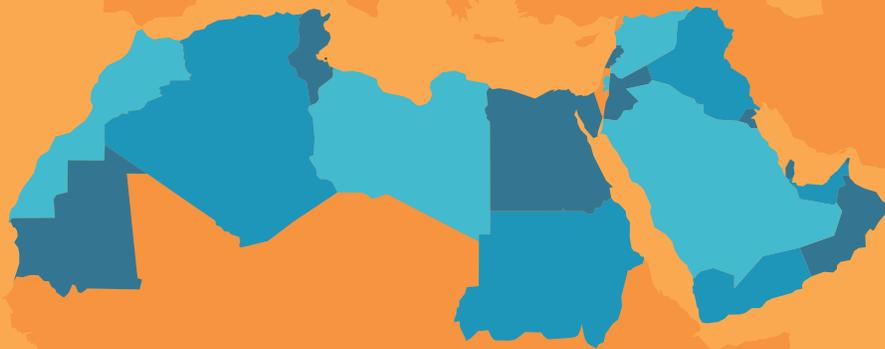




الباروميتر العربي
ARAB BAROMETER

Racial Discrimination and Anti-Blackness in the Middle East and North Africa

August 2022



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Executive Summary

The issue of race and race relations has recently gained increased salience in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Increased levels of migration to and through a number of MENA countries and the historic marginalization of Black communities in the region have brought some of these issues to the forefront. However, there has been scant attention to the views of publics across the region toward such issues. Arab Barometer's Seventh Wave is the first survey to systematically examine the degree to which citizens across MENA perceive racial discrimination and anti-Black discrimination to be a problem in their countries.

The results suggest that citizens in surveyed countries understand and view racial discrimination differently from anti-Black discrimination. In most countries surveyed, majorities affirm that racial discrimination is a serious problem. Yet, only a minority of citizens report that discrimination against Black individuals is a problem to a great or medium extent in all but two countries. Furthermore, only in Tunisia is there a majority who think both racial discrimination and discrimination against Black individuals is a problem. This raises questions for further research on how MENA citizens understand "race" and on the extent to which there is awareness of anti-Black discrimination in their countries.

Perceptions of discrimination against Black individuals do not consistently vary by level of education, which is common in a number of other countries. However, there are often differences by gender, with women being more likely to report both racial discrimination and anti-Black discrimination in many of the countries surveyed.

The data also make clear that, at least in limited ways, citizens are open to greater representation of Black individuals in society. Although majorities typically say Black people are well represented in television programs, in most countries surveyed majorities are welcoming of having a greater number of Black people appear on television. But this desire for greater representation also merits further research because Middle Eastern television series — specifically comedies — have frequently depicted Black individuals in demeaning and derogatory ways.

Despite a widespread perception that racial discrimination is a problem, relatively few citizens report being the subject of such discrimination personally. At most, a third say they have been victims in Morocco, while just over a quarter or fewer say the same in all other countries surveyed. Yet, among those who have suffered racial discrimination, few have reported the incident to an authority figure. Instead, the most commonly reported reaction is ignoring the incident, followed by verbally responding to it.

These are among the main findings of ten nationally representative public opinion surveys conducted across the Middle East and North Africa from 2021-22 as part of Arab Barometer’s Wave VII. The results include nearly 23,000 interviews across the region and have a margin of error of approximately ±2 points in each country. Overall, the results make clear that while racial discrimination is widely perceived as a problem across the region, citizens believe it takes a number of forms that do not necessarily include anti-Black discrimination. Additionally, many citizens are open to greater representation of Black individuals on television, though additional research would benefit clarifying how citizens understand representation. Still, tackling discrimination will require a greater reckoning of these issues within society and by governments, especially given the clear magnitude of the problem and the fact that relatively few victims of discrimination report taking clear action against their attackers.

Introduction

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), academics and ordinary citizens are connecting the legacies of slavery to present-day anti-Black racism and discrimination in the region today. In order to join these timely and important discussions, this report provides an analysis of the extent to which citizens in ten MENA countries perceive racial discrimination and anti-Blackness to be a problem in their respective countries. This report utilizes data from the Arab Barometer’s Wave VII findings conducted in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan, Tunisia, and Mauritania.

In this report, racial discrimination is defined as race-based discrimination; however, there is no consensus amongst sociologists and anthropologists on the exact definition of “race.”¹ On one hand, race can refer to, “a group of people sharing certain visible and measurable characteristics, such as hair, pigmentation, skull measurements, height, and other physical features.”² On the other hand, “the very concept of ‘race’ as a biological category to classify human difference is not supported by any biological or genetic evidence.”³ While events in the United States brought the issue of racism center-stage globally, it is important to emphasize that understandings of race differ between the United States and

¹Project on Middle East Political Science. “Racial Formations in Africa and the Middle East: A Transregional Approach,” *Project on Middle East Political Affairs*. (September 2021): 41; El Zein, Rayya. “Introduction: Cultural Constructions of Race and Racism in the Middle East and North Africa / Southwest Asia and North Africa.” *Lateral* (Spring 2021): 5.

²Bernard, Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Enquiry*. (New York Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992): 135.

³Laura Menin, “Introduction. Slavery and the Racialization of Humanity: Coordinates for a Comparative Analysis.” *Antropologia* 7, no. 1 N.S. (April 2020): 10.

the MENA region. This owes to several reasons, namely because color and phenotype are not the sole markers of difference. Instead, racial discrimination in MENA encompasses a broader range of prejudices based not only on skin color but also ethnicity and place of origin.

