

Arab Barometer VI

Lebanon Country Report

2021

Executive Summary

Lebanon is a country in crisis on multiple fronts. Amid an ongoing political and financial crisis, the country has also suffered from the global COVID pandemic in over the course of 2020-1. These challenges were compounded by the massive explosion in Beirut's port on August 4, 2020, which led to hundreds of deaths and widespread destruction of homes and businesses in the country's capital city.

Lebanese are deeply worried about their country's future and have abysmal ratings of their domestic conditions and the government's performance. Despite ongoing challenges from COVID, which has hit Lebanon hard, economic concerns are the dominant worry of most in the country. Given the collapse of the Lebanese Pound, virtually no citizens rate the economy as good and there is very little optimism for the future. Lebanese are the most pessimistic about their country's economic future of any country surveyed in Arab Barometer's sixth wave.

Among all the economic worries, the rising cost of living is seen as the biggest challenge. Usurpingly, about half citizens are seeking to leave their homeland for better opportunities abroad. Yet, when asked about the primary reason for wanting to emigrate, economic conditions are not the dominant reason given. Instead, the most commonly named reason is corruption, implying citizens are even more frustrated by the failure of the political system which ultimately led to the financial crisis.

Given political and economic conditions, COVID could not have hit Lebanon at a more difficult time. There is near universal concern about the spread of COVID in the country, which is exacerbated by the challenges faced by the health system. Fewer than one-in-five rate the health care system positively, which helps explain the extremely low ratings of the government's response to the COVID crisis. Moreover, COVID also had dramatic effects on economic well-being, with one-in-five who were employed before the pandemic saying they had lost their job as a result of the virus.

Beyond these two challenges, Lebanon also suffered the devastating Beirut port explosion in August 2020. When trying to make sense of this tragedy, a clear majority of citizens point to corruption as the main cause, suggesting they place the most blame on their political system. Perhaps as a result, the plurality wants an independent investigation by international experts or the Lebanese Armed Forces, which is the most trusted institution in the country. Yet, many also want deeper reforms. Only one-in-ten Lebanese favor maintaining a sectarian system like is currently in place compared with more than half that want a civil or secular system of governance. Nevertheless, there

is some fear of the potential consequences of reform, with roughly half saying they are unwilling to give up the political positions that have been historically occupied by members of their sect. Thus, political reform is desired, but there remains substantial reticence about implementing it.

In terms of international actors, views of most regional powers are relatively low in Lebanon, with strong divisions by sect. Only a quarter of citizens have a favorable view of the U.S., which is unchanged from the Biden to the Trump administrations. China is somewhat more popular than the U.S., but still a minority of Lebanese have a favorable view of it, which is amongst the lowest among all countries surveyed. Views of Saudi Arabia and Iran are also poor, with only a quarter of all Lebanese having favorable attitudes, albeit with Sunnis being significantly more favorable toward Saudi Arabia and Shias much more favorable toward Iran. Overall, France is the most popular foreign country among those included in the survey, even though fewer than half rate France positively.

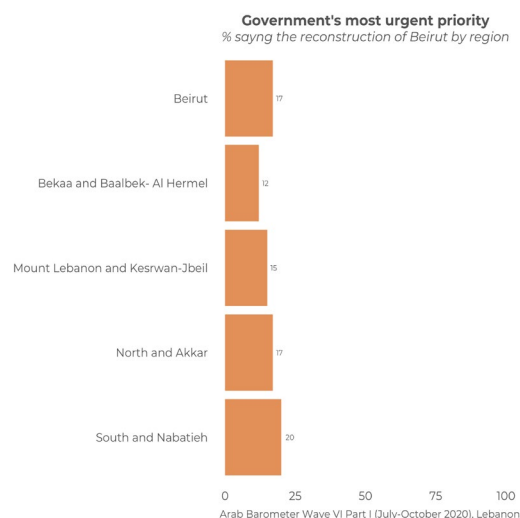
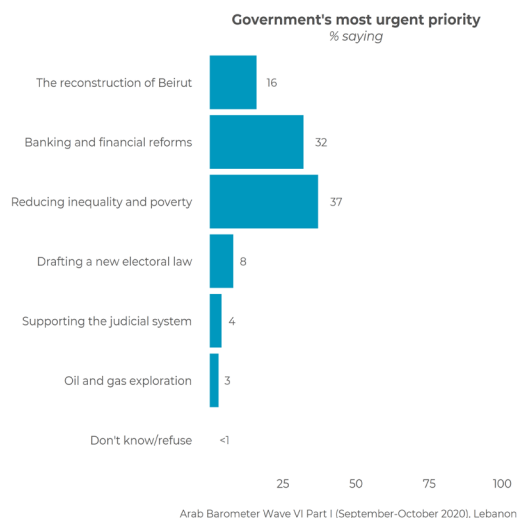
These are among the main findings of three nationally representative telephone surveys conducted in Lebanon during the course of 2020-1. The sample was drawn through random digit dialing (RDD). Between July 2020 and March 2021, we interviewed 3,000 Lebanese citizens to track changes in their evaluations of their conditions over time during the pandemic. The margin of error of these reported results is ± 3 percentage points. The surveys are part of Arab Barometer's sixth wave which was carried out in seven MENA countries. Arab Barometer's sixth wave is the only publicly available survey that captures the changing sentiments of citizens across MENA during the unprecedented times of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additional information about the surveys can be found in the links below:

[About AB6](#)

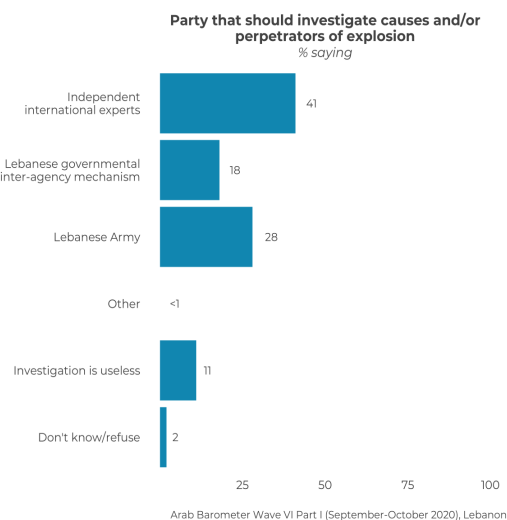
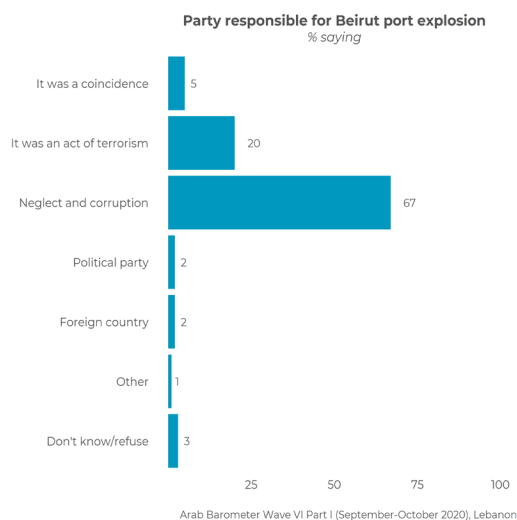
[How we did this](#)

Aftermath of the Beirut Explosion

Despite the horror of the Beirut explosion, in October 2020 relatively few Lebanese said that this is the most important issue facing the country. Only 16 percent say the government's primary focus should be on the reconstruction of Beirut compared with 37 percent who say reducing poverty and 32 percent who say financial reforms. In all major regions of the country, one-in-five or fewer said the city's reconstruction is the most pressing issue.

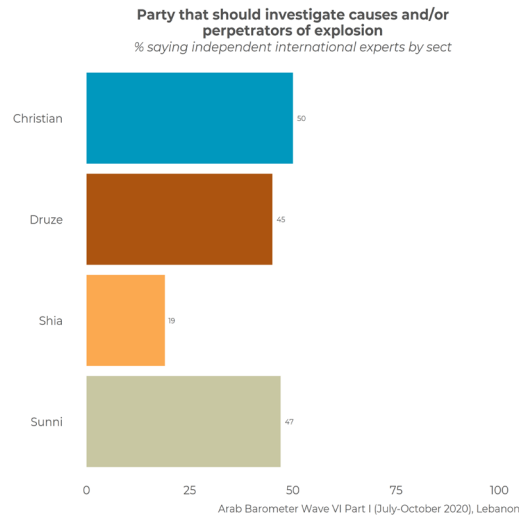


The survey makes clear that most Lebanese did not see the port explosion as a single unfortunate event, but part of the broader problems facing the country. When asked about the primary cause of the port explosion, two-thirds blamed neglect and corruption by the governing system. By comparison, just one-in-five blamed an act of terrorism while five percent or fewer said it was a chance occurrence, or the act of a domestic or foreign actor.



