



Gender Attitudes and Trends in MENA: The Effects of Working Women

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Executive Summary

Gender equality continues to be elusive in many parts of life in countries across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Although there is widespread support for women enjoying equal rights, there has been some retrenchment on these issues in recent years. Even greater declines are found when looking at support for women having equal roles in public and private life, which were already less favored than equal rights. A significant part of these views may be tied to women's employment.

Breaking with the previous trend of improving views on gender equality, we now find an increase in support for patriarchal norms in both the private and public spheres compared to Arab Barometer's last survey in 2021-2022.

Women's employment remains a major issue across the region. MENA still boasts the lowest female labor force participation rate of any world region and many male citizens do not agree that men and women should be afforded equal opportunities at work. This low level of women's employment appears to have major effects on other aspects of life. The survey results show that men and women who have at least one female relative who held a job at any point are much more likely than those who do not to support gender equality on a large number of issue areas among both men and women. Men with working female relatives tend to have opinions on gender equality that are closer to those of women in their country than other men. For women, having a female relative in the labor force is associated with stronger beliefs in gender equality than even women having held jobs themselves.

Increasing female labor force participation could not only increase the economic well-being of women, but also the acceptance of gender equality among men and women. As more women hold jobs outside the home, more citizens will have female relatives who have worked. The positive views of gender equality held by men who currently have working female relatives suggest that men may adopt more pro-equality views as more of their female relatives join the labor force. Acceptance among men is especially important as men hold many decision-making positions both in public life and at home. Support from men for gender equality is crucial to achieving it.

The set of countries surveyed by Arab Barometer are diverse with respect to population size, demographics, history, and culture. This variation contributes to a variety of views on all subjects, including gender. For example, the female labor force participation rate in Kuwait is dramatically higher than any other country surveyed. The Kuwaiti government has long used its oil revenues to fund jobs for its citizens, both male and female, in the public sector. It is rare to find a Kuwaiti man who does not have any female relatives who have held a job.

In stark contrast to Kuwait is Mauritania. Few women in Mauritania have ever held a job, and educational attainment between men and women is striking. While there are certainly broad trends and findings from the region as a whole, this report includes several individual country-specific findings as well.

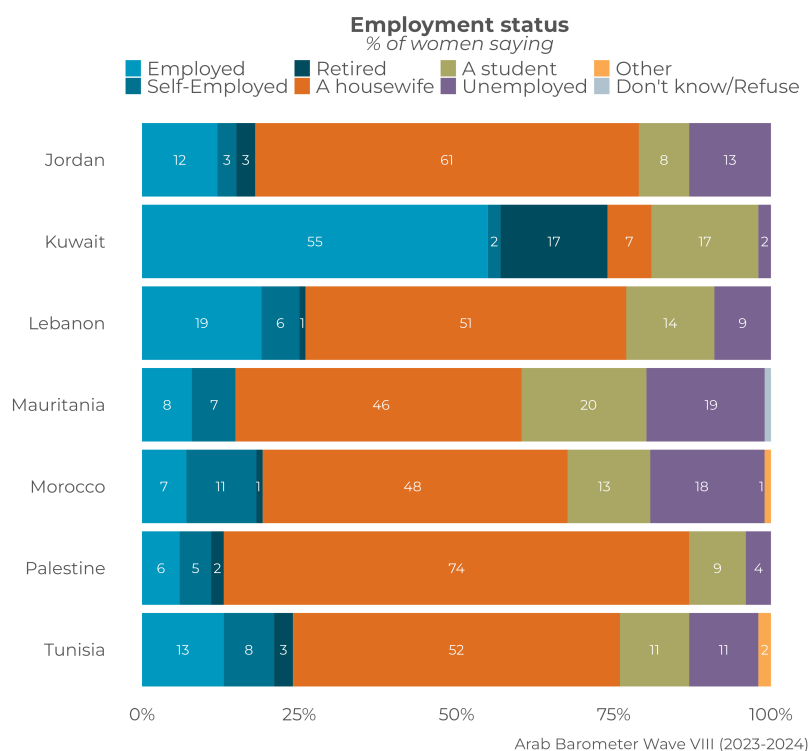
These findings are based on seven nationally representative public opinion surveys conducted across the Middle East and North Africa from 2023-24 as part of Arab Barometer Wave VIII. The results include over 13,000 interviews across the region and have a margin of error of ± 3 points or less in each country. Overall, these results make clear that while views of MENA citizens are experiencing some backsliding away from gender equality, there are still opportunities to advance gender parity across many aspects of life.

Women in the Workforce

Women Who Work

Given that MENA continues to be the region with the lowest female labor force participation (FLFP), it is unsurprising that a plurality of women in nearly every country surveyed by Arab Barometer identify as housewives rather than employed or self-employed. Outside of Kuwait, Lebanon (25 percent), Tunisia (21 percent), and Morocco (19 percent) have the highest percent of women who identify as employed or self-employed. Palestine has the fewest employed women at only 11 percent.

Kuwaiti women are far more likely than women from any other country surveyed to describe themselves as employed or self-employed (56 percent). This is largely due to the government investing its oil revenue into creating jobs for its citizens and increasing their commitment to promoting women in the workforce (Mosly 2023, *Gulf Women in the Workplace*).

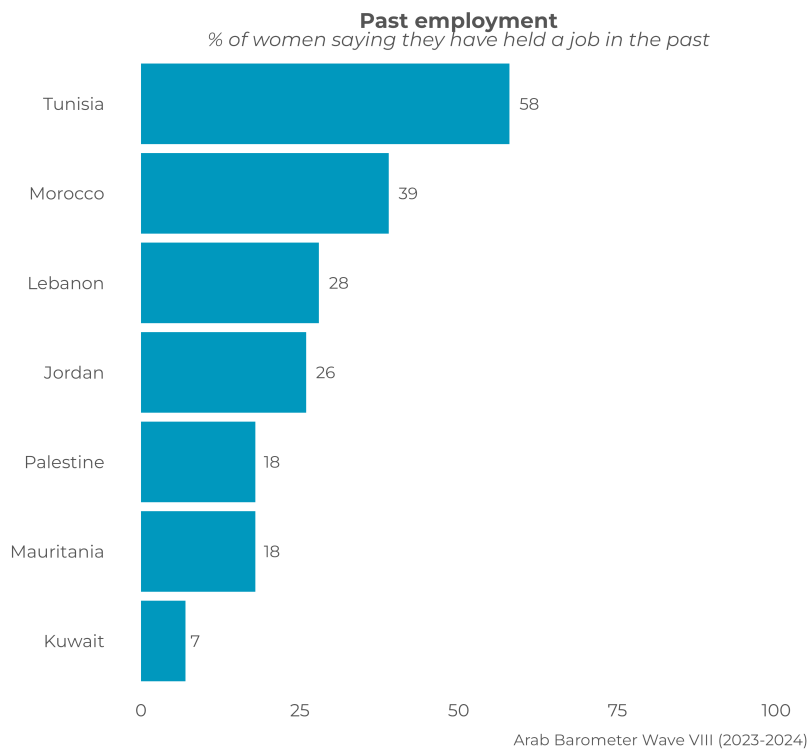


Among those women who are employed, the types of employment women find themselves in is fairly consistent across the region. By and large women tend to work in the private sector and are salaried as opposed to paid hourly or from profits. The most common industry of work tends to be education. Kuwaiti women are again the exception, with 87 percent of employed women working in the public sector, which is again a nod to the Kuwaiti government's investment in FLFP.

A relatively small portion of women describe themselves as unemployed. Mauritania and Morocco have the largest proportion of unemployed women at 19 percent and 18 percent, respectively. Most unemployed women surveyed are looking for jobs and often have held a job in the past.

Even though relatively few women across the countries surveyed describe themselves as currently employed, many others say they have held jobs in the past. In particular, 58 percent of Tunisian women who identified as housewives, students, or unemployed said they have held a job in the past. Palestinian and Mauritanian women are the least likely to say they have held a job in the past; only 18 percent of women not currently employed in each country say they

have been employed previously.



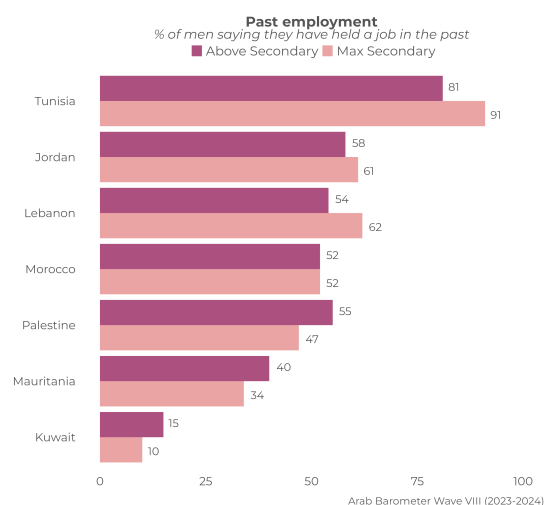
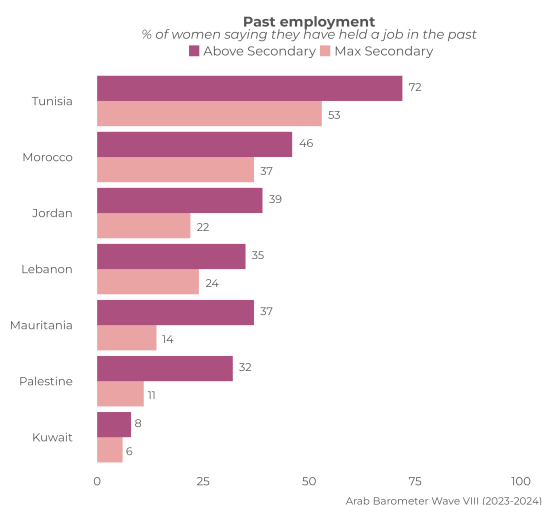
Throughout much of the region, there are distinct norms differentiating men and women’s employment in MENA. These differences are best illustrated by breaking down who has held a job along education and income lines. Kuwait continues to be the exception.

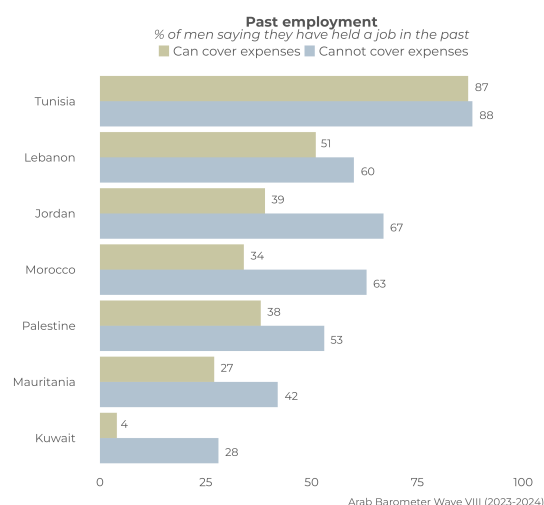
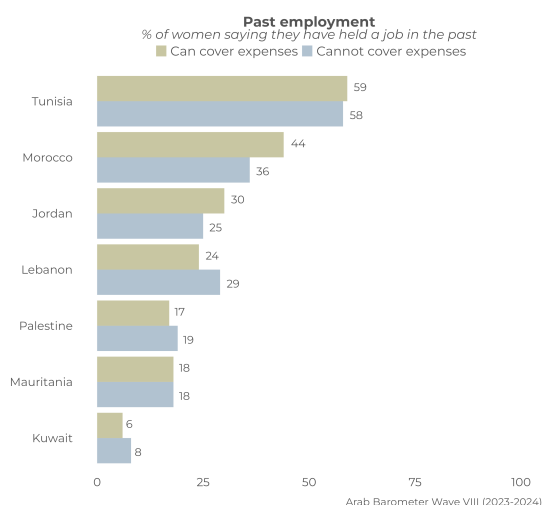
A woman’s level of education strongly correlates with whether she held a job in the past. The smallest gap is seen in Morocco, where women with above a secondary education are nine points more likely than women with at most a secondary degree to have held a job. In all other countries we see at least a double-digit difference between women with higher and lower levels of education. The more education a woman has, the most likely she is to have held a job in the past.

