



Views on the Environment and Climate Change in the Middle East and North Africa

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Executive Summary

Citizens across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) are well-aware of the environmental challenges facing their countries and the region at large. Among a number of environmental issues, access to clean water stands out as the most important challenge troubling pluralities in all countries surveyed in Arab Barometer Seventh Wave, followed by waste management and air quality. MENA citizens differ, however, in their perceptions of the most pressing water-related issues facing their communities. In Egypt, Iraq, Tunisia, Sudan, and Jordan, at least half cite pollution of drinking water as the main water issue while pluralities do the same in Lebanon and Palestine. In Kuwait and Libya, pollution of waterways is a more important issue while Mauritaniens and Algerians voice more concern regarding lack of water resources than other water issues.

The majorities of people in all countries surveyed hold each other and their governments responsible for contributing to the environmental challenges facing the region. This view transcends all demographic differences in most countries as people share the view despite differences in age, education, income, and gender. In response to climate change, at least pluralities want their governments to do more in all countries surveyed. Only small minorities in all countries say they want their governments to do less on this front. Support for more government involvement in addressing climate change tends to be more pronounced among urbanites and those whose income covers their expenses in most countries. When compared to other issues, like food insecurity, subsidies, or education, however, the environment ranks lowest in the list of priorities for government spending as well as preference for foreign aid.

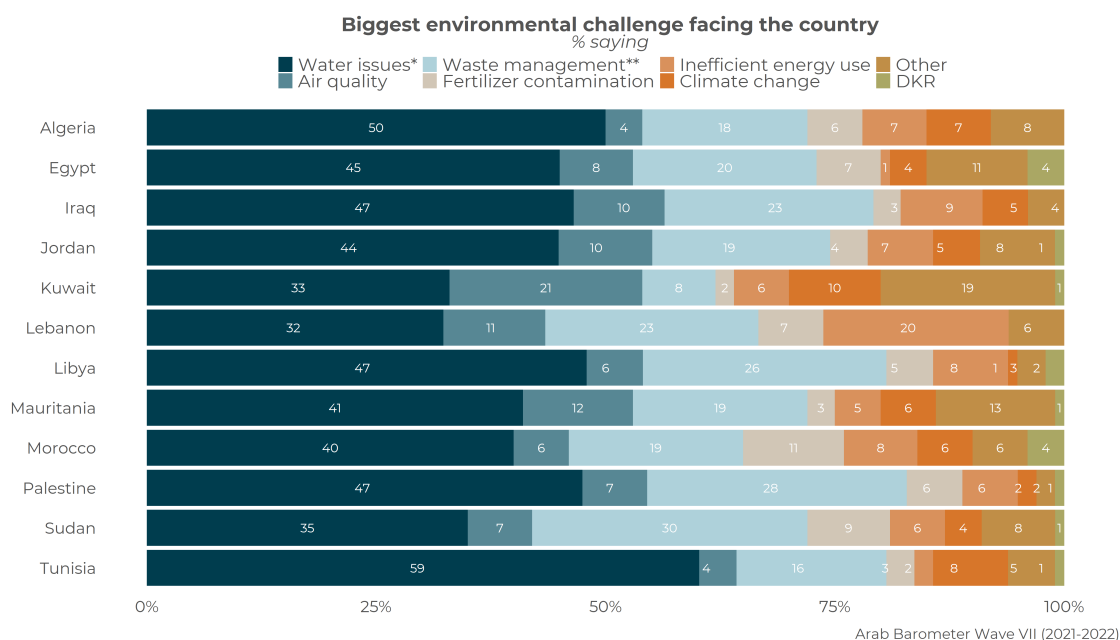
Many citizens across MENA say they reuse basic items such as glass or plastic bottles. This is especially true among people who cannot cover their expenses, reflecting the motives behind such behavior. At least pluralities in most countries surveyed say they reuse bottles to save money or because it is convenient. Only in Kuwait do nearly half of the population say they do so to protect the environment.

These are among the main findings of 12 nationally representative public opinion surveys conducted across the Middle East and North Africa from 2021-22 as part of Arab Barometer Wave VII. The results include more than 26,000 interviews across the region and have a margin of error of ± 2 points or less in each country. Overall, these results make clear that MENA citizens recognize, and are concerned about, the environmental challenges facing the region. People across MENA agree that both citizens and governments contribute to these challenges. At the same time, the results show a broad support among citizens for more government actions in response to climate change. However, despite recognizing the existence and importance of climate change and environmen-

tal challenges, other more pressing and immediate issues take priority. The results also demonstrate that a recycling mindset already exists in the region, suggesting that highlighting the environmental benefits of recycling could prove fruitful.

