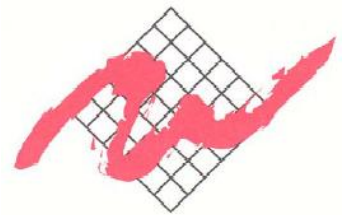


The Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa (SWMENA) Project

Focus on Lebanon | Civic & Political Participation
Topic Brief

*A project by the International Foundation for Electoral
Systems (IFES) and The Institute for Women's Policy
Research (IWPR) with funding from the Canadian
International Development Agency (CIDA)*



CIVIC & POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

This topic brief presents the main findings from the SWMENA survey in Lebanon on civic and political participation. It includes an analysis of civic engagement through membership in different types of organizations and taking part in different activities to express opinions on political and social issues. Voting behavior is also explored in reference to participation in the most recent parliamentary elections in June 2009 as well as women’s opinions about policy priorities and factors influencing their voting choices.

Engagement in Different Types of Organizations

In order to examine the extent of civic engagement of women in Lebanon, we asked respondents if they are currently or had been members of different types of organizations. This shows the level of association of people with others outside their house and can be a reflection of how active and informed they are as citizens.

- Data from the SWMENA survey suggests that overall levels of membership in different organizations are relatively low for both men and women yet they are lower for women: 18% of Lebanese women are members of one organization, 5% are members of two organizations, and 3% are members of three organizations or more. This leaves 74% of women who are not members of any organization compared with 66% of men.
- Figure 1 shows that men are generally more likely to be members of different types of organizations than women: there are three times as many men than women members of political parties (21% of men vs. 7% of women). This is also the case for membership in trade unions and professional syndicates: 7% of men are members vs. 3% of women.
- Women are however more active than men in certain organizations such as religious groups, charity organizations and women’s organizations: indeed more women are likely to be members of these organizations than men.

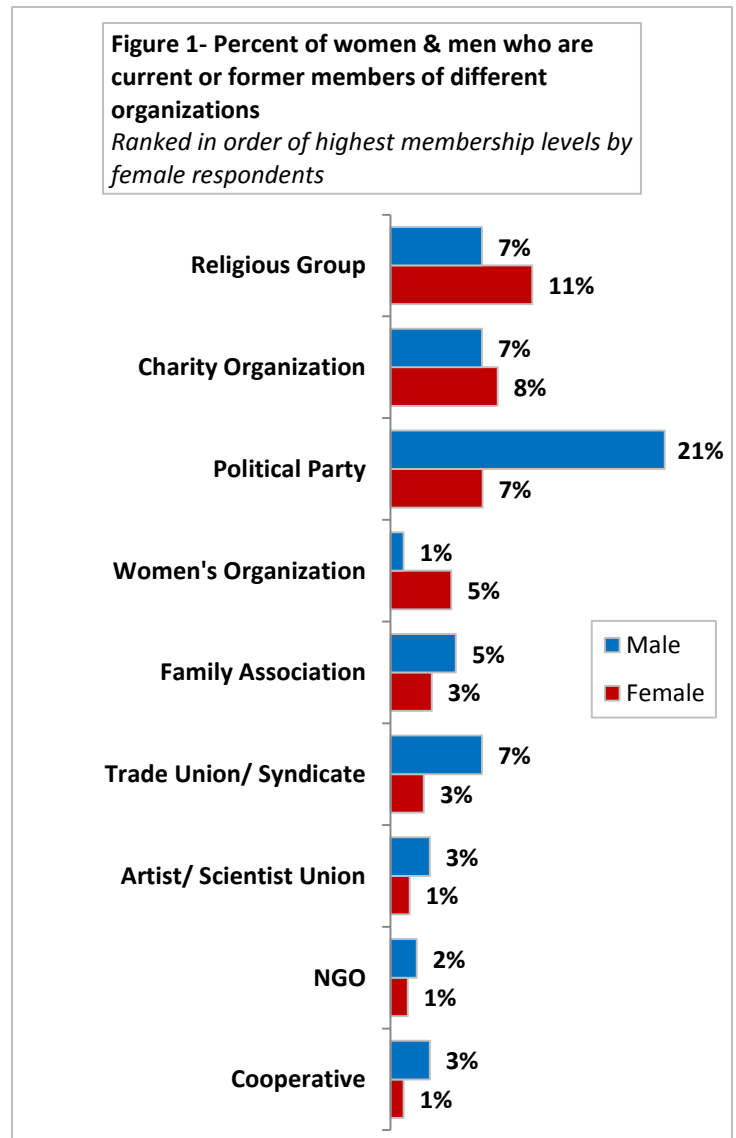
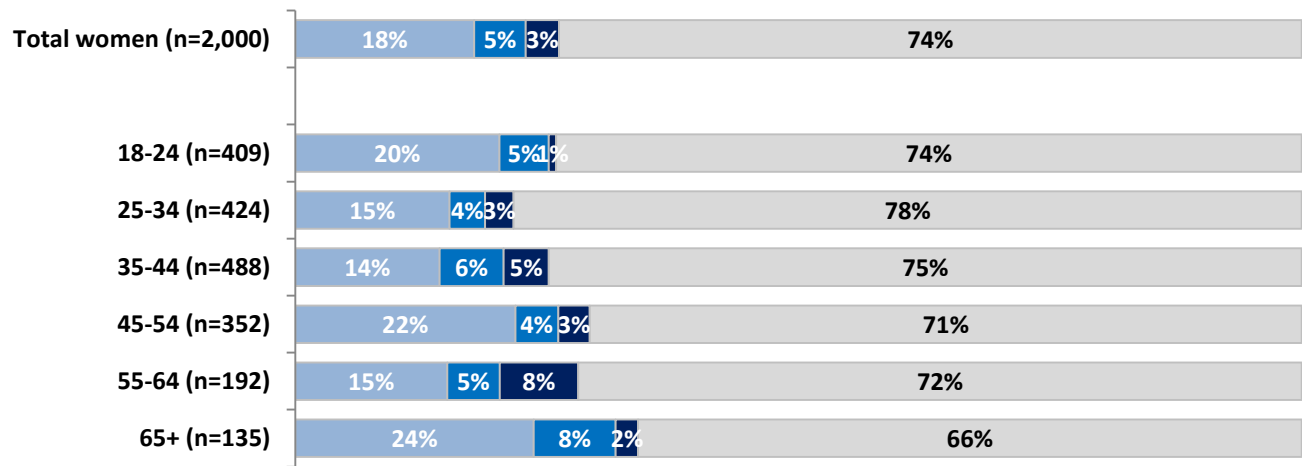
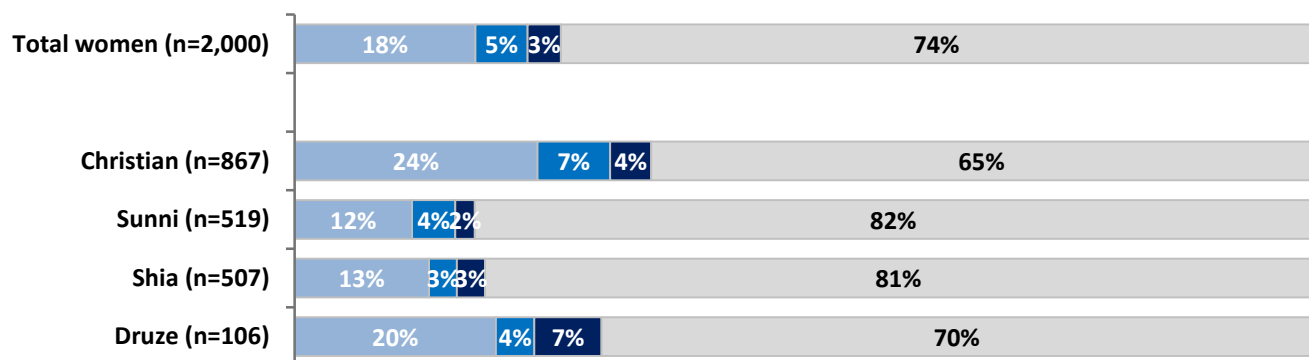