Anti-Black discrimination is a form of structural and systemic racism and prejudice against Black individuals of African descent. Similar to anti-Black discrimination is the notion of anti-Blackness, defined as negative and hostile attitudes toward Black or dark-skinned people. Scholars who study the history of slavery in the MENA region largely agree that the association between skin color and place of origin with specific kinds of slavery serves as the root cause of anti-Blackness.⁴ Adopting anti-Blackness as a frame to understand racial discrimination in MENA is important because it requires citizens of the region to look inward and reckon with histories of colonialism, imperialism, and enslavement that pre-dates European and Western interference. Additionally, centering anti-Blackness in the study of race relations in the MENA region gives leverage to the study of transregional comparative racial formations, or how “difference—from skin color to language to ancestry—forms the basis of exclusionary practices and state oppression.”⁵ Finally, placing anti-Blackness at the center of the discussion supports its existence as a systemic, global phenomenon that is present outside of the context of the United States, which has historically served as the predominant site for interrogating race and racism.⁶

The association between Blackness, servile status, and racial inferiority has continued into the present and has grave consequences for Black citizens and non-citizens in the MENA region today. For example, the term *abd* (slave) is regularly used throughout Arabic-speaking countries to refer to a Black person.⁷ Blackface, the use of make-up to imitate and portray the appearance of a Black person, and other demeaning, anti-Black stereotypes are portrayed on popular Arab TV shows and movies.⁸ Activists in Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, and elsewhere point to the lack of Black media presenters, anchors, and television hosts

⁴Terence Walz and Kenneth M. Cuno, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: Histories of Trans-Saharan Africans in Nineteenth-Century Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Mediterranean*. (Cairo Press, 2010): 8. For further research on racial formation and histories slavery in MENA, please consult the work of Eve Troutt Powell, John Hunwick, Ehud R. Toledano, Chouki el-Hamel, etc. just to name a few.

⁵Project on Middle East Political Science. “Racial Formations in Africa and the Middle East: A Transregional Approach,” 4.

⁶Michelle Christian, “A Global Critical Race and Racism Framework: Racial Entanglements and Deep and Malleable Whiteness.” *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 5, no. 2 (April 2019): 170.

⁷Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East*, 114.

⁸Bahria Amin, “Anti-Blackness in the Arab World and the Violence That Doesn’t Get A Hash-tag.” Scene Arabia, June 10, 2020. <https://scenearabia.com/Life/Arab-Anti-Blackness-Racism-and-the-Violence-that-Doesn-t-Get-A-Hashtag>.

which contributes to the invisibility of these countries' Black populations.⁹ Anti-Blackness also manifests in state-sanctioned violence against Black indigenous populations and Black Africans migrants and refugees throughout the region.

Of course, racial discrimination in the Arab world is by no means limited to anti-Black discrimination.¹⁰ It has and continues to impede racial and ethnic minorities' access to social mobility (through jobs and marriage) as well as their access to land property, political representation, or religious positions."¹¹ However, there exists a particular form of xenophobia and prejudice against Black individuals of African origin and other dark-skinned populations with its roots in the slave trade that is increasingly receiving attention.

The purpose of this report is two-fold. First, it aims to provide a baseline assessment of the views of citizens in 10 MENA countries on the extent to which they perceived racial discrimination and anti-Black discrimination to be a problem in their respective countries through the use of data from Arab Barometer's seventh wave, including more detailed examinations of Tunisia, Sudan, Egypt, Iraq, and Morocco. Second, the report aims to raise awareness amongst policy-makers, academics, and the general public by providing context and possible explanations for the findings we see, what they mean, and why they matter.

Findings from this report are based on data collected as part of Arab Barometer's seventh wave of nationally representative face-to-face surveys conducted between 2021 and 2022 in 10 countries: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan, and Tunisia. In each country, between 1,800 and 2,400 citizens were interviewed to measure their opinions and attitudes about economic, political, and social issues affecting their country and the MENA region at large. Response rates ranged between 17 and 79 percent, and the margin of error of these reported results is ± 2 percentage points. Additional information about Arab Barometer's seventh wave can be found in the Technical Report and on Arab Barometer's website.

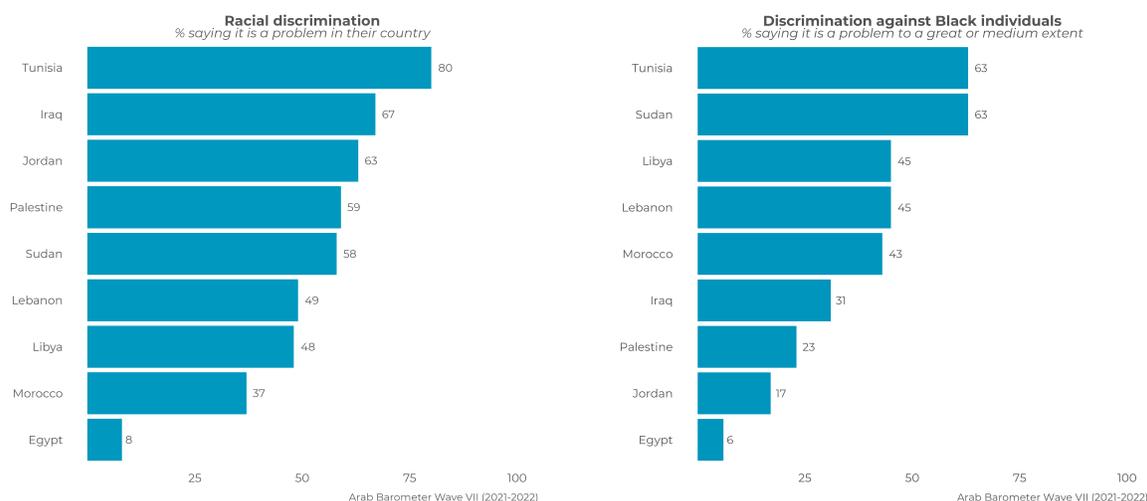
⁹Luck, Taylor. "Black Lives Matter: Voicing Solidarity, Arabs Expose Racism at Home." CS Monitor, June 22, 2020. <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2020/0622/Voicing-solidarity-against-US-racism-Arabs-expose-scourge-at-home>.

¹⁰Bahria Amin, "Anti-Blackness in the Arab World."

¹¹Project on Middle East Political Science. "Racial Formations in Africa and the Middle East," 42.