Perceived Challenges

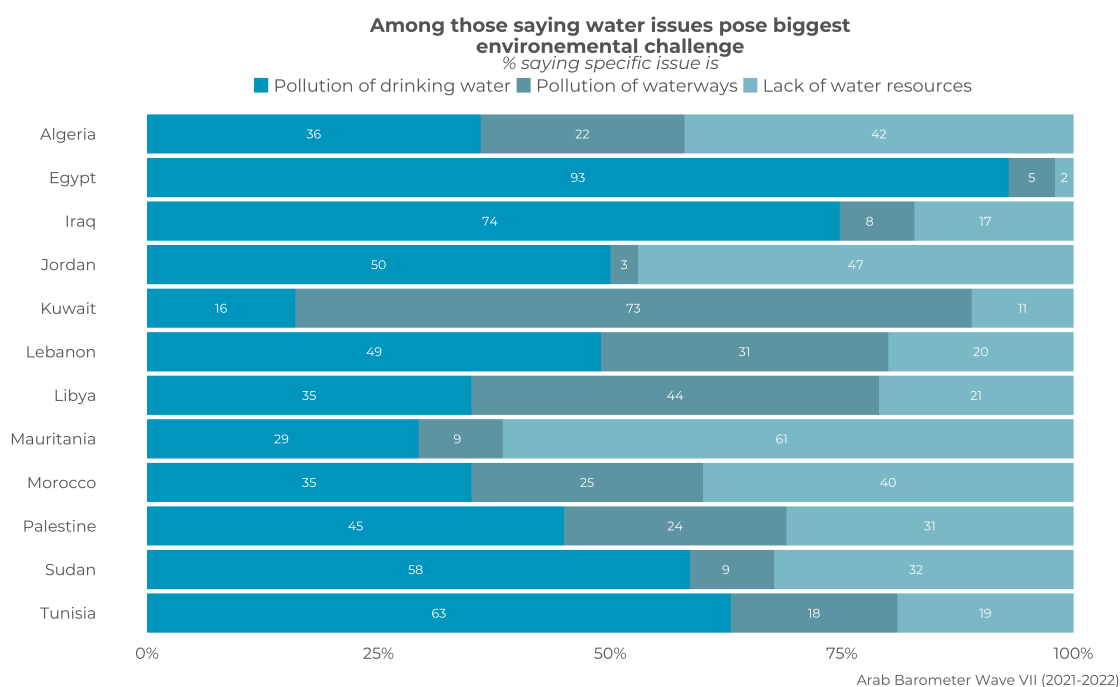
Among environmental challenges, water stands out as the biggest challenge facing countries across MENA. Roughly a third or more in all countries surveyed cite water-related issues when asked about the biggest environmental challenge facing their country. This is especially true in Tunisia (59 percent) and Algeria (50 percent). Nearly half in Iraq (47 percent), Libya (47 percent), and Palestine (47 percent) say the same. This view is shared by 45 percent of Egyptians, 44 percent of Jordanians, and four-in-ten Mauritians (41 percent) and Moroccans (40 percent), respectively. While it remains the biggest perceived challenge, water is only cited by a third in Sudan (35 percent), Kuwait (33 percent), and Lebanon (32 percent).



*Water issues include pollution of drinking water, pollution of waterways, and lack of water sources
**Waste management include trash management and hazardous waste contamination

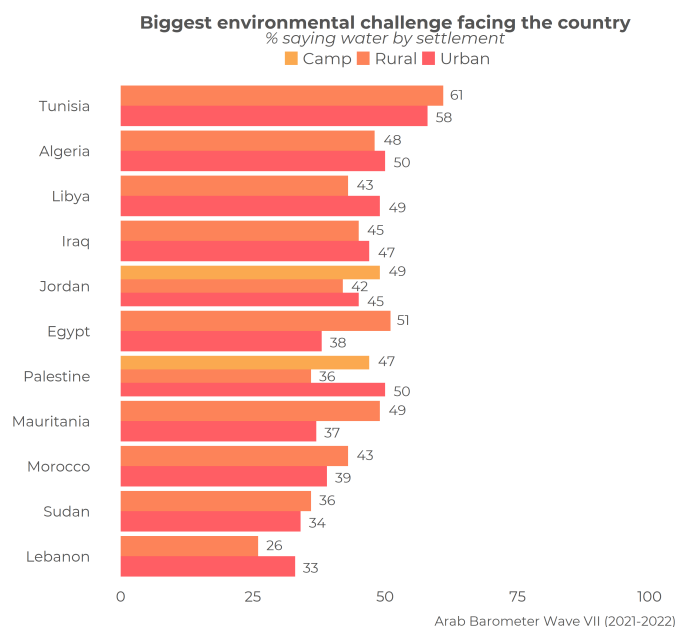
Though pluralities across the region agree that water-related issues are the biggest environmental challenge facing their countries, there are stark differences when it comes to the specific water-related issues each country is grappling with. For example, pollution of drinking water is perceived as a major challenge in several countries. Among people citing water as the biggest challenge, the vast majority of Egyptians (93 percent) and three quarters (74 percent) of Iraqis say pollution of drinking water is the main water-related issue in their country. The same is true for 63 percent in Tunisia and 58 percent in Sudan of those concerned about water. Half or fewer of their counterparts in Jordan (50 percent), Lebanon (49 percent), and Palestine (45 percent) share the same sentiment, as do a third in Algeria (36 percent), Libya (35 percent), and Morocco (35 percent). Pollution of drinking water, however, is not as prominent of an issue in Mauritania (29 percent) and Kuwait (16 percent) among those concerned about water. (29 percent) and Kuwait (16 percent) among those concerned about water.

