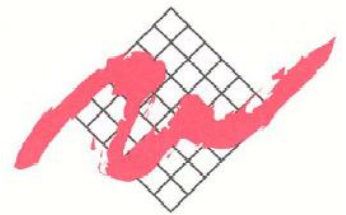


The Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa (SWMENA) Project

Focus on Yemen | Civic and 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)*



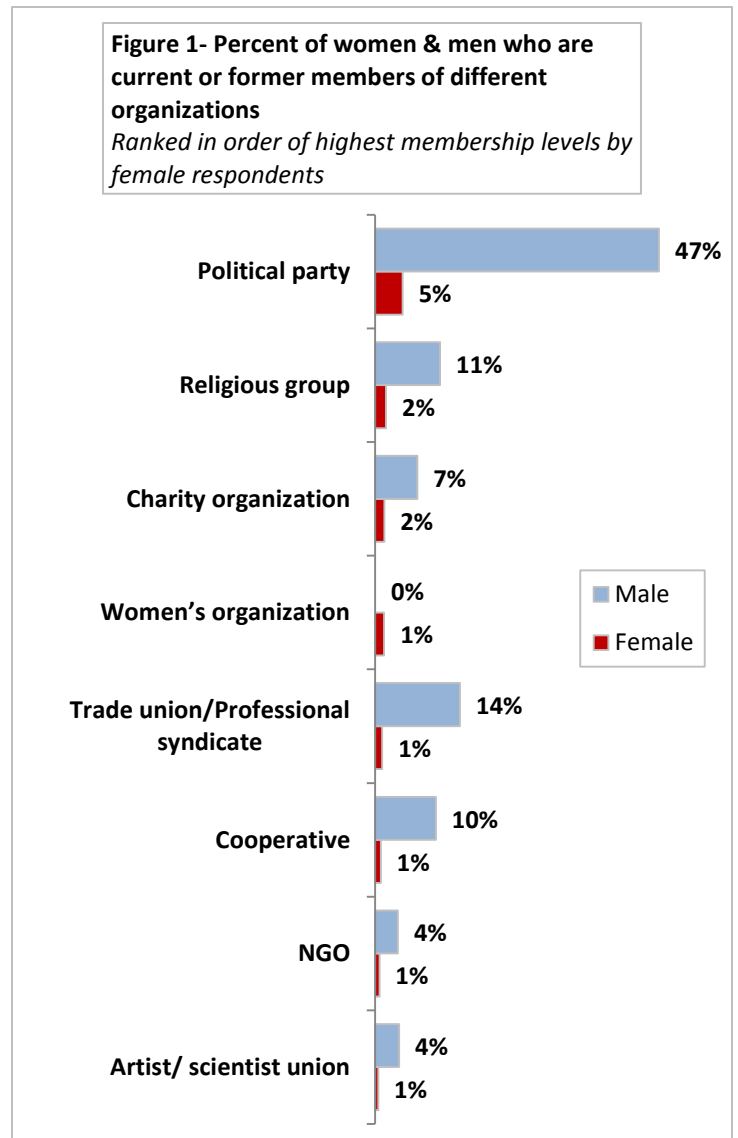
CIVIC & POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

This topic brief presents the main findings from the SWMENA survey in Yemen 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 2006 municipal and presidential elections 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 Yemen, 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.

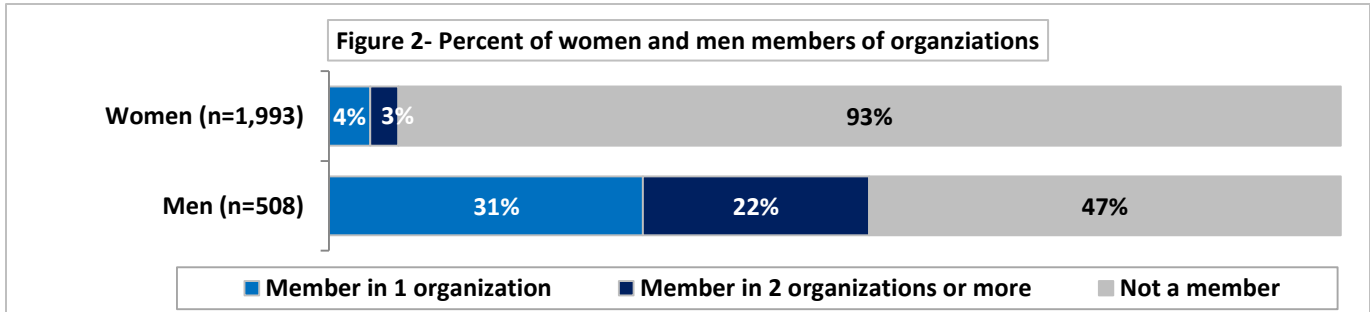
- Data from the SWMENA survey shows that overall levels of membership in different organizations are extremely low for women and relatively low for men with the exception of membership in political parties.
- Five percent of Yemeni women say they are members of political parties compared to nearly 47% of men. Indeed, the Yemeni population is known to be highly politicized; however, the large gender gap in membership of political parties indicates that women are not partaking in this political activism as much as men.
- No more than 2% of Yemeni women report being members of other types of organizations such as religious groups, charity organizations women’s organizations, trade unions, cooperatives, NGOs, and artist or scientist unions.
- More men are members of different organizations than women: 14% of Yemeni men are members of trade unions or professional syndicates, 11% are members of religious groups, 10% are members of cooperatives, and 7% are members of charity organizations (Figure 1).



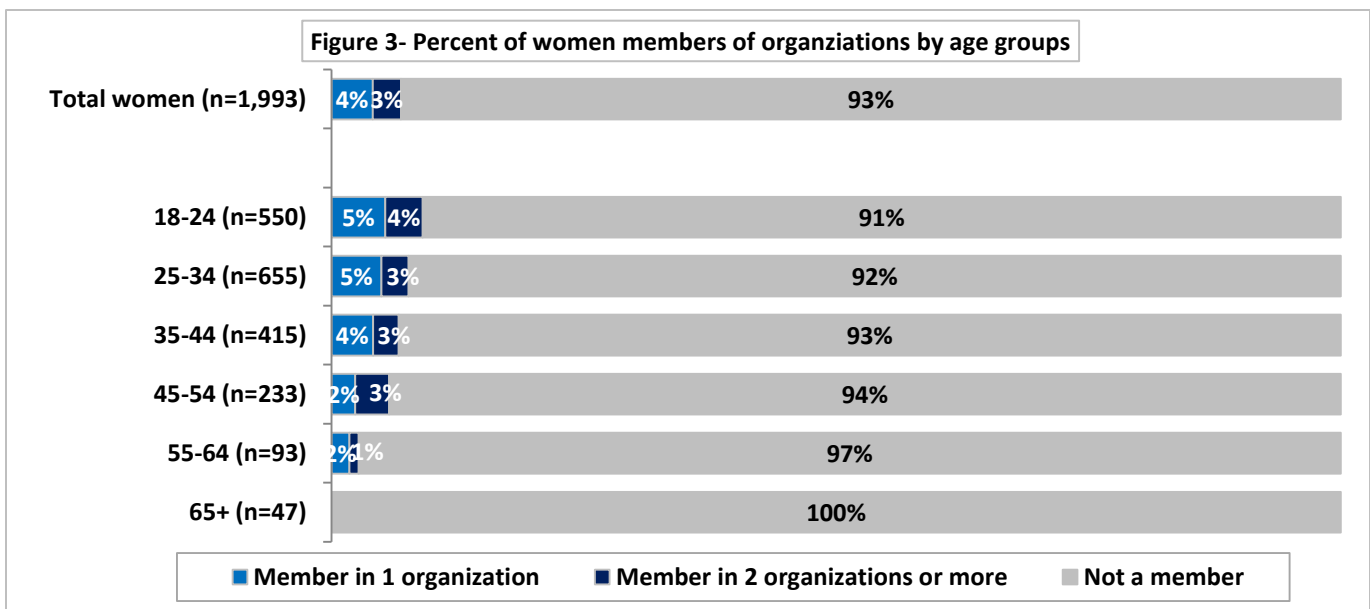
- When aggregating data on memberships in organizations regardless of organization type, we find that 4% of Yemeni women are members of one organization, 2% are members of two organizations and another 1% are

members of three organizations or more. This leaves 93% of Yemeni women who are not members of any organization (Figure 2).