In terms of investigating the explosion, Lebanese are inclined to turn to independent international experts. Four-in-ten (41 percent) believed this would be the best choice to investigate the underlying causes, compared with 28 percent who say the Lebanese Army and 18 percent who say it should be Lebanese political parties. Additionally, one-in-ten (11 percent) say the investigation would simply be useless. Notably, there are dramatic differences

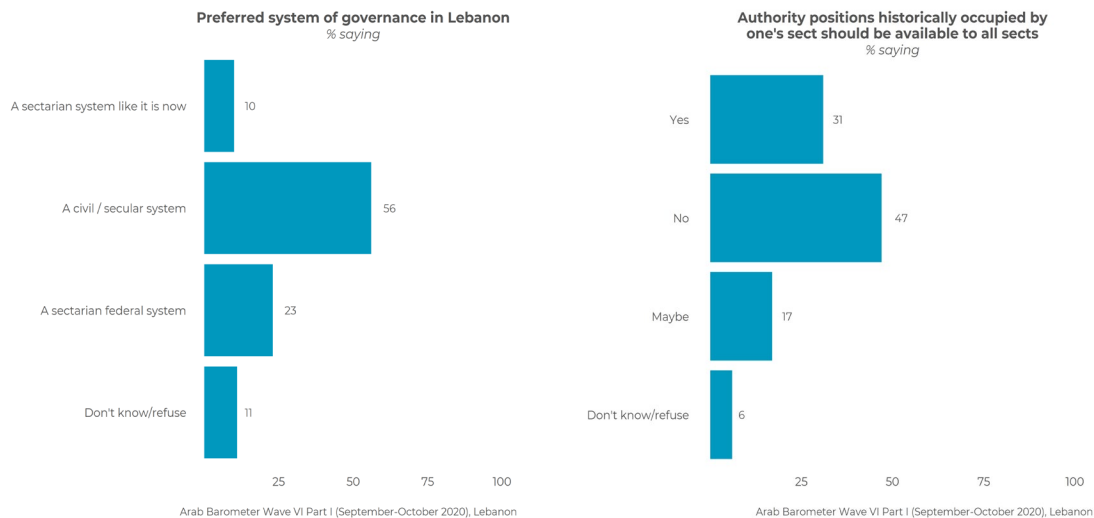
by sectarian identity. Only 19 percent of Shias favor independent international experts compared with about half of Christians, Sunnis and Druze favor independent international experts.



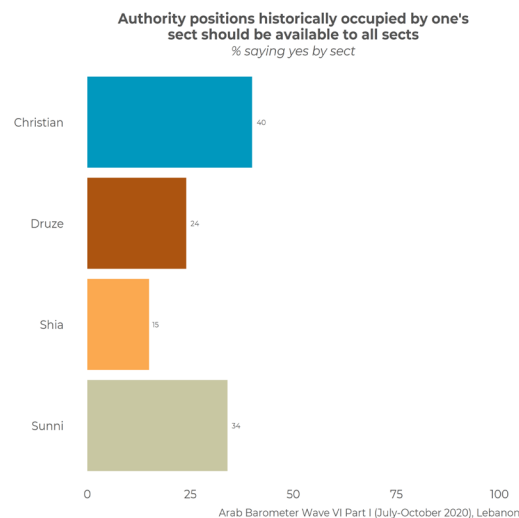
Overall, fewer than one-in-ten Lebanese lost their jobs, their homes, or a family member or close friend in the explosion. However, the level of devastation among Beirutis was far higher. Fully 38 percent said they lost their home, a third (33 percent) lost their job in the aftermath, and 17 percent lost a family member or close friend.

Political Reforms

Continued crisis and the collapse of the Lebanese state have led to ongoing questions about large-scale political reforms in the country. One major question is the role that sect should play in the political system. When asked, only one-in-ten Lebanese prefer the sectarian system, which is effectively no change from the existing system. Meanwhile, a slight majority (56 percent) say they prefer a civil or secular political system while 23 percent want a federal system that preserves a role for the country's different sects. Notably, Lebanon's Christians are the most supportive of a secular civil state (72 percent), compared with fewer than half of Sunnis and Shias, respectively.



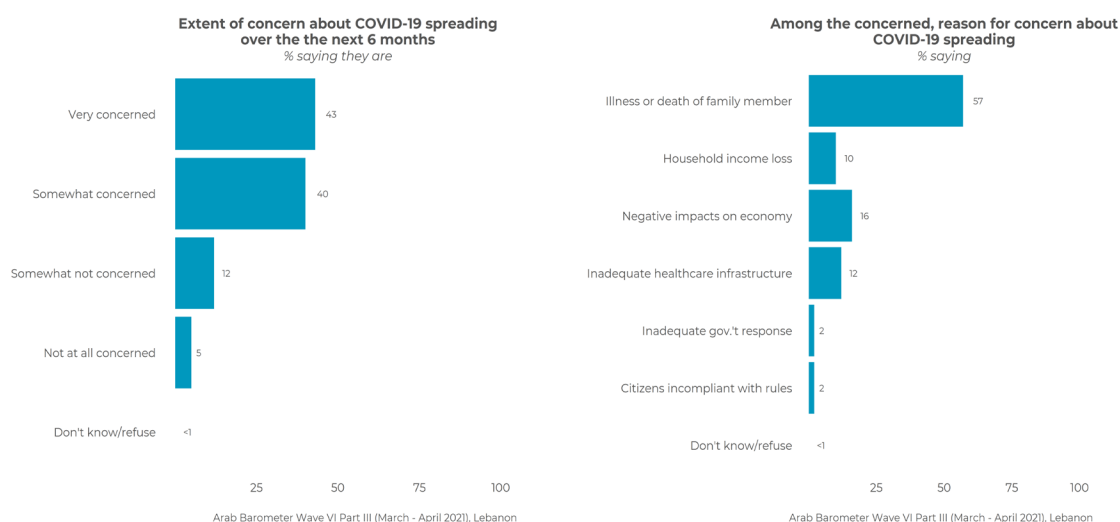
Yet, while a non-sectarian state may be seen as a desirable system, Lebanese remain worried about losing certain aspects based on the current system. When asked if they would be willing to give up political positions that have been historically occupied by members of their sect, nearly half (47 percent) of Lebanese say no. Just 31 percent say yes while 23 percent say maybe or that they are unsure. Shias are particularly cautious about giving up their enshrined positions from the current system, with only 15 percent saying that authority positions historically occupied by one's sect should be available to all sects.



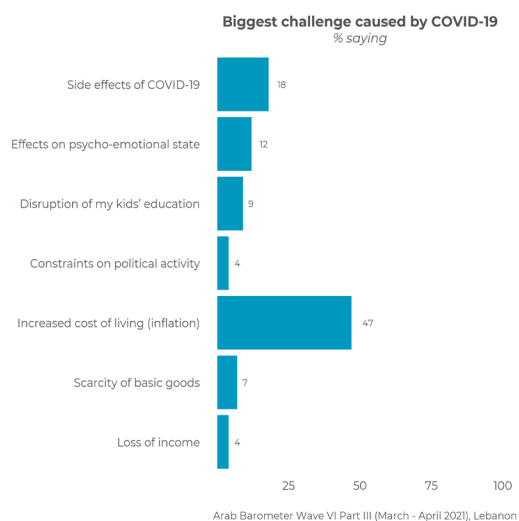
COVID

Concern about COVID in Lebanon has been relatively unchanged over the course of the pandemic. In October 2020, 85 percent of citizens said they were concerned about its spread compared with 83 percent in March 2021. For both

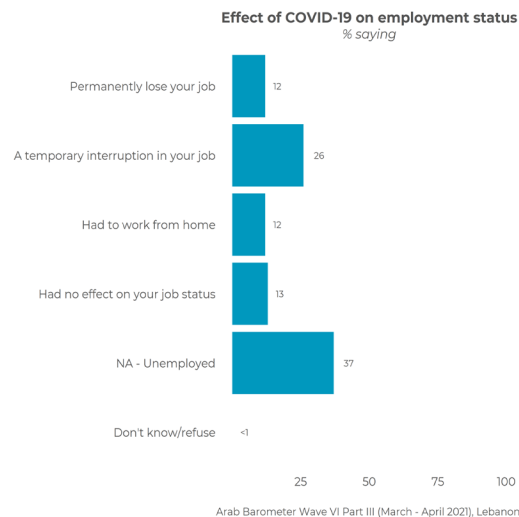
periods, concern about the spread of COVID was higher in Lebanon than in any other country surveyed. Despite the financial hardship facing the country, the predominate reason for concern of citizens is the illness or death of a family member (57 percent), compared with just 16 percent who say negative economic impacts, 12 percent who say overwhelming the healthcare system, and 10 percent the resulting loss of household income.



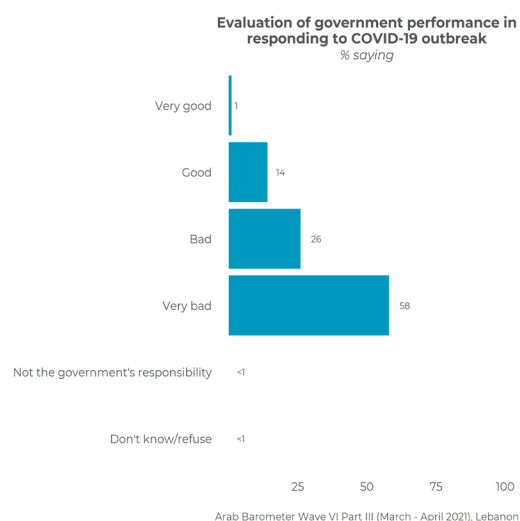
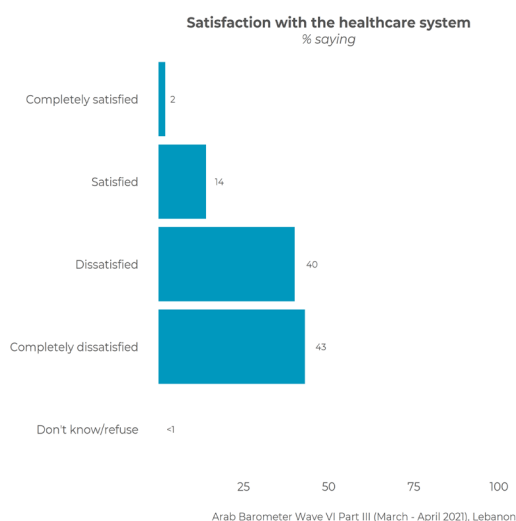
In terms of challenges caused by COVID, nearly half (47 percent) of Lebanese say the biggest challenge has been the increased cost of living. Another 18 percent say having contracted COVID while 12 percent say psychological effects and nine percent disruption of education.



