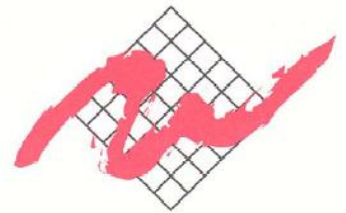


# The Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa (SWMENA) Project

Focus on Yemen | 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  
International Development Agency (CIDA)*

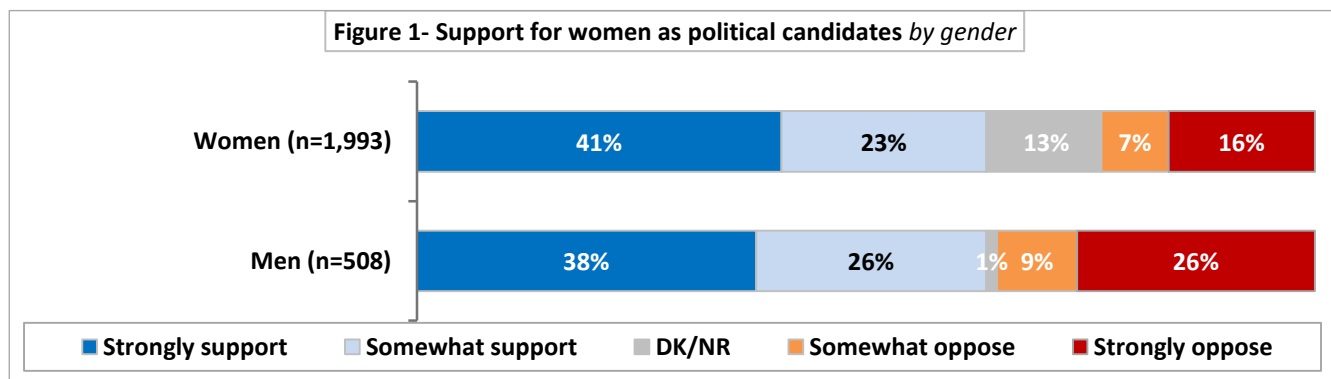


Before conducting the SWMENA survey, NGOs in Yemen that work on several aspects of women’s issues completed a short survey to identify their data needs. One of the main challenges identified by these groups is the stereotypical view of women’s image in Yemen in terms of their role in family and society. These groups identified the conservative or male-dominated mentality that restricts a woman’s role to marriage, child-bearing, and serving the husband and the family as one of the main issues facing women in Yemen.

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 and pursue education, support/opposition for women involved in decision-making positions, and others. These questions give a sense of existing attitudes between groups in society such as between genders and between women of urban/rural areas, education levels, and age groups.

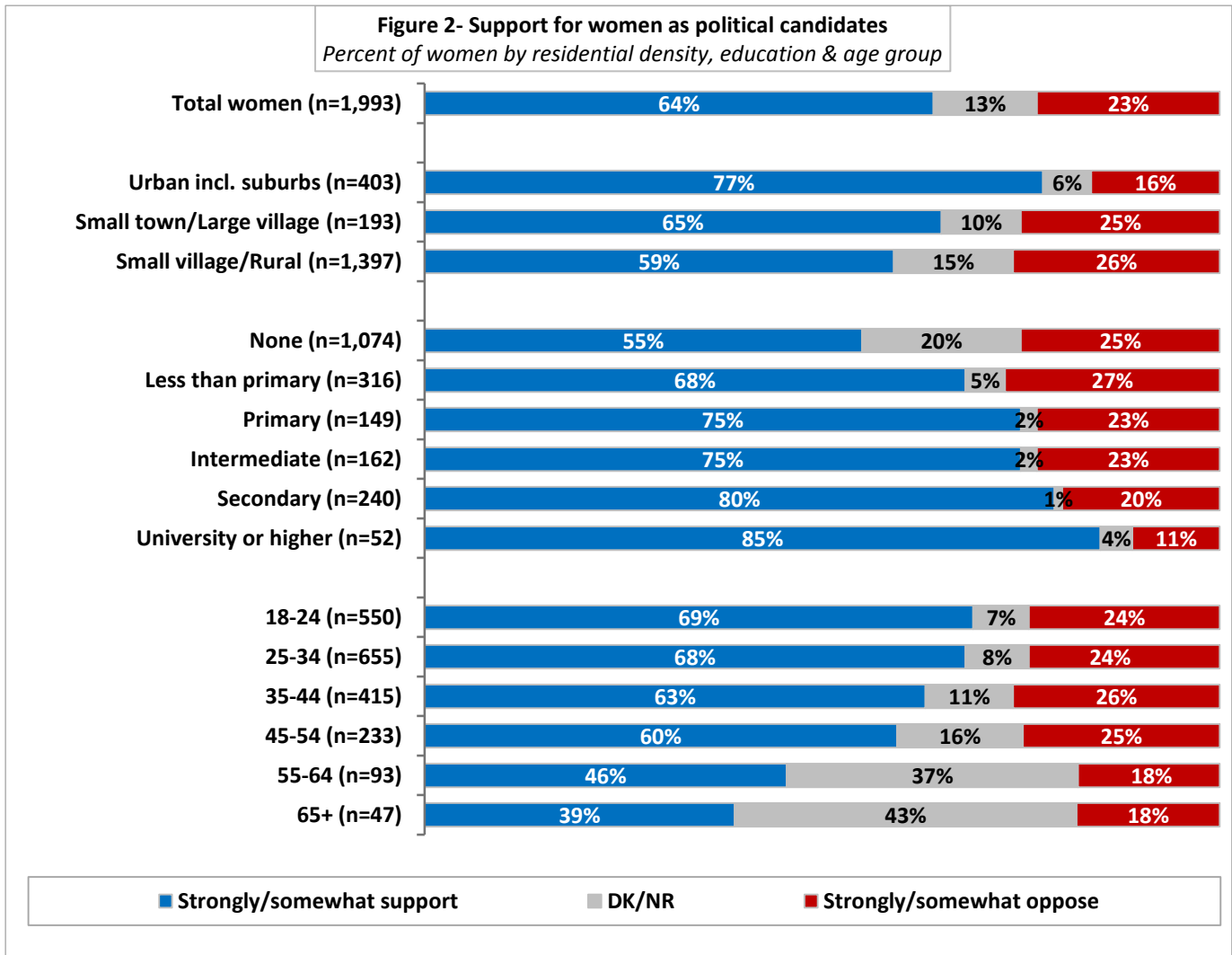
## Opinions on Women’s Involvement in Politics & Decision-Making Positions

Survey data suggests that there is a fairly high level of support for women becoming involved in politics as candidates for office and is mostly the same between genders. Figure 1 shows that 64% of men and women each strongly/somewhat support women as political candidates. However, 12% more men than women oppose women as political candidates. One third of Yemeni men (35%) compared to 23% of Yemeni women strongly/somewhat oppose women as political candidates.



