

Arab Barometer VI

Morocco Country Report

2021

Executive Summary

The Moroccan government has been among the most effective in the region in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic, especially with securing a large stock of vaccinations before most other non-Gulf countries in MENA. Moroccans have rewarded the government for its efforts, with the vast majority (86 percent) saying they are satisfied with their country's response to COVID-19. It appears this has also translated to high ratings of the government overall, as the Moroccan government boasts the highest favorability among all seven countries surveyed in the sixth wave of Arab Barometer's public opinion surveys.

The government's efforts to tackle COVID-19 effectively are also seen in the response of the population. Around eight-in-ten citizens said they are likely to receive the vaccine if available. The rate is even higher among Moroccan women, with 82 percent of them saying they are likely to take the shot — making them the most likely group to be vaccinated by gender and country among those surveyed.

Moroccans are also relatively positive about their country's economic outlook, despite the effects of the pandemic on the global economy. When asked about the country's economic situation, more than six-in-ten said it is good or very good (63 percent) and that the country's economy will be better in the upcoming years (67 percent). One reason for this positive outlook might lie in the fact that around half of the population in Morocco said they have received some form of relief aid during the COVID-19 pandemic (49%) —the highest in all countries surveyed.

However, the results of the surveys are not all positive. Arab Barometer's sixth wave of surveys demonstrate a number of challenges, including the issues of gender and personal freedoms. During the peak of the pandemic —and while Morocco was battling its second wave of infections— around half of women said that gender-based violence had increased over the course of the pandemic. Also, the pandemic affected employment of women more than men: a fifth of women stated that they permanently lost their jobs during the pandemic; and the rate is even greater for women whose income cannot cover their expenses and women with no higher education.

In addition, the pandemic has affected perceptions of freedoms in Morocco. Between October 2020 and March 2021, Arab Barometer's sixth wave of surveys recorded a nine-point decline in perceptions of freedom of the press and perceptions of freedom to express opinions. The surveys also recorded a 14-point decline in perceptions of freedom to participate in protests over the

same period. This decline is most likely the result of strict restrictions established by the government to fight the spread of the virus.

Another continuing challenge relates to the quality of public services. Around half of Moroccan citizens are not satisfied with the quality of their national education and healthcare systems. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a plurality of Moroccan citizens also expressed that the education of their children was the biggest challenge caused by COVID-19.

Regarding foreign relations, Moroccan citizens express high approval for Turkey and its President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. By comparison, Moroccans hold favorable views toward Saudi Arabia, but views of Crown Prince Mohamed Bin Salman are significantly less favorable. Also, about six-in-ten Moroccans have favorable views towards China in the spring 2021 survey, a ten-point increase from October 2020.

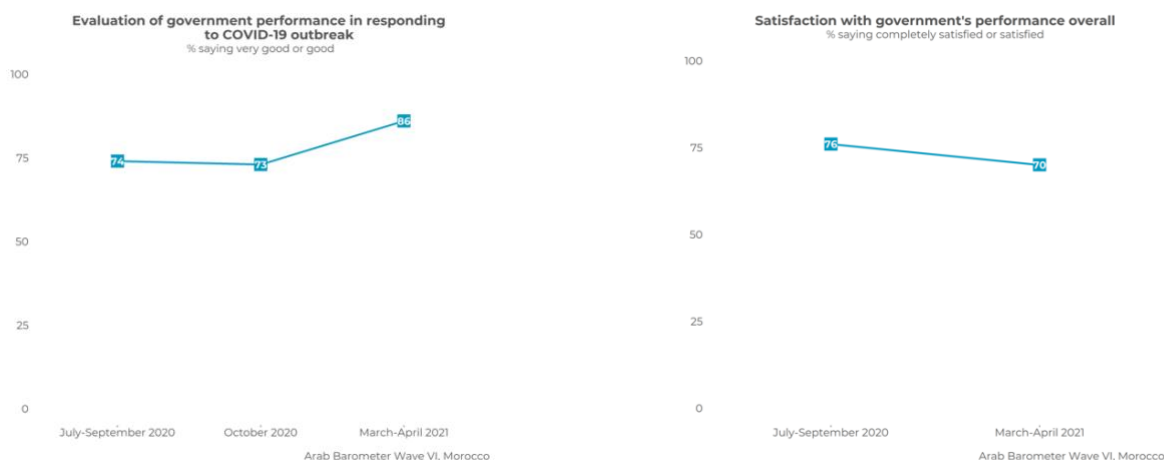
Meanwhile, Moroccans have recorded the highest change in approval towards the U.S. from October 2020 to March-April 2021. This dramatic change is likely the result of two primary factors. First, Moroccans, like citizens across the region, view President Biden more favorably than President Trump. Second, the U.S. recognition of Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara under the Trump administration has likely played a role in the dramatic change in attitudes toward the U.S. The recognition occurred simultaneously to the announcement of Morocco's normalization deal with Israel. Although fewer than half of citizens in Morocco approve the normalization of relations with Israel, this level is far higher than approval of normalization between Israel and the UAE and Israel and Bahrain, for which fewer than one-in-ten Moroccans approve. The difference between these two approval rates highlights the importance of the Western Sahara issue in Morocco.

