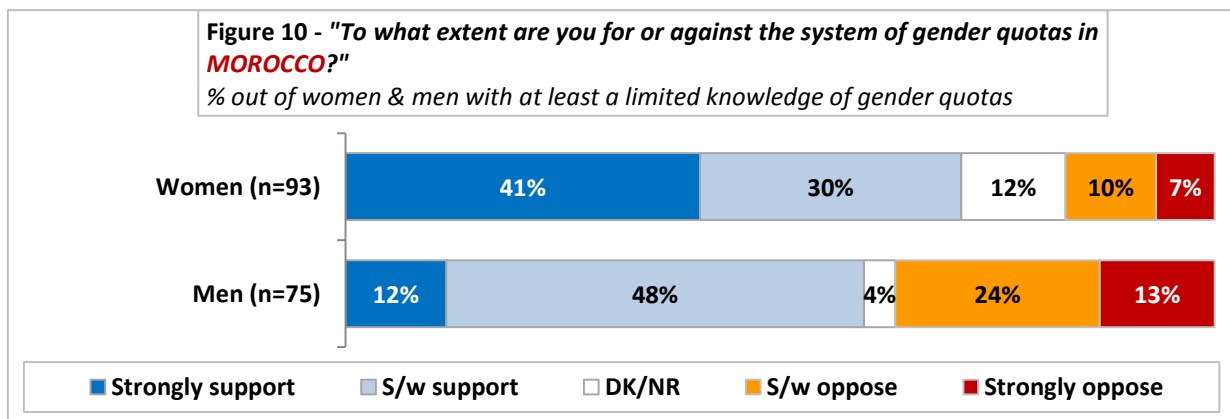
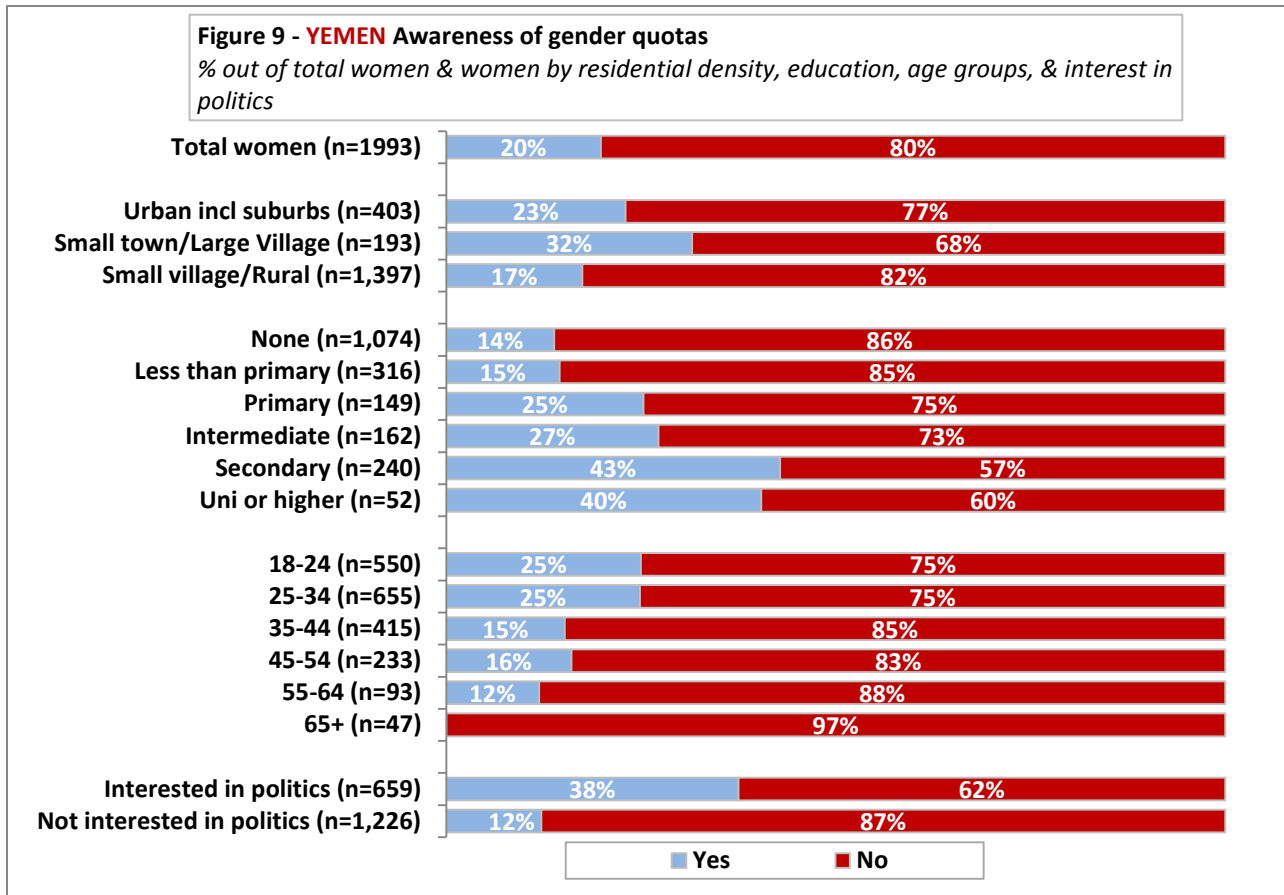
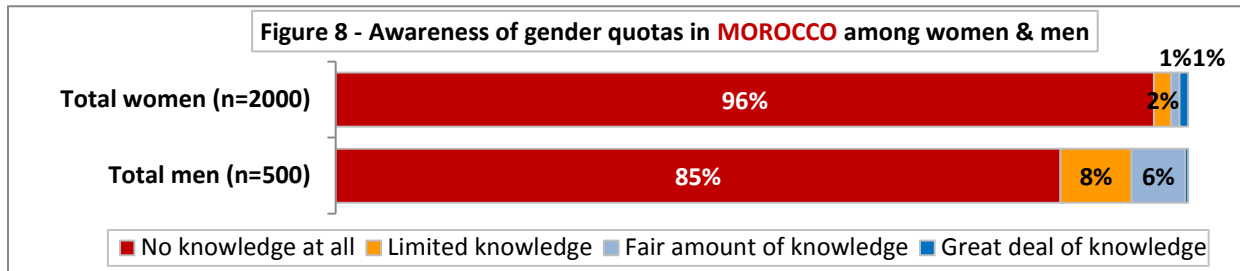