- Meanwhile, 31% of men are members of one organization, 11% are members of two organizations, and 12% are members of three organizations or more.

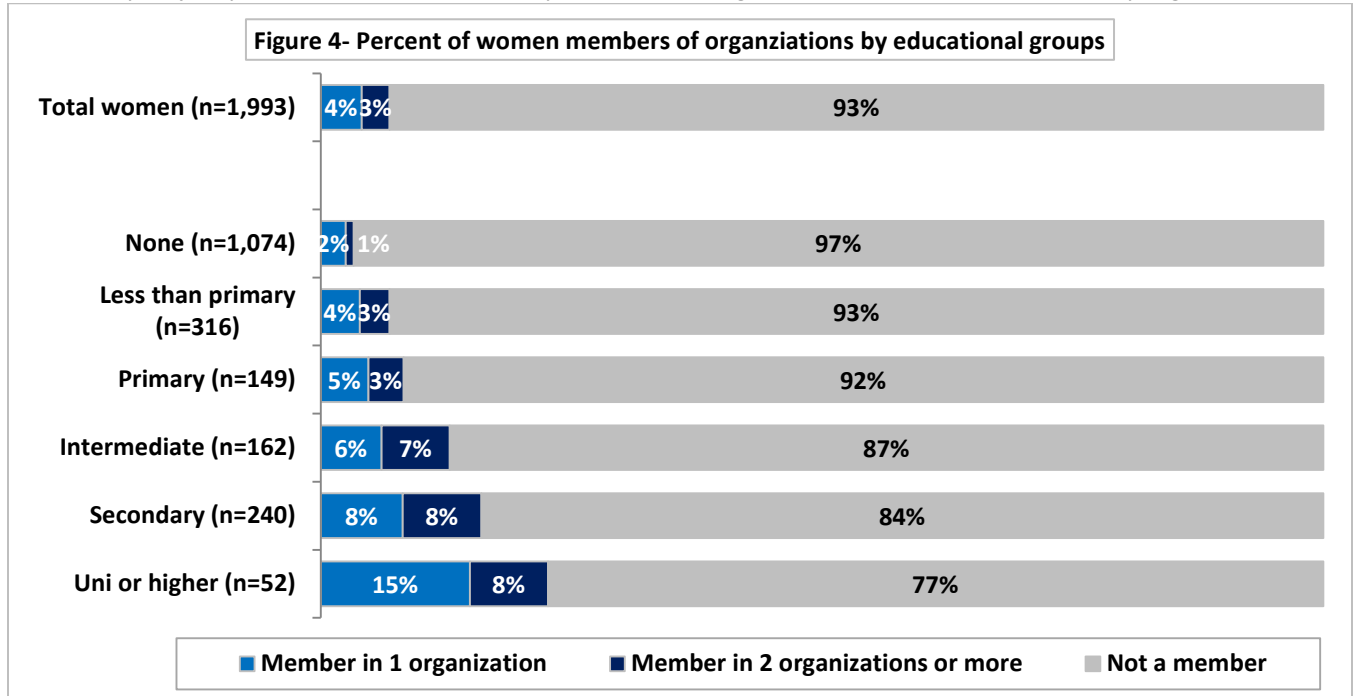


- When breaking down membership levels for women by age groups, we do not see significant differences. Membership in organizations is low across the board but is particularly subdued for women who are 55 years or older. It is highest for women who are in the 18-24 age group where 5% are members of one organization and 4% are members of two organizations or more (Figure 3).

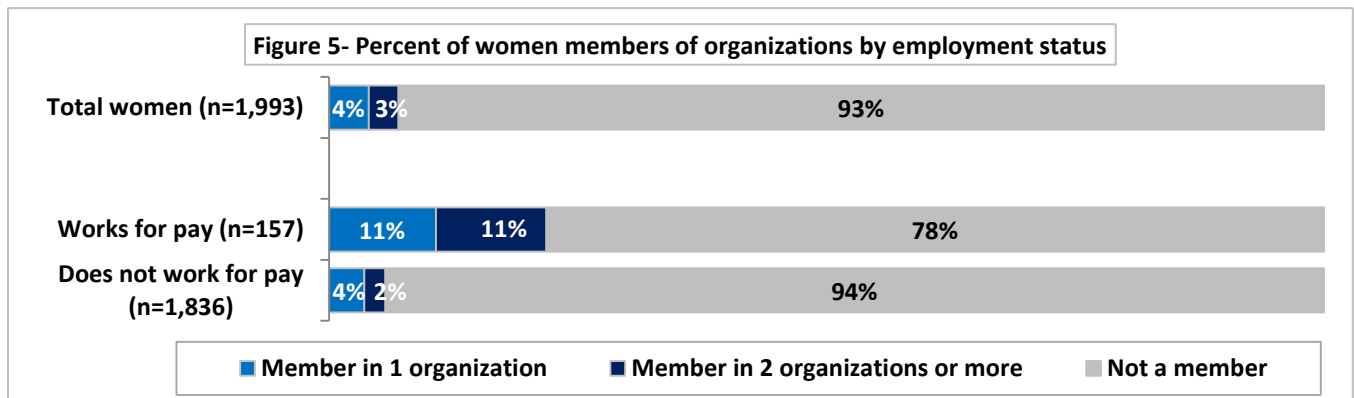


- Women’s civic engagement as measured by membership in different organizations increases with educational attainment but remains relatively low even for highly educated women. For women with no education, membership in organizations is small, standing at merely 3%. (Figure 4). For those with less than a primary education, only 7% are members of one organization or more, while the remaining 93% are not members of any organization. Among women with a primary education, 5% are members of one organization 3% are members of

two organizations or more, and 92% are not members of any organization. Among women with an intermediate education, 6% are members of one organization, 7% are members of two organizations or more and 87% are not members of any organization. Women with a secondary education exhibit slightly higher levels of civic engagement: 8% are members of one organization and 8% are members of two organizations or more. Women with a university education or higher are understandably the most likely to be members of different organizations with 15% reporting being members of one organization and 8% being members of two organizations or more. Still, a hefty majority of women with a university education or higher (77%) are not members of any organization.