In contrast, a woman’s economic security does not directly correlate with having held a job in the past. Only in Morocco, Jordan, and Lebanon are there notable differences between women who can cover their expenses and women who cannot cover their expenses and the likelihood of having held a job in the

past. In Morocco and Jordan, women who can cover expenses are more likely to have held a job in the past than women who cannot cover their monthly expenses. There is an eight-point difference in Morocco and a five-point difference in Jordan. In Lebanon, women who cannot cover their monthly expenses are five points more likely to say they have held a job in the past than women who can cover their expenses.

The patterns seen among women by income and education as they relate to past employment are the reverse of what is seen among men. Men who cannot cover their monthly expenses are much more likely than those who can to have held a job in the past, while a man's level of education does not share the same strong correlation.





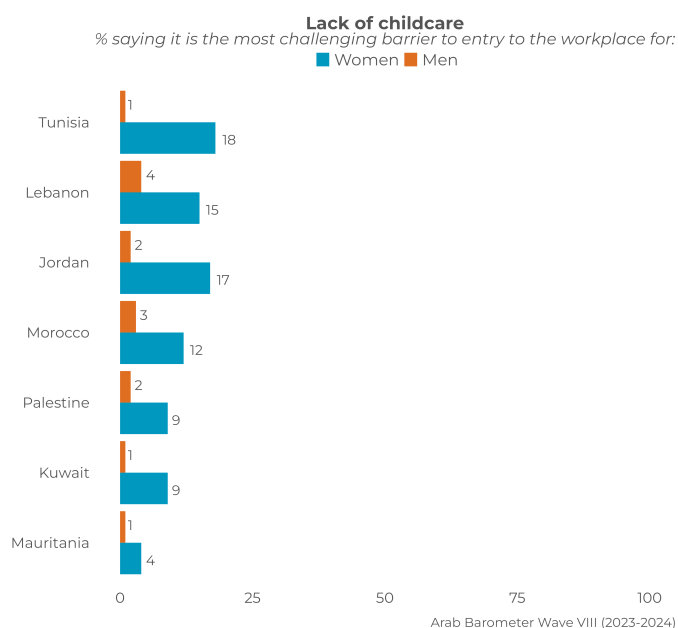
Contrasting the effects (or non-effects) of income and education on men and women's employment history highlights the distinctive roles employment plays in the lives of men and women. In every country surveyed, a plurality of women who are not currently employed are married. This is true for both women who have and have not held a job in the past. Conversely, most men who are not currently employed are single. A woman who has held a job in the past, but does not currently work, is likely able to rely on her husband's income, while a man in the same position is more likely to be single and therefore cannot rely on his wife's income.

Of the women who have held a job in the past, at least half in Tunisia (65 percent), Morocco (50 percent), Jordan (62 percent), and Lebanon (50 percent) plan on returning to work. These four countries are the only ones with a large enough sample size for analysis. With half or more of non-working women who have previously worked expressing interest in rejoining the labor force, convincing women to return to work should not be a problem. It is not minds that need to be changed (at least among previously employed women). If governments can address the structural issues women face, FLFP should increase.

Childcare and FLFP

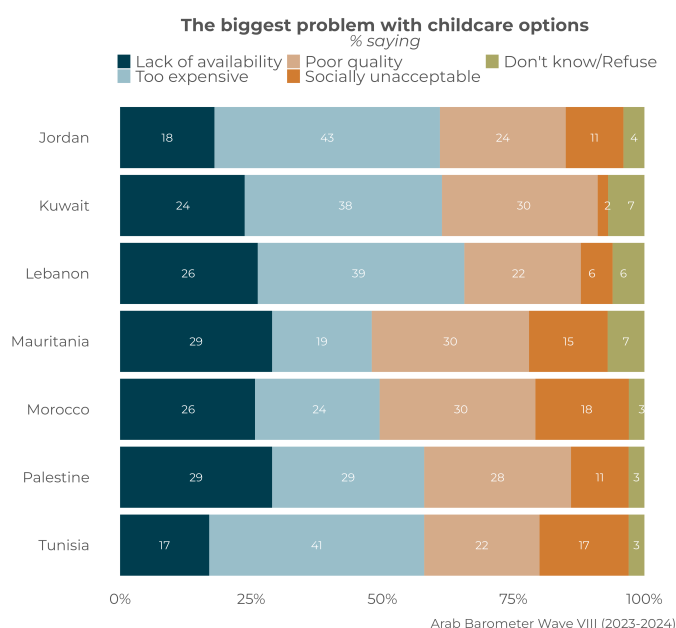
Arab Barometer finds wide acceptance that women and men face distinctly different challenges when attempting to join the labor force. In every country surveyed, a lack of childcare or a lack of flexible hours are at least one of the top two most cited barriers women face when entering the workforce from a list of nine options. Neither of these make the top three barriers to workforce entry for

men in any country. Citizens are especially more likely to say a lack of childcare is the biggest barrier for women compared with men.



To better understand why childcare remains such a barrier to FLFP, Arab Barometer asks what is the biggest problem with childcare in a respondent's own country. In most cases, a plurality of citizens says the cost of childcare is the biggest issue. Citizens in Jordan (43 percent), Tunisia (41 percent), Lebanon (39), and Kuwait (38 percent) name childcare expenses far more often than any other option. In all four countries, concerns over cost are not diminished in importance by income. Whether citizens can cover their monthly expenses does not affect the likelihood of cost being named the most pressing issue with accessing childcare.

Palestinians are just as likely to say a lack of availability as they are to say the expense (29 percent, each). Meanwhile, Mauritania and Morocco are the only countries for which expense is not at least tied for the biggest issue with childcare. Citizens in both countries say that poor quality, closely followed by a lack of availability, are currently the biggest problems with childcare.



Notably, a plurality of men and women in every country largely agree on the biggest problem with the current state of childcare. In the majority of countries, both men and women are most likely to say that affordability is the biggest problem with childcare. For example, while Tunisian women are more likely than Tunisian men to say affordability is the biggest problem with childcare (46 percent of women versus 36 percent of men), affordability is the most popular choice for both men and women. The same is often true of the second most agreed upon answer. This tells us that there seems to be a strong consensus on the issues surrounding childcare in each country.

Social acceptability is the least common response when asked about issues with childcare. Neither women nor men considered societal pressures to provide childcare at home instead of using public or private childcare providers as the biggest problem with childcare. This is not to say social pressure may not be an issue; rather, issues of cost, quality, and availability are seen as more pressing.

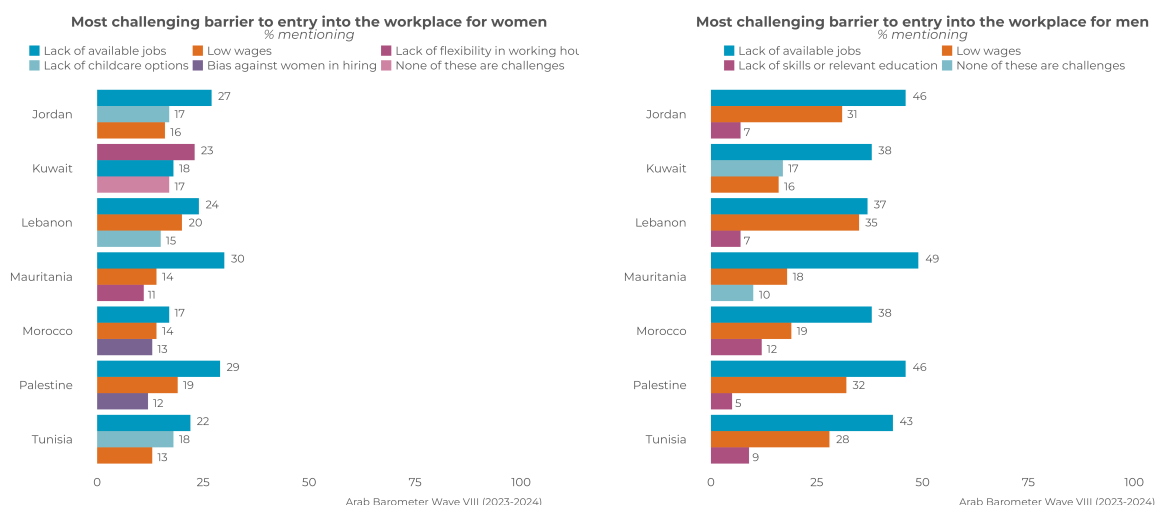
These results are positive on several fronts for governments that want to encourage FLFP. Women in MENA largely indicate they are open to returning to work if they are not currently working. Issues with childcare are consistently cited across the region as a top barrier women face to entering the workforce; more specifically the cost of childcare. Government subsidies may go a long way to alleviate these concerns. Combating a dearth of or poor quality childcare

may take months or years of investment in infrastructure and training. Providing financial assistance, on the other hand, not only could be achieved through legislation, but also addresses a top concern. Childcare subsidies could significantly reduce the barrier to entry for women in MENA who want to rejoin the workforce.

Other Barriers

Childcare is only one of several barriers to workforce participation women face. In fact, when asked what the biggest barrier facing women entering the workforce, the most common response across countries is a lack of available jobs, often followed by low wages. Not being able to afford childcare while working is secondary if women cannot find an available job in the first place. Similarly, across the globe women and men with children need to balance the cost of childcare against the wages received from working while children are in childcare. A combination of cultural norms and the fact that women tend to receive less pay than men are often suggested as reasons women wind up being the ones who take on the burden of childcare and leave the workforce. Increasing the availability of jobs as well as the income those jobs provide increases the opportunities for women to join the workforce and afford childcare.

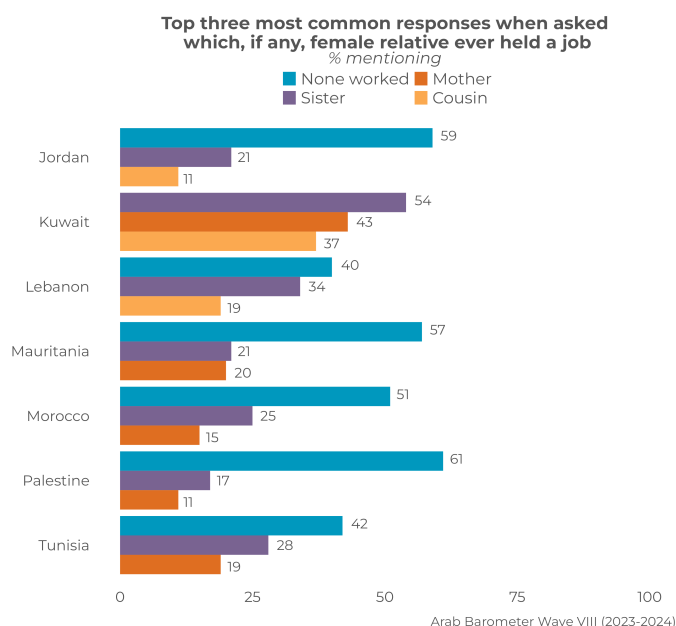
In comparing the perceptions of barriers to workforce entry faced by women versus men, we find implicit acknowledgment that women face more barriers than men. A lack of jobs and low wages are the most commonly cited barriers to workforce entry for men, just as they often are for women. The important difference is the size of the plurality selecting those options. In every country, a majority of citizens point to job scarcity or low wages as the biggest barriers to workforce entry for men. In contrast, even though the same responses are the relatively most common choices for barriers women face, the combination of the two never reaches a majority. That is, only between 31 and 48 percent of citizens choose job scarcity or low wages as a barrier for women, compared to 55 to 78 percent of citizens choosing one of the two as a barrier for men.