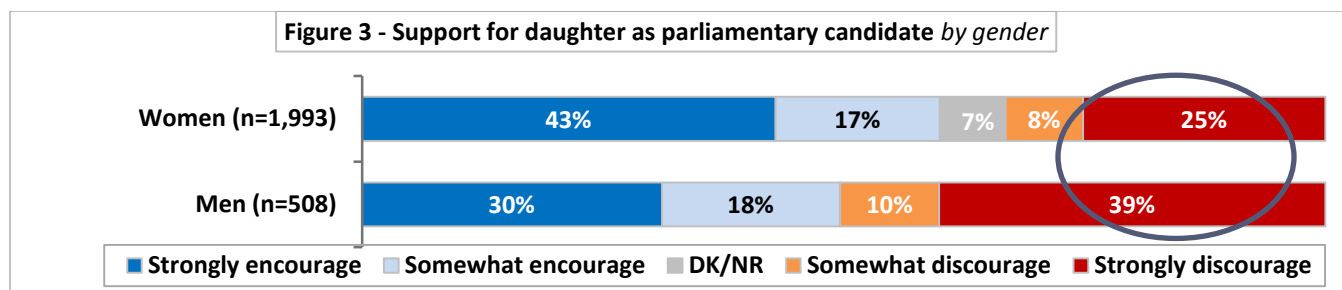
Majorities of women across various education levels, age groups, and settlement types strongly/somewhat support women as political candidates. By education, support increases as education increases. However, the highest percentage of women who say they don’t know are women with no education (20%), which is four times more than women with higher levels of education. By age, younger Yemeni women have higher percentages of support than older Yemeni women. Yet, over one-third of women 55 and older 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. Majorities of women across different areas support women in politics, with women in urban areas more supportive of women in politics than women in small towns or rural areas (Figure 2).





When asked whether they would encourage a daughter (if they have one or supposing they have one) to become involved in politics, opinions are split between encouraging and discouraging a daughter. Over half of both women and men only say they would encourage a daughter becoming involved at both a local and national level. Still, women are slightly more likely than men to say they would strongly/somewhat encourage a daughter to become involved in politics as a municipal candidate (60% and 50%, respectively) and a parliamentary candidate (60% and 49%, respectively).

On the other hand, half (51%) of Yemeni men say they would strongly/somewhat discourage a daughter from being a parliamentary candidate and a large 40% of Yemeni men would *strongly* discourage a daughter from this option. This is 14% higher than the percentage of women who would strongly discourage a daughter (26%), but it is interesting to note that over one third (34%) of Yemeni women would also strongly/somewhat discourage a daughter from this path (Figure 3).



Of both women and men who say they would discourage a daughter from becoming involved in politics as a municipal or parliamentary candidate, the three most cited responses by women and men involve traditional views of women's abilities and roles. The most cited reasons given by women include: these issues are exclusive to men only (30%), a girl has to take care of her house only (23%), and girls cannot handle political responsibilities (15%). Next, 11% of women say it is because they are scared that she would get harmed, 3% say it is because she cannot succeed because society will not support her.

Of men who would discourage a daughter from becoming involved in politics, the first most-cited response is the belief that a girl has to take care of her house only (33%), followed by the belief that these issues are exclusive to men only (20%), and the perception that girls cannot handle political responsibilities (15%). Four percent of men say it is because she cannot succeed because society will not support her, 3% say it is because they are scared that she would get harmed, and 3% cite customs/traditions/religious reasons (Figure 4).

**Figure 4 - "Why would you discourage your daughter to become involved in politics as a candidate?"**

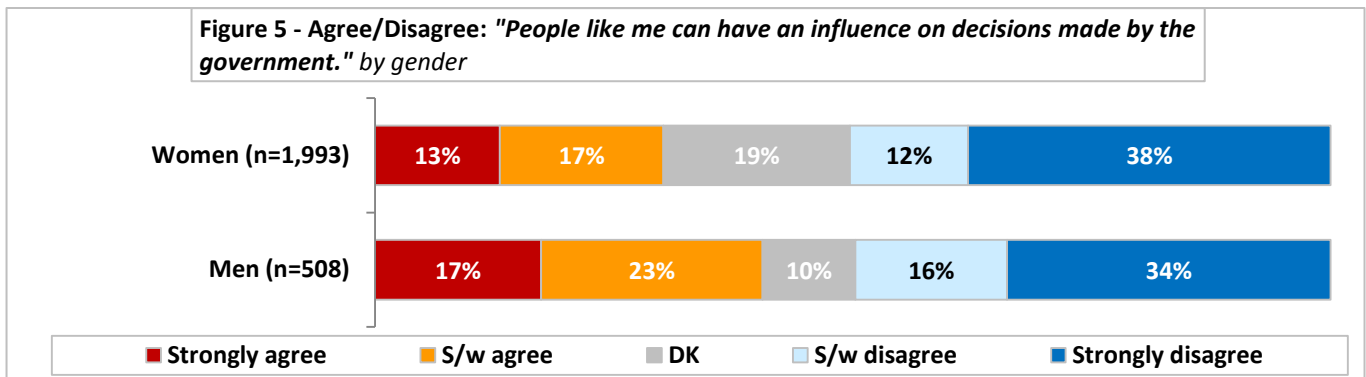
Percent of men and women who answered "strongly or somewhat discouraged" to question on daughter's involvement in politics

	Women (n=671)	Men (n=263)	Ranking according to men's responses
1) These issues are exclusive to men only	30%	20%	(2)
2) A girl has to take care of her house only	23%	33%	(1)
3) Girls cannot handle political responsibilities	15%	15%	(3)
4) I am scared for her/she might get harmed	11%	3%	(5)
5) She cannot succeed because society will not support her	3%	4%	(4)
6) Customs/Traditions/Religious reasons	1%	3%	(6)

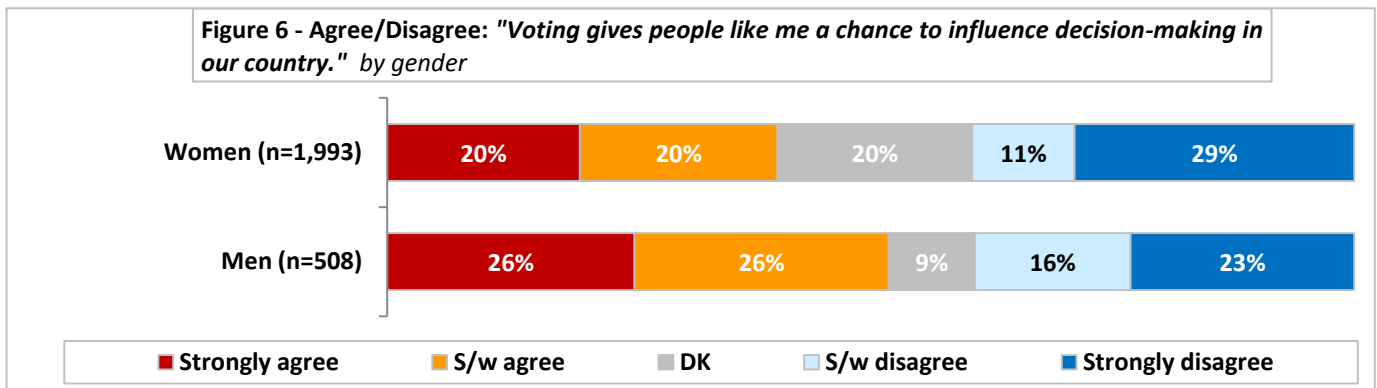
## Opinions on Voting, Influence & Decision-Making

Respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree with a series of statements about their perceived influence of voting and decision-making on the government, women’s autonomy in political decision-making, and perception of women as political and business leaders compared to men.