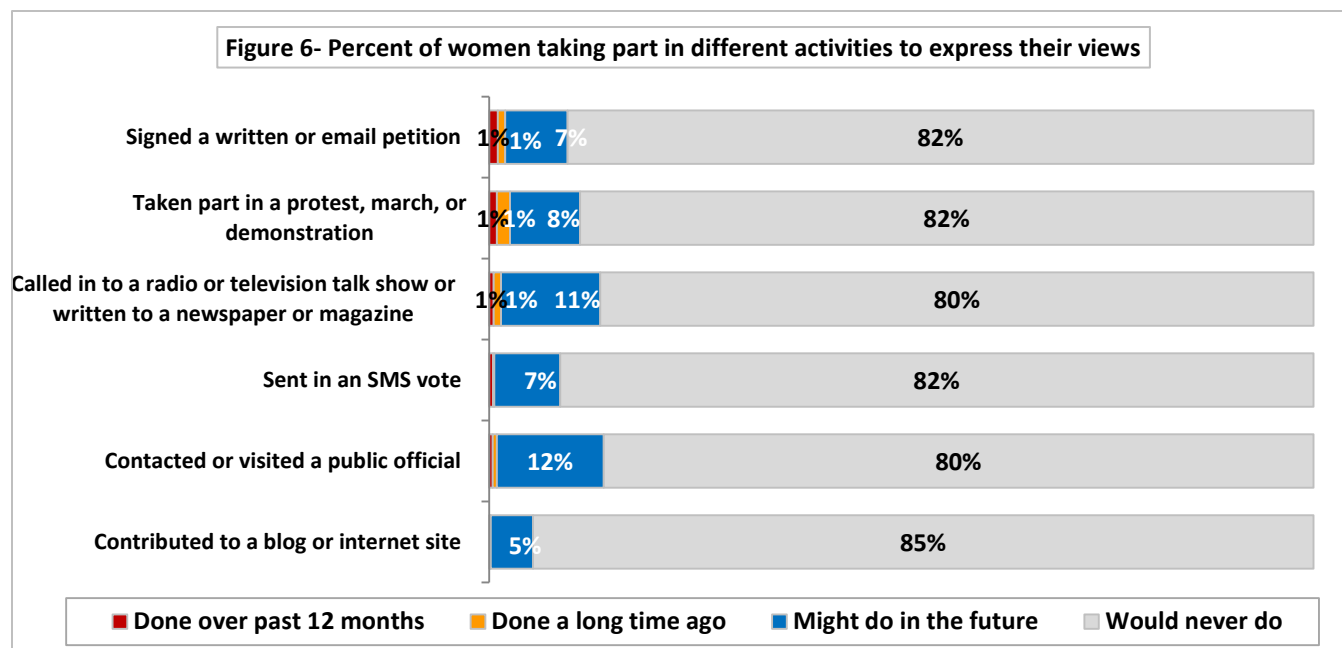
- When comparing women who are part of the labor force with those who are not, we find a large difference in the levels of membership in different organizations. Twenty-two percent of women who are employed are members of one organization or more compared to only 6% of women who are not employed. This shows that as women’s economic role expands their level of civic engagement (as measured by their membership in organizations) increases as well (Figure 5).



Engagement in Activities to Express Views

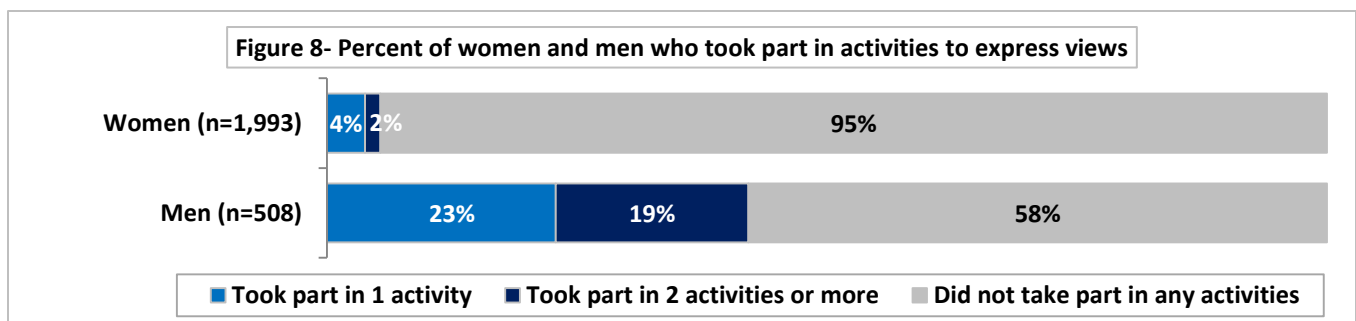
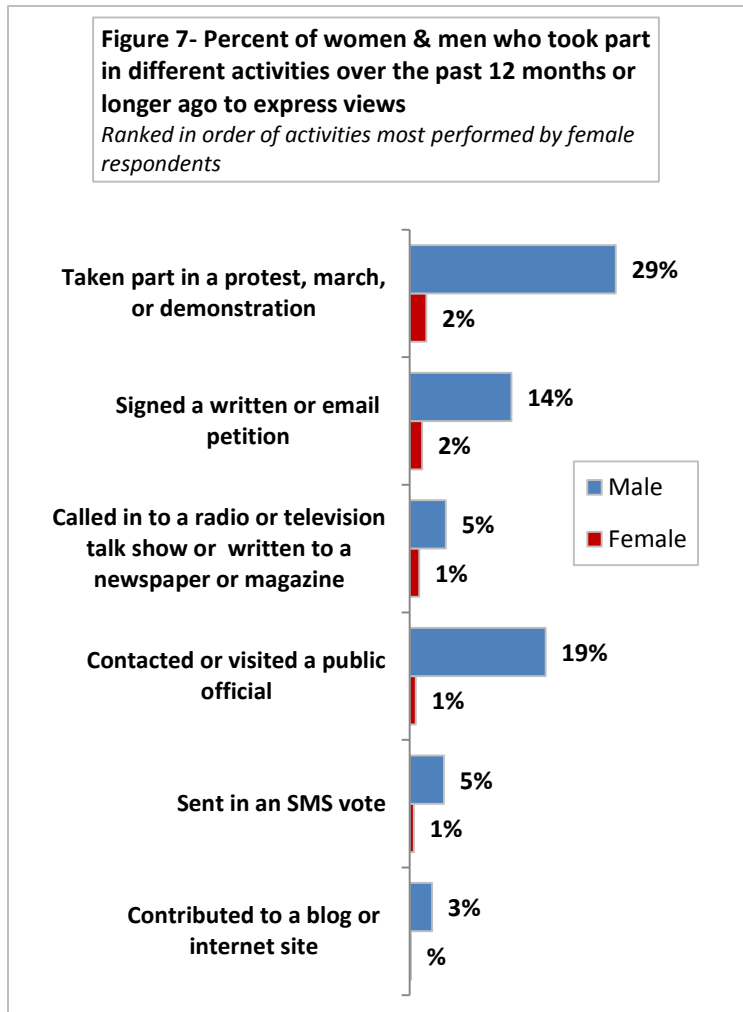
Another way of gauging the civic participation of women is by looking at different activities that women can partake in to express their opinions on political and social issues.

- The SWMENA survey shows that very few Yemeni women take part in any activities to express their views on social and political issues. Indeed, when presented with a list of activities that citizens could use to make their opinions heard about issues in their community or at the national level, the share of women who report taking part in any activity is almost negligible and the sweeping majority of women are not even willing to engage in these activities in the future. This data reflects the well-known social limitations on women's movement in Yemen and their subsequent constrained ability to interact with others in the public sphere.