These are among the main findings of three nationally representative telephone surveys conducted in Morocco during the course of 2020-1 using a random digit dialing (RDD) approach. Between July 2020 and March 2021, we interviewed 3,209 Moroccan citizens to track changes in their evaluations of their conditions over time during the pandemic. The margin of error for the 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

COVID19

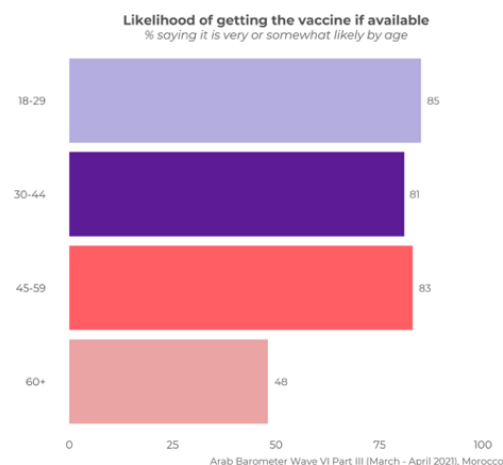
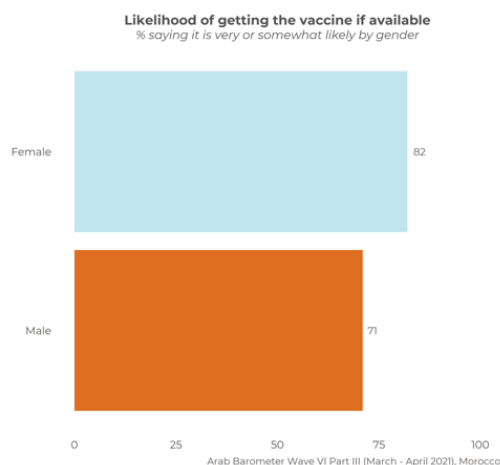
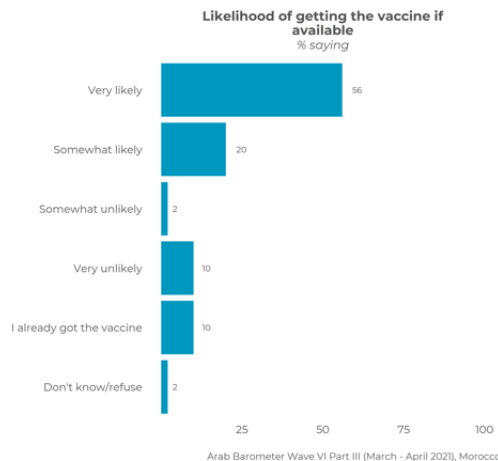
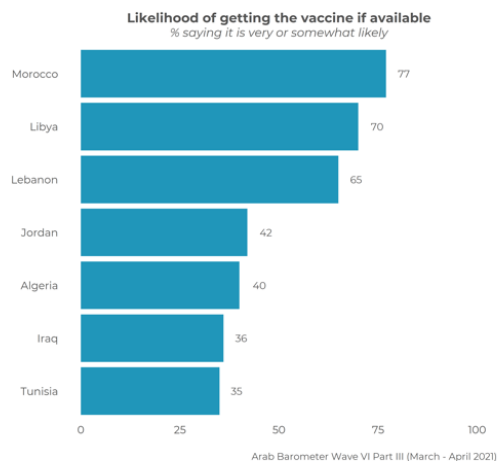
An overwhelming majority of Moroccan citizens are satisfied with their government's performance in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the outset of the pandemic, 75 percent of citizens said their government's response was good or very good. As the country battled the second wave, levels of satisfaction remained relatively unchanged at 73 percent, but increased to 86 percent in the survey in March-April 2021. This level appears strongly linked with positive views of the government overall — when asked about their government's general performance, 70 percent of Moroccans said they are satisfied or completely satisfied in March-April 2021.



VACCINE HESITANCY

Moroccan citizens are the most likely to receive the vaccine if available among all seven MENA countries surveyed. As the country pushes through its successful vaccination rollout, a vast majority of the population is positive about receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, with 77 percent of Moroccans being likely or very likely to get the shot. Notably, women in Morocco are more likely to say they plan to be vaccinated relative to men (82 percent vs. 71 percent).