Women and men both have mixed assessments of whether, “People like me can have an influence on decisions made by the government,” but more respondents disagree that they can influence government decisions. Thirty percent of women and 41% of men strongly/somewhat agree with this statement, half of women and men (50%) strongly/somewhat disagree that they can influence decisions made by the government, and 19% of women and 10% of men say they don’t know (Figure 5).

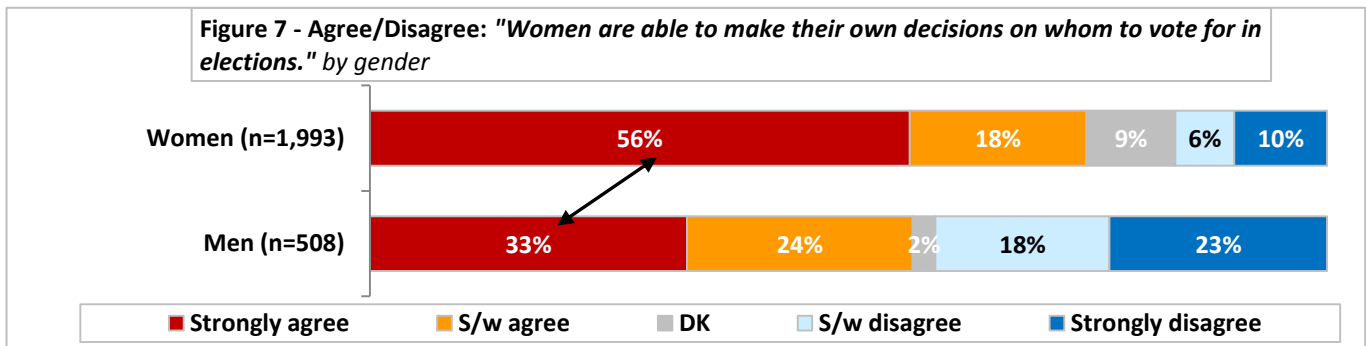


When framed in a way that asks specifically about whether they think voting gives them chances to influence decision-making in their country, respondents are a bit more optimistic but opinions on the power of their vote are still mixed. Forty percent of women and 52% of men strongly/somewhat agree that voting gives them a chance to influence decision-making in the country, while 40% of women and 39% of men strongly/somewhat disagree, and 20% of women and 9% of men say they don’t know (Figure 6). Figure 5 and 6 show there is only a small difference in opinion between genders, however women are more likely than men to say they don’t know.

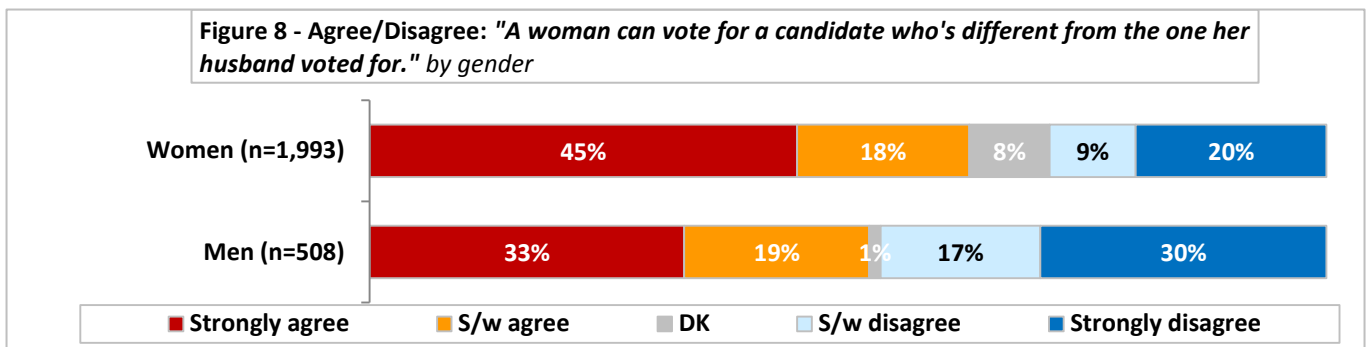


When asked generally about women’s ability to freely make their own decisions when voting, a majority of women and men, with more women than men, strongly or somewhat agree with the statement “Women are able to make

their own decision on whom to vote for in elections” (75% and 57%, respectively). Nevertheless, more women *strongly* agree with this statement (56%) than men (33%), highlighting the gender split on the intensity of opinion regarding women’s freedom of electoral decision-making (Figure 7).

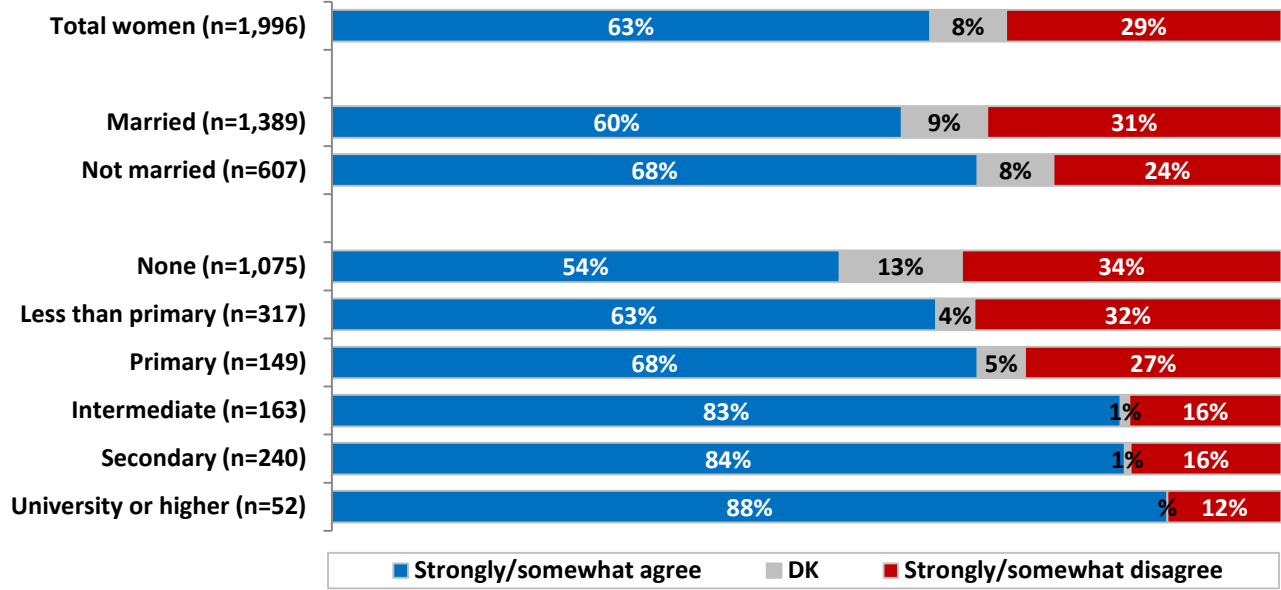


On the other hand, when asked more specifically if a woman can vote for a candidate who’s different from the one her husband voted for, less men and women agree with this statement, but still over half of men agree “A woman can vote for a candidate who’s different from the one her husband voted for.” While 52% of men and 63% of women strongly/somewhat agree with this statement, nearly half of men (47%) disagree that a woman can vote for a different candidate than her husband, and even 29% of women disagree. This points to a troublesome view of voting held by almost half of men and a third of women that does not see women’s voting as an individual decision, but instead a decision dependent on her husband (Figure 8).



