



WOMEN'S FREEDOM IN FOCUS: MOROCCO

**FINDINGS FROM JANUARY 2004 FOCUS GROUPS WITH
MOROCCAN CITIZENS ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A set of nationwide focus groups with Moroccan citizens conducted by Freedom House in January 2004 conveys important insights about popular attitudes on women's economic, social, political, and legal rights. Aimed at gaining a deeper appreciation for the openings and challenges to advancing the cause of women's rights and freedom, this set of focus groups is one component of Freedom House's Survey of Women's Freedom in the Middle East and North Africa, a project to facilitate and support national and international efforts to empower women in the Middle East and North Africa.

Key findings from the research include:

- **A general sense of women's progress in Morocco.** More than three quarters of the focus group participants—men and women alike—say things have improved for Moroccan women in recent years. Rural views on women's freedom are less progressive than in urban areas, with rural participants depicting a direr living situation where women's freedom is subject to additional constraints.
- **Education and jobs for women seen as key factors contributing to progress and change.** Focus group participants describe efforts to increase the quality of women's education and women's increasing presence in the workplace as two of the most important factors contributing to changes in the status of Moroccan women.
- **Broad support for women's educational rights.** Participants broadly support women's educational rights—among the broad range of issues probed in the focus groups, a woman's right to education has the most popular support. One rationale for the strong support is grounded in the traditional view of women as the center of the family—several participants say that educated women will be better at raising their children. Participants also note that educated women understand their rights better and have better employment opportunities than lesser-educated women.
- **Changing views on women's right to work.** Economic necessity is one factor leading to changes in popular views on women in the work force—several participants say the rising cost of living requires two incomes. In addition to providing more financial security and independence, several participants note that working women receive greater respect and have more of a voice in their families because they are contributing financial support.

- **Broad support for women’s political rights.** Focus group participants express strong support for women’s political rights in response to questions about whether women have the right to participate in political discussions, vote, and run for office. Some, however, express the view that women are not suited for serving in certain senior leadership positions in government, such as prime minister, saying that women’s traditional responsibilities in the family would prevent them from doing the job. Also, some participants express views that women are too sensitive and emotional to handle these positions. In cases where participants can point to concrete examples of a woman serving in a particular position such as Member of Parliament, advisor to the king, or minister, there are fewer questions about whether a woman can capably serve in that position.
- **Divided views on women’s family and social rights.** Focus group participants are sharply divided over recent reforms to Morocco’s Family Status law, or Moudawana.¹ Some praise the reforms as a positive sign of progress in Morocco, while others brand the reforms as antithetical to Islam, saying that international organizations like the World Bank have forced these reforms on Morocco. Several focus group participants also question whether these reforms will be implemented properly.
- **Questions about women’s legal rights and access to justice.** When asked about implementation and execution of existing laws, several focus group participants question whether women’s legal rights are respected and whether they have equal access to justice. In the discussion on legal rights, both men and women raise concerns about abuse, harassment, and violence against women.
- **Islam strongly informs views on women’s rights.** Focus group participants’ understanding of Islam strongly informs their views on women’s freedom. The values system of ordinary Moroccans remains strongly informed by the rich and deep traditions of the Muslim faith, and there is a diversity of views on how to apply the principles of Islam to today’s realities. In discussing the evolving role and status of women in Morocco, participants reference Islamic sources in arguments opposing change, as well as in arguments favoring change.

¹ In Arabic, “Moudawana” translated literally can mean any particular code of law; in this report, when the term “Moudawana” is used, it refers specifically to the revised Family Status Code in Morocco passed by the government in February 2004, reflecting the term ordinary Moroccans use when discussing this new Family Status Code.

VIEWS ON THE OVERALL STATUS OF MOROCCAN WOMEN

General Outlook on Overall Situation in Morocco

The starting point for examining ordinary Moroccans' attitudes on women's freedom is a brief examination of the general mood of the country. The national mindset on developments in the country is mixed, with a general sense of progress among all participants tempered by serious concerns about unemployment, the rising cost of living, corruption, and threats to personal security. Younger Moroccans, particularly those living in cities, speak of progress, change, and investments in economy and information technology.