Figure 2- Percent of women members of organizations by age groups



Member in 1 organization Member in 2 organizations Member in 3 organizations or more Not a member

Figure 3- Percent of women members of organizations by sect



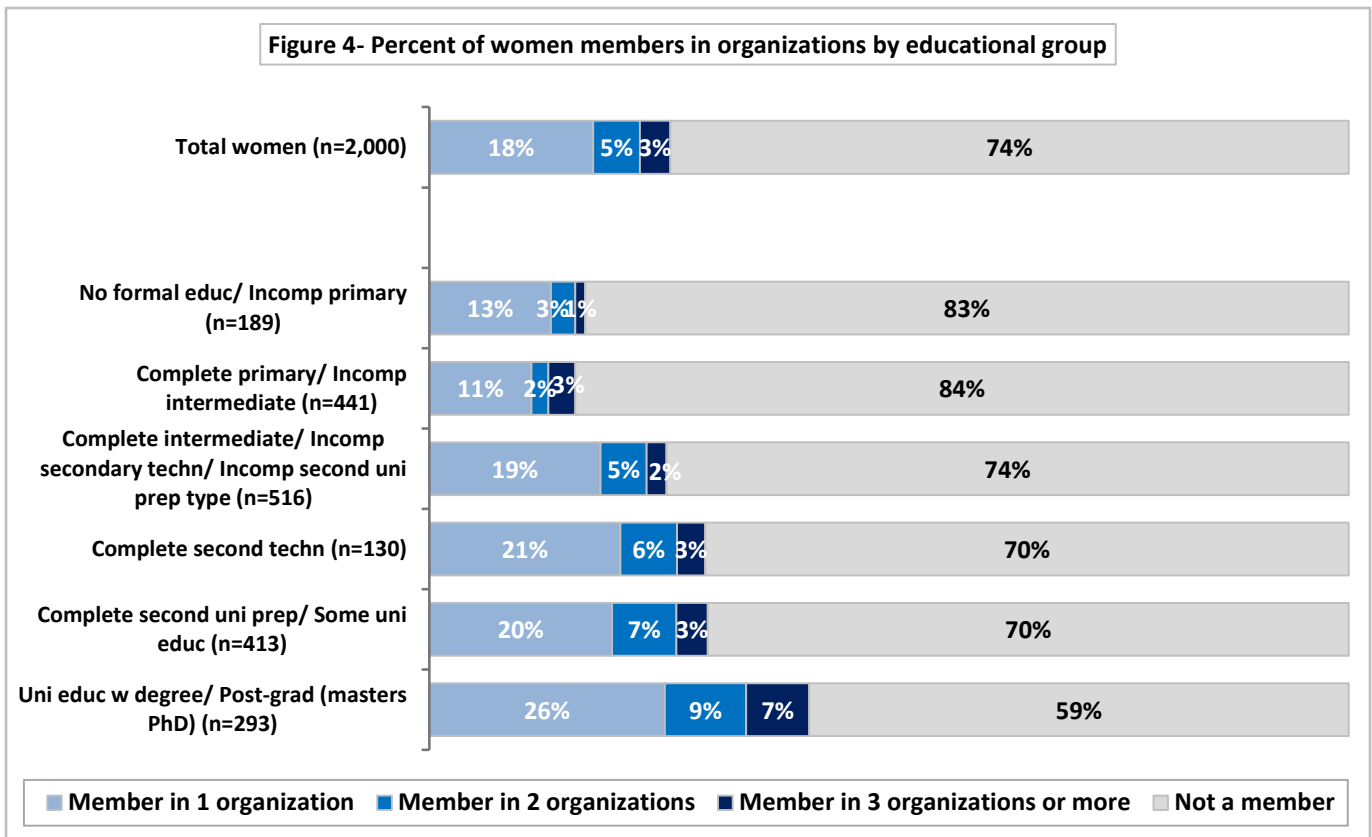
Member in 1 organization Member in 2 organizations Member in 3 organizations or more Not a member