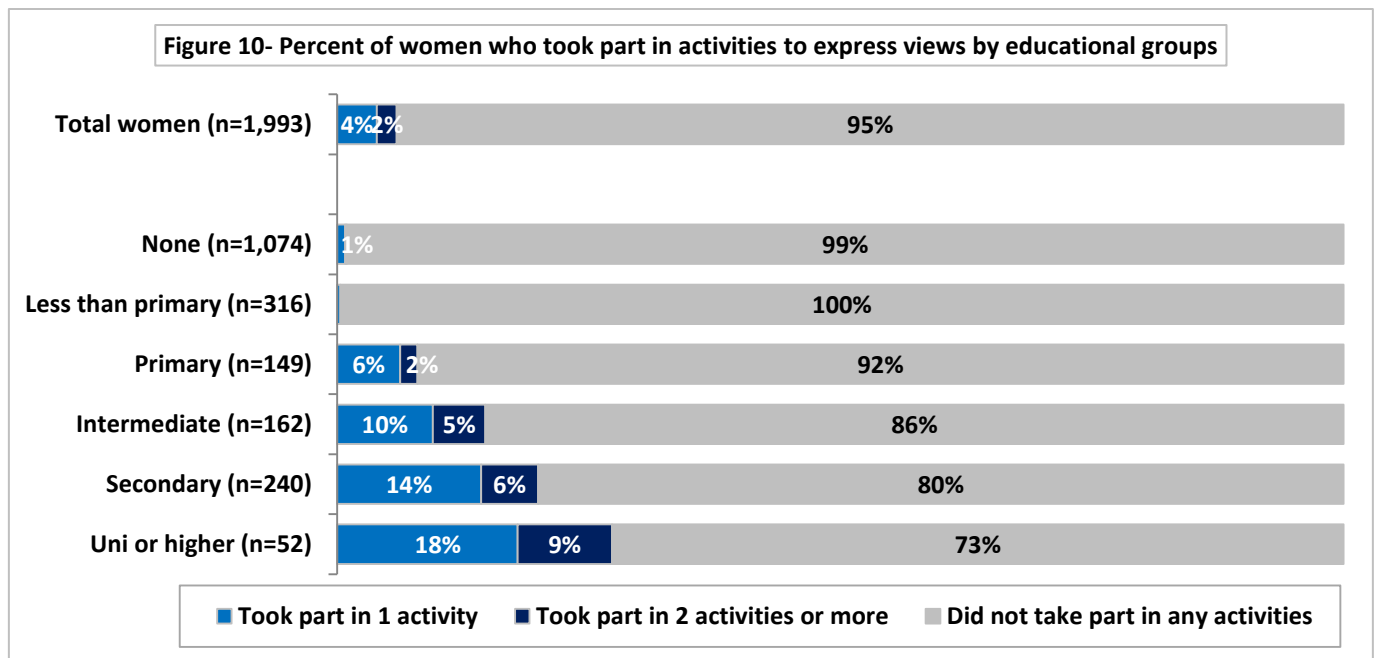
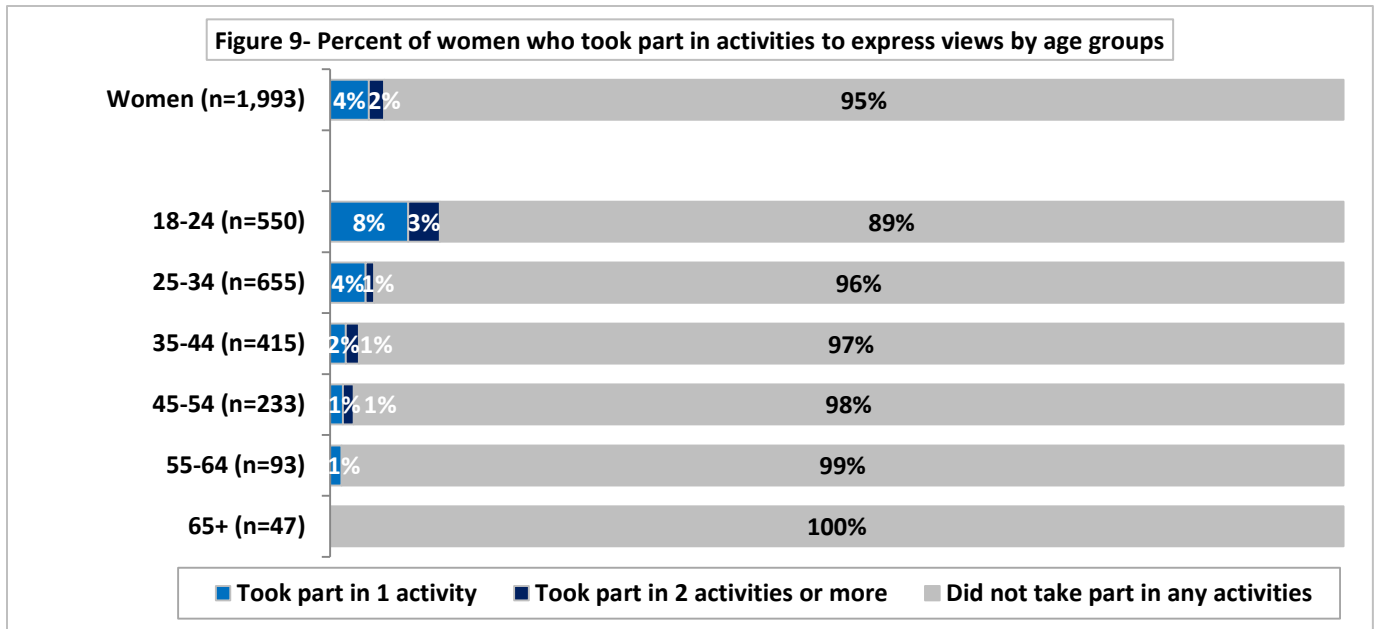


- According to survey findings, less than 2% of Yemeni women have ever signed a petition, taken part in a protest, or called in a radio or TV show or wrote to a newspaper or magazine to express their views on a social or political issue. What is more noteworthy is that at least four in five Yemeni women do not expect or plan to engage in such activities in the future.
- Women's participation in different activities to express their views is not only low in absolute terms but it is also low relative to their male counterparts. Men are fifteen times more likely (29%) than women (2%) to have taken part in a protest, march or demonstration. Nineteen percent of men have contacted or visited a public official at any level of government over the past year or longer ago to express their views on a social or political issue versus only 1% of women. Similarly, 14% of men say that they signed a petition to express their views on a certain political or social issue compared with only 2% of women (Figure 7).

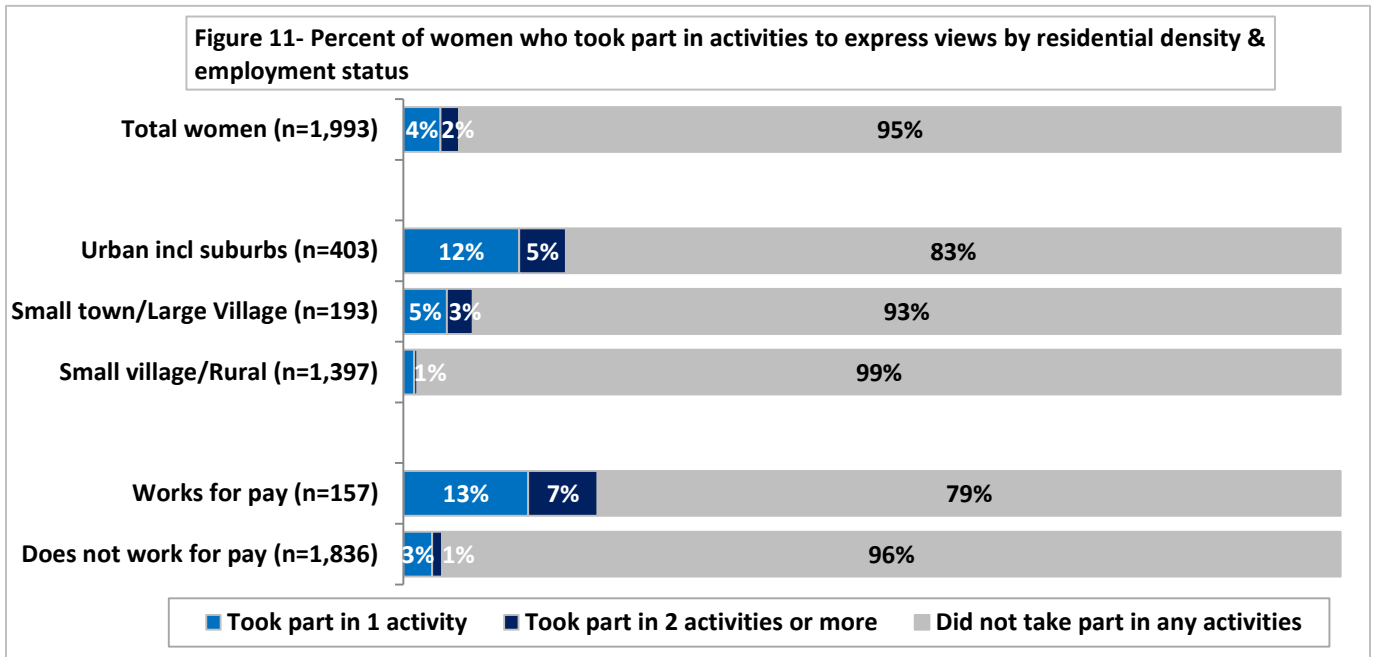
- When aggregating activities regardless of the type of activity, the difference in engagement between men and women becomes even more pronounced. Figure 8 shows that 23% of Yemeni men have taken part in one activity to express their views over the past year or longer ago and 19% have taken part in two activities or more. This leaves 58% of men who have not taken part in any activities to express their views. Meanwhile, the percent of women who have not taken part in any activity stands at a much higher 95%, as only 5% of women have taken part in one or more activities to express their views over the past year or more.
- When examining women’s participation in activities by age groups, the data shows that only women who are 18-24 tend to noticeably engage in some activities to express their views on social and political views. In this younger age group, 8% of women have taken part in one activity in the past year or longer ago and 3% have taken part in two activities or more to express their views. This still leaves nearly 89% of women 18-24 who have not taken part in any activities to express their views. For all older age groups, fewer than 5% of women have ever taken part in activities to express their views while the overwhelming majority has not taken part in any activity to express their views on social and political issues (Figure 9).



