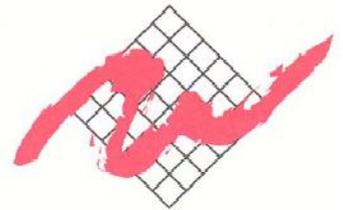


# The Status of Women in the Middle East and North Africa (SWMENA) Project

Focus on Lebanon | Attitudes Towards Policy Change  
Topic Brief

*A project by the International Foundation for Electoral  
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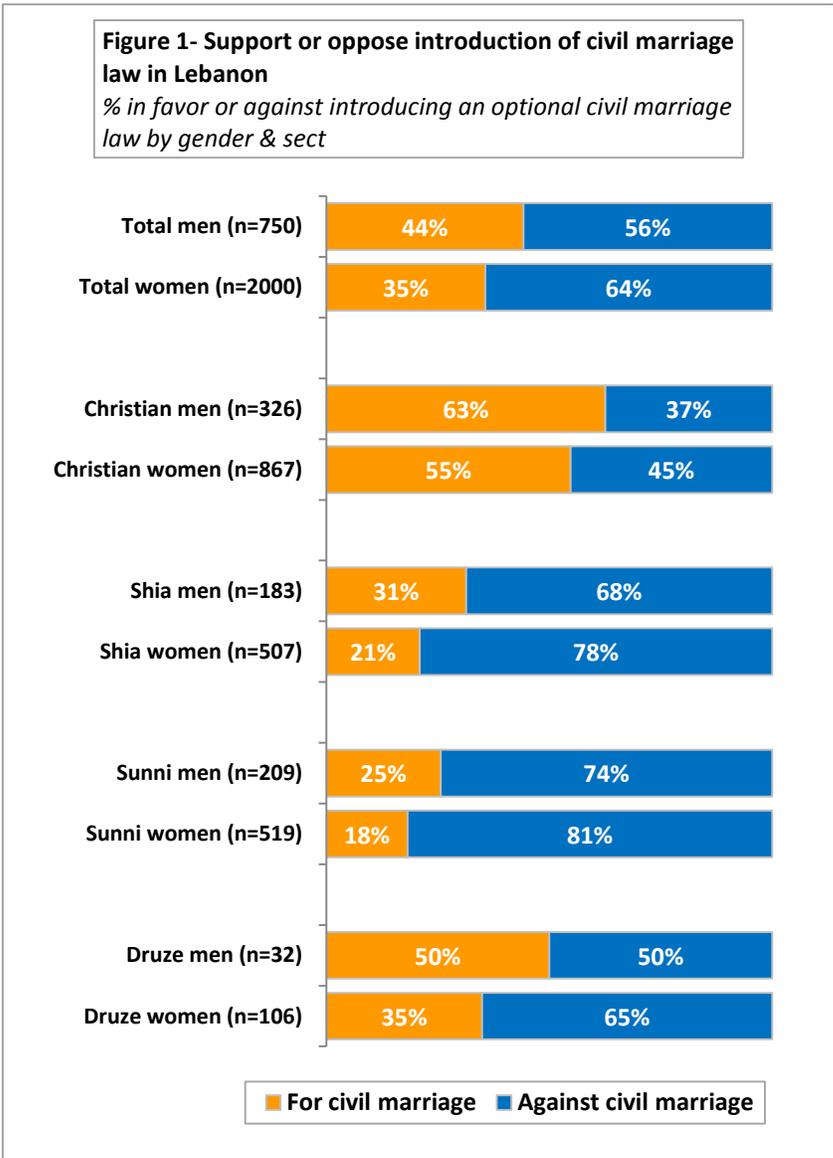
## ATTITUDES TOWARDS POLICY CHANGE

This topic brief presents the main findings from the SWMENA survey in Lebanon on people’s attitudes towards policy change. The survey elicited opinions on possible law reforms that have the potential of improving the status of women in Lebanon. These include opinions on an optional civil marriage law, on introducing gender quotas in elected bodies, and on reforming the citizenship law.