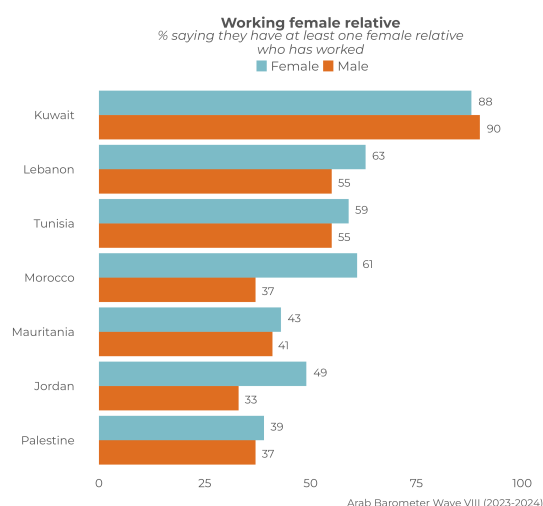
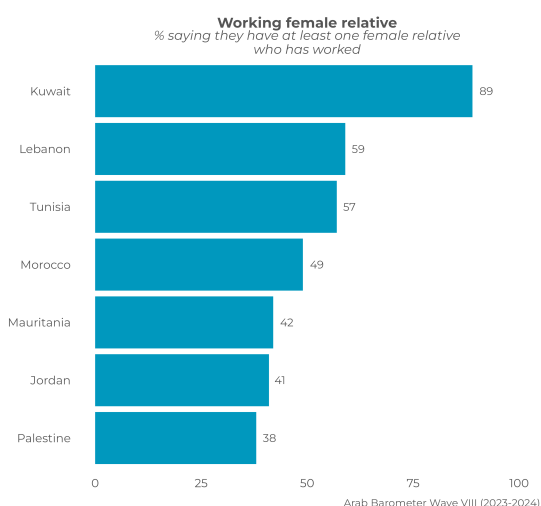
This does not necessarily mean that job availability or low wages are less important or prominent barriers for women than men, but that citizens recognize women face a wider variety of challenges. Opinions on the most challenging barrier faced by women are much more disparate. Consensus is more difficult to reach because women face many barriers. Childcare, for instance, is a popular choice of barrier for women but not for men. Bias against women in hiring is not particularly popular, but in every country is more likely to be mentioned than bias against men.

Working Female Relatives

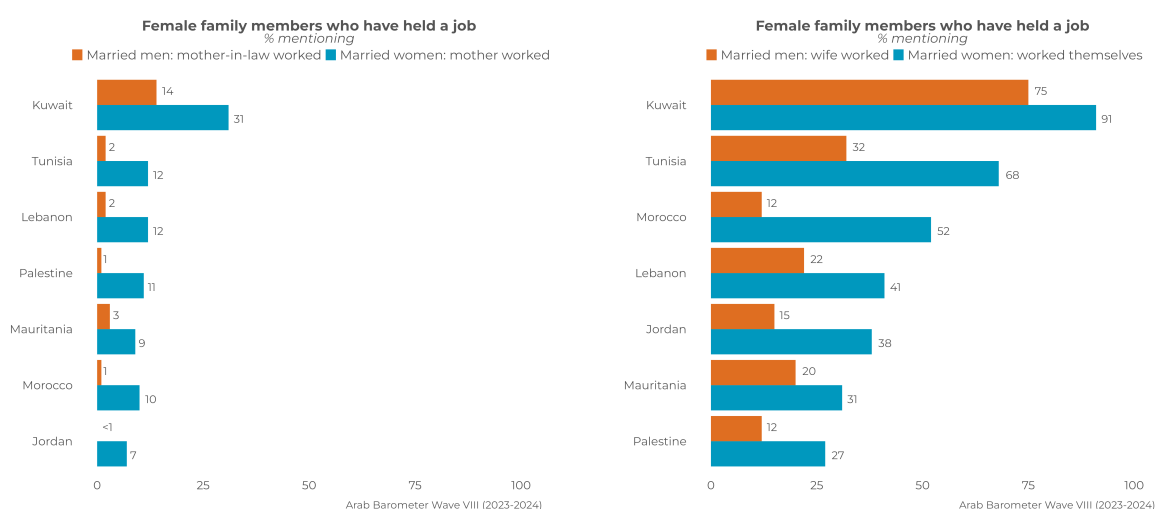
For the first time, Arab Barometer asked respondents if they have any female relatives who work. Respondents were asked to select all female relatives they have who have ever held a job. In every country except Kuwait, the most common response is that the respondent does not have any female relatives who worked. Among those who do have a female relative who worked, the most common response is sister, followed by mother in Mauritania, Morocco, Palestine, and Tunisia. In Jordan and Lebanon, a sister working is still the most common, but a cousin working is more common than a mother working.



In general, women tend to be more likely than men to say at least one female relation has held a job. The difference is especially striking in Morocco (24-point difference), Jordan (16-point difference), and to a lesser extent Lebanon (eight-point difference). Although differences are also found in Tunisia, Mauritania, and Palestine, the differences are not statistically significant at standard levels.



There is clearly a gender gap in knowledge of female relative's workforce participation. Women in Kuwait, Mauritania, Lebanon, and Morocco are all significantly more likely than men to say their mothers have worked. Women who are married are far more likely to say their mother worked than men who are married are to say their mother-in-law worked. Furthermore, on average there is nearly a 30-point difference between the percentage of married women who say they currently hold or have held a job in the past and married men who say their wife has held a job at some point. The largest difference is seen in Tunisia, where 68 percent of wives say they currently have a job or have worked in the past, but only 32 percent of husbands say their wife has worked at some point.



The responses to the question of working female relatives should be understood as citizens, particularly men, who can or cannot name a female relative who has held a job. It is likely that more men have working female relatives than they realize, given the response differences between men and women.

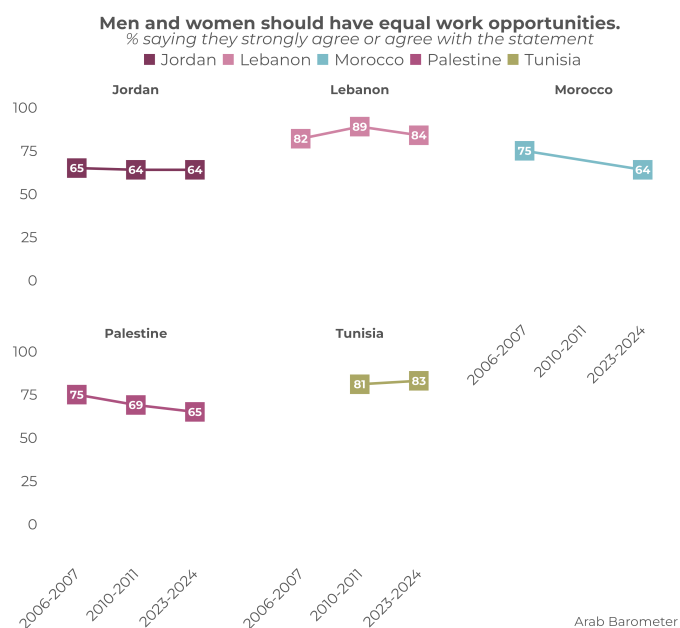
Across the region, both men and women who have more than a secondary education, can cover their expenses, and live in urban areas tend to be more likely to name a female relative who has held a job. The largest, most consistent differences are seen when comparing levels of educational attainment. For both men and women, citizens with more than a secondary education are much less likely to say no female relative has ever worked. In every country surveyed fewer than half of women with more than a secondary education did not know of any working female relative.

The demographic breakdowns of who does or does not have working female relatives is consistent with the demographic breakdowns of women who have said they have held a job in the past. It follows that citizens in the same demographic camps of women who have held jobs in the past are more likely to have women in their family who do or have held a job. The impact of being related to working women goes beyond views associated with high levels of education, relative wealth, or urbanity. Men related to working women have more progressive views on gender issues than men who are not. Women with working female relatives are more likely to work than those who do not. We also find larger positive differences on gender attitudes between women with or without working female relatives than between women who have or have not ever been employed. This indicates that having a working woman in the family may have a bigger impact on a woman's view of gender equality than even having a job herself. The next several sections explore the areas where we see these effects in greater detail.

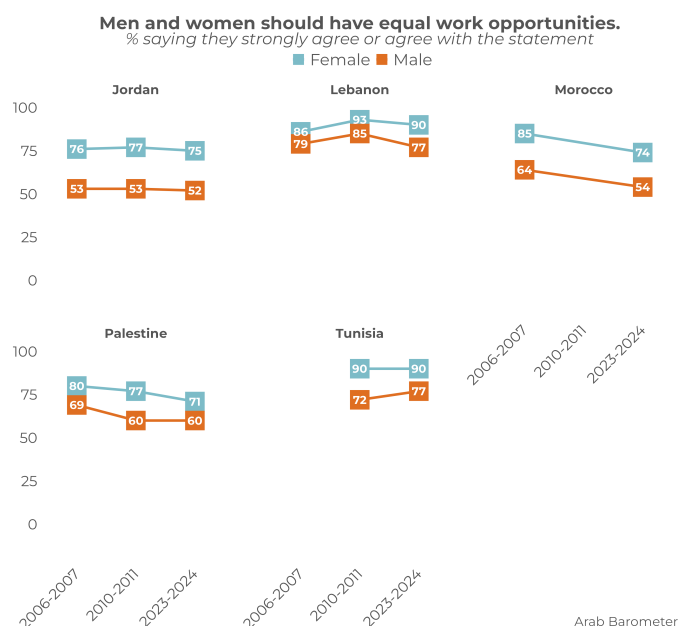
Views on Female Labor Force Participation

Trending Views

Arab Barometer has asked about support for equal work opportunities for men and women in the past. Worryingly, in three of the five countries where it is possible to compare changes over time, support for equal opportunities in the workplace has dropped. Lebanon and Palestine have both seen an overall decrease in agreement that men and women should have equal work opportunities since last asked in Arab Barometer surveys in 2010-2011 (five points and four points, respectively). This is a continuing trend for Palestine, where the question was first asked in 2006, and a return to the status quo from when Lebanese were first asked in 2007. Morocco has also seen a 11-point drop when from the question was first asked in 2007. There has been no significant change over the past 12 to 17 years in either direction in Tunisia or Jordan, the only other countries in which the question was previously posed.



This trend is not driven just by men, but by women as well. In Morocco, women are 11 points less likely today than in 2007 to agree that work opportunities should be provided equally. Across the same time span, Palestinian women today are nine points less likely to agree. While agreement among Lebanese women dropped only slightly since 2012, Lebanese men are eight points less likely to agree. As a silver lining, there is a five-point increase in this belief among Tunisian men.



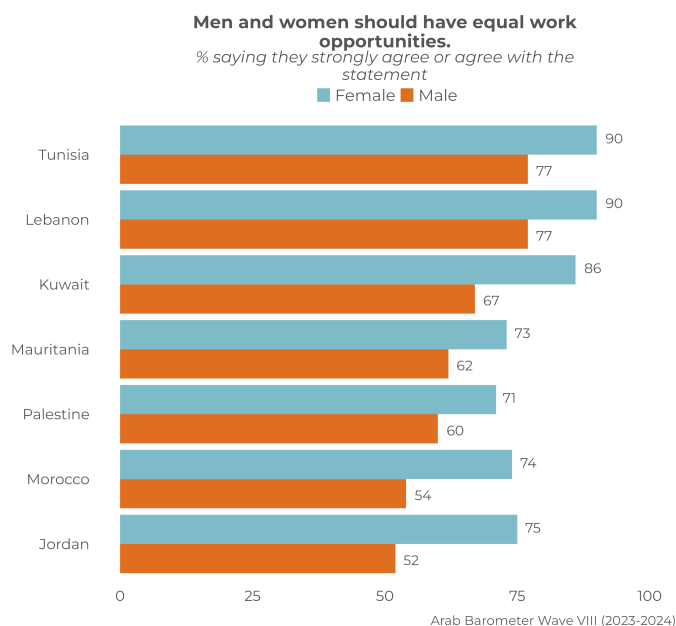
This trend is especially worrying in the recent post-Covid years. The Covid pandemic is widely reported as having an especially negative impact on FLFP (Moghadam 2021). Antagonism towards equal workplace opportunities, let alone providing women specific encouragement, only at best stalls any efforts to recover pre-pandemic levels of FLFP.

Current Status

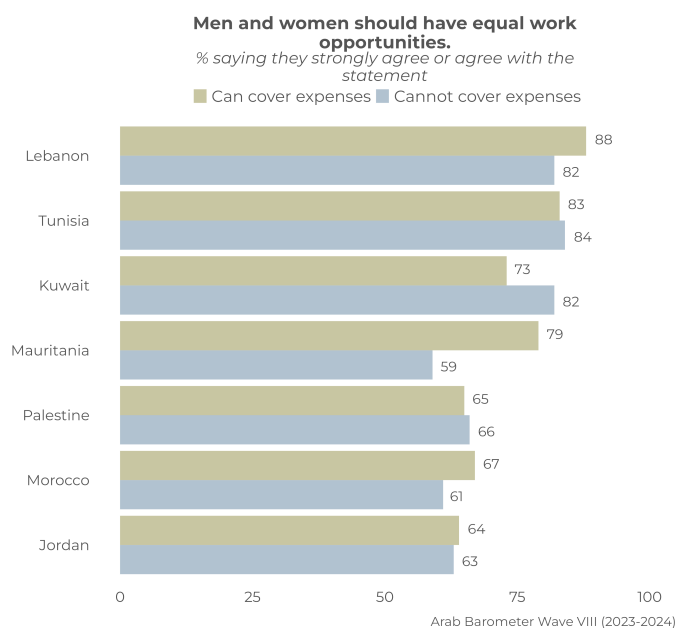
Since the question only asks if men and women should be given equal opportunities at work, not whether one gender should be favored over the other, there is a chance respondents might disagree because they think women should be given more opportunities at work than men. This would imply supporting equal work opportunities indicates less support of women in the workplace. The demographic breakdowns of support, however, do not bear this interpretation out.