Figure 11 - "Do you support or oppose the introduction of gender quotas in **LEBANON**?"

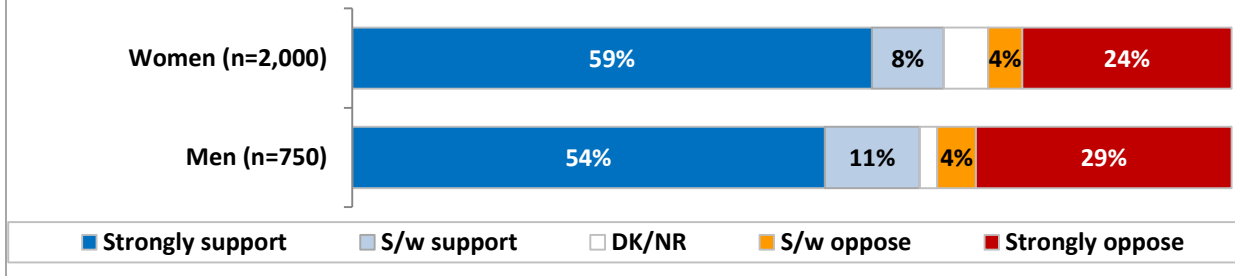


Figure 12 - **YEMEN** "Do you personally support or oppose a system that reserves seats for women in parliament and in local councils in Yemen?"  
% of total men and women and those aware of quotas