When looking at membership in different organizations irrespective of the type of organization and breaking down by different demographics of women, we observe the following:

- Figure 2 shows that women who are 45 or older are much more likely to be members of different organizations than younger women. The 25-34 age group stands out as being the least active: 78% of women in this age cohort are not members of any organization. This is in contrast to women in the 65+ age group where 24% are members of one organization, 8% are members of 2 organizations, and 2% are members of 3 organizations or more. It is noteworthy that women who are 18-24 are more active than those 25-44. The pattern of engagement in different organization is thus one where women are more active in their younger years then their engagement slows down and picks up again as they reach their mid-forties.

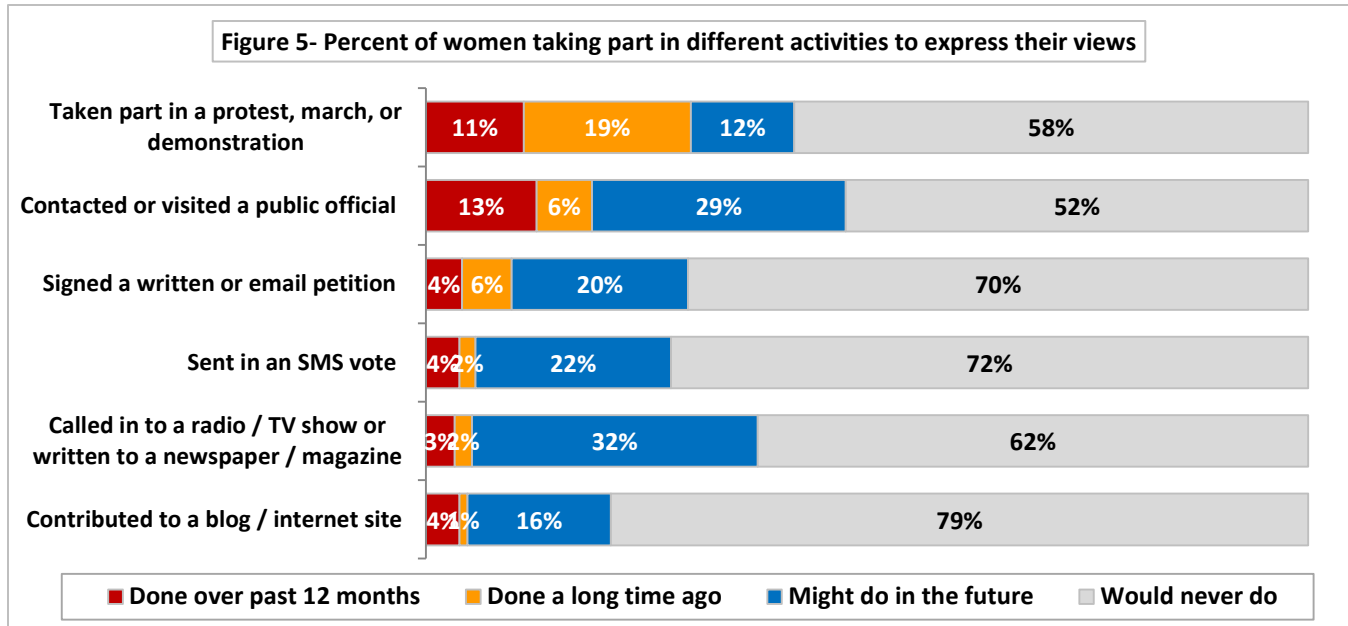
- Figure 3 shows that Christian and Druze women are more likely to engage in different organizations than Sunni and Shia women: 35% of Christian women and 31% of Druze women are members in one organization or more compared with only 18% of Sunni women and 19% of Shia women.
- As education levels increase, the likelihood of being members of different organizations increases as well. Indeed, Figure 4 shows that membership is highest for those with a university education or higher as 41% are members of at least one organization.
- When examining membership by marital status, we observe that the level of engagement in organizations is higher for women who are single than those who are married: 28% of women who are single are members in at least one organization compared with 25% of women who are married. Women with children under 18 are less likely to be members of organizations (22%) compared with women without children (27%).