Women are far more likely to believe that men and women should have equal work opportunities. In every country surveyed, a strong majority of women support equal opportunities in the workplace. Even in the country with the least support among women, Palestine, 71 percent of women favor equal opportunities. In both Tunisia and Lebanon, 90 percent of women agree. Men, by contrast, are less supportive of equal work opportunities. Tunisian and Lebanese men tie for the most supportive with 77 percent of men agreeing that men and

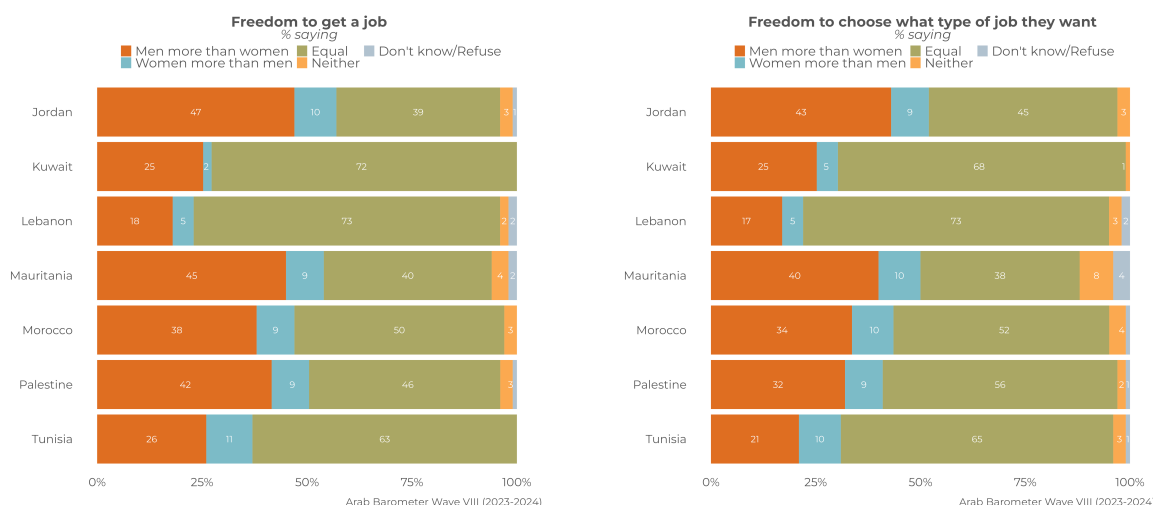
women should have equal work opportunities. Moroccan and Jordanian men are the least supportive, with only 54 percent and 52 percent of men agreeing, respectively.



In some countries, whether citizens can cover their monthly expenses affects their opinion on affording women and men equal opportunities at work. Mauritania is a particularly striking example, where 79 percent of citizens who can cover their monthly expenses support equal work opportunities compared to 59 percent of those who cannot cover their monthly expenses. There is also a six-point difference between economic groups in Lebanon and Morocco. In both cases, like Mauritania, those who can cover expenses are more likely to support equality in the workplace.



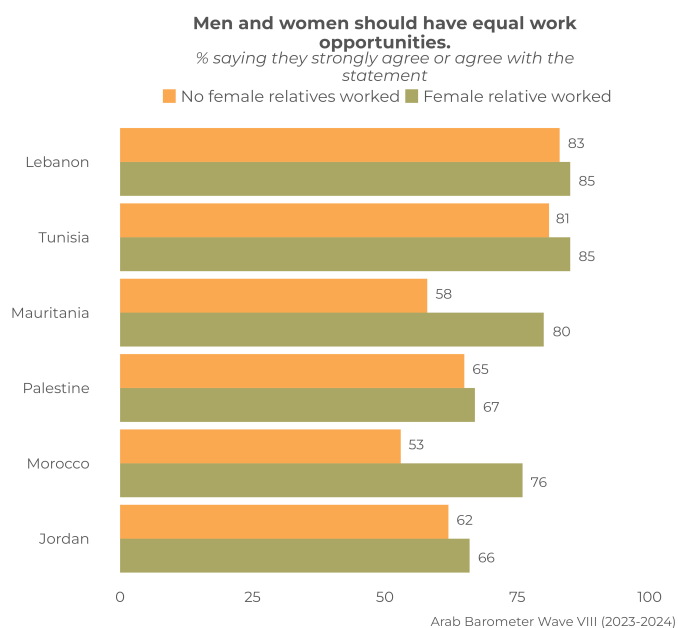
The division in attributes among economic classes spans the gender divide as well. In Mauritania, Morocco, and Lebanon, both men and women who say they struggle to cover monthly expenses are less likely to support equal workplace opportunities. Despite the sizable gap between men and women's support for equal opportunities in the workplace, men and women have similar perceptions of which gender has more opportunities on the job market. Namely, across the region both men and women say both genders have equal freedom to choose a career and pursue that career. Arab Barometer asks whether men, women, equally, or neither have more freedom to get a job as well as get a job of their choice. In both cases across every country, "equal" and "men more than women" are the most common responses. With respect to freedom to get a job, the most common response in most countries is "equal." The exceptions are Jordan (47 percent) and Mauritania (45 percent) where citizens say men have more freedom to get a job than women. A similar pattern is seen when asked who has more freedom to choose the type of job they want. In nearly all countries citizens are most likely to say men and women have equal freedom. Jordan and Mauritania are partial exceptions. In Jordan and Mauritania, citizens are statistically just as likely to say equal compared with men more than women.



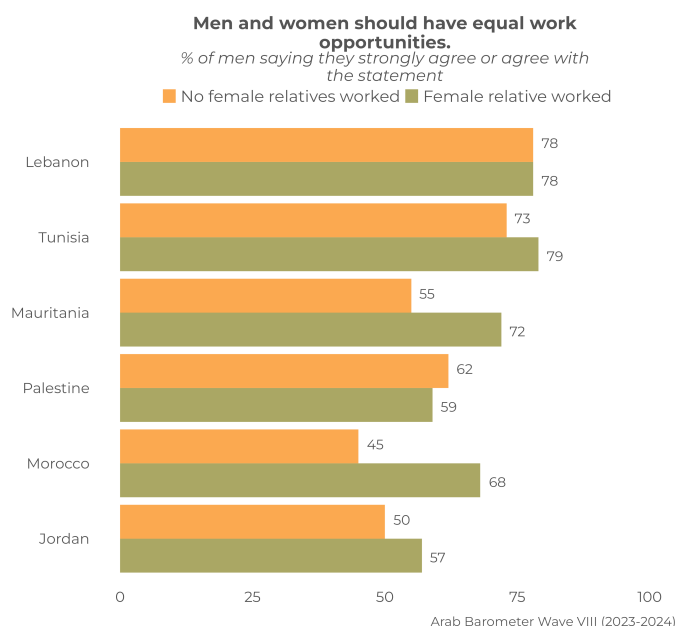
Among those who believe one gender is advantaged in freedom to get a job, the results reveal it is clearly men. The same is true for freedom to pursue a career of one's choice. Even though citizens are most likely to say men and women have equal freedom overall, citizens are also still much more likely to say men have more freedom than women have more freedom. Very few citizens, especially men, say that women have more freedom than men with respect to labor force participation, suggesting men are cognizant of their inherent advantages in this regard. At most only one in ten citizens think women have more freedom than men, whereas at least nearly one in five citizens think men have more freedom than women.

Impact of Working Female Relatives

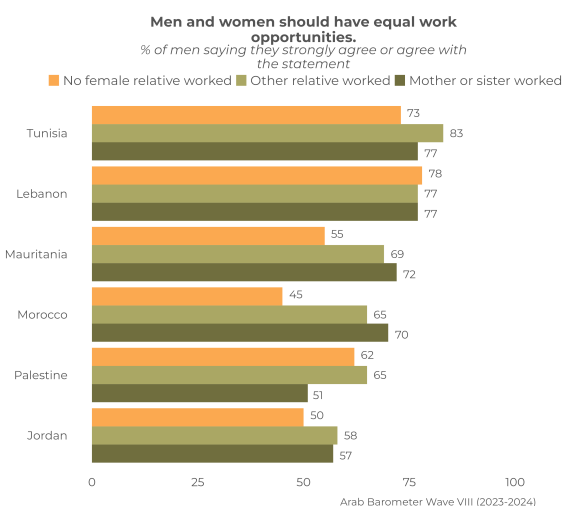
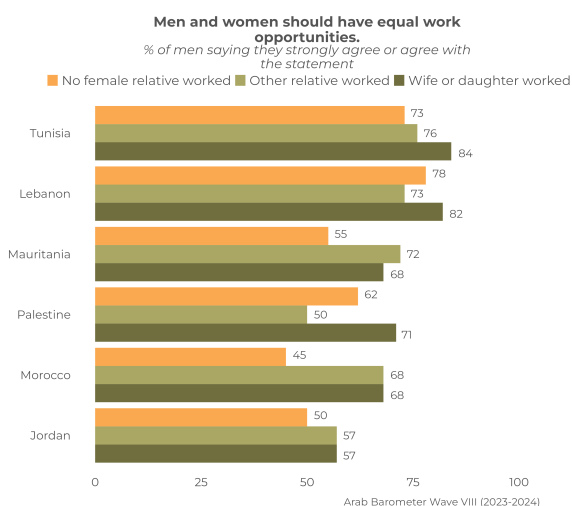
Knowing at least one female relative who had held a job significantly increases the likelihood citizens support equal work opportunities for men and women in Mauritania and Morocco. In Morocco, citizens are 23 points more likely to agree that work opportunities should be equal, and in Mauritania citizens are 22 points more likely.



Although the differences between those who do and do not know of at least one female relative who held a job are not statistically significant among all citizens in other countries, there are other differences among men specifically. In addition to men in Mauritania and Morocco, Jordanian and Tunisian men who know a female relative held a job are more likely to agree on equal work opportunities for all genders. Jordanian men are seven points more likely to agree and Tunisian men are six points more likely to agree with this concept.

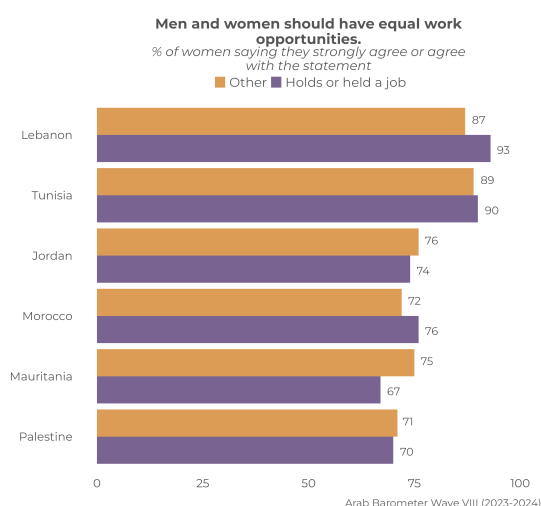
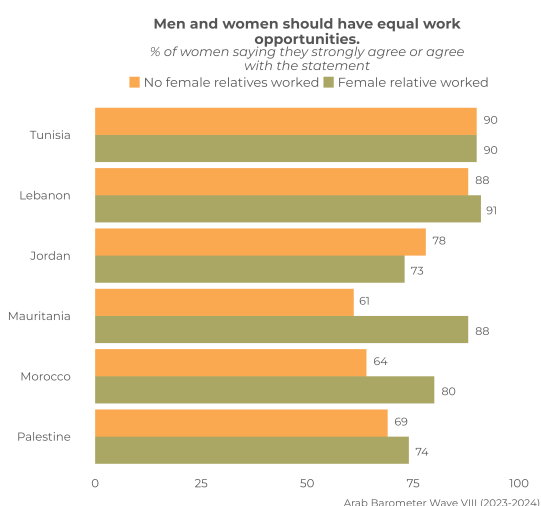


Whether a specific female relation who is working or any female relative working makes men more supportive of equal work opportunities varies across the region. In Morocco and Mauritania, where having any female relative working overall makes the biggest difference, it seems to be having any female relative who has held a job is linked with increased support for gender neutral workplace opportunities. In other countries, who is working matters to a greater extent.