Racial Discrimination versus Anti-Black Discrimination

Arab Barometer’s Wave VII data suggests that there is a gap in how citizens of the MENA region view racial discrimination versus anti-Black discrimination. The majority of citizens in Tunisia (80 percent), Iraq (67 percent), Jordan (63 percent), Palestine (59 percent), Sudan (58 percent), and nearly half of all citizens in Lebanon (49 percent) and Libya (48 percent) report that racial discrimination is a serious problem in their country. However, only in Tunisia (63 percent) and Sudan (63 percent) do most citizens say that discrimination against Black individuals is a problem to a great or medium extent. Less than half of all citizens in Libya (45 percent), Lebanon (45 percent), Morocco (43 percent) and Iraq (31 percent) recognize anti-Black racism as a problem. In Palestine, Jordan, and Egypt, fewer than one in four say the same.



Tunisia and Sudan stand out among the list of surveyed countries for having majorities recognize that each racial discrimination and discrimination against Black individuals are problems in their countries. Tunisia is unique in being the only country in the MENA region that specifically has a law criminalizing racial discrimination, which the Tunisian parliament passed with a majority vote in October 2018.¹² The creation of the MENA region’s first anti-discrimination law occurred in large part due to the work of anti-racist activists and grassroots organizations in Tunisia, such as ADAM for Equality and Development and

¹²Alyssa Bivins, “The Limits of Confronting Racial Discrimination in Tunisia with Law 50.” *MERIP*, August 2021. <https://merip.org/2021/08/the-limits-of-confronting-racial-discrimination-in-tunisia-with-law-50/>.

M'nemty, both of which played a major role in raising awareness about the issue of anti-Black racism following the 2011 Tunisian Revolution.¹³ Arab Barometer findings, and specifically the widespread acknowledgement about the issue of racial discrimination, seem to reflect their efforts.

In order to understand racial discrimination and anti-Blackness in a country like Sudan, a diverse yet majority Black country, it is important to understand the role of colorism. Colorism is a form of anti-Blackness in which there are negative and hostile attitudes towards darker-skinned individuals, and the favoring of lighter-skinned individuals, usually within the same racial community.¹⁴ Colorism has long plagued Sudan, which possesses a history of tense race relations between the light-skinned, Arab minority elite and dark-skinned, non-Arab populations in the peripheries.¹⁵ These fraught race relations eventually led to the secession of South Sudan in 2011.¹⁶ Arab Barometer findings suggest that the legacies of race are still acknowledged by Sudanese citizens.

In contrast to Tunisia and Sudan, Egypt is the country where the smallest number of citizens say both that racial discrimination is a problem (only 8 percent) or that discrimination against Black individuals is a problem to a great or medium extent (only 6 percent). However, Black populations in Egypt have faced a long history of oppression and marginalization, and there is evidence of human rights violations against Egypt's Nubian and Bedouin populations and Black African migrants and refugees, including forced relocations and arbitrary violence against peaceful protesters by state actors.¹⁷ The use of anti-Black tropes in Egyptian films, which are widely viewed throughout the Arab world, has also contributed to the marginalization of Black populations in Egypt.

In the remaining countries save Morocco, the percentages of citizens who view racial discrimination as problem are larger than percentages of citizens who view discrimination against Black individuals to be a problem. The contrast is most stark in Iraq, where the share of citizens reporting that anti-Black discrimination is a problem (31 percent) is less than half of the share of citizens who report racial discrimination is a problem (67 percent). In Iraq, there are an estimated 2 million Afro-Iraqis, most of whom reside in Basrah, and are the descendants of East African slaves brought to the country by Arab slave traders in the ninth century.¹⁸ Afro-Iraqis have also experienced a long history of marginal-

¹³Bivins, "The Limits of Confronting."

¹⁴Trina Jones, "Shades of Brown: The Law of Skin Color." *Duke Law Journal* 49, no. 6 (2000): 1489. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1373052>.

¹⁵"Viewpoint from Sudan - Where Black People Are Called Slaves." *BBC News*, July 26, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-53147864>.

¹⁶Project on Middle East Political Science. "Racial Formations in Africa and the Middle East," 88.

¹⁷Ibid. 44.

¹⁸Ibrahim Al-Marashi."The story of Afro-Iraqis: From medieval slave revolts to climate

ization and oppression. Today, Iraq's Afro-Iraqi population faces a number of challenges, such as high illiteracy rates, extreme poverty, and little to no political representation.¹⁹

Morocco stands out among surveyed countries because it is one of only two countries (the other being Sudan) where the percentage of citizens who think anti-Black discrimination (43 percent) is higher than the percentage of citizens who think racial discrimination is a problem (37 percent). Today, Black individuals in Morocco have also experienced long histories of anti-Black racism and prejudice which have their roots in the enslavement of Black Africans in this country.²⁰ Morocco acts as a transit site for migrants and refugees seeking to find refuge in Europe and has implemented a series of externalization measures with the economic and political help of the European Union as a means to deter migration into Europe. As of 2021, there are roughly 700,000 Sub-Saharan migrants living in Morocco, most of whom reside in major cities like Casablanca, Rabat, and Tangier.²¹ However, as stated by the Global Detention Project, these measures are “increasing the vulnerability of migrants to a range of human rights abuses, helping fan the flames of racism targeting sub-Saharan Africans, encouraging forced displacements, and spurring new forms of ad hoc detention situations.”²²

Arab Barometer's data finds that 37 percent of Moroccans say that racial discrimination is a problem in their country. However, 42 percent of Moroccans say that discrimination against Black individuals is a problem to a great or medium extent. Similarly, 40 percent of Moroccans report that discrimination against Sub-Saharan migrants is a problem to a great or medium extent. Arab Barometer findings suggest that there exists consciousness and awareness about the existence of anti-Black discrimination in Morocco, specifically discrimination against Sub-Saharan African migrants in the country today.

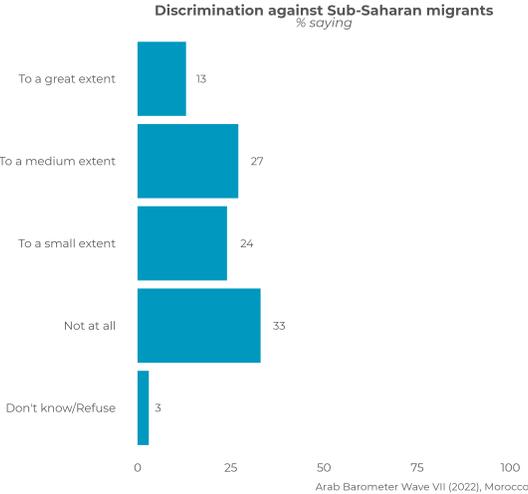
apartheid.” The New Arab, 25 February 2022. <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/analysis/story-afro-iraqis>.