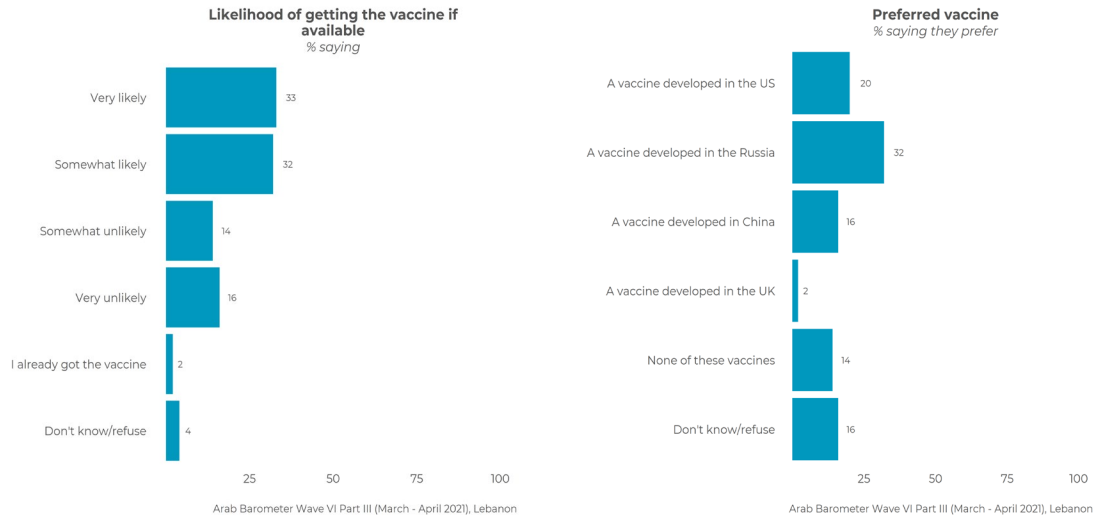
Among those who were permanently employed before COVID, the majority say that COVID had some impact on their work. One-in-five (19 percent) said they had lost their job permanently while 41 percent say they experienced a temporary job interruption. Among those employed before the pandemic, men were more greatly affected, with 46 percent saying they had experienced a temporary interruption compared with 33 percent of women. However, there was no difference between the two on the rate of permanent job losses (19 percent, each).



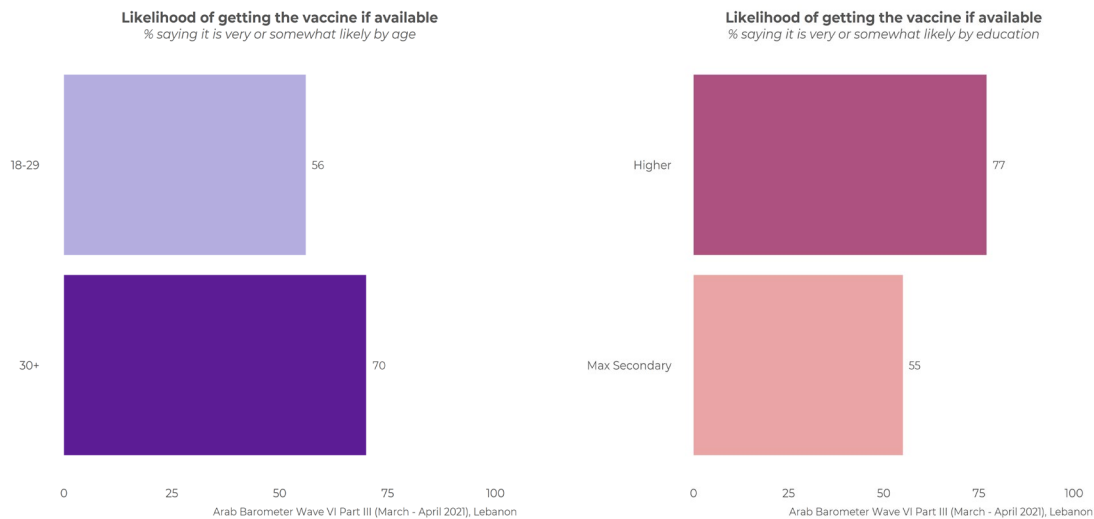
As COVID has struck Lebanon, there are extremely low ratings of the health care system. Only 17 percent of citizens say that they are satisfied or completely satisfied with the health care system, which is the lowest among the countries surveyed. Citizens are also very frustrated with the government's performance on managing COVID, with only 16 percent rating it positively.



COVID has also had a significant impact on the education in Lebanon, as it has in most countries around the world. Nearly all Lebanese (87 percent) say the pandemic has had negative effects on the educational system. Additionally, the percentage of citizens saying that they were satisfied with the educational system dropped during the course of the pandemic, falling from 27 percent in October 2020 to 18 percent in March 2021.

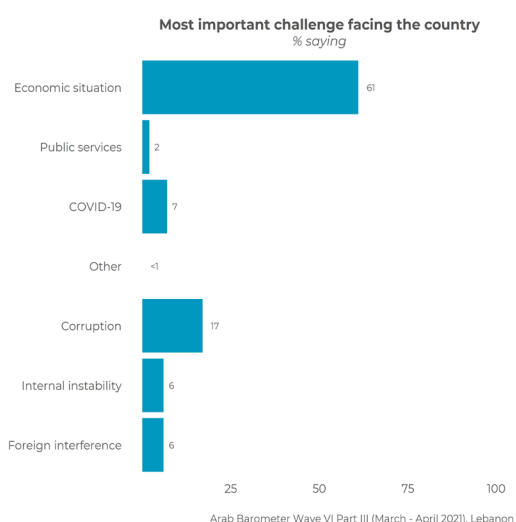


In March 2021, two-thirds of Lebanese said they intend to get the vaccine if it is available. However, there are important differences by age and level of education. A slight majority (56 percent) of youth ages 18-29 say they intend to be vaccinated compared with 70 percent of those who are 30 years of age and older. Meanwhile, those with a college degree were 22-points more likely to say they will get the vaccine than those with a secondary degree or less. Lebanese most prefer a vaccine developed in Russia or the U.S. over one from China or the U.K.

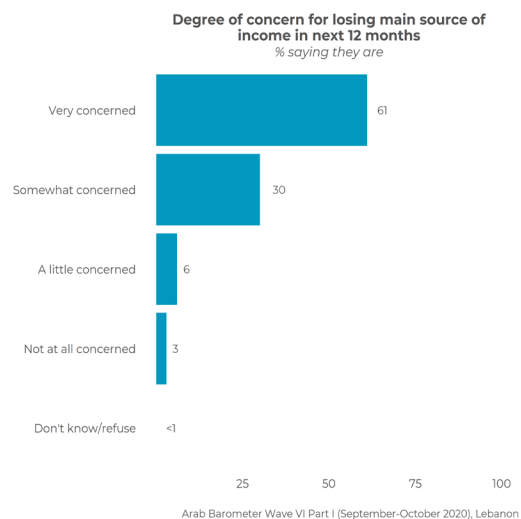
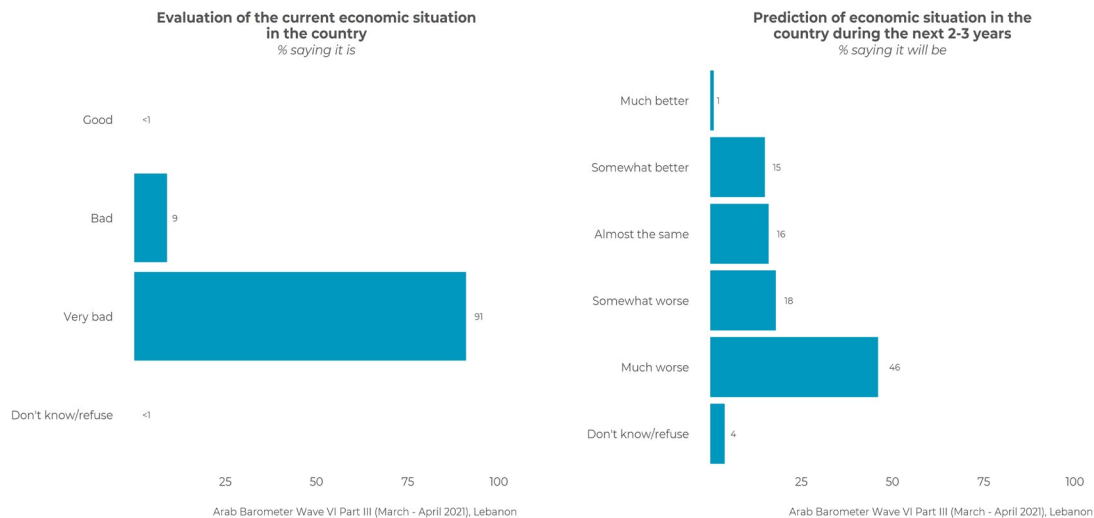