Unmarried women are slightly more likely to agree (68%) that a woman can vote for a different candidate than her husband than married women (60%). By education levels, as a woman’s education increases higher percentages of women strongly/somewhat agree a woman can vote for her own candidate (Figure 9).

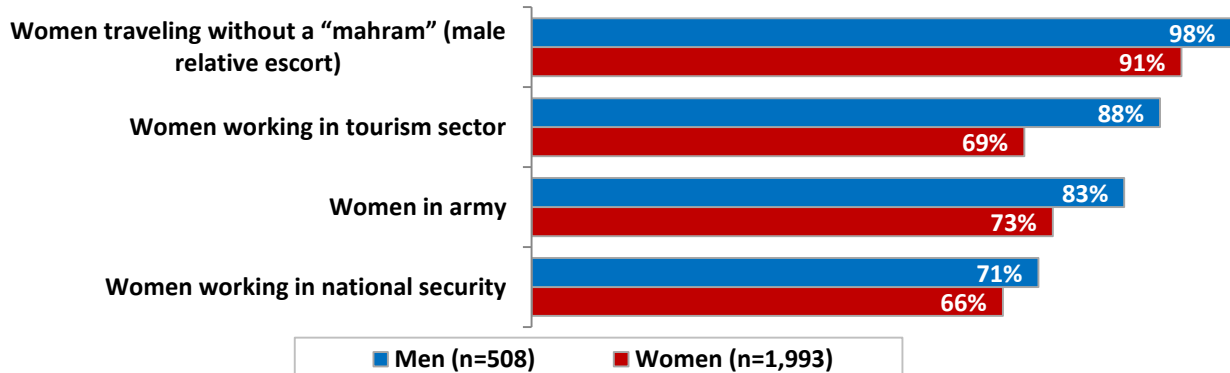
**Figure 9 - Agree/Disagree: "A woman can vote for a candidate who's different from the one her husband voted for." Percent of women by marital status & education**



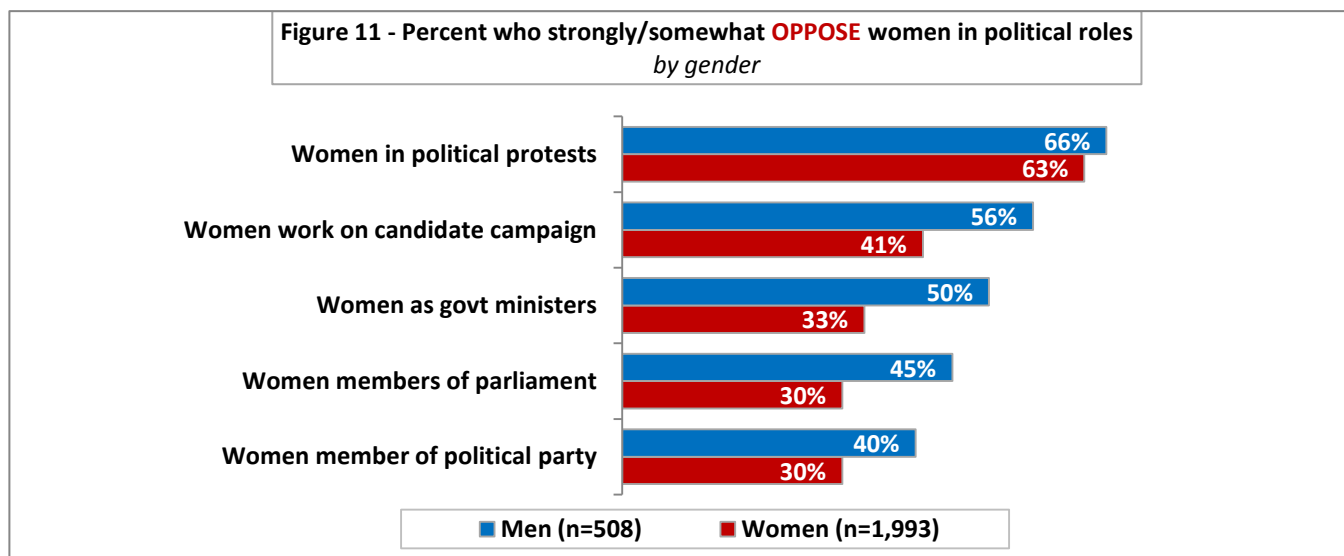
### Women in Leadership Positions

When asked whether they would support or oppose women’s involvement in various social, professional, and political roles we see high levels of opposition from both men and women. While majorities of both men and women oppose women in these roles, statistically significant differences appear between the percentage of men who oppose and women who oppose women in some of these roles. In terms of social and professional roles, majorities of both men and women strongly/somewhat oppose women traveling without a mahram (98% and 91%), women working in the tourism sector (88% and 69%), women in the army (83% and 73%), women working in national security (71% and 66%), and women participating in political protests (66% and 63%). The percentage of not only men who oppose women in these roles but women who oppose as well is significant when examining potential attitudinal barriers to women’s participation in these types of activities. Particularly, the very high percentage of women and men who oppose women traveling without a mahram or male escort highlights a significant restriction on women’s freedom of movement (Figure 10).

**Figure 10 - Percent who strongly/somewhat OPPOSE women in social & professional roles by gender**



There is less opposition to women in various types of political roles and even pluralities or majorities of men and women strongly/somewhat supporting women working on a candidate campaign (43% men support, 51% women support), women as government ministers (50% and 60%), women members of parliament (55% and 62%), and women members of political parties (59% and 61%) (Figure 11). Support for women in these political roles 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.



Indeed, when aggregating opinions 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 12).