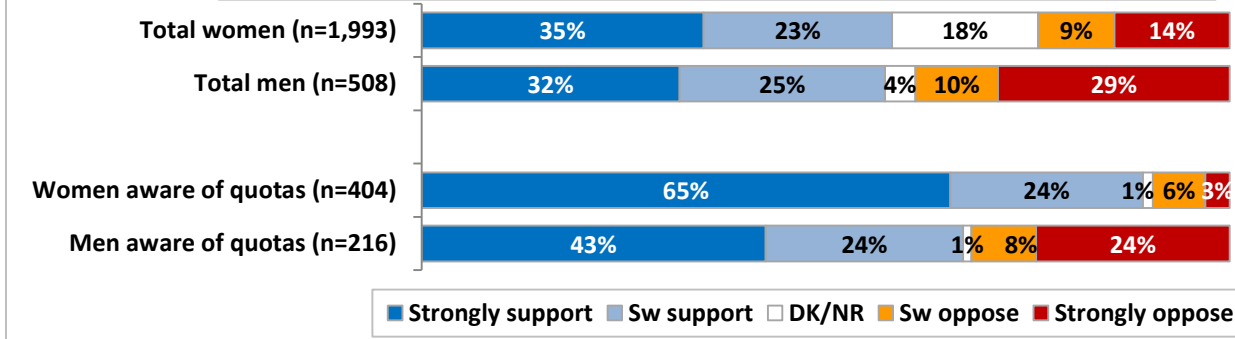
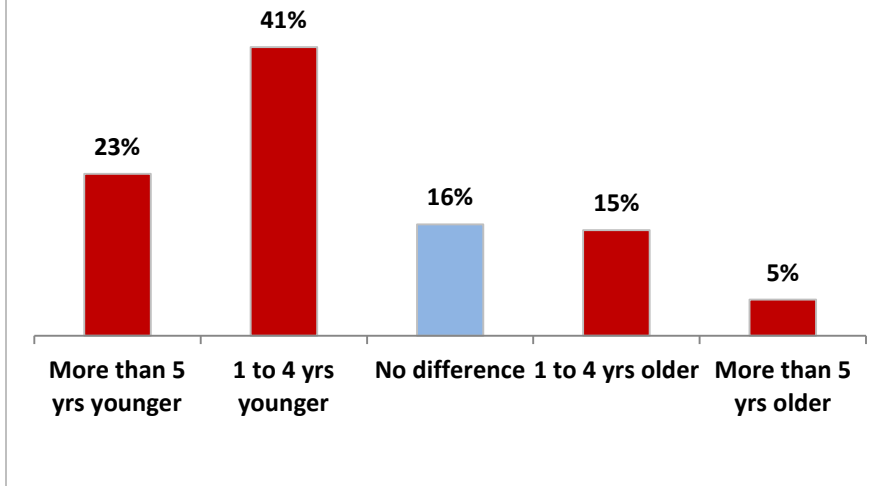
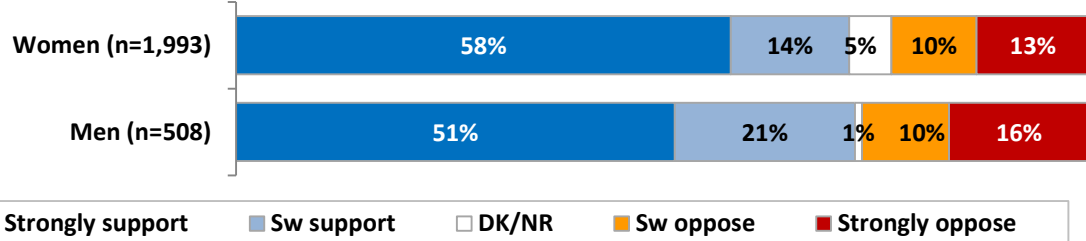


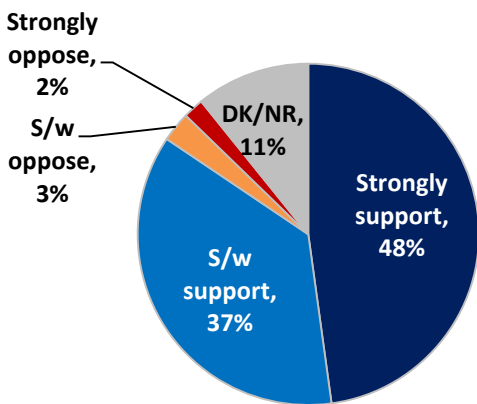
Figure 13 - Marriage Age Differential: difference between actual marriage age and minimum acceptable marriage age for girls  
% out of married women with a definite response n=1,378



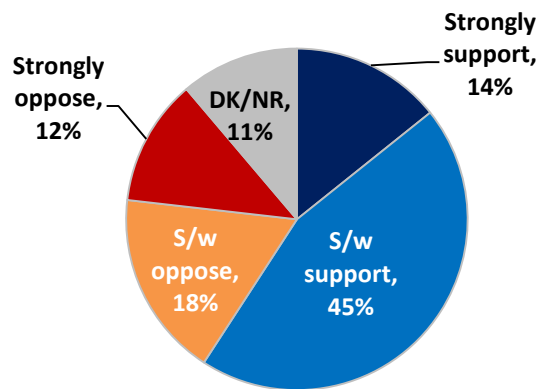
**Figure 14 - "There is talk about adopting a law that would set a minimum age for a girl's marriage in Yemen so that girls would not be allowed to get married if they are under this minimum age. Do you personally support such a law or not?"**  
 % of men and wom