Stark variations exist on the pollution of waterways, such as rivers and seas, among those citing water as the biggest challenge. Within the group, three quarters (73 percent) of Kuwaitis say pollution of waterways is the main challenge. In the remaining countries, however, no more than half of this group says the same. This includes 44 percent of Libyans, three-in-ten (31 percent) of Lebanese, quarter (25 percent) in Morocco, a quarter (24 percent) in Palestine, a fifth (22 percent) in Algeria, and a fifth (18 percent) in Tunisia. Less than one-in-ten share this view in Sudan (nine percent), Mauritania (nine percent), Iraq (eight percent), Egypt (five percent), and Jordan (three percent).

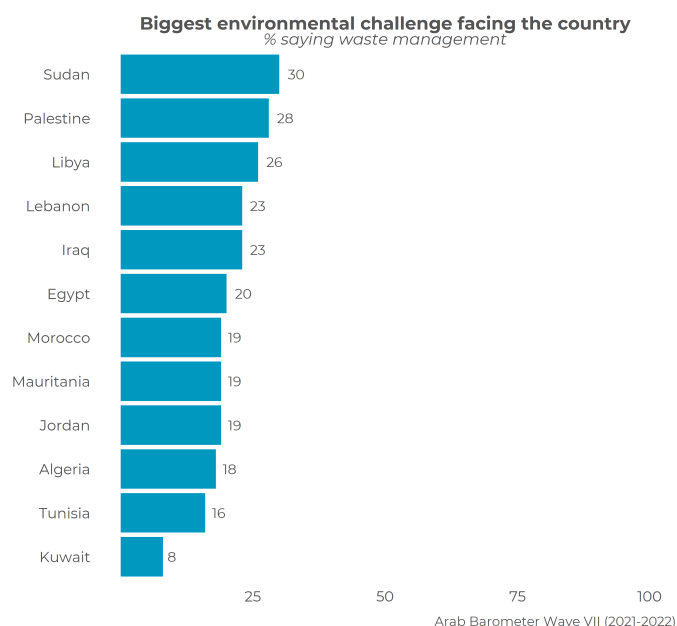


Lack of water resources is another critical part of the water-related issues in the region. Among people saying that water is the biggest environmental challenge, six-in-ten (61 percent) Mauritians cite lack of water resources as the main problem. The same is true for nearly half of the group in Jordan (47 percent), and four-in-ten (42 percent) in Algeria and Moroccan (40 percent), respectively. A third say the same in Sudan (32 percent) and Palestine (31 percent) among those saying water poses the biggest environmental challenge. About one-in-five or fewer of their counterparts in the remaining countries, however, share this view, including a fifth in Libya (21 percent), Lebanon (20 percent), and Tunisia (19 percent). Lack of water resources is a lesser concern in Iraq, Kuwait, and Egypt.

Arab Barometer Wave VII results demonstrate that urban-rural cleavages exist when it comes to considering water as the biggest environmental challenge. The urban-rural divide, however, is not uniform across the region. For example, recent [studies](#) show that out of 7.3 million Egyptians deprived of access to safe water, 5.8 million live in rural areas. It is, thus, not surprising that rural Egyptians are 13 points more likely to say water poses the biggest challenge than their urban counterparts. Similarly, the gap between the rural and urban populations in Mauritania amounts to 12 points. However, the opposite is true in Palestine (-14 points), Lebanon (-7 points), and Libya (-6 points), where those living in urban areas are more likely to point to water issues as the biggest challenge.



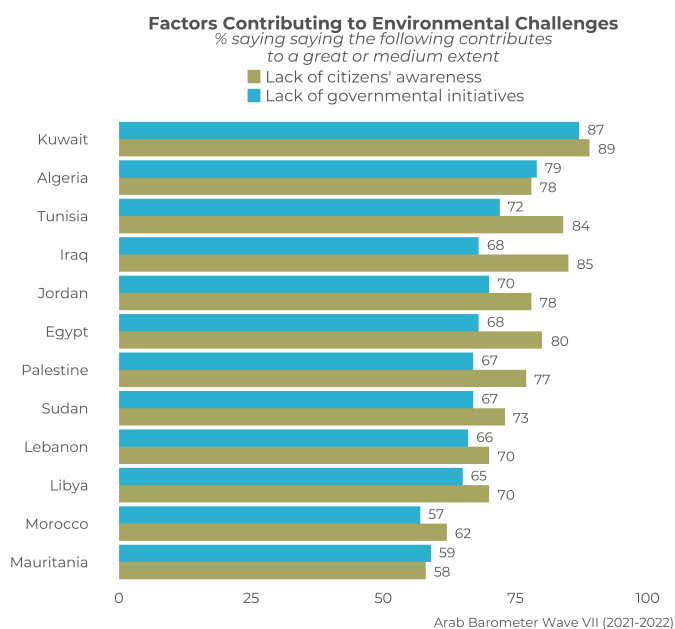
Another prominent environmental challenge is waste management, including trash collection and hazardous waste contamination. Three-in-ten people in Sudan (30 percent) and Palestine (28 percent) say it is the biggest environmental challenge facing their country. The same is true for a quarter of the population in Libya (26 percent), while 23 percent in Iraq and Lebanon say the same. Furthermore, a fifth in Egypt (20 percent), Morocco (19 percent), Mauritania (19 percent), Jordan (19 percent), and Algeria (18 percent). Only in Tunisia (16 percent) and Kuwait (eight percent) do less than a fifth of the population consider waste management the biggest environmental challenge.