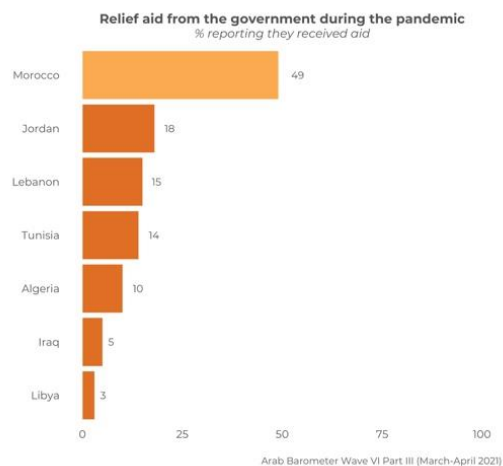
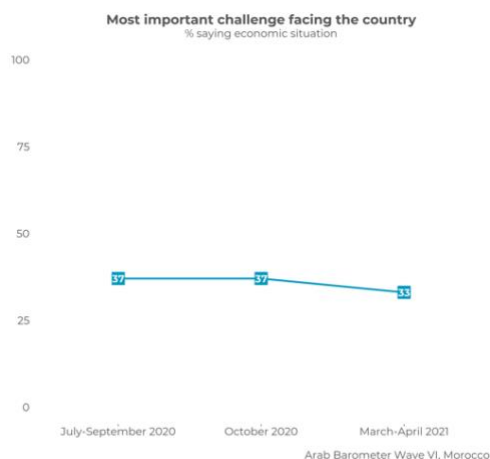
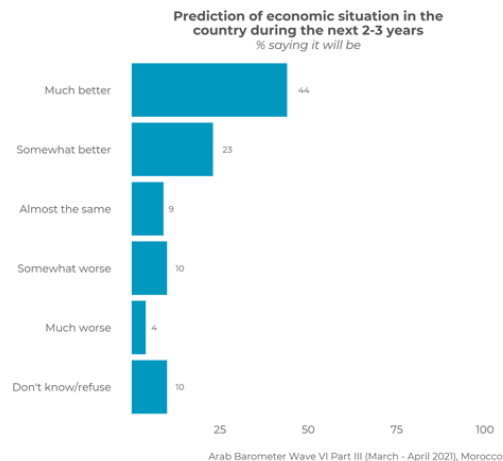
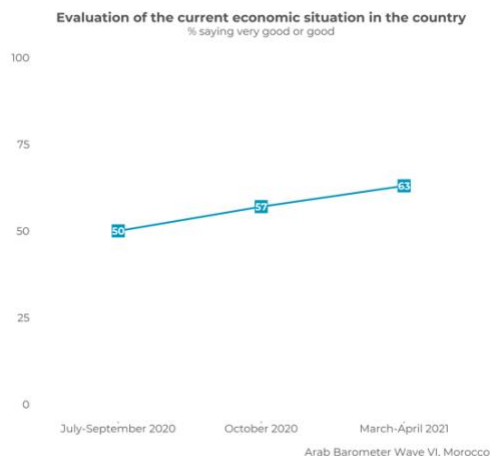
Also notable is the difference in vaccine acceptance by age: over eight-in-ten citizens below the age of 60 said they are likely to receive the shot, while less than half (48 percent) of citizens over the age of 60 said they are likely to get vaccinated.



ECONOMY

Moroccan citizens have a positive outlook on their economic situation despite the effects of the pandemic. In Spring 2021, a sizable majority of Moroccans said that the current economic situation in the country is good or very good (63 percent), which was a slight increase from 57 percent in October 2020 when the country was suffering from its second wave of COVID-19 cases. Meanwhile, only a third of citizens said in March 2021 that the economic situation is the most important challenge facing the country.

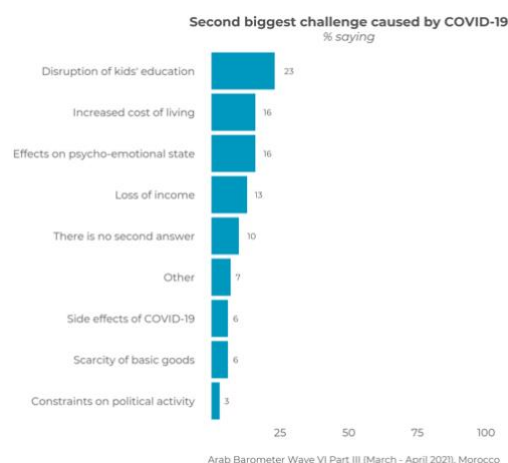
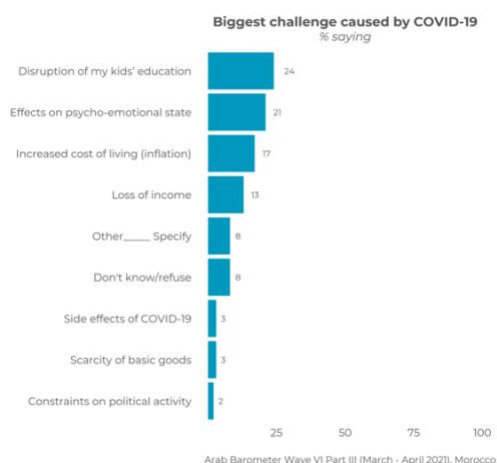
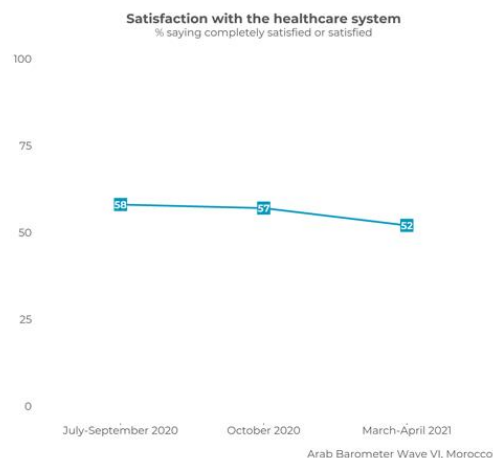
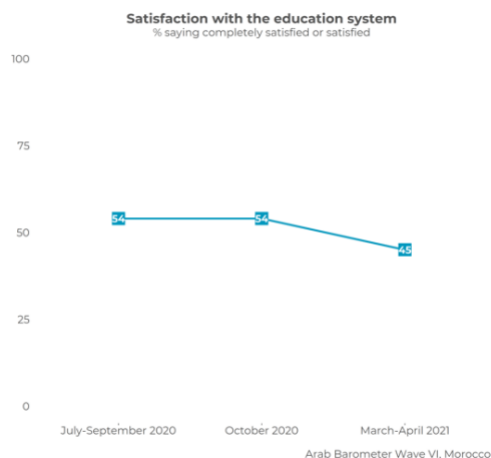
One reason for this optimism might lie in the fact that almost half of all respondents in Morocco (49 percent) said they received some form of COVID-19 relief aid—more than in any other country surveyed. As a result, two-thirds of Moroccans surveyed in spring 2021 said they are confident the economy will improve in the coming years.