¹⁹Minority Rights Group International, “Black Iraqis.” *Minority Rights Group*, <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/black-iraqis/>.

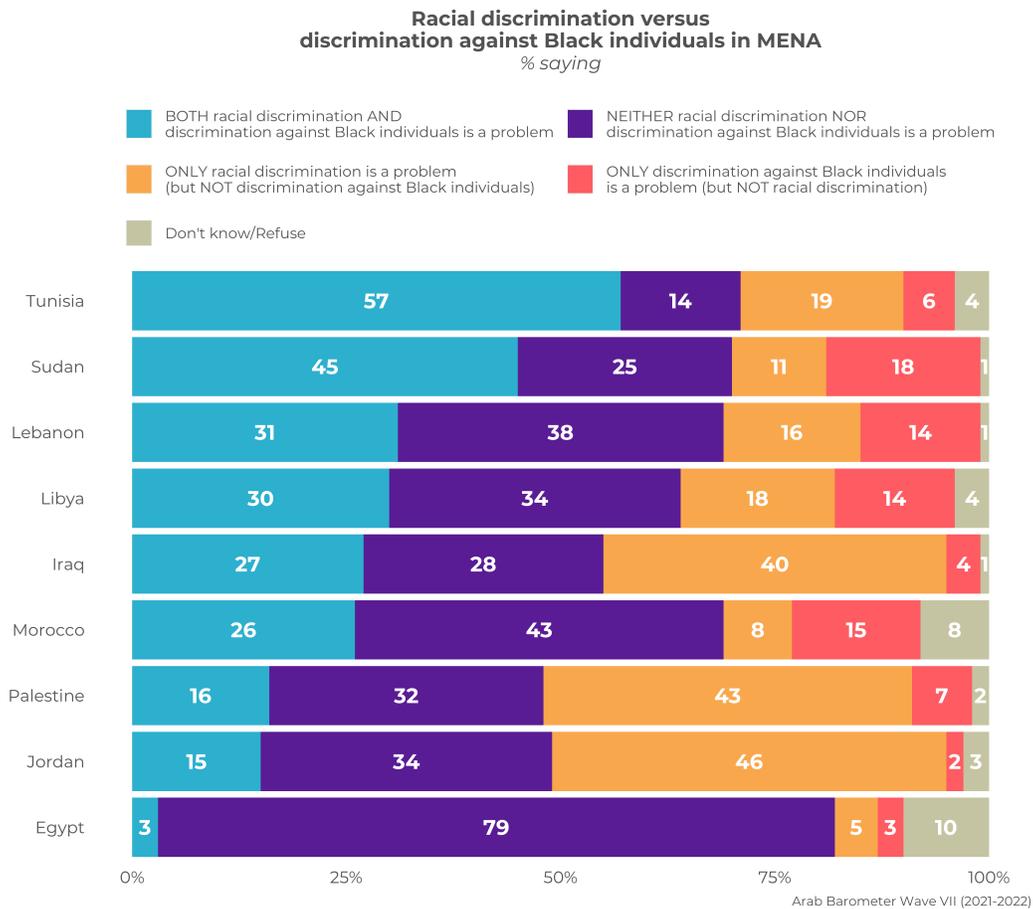
²⁰Stephen J. King, “Ending Denial: Anti-Black Racism in Morocco.” *Arab Reform Initiative*, August 28, 2020. <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/ending-denial-anti-black-racism-in-morocco/>.

²¹High Atlas Foundation, “Sub-Saharan African Migration into Morocco.” July 10, 2022. <https://highatlasfoundation.org/sub-saharan-african-migration-into-morocco/>; Brahim El Guabli, “The Sub-Saharan African Turn in Moroccan Literature.” *MERIP*, March 9, 2021 <https://merip.org/2021/03/the-sub-saharan-african-turn-in-moroccan-literature/>.

²²Global Detention Project, “Immigration Detention in Morocco: Still Waiting for Reforms as Europe Increases Pressure to Block Migrants and Asylum Seekers.” *Global Detention Project*, July 26, 2021. <https://www.globaldetentionproject.org/immigration-detention-in-morocco-still-waiting-for-reforms-as-europe-increases-pressure-to-block-migrants-and-asylum-seekers>.



The findings signal that in surveyed MENA countries, when citizens think about “racial discrimination,” they differentiate it from discrimination against Black individuals. This is further evidenced by looking at covariance—or overlap—in beliefs about both forms of discrimination being problematic. Citizens can believe that both, neither, or one or the other forms of discrimination (racial versus anti-Black) is problematic. For example, in Tunisia, while 80 percent say that racial discrimination is a problem and 63 percent say anti-Black discrimination is a problem, only 57 percent of Tunisians—a smaller share albeit still a majority—report both forms of discrimination are problematic in their country. Meanwhile, in Sudan, while 58 and 63 percent respectively say racial and anti-Black discrimination are problematic, only a minority of citizens—45 percent—say both are.



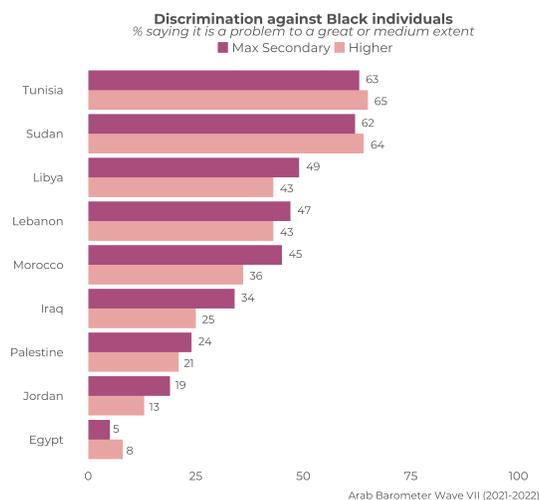
Some reasons that might explain this distinction are linguistic and connotational differences. Linguistically, the concept of “racial discrimination” (al tameez al ansrui) in Arabic not a word-for-word translation of the English translation. In this way, Arab Barometer findings potentially reaffirm that notions of “race” operate differently in MENA than in the US, and as such, there is a need to further probe and construct local connotations and understandings of “racial.” Furthermore, these understandings likely vary from country to country.