- When looking at women’s participation in activities by educational groups, we find that the level of engagement increases with educational attainment. For women with a primary education or less, the level of engagement is almost nonexistent. For women with a primary education, 8% have engaged in one or more activities to express their views. The level of engagement increases systematically as educational attainment increases and reaches its peak for women with a university education or higher, where 18% of women have taken part in one activity to express their views and another 9% have taken part in two activities or more to express their views. Still, 73% of women with a university education or higher have never taken part in any activity to express their views on social and political issues (Figure 10).



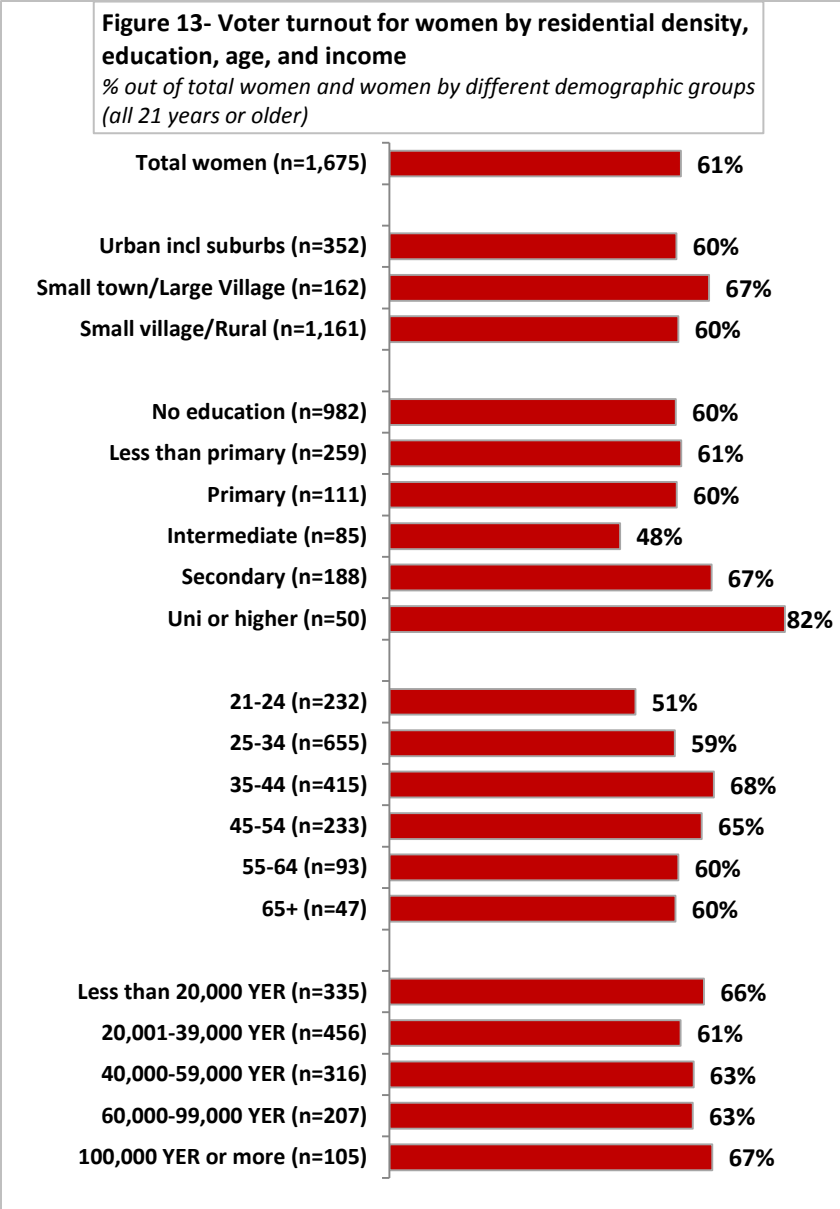
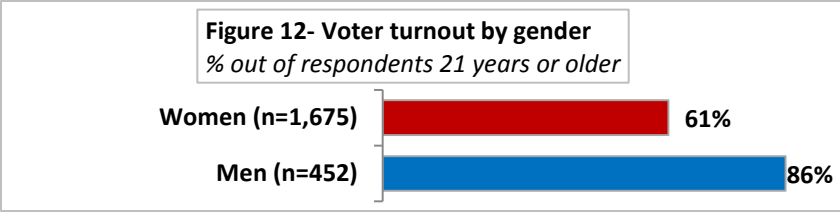
- Many more women in urban areas (including suburbs) have taken part in activities (17%) to express their views than women living in small towns or large villages (8%) or women in small villages (1%). The level of civic activism is five times higher for women who work for pay (21% have taken part in activities) than for women who do not work (4%) (Figure 11).



Voting in Local Council and Presidential Elections

In addition to measuring participation through civic engagement, SWMENA survey respondents were asked a series of questions about their participation in the September 2006 local council and presidential elections, since these were the most recent elections that took place in Yemen¹. Respondents were also asked about their opinions about policy priorities for elected officials and the main factors driving their voting choices.

- Survey results indicate that while a solid 61% majority of Yemeni women said they had voted in the local council and presidential elections in September 2006, women’s voter participation is noticeably lower than men’s. Among men, a sweeping 86% majority report voting in these elections. There is indeed a gender gap in voter participation in Yemen, however, the difference is not as dramatic as the one seen in terms of civic engagement. Furthermore, the high levels of voter turnout could be attributed to the fact that the 2006 elections were for both local councils and presidential elections, meaning that the mobilization of voters was at a high capacity.
- When looking at women’s voter turnout by residential density, we do not find differences in voter turnout between urban areas and rural areas



¹ The series of questions on voter participation are filtered by those who are at least 21 years of age at the time of the survey interview since younger respondents would not have been eligible to vote in the September 2006 elections. Voting age in Yemen is 18 years or older.

(60%), however, voter turnout is slightly higher in small towns/large villages (67%). This might be due to the ease of mobilizing women to go vote in small towns due to the small area size, high population levels, and better road infrastructure compared to villages which tend to have harder roads and more scattered residential units.