Public Services

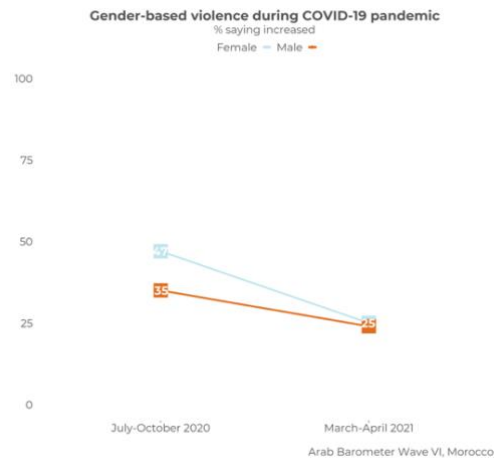
Education and healthcare continue to be the two salient issues Moroccans citizens are asking their government to tackle. A year into the pandemic, about half (52 percent) of Moroccans were satisfied or completely satisfied with the national healthcare system. By comparison, just under half (45 percent) were satisfied with their national education system (45 percent).

Unsurprisingly, when asked about the biggest challenge caused by the pandemic, a plurality of citizens listed disruption of children's education as either the greatest challenge (24 percent) or the second greatest challenge (23 percent).

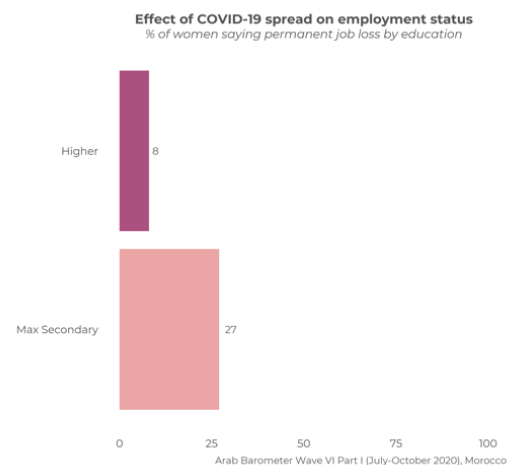
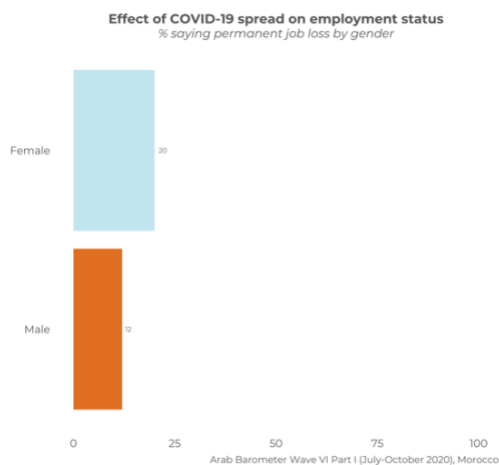


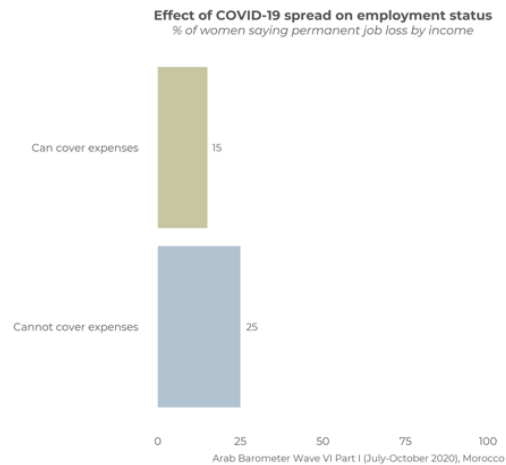
GENDER

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the effects of the often-hidden scourge of gender-based violence (GBV). At the peak of the second surge in the country in July-October 2020, nearly half (47 percent) of women in Morocco said that GBV had increased during the pandemic, compared to 35 percent of men saying the same thing. However, the percentage declined to 25 percent of women saying that GBV has increased during the pandemic by spring 2021, compared to 24 percent of men.