Figure 4- Percent of women members in organizations by educational group

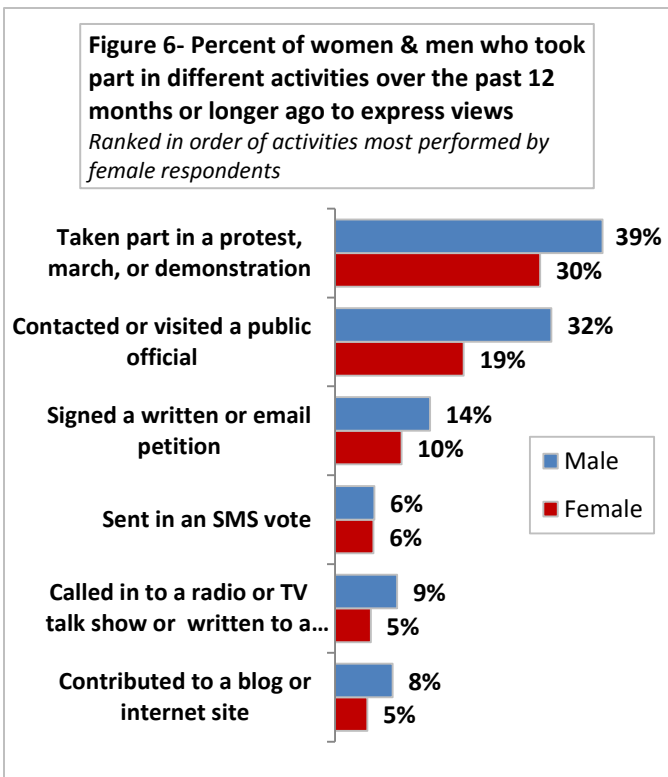


Engagement in Activities to Express Views

Another way of gauging the civic participation of women is by looking different activities that women can take to express their opinions on political and social issues.



- The activities that women mostly do to express their opinions on social and political issues are protests or demonstrations and contacting public officials (at any level of government). As Figure 5 shows, 11% of women have reported taking part in a protest or demonstration over the past 12 months and 19% have done so longer ago. Of those who have not done so, 12% say they might take part in a protest in the future yet 58% say they would never do this. It is not surprising that a lot of women have taken part in a protest in the past given that Lebanon has witnessed numerous public rallies since the assassination of the former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri in February 2005 and subsequent political developments that were characterized by a strong polarization between opposition supporters and parliamentary majority supporters.
- Very few women, however, take part in other types



of activities that perhaps require a higher level of individual initiative. Contributing to a blog or website is the least common and only 16% believe they will do that in the future. Similarly, only 5% of women have called in a radio or TV show to express their opinions in the past, but in contrast to contributing to a blog or website, three in 10 women believe they might call in to radio or TV show in the future. Women who are 18-24 are slightly more likely to have contributed to a blog or website than older women.

- Men are slightly more likely than women to have taken part in different activities to express their opinions. In particular, as Figure 6 shows, many more men (32%) than women (19%) have contacted or visited a public official over the past year or longer ago. Thirty-eight percent of men have taken part in one or more activities to express their views over the past year compared with a lower 24% of women.

Figure 7- Percent of women who have taken part in one activity or more over the past 12 months by age group