A number of young men in Fez say that the country is going in the right direction because of free market policies, globalization, trade, and privatization. Several young men in Rabat praise the investments made in tourism, saying that this will eventually help create jobs and reduce the need for illegal emigration. One younger unmarried woman in Fez says that things in Morocco are getting better because of open market policies and interaction with the European Community.

Underneath this overarching sense of progress and hope, which is much stronger in the cities than in rural areas, are a number of deep concerns connected to economic status and quality of life. This research offers signs of two separate Moroccos drifting apart. One is a Morocco where people have access to educational opportunities and information about the world with which their country is increasingly connected. The second Morocco is more rural, disconnected from the rest of the country, and mired in illiteracy, unemployment, and a lack of basic services.

First and foremost, Moroccans worry about getting a job; several participants ask what is the point of getting an education if graduates end up sitting at home with no jobs. One younger man in Fez says, "Unemployment is the heart of the problem" in Morocco.

Several participants say the government is at fault for the unemployment—it does not properly train people in its schools for the work force, and it does not offer enough incentives to people to start new businesses. Coupled with concern about unemployment are worries about the cost of living rising out of control. A number of participants also say that Morocco has a housing problem, and they link these three issues—unemployment, the rising cost of living, and inadequate housing—to corruption in the state and private sectors.

Participants talk about bribing government officials to get a housing permit and greasing the palms of company officials to secure a job. They also discuss having to pay bribes in schools and hospitals, offering signs that corruption is an endemic problem in several sectors.

Outside of these core economic concerns, Moroccans express some fears about a deteriorating security situation, with comments mostly focused on street crime rather than terrorist acts by extremists. The terrorist bombings in May 2003 in Casablanca have not led to widespread fear about the possibility of future terrorist attacks. Few participants raise terrorism as a major concern, and the handful of participants who mention terrorism generally give the authorities good marks for what it has done in response to the Casablanca attack. The focus is instead on the most common violent crimes, which several participants say hurt more women than men.

Overall, rural participants are much more negative in their general outlook than their counterparts in the cities, with older women who recently arrived in Fez from rural areas having the most negative outlook. One older woman who recently arrived in Fez says, “I don’t like anything about Morocco. I am so miserable. I live so miserably.” In the rural areas, the lack of jobs, educational opportunities, access to health care, and basic services like electricity and water seemingly has the effect of preempting any discussion on the rights of women. In the dire living circumstances experienced by many rural participants and a few of these women who recently moved to the city, “women’s issues” are not unlike “men’s issues,” and they are centered around the most basic issue of subsistence.

“Our life is really so bad, and we suffer from many things. Even if we women have all of those rights, we would still be suffering.” [Rural Berber women, ages 30-44, towns of Abadou]

“So you asked me to talk about something that concerns me as a woman, and this is it—I want a house. That’s my problem. Because of this house I don’t have. No water, no electricity, the cold, the medicine, the medicine, that’s why we are begging our beloved king. God bless him again and again. We are living in civilization, we are living in the city, and we are worse than the people in the countryside.” [Newly urban women, ages 45-65, Fez]

General Sense of Progress for Women

The overall sense among ordinary Moroccans is that the situation for women has improved in recent years. More than three quarters of the focus group participants say that things have improved for women, with younger and female participants having a slightly more optimistic outlook than their older and male counterparts.

Participants note a broader acceptance of women’s rights as compared to the past, and several attribute the changes to public investments in women’s education and women’s growing awareness of their rights. Even among the more pessimistic rural participants, there

is a sense of progress. The perception is that women have fewer restrictions placed on them than in the past.

“Things have changed because women have changed. Women are educated and more aware. They have raised their consciousness. Think about the past, when they were staying at home. They were illiterate and ruled by husbands, now they rule themselves.” [Married urban women, ages 18-24, Rabat]

“Women have more freedom than before. Women today plant the crops, and they guard the cattle. In the past, women wouldn’t go to the field. They were always locked in houses. Now they are outside.” [Rural Berber men, ages 45-65, towns of Ait Ourir]

“Now if a woman wants to visit her family or her brothers, she can. A woman can also travel, and the husband does not object. In the old days, women could not leave the house without taking permission from their husbands.” [Married rural Berber women, ages 18-29, towns of Ait Ourir]