Other environmental challenges are cited but are less common. For example, air quality is reported by a fifth of Kuwaitis (21 percent) as the biggest challenge. No more than 12 percent in all other countries share this view. Similarly, a fifth (20 percent) of people in Lebanon say that the inefficient use of energy is the main environmental challenge facing Lebanon. Less than a one-in-ten in all other surveyed countries say the same.

Contributors to Environmental Challenges

Overwhelming majorities in most countries surveyed consider lack of environmental awareness among citizens as a great or medium contributor to environmental challenges. The percentage is highest in Kuwait where 89 percent of people hold this view, followed by Iraq (85 percent) and Tunisia (84 percent). The lowest percentages are seen in Mauritania where more than half (58 percent), and in Morocco (62 percent), share the view.



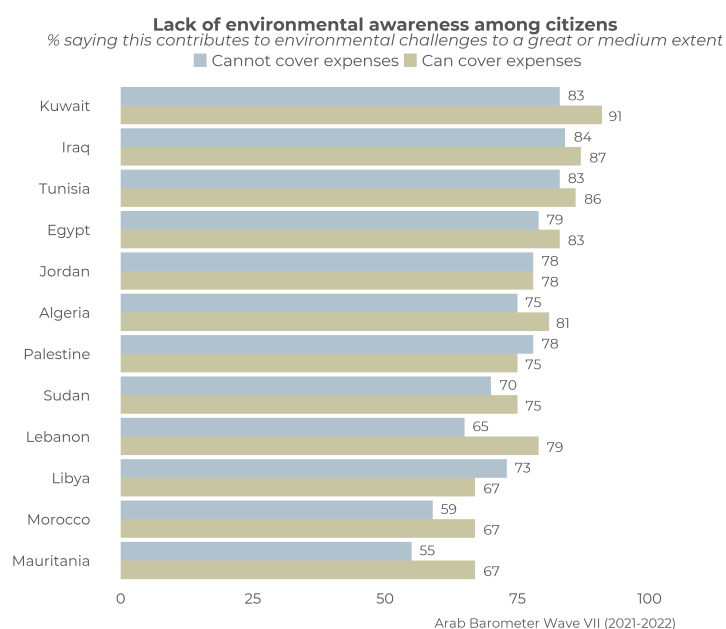
Notably, Mauritanian youth are more likely to blame lack of citizens awareness as contributing to environmental challenges compared to their older counterparts. Two thirds of youth (67 percent) in the North African country hold such a view, as compared to only half (52 percent) of those ages 30 or older. In no other country surveyed is there a significant difference between the two age groups in this regard. Small differences are seen in Palestine (81 percent for youth vs. 75 percent for those 30 or older), Kuwait (+5 point), and Egypt (+5 points).

Views vary more by education levels. This is especially true in Tunisia where 94 percent of people who have college degrees say lack of awareness contributes to a great or medium extent to environmental challenges, compared to 81 percent of those who only have a secondary degree or less. The gap is similarly

wide in Sudan (+12 points) and is smaller in Algeria (+8 points) and Lebanon (+6 points).

By gender, significant differences only exist in Egypt where 86 percent of men hold the view that lack of citizens awareness contributes to environmental challenges, compared to 73 percent of women, and in Morocco (66 percent for men vs. 59 percent for women).

Income seems to be a more differentiating factor than other demographic variables. Views on citizens awareness of environmental challenges vary between those with who are and are not able to afford their basic expenses. The gap is largest in Lebanon as those whose income covers their expenses are 14 points more likely to say lack of awareness contributes to environmental challenges than those who struggle to make ends meet. The gap is also large in Mauritania (+12 points), Morocco (+8 points), Kuwait (+8 points), and Algeria (+6 points). Only in Libya (6-point gap) are people whose incomes do not meet their expenses more likely to hold such a view compared to those who can cover their expenses.