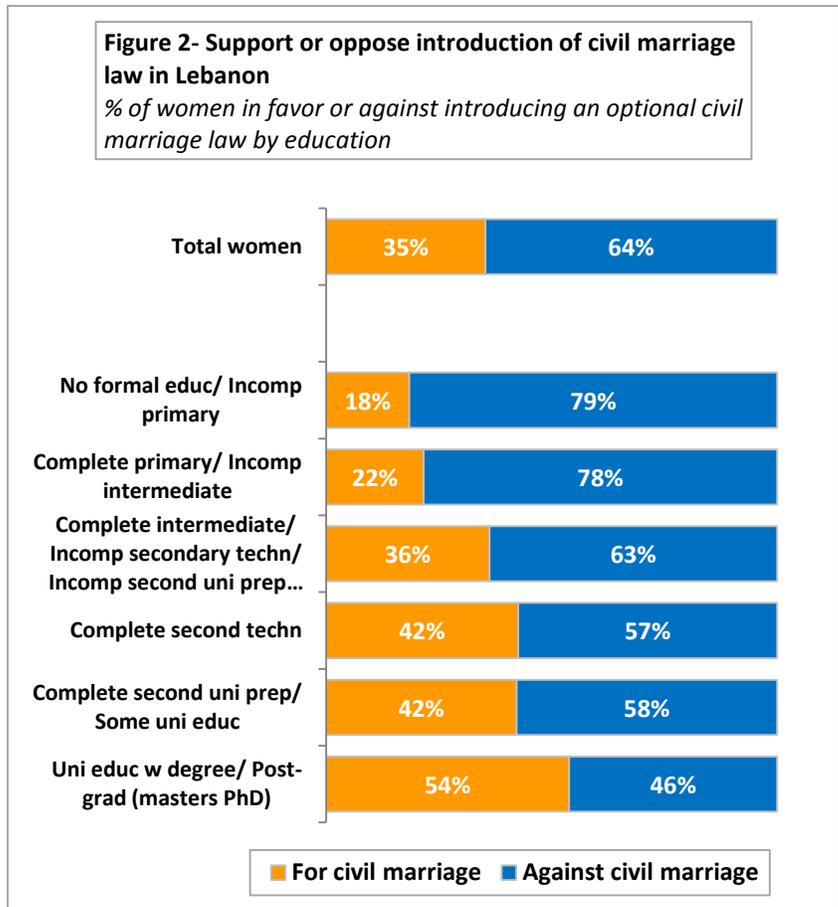
### Opinions on Introducing a Civil Marriage Law in Lebanon

The introduction of a civil marriage law in Lebanon is considered to be a much-needed reform that would make laws governing marriage and family more favorable towards women. Currently, personal status laws in Lebanon are governed by different religious provisions, with each sectarian group having its own set of laws that are mostly patriarchal in nature. Survey data shows that majorities of both men and women are opposed to the introduction of civil marriage in Lebanon.

- When asked if they supported the introduction of an optional civil marriage law in Lebanon, more women (64%) than men (56%) said they opposed it (Figure 1).
- The gender split on this issue is not as significant as differences in opinions that are due to respondents’ sectarian identities. Certain religious sects in Lebanon oppose civil marriage more than others: at least seven in 10 Muslim Sunnis and Muslim Shias oppose civil marriage regardless of gender.
- Christians are more in favor of adopting an optional civil marriage law with a slim majority of women (55%) supporting it and 63% of men also in favor. This may be due to the difficulty of obtaining a divorce especially among Catholics who tend to change their sect to be able to get an easy divorce. Among the Druze sect, a majority of women oppose the law, and men are split 50-50.



- The data suggests that as women’s education levels increase, support for civil marriage increases as well. In fact, only those who have completed a university education or post-graduate studies have a majority support (54%) for the introduction of a civil marriage law. All those who have less than a university education oppose the introduction of a civil marriage law thinking that Lebanon should not introduce any form of civil marriage and must maintain marriage laws as they are (Figure 2). For those with no formal education or incomplete primary education, support for civil marriage is lowest (18%). This may be showing that as education levels increase, women become more aware of what rights a civil marriage guarantees for women and thus become more supportive of such a law.