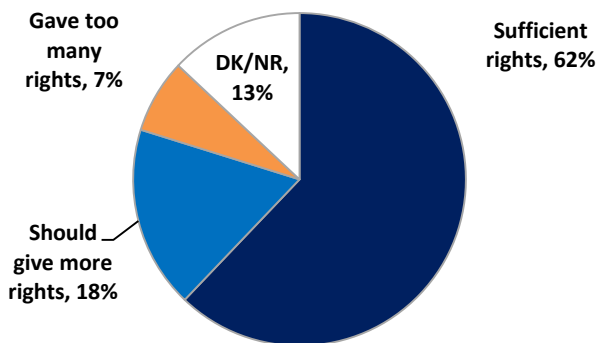
**Figure 15 - Support of Moudawana**  
 % of women (n=2,000)



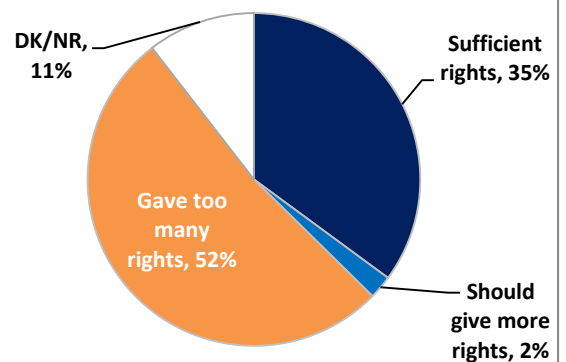
**Figure 16 - Support of Moudawana**  
 % of men (n=500)



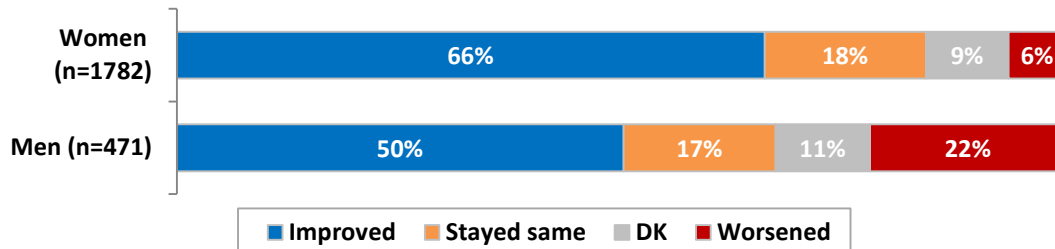
**Figure 17 - Satisfaction with Moudawana**  
 % of women (n=2,000)



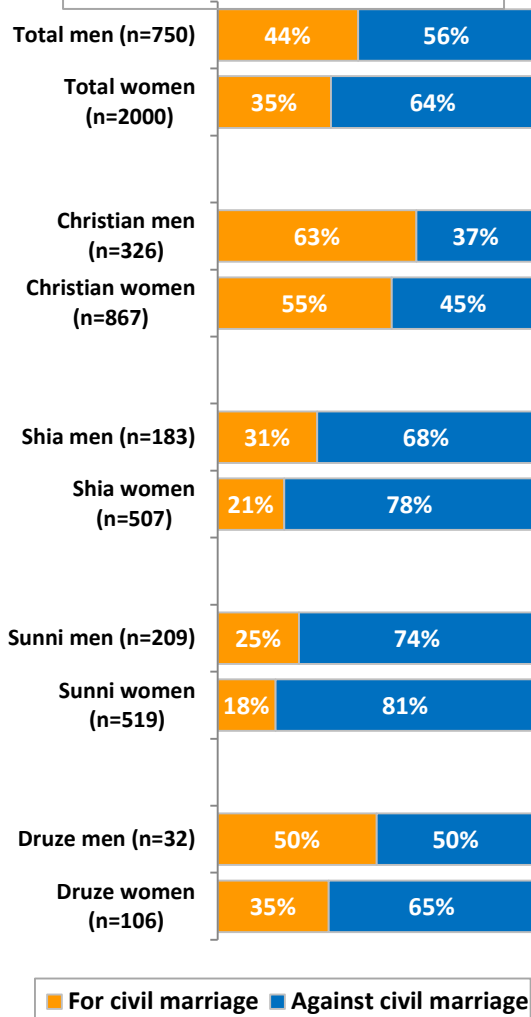
**Figure 18 - Satisfaction with Moudawana**  
 % of men (n=500)



**Figure 19 - "Do you think the adoption of the Moudawana has improved the status of women in Morocco, kept women's status the same or became worse?" by gender**



**Figure 20- Support or oppose introduction of civil marriage law in Lebanon**  
% in favor or against introducing an optional civil marriage law by gender & sect



**Figure 21- Support or oppose introduction of civil marriage law in Lebanon**  
% of women in favor or against introducing an optional civil marriage law by education