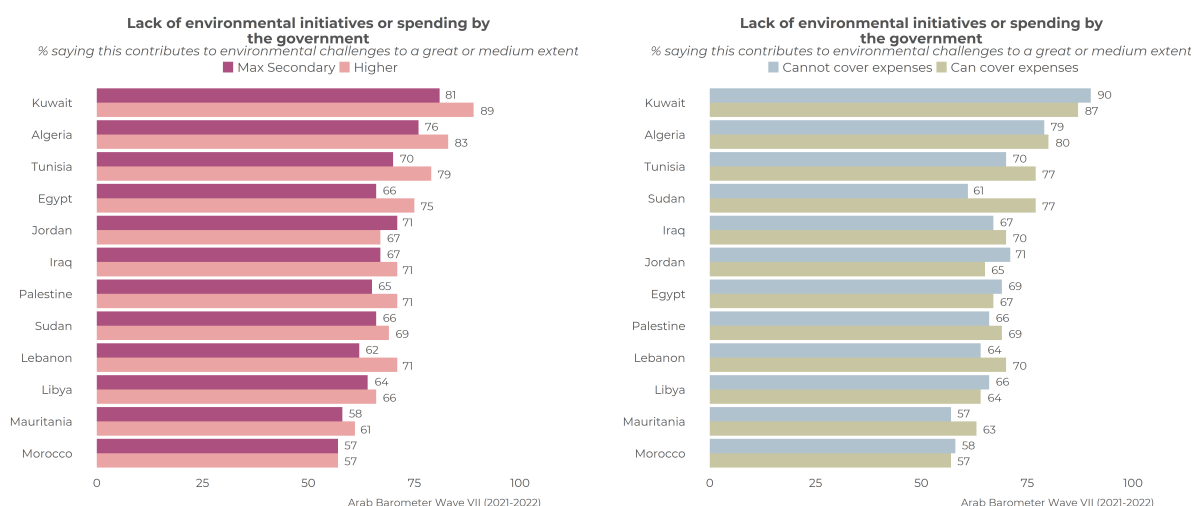


In 10 of 12 countries surveyed, at least 65 percent of people say that lack of government spending contributes to a great or medium extent to the environmental challenges. The vast majority of Kuwaitis hold this view (87 percent),

and so do 79 percent of Algerians. Even in the two countries with lowest percentages, more than half blame lack of governmental initiatives in Mauritania (59 percent) and Morocco (57 percent).

In some countries, youth tend to attribute more blame to the government when it comes to the environment as compared to their older counterparts in Sudan (71 percent vs. 62 percent), Kuwait (91 percent vs. 85 percent), Lebanon (70 percent vs. 64 percent), and Morocco (61 percent vs. 56 percent). In all other countries, differences are insignificant.

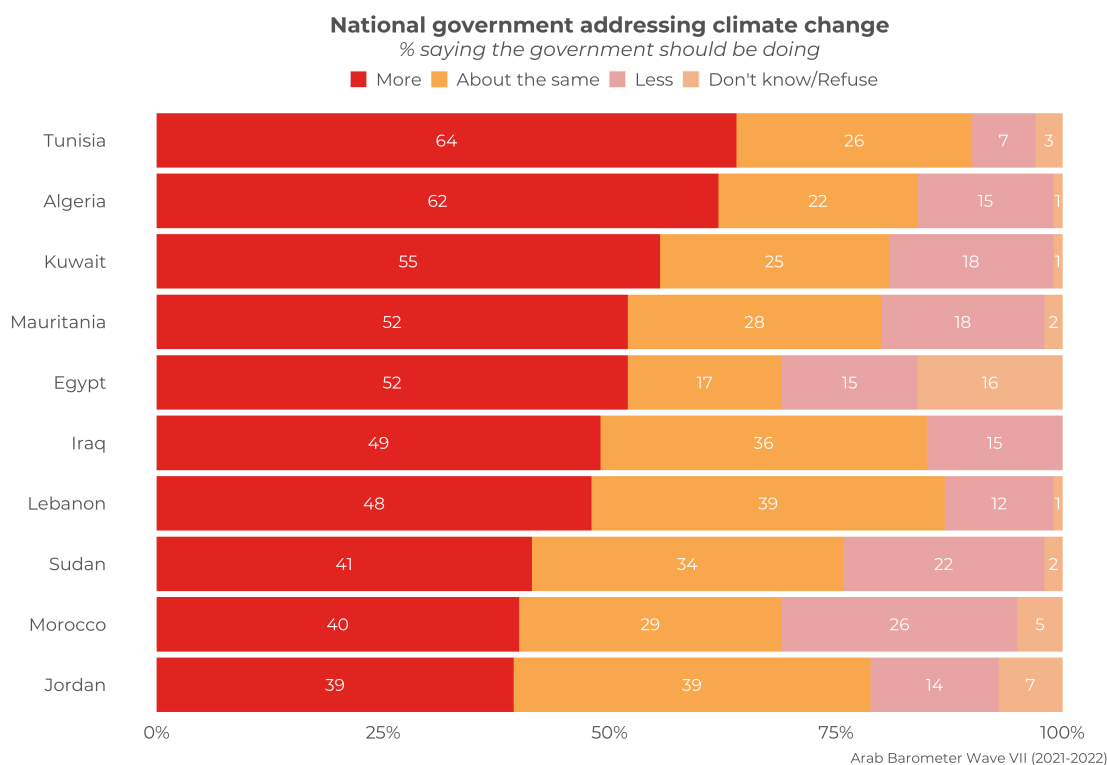
Similarly, people with higher levels of education are more likely to say that lack of governmental action is contributing to environmental challenges than those with lower education levels in half the surveyed countries. This is especially true in Tunisia, Egypt, and Lebanon where the gap between the two educational levels is nine points. The gap is also meaningful in Kuwait where it is eight points, Algeria (seven points), and Palestine (six points). In the remaining countries, there are no significant differences based on the level of education.



Those with who are able to afford basic necessities are more likely to attribute lack of government spending to environmental challenges than people who cannot in Sudan (+16 point), Tunisia (+7 points), Lebanon (+6 points), and Mauritania (+6 points). Only in Jordan is the opposite true. Jordanians who are unable to afford basic necessities (71 percent) are more likely to say that lack of government spending contributes to environmental challenges than those who can (65 percent). In the remaining seven countries, income levels do not affect views on this issue.