“Even though we are complaining about the husband’s authority, at least we are here at this session, together. Our husbands are more tolerant. But in the old days, women couldn’t go out of the house. Women were just like things, like pieces of furniture in the house. We have a little bit more freedom than before.” [Married rural Berber women, ages 18-29, towns of Ait Ourir]

“Now today’s women are not like the women in the past, because in the past their minds were not open and we weren’t open to women’s rights. But now even rural women watch television, and they are more aware and they know their rights.” [Newly urban men, ages 18-29, Fez]

Some Credit the King for Women’s Progress, Others Note the work of NGOs

Participants provide several reasons for these advancements in the status of women, including increased educational opportunities for women and the increased presence of women in the work force—discussed in greater detail below. King Mohammed VI garners some of the credit for women’s progress. One younger unmarried woman in Fez says the fact that the king has chosen a female advisor demonstrates that women are becoming equal. However, most comments on the king’s contributions to advancements for women center on his high-profile involvement in advocating changes to the Moudawana.

“I think that if the king keeps on doing what he is doing, things are going to be better for women.” [Urban women, ages 30-44, Rabat]

“Now women are conscious of their rights. They are no longer silent, now they can ask for their rights. Their condition in the workplace is better, and the Moudawana is making it better.” [Urban women, Ages 30-44, Rabat]

“In the old days, a bride would not visit her family until a year after she was married. She would stay with her husband for a whole year. I mean here, in the countryside. Now it’s different, a bride can visit her family three days after her wedding, if she wants to. Today, women have more rights than women in the past. Now our King Mohammed VI, God bless him, has granted women their rights at home and at work, unlike women in the past. Praise God.” [Rural Berber women, ages 30-44, towns of Abadou]

In addition to the reforms driven from the top down, ordinary Moroccans also give credit to non-governmental organizations for enhancing the status of women in Morocco. Men and women alike in the focus groups generally have positive things to say about the role of non-governmental organizations in enhancing the status of women in Morocco by providing them jobs and skill-building opportunities such as in weaving associations.

Calls for “Responsible” Freedom

Increased freedoms for women are not without controversy. Particularly among men and some older women, there is worry that young women interpret freedom as a license to do whatever they want to do without thinking of the implications of their actions. They worry about the implications that this has on Moroccan society. Some men, in particular, express concern that women in Morocco might not be “ready” for all of these rights—a handful of men say that nowadays women have more rights than men.

“Women take freedom as doing what you want to do, so society has become immoral.” [Newly urban men, ages 18-29, Fez]

“This is one thing we haven’t talked about before—freedom. Women should understand freedom in its true meaning... There are some girls or women in general who understand freedom in a different way, who think that freedom is to do whatever they want, like free to go out when they want to and come back whenever they want to. So for them, freedom is just going astray. So women should understand freedom in its true sense. That is, freedom of women is knowing their rights and being able to rule their businesses, and to rule their families and to rule themselves.” [Urban women, ages 30-44, Rabat]

“There are women who exploit and take advantage of those rights. For example, if you want her to do something, and she might just oppose you. When you start arguing with her, she becomes furious with you and she talks about her rights and her laws, and showers the man with so many rights, with so much talking. What happens is that you just can’t talk to her anymore.” [Married urban men, ages 18-29, Fez]

Rural Berber Women Feeling Left Behind

Despite the general view that women have progressed in Morocco over the past few years, rural women in these focus groups offer a much more negative depiction of their status vis-à-vis men. Older women who recently moved from the rural areas to the city of Fez have the most pessimistic outlook on the general situation and the status of women, with one of these women saying, “Most women have gotten better, except for us.” These recent arrivals to the city—as well as the Berber women from rural communities in Morocco’s High Atlas Mountains—offer a much more negative view of the status of women. Their discussions are focused on the most basic rights, such as the right to go outside of the home when they choose to. Social forces, most prominently the men in their lives, rather than government laws and practices seem to be the main inhibitor of these rural and formerly rural women’s freedoms. Some of these women describe a situation in which they feel trapped.