**Figure 12– Aggregated support for women in political roles , by gender**

	Women (n=1,993)	Men (n=508)
1. Women in political protests		
2. Women work on candidate campaign		
3. Women as govt ministers		
4. Women members of parliament		
5. Women member of political party		
Support for women in <b>none</b> of the political roles	26%	30%
Support for women in <b>1-2</b> political roles	17%	20%
Support for women in <b>3-4</b> political roles	35%	27%
Support for women in <b>all 5</b> political roles	22%	23%

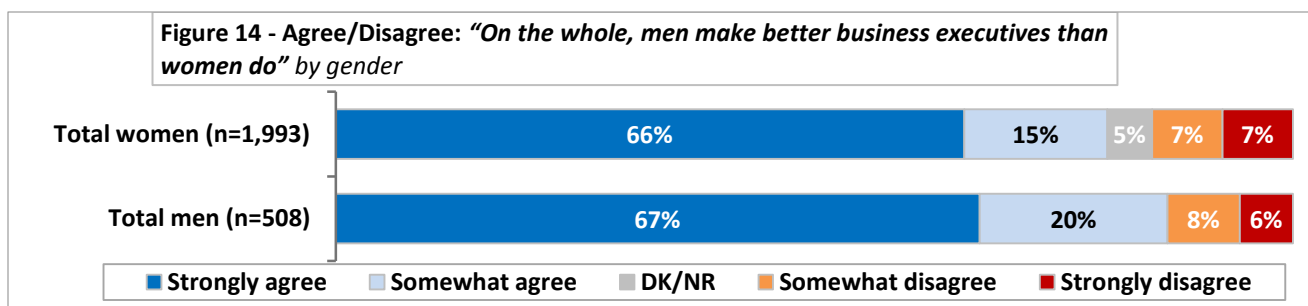
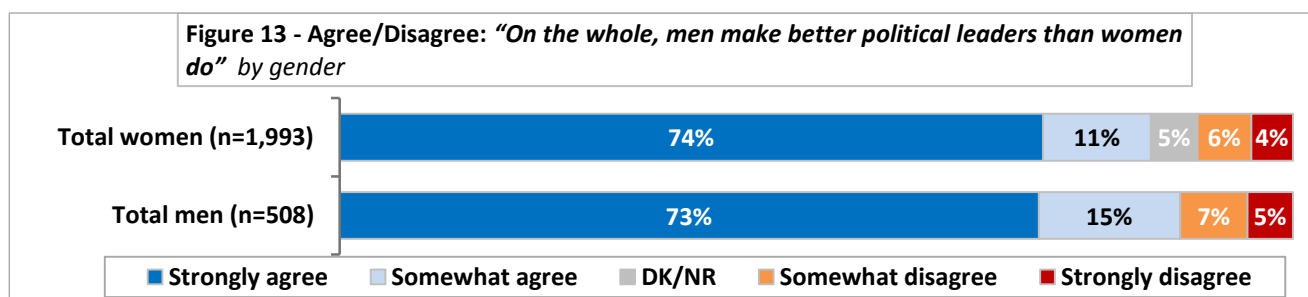


In contrast, while men and women support women involved in various political roles, men are still viewed as better political leaders and business executives by large majorities of both men and women.

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 majorities of both men and women at mostly the same percentages strongly/somewhat agree with these statements (Figures 13 and 14). Eighty-eight percent of men and 85% of women strongly/somewhat agree that men are better political leaders than women. Similarly, 87% of men and 81% of women believe men make better business executives than women.

These findings suggest that a stereotype of men being better in leadership roles might be pervasive in Yemeni society amongst men and women alike. Nevertheless, the fact that very few women currently serve as political leaders or business executives means there are very few examples for Yemeni to draw opinions. This widespread perception in society by both men and women might tend to keep more men in these positions and could hinder women from attaining these types of leadership positions.

Women with higher educational attainment are more likely to disagree with these statements, but still majorities of women at all education levels agree men are better political leaders and business executives. Higher percentages of women aged 18-34 disagree that men make better political and business leaders than women aged 35 and above, but again majorities of women across all age levels agree men make better leaders. More than double the percentage of women who work for pay disagree that men make better business leaders (34%) than women who do not work for pay (13%), but again majorities of women regardless of work status agree men are better political and business leaders. Work status, or women in the workforce, seems to impact women’s opinions of women in business leadership positions.



## Opinions on Rights and Autonomy of Women

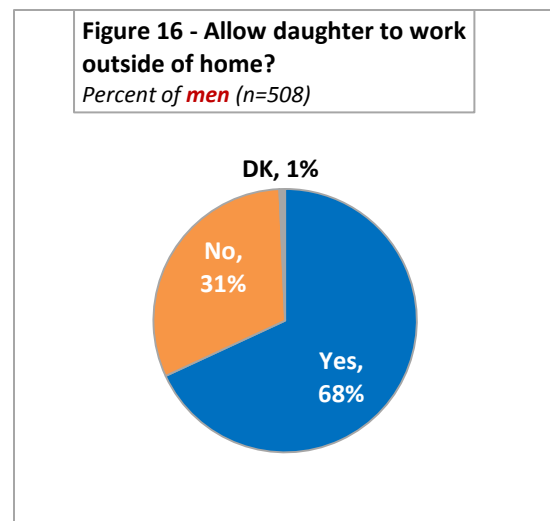
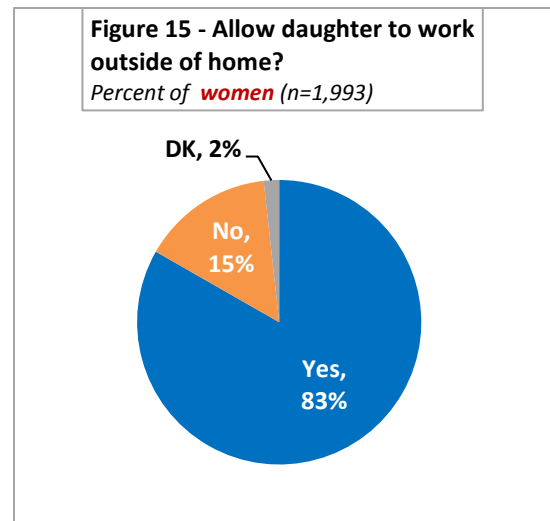
*SWMENA* survey respondents were also asked a series of questions aimed at understanding dynamics between women and men, husbands and wives, and parents and sons or daughters in areas such as equal access to education, employment, and other issues of gender equality.

Respondents were asked how they feel about a daughter working outside of the home. Figures 15 and 16 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 women are more likely to say yes than men (83% and 68%, respectively). It is noteworthy, however, that twice as many men as women say they would *not* allow their daughter to work outside the home (31% and 16%, respectively).

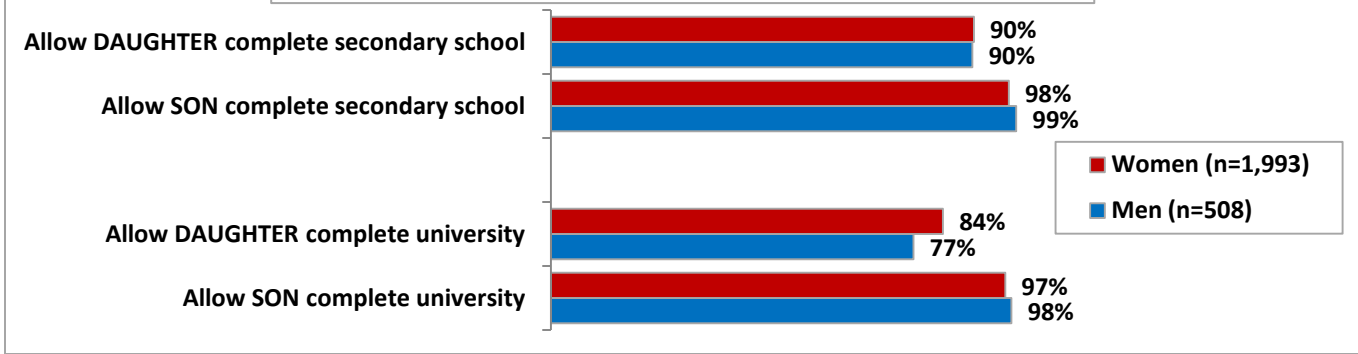
Of women who say they would not allow a daughter to work outside the home, 60% say it is because women should tend to the home and children, 7% say it is because there are no appropriate jobs for women, 7% say it is too dangerous, 7% say it is because she should focus on getting married, and 1% cite habits and customs. Of men who say they would not allow a daughter to work outside the home, 56% say it is because women should tend to the home and children, 8% say it is because there is no appropriate jobs for women, 8% say it is too dangerous, 7% say it is because she should focus on getting married, and 2% cite habits and customs.