The stark divergence in perceptions regarding racial discrimination versus anti-Black discrimination can also be due to the “culture of silence” in MENA, or the refusal to engage in discussions about the history of slavery and even less willingness to acknowledge present-day anti-Blackness.²³ This can be explained by a general lack of awareness of the extensive history of slavery in the region, in addition to the fact that these discussions are taboo topics in the region.

²³Yasmine el-Geressi, “Racism in the Arab World: An Open Secret.” *Majalla*, June 12, 2020. <https://eng.majalla.com/node/91756/racism-in-the-arab-world-an-open-secret>.

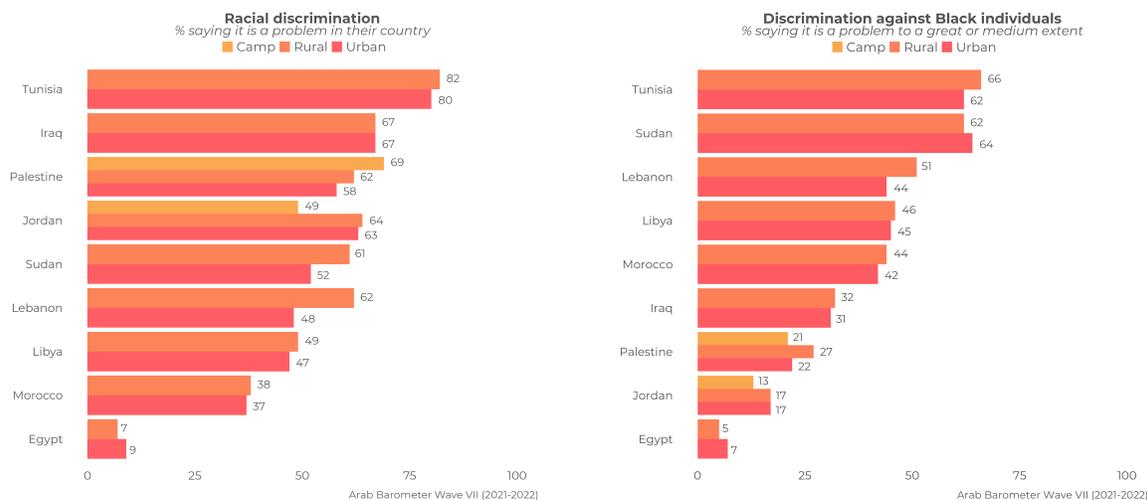
For this reason, citizens of MENA may not want to acknowledge that anti-Black discrimination as something distinct from other forms of racial discrimination, which results in the denial of its very existence. Even then, anti-Blackness is often dismissed as light-hearted and well-intentioned jokes.²⁴ However, as the literature demonstrates, racial consciousness with regard to Blackness, with its roots in the slave trade, exists; however, race (i.e. skin color and phenotype) as a concept more generally is not widely understood.

Relatedly, the findings point to a lack of awareness about the existence or severity of anti-Black racism; what it looks like; and identifying it as a serious issue of concern to the same degree as other forms of racial discrimination. Interestingly, those with lower levels of education in Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Iraq, Palestine, and Jordan are more likely than those with higher education to say there is discrimination against Black individuals.



Acknowledgment that racial discrimination is a problem and specifically that racial discrimination against Black individuals is a problem varies by both region and gender. Those residing in refugee camps in Palestine (69 percent) and in rural areas in each Sudan (61 percent) and Lebanon (62 percent) are more likely to report that racial discrimination is a problem in their country. Individuals living in rural areas in two of these countries—Lebanon and Palestine—are also more likely than those living in urban areas to say that discrimination against Black individuals is a problem.

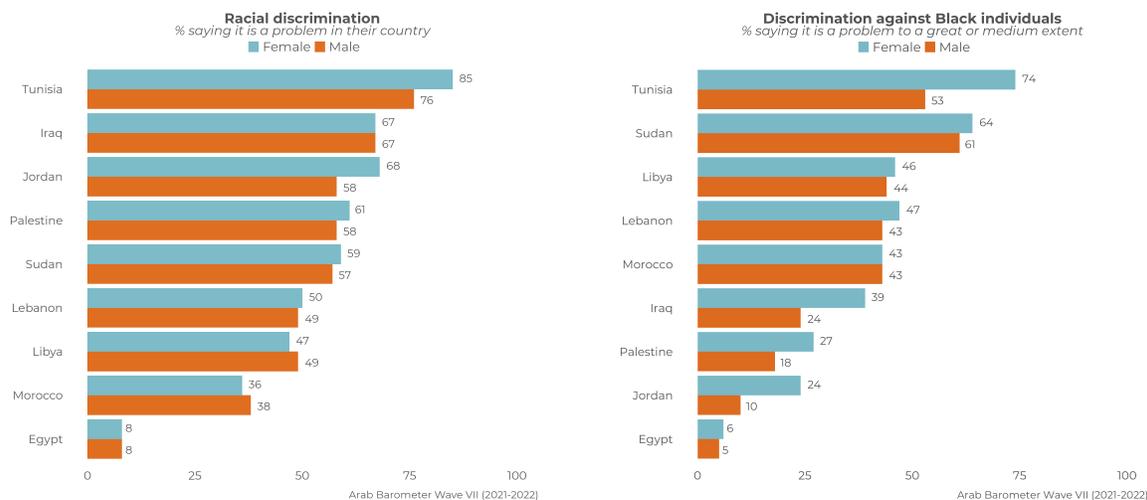
²⁴Tuqa Nusairat, “Black Lives Also Matter in the Arab World.” *Atlantic Council*, June 12, 2020. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/black-lives-also-matter-in-the-arab-world/>.