“Women have no rights—they have no rights. For example, if a woman is working as a maid, what rights does she have? Is she going to take the guy she is working for to court? Women have no rights, we can’t do anything.” [Newly urban women, ages 45-65, Fez]

“A woman shouldn’t go to the market; only children can go to the market. But when you send your child to the market, he doesn’t know how to choose the vegetables. We wish we could go to the market.” [Rural Berber women, ages 30-44, towns of Abadou]

“Men and women are different in many ways. If you want to go out, the man would not let you go out. You always need to get his approval.” [Married rural Berber women, ages 18-29, towns of Ait Ourir]

“We always have to wait for the husband. If anything is lacking at home, we have to wait for the husband. Men always have more authority than women. If her husband is bad and beats her, she can’t even leave the house. If she goes outside of the house, [can you imagine] what is going to happen to her?” [Married rural Berber women, ages 18-29, towns of Ait Ourir]

Several rural women say that they prefer to remain in a bad marriage because of the social stigma that often accompanies divorces, and one woman says that women try to have a lot of children as a tactic to prevent a divorce.

A few of the men in the rural regions confirm this situation of women being subordinate to men’s wishes on most basic matters. One middle-aged Berber man from the towns of Abadou says, “Now we see that women today travel all by themselves, and this is not part of our tradition. A woman shouldn’t travel all by herself, and she shouldn’t wear these clothes. This is not part of our traditions.” A handful of other men in the rural regions express dismay that men and women are becoming more and more similar, including in terms of clothing and haircuts. For these men, the change in the status of women is disconcerting, upsetting their way of life as they have always understood it.

STRONG SUPPORT FOR WOMEN'S EDUCATION

Focus group participants see increased educational opportunity for women as one of the strongest forces contributing to increased women's freedom and prosperity in Morocco.

Out of all of the rights examined in the research, a woman's right to education enjoys the strongest support among ordinary Moroccans. Participants believe that boys and girls should have the same access to education—many see education as a vital necessity in today's world, and very few agree with arguments that say that it is more practical to focus on boys' education rather than girls'. When asked to choose the two most important rights and concerns for women from a list of eight, encompassing economic rights, social and family rights, and the right to participate in politics, the right to education was a leading response in eight of the twelve focus groups. One rural Berber woman says that she wants to get an education before she gets electricity.

Ordinary Moroccans see getting an education as the first basic step toward gaining a sense of worth and value. Several rural Berber women denigrate themselves for being illiterate, calling themselves “cows” and “zeros” for not being able to read. Other Moroccans see education as the basis for everything in society.

“These days everything is based on education. If you aren't educated, you don't exist.” [Newly urban men, ages 18-29, Fez]

“I wish we could have literacy programs here so we could understand everything when we go somewhere. Now, we don't know everything. We are like cows because we don't know anything. No one shows us anything.” [Rural Berber women, ages 30-44, towns of Abadou]

“We are zeros because we weren't educated. We want our children to be better educated, so they could be better and have a better life.” [Married rural Berber women, ages 18-29, towns of Ait Ourir]

“If I were educated, I would know how to talk to you. I don't know how to talk to you. I would know how to talk. I really thank you. You were really patient with us. We don't know how to talk with you because we are not educated.” [Rural Berber women, ages 30-44, towns of Abadou]

When talking about the need for an education, most of the participants focus on the need to provide a basic level of skills—the ability to read and write, and perhaps skills to practice a particular craft. The focus group participants praise recent efforts in Morocco made to increase literacy and provide workers with skills such as embroidery. Several female participants say the reason why things have gotten better for women in Morocco is that

women have more opportunities to learn how to read and write. As one rural Berber woman says, “The percentage of educated people has risen. In the old days, a lot of women were not educated, but now, thank God, the state educates boys and girls. They both go to school. We have more schools in the mountains than before. Even when parents don’t want to send children, the state comes and forces them to go to school.” Despite the general view that education has improved, there is also consensus that more must be done to invest in education, particularly education for girls. Overall, participants provide three main reasons supporting increased educational opportunities for women: educated women are better raising children, they are more aware of their rights, and they have better employment opportunities.

1. Educated Women Are Better at Raising Children

One of the rationales provided by participants for their strong support for women’s education is solidly grounded in a traditional view of women’s role in Moroccan society as the center of the family, with the mother shouldering most of the responsibility for raising children. Women are seen as “future mothers,” and as such, participants view them as a lynchpin for fighting illiteracy in Morocco—a literate woman can help her children with their homework. This perspective is found in virtually all of the demographic groups included in this research project—men and women, young and old, rural and urban. This view is strong among the younger generations of Moroccans.