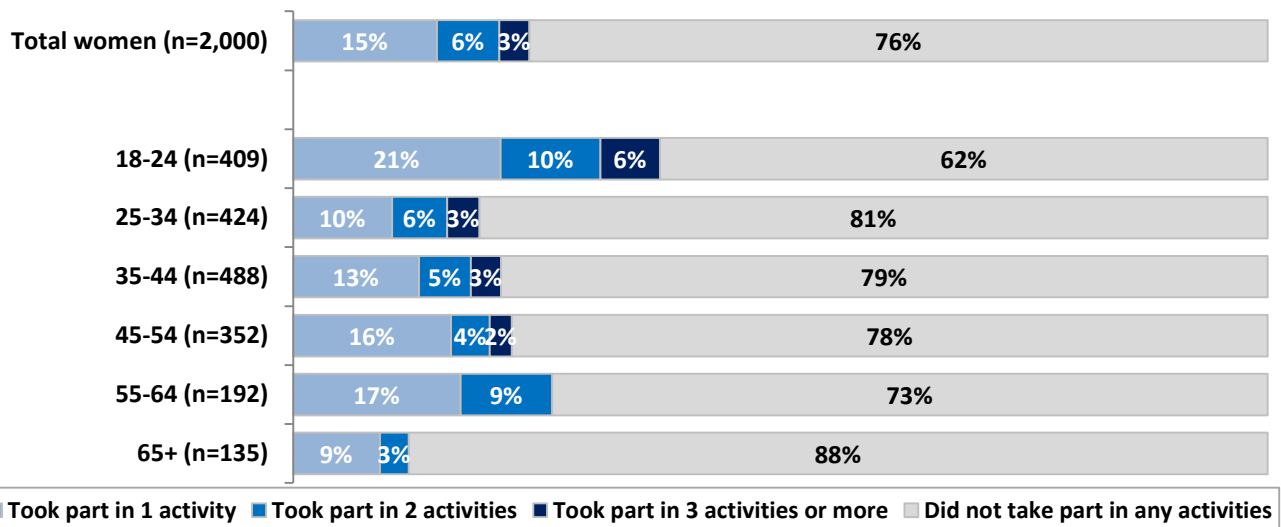
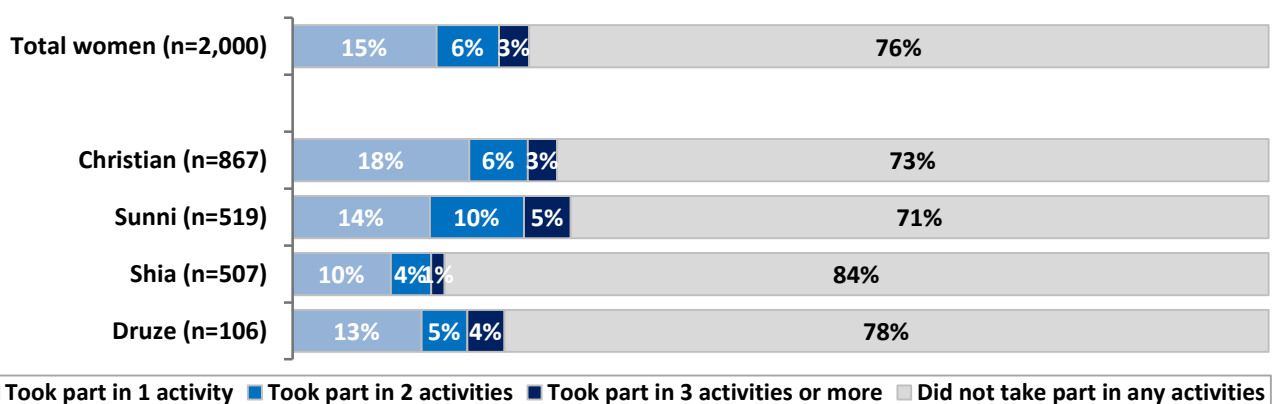


Figure 8- Percent of women who have taken part in one activity or more over the past 12 months by sect

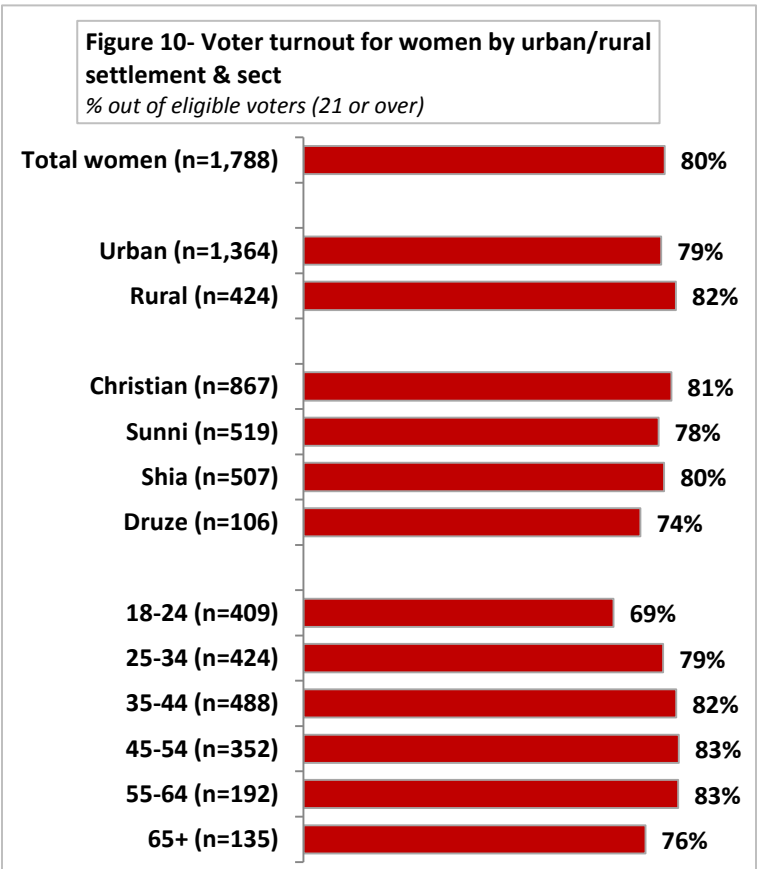
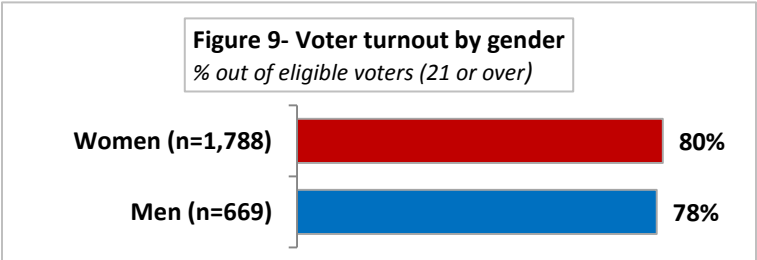