- When looking at voter turnout by educational attainment, we find that women with a secondary education or higher have higher voter turnout compared with women in other educational categories: a full 82% of women with a university education or higher have voted in the September 2006 elections and 67% of women with a secondary education reported voting as well. Less than a majority of women who have completed an intermediate education (48%) have voted in these elections whereas more women with a primary education or lower (60%) have voted in these elections.
- In terms of age groups, women 35-44 have the highest voter turnout with 68% saying they voted in the September 2006 elections. Women 45-54 also had a relatively high turnout (65%) while younger women 21-24 have the lowest voter turnout at 51%.
- Interestingly, when looking at voter turnout by household income levels, we notice that women belonging to the lowest income level (household income of 20,000 Yemeni Riyals or less) and women belonging to the highest income level (household income of 100,000 Yemeni Riyals or more) tend to vote in higher rates than women in other income categories; 66% of women in the lowest income group and 67% of women in the highest income group reported voting in the 2006 elections, compared with a 61% voter turnout level for women as a whole (Figure 13).
- In general, while women's voter turnout may be slightly different for certain demographic groups, it must be noted that voter turnout is relatively high for women across all ages, educational groups and geographic locations. This is likely the result of systematic political mobilization activities on behalf of political parties that target all groups of eligible voters.
- Respondents who reported not casting a vote in the September 2006 elections were asked to provide the main reason why they didn't vote. The most frequently cited reason by both women (18%) and men (23%) is not being registered to vote. Several women (13%) mention not being interested in elections or politics as their main reason for not voting: this comes in second place for women and in sixth place for men. The third most frequently cited reason by women is being sick; this comes in fourth place for men (7%). It is noteworthy that one main reason for not voting for women is not being allowed to vote: this is mentioned by 11% of women and comes in fourth place.
- Not surprisingly, no men mention this as their reason for not taking part in the elections. This suggests that many women in Yemen are still not free to practice their right to vote as they are usually forbidden from voting by their husbands or male relatives. For men, the second most cited reason for not voting is being out of town or country when the elections took place (23%); this is only mentioned by 3% of women since women's activities tend to be mostly home-bound. The third most cited reason by men for not voting is not being eligible to vote (8%) (Figure 14).

Figure 14- Why did you not cast a vote in the September 2006 elections?
% out of respondents (21 years or older) who reported not voting; ranked from highest to lowest according to citations by female respondents

	Women (n=626)	Men (n=62)	
1) Was not registered to vote/ was not on the voter list	18%	23%	(1)
2) Not interested in elections/politics	13%	6%	(6)
3) Was sick	12%	7%	(4)
4) Was not allowed to vote	11%	0%	(10)
5) Did not support any candidate/party	5%	3%	(7)
6) Was busy	5%	7%	(5)
7) Was not eligible to vote	4%	8%	(3)
8) Was out of town/country when elections happened	3%	23%	(2)
9) All politicians are corrupt/bad	2%	3%	(8)
10) My vote would not have made a difference	1%	2%	(9)

Shows ranks according to citations by men

Factors Influencing Voting Choices

All survey respondents were asked about the most important factors that would influence their voting choices when voting in parliamentary elections. The results show that for both women and men, the top three factors are the same and in the same order.

- The top factor mentioned by respondents as influencing their voting choices is the services that candidates provide to their area: this was mentioned by 61% of women and 71% of men. This is followed by the factor that candidates are not corrupt or the honesty of the candidate, mentioned by 37% of women and 48% of men, and the candidate's charisma or personality (21% of women and 31% of men). In fourth place, 19% of women mentioned the candidate's stance on issues of importance to women as being one of the main factors influencing their voting choices; this was only mentioned by 4% of men. Meanwhile, 18% of women mention the religiosity of the candidate as being one of the main factors influencing their voting choices. This is mentioned by a similar proportion of men (17%) and ranks in sixth place.
- For men, the candidate's party takes a high priority (fourth place) with a quarter of men mentioning it as a factor influencing their voting choices. This factor is mentioned by 14% of women (Figure 15).
- Twenty-two percent of men mention the candidate's platform in the fifth place as being one of the main factors influencing their voting choices. This is much lower on women's voting priorities and is mentioned by only 9% of women (not shown).

Figure 15- When voting in parliamentary elections, what is the most important factor that influences your choice?
% out of total; ranked from highest to lowest according to citations by female respondents

	Women (n=1,996)	Men (n=508)	
1) Services that candidates provide to our area	61%	71%	(1)
2) Candidates who are not corrupt/ honesty of candidate	37%	48%	(2)
3) Candidate's charisma/personality	21%	31%	(3)
4) Candidate's stance on issues of importance to women	18%	4%	(11)
5) Religiosity of the candidate	18%	17%	(6)
6) Candidate's party	14%	25%	(4)
7) My family or friends always vote for/ like this candidate	13%	8%	(10)
8) Candidate's previous performance	12%	17%	(7)
9) Services that candidate provides to my family	12%	13%	(8)
10) Candidate that represents my group's interests	10%	11%	(9)

Shows ranks according to citations by men

- When looking at factors influencing women's voting choices by educational attainment, we find that the top two factors are the same across all educational levels, namely the services that candidates provide to their area and candidates who are not corrupt. For women with a lower education attainment, i.e. those with less than a primary education, the third most cited factor is the candidate's charisma or personality. This ranks in fourth place for women with a primary education or higher (Figure 16).
- It is encouraging to note that women who have a primary education or higher tend to prioritize the candidate's stance on issues of importance to women much more than women with a lower educational attainment. Indeed, this factor ranks third for women with a primary education or higher whereas it ranks seventh for women with no formal education and fifth for women with with less than a primary education.
- The religiosity of the candidate is a factor that makes it to the top five factors influencing voting choices for women in most education groups. For women with less than a primary education, it ranks fourth and for women who have a primary or intermediate education, it ranks fifth. However, it drops to the sixth place for women who have a secondary education or higher.
- It is also noteworthy that for women with no education, an important factor influencing their voting choices (in the fifth place) is whether their family or friends always vote for or like the candidate. The importance of this factor is much lower for women who have a higher educational attainment: it ranks tenth for women with less than a primary education, ninth for women with a primary education and eleventh for women with an intermediate education or higher.

Figure 16- Factors influencing voting choices <i>Shows ranks according to mentions by women in each education group</i>	None (n=1,074)	Less than Primary (n=316)	Primary (n=149)	Intermediate (n=162)	Secondary or higher (n=292)
Services that candidates provide to our area	1	1	1	1	1
Candidates who are not corrupt	2	2	2	2	2
Candidate’s charisma/personality	3	3	4	4	4
Religiosity of the candidate	4	4	5	5	6
My family or friends always vote for/ like this candidate	5	10	9	11	11
Candidate’s party	6	6	7	7	10
Candidates’ stance on issues of importance to women	7	5	3	3	3
Services that candidates provide to my family	8	7	8	10	9
Candidate’s previous performance	9	8	6	6	5
Candidate that represents my group’s interests	10	9	10	9	8

- When looking at factors influencing women’s voting choices by residential density, we find that the top two factors are the same across all three types of residential density: services that candidates provide to their area and candidates who are not corrupt. For women living in small villages (rural areas), the religiosity of the candidate ranks third in terms of factors influencing voting choices. This factor is ranked fourth among women living in small towns or large villages and sixth for women living in urban areas, including suburbs. The candidate’s stance on issues of importance to women ranks high (third place) for women living in urban areas, while it represents a much lower priority (sixth place) for women living in small villages in rural areas or in small towns or large villages.

Figure 17- Factors influencing voting choices <i>Shows ranks according to mentions by women by residential density</i>	Small village/Rural (n=1,397)	Small town/Large village (n=193)	Urban incl suburbs (n=403)
Services that candidates provide to our area	1	1	1
Candidates who are not corrupt	2	2	2
Religiosity of the candidate	3	4	6
Candidate’s charisma/personality	4	3	4
Candidate’s party	5	5	9
Candidates’ stance on issues of importance to women	6	6	3
My family or friends always vote for/ like this candidate	7	7	10
Services that candidates provide to my family	8	8	7
Candidate’s previous performance	9	9	5
Candidate’s platform	10	10	11



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

- Highest on Yemeni women’s list is fighting poverty (58%), fighting corruption (38%), creating jobs (33%), improving access to healthcare (27%), and improving the economy in general (27%).
- Men’s top policy priorities are not too different from women: the top two concerns are the same but in reverse order. Sixty-four percent of men mention fighting corruption, followed by fighting poverty (49%). Improving the economy in general ranks in third place for men (44%), followed by creating jobs (38%), and improving the quality of education (22%).
- Women place more importance than men on improving the status of women in the country: 16% of women mention this among their top policy concerns compared with only 3% of men (Figure 18).