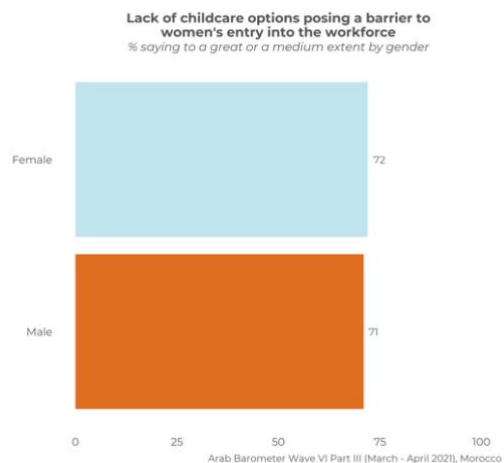
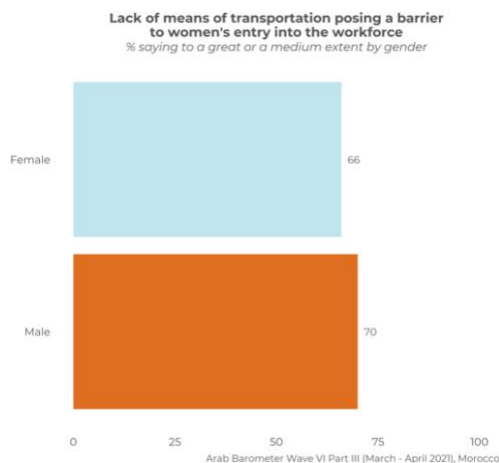


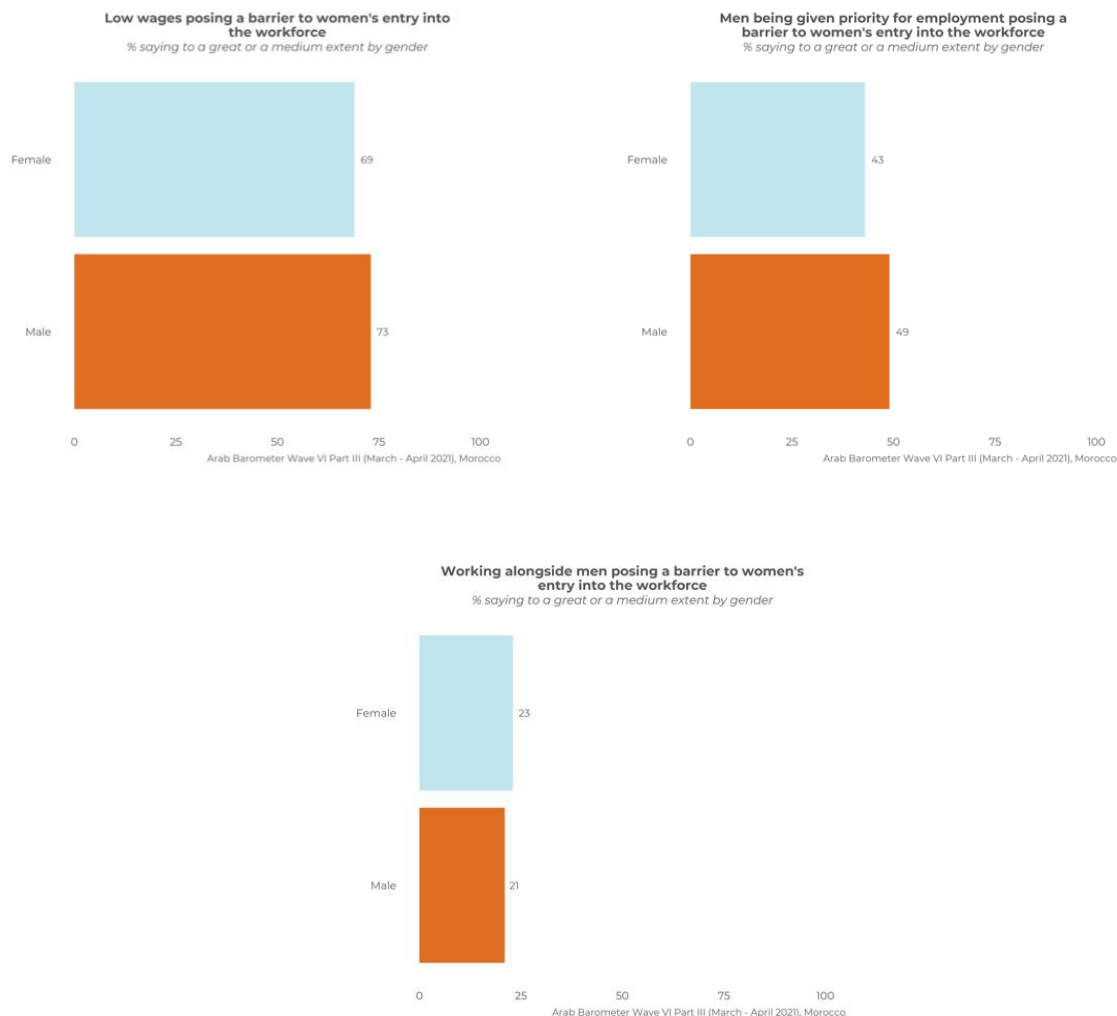
Moroccan women suffered more than men from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Throughout the sixth wave of surveys conducted during different periods of the crisis, Arab Barometer demonstrates a disproportionate toll of the pandemic on women. Among those employed before the pandemic, one-in-five women in Morocco reported a permanent loss of a job, compared to 12 percent of men. The impact of COVID on the permanent job loss is even higher for women whose income cannot cover their expenses (25 percent), and on women with no higher education (27 percent).