“Girls are the mothers of the future. If they are not educated, they would not raise their children properly.” [Unmarried urban women, ages 18-24, Fez]

“Here in Morocco we still have housewives. Women take care of the house and children, and that’s the hardest job to do. She needs to be educated to bring up her children. Children are important because they are the future of our country.” [Urban men, ages 30-44, Rabat]

“[A mother’s role in] raising children is important. She is the one who raises the children. She is the school of children. When they go to school and come home, she is the one who raises them at home. It’s the mother’s business. If they are good children, it’s because of the mother.” [Married urban women, ages 18-24, Rabat]

“Women all want to go to school. When women are educated, they are in charge of the homework of the children, and she becomes more aware and conscious of life.” [Rural Berber men, ages 30-44, towns of Abadou]

2. Educated Women Are Perceived as More Cognizant of Their Rights

Participants—both men and women—describe education as a vital basic first step towards creating greater equality between men and women. It is the key that opens the door to a woman being able to defend herself in court, get a job, and participate in politics. By

knowing how to read and write, a woman would be able to understand and sign legal documents, and she need not have the approval of her father or brother to get married or divorced, according to one middle-aged Berber woman from the rural Atlas region.

“Women who are educated have a say in everything. They go to court, they know how to defend themselves.” [Newly urban women, ages 45-65, Fez]

“Women are like men; when they are educated, they can understand it all.” [Rural Berber men, ages 45-65, towns of Abadou]

“Women have the right to be educated. If the husband is also educated, they would live very well. What I’m saying is that when a woman is not educated, she does not know how to ask for her rights. She can’t go to a court, and she can’t participate in politics. We need to educate everyone. I wish one hundred percent of population was literate.” [Newly urban men, ages 18-29, Fez]

“I think you should educate your children equally. If a woman goes to the government administration or the district office, she signs documents without reading them. Even in the political field, when you talk to uneducated women, they would say, ‘I don’t know’.” [Married urban women, ages 18-24, Rabat]

A few rural Berber men offer women’s lack of education as justification for not treating women equally in politics—one says he tells women how to vote because they “don’t know anything,” and another says that women should not serve in local government because “they don’t understand anything about elections.” Several participants say that a woman can serve in leading positions in government, but only “if she is educated.” There is almost an unrealistic idealization among the illiterate women in the focus groups about what an education would provide them.

Because educated women are perceived as having more power to defend their rights, it is not surprising that some Moroccan men perceive this as a threat. One younger man in Rabat complains about the effect that a literacy program had on his wife, saying “Now she thinks she has to have her say with her husband. Instead of asking for her rights, she wants to have authority over her husband.” Another young man in Rabat says that if a man marries an educated woman, he “won’t be able to control her, because she has her own education and way of thinking.”

3. Educated Women Have Better Chances of Getting Good Jobs

The third main reason cited for supporting women and education is connected to the workplace—several participants say that having a better education will increase a woman’s chance to get a good job. This sentiment is particularly strong among younger women living in cities and those who are more cognizant of the changes in Morocco’s economy.

CHANGING VIEWS ON WOMEN'S ECONOMIC RIGHTS

Ordinary Moroccans cite the increasing presence of Moroccan women in the workplace as one of the most important factors contributing to changes in the status of women.

Necessity seems to be a main impetus behind the growing presence of women in the workplace; participants, particularly those living in cities, say that the economic changes and rising cost of living require families to have two incomes. In this context, some men are inclined to accept women as co-breadwinners, rather than resent it. Unemployment among younger Moroccans may also increase the need for older women to enter the work force or stay working longer than they anticipated. For example, one widow in Rabat says that her children's problems in finding jobs have kept her working longer than she expected.