- As Figure 7 shows, the 18-24 age group is the most active in taking part in activities to express opinions on political or social issues. Then, activism drops for the 25-34 age group, and starts picking up again as women get older, reaches a new peak for the 55-64 then drops to its lowest level for the 65+. This is different from the pattern of civic engagement seen in terms of membership in different organizations where the tendency to become members increases with age.
- Christian, Sunni and Druze women are much more likely to have taken part in activities to express their views over the past year (Figure 8). This could be directly related to the nature of the representative political parties of these groups. While Christians, Sunnis and Druze are organized and represented in parties with a generally secular outlook, the main Shia party is of a religious nature and calls for gender segregation.
- As seen with engagement in different organizations, activism in the form of taking part in different activities increases as education levels increase and is higher for single women than it is for married women.

Voting in Elections

SWMENA survey respondents were asked a series of questions about their participation in the June 2009 parliamentary elections and their opinions about policy priorities for elected officials and the main factors driving their voting choices.

- While civic engagement as seen in the previous analysis is relatively limited, voting in the elections, which is a more direct form of political participation, was high for both men and women in a closely contested election. In fact, women report slightly higher voter turnout than men in the June 2009 parliamentary elections: 80% said they voted vs. 78% of men, but the difference is not statistically significant (Figure 9). This shows that there is no gender gap in voter participation in Lebanon.
- Also interestingly, there is no statistical difference in women’s participation in elections when looking at urban vs. rural areas or when looking at voter turnout by sect (Figure 10).
- Turnout is lower, however, for women in the 21-24 age group with only 69% reporting voting in the elections: this is significantly lower than older age groups and might be partly a



reflection of those women who had not yet turned 21 (the legal voting age) when elections took place. When eliminating those who are 21 from the base, we find that the 22-24 cohort still has a lower voter turnout (76%) than most age categories except for the 65 and older.

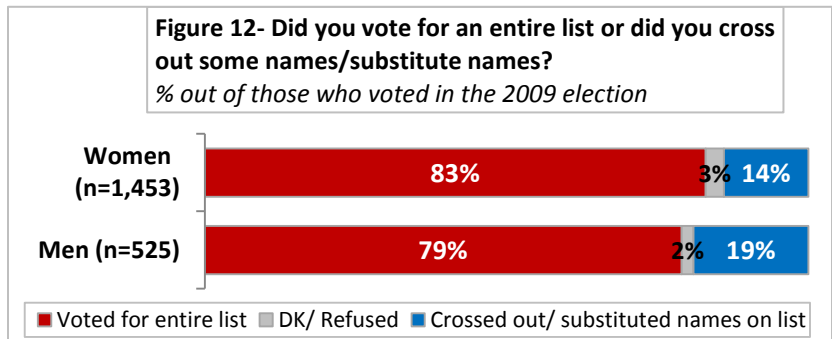
| Figure 11- Why did you not cast a vote in the June 2009 parliamentary election? <i>% out of eligible voters who didn't vote; ranked from highest to lowest according to citations by female respondents</i> | Women (n=360) | Men (n=143) | Ranks (n) |
|--|------------------|----------------|--------------|
| 1) Did not support any candidate/party | 15% | 13% | (3) |
| 2) Not interested in elections/politics | 14% | 17% | (1) |
| 3) Was sick | 10% | 3% | (10) |
| 4) Was not registered to vote/ was not on the voter list | 9% | 7% | (6) |
| 5) All politicians are corrupt/bad | 9% | 7% | (7) |
| 6) Was busy | 9% | 5% | (8) |
| 7) Was out of town/country when elections happened | 8% | 15% | (2) |
| 8) Was not eligible to vote | 6% | 13% | (4) |
| 9) My vote would not have made a difference | 6% | 8% | (5) |
| 10) Didn't have the ID card | 6% | 2% | (11) |

Shows ranks according to citations by men

- Of those eligible voters who did not vote in the elections, two of the three most cited reasons for not voting by both men and women are the fact that they did not support any candidate or party or that they are not interested in politics (Figure 11). Yet the third most cited reason for not voting by women is “being sick”: this only comes in the tenth place for men. Fifteen percent of men who did not vote said they were out of town/country when elections took place: this is much less common among women (8%).
- Reasons for not voting differ when breaking down results by sectarian groups: Christian women are more likely not to have voted for voluntary reasons related to some sort of dissatisfaction with the political situation: not being interested in elections or politics (21%) or not supporting any candidates (17%). For Sunni and Shia women “not being registered” is cited by many respondents (12% and 13% respectively). Druze women have reasons similar to those cited by Christians.

Voting Behavior

In Lebanon, the block vote system with sectarian quotas is used in parliamentary elections and there is no standard ballot. Many parties and pre-election coalitions publish their own unofficial ballots (called lists), which voters are free to modify and select candidates from more than one party or coalition. In the survey, voters were asked if they voted for party/coalition lists as they



are or if they crossed out/substituted names from the list.