Government Action on Climate Change

Across MENA, there is broad support among citizens for more government actions in addressing climate change. Levels vary from about two thirds (64 percent) in Tunisia to four-in-ten (39 percent) in Jordan saying their governments should be doing more in addressing climate change. In addition to Tunisia, in Algeria (62 percent) and Kuwait (55 percent) more than half hold this view. About half of people in Mauritania (52 percent), Egypt (52 percent), Iraq (49 percent), and Lebanon (48 percent) say the same. Meanwhile, about four-in-ten in Sudan (41 percent) and Morocco (40 percent) say the same.

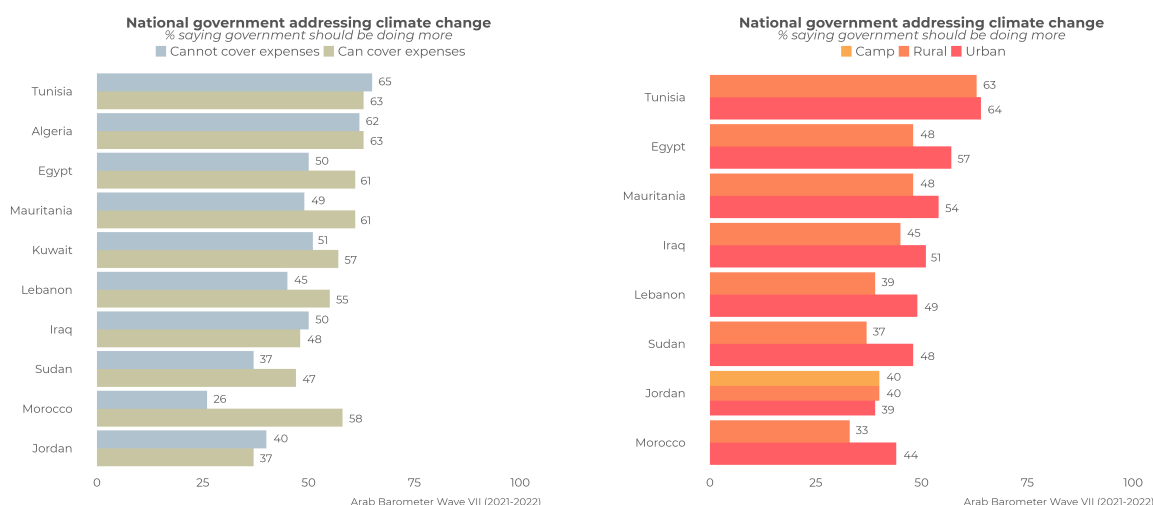


By comparison, relatively few across the region say they want their government to do less in response to climate change. The largest minority is found in Morocco, where a quarter (26 percent) want the government to do less, while in Sudan a fifth (22 percent) of the population holds this view. In all other countries, less than a fifth say the same.

Desire to see more government involvement in addressing climate change is stronger among younger generations in MENA. This is most evident in Mauritania where two thirds (68 percent) of youth ages 18-29 say they want their government to do more as compared to only four-in-ten (41 percent) of those 30 or older. This is particularly a result of low levels of desire to see the government doing more among Mauritians who are 60 or older, among whom only a quarter (24 percent) want the government to do more. A similar phenomenon exists in Lebanon where 56 percent of youth want more government actions in addressing climate change compared to 44 percent of those 30 or older. Only a third (35 percent) of Lebanese 60 or older share this view compared to half of their younger compatriots. A large gap between youth and older generations in this regard is seen in Morocco as well where half of youth ages 18-29 want the government to do more compared to only a third of those 30 or older (35 percent). The gap is smaller in Kuwait (60 percent for youth vs. 53 percent for older people) while there are no significant differences in the rest of surveyed countries.

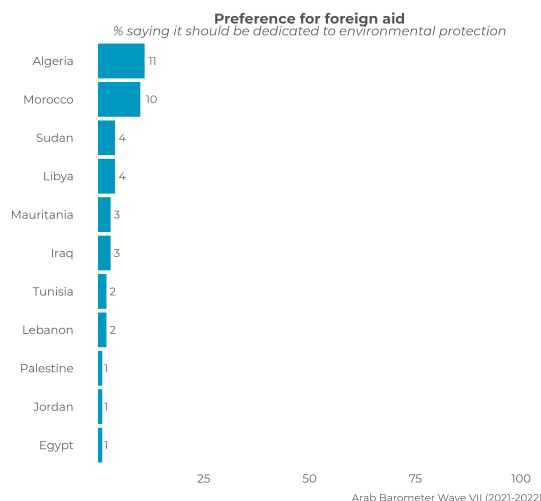
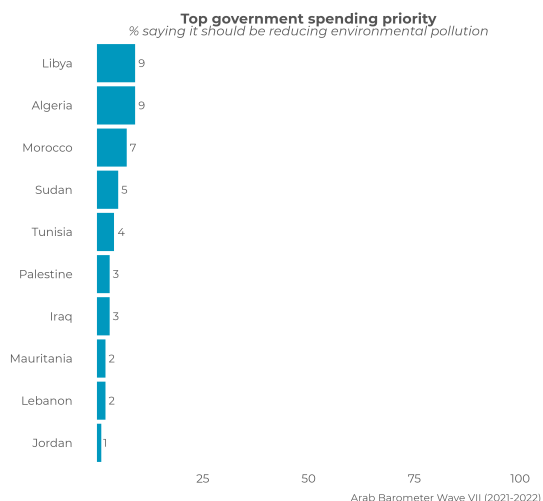
MENA citizens with higher levels of education tend to be more supportive of increasing government actions to combat climate change than their less-educated compatriots. The gap between the two groups is largest in Morocco where more than half (56 percent) of those with college degrees or higher say they want the government to be doing more compared to only a third of those with only a secondary degree or less (34 percent). In Egypt, six-in-ten people with higher degrees say the government should do more compared to only half of those with lower degrees. The gap is smaller in Algeria (+7 points), Sudan (+7 points), and Tunisia (+6 points). In Kuwait, Mauritania, Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan, there are not substantive differences by level of education.