"Today's life is so expensive and a woman has to work to help her husband." [Married urban women, ages 18-24, Rabat]

"I think that today women should work because one income is not enough." [Urban men, ages 30-44, Rabat]

"I think that [a woman working] is a good thing—she can help me financially if she works. It will help take care of our children, and of course we all hope the best for our children. Also there are families with only widows, and she must take care of the children." [Married urban men, ages 18-29, Fez]

"Work shouldn't only be for women without husbands or widows. We are eight people in a shantytown. We work whether we want to or not. I was sick, and the doctor gave me aspirin and told me not to work. How could I not work? How could I buy the medicine without working? I really need the money." [Newly urban women, ages 45-65, Fez]

"The most important thing is work. If you work, you will find everything you need." [Rural Berber women, ages 30-44, towns of Abadou]

"When you look for a wife, you look for a working woman because cost of living is high." [Newly urban men, ages 18-29, Fez]

Ordinary Moroccans generally accept the notion that a woman can do the same job as a man if she has the same training and education—within certain limits. A handful of participants say that jobs requiring extreme physical exertion are an exception; as one younger woman in Rabat puts it, women and men are different when it comes to muscles, but not brains. Some

participants suggest that certain jobs—like teaching and nursing—are better careers for women; one younger woman in Rabat says that a woman can use her mothering instincts in those fields. Also, a few participants express reservations about the social acceptability of women taking certain jobs—a few older participants do not think it is good for women to work in restaurants, theaters, or as bus drivers. But overall, there is a strong sense that women need to work because of the changes in Morocco’s economy, and that women can do as good a job as men.

Perceptions of Discrimination in Hiring Against Men

Surprisingly, both women and men in the focus groups say that it is men who face more hiring discrimination in the workplace—they say that employers are more willing these days to hire a woman over a man. One rural Berber man from the High Atlas region southeast of Marrakesh says women have 95 percent of the jobs, and a younger married man in Fez says that the reason why women have more rights than men is that so many women are working and men cannot find a job.

The reasons cited for Moroccan employers’ preference for women over men, however, demonstrate that participants are not talking about equality of opportunity; participants maintain that employers choose women over men because women are willing to accept a lower wage and fewer benefits, perhaps because they are not perceived as the main breadwinners of families.

“A woman has more opportunities to work. Women accept lower wages because they have no responsibility for the bills like paying the doctor. Women only want to buy makeup.” [Married urban women, ages 18-24, Rabat]

“Women only want to work to get money for makeup, while men want to work to support their families. That’s why company owners want to hire them—they are cheaper labor.” [Urban men, ages 30-44, Rabat]

“More women work in those companies. It’s because women get half of what men get, but they work longer. For example, the boss would say, I would give women ten Dirhams and men twenty Dirhams.” [Rural Berber men, ages 45-65, towns of Ait Ourir]

“Too often, employers don’t give female employees everything they are entitled to, including medical insurance and social security.” [Married urban men, ages 18-29, Fez]

This situation leads several participants to call for measures to equalize pay and benefits for men and women in the workplace. At the same time, some call for special provisions to help women in the workplace without sacrificing home and family life, including shorter working hours for women, especially new mothers.

Jobs Provide Financial Freedom for Women

One of the main benefits women receive from a job is a degree of financial freedom from their families and husbands, something they lacked in the past. Some women see this as vital insurance and protection against things that might go wrong, including the breakup of their marriage.

“[Women working] is a good thing—because working women live better than women who don’t work. They have financial freedom, they can buy what they want, and they can go out of the house.”
[Urban women, ages 30-44, Rabat]

“A working woman is better than a housewife. I think the best protection for women is money. In the old days, women were protected by husbands, but in those old days, men had dignity and would take care of women. Now they don’t provide for their wives like they used to, and sometimes they will get a second wife. I think a professional career is the best protection for a woman.”
[Urban women, ages 30-44, Rabat]

“Women have it better today. In the old days, if the husband didn’t buy clothes for her, she didn’t have anything. She couldn’t get the money she wanted. Now she can work and get the money she wants, so she rules herself. Before women were so frightened, and women couldn’t leave the house without her husband’s approval.” [Newly urban women, ages 45-65, Fez]

Working Women Are Changing Power Balances in Moroccan Families

For many Moroccan women, the money and financial freedom provided by jobs is only part of the benefit derived from working. Both the men and women in these focus groups describe the impact that the increased presence of women in the work force has had on their families and Moroccan society, indicating that working women are one of the greatest catalysts for change in Morocco.