Structural barriers are affecting Moroccan women's entry into the workforce more than cultural barriers. An overwhelming percentage of women say that lack of childcare options and low wages were the biggest barriers to entry to the workforce (72 percent and 69 percent, respectively), while 66 percent said the lack of transportation options is stopping them from joining the workforce. In contrast, fewer than half of Moroccan women (43 percent) say men receiving priority in hiring is a key challenge limiting their entry into the workforce. Finally, less than 1 in 4 women (23 percent) said mixed workplaces are the barrier stopping them from joining the workforce, which is similar to the rate of men who see mixed-gender workplaces as a barrier for women's entry to the workforce (21 percent).



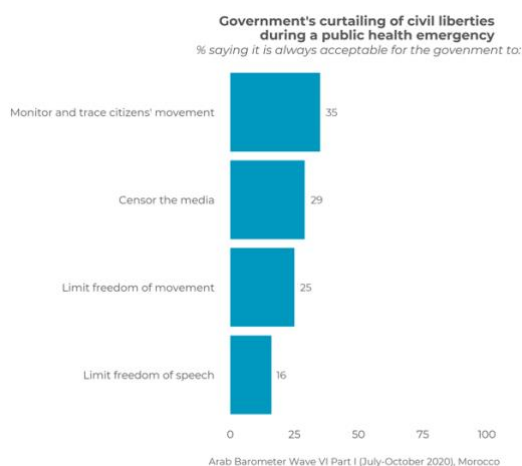
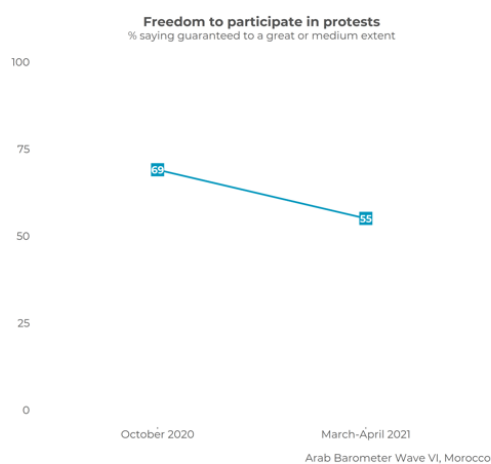
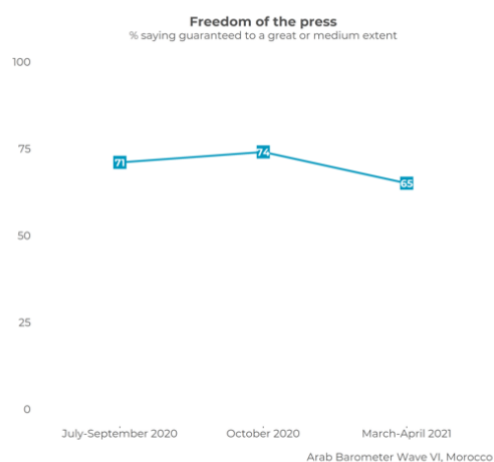
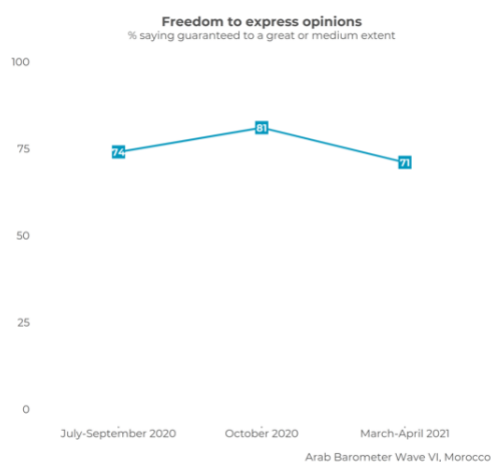


FREEDOMS

As the pandemic raged on, perceptions of freedoms declined in Morocco. Morocco deployed multiple law enforcement agencies—including the military—to enforce COVID-19 restrictions. As a result, multiple sectorial protests were banned or violently repressed. In addition, the Moroccan government charged multiple persons in the beginning of the pandemic because of their speech online. These steps might explain the nine-point decline in perceptions in freedom to express opinions and freedom of the press from October 2020 to March 2021. More telling is the 14 percent decline in perceptions of freedom to participate in peaceful demonstrations between October 2020 (69 percent) and March 2021 (55 percent).