When asked whether they would allow a son or daughter to complete secondary school or university education if they so chose, majorities of both men and women say yes they would allow both a son and daughter to do so. However, higher percentages of men and women support a son completing both levels of education in comparison with those who would support a daughter.

Ninety percent of men and women say they would allow a daughter to complete secondary school and 99% of men and 98% of women say they would allow a son to complete secondary school. Regarding university, sweeping majorities of men (98%) and women (97%) also say they would allow a son to complete university. However, when asked the same question about daughters, the proportions of men and women who would allow their daughters to complete university are significantly lower: 77% of men and 84% of women. Despite the fact that fewer men and women respondents would allow a daughter to complete either secondary school or university, it is notable that over three-quarters of Yemeni men and women say they would allow a daughter to complete both of these levels of education if she so chose (Figure 17).



**Figure 17- Allow daughter/son to complete secondary school/university?**  
(Percent who say "Yes," by gender)

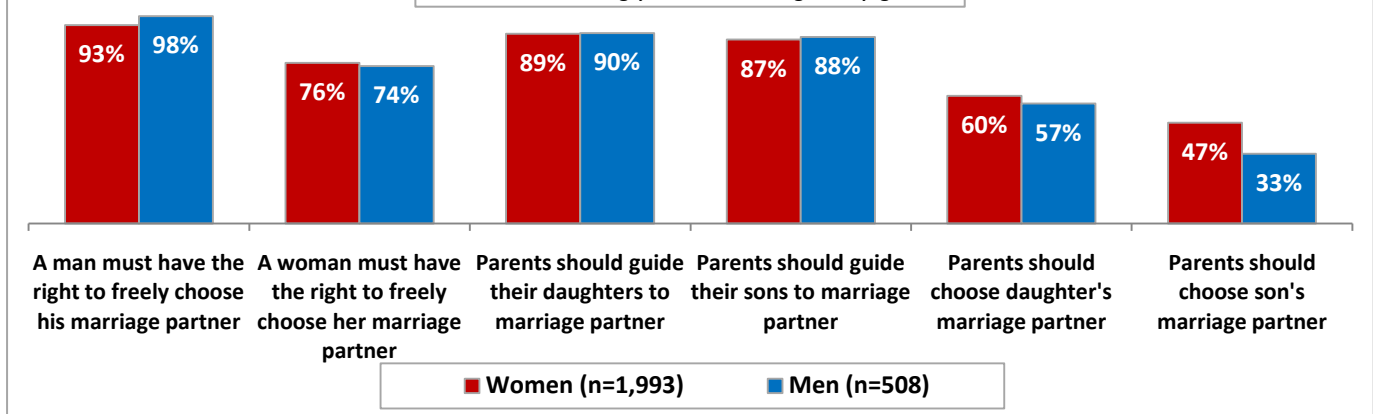


Men and women who say they would not allow their daughter to pursue her education cite similar reasons and in the same order with slightly different percentages. Twenty-six percent of women and 26% of men say it is because school/university is far from home, 20% of women and 19% of men say because she has household responsibilities, 15% of women and 13% of men say because it is not convenient for her to go to school/university, 14% of women and 8% of men say because they cannot afford to pay for her education, 10% of women and 4% of men say it is because she has to focus on getting married, 4% of women and 8% of men say it is because of shame/traditions/customs, and 2% of women and 8% of men say it is enough for women to be able to read and write.

When respondents were asked about women’s freedom in choosing marriage partners, there is high support for both men and women to be able to freely choose their marriage partner, but there is also support for daughters and sons to be guided by their parents. Ninety-eight percent of men and 93% of women believe sons should have the right to freely choose their marriage partner. Fewer respondents but still majorities believe the same freedom should be applied to daughters: 76% of women and 74% of men believe daughters should be able to freely choose.

Men and women respondents have similar outlooks on the role parents should play in guiding both sons and daughter to their marriage partner. The biggest disparity in opinions lies in the responses to whether parents should choose the marriage partner. When it comes to daughters, a sizable 60% of women and 57% of men believe that since parents have their children’s best interest at heart, they should choose their daughter’s marriage partner. In contrast, only 47% of women and 33% of men believe parents should choose the son’s partner. These findings bring

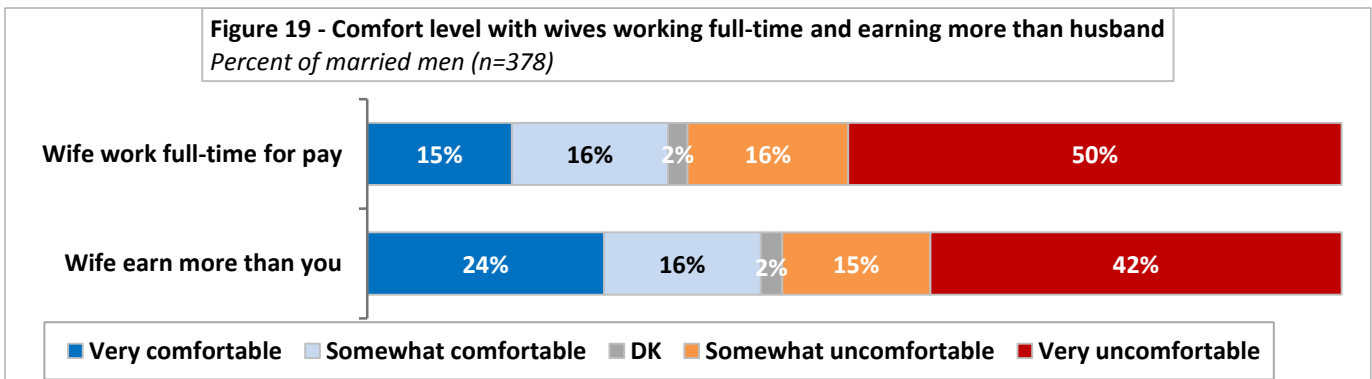
**Figure 18 - Freedom of Marriage Choice**  
Percent who strongly/somewhat agree by gender