This finding is unexpected in Lebanon. Most of the country’s African migrant workers and refugees, against whom there is tremendous abuse and discrimination that is well documented,²⁵ tend to live in or around the country’s capital of Beirut. While Arab Barometer surveys are conducted among Lebanese nationals only, those in urban areas who would be more likely to directly witness discrimination against Black individuals yet are less likely to report it happens.

While women in Tunisia (85 percent) and Jordan (68 percent) are significantly more likely than men to report that racial discrimination is a problem in their countries, the gender divide is much more prevalent in acknowledging anti-Black racism. In five countries, greater shares of women than men acknowledge discrimination against Black individuals. The 21-point difference between women and men is largest in Tunisia, one of only two countries (the other being Sudan) where majorities recognize anti-Black discrimination as a problem to a great or medium extent. While it is only minorities of women in Iraq (39 percent), Palestine (27 percent), and Jordan (24 percent) who say that anti-Black discrimination is a problem, they are still much more likely to do so than men.

²⁵Dario Sabaghi. “African workers in Lebanon are stuck and unpaid by an exploitative labor system worsened by Covid.” *QuartzAfrica*, October 5, 2020 <https://qz.com/africa/1924751/african-workers-in-lebanon-stranded-and-unpaid-by-kafala-labor/>.



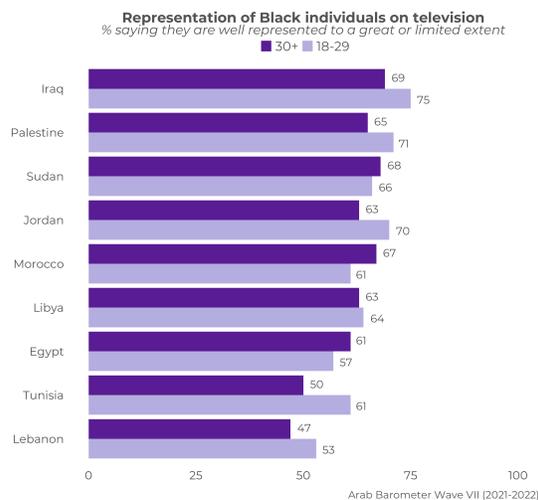
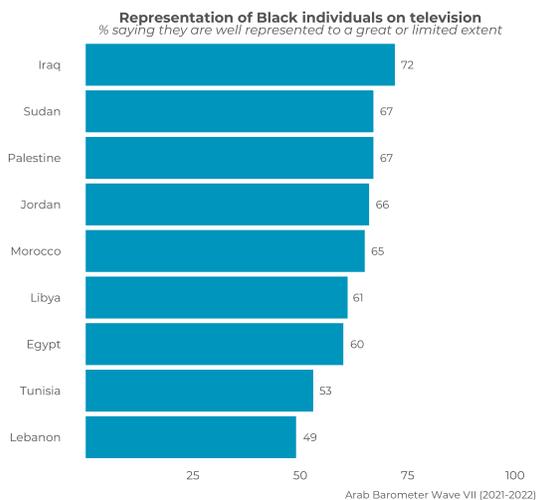
Women may be more likely to report that both racial discrimination and anti-Black discrimination is a problem in their respective countries due to societal expectations for marriage, a crucial means for upward social mobility.²⁶ For example, skin-bleaching is a popular practice in an attempt to brighten one’s skin-tone as a means to increase one’s chances for marriage.²⁷ Given gendered expectations for marriage and Eurocentric beauty standards, women therefore may be more likely to identify racial discrimination and anti-Black discrimination as problems in their respective countries.

Representation of Black individuals on TV

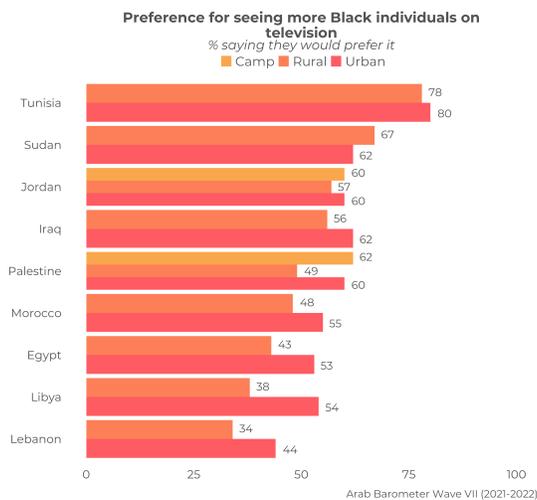
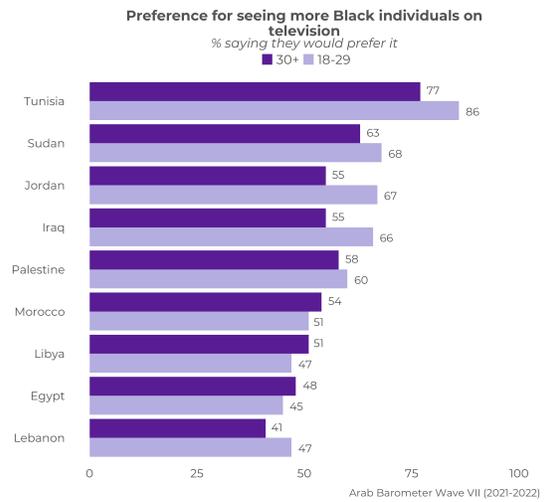
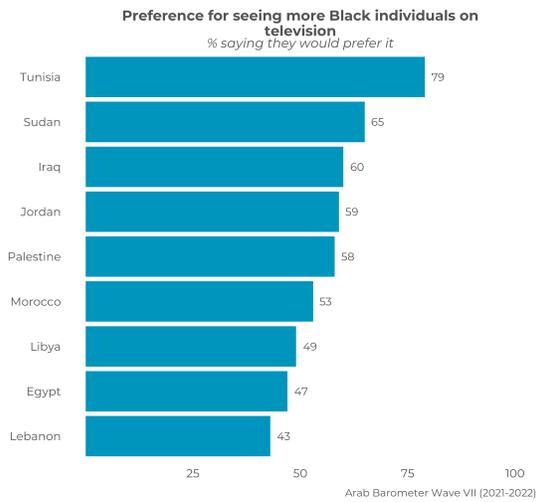
Arab Barometer findings suggest that citizens in surveyed countries believe that Black people are generally well represented on television, and preference for having more Black people represented remains high. A significant majority of citizens in Iraq (72 percent), Sudan (67 percent), Palestine (67 percent), Jordan (66 percent), Morocco (65 percent), Libya (61 percent), Egypt (60 percent), Tunisia (53 percent) and about half of the citizens in Lebanon (49 percent) say that Black individuals are well represented to a great or limited extent on television. In five countries, this belief is even higher among young people than older citizens. The age gap between 18-to-29 year-olds and those over 30 is especially noteworthy in Tunisia (11-point difference) and is also significant in Jordan (7-point difference) and Lebanon, Palestine, and Iraq (6-point difference in each).