Figure 18- 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=1,993)	Men (n=508)	
1) Fighting poverty	58%	49%	(2)
2) Fighting corruption	38%	64%	(1)
3) Creating jobs	33%	38%	(4)
4) Improving access to healthcare	27%	16%	(8)
5) Improving the economy in general	27%	44%	(3)
6) Improving quality of education	26%	22%	(5)
7) Reinforcing stability/ national security	17%	16%	(7)
8) Improving the status of women in the country	16%	3%	(10)
9) Developing local infrastructure	10%	18%	(6)
10) Addressing internal political problems	6%	11%	(9)

Shows ranks according to citations by men

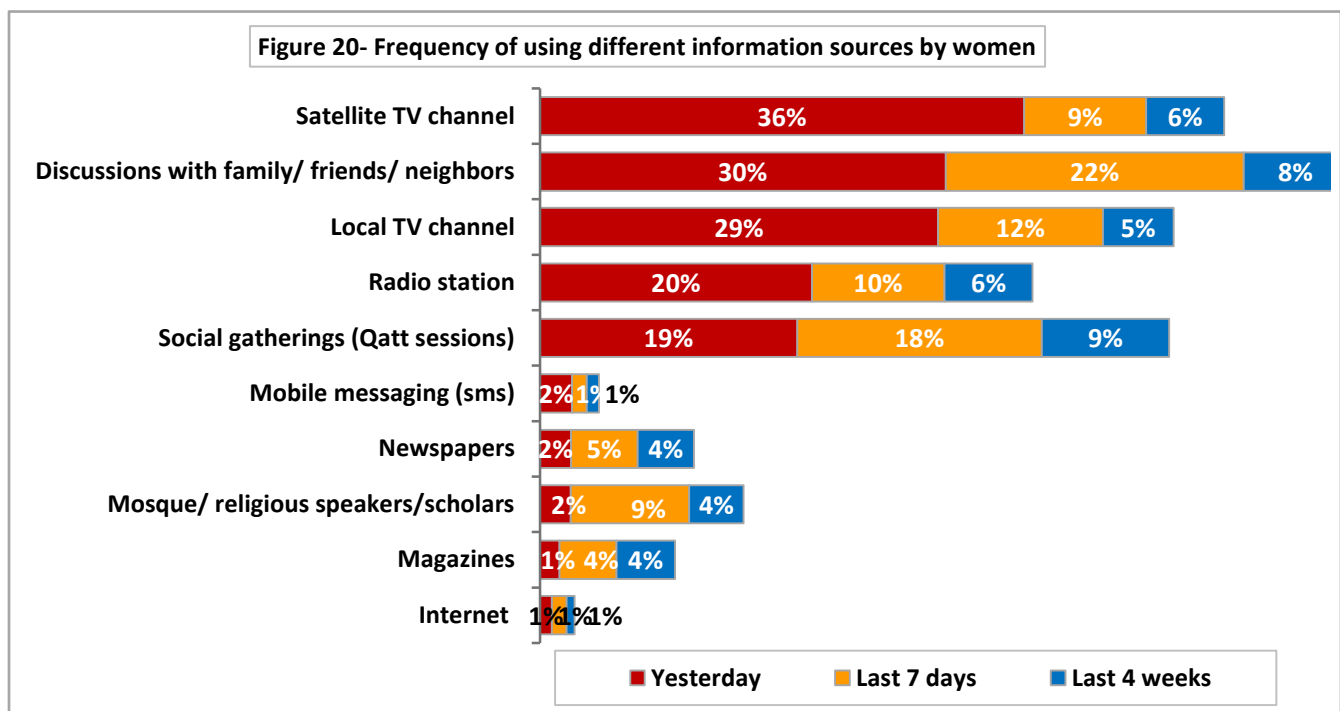
- When looking at women’s policy priorities by residential density, we find that fighting poverty is the number one policy concern for all women, whether they live in urban areas, rural areas, or in small towns or large villages. For women living in small villages, the second policy priority is improving access to healthcare. This ranks fifth for women living in small towns or large villages and much lower in the ninth place for women living in urban areas. The third policy priority for women living in small villages is fighting corruption; this ranks higher in the second place among women living in small towns or large villages and urban areas.
- For women living in small towns or large villages and urban areas, the third priority is creating jobs. This ranks in fifth place for women living in small villages (Figure 19).

Figure 19- Issues elected officials should prioritize while in office <i>Shows ranks according to mentions by women by residential density</i>	Small village/Rural (n=1,397)	Small town/Large village (n=193)	Urban incl suburbs (n=403)
Fighting poverty	1	1	1
Improving access to healthcare	2	5	9
Fighting corruption	3	2	2
Improving quality of education	4	7	7
Creating jobs	5	3	3
Improving the economy in general	6	4	4
Reinforcing stability/ national security	7	6	5
Improving the status of women in the country	8	8	6
Developing local infrastructure	9	9	10
Addressing internal political problems	10	10	8

Media Use & Interest in Politics

SWMENA survey respondents were asked about the frequency of using different media sources to obtain news and information about developments in Yemen.

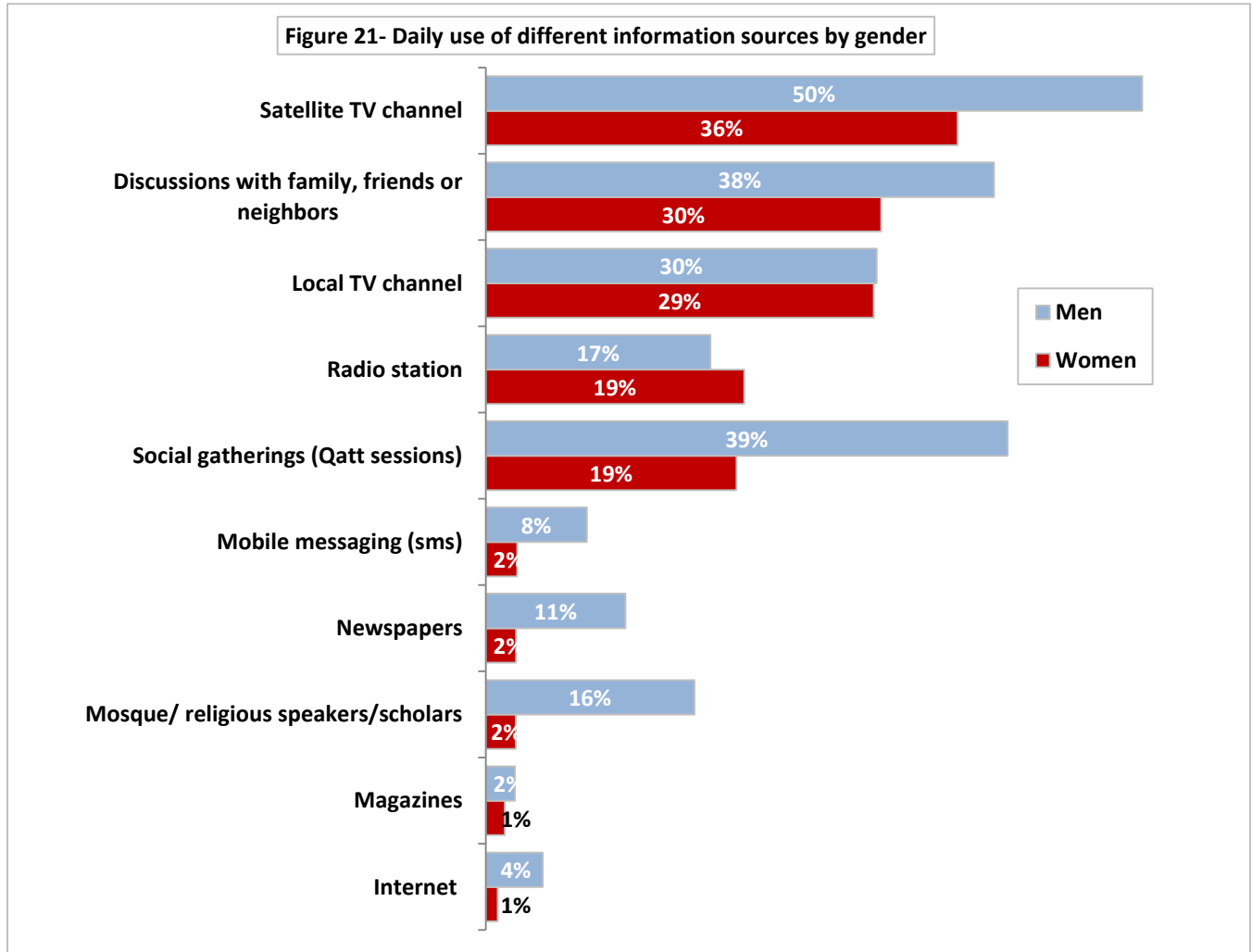
- Satellite TV channels are the most frequently used information sources by women in Yemen: 36% of women report watching satellite channels on a daily basis. Local TV is also used frequently with almost three in 10 Yemeni women saying they watch it on a daily basis. Many Yemeni women resort to word of mouth (discussions with family, friends, neighbors) to learn about local developments: 30% say they engage in such discussions daily and 22% do so on a weekly basis. Radio stations are used daily by 20% of women and weekly by 10% of women.
- Qatt chewing sessions are a unique Yemeni phenomenon where people gather and sit for long hours and exchange news and stories. Nineteen percent of women say they join Qatt sessions on a daily basis to obtain news and information about local and national developments in Yemen and another 18% say they do so on a weekly basis.
- Newspaper and magazine readership is extremely low with less than 2% of women saying they read these print media on a daily basis to obtain news and information about developments in Yemen. Mobile messaging and internet use are also very limited (Figure 20).