Domestic Conditions

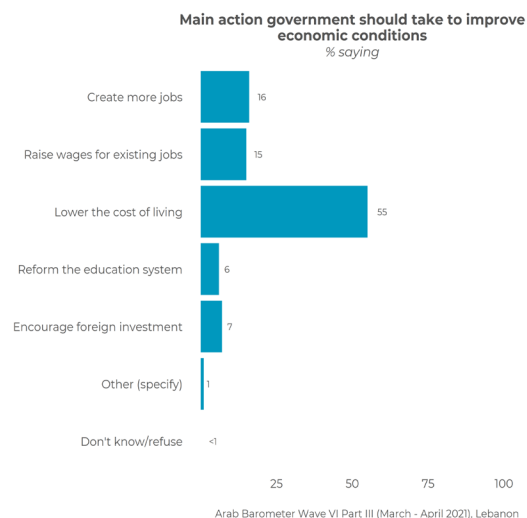
Despite the widespread challenges from COVID, this is not the primary concern for most Lebanese. Rather, economic conditions are the predominate worry (61 percent) followed by corruption (17 percent), while just seven percent name COVID as the biggest issue facing Lebanon. Among countries surveyed, Lebanon is the only one where COVID was not seen as one of the two greatest challenges facing the country, underscoring the depth of concern about other issues in the country.



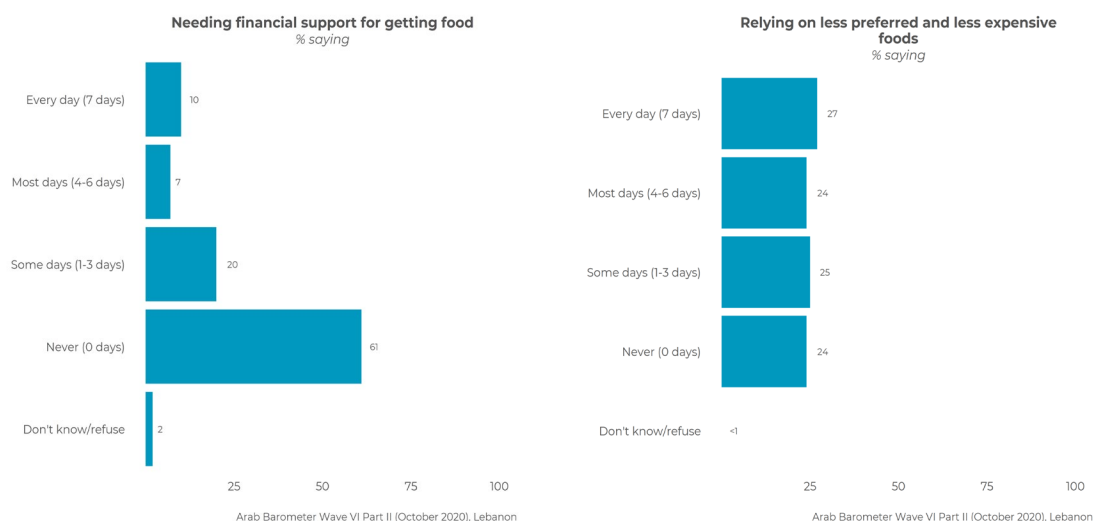
Since 2019, the Lebanese Pound plummeted as a result of the financial crisis, with some estimates showing that 80 percent of the population now live in poverty. Unsurprisingly, less than one percent of Lebanese rate economic conditions as good or very good, which is the lowest among countries surveyed. There is also little optimism for the future – just 16 percent say they expect economic conditions to improve in the coming few years, which is more than 10 points lower than in any other country surveyed in Arab Barometer’s sixth wave. Moreover, nearly all citizens (91 percent) are somewhat or very concerned about losing their main source of income in the coming year.



These concerns are particularly related to the rising cost of living as a result of the loss of 90 percent of the value of the Lebanese Pound since 2019. When asked about the key step the government should take to improve economic conditions, more than half (55 percent) say lowering the cost of living, which is more than twice the percentage in any other country surveyed. By comparison, despite high rates of unemployment, just 16 percent say the primary action the government should take is creating jobs.

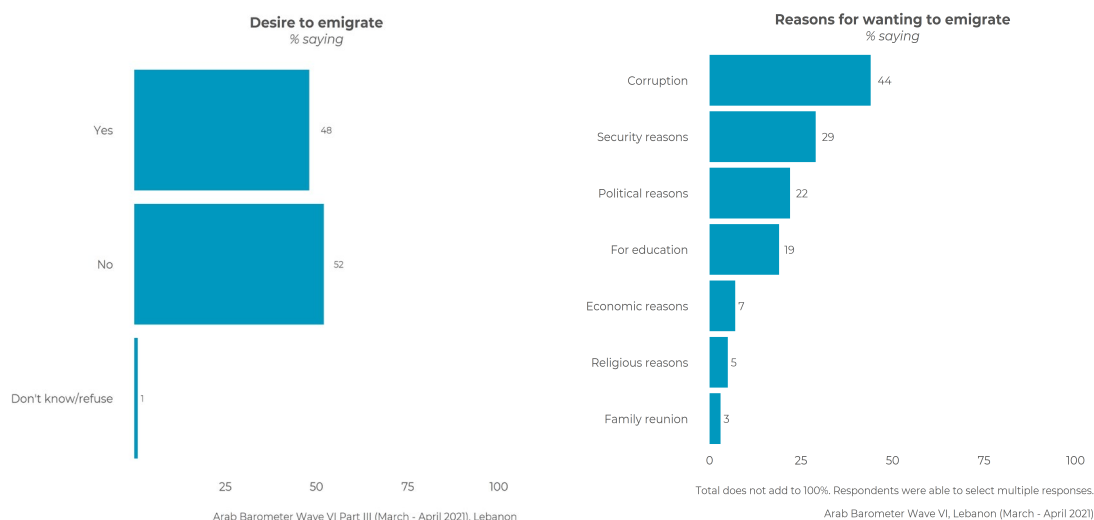


Given the financial crisis, Lebanese are taking significant steps to reduce their expenditures. Half (51 percent) say they have substituted less preferred or less expensive foods in the past week, which is the highest among all countries surveyed. Meanwhile, 17 percent say they have needed financial support to afford food over the past week. A similar percentage said they worried that their money for food would run out before they could afford more (19 percent) or that their money did not last and they were not able to buy more food (17 percent).

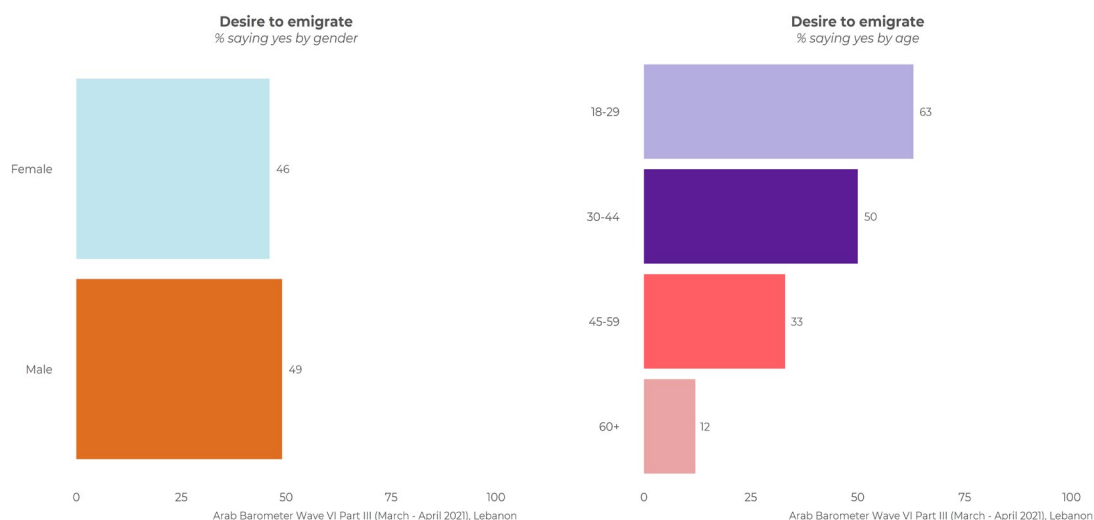


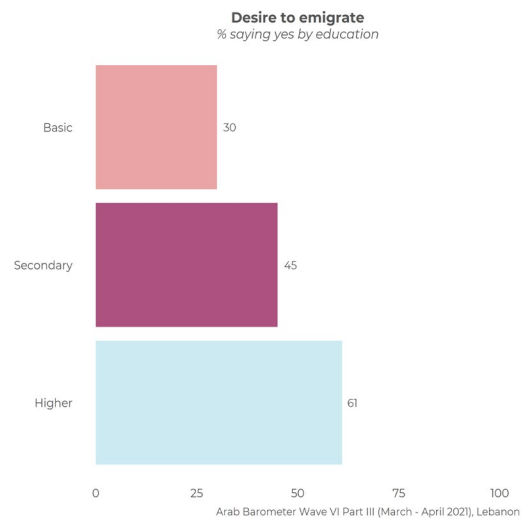
Instead of turning to the government to address conditions, roughly half of Lebanese (48 percent) say they want to emigrate. Notably, unlike in most countries, economic reasons (7 percent) are not the primary motivation for

citizens wanting to leave. Rather, the most common reason cited is corruption (44 percent), followed by security considerations (29 percent), political reasons (22 percent), and education (19 percent). In short, myriad conditions, particularly related to problems of governance, appear to be the driving motivations for leaving Lebanon.