²⁶Lynn Sheikh Moussa, “From Blackface to Bleaching Creams, Racism Is Clear-Cut in the Arab World,” *Beirut Today*, June 24, 2020, <https://beirut-today.com/2020/06/24/blackface-bleaching-racism-arab/>.

²⁷Moussa, “From Blackface to Bleaching Creams.”



Additionally, the majority of citizens in six countries (Tunisia, Sudan, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, and Morocco) and nearly half of the citizens in Libya and Egypt report that they would prefer to see more Black individuals on television. And just as youth are more likely to say Black individuals are well represented on TV, age differences are even larger in the expressed preferences of 18-29 year-olds in seeing more Black individuals on TV. In five countries (Tunisia, Sudan, Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon), the age gap ranges from five and six points in Sudan and Lebanon, respectively, to 12 points in Jordan, 11 points in Iraq, and 9 points in Tunisia. By contrast, while it is the rural populations in some countries were more likely to say that racism against Black individuals is problematic, it is the urban populations in Iraq (62 percent), Morocco (55 percent), Egypt (53 percent), and Libya (54 percent), and Lebanon (44 percent) who are more likely to say that they would prefer seeing more Black individuals on television.



Arab Barometer findings on representation and preference for seeing more Black individuals on television merit consideration of citizens' understandings of representation. On one hand, representation in this context may denote the number of Black people who appear on television (in other words, the extent to which Black citizens are represented numerically.) On the other hand, representation can also refer to the quality of representation, or whether Black people are represented in a positive or negative light. Whether citizens have a quantitative versus qualitative understanding of "representation" has important implications for how the findings are understood.

Quantitative understandings of representation might explain the congruence between higher shares of citizens believing that Black individuals are well represented on television and lower shares of citizens expressing preference for seeing more Black individuals on television: if citizens believe Black individuals are already well represented numerically, it would follow that the preference to see more of them on television is lower. For example in Iraq, 72 percent of citizens say Black individuals are well represented while a smaller majority (60 percent) would prefer to see more Black individuals on television. This congruence also appears in Palestine, Morocco, Jordan, Egypt, Libya, and Lebanon. In Tunisia, however, a slightly different pattern emerges. While 53 percent of citizens suggest that Black individuals are well represented on television, a much higher 79 percent express a preference for seeing more Black individuals on television. This suggests that Tunisians are signaling that the number of Black individuals on television is perhaps lower than it should be and thus there is preference to see more of them.

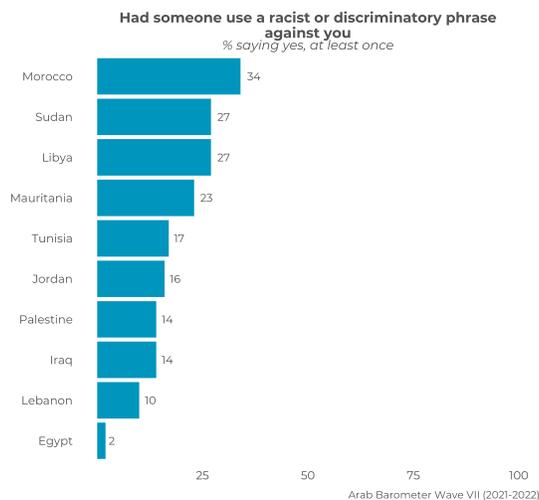
Qualitative understandings of representation potentially reveal a lack of acknowledgement of how problematic the prevalence of blackface and other anti-Black racist tropes used in popular media in MENA are. Racist mockery and derogatory language against Black people consistently make it to the TV screens of millions of individuals in the MENA region.²⁸ On these comedies, Black individuals are often portrayed as servants, doormen, and prostitutes.²⁹ When citizens say that they would prefer to see more Black people on television, it could mean that they do not see the use of anti-Blackness for comedic effect as problematic. This would reaffirm the existence of racial blindness and denial that impedes some citizens from acknowledging the dehumanizing ways that Black individuals are portrayed on television.

Reporting Instances of Racial Discrimination

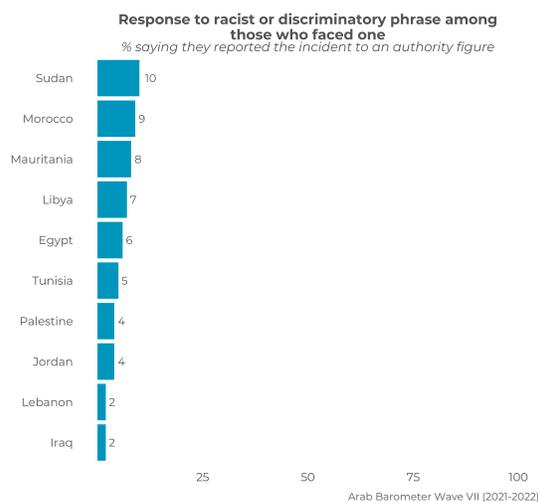
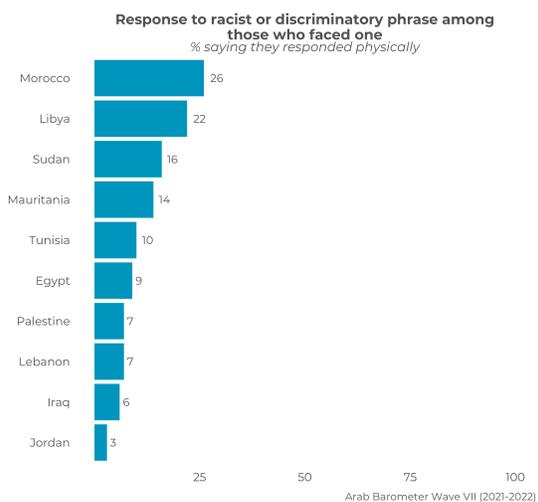
While most citizens suggest that racial discrimination is a problem in their countries, very few citizens themselves report having faced personal discrimination in the form of racist or discriminatory phrases used against them. At most, about a third of Moroccans suggest they were the targets of racist comments at least once, followed by 27 percent of Sudanese and Libyan citizens and 23 percent of Mauritians who report the same. In the remaining five countries, fewer than one in five have faced this form of personal discrimination.