Economic well-being is a more distinguishing factor when it comes to views of the governments role in addressing climate change. In six of the ten countries included in this question, people with who are able to cover their basic expenses are more likely to say their government should be doing more for the climate. This is especially true in Morocco where more than half (58 percent) of those who can meet their basic needs hold this view as compared to only a quarter (26 percent) of those who cannot. The gap is also meaningful, though smaller in Mauritania (12 points), Egypt (11 points), Lebanon (10 points), Sudan (10 points), and Kuwait (6 points). Only in Tunisia, Algeria, Iraq, and Jordan are there not substantive differences based on income levels.



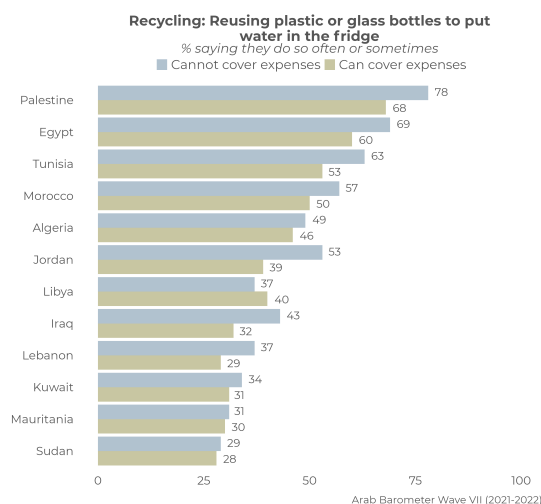
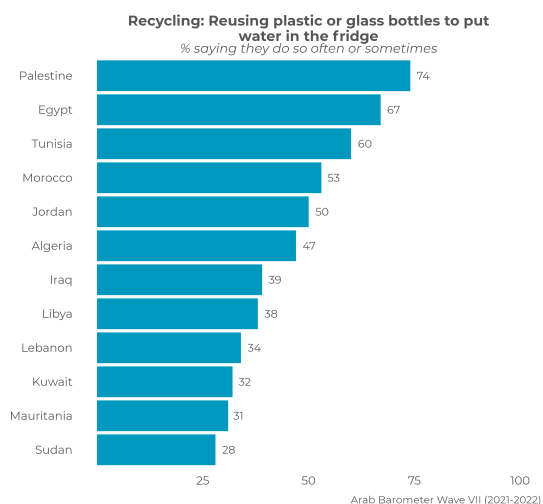
In most countries included in the Arab Barometer seventh wave, those living in urban areas tend to be more supportive of increasing government involvement in efforts combating climate change than those in rural areas. In Morocco and Sudan, urbanites are 11 points more likely to say they want their government to do more than their rural counterparts. The gap is similar in Lebanon (10 points) and Egypt (9 points) while it is smaller in Iraq and Mauritania (6 points in each country). There are no significant differences between rural and urban people in Tunisia, Algeria, and Jordan. This, however, does not mean that people in rural areas want their governments to do less in addressing climate change. Rather, rural people tend to express satisfaction with the current level of government intervention. This is evident in Mauritania, Morocco, and Sudan where rural citizens are more likely to say they want the government to do the same as compared to urbanites with a margin of 11 points, 10 points, and 10 points, respectively. The trend is true, though with smaller gaps, in Lebanon (7 points) and Iraq (5 points).

While at least pluralities in all countries surveyed want stronger governmental commitment to combating climate change, other more-immediate challenges take priority. When asked about their governments top spending priorities, fewer than one-in-ten people across the region cite reduction of environmental pollution, placing the issue at the bottom of the priorities list for government spending. This is also true when it comes to preferences for foreign aid or the United Nations first socioeconomic priority in the region. No more than a tenth of the population in any country surveyed choose environmental protection or climate change when presented with more alternative issues like economic development or education reform.