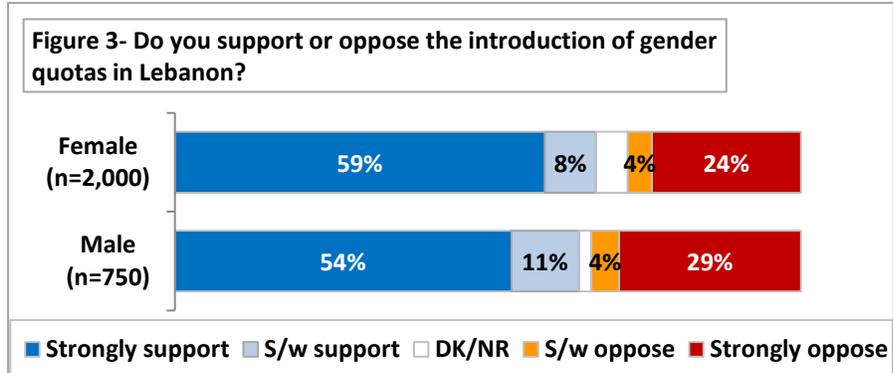
- The same relationship holds for surveyed men: men who are highly educated express more support for civil marriage than those who are less educated. Yet among men, there is a majority support for civil marriage starting from those who have a completed secondary technical education. The level of support for civil marriage among the highest educated (completed university education or higher) stands at 58%, higher than the level of support among women with a similar education level (54%).
- When comparing women who are interested in matters of politics and government to those who are not, we find that support for civil marriage is higher among women who are very or somewhat interested (40%) in politics compared to those who are not too interested or not interested at all (30%) but their support remains short of a majority. This is perhaps a reflection that women who show a high interest in politics are ridding themselves from the roles traditionally drawn for them by society, including religious ones, which may explain their support for a non-religious form of marriage.
- Similarly, women who are active in civic organizations demonstrate a higher level of support for civil marriage than those who are less civically active. Nearly 51% of women who report being members of 3 organizations or more support the introduction of a civil marriage law. Those who are not members of any organization show a very low level of support (only 31%).
- Similarly, women who report taking part in different activities over the past 12 months (such as participating in protests, contacting a public official, etc...) to express their views are more likely to support the introduction of

civil marriage than those who do not. Fifty-two percent of women who have done three different activities to express their views support the introduction of civil marriage compared with only 32% among those who have not taken part in any activity over the past 12 months.

## Opinions on Introducing Gender Quotas in Lebanon

Another possible law reform that we surveyed is the introduction of gender quotas. Currently, the representation of women in the newly elected 2009 parliament is at an abysmal rate of 3.25%, this is down from an already low 4.68% rate in 2005. The representation of women in local municipalities is even more limited, standing at a tiny 2%. When we asked people if they supported the introduction of gender quotas in elected bodies in Lebanon, the findings were favorable.

- Over two-thirds of Lebanese women (67%) support the introduction of gender quotas in parliament. Slightly fewer men (65%) support them but still the proportions are quite similar (Figure 3).
- Of those women who oppose quotas, half believe quotas are unfair as they are against the principal of equal opportunity (Figure 4). Ten percent think politicians should be elected based on qualifications not sex, and 5% believe women are less qualified than men.
- Other cited reasons fall more into a stereotypical view of women's roles in society: 18% oppose quotas because they think women have no place in politics and 8% believe a woman's place is at home (Figure 4).
- The top three reasons cited by women for



**Figure 4- Top five reasons for opposing quotas**  
(% out of women who oppose them n=554)

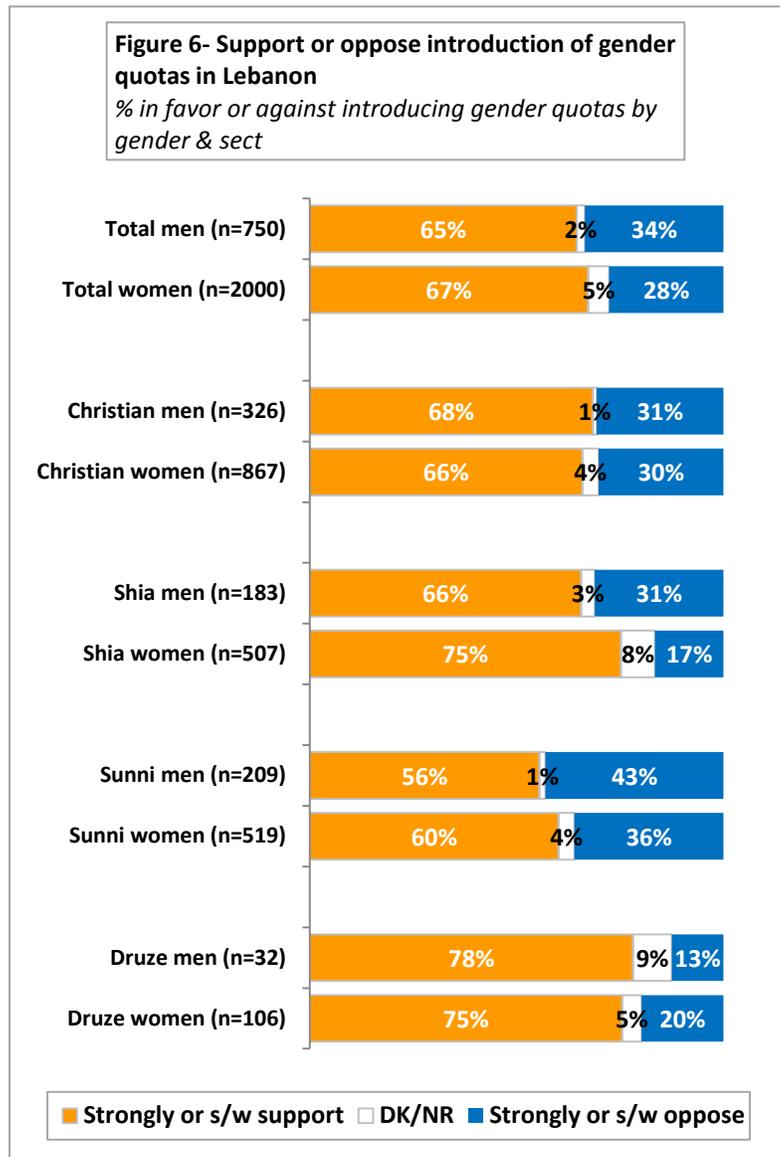
Reason	% of cases
Quotas are unfair, against the principle of equal opportunity	50%
Because women have no place in politics	18%
Because it means that politicians get elected based on sex not qualifications	10%
Because a woman's place is at home	8%
Because women are less qualified/ less educated than men	5%