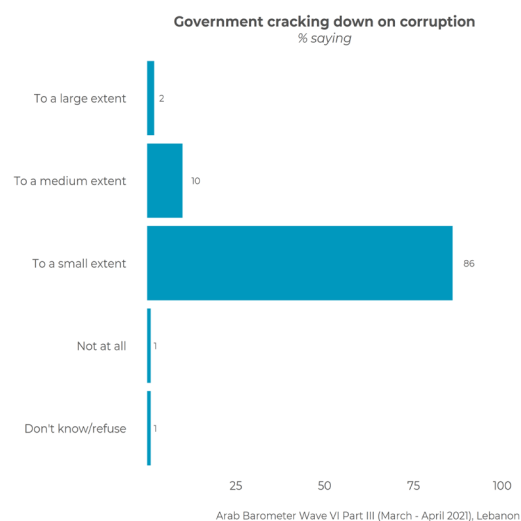
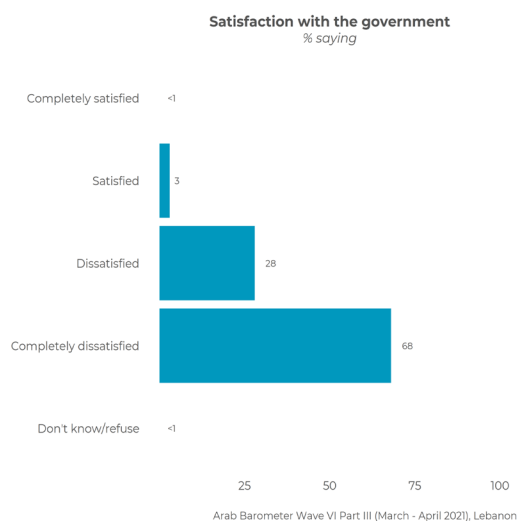


Unlike in most countries surveyed, there is not a significant gender gap in the desire to emigrate, with 49 percent of men and 46 percent of women wanting to leave their homeland. However, nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of youth ages 18-29 want to leave, presumably due to the lack of hope they have for their futures. Lebanon is also at risk for brain drain, with 61 percent of those with a college education wanting to emigrate compared with 37 percent of those with a secondary degree or less.

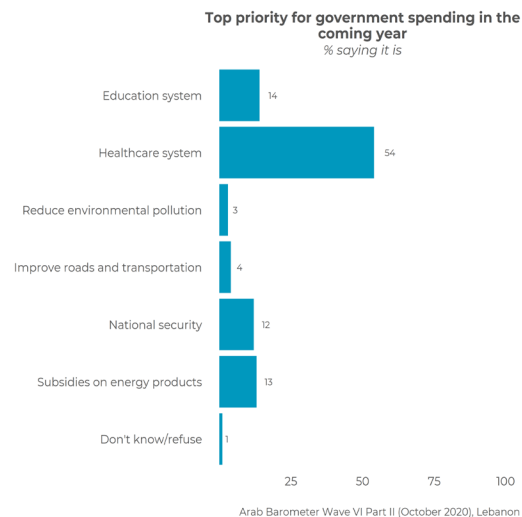




Ratings of government performance are dismal in Lebanon, owing in large part to the collapse of the financial system, high levels of corruption, and failure of the political system to address many basic problems facing the country. Just four percent say they are satisfied with the government's overall performance in spring 2021 while only one percent of citizens say the government is doing well keeping prices down. Nine-in-ten (89 percent) say corruption is prevalent to a large or medium extent, which is tied for the highest in any country surveyed in Arab Barometer's sixth wave. However, just 12 percent of Lebanese say the government is working to address corruption, which is by far the lowest in any of the seven countries surveyed.

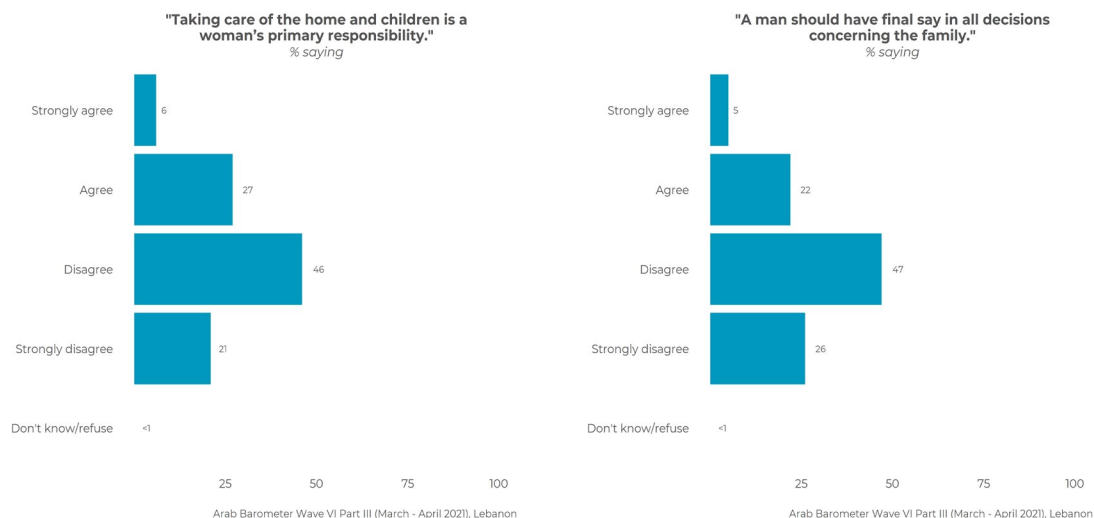


When asked about government spending priorities in the year, more than half (54 percent) of Lebanese want greater investment in healthcare followed by 14 percent who say education, 13 percent energy subsidies, and 12 percent national security.

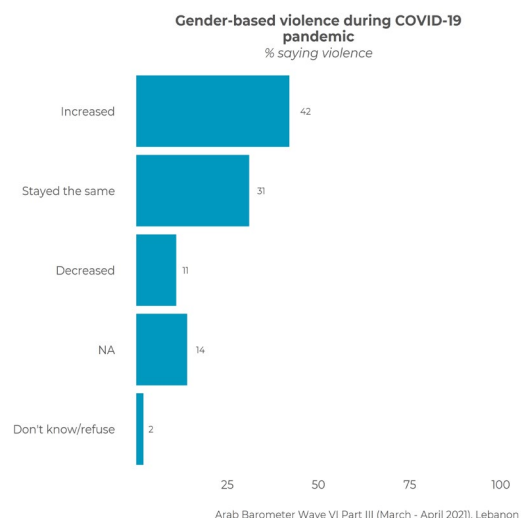


Gender

Lebanon remains one of the most equal countries in MENA on issues related to women's rights and roles. When asked about women's role in the family, only a third say that a women's primary responsibility is taking care of the home and the children, which is the lowest in any country surveyed. Moreover, there is not a stark gender divide, with men being only six points more likely to hold this view. Similarly, only 27 percent of Lebanese agree with the statement that a man should have the final say in all decisions concerning the family, with only a ten-point gap between views of men and women.



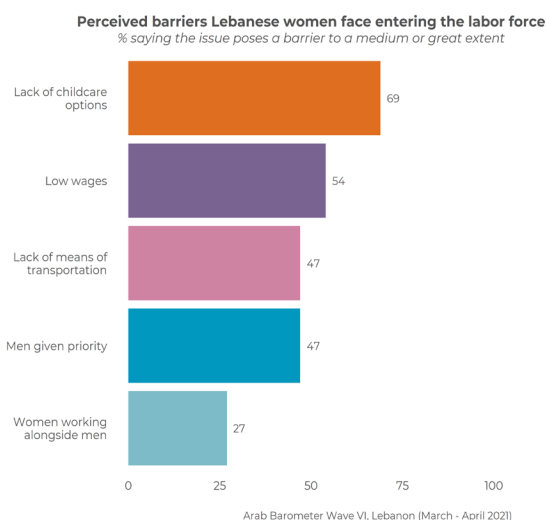
However, there are reasons to fear that COVID has exacerbated a number of issues facing women. When asked if community levels of gender-based violence had increased during the course of the pandemic, among all Lebanese, 42 percent said it had increased in spring 2021 compared with only 20 percent in fall 2020. Notably, women are not significantly more likely than men to say that gender-based violence has increased, with the difference falling within the survey's margin of error.