“My opinion is not heard because I’m a housewife, and I stay at home. I have to agree with him all the time.” [Married rural Berber women, ages 18-29, towns of Ait Ourir]

“We have heard a lot about rights of women, but those are women who are working.” [Married rural Berber women, ages 18-29, towns of Ait Ourir]

“When women work hard, they come back home, and they say things like, ‘I’m working too,’ and they have more power and authority at home.” [Newly urban unmarried men, ages 18-29, Fez]

“Working gives greater value to women, especially in the family. As far as a woman’s in-laws are concerned, a working woman is more respected. If the wife is working, the husband and his family will have more respect and value for her.” [Urban women, ages 18-24, Rabat]

“Men and women are equal, but why does this Muslim society allow men to have more power than women, and don’t respect women? Now they are both working, and they have income, and they should be more equal.” [Unmarried urban women, ages 18-24, Fez]

“If she is not working, she can’t say anything to her man. Men would never give all of the income to her. He would just take the money, go and gamble or have coffee, and she is so dependent on him. When she talks, he won’t hear her.” [Newly urban women, ages 45-65, Fez]

Rural women in these focus groups in particular see something as basic as going out of the house on a regular basis as a key right that is not always respected by their husbands or male relatives. For some women, these new experiences provided by a job have changed their whole perspective on life. As one middle-aged woman in Rabat says, “Now, we see that women have started to work, and they are more informed and have a wider perspective. The condition of women is a lot better now that they have started working.”

Several men and women in the focus groups describe the equalizing impact that a woman’s job has on internal family decision making and power dynamics, with participants saying that a working woman’s voice is more respected within the family than one who stays at home and raises the children. A number of female focus group participants who do not work say that their views are not as respected by their husbands and in-laws, and that they have fewer rights than women who work.

Nevertheless, several working women in the focus groups complain that they now face a “double burden”—one at work, and a second at home, and a number of the working women criticize their husbands for not helping pick up the slack with chores on the home front.

Reservations about Working Women in Morocco

Despite this relatively strong support for a woman’s right to work, Moroccans are deeply conflicted about what more women in the work force means for home and family life. Some express worries that more women working might destroy the basic fabric of Moroccan society by leading women to neglect what most Moroccans view as the primary role of women: taking care of the house and raising children. Men are more likely to express reservations, with rural Berber men in particular not as pleased with women entering the work force.

“When a woman works, her children are left unattended at home, and the shame is all hers. A woman must stay at home, and a man must work outside.” [Rural Berber men, ages 30-44, towns of Abadou]

“Now things are better for women, because there are some women who go to work while their men stay at home. Some go to work and leave their husbands with their children, and they dictate their will to their husbands. I have seen them with my own eyes!” [Rural Berber men, ages 45-65, towns of Ait Ourir]

“A woman should not have authority over a man. If a woman starts working and gets more money than her husband, she feels like she can have more authority than her husband.” [Married urban men, ages 18-29, Fez]

“I wouldn’t have gotten married if I knew my wife wanted to work. I need my lunch ready, and my clothes clean.” [Married urban men, ages 18-29, Fez]

“If she is working, who is going to raise the children? The nursery or the kindergarten? This is not raising children. Children need tenderness. This is not raising children. There is no comparison between mother’s arms and a kindergarten.” [Urban men, ages 18-29, Rabat]

However, the need for two incomes to help their families make ends meet in a time of economic change and increased costs of living tends to override these concerns about women having more power than men for most male focus group participants. Economic necessity seems to be causing a growing, yet still begrudged, acceptance of women’s right to work among men. The default position for many women and men in Morocco seems to be that it would be preferable if women could stay home, because women are perceived as the glue that binds families together. A younger woman in Rabat says that women are the “center of the family,” and without them, there is no family.

Few Questions on Women’s Rights to Own Property; Concerns about Inheritance

Ordinary Moroccans raise few questions or objections to a woman’s right to independently own and manage property and businesses—numerous participants say that Islam provides women with strong rights to own and manage her property independently, and participants claim that these rights are supported in Morocco’s laws and practices. Some participants say that societal traditions place constraints on women’s property rights in certain parts of the country, particularly in the rural southern part of Morocco, but no one argues that these traditions and practices are in any way justified.

Matters of inheritance, however, are a different story. When participants are asked about whether women should have equal inheritance rights, “equal” is not the main concern, but rather what the religion of Islam says. One younger man in Fez says, “I don’t want to talk about this, because God has settled it for us.” Others say it is not a matter for people to debate, with several participants making reference to the religion when talking about inheritance.