**Figure 5- Top five reasons for supporting quotas**  
(% out of women who support them n= 1,345)

Reason	% of cases
Because women should have the same rights as men	45%
Because women should have a role in political life	29%
Because women are just as qualified/educated as men	26%
Because elected bodies should represent major social groups in society/ Women are half the population and should be represented	16%
Because women are better at representing women's needs/demands	8%

supporting quotas are the belief that women should have the same rights as men (45%), that women should have a role in political life (29%), and that women are just as qualified and as educated as men (26%) (Figure 5).

- Looking at opinions on the introduction of gender quotas by sect (Figure 6), we find that the level of support is highest among Druze and Shia women, with 75% of them supporting gender quotas compared with a 66% support among Christian women and 60% among Sunni women. This may be a reflection of the lack of representation of Shia and Druze women in parliament and their low levels of representation on municipal councils. It must be mentioned, however, that since the notion of gender quotas is somewhat complex, at least 4% of women in each sect said they either don't know or refused to answer. Among Shia women, the percentage of women who did not know or refused was at an even higher level (8%).
- Among men, the highest level of support for gender quotas is among the Druze (78%), yet it must be cautioned that the sample of Druze men is too small to allow reliable inferences. Meanwhile, 68% of Christian men support gender quotas, compared with 66% of Shia men and 56% of Sunni men.
- Overall, while the majority of women and men of all sects support the introduction of gender quotas in Lebanon, Sunni men and women have the lowest level of support when compared to other sects.
- Unlike opinions on the civil marriage law, opinions on gender quotas are not sensitive to education levels. While women with a partial or complete university education have a slightly higher level of support for the introduction of gender quotas than women who are less educated, the difference is not statistically significant.
- Not surprisingly, women who have expressed an interest in matters of politics and government are more likely to be in favor of introducing gender quotas than women who are not interested in these matters (73% vs. 60% respectively).



## Opinions on Reforming the Citizenship Law in Lebanon

One piece of law reform that civil society groups in Lebanon have been actively trying to push is related to the citizenship law. According to the Lebanese law, the Lebanese nationality is only passed by the father with only a few applicable exceptions. As such, Lebanese women who are married to foreign men are prohibited by the current citizenship law from passing their nationality to their family members while the same law allows Lebanese men who are married to foreign women to automatically transfer their nationality to their spouses and children. In the SWMENA survey, we asked respondents if they supported keeping the citizenship law as it is or if they supported changing the law to allow Lebanese women to pass their nationality just as men do. Survey results suggest that there is an overwhelming public support for reforming the citizenship law.

- At least eight in 10 women (82%) support reforming the citizenship law to allow Lebanese women to be able to pass their nationality to their spouses and children. While a large majority of men (73%) also support changing the law, the level of support is less pronounced than among women. Indeed, over a quarter of Lebanese men would like to keep the citizenship law as it is while 18% of women maintain a similar position.
- While a large majority of women from each sect supports reforming the citizenship law to allow Lebanese women to pass their nationality, Christian women stand out as being mostly supportive of this law reform with 86% saying they would like to change the law, compared with 80% of Druze women, 79% of Shia women and 78% of Sunni women (Figure 8).
- When performing a similar breakdown of these results by men of different sects, we do not observe a statistically significant difference between them on their opinions towards the citizenship law in Lebanon.