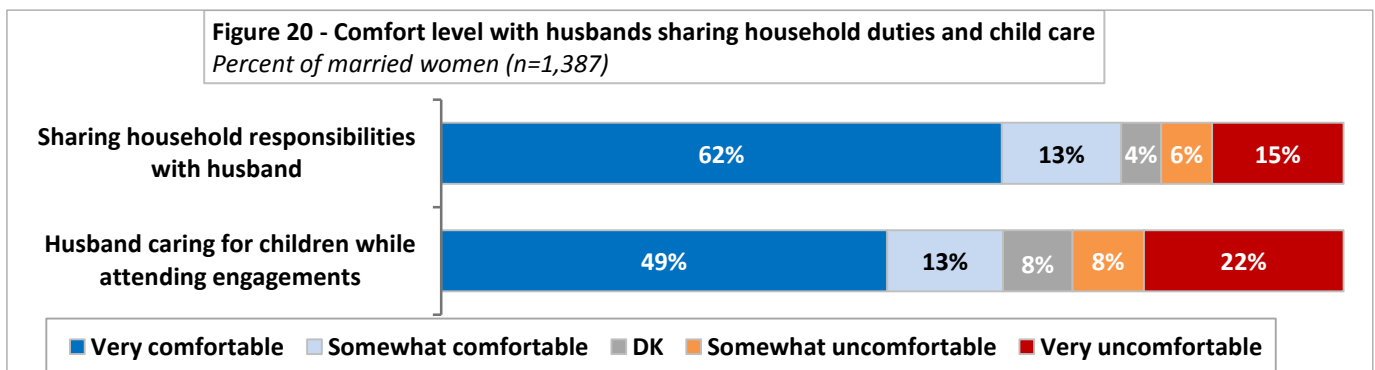
to light a difference in perceptions of sons having more decision-making freedom in marriage choices than daughters do (Figure 18).

Next, a few statements were asked of only married men or only married women to understand dynamics between husbands and wives.

Married men were asked about how comfortable they would be if their wife worked full-time for pay and if their wife earned more than them. The data shows husbands are still mostly uncomfortable relinquishing their role as the primary breadwinner in the family. A majority of married men say they would be very/somewhat uncomfortable (67%) with their wives working full-time for pay and a majority of married men (57%) say they would be very/somewhat uncomfortable if their wife earned more than them. Less than a third of married men (31%) say they would be very/somewhat comfortable if their wife worked full time for pay or if she earned more than him (40%) (Figure 19).

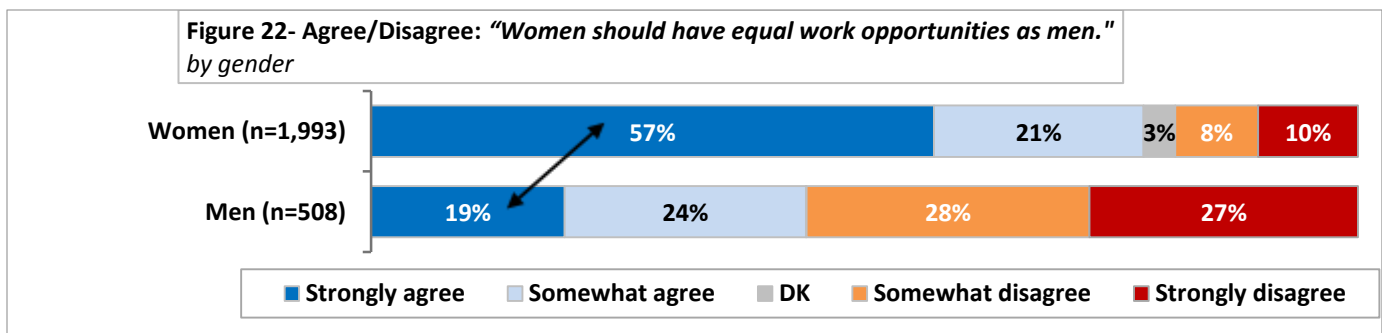
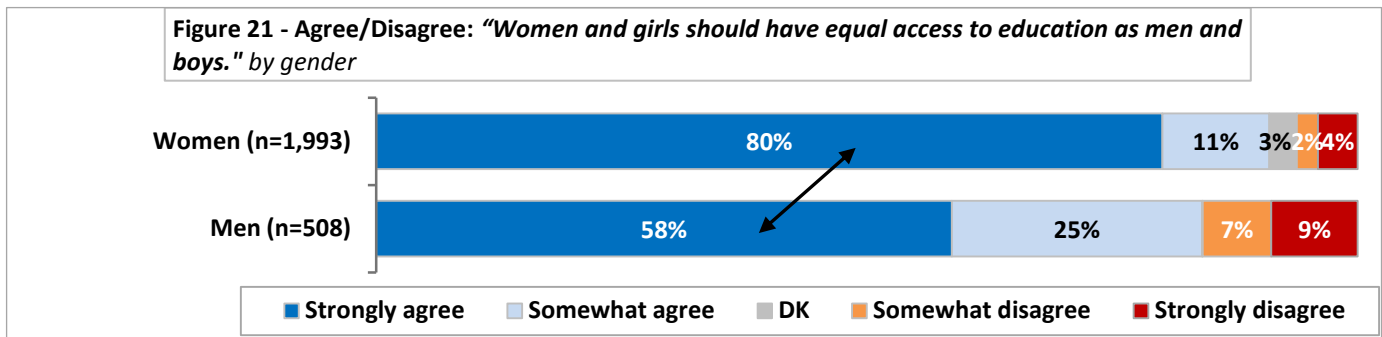


Married women were asked about how comfortable they would be sharing household responsibilities with their husbands and if their husbands cared for the children on a regular basis while they attend meetings, classes or other regular engagements. Three-quarters (75%) of Yemeni women say they would be very/somewhat comfortable sharing household responsibilities with their husbands and 62% of women also say they would be very/somewhat comfortable having their husbands care for the children while they attended meetings or other engagements. This indicates that women would prefer a more equitable household balance, with their husbands pitching in to share household responsibilities and watch the children (Figure 20).

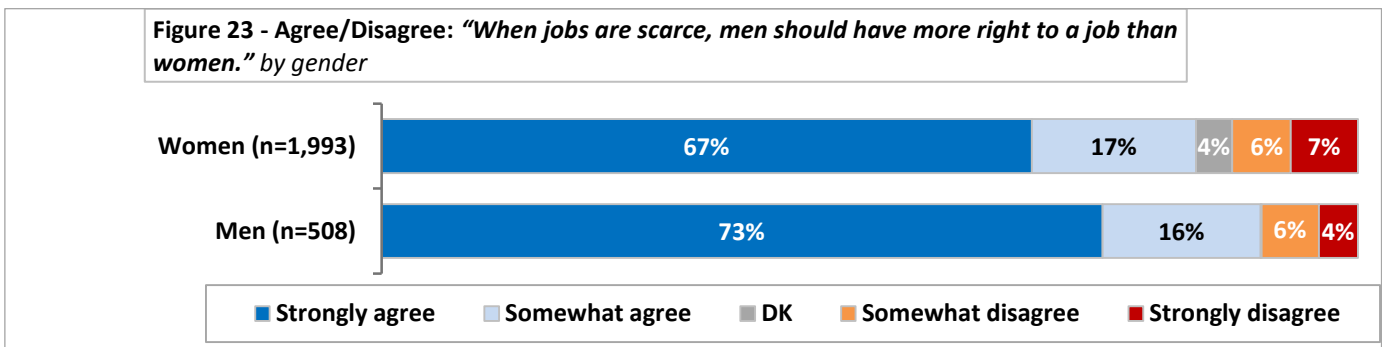


Respondents were next read a series of statements about different dynamics between women and men and husbands and wives and asked to what extent they agree or disagree. The aim of these questions is to understand how equality-based or “progressive” the respondents’ are on certain issues surrounding gender equality.