In Tunisia and Lebanon, men who have either a wife or daughter who has held a job are more likely than men with other female relatives holding a job to support equality in the workplace. Of Tunisian men who have either a wife or daughter who held a job, 84 percent support equal workplace opportunities compared to 76 percent of men who have a different female relative who held a job. Similarly, 82 percent of Lebanese men with a wife or daughter who works support equal workplace opportunities compared to 73 percent of men who have a working female relative who is not their wife or daughter. There is no difference in Morocco or Jordan, and men in Mauritania are slightly more supportive if they have a working female relative who is neither their wife nor daughter. Having a sister or mother who worked is slightly more impactful than having other working female relatives in Morocco and Mauritania, but does not stand out in Tunisia, Lebanon, or Jordan. In all cases, men with a working wife or daughter are far more likely than men without any working female relatives to support gender neutral workplace opportunities.

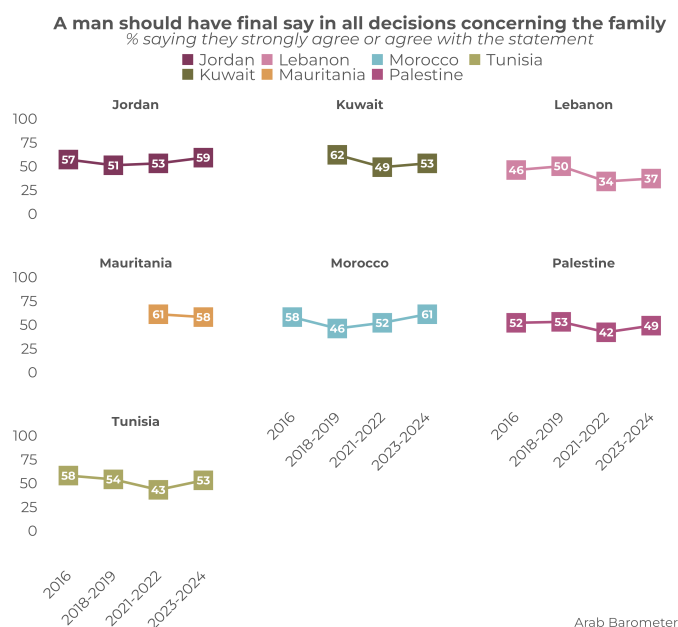
Whether or not a woman knows a female relative who held a job influences her opinion of equal work opportunities more than whether or not she has held a job herself. The differences in support for equal work opportunities among women who have and have not ever held a job tend to be smaller than the differences between women who do and do not know a female relative who worked. For example, in Morocco women who currently have a job or have worked in the past are only four points more likely than women who have never held a job to say there should be equal work opportunities for men and women (76 percent versus 72 percent). By contrast, women in Morocco who know a female relative who has held a job are 16 points more likely than women who do not to support equal work opportunities (80 percent versus 64 percent).



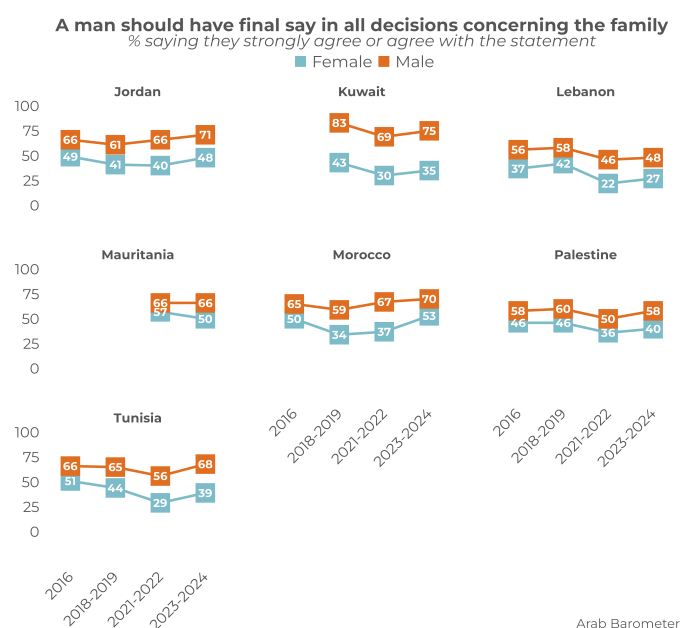
Views on Home Life

Trending Views

Arab Barometer regularly asks if a man should have the final say in all decisions concerning the family. Agreement with this sentiment increased in four of seven countries surveyed: Jordan, Morocco, Palestine, and Tunisia. Elsewhere, neither the slight increase in this percentage in Kuwait and Lebanon nor the slight decrease in Mauritania represent significant changes.



In both Jordan and Morocco, the increase puts the overall level of support for this view at the highest level even since Arab Barometer began surveying those countries. The two countries followed similar patterns, with an initial sharp drop in agreement between 2016 and 2018 before slowly increasing to levels last seen in 2016. Tunisia has the largest increase in support. In 2021 only 43 percent of Tunisians thought men should have the final say in all family decisions; in 2023, 53 percent of Tunisians agree.

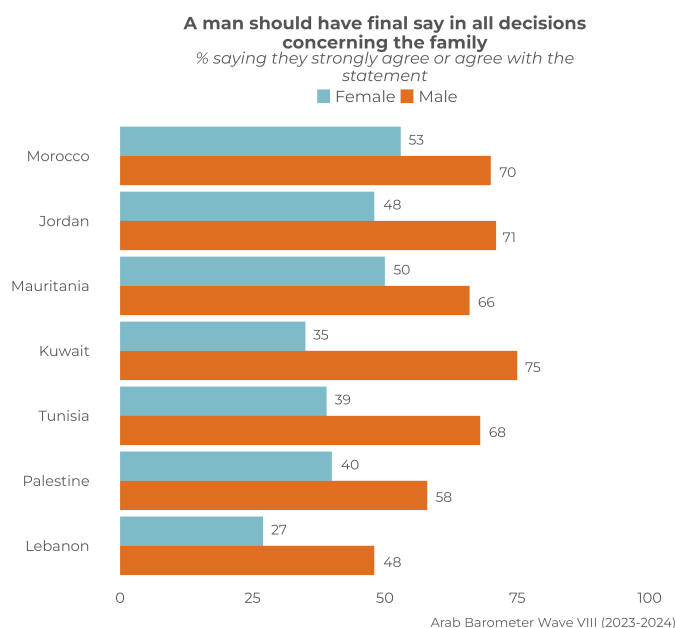


A change in support among women is just as responsible for the overall increase as a change in men's attitudes. In all countries except Mauritania, levels of support among women have increased since the countries were last surveyed in 2021 and 2022. The largest increase is among Moroccan women. In 2022, just 37 percent of women said they agreed or strongly agreed that a man should have the final say in all decisions concerning the family; by winter 2023-2024, this level increased to 53 percent of Moroccan women. Meanwhile, views among Moroccan men increased only three points, from 67 percent to 70 percent. Only among Mauritanian women do we see a decrease in this belief within the last few years. In 2021, 57 percent of Mauritanian women agreed, compared to 50 percent in 2024. The opinions of Mauritanian men remained unchanged over the same period.

Current Status

The general increase in support for men having the final say in family decisions belies the tremendous gap between the opinions of men and women on the matter. While more than half of male citizens agree in six of the seven countries (75 percent in Kuwait, 71 percent in Jordan, 70 percent in Morocco, 68 percent in Tunisia, 66 percent in Mauritania, and 58 percent in Palestine), fewer than half of female citizens agree in five of seven countries (48 percent in Jordan, 40 percent in Palestine, 39 percent in Tunisia, 35 percent in Kuwait, and 27 per-

cent in Lebanon). There are four countries where more than half of male citizens agree and fewer than half of female citizens agree (Kuwait, Jordan, Tunisia, and Palestine).

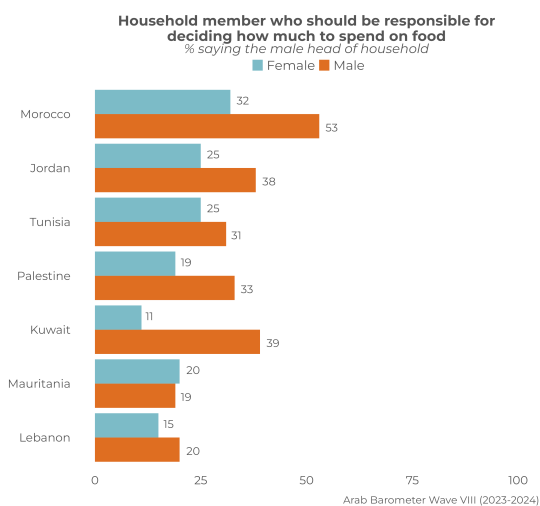
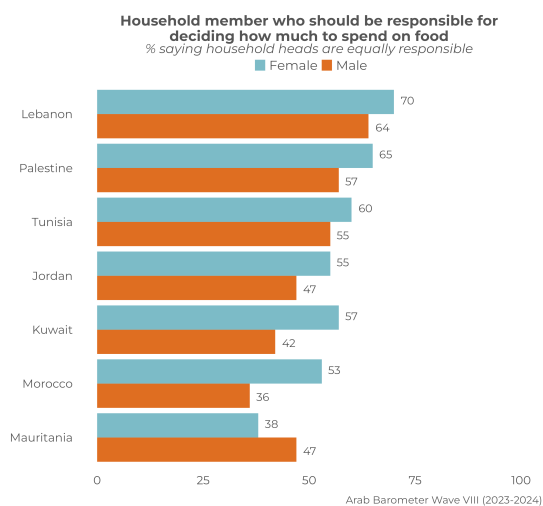
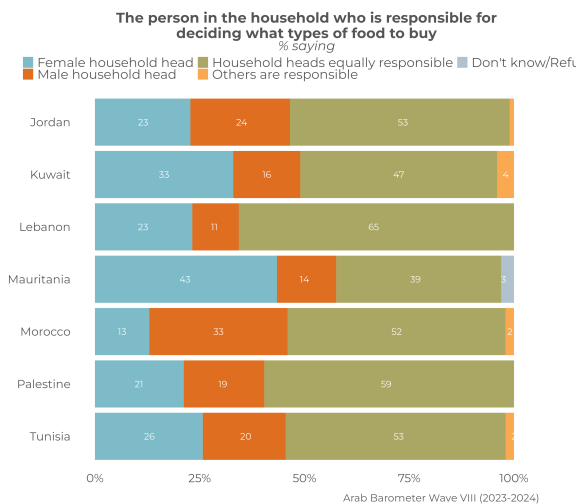
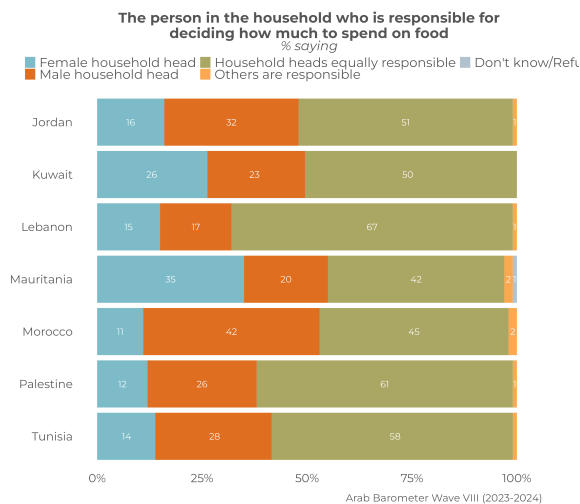