- Survey results indicate that men were more likely than women to form their own lists which shows that they put more thought than women into the voting selection process (Figure 12).
- Shia women were more likely to stick to entire lists when they casted a vote when compared to women from other sects: 87% of Shia women voted for an entire list compared with 84% of Sunni women, 81% of Christian women and 74% of Druze women.

Factors Influencing Voting Choices

| Figure 13- When voting in parliamentary elections, what is the most important factor that influences your choice? <i>% out of total; ranked from highest to lowest according to citations by female respondents</i> | Women (n=2,000) | Men (n=750) | |
|--|--------------------|----------------|------|
| 1) Candidates who are not corrupt | 21% | 23% | (1) |
| 2) Services that candidates provide to our area | 19% | 13% | (3) |
| 3) Candidate's platform | 16% | 20% | (2) |
| 4) Candidate's previous performance | 8% | 11% | (4) |
| 5) Services that candidates provide to my family | 6% | 4% | (7) |
| 6) Candidates who did not fight in the civil war | 6% | 4% | (8) |
| 7) Candidate that represents my sect's interests | 5% | 7% | (5) |
| 8) List leader personality, charisma | 5% | 6% | (6) |
| 9) Candidate's stance on issues of importance to women | 3% | 3% | (9) |
| 10) My family or friends always vote for/like these candidates | 3% | 1% | (11) |

Shows ranks according to citations by men

- The three most important factors that influence voting choices are similar among men and women: candidates who are not corrupt, services that candidates provide to their area, and candidate’s platform (Figure 13).
- The top three factors influencing voting choices for women are the same across broad age groups but the order is different. Younger women place more emphasis on the candidate’s platform than older women.
- In urban areas, women prioritize the factor that candidates are not corrupt while in rural areas women prioritize the candidate’s ability to provide services to their areas.
- While the most important factors for voting do not differ much between men and women, there are important differences between women along sectarian lines. For Christian women, the top three factors cited as most important are candidates who are not corrupt, candidate’s platform and the services that candidates provide to their area. Women of all other sectarian groups prioritize “services that candidates provide to their area” as the leading consideration when making their voting choice. Druze women place more emphasis than others on services that candidates provide to their area. Druze and Shia Muslim women mention the leader’s charisma as an important consideration while other sectarian groups do not mention it. Christian, Sunni and Shia women

mention the candidate’s platform in the top three voting considerations while Druze women put less emphasis on this attribute.

Figure 14- Which issues should elected officials prioritize while in office?
% out of total; ranked from highest to lowest according to citations by female respondents

| | Women (n=2,000) | Men (n=750) | |
|--|-----------------|-------------|------|
| 1) Improving the economy in general | 50% | 42% | (2) |
| 2) Creating jobs | 43% | 41% | (3) |
| 3) Fighting corruption | 40% | 47% | (1) |
| 4) Fighting poverty | 33% | 27% | (4) |
| 5) Improving access to healthcare | 30% | 27% | (5) |
| 6) Reinforcing stability, national security | 23% | 27% | (6) |
| 7) Addressing internal political problems | 16% | 17% | (7) |
| 8) Developing local infrastructure | 14% | 16% | (8) |
| 9) Improving quality of education | 14% | 11% | (9) |
| 10) Improving the status of women in the country | 13% | 8% | (10) |
| 11) Foreign policy issues, country's standing in international community | 4% | 5% | (11) |

Shows ranks according to citations by men

Lebanese women were asked to rank their top policy concerns, i.e. the issues that they believe elected officials should prioritize while in office.

- Highest on their list is the economy, followed by job creation and then fighting corruption (Figure 14). The top three policy priorities for men and women are the same but the order is different. Women stress more the importance of improving the economy in general and are slightly more likely to cite developmental concerns than men. Men’s first policy priority is fighting corruption. Creating jobs is important for both sexes.
- Improving the status of women in the country is very low on women’s and men’s priority list: only 13% mention it, falling in the tenth place. It is in the same position for men, but even fewer men mention it (only 8%).