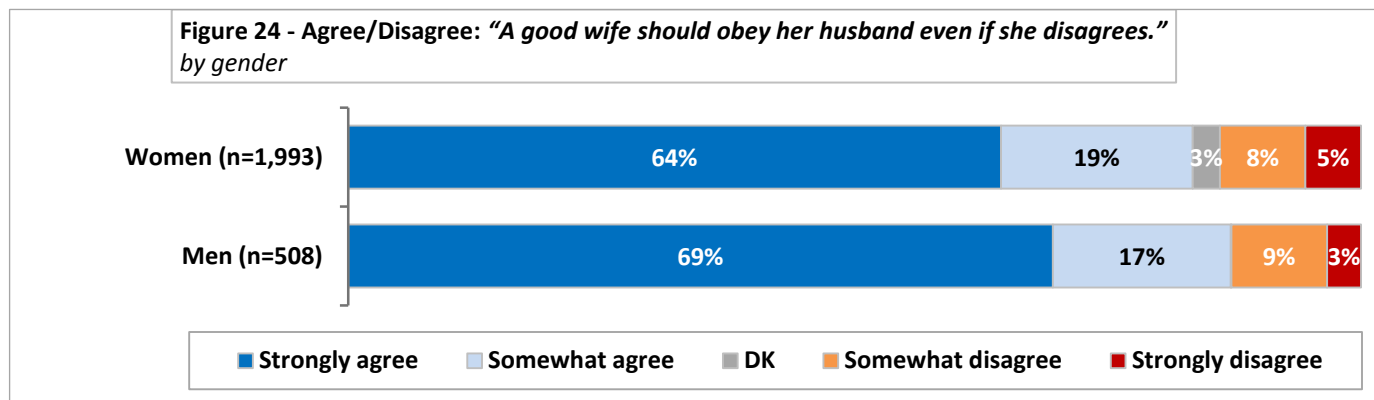
A majority of both women and men strongly/somewhat agree that “Women and girls should have equal access to education as men and boys” (91% and 84%, respectively) (Figure 21). Yet, when asked whether “Women should have equal work opportunities as men,” 78% of women strongly/somewhat agree and only 44% of men agree (Figure 22). The largest disparity in opinions between genders is in the intensity of support: while 80% of women strongly agree on equal access to education, only 58% of men strongly agree. Similarly, while 57% of women strongly agree to equal work opportunities, only 19% of men strongly agree.



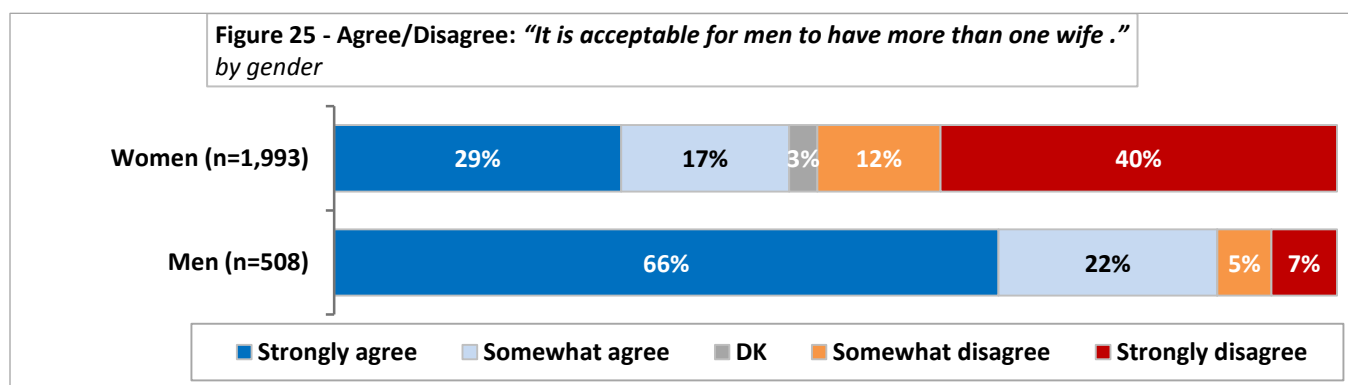
When jobs are scarce, majorities of Yemeni women (83%) and men (89%) both agree that men should have more of a right to a job than women. This demonstrates that women and men agree to equal work opportunities in theory, but if jobs are scarce men should be prioritized (Figure 23).



Majorities of men and women also believe a good wife should obey her husband even if she disagrees: 83% of women and 87% of men strongly/somewhat agree. Figures 23 and 24 show that men and women have similar outlooks on women’s and wives’ submissive roles in relation to men and husbands. 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.



Regarding polygamy, or the ability of men to have more than one wife, there is a difference of opinion on this issue between men and women. A strong 88% of men strongly/somewhat agree it is acceptable for men to have more than one wife, while only 46% of women agree. In fact, over half of women (52%) strongly/somewhat disagree that it is acceptable for men to have more than one wife versus 12% of men who disagree (Figure 25). Among women in polygamous marriages, nearly two-thirds (65%) agree that it is acceptable for a man to have more than one wife. For women in monogamous marriages, the proportion agreeing with this statement is lower but stands at a sizable 40%.



When aggregating opinions on these five statements related to gender equality and classifying the more equality-based or “progressive” responses, we see women gave progressive responses to more of these statements than men. As seen in Figure 26, 36% of women gave progressive opinions to three of the five statements compared to only 12% of men. Thirty-eight percent of both men and women gave progressive responses to two statements, 33% of men

gave progressive responses to only one statement and 13% did not give any progressive responses to any questions on gender equality. Overall, 50% of women gave progressive responses to three or more statements compared to only 16% of men (Figure 26).

Figure 26 - Percentage of “progressive” responses to statements on gender equality, Percent by gender <u>Agree/Disagree Statements:</u>	Women (n=1,993)	Men (n=508)
1. “Women and girls should have equal access to education as men and boys.”		
2. “Women should have equal work opportunities as men.”		
3. “When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women.”		
4. “A good wife should obey her husbands, even if she disagrees.”		
5. “It is acceptable for men to have more than one wife.”		
Gave “progressive” responses to <b>0</b> statements on gender equality	5%	13%
Gave “progressive” responses to <b>1</b> statement on gender equality	8%	33%
Gave “progressive” responses to <b>2</b> statements on gender equality	38%	38%
Gave “progressive” responses to <b>3</b> statements on gender equality	36%	12%
Gave “progressive” responses to <b>4</b> statements on gender equality	12%	3%
Gave “progressive” responses to <b>5</b> statements on gender equality	2%	1%

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 the average score when aggregating responses were relatively similar for women and men at 5.6 and 5.8 respectively, indicating a similar outlook between genders on the role of fate in their lives (Figures 27 & 28).