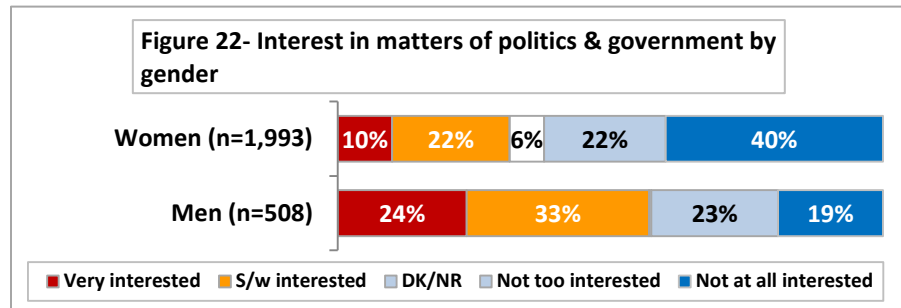
- When comparing the daily use of different information sources by gender, we notice that men tend to generally use different information sources more than women (Figure 21). For instance, half of surveyed men say they watch satellite TV on a daily basis compared with just over a third of women. Men tend to also engage in daily

discussions with family, friends, or neighbors to learn about developments more than women (38% for men versus 30% for women).

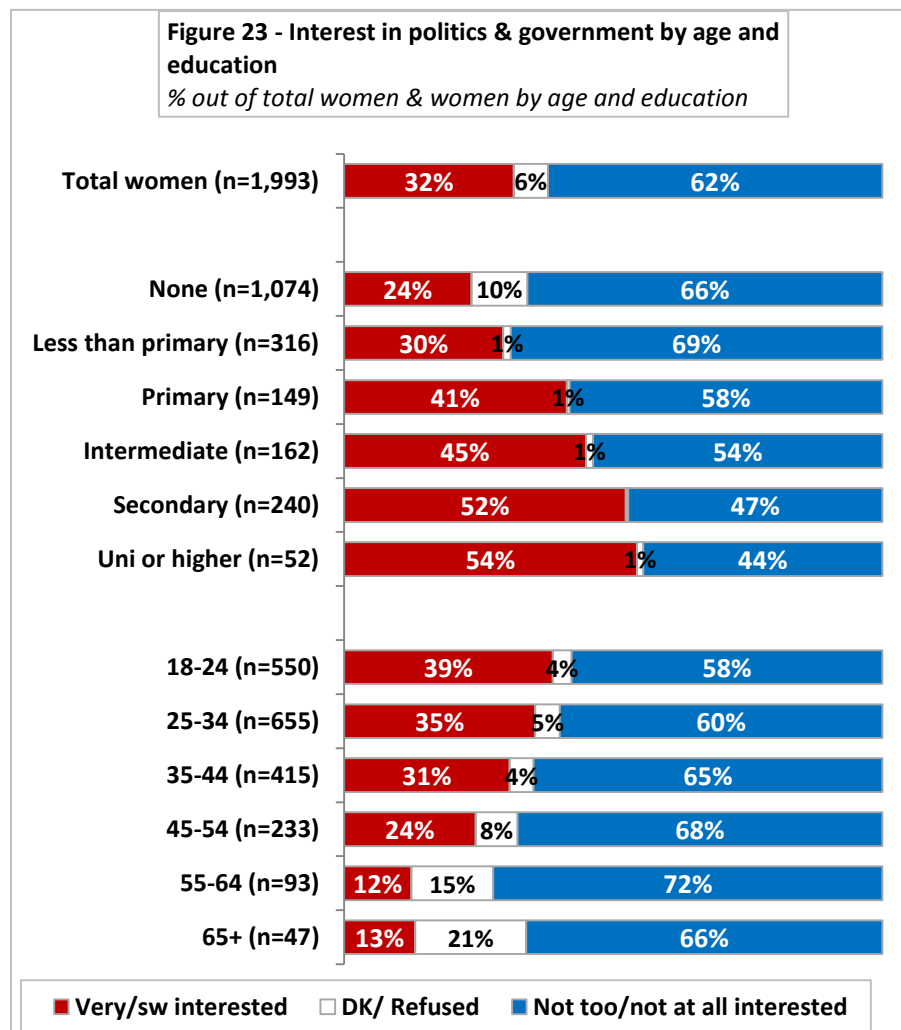
- The use of local TV and radio is similar between the sexes: 30% of men and 29% of women watch local TV on a daily basis, and 17% of men and 19% of women tune in to the radio daily to obtain news and information.
- Qatt chewing sessions are more common among men than women: twice as many Yemeni men (39%) than women (19%) say they attend such sessions daily to obtain information about developments in Yemen. Men are also much more likely than women (16% versus 2%) to obtain news and information from mosque attendance, religious speakers, and religious scholars.



- In terms of interest in matters of politics and government, Yemeni women tend to show less interest in these matters than men: while nearly a third of women say they are very (10%) or somewhat (22%) interested in matters of politics and government, a 57% majority of men say they are very (24%) or somewhat (33%) interested in these matters.



- When looking at women’s interest in politics and government by education groups, we find that interest in matters of politics and government increases systematically with educational attainment. Interest levels range from just 24% for women with no formal education to more than double this level for women with a secondary education or higher. However, it must be noted that even among women with a university education or higher, more than two in five women (44%) are not too interested or not at all interested in these matters.



- When examining the pattern of interest in these matters by age group, we see that younger women tend to show higher interest than older women. For instance, while 39% of women who are younger than 24 are very or somewhat interested in matters of politics, only 12% of women who are 55 or older are interested in these matters. This relationship may reflect the correlation between age and education in Yemen as younger women tend to have a higher educational attainment than older women.