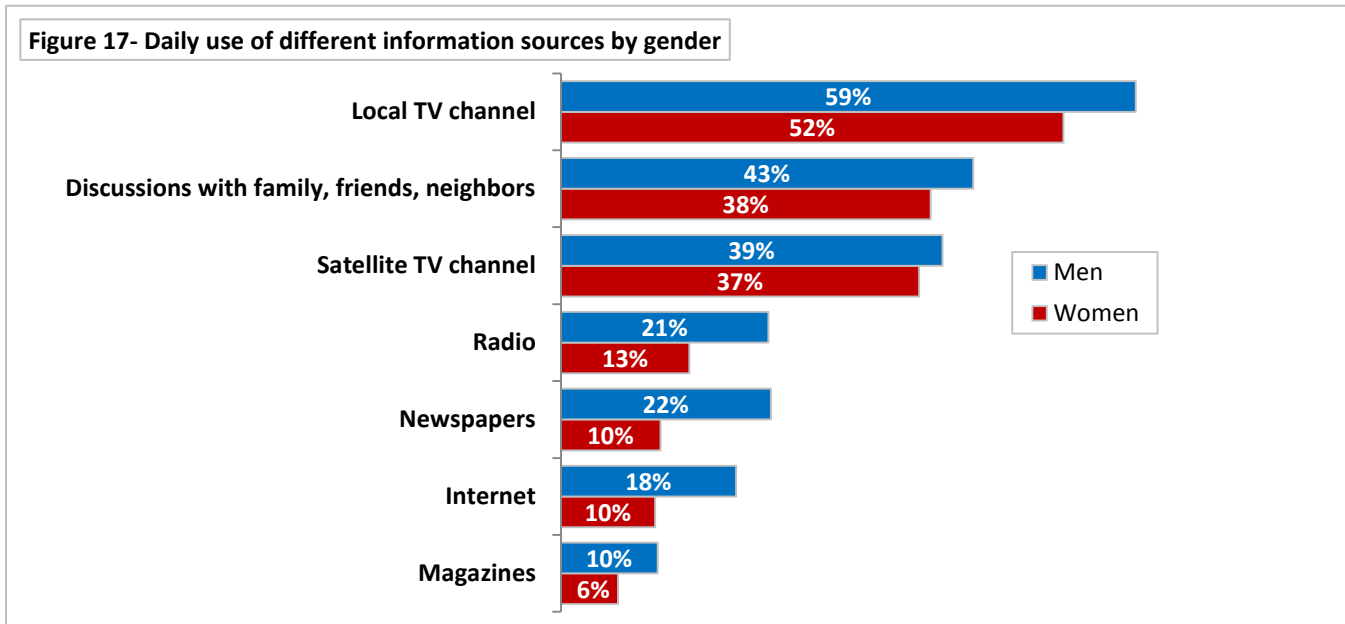
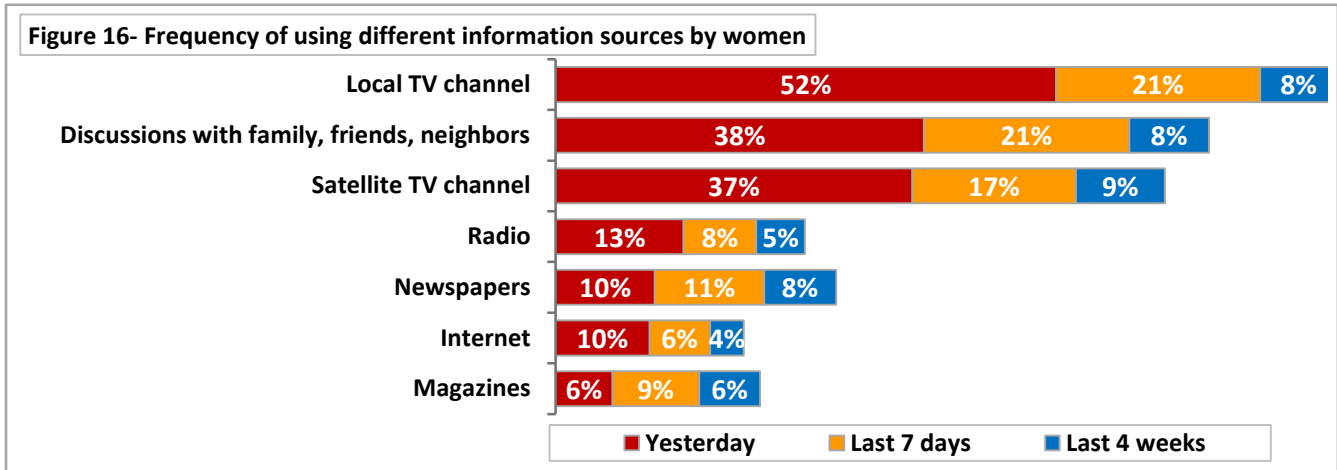
Figure 15- Issues elected officials should prioritize while in office
Shows ranks according to mentions by women in each age group

| | 18-34 (n=833) | 35-54 (n=840) | 55+ (n=327) |
|---|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| Improving the economy in general | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Creating jobs | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Fighting corruption | 3 | 2 | 3 |
| Fighting poverty | 4 | 4 | 5 |
| Improving access to healthcare | 6 | 5 | 1 |
| Reinforcing stability, national security | 5 | 6 | 6 |



- When looking at top policy concerns by age groups (Figure 15), we find that women who are 55 or older have a different set of priorities than women in younger age groups: Those 18-34 and 35-54 consider improving the economy in general as their top priority whereas the 55+ consider improving access to healthcare as their top priority. The 18-34 and the 35-54 mention creating jobs and fighting corruption among their top three policy concerns. This is less important for the 55+ who only mention it in the fourth place.

Media Use & Interest in Politics



- TV (including local and satellite) as well as word of mouth are the most frequently used information sources by Lebanese women (Figure 16).

- When comparing daily use of different information sources between men and women (Figure 17), we notice that men in general tend to use various media and information sources more frequently than women. Twice as many men than women read newspapers on a daily basis and almost twice as many listen to the radio and use the internet.
- The majority of women in Lebanon (55%) are very or somewhat interested in matters of politics and government (Figure 18). However, men show a higher interest in these matters than women (60%).
- There is no important different in interest in politics between women from different sects .
- Women with at least some university education report a higher level of interest in matters of politics and government than those with a lower level of education.