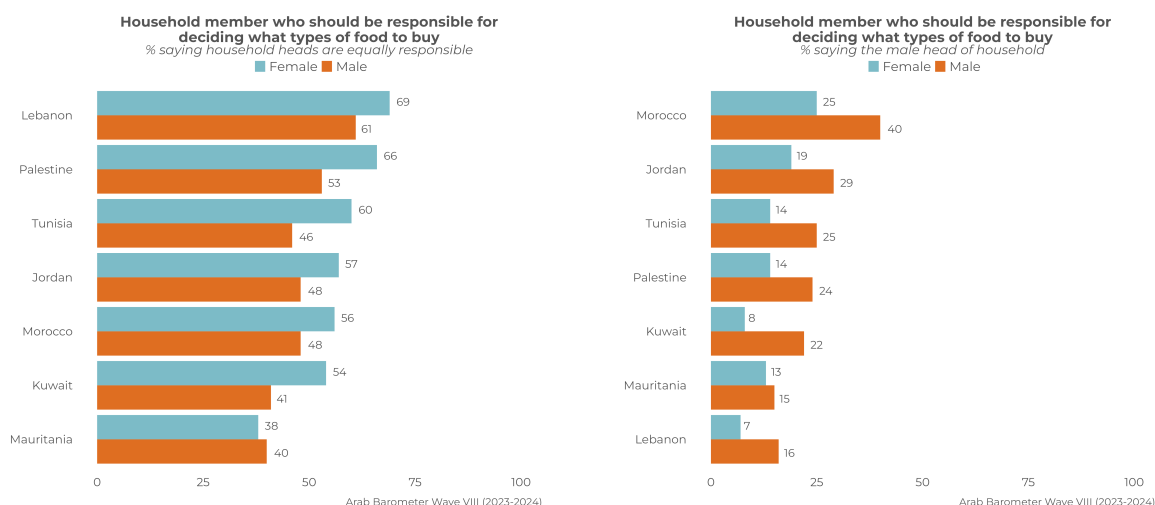
Even in countries where both men and women fall on the same side of 50 percent, a significant gap still exists. Moroccan women are the most likely to support the idea that a man should have final say in familial decisions, with 53 percent agreeing or strongly agreeing. This is barely a majority and still 17 points behind the 70 percent of Moroccan men who agree. On the other side of the spectrum is Lebanon. Lebanese men are the least likely to think a man should have the final say at home (48 percent), but Lebanese women are less likely still (27 percent).

To better understand perceptions of decision-making in the home, Arab Barometer asks respondents about two household decisions in particular: who should be responsible for deciding how much money to spend on food and who should be responsible for deciding which types of food to buy. A plurality of citizens across the region agree that the responsibilities should be shared equally, but nuances appear in several demographic breakdowns. In both cases, women are much more likely than men to say the male and female head of household equally share the responsibility, while men are more likely to say the male head of household should be responsible.

Arab Barometer – Wave VIII

Gender Report





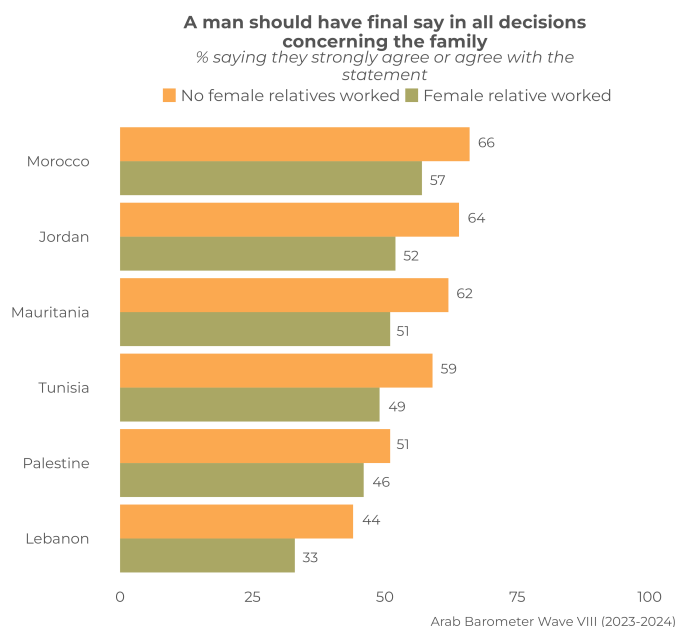
In line with all discussions surrounding gender roles, there is a sharp divide between the views of men and women regarding who should make decisions on feeding the family. Although a plurality of citizens in each country says the male and female household heads should be equally responsible for deciding how much money to spend on food and what food to buy, women tend to drive this plurality. In Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, and Mauritania, fewer than half of the male citizens think the male and female household heads should decide the household food budget together. The same pattern is seen regarding the types of food to buy. Men are much more likely than women to say the male head of household should be making the decisions. Despite the aspirational opinions that men and women should share responsibilities equally, there is still strong support, at least among male citizens, for men making household decisions.

Mauritania is a notable exception to the general view that food-related decisions should fall under the male per view. In Mauritania, food is clearly the woman's responsibility. Men view deciding what or how much to spend on food as neither a shared responsibility nor the man's responsibility. Mauritanian men, and women, think the female head of household should make decisions surrounding food for the household. There is a strong correlation between men who believe men and women should have equal opportunities in the workplace and their views of responsibilities for household decisions. Men who support equal workplace opportunities are much more likely than men who do not to think household decisions should be shared responsibilities. These men are also far less likely to say the male head of household should be responsible. Views on gender at home are closely related to views of gender in the workforce.

Impact of Knowing Working Women

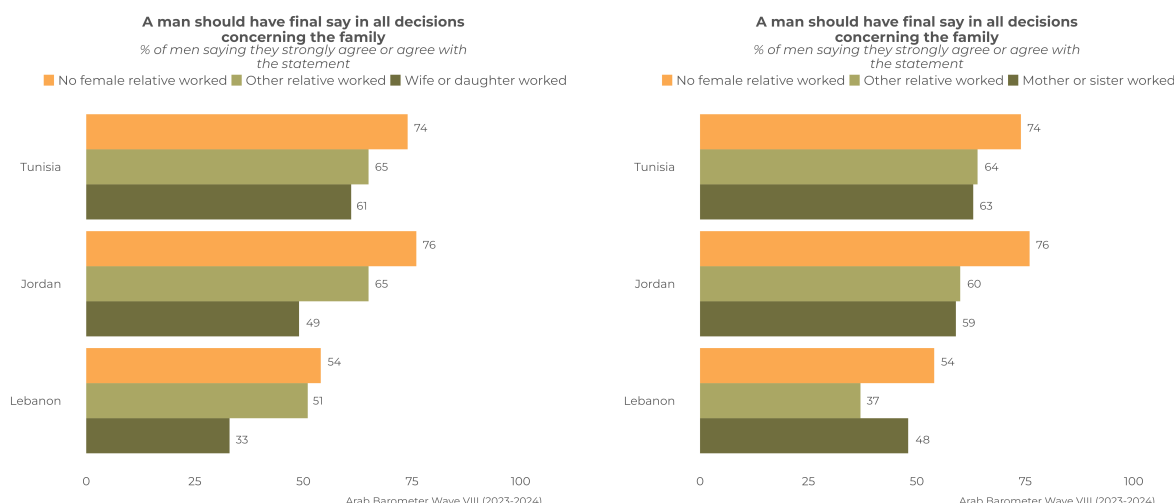
It is natural to think having female relatives who participate in the workforce may affect or correspond with a citizen's overall attitude towards women's workforce participation, but Arab Barometer finds those with working female relatives have more gender-neutral views of the roles and responsibilities of home life as well.

Everywhere citizens who can name at least one female relative who has been employed are less likely to agree that a man should have final say in familial decisions. Even accounting for the fact that women are more likely than men to be able to name a working female family member, this finding still holds among men in all countries except Morocco. The largest difference among men is found in Jordan; men who do not have a working female relative are 17 points more likely than those who do not to agree that men should have the final say in family matters. For Jordanian women, having a working female relative who works does not make a difference. Jordanian women are the exception, however. In all other countries, women who have a working female relative are even less likely to think men should have the final say. Everywhere, fewer than half of women who are related to women who have held a job think men should have the final say in family decisions.



In countries with a large enough sample for analysis (Tunisia, Jordan, and Lebanon),

the specific family connection affects the impact size for men. Having a wife or daughter hold a job is associated with bigger differences than having a mother or sister hold a job.

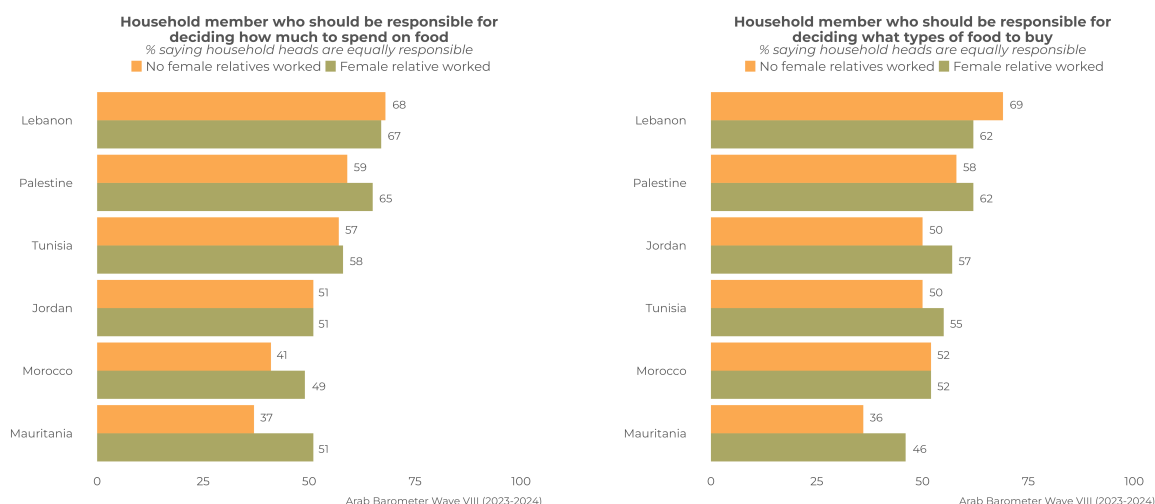


The influence of having employed female family members is greater than that of income, education, or urbanity. The differences between those who do and do not have an employed female relative tend to be significant and sustained across the region. Although we do see similar expected differences with respect to other common demographics (e.g., citizens with more education, greater incomes, and who live in cities are less likely to agree that men should have the final say in family matters), these differences tend not to be as large or as common across the region as the differences accounted for by female relatives who are employed.

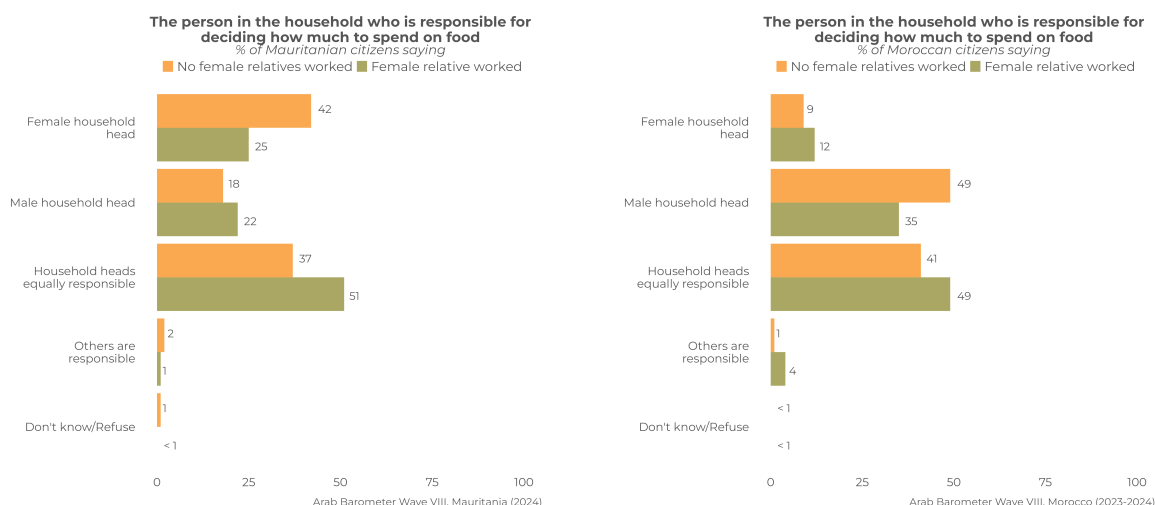
A key question is what is the mechanism that makes having a female relative that works so powerful. When women hold jobs, they can contribute to the household financially. Most likely, their contributions to household are more readily recognized, giving their decisions and opinions more legitimacy than they might otherwise be allowed. Increasing FLFP can increase the validity and acceptance of women's decisions on family matters. If more men have wives and daughters who have held a job, it appears that support for the male household head unilaterally making family decisions is likely to decrease.