It is important to note that despite the decline in perceptions of freedoms, only a minority of Moroccans citizens are ready to give up their freedoms in times

of public health emergencies. Fewer than one-in-four citizens say it is always acceptable for the government to monitor and trace citizens' movement (35 percent), most likely having in mind apps that governments launched to trace citizens who are infected with the COVID-19 virus or have come in contact with one. Also, 29 percent of Moroccans said they accept that their government censors the media in times of public health emergency. When asked if it is acceptable for the government to limit freedom of movement, only one-in-four citizens agreed. Finally, only 16 percent found it acceptable for the government to curtail freedom of speech during times of emergencies.



INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

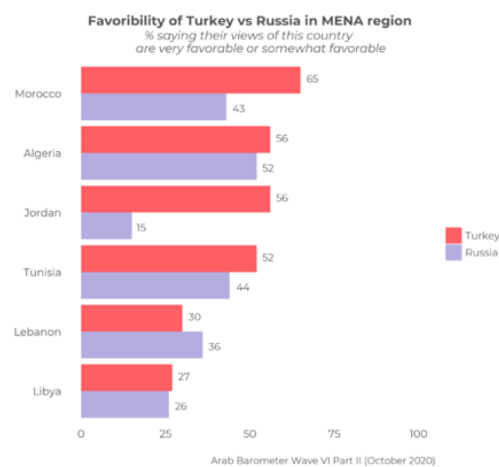
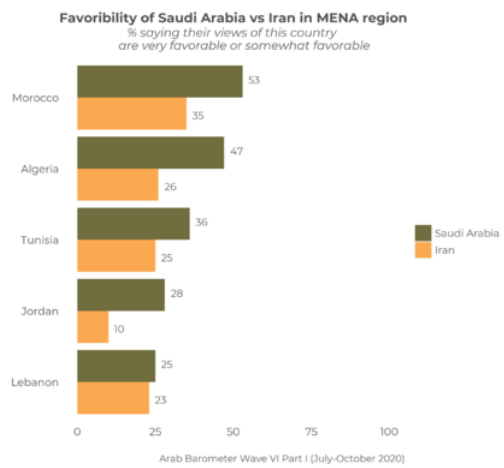
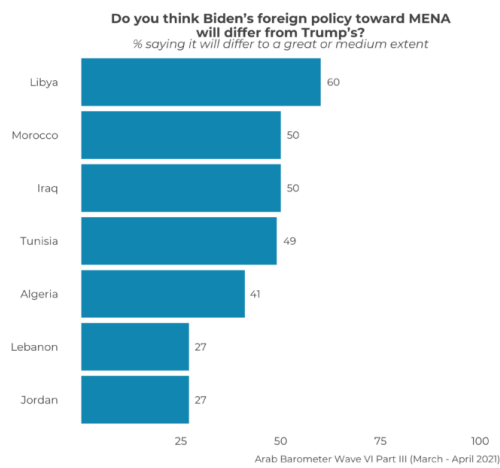
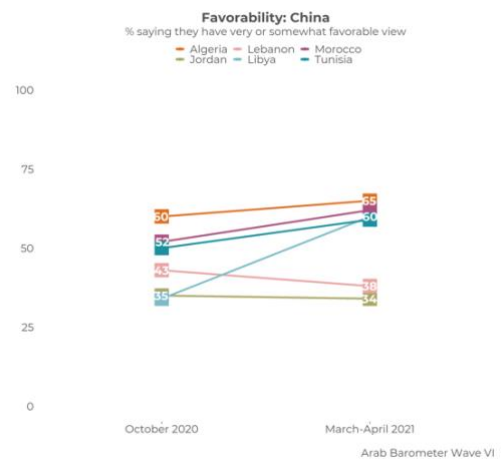
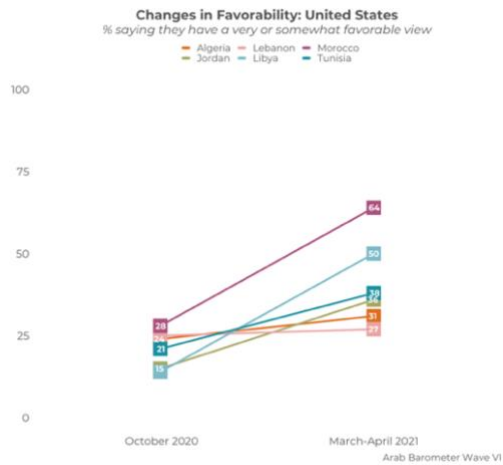
Morocco recorded the biggest change in favorability towards the United States after the change in the U.S. administrations among all MENA countries surveyed. When asked in October 2020 (during the Trump presidency), 28 percent of Moroccans said they have a very or somewhat favorable view of the United States. Comparatively, 64 percent said they had favorable views towards the United States in the spring 2021 survey, which represents a 36-point increase—more than in any other country surveyed in the sixth wave.