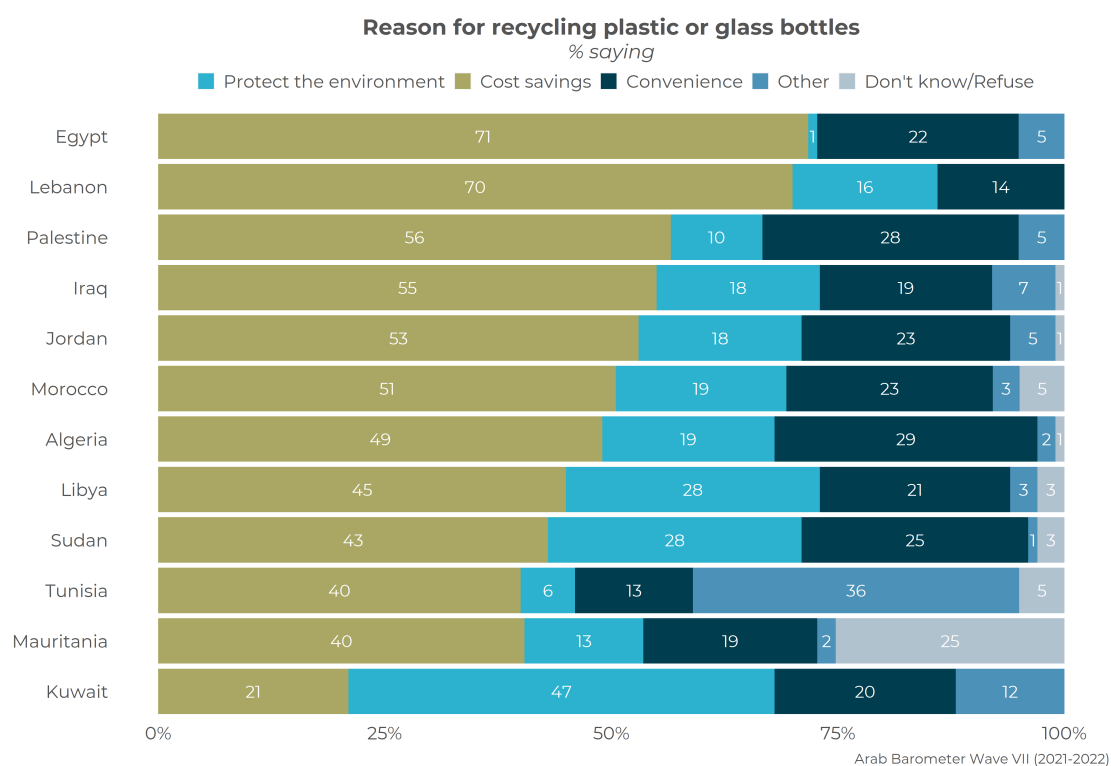


Recycling Habits

Many citizens across MENA engage in basic recycling habits such as reusing plastic or glass bottles. Three quarters (74 percent) in Palestine and two thirds (67 percent) in Egypt say they often or sometimes recycle bottles, while six-in-ten Tunisians and more than half (53 percent) in Morocco say the same. Smaller percentages engage in such behaviors in Jordan (50 percent), Algeria (47 percent), Iraq (39 percent), and Libya (38 percent). A third or less say the same in Lebanon (34 percent), Kuwait (32 percent), Mauritania (31 percent), and Sudan (28 percent).



Recycling behavior is more common among people with who struggle to afford basic necessities. In Jordan, while more than half (53 percent) of those who cannot afford basic necessities say they often or sometimes reuse bottles to cool put water in the fridge, only four-in-ten (39 percent) of those who are relatively better off say the same. The gap between the two groups is large in Iraq (11 points), Palestine (10 points), Tunisia (10 points), and Egypt (9 points). It is smaller, though still significant, in Lebanon (8 points) and Morocco (7 points). The income-based differences in recycling behavior reflect the main motives behind the behavior in the first place.



At least pluralities in all countries surveyed, save Kuwait, say the main reason for their recycling is cost saving. This is especially true in Egypt (71 percent) and Lebanon (70 percent) where seven-in-ten people cite this reason. More than half in Palestine (56 percent), Iraq (55 percent), and Jordan (53 percent) say the same, while about half do in Morocco (51 percent) and Algeria (49 percent). Cost saving is also the main reason behind recycling for 45 percent of

Libyans, 43 percent of Sudanese, four-in-ten Tunisians, and four-in-ten Mauritians. Only in Kuwait is a minority (21 percent) saying they recycle to save money. Kuwait is the only country where nearly half (47 percent) say that protecting the environment is what motivates them to recycle. In Sudan and Libya, about three-in-ten (28 percent) say the same while less than a fifth in all other surveyed countries share the sentiment.

Conclusions

Arab Barometer Wave VII findings show that MENA citizens are concerned about a number of environmental challenges facing their country, with water-related issues standing out as the most important ones. Citizens also acknowledge that they share responsibility with their governments in contributing to these challenges, while advocating for more government involvement to address climate change. However, faced with more immediate challenges, like food insecurity and economic instability, citizens are more focused on other challenges than the environment at present. At the same time, Arab Barometer findings show that citizens are already engaging in recycling behavior for personal reasons, suggesting that governments should encourage such behaviors while highlighting their importance in protecting the environment.



ABOUT ARAB BAROMETER

Arab Barometer is a nonpartisan research network that provides insight 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 across 15 countries.

We are the longest-standing and 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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