Whether or not a citizen has a working female relative is not as strongly linked with household decision making as it does in previous questions. That is, when citizens think about who should oversee household food spending or shopping,

having a working female relation does not strongly affect the views throughout the region that these decisions should be shared, with a few notable exceptions.



In Morocco and Mauritania there is an 8-point and 14-point difference, respectively, among those with and without working female relatives supporting shared responsibility among male and female household heads deciding on how much money should be spent on food. Moroccan and Mauritanian are the least likely overall to say money spent on food should be a gender neutral decision, although for different reasons. Moroccan citizens largely view these decisions as the male head of household's responsibility, but while Mauritanian citizens view them as the female household head's responsibilities. In both cases, citizens that have working female family members are more likely to say decisions regarding spending money on food should be shared rather than the traditional view of who should be in charge. That is, in Morocco, citizens with working female relatives are less likely to say the male household head should be responsible and in Mauritania citizen with working female relatives are less likely to say the female household held should be responsible.



The findings from Morocco and Mauritania highlight that regardless of whether society has traditionally viewed decisions as a “man’s job” or “woman’s job”, being related to a woman who has held a job encourages gender neutral views. We see movement towards shared responsibility regardless of which gender citizens originally hold responsible.

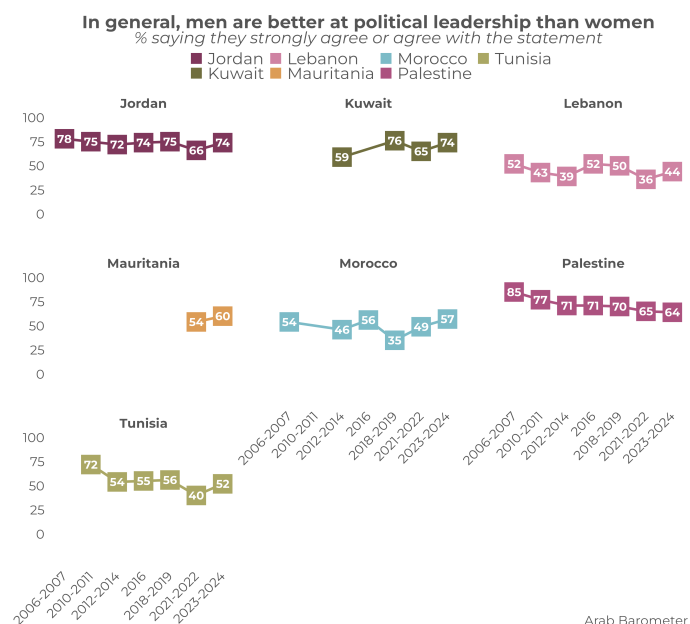
The same pattern holds for Mauritania with respect to household heads deciding which types of food to buy. That is, those with working female relatives are more likely to say the decision should be shared equally, while those without working female relatives viewed deciding which types of food to buy as a woman’s responsibility. Citizens of Palestine, Jordan, and Tunisia related to women in the workforce also were more likely than those who are not to say deciding on which food to buy should be shared equally. In Morocco, having a female relatives who works is not related to a citizens view on who should be responsible in this scenario.

Views on Political Participation

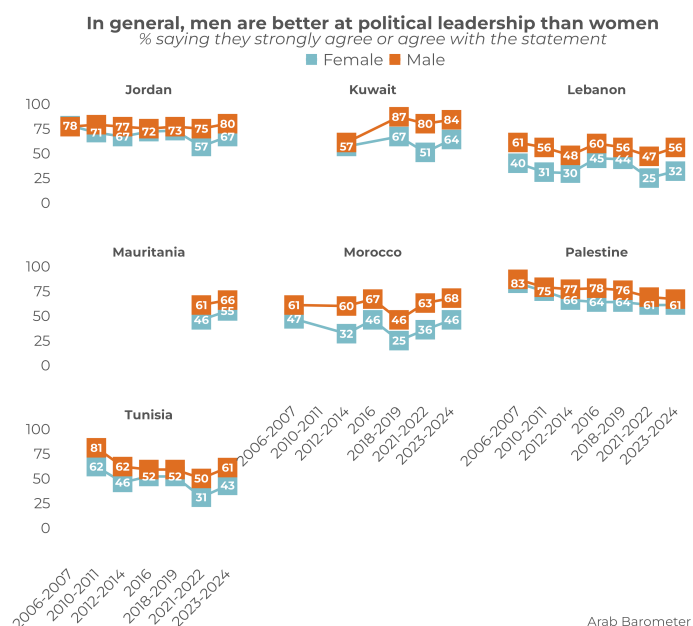
Trending Views

Women across MENA have suffered a setback in views on gender equality in politics in recent years. In six of seven countries surveyed, agreement with the statement “In general, men are better at political leadership than women” has increased since Arab Barometer most recently asked the question in 2021-2022. For the countries in which it is possible to compare over time, this in-

crease brings levels back to or above those observed a decade ago. Only in Palestine do we see a continuing decline, although the difference from the previous Wave VII in 2021 is negligible.

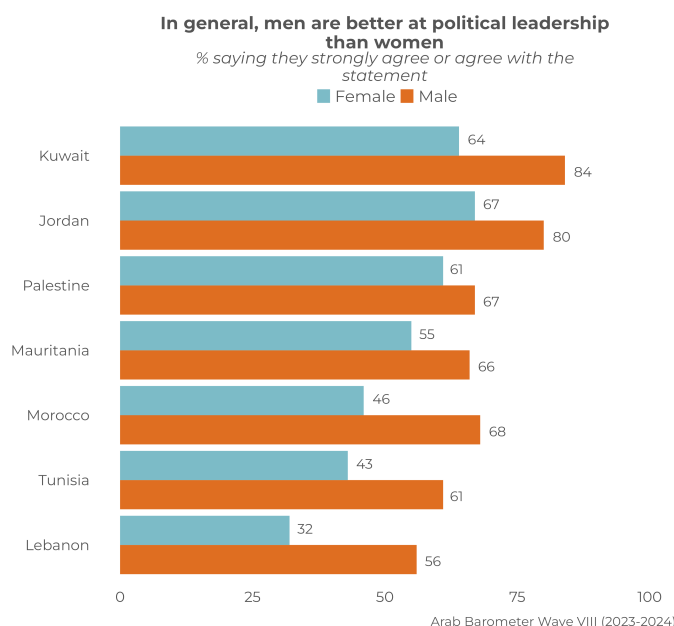


The increase in perceptions that men are better at politics is found among both men and women. In fact, in Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, and Kuwait, the percentage point increase for women is greater than that of men. In Kuwait, men are now four points more likely to agree with this statement compared with 13 points for women. Jordan, Morocco, and Mauritania have similar patterns with the increase of men's support in the single digits and the increase in women's support in the double digits. In Tunisia, preferences for men's political leadership increased by double digits for both men and women (11-point increase among men; 12-point increase among women).

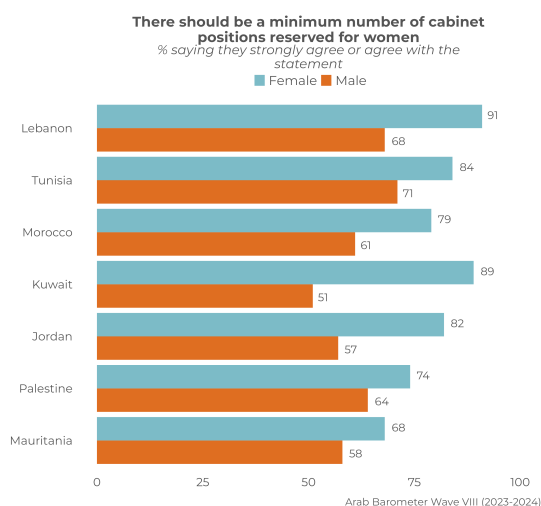
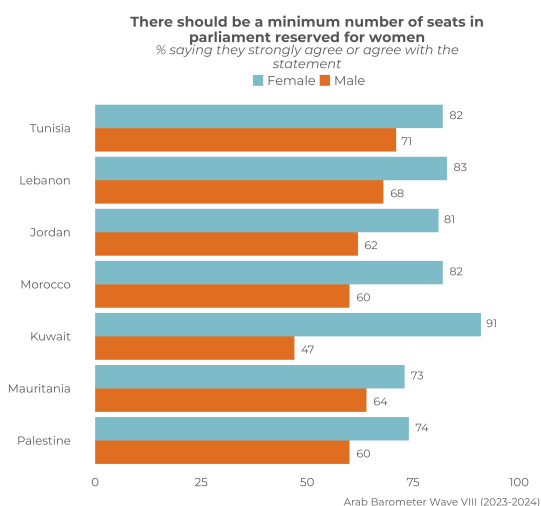


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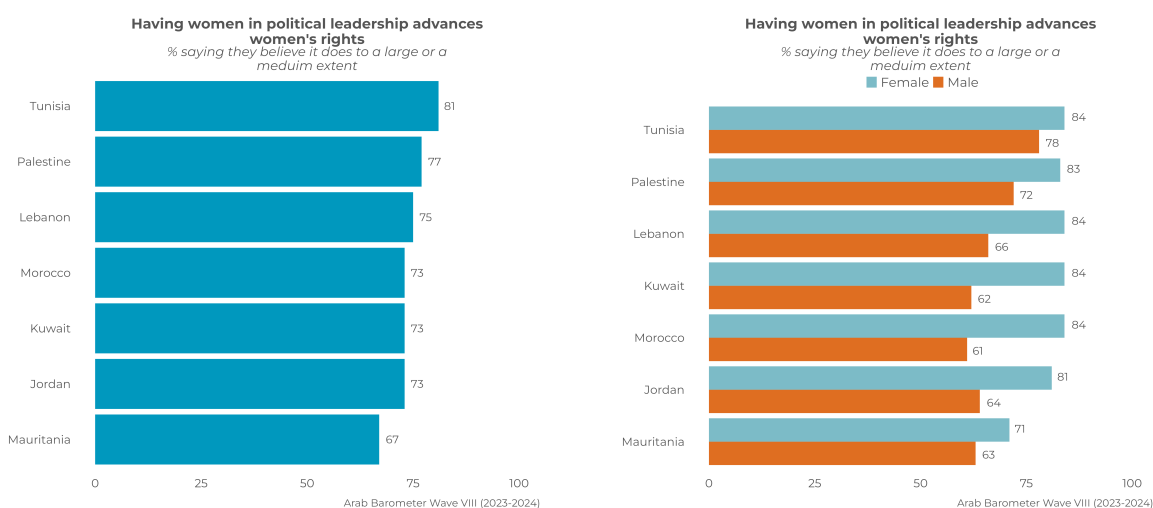
Still, in every country, women are far more likely to disagree than men are better at political leadership. Men and women in Lebanon have the most divergent opinions. Lebanese women are 24 points less likely than Lebanese men to say the men are better at political leadership than women. Notably, men in Lebanon are less likely to agree than men from any other country surveyed in 2023-2024. Palestinian men and women exhibit the smallest gap between the sexes, although women are still six points less likely to agree than men.