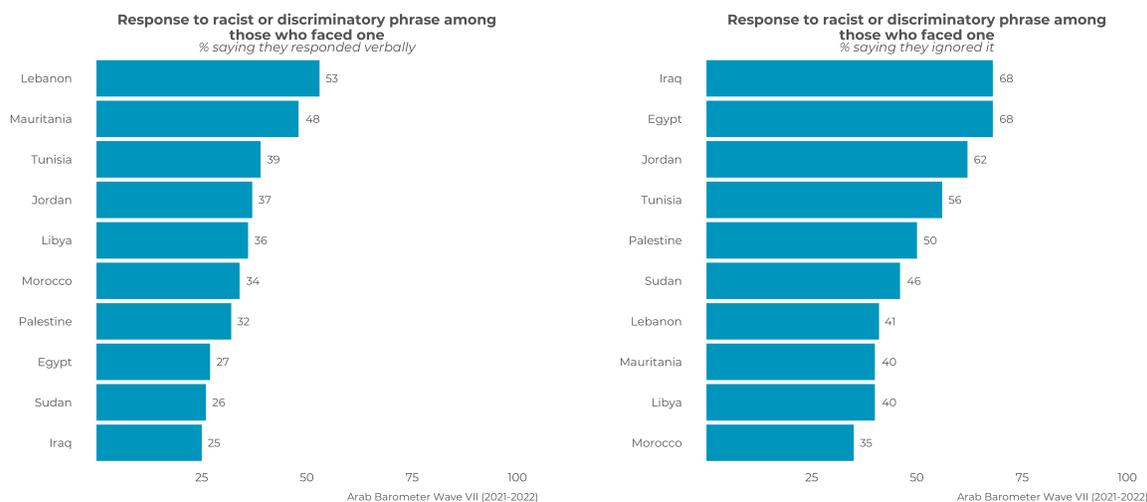
²⁸Hana al-Khamri, "The Outrageous Racism That 'Graced' Arab TV Screens in Ramadan." *Al Jazeera*, July 1, 2018. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2018/7/1/the-outrageous-racism-that-graced-arab-tv-screens-in-ramadan>.

²⁹Amin, "Anti-Blackness in the Arab World."



When asked to indicate all the different types of ways they responded to racist or discriminatory phrases used against them, few responded physically, and even fewer say they reported these incidences to an authority figure. This is the case even in Tunisia, where legal frameworks would allow them to do so. The country with the highest rates of incidence reporting is Sudan (10 percent). Instead, nearly half of all citizens in Lebanon (53 percent) and Mauritania (48 percent) and sizeable minorities in Tunisia, Jordan, and Libya say they responded verbally. But by far the most commonly reported response was to do nothing. Majorities in Iraq (68 percent), Egypt (68 percent), Jordan (62 percent), and Tunisia (56 percent) report they ignored instances of personal discrimination.





These findings may signal that there are few incentives to report instances of racial discrimination to an authority figure (whether or not anti-discrimination laws are put in place, like in Tunisia) or that the consequence for doing so may be severe. This leaves very little recourse for people to pursue legal action and obtain justice, especially amongst vulnerable groups, such as women, non-citizens, and those of lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

Conclusions

The findings from this report on racial discrimination and anti-Blackness in the Middle East and North Africa suggest that many citizens in the region do not view anti-Black discrimination as the same as racial discrimination. While a significant majority of citizens in five out of nine countries report that racial discrimination is a serious problem in their countries, majorities in only two countries report that discrimination against Black individuals is a problem to a great or medium extent. This could be due to several factors including linguistic and connotational differences, lack of awareness, and silence regarding the topic of anti-Black racism in the region. Future research on this topic might consider what citizens in each country understand by “race” and specifically the groups they have in mind when reporting that there is racial discrimination.

Further research could also seek to more definitively establish why most citizens in all but Sudan and Tunisia think that anti-Black discrimination is not problematic in their countries. Additionally, probing understandings of representation of Black individuals on television is a rich area for further research that might reveal citizens’ biases. For example, gauging reactions to popular television programs that show various depictions of Black individuals may help to assess the

extent to which racial blindness precludes acknowledgement of depictions as demeaning or dehumanizing.

Lastly, the data demonstrates that there may be little to no incentive in reporting incidences of racial discrimination to an authority figure, both in countries with and without anti-discrimination laws. Very small percentages of citizens in all 10 countries say that they reported incidences of racism or discrimination to an authority figure. For example, the country with the highest rates of reporting was Sudan with 10 percent. Furthermore, significant majorities in 3 out of 9 countries (Iraq, Egypt, and Jordan) and the majority of citizens in Tunisia reported that they ignored instances of personal discrimination. These findings may signal that there are few incentives to report instances of racial discrimination to an authority figure (whether or not anti-discrimination laws are put in place, like in Tunisia) or that the consequence for doing so may be severe.

The findings point to a clear need to center anti-Blackness in conversations about race relations in MENA as well as the need to conceptualize this phenomenon using language specific to the region that does not rely on Western (specifically US) interpretations of race and racism. However, there is equally a need to have conversations on race, slavery, and current-day anti-Blackness in the MENA region that are nuanced and consider local contexts and historical trajectories. Data from Arab Barometer's Seventh Wave and the literature on race and racism in MENA point to the need to analyze anti-Blackness separate from racial discrimination more generally.



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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