Female labor force participation rates are low across MENA, including in Lebanon. In spring 2021, only a fifth of women (21 percent) said they were employed or self-employed. To evaluate the barriers women face in finding employment, Arab Barometer asked about five potential challenges. Three of

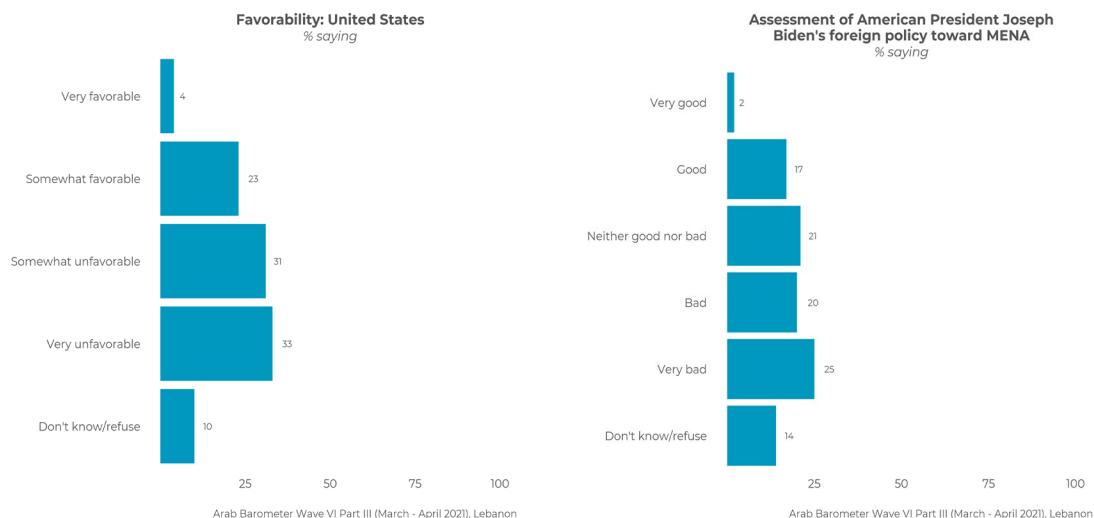
these were structural while two were cultural. Overall, like most countries in MENA, Lebanese perceive structural barriers to be significantly greater barriers.

The most commonly cited barrier to women's participation in the labor force is lack of childcare options (69 percent), followed by low wages (54 percent). Nearly half (47 percent) cite lack of transportation. By comparison, 47 percent say men being given priority while only 27 percent say mixed workplaces are an issue. Notably, there are not dramatic differences in the perceptions of Lebanese men and women, with similar percentages saying each of these is barriers. The only significant difference is for women working alongside men, with men being six points more likely to perceive this as a barrier compared with women.



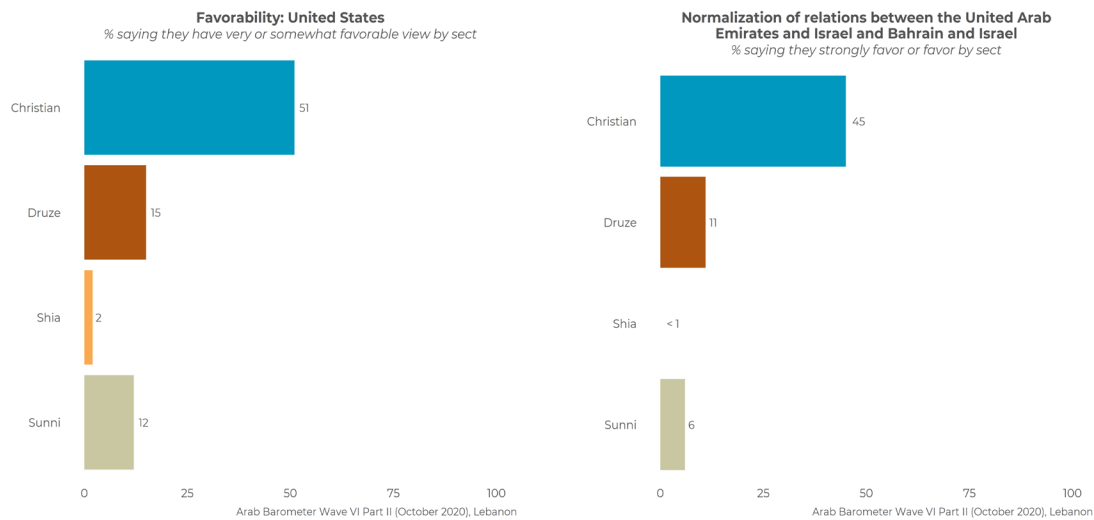
International Relations

Views of the U.S. in Lebanon are the lowest among all countries surveyed. Only a quarter (27 percent) had a favorable view of the U.S. in March 2021, which is effectively unchanged since October 2020 (25 percent). In fact, Lebanon is the only country in the sixth wave where views of the U.S. did not improve dramatically during this period.

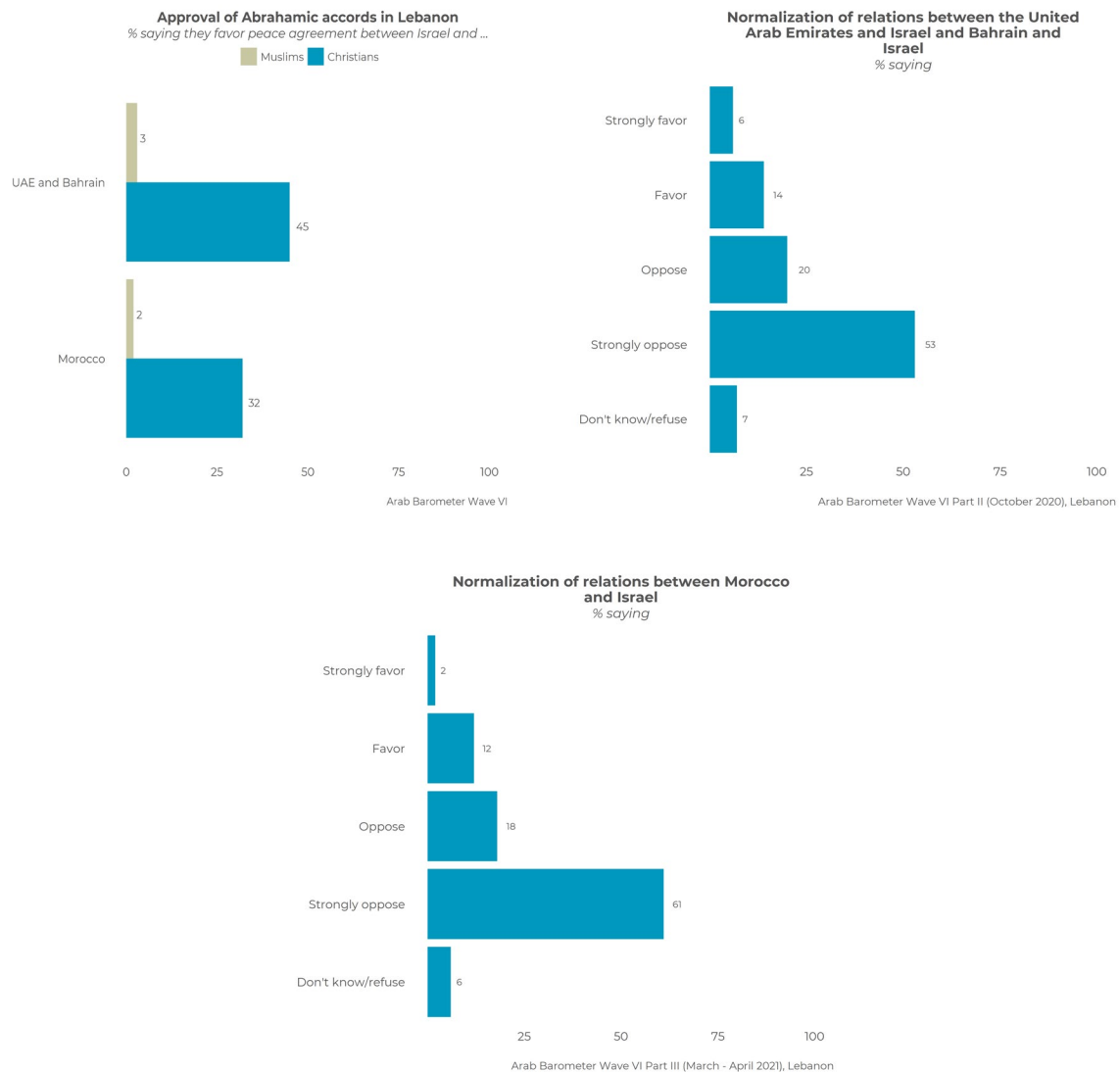


Elsewhere, more positive views of the Biden administration compared with the Trump administration appear to play a significant role in changing views of the U.S. However, in Lebanon, Biden is not favored by the population at large over Trump. In October 2020, 18 percent of citizens said Trump had favorable policies toward MENA compared with 19 percent in March 2021 that rated the policies of Biden favorably. Meanwhile, when asked before the U.S. election which candidate was better for the region, 17 percent favored Trump while 16 percent chose Biden with the remainder not having a preference for one or the other.