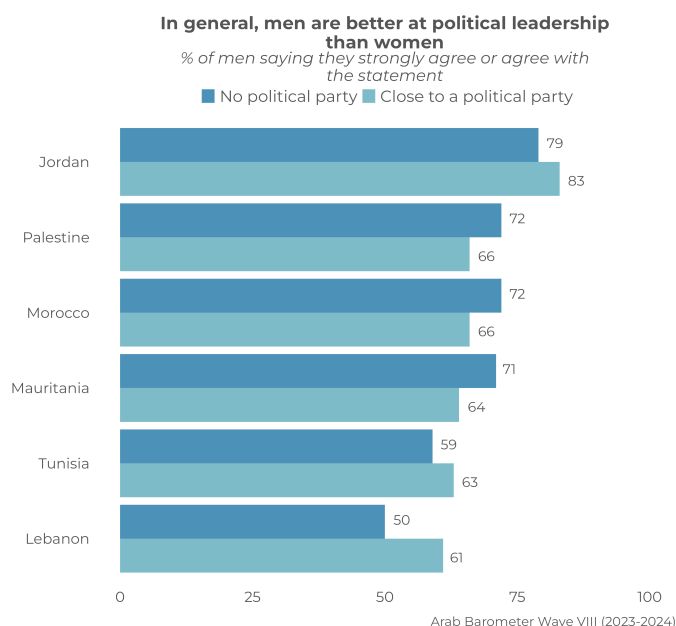
Yet, while the perception that women are equally capable politicians compared with men has decreased, there are other findings that offer more hope. A majority of citizens think there should be cabinet positions and parliamentary seats reserved for women. Moreover, most citizens also think that having women in positions of political power advances women's rights. Even though citizens are saying they think men may be better at politics than women, there is still a will to increase women's representation in politics.



In the current Wave VIII, Arab Barometer asked MENA citizens if they thought having women in positions of political leadership advances women's rights. A majority of citizens in every surveyed country say they believe having female political leaders advances women's rights to a great or medium extent, although just like views on women's political leadership, there is a significant gap between men and women. The average difference in views between men and women in the countries surveyed is 15 points.



In Palestine, Morocco, and Mauritania, men who name a political party they are close to are less likely to agree that men are better political leaders than women. In Lebanon, the opposite is true (11-point difference). Citizens who name a political party they feel close to are, in most countries, far more likely to say they voted in the previous parliamentary election and are interested or very interested in politics.

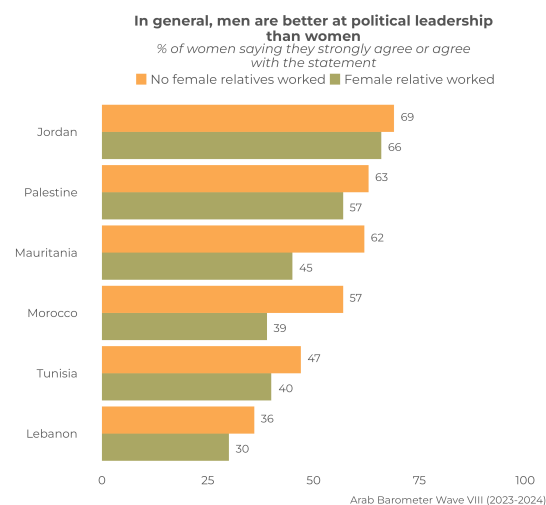
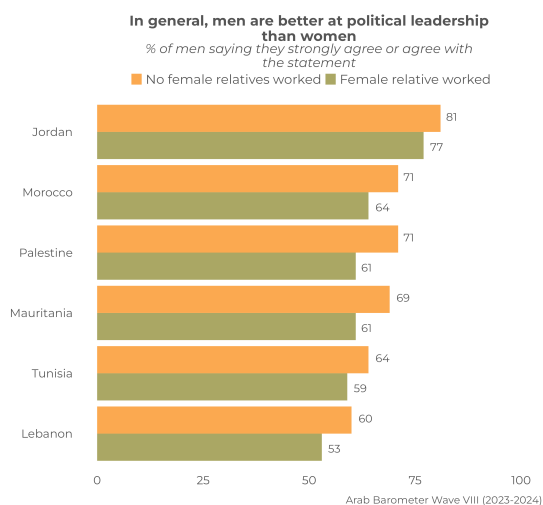
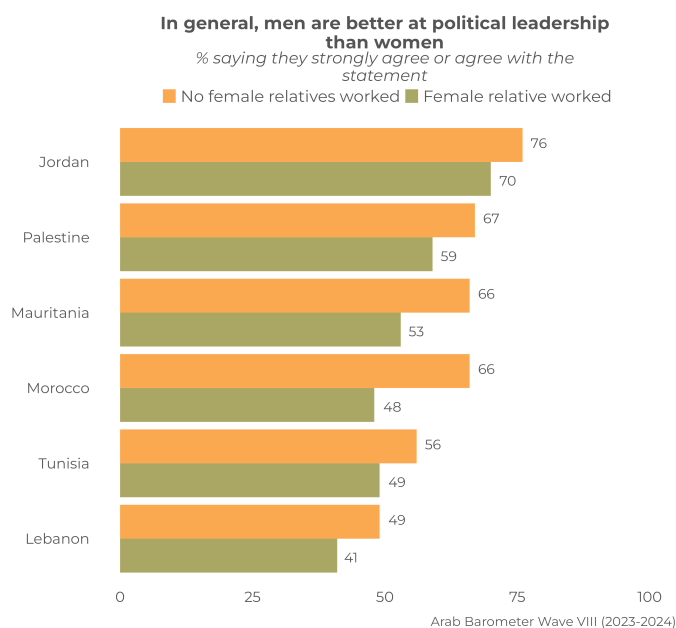


The decision to select a political party you feel closest to is one measure of political interest, and those who are interested in politics tend to engage with the field more than those who are not. Support for women's role in politics from citizens who are more engaged indicates political will among the populace to promote women's participation in the political arena. Lawmakers have the freedom to promote policies that will help women enter politics as these policies are favored by those who vote.

Impact of Working Female Relatives

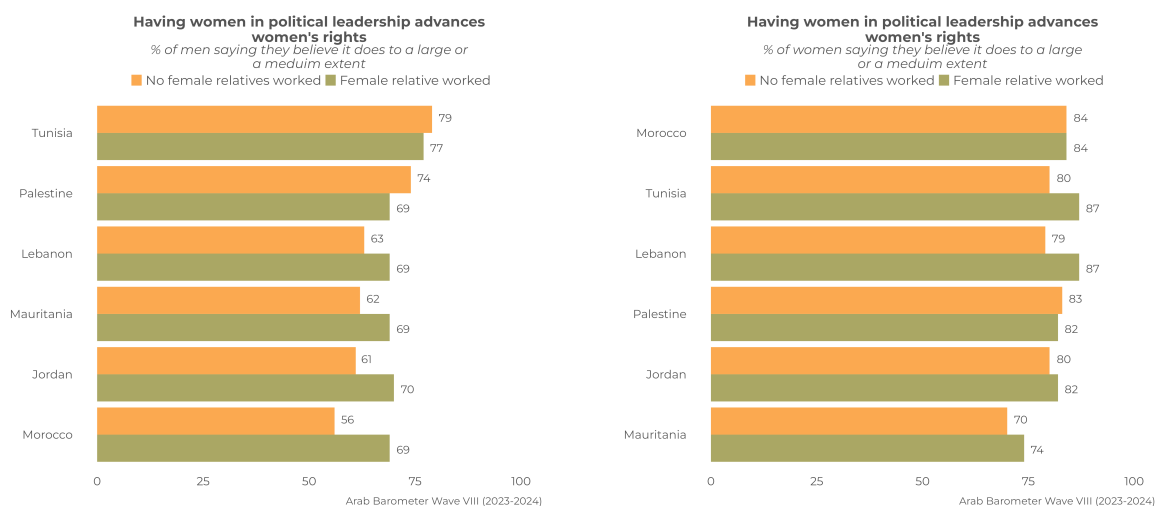
Just as with opinions of gender dynamics at home, Arab Barometer also finds that having female relatives in the workforce corresponds with a more progressive view of women in politics.

Whether or not a citizen has a female relative who works is linked with views about women's abilities as political leaders more strongly than income, education, or urbanity. In every country surveyed, citizens who can name a working female relative are at least six points less likely to agree that men are better political leaders compared with those who do not have a working female relative. The relationship holds among both men and women. The largest difference is seen in Palestine, where men who have a working female relative are ten points less likely to think men are better at political leadership than women.

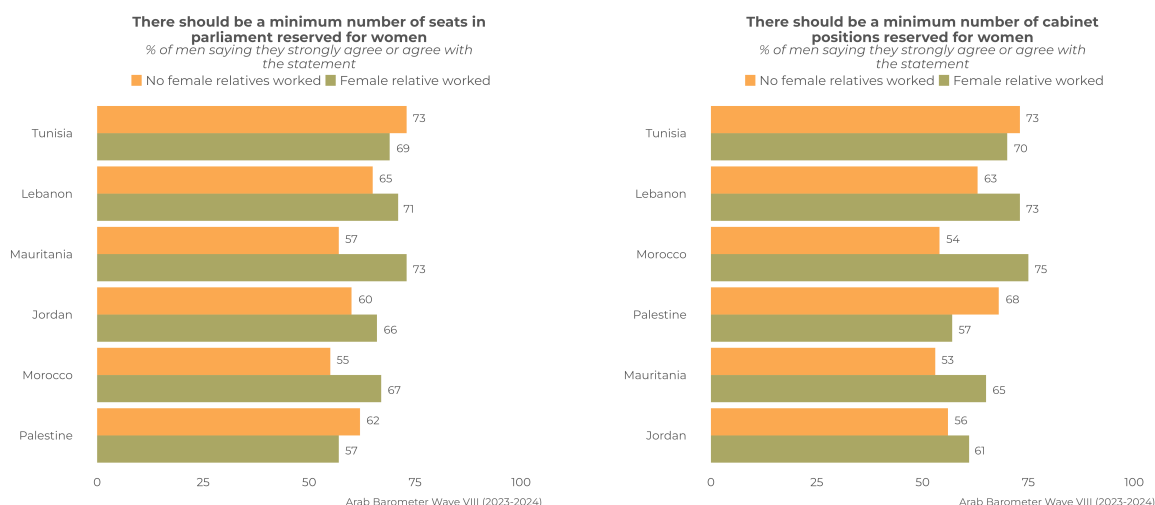


Men who have a female relative who has held a job are more likely to think women in politics advance women's rights in Morocco (13 points), Jordan (9 points), Mauritania (7 points), and Lebanon (6 points). The opposite is true in Palestine (-5 points) and having a working female relative does not make a

difference in Tunisia. In most countries, having a female family member who works does not cause a significant difference this perception among women. The exceptions are among Tunisian and Lebanese women, who are seven and eight points, respectively, more likely to say women in political leadership advances women's rights if they have a working female relative compared to those who do not.



In most countries, especially Morocco and Mauritania, men with female relatives in the labor force are more supportive of political quotas for women. Moroccan men with at least one working female relative are 21 points more likely than men who do not to support a minimum number of cabinet positions reserved for women. Among Mauritanian men, there is a 12-point difference. There is a similar difference in opinion among men with and without working female relatives regarding reserving parliamentary seats for women.



For women, having a working female relative or ever holding a job oneself does not affect their support for political quotas. A strong majority of women in every country support reservation quotas for women both in parliament and in the cabinet.

Taken all together, women support women in politics universally, while men with working female relatives have a more positive view of women in politics, especially if their wife or daughter has held a job. It stands to reason that increasing the FLFP may also increase support for women's involvement in politics. Most citizens, regardless of whether or not they have female relatives who work, believe women in politics advances women's rights. Increasing FLFP may increase the support of women's involvement in politics, and therefore advance women's rights on the whole.

Conclusion

The most recent Arab Barometer survey finds a definitively positive impact from citizens having working female relatives on views of gender equality. The affects go beyond opinions on women in the workplace, which may be expected. Citizens across the region, both men and women, with female relatives in the labor force have more positive views of women's authority at home as well as women's participation in politics.

Evidence suggests that movement towards gender equality in MENA has stalled at best, or at worst is losing ground. However, the findings also suggest con-

crete solutions to help advance women's rights. It is politically popular to reserve seats in parliament and in the cabinet for women. Furthermore, most citizens agree that including women in government advances women's rights. Despite some backsliding, citizens across MENA are still largely supportive of moves towards gender equality.

With the understanding that women's greater participation in the labor force promotes gender equality in all aspects of society, governments and organizations should focus efforts on helping women join the labor force. Finding opportunities for women, improving wages, and identifying ways to lower the financial burden of childcare would go a long way to lower workforce entry barriers for women.



About Arab Barometer

The Arab Barometer is a nonpartisan research network that provides insights into the social, political, and economic attitudes and values of ordinary citizens across the Arab world.

We have been conducting rigorous and nationally representative public opinion surveys on probability samples of the adult populations across the Arab world since 2006. The margin of error is ± 2 percent.

The Arab Barometer is the largest repository of publicly available data on the views of men and women in the MENA region. Our findings give a voice to the needs and concerns of Arab publics.



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