However, this change might not all be explained by the change in the White House. Granted that part of this increase is due to the hopes of MENA citizens for policy shifts under the new Biden administration. Overall, 50 percent of citizens in Morocco said that Biden's foreign policy towards MENA will differ from that of Donald Trump while Moroccans were four times as likely to prefer Biden over Trump before the U.S. election. But another major development that might explain this drastic change in US favorability is when Former President Donald Trump signed a presidential proclamation recognizing Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara.

Morocco recorded a ten-point increase in favorability towards China between October 2020 and March-April 2021, most likely because of Chinese vaccine diplomacy, which sought to provide access to Chinese-made vaccines to countries around the world, and which culminated in Morocco potentially producing Chinese vaccines locally.

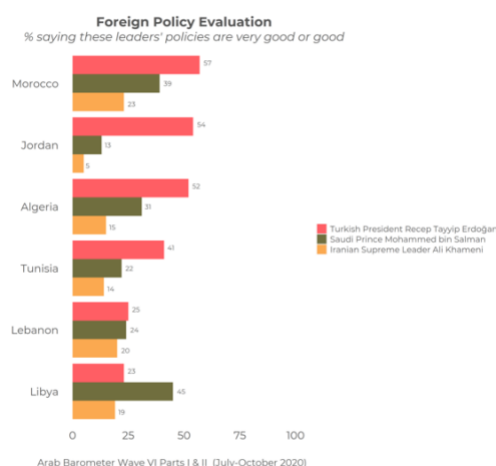
Moroccan citizens also recorded high favorability ratings for other major powers. When asked in October 2020, around two thirds of Moroccans said they have favorable views towards Turkey (65 percent), which correlates with the high approval ratings of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Furthermore, about half of citizens (53 percent) said they have a favorable view towards Saudi Arabia—a long-standing ally and a major supporter of Morocco. Also, 43 percent of Moroccans have favorable views towards Russia, while only 35 percent have favorable views towards Iran—still the highest approval rating among all countries surveyed.

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REGIONAL LEADERS

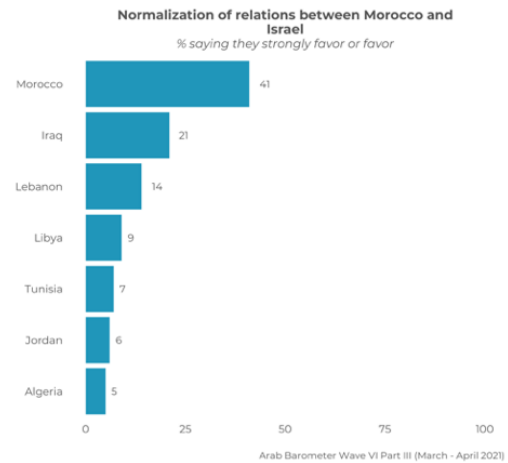
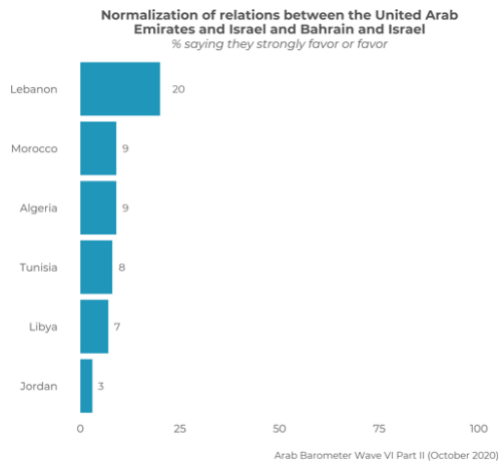
Compared with other countries in the region, Morocco —geographically distant from multiple conflicts (Libya, Syria, Yemen) in which regional powers are heavily involved — is less affected by regional conflicts. This in turn is reflected in high approval ratings for regional leaders who might not all have the same high ratings in other MENA countries. A majority of Moroccans say the foreign policies of Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan are good or very good (57 percent) —far higher than any other regional leaders. At the same time, although Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS) and Iranian Supreme leader Ali Khamenei’s approval ratings are low compared to Erdogan, their approval ratings in Morocco are still higher than most or all other countries surveyed. Arab Barometer’s sixth wave recorded a higher approval rating for Saudi Arabia compared to that of its Crown Prince Bin Salman in Morocco (53 percent for Saudi Arabia compared to 39 percent for Bin Salman), which might reflect the rejection of Moroccan citizens of some foreign policy actions he has taken in the past few years. Also, despite the low approval rating for Khamenei in Morocco (23 percent), it is still the highest approval rating for the Iranian leader across all countries surveyed.



NORMALIZATION

Moroccan citizens overwhelmingly reject normalization of relations between Israel and the UAE and between Israel and Bahrain, while a sizable minority supports normalization between Israel and Morocco. Fewer than one-in-ten Moroccans (9 percent) favor or strongly favor normalization of relations between Israel and the UAE and between Israel and Bahrain. However, 41 percent of Moroccans support the normalization of relations

between Israel and Morocco. This discrepancy can be explained by the benefits Morocco received in exchange for recognizing Israel. Concurrently, the U.S. formally recognized Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara, which is a long-standing objective for Morocco.





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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