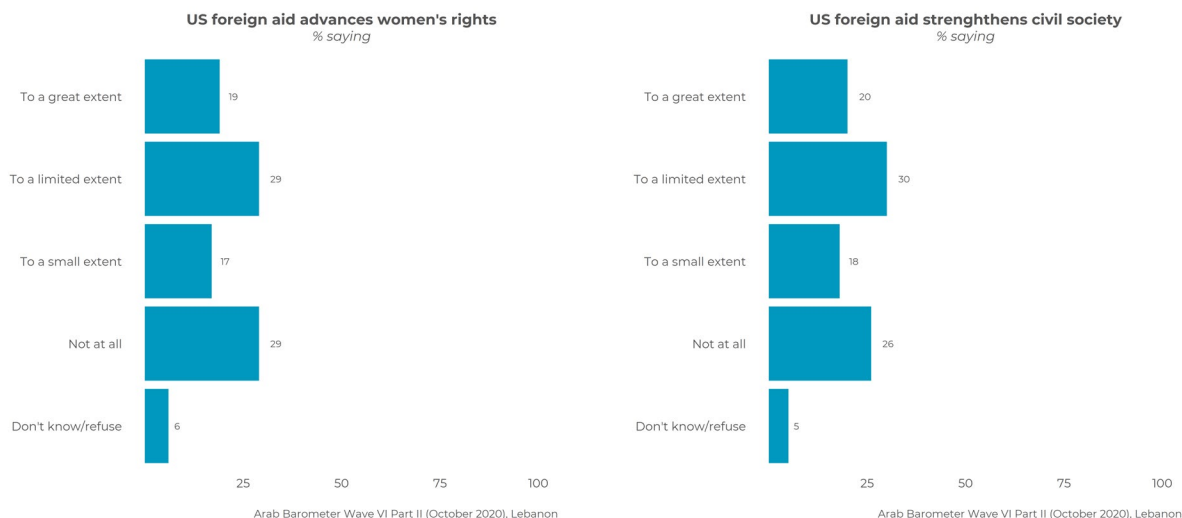
These national-level results conceal significant differences within the country. Fully half (51 percent) of Christians in Lebanon had a favorable view of the U.S. in October 2020 compared with just seven percent of the country's Muslim population. In March 2021, Christians were somewhat less inclined toward the U.S. at 44 percent but remained far more supportive than Muslims overall (15 percent). This tracks closely with views of the U.S. president, with Christians being seven percent less supportive of Biden's foreign policies compared with Trump's while Muslims were six percent more supportive of Biden's policies compared with Trump's.



Views of the Abraham Accords and Morocco's normalization agreement with Israel have not helped views of the U.S. in Lebanon. Only one-in-five Lebanese favor the peace agreements between Israel and the U.A.E and Bahrain, respectively, while just 14 percent favor the peace deal with Morocco. Notably, the country's Christian population is significantly more supportive of the Abraham Accords than the Muslim population (45 percent vs. 3 percent).

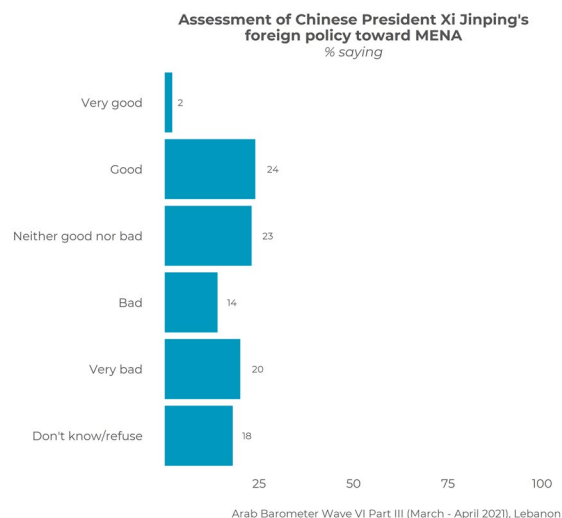
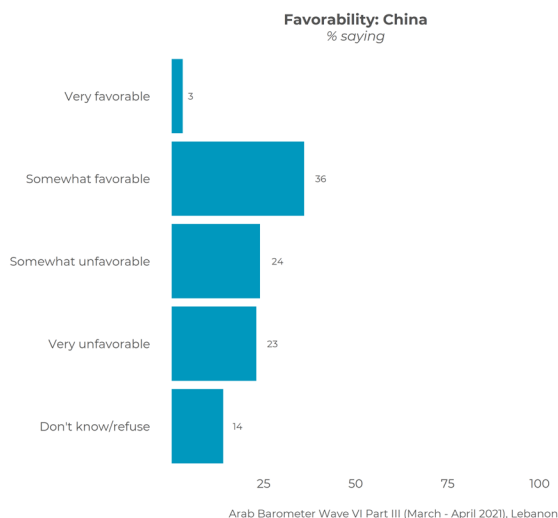


Despite weak support for the U.S., there is a general sense that U.S. assistance to the country is having beneficial effects. Half of Lebanese say that U.S. aid helps strengthen civil society while 48 percent say it works to advance the rights of women.

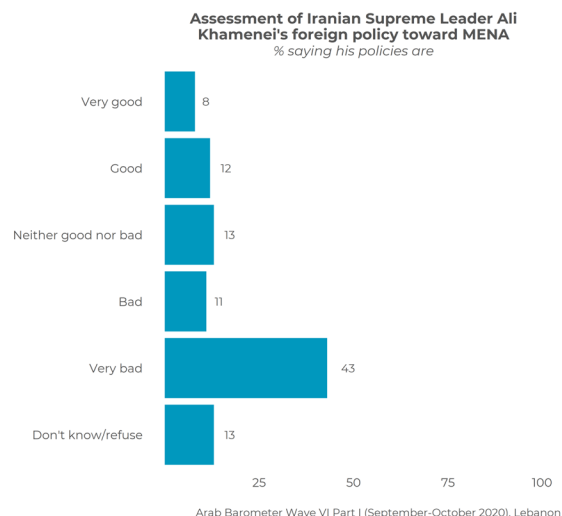
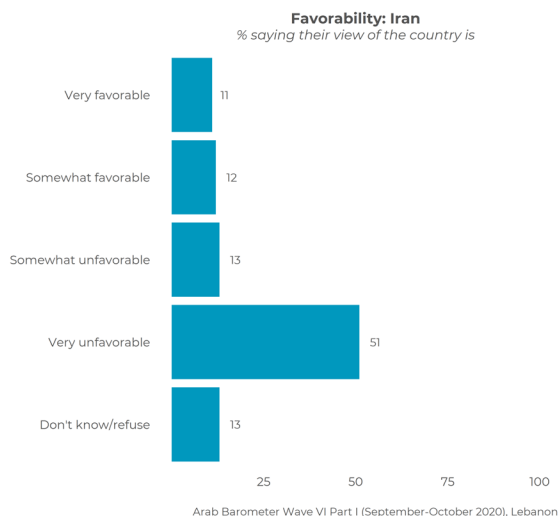


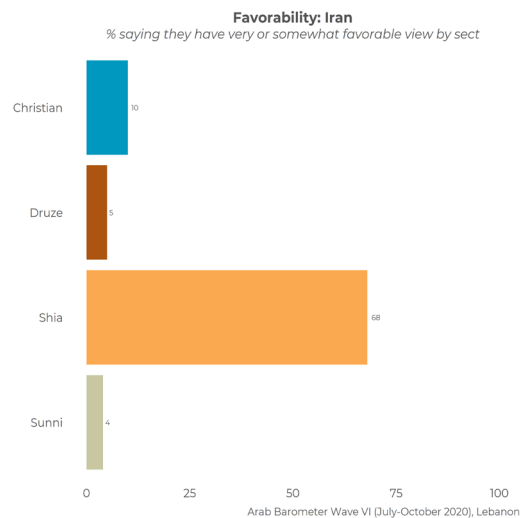
Given the magnitude of political, economic, and security challenges facing Lebanon, there is not a clear consensus about the most desired area for foreign assistance. The most common response (27 percent) is infrastructure, followed by civil society development (20 percent), improving education (12 percent) and promoting women's rights (11 percent), while 12 percent are opposed to foreign aid entirely.

Unlike most Arab publics surveyed, views of China are relatively poor in Lebanon. Just 38 percent of Lebanese have a positive opinion of China, whereas a majority do in most countries surveyed. This may result from concerns about the strings attached to Chinese engagement when China increased engagement following the COVID-19 outbreak in spring 2020. Meanwhile, Chinese President Xi Jinping's foreign policies are only viewed favorably by a quarter (26 percent) of Lebanese. Overall, Christians in Lebanon are more likely to favor China compared with Muslims (52 percent vs. 30 percent).

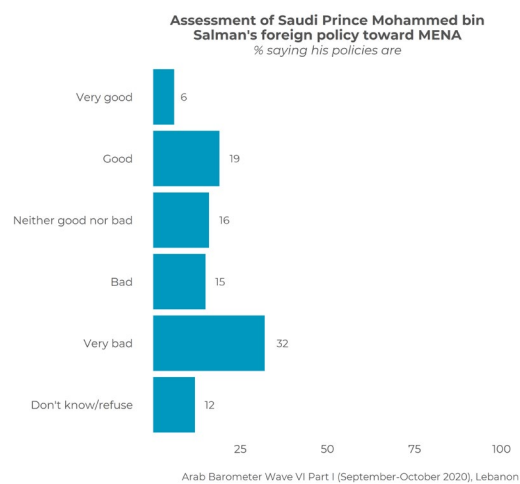
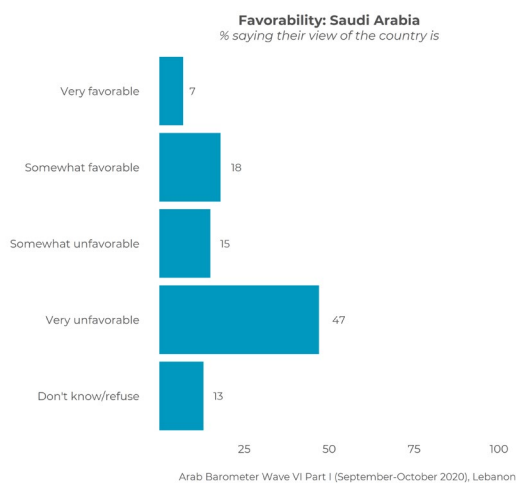


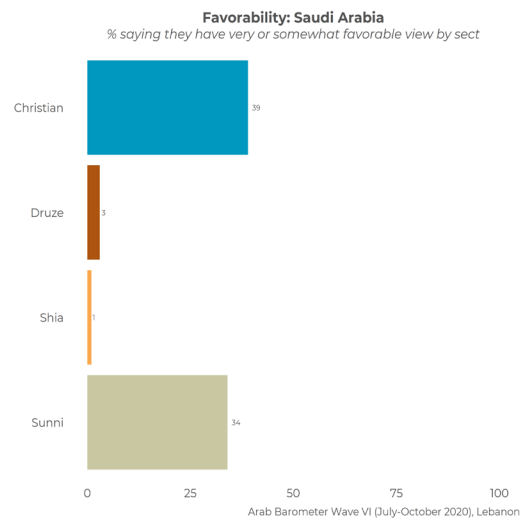
Views of two major regional powers, Iran and Saudi Arabia, are relatively low in Lebanon. Overall, just 23 percent of Lebanese have a very or somewhat favorable view toward Iran, which is close to the percentage that hold a favorable view of the foreign policy of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei (20 percent). Unsurprisingly, there are dramatic differences by sect, with a clear majority of Shias having favorable views of Iran (68 percent) and Khamenei's foreign policies (60 percent), which far exceeds any other sect in Lebanon.



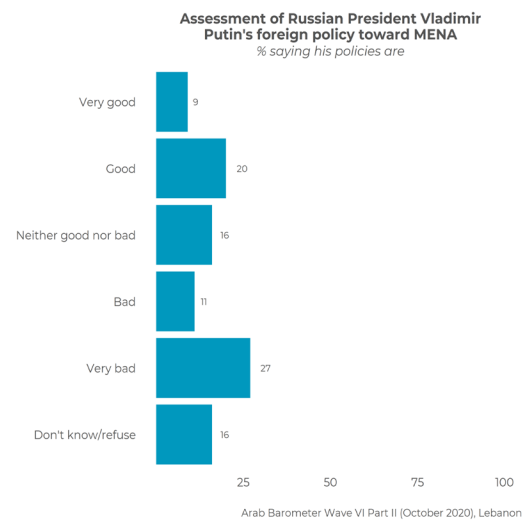
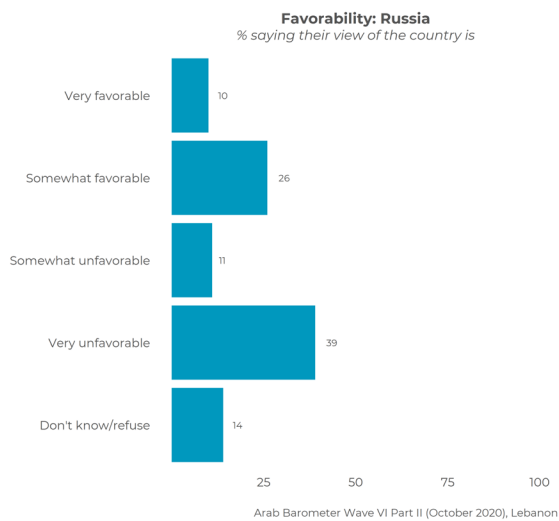


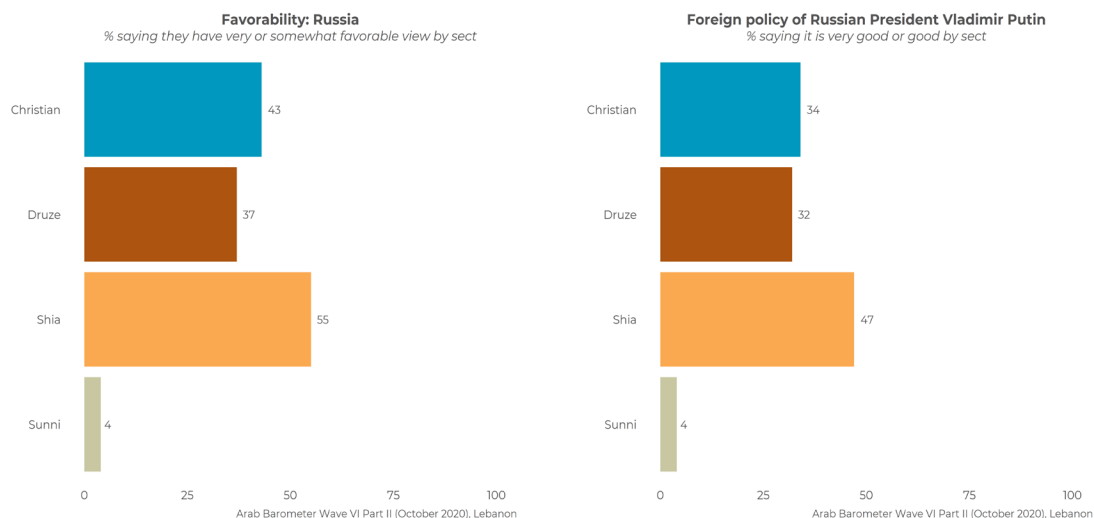
For Saudi Arabia, overall attitudes are fairly similar. A quarter of Lebanese view the country favorably while 24 percent favor the foreign policies of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. Support for Saudi Arabia is highest among Sunnis (34 percent) and Maronite Christians (40 percent), while there is virtually no support among Shias or Druze. Results are similar for approval of the foreign policies of Mohamed bin Salman.



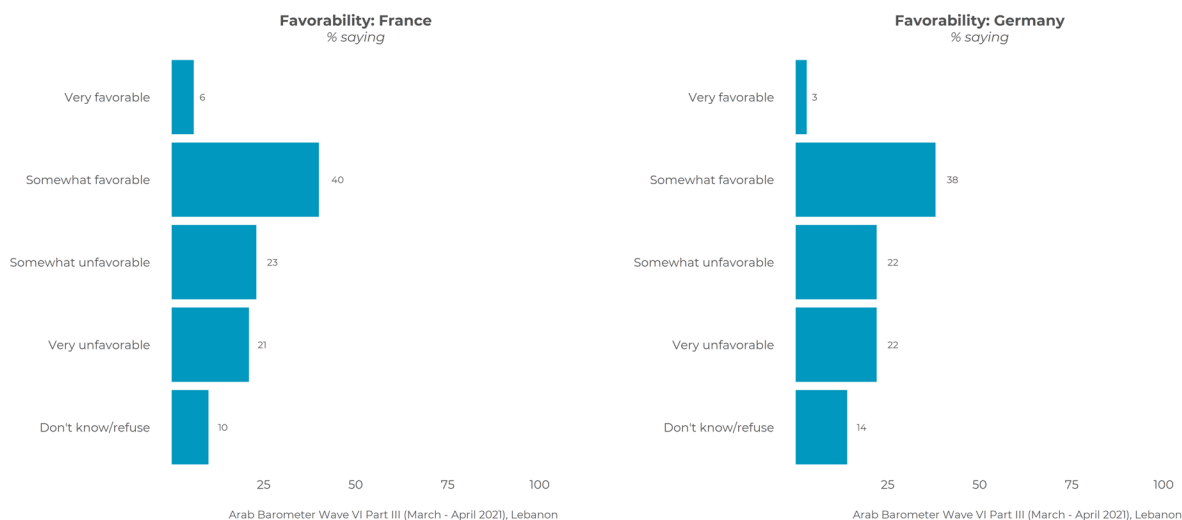


Views of Russia are relatively low. Just over a third (36 percent) of Lebanese have a positive view, while three-in-ten say they approve of Russian President Vladimir Putin's foreign policies. Shias are far more likely to hold favorable views of Russia (55 percent) and Putin (47 percent) than other major sects, likely due to Russia's support of the Syrian regime.





Favorability of European powers is moderate. Unlike most countries in the region, France has more positive ratings in Lebanon compared with Germany. Nearly half (46 percent) have a positive view toward France while 38 percent favor the foreign policies of French President Emmanuel Macron. Germany is favored by 41 percent in Lebanon, while German Chancellor Angela Merkel's policies are favored by 28 percent. Likely, Macron's attempt to resolve the political deadlock in Lebanon in 2020 has bolstered views of France, as the country's citizens look for needed reforms.





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.



ARABBAROMETER.ORG



[ARABBAROMETER](https://www.facebook.com/ARABBAROMETER)



[@ARABBAROMETER](https://twitter.com/ARABBAROMETER)