“Religiously speaking, the creed is clear. It is a percentage that’s imposed by religion. There is a third that could be given, not as inheritance, but more like a gift, or as a present. Those are the types of things that we can manipulate, but we cannot play with the doctrine.” [Urban women, ages 18-24, Rabat]

“Islam offers a clear message. It is clear and doesn’t require any interpretation. We talk about inheritance. We shouldn’t change the inheritance laws just so women could get an equal share. If we want to change that, we are going to change religion and doctrine; I think this should not happen.” [Unmarried urban women, ages 18-24, Fez]

“Our constitution is the Quran. We must follow the Quran. What she gets is more than enough. There is nothing apart from what God has given her.” [Rural Berber men, ages 45-65, towns of Ait Ourir]

BROAD SUPPORT FOR WOMEN'S POLITICAL RIGHTS

Focus group participants express strong support for women's political rights in response to questions about whether women have the right to participate in political discussions, vote, and run for office. Even participants with the most traditional and conservative outlook on the status and role of women in Morocco express few reservations about women working in politics and government. Morocco's policy of including women in politics and ensuring their rights to vote, as well as its recent attempts to include women in senior leadership positions in the government, has led to broad support for women's political rights.

Views on Democracy in Morocco: Mixture of Hope and Growing Skepticism

In the context of discussions about women's political rights, ordinary Moroccans express mixed feelings about the attempts to expand democracy in Morocco. Most participants make note of recent openings and developments on democracy, connecting it with the limited progress Morocco has seen on the economic and educational fronts.

A democratic process has begun, but much more work is needed, and people need more information about democracy. As one young man in Fez says, "Before we didn't hear about democracy, and now we hear more about it." Another young man in Fez says, "As far as democracy is concerned in our society, we don't know what democracy is. It is a concept that is alien to Moroccan society. What is democracy? The notion of democracy is not known in our country." Several other participants note that the transition of power to a new king and to a new generation might create an opportunity for more democratic political change in the country.

There are hints of a growing skepticism about how this limited democracy is practiced, especially in the rural areas and among the poorer voters. Several ordinary Moroccans describe elections as a process where they only hear empty promises from the candidates; like in many other democracies—both emerging and established – the lack of delivery on these election promises causes greater distrust and doubts about these leaders and the democratic process overall.

"During the elections, all of those people come and promise to build these things and promise they are going to change our lives. Once those elections are over, they just leave us and go away."
[Newly urban women, ages 45-65, Fez]

"All of those people come and give us all kind of promises, and as soon as they are elected they disappear." [Rural Berber men, ages 30-44, towns of Abadou]

“There was this woman... She came to us, and she was nice to me, and I was nice to her. She listened to me. I’m telling you the truth. We hugged her, and she hugged us. She came to us, saw where we lived, and saw our ordeal. She said, “Be sure, it is all going to change.” And where is she now? She’s in Rabat. She’s very rich. Go to her and tell her this message, from the women who come every day to Dar Shabab, go tell her this. She told us, it will be fine and I’m going to do everything for you. We are going to see God before we see her.” [Newly urban women, ages 45-65, Fez]

“The candidate said vote for me, we’re going to do so much for you, and the rain comes through the roof in the house, on the candles. He won the office, but what does he do? He sends his son abroad for school, and my son is twenty-one and wants a job, and he can’t find one. All he does is roam all over the city. My husband is seventy years old. We are lost in general, we are lost in everything, we are lost. If I want to go the market, we can’t buy anything. We have no house, no job, no electricity and no job.” [Newly urban women, ages 45-65, Fez]

The growing skepticism about the current state of affairs in politics and government, though, actually leads some of the men in the focus groups to argue that perhaps getting more women involved in top positions in government might be the solution to the problems. A rural Berber man from the towns of Ait Ourir says that since everyone in government has failed so far, Morocco should try to have more women as a “sort of experiment.” Similarly, a younger married man from Fez says that perhaps female ministers will be better than the male ministers who have not been able to do much for the country.

Views on the Impact of Including Moroccan Women in Politics

Unlike a handful of countries in the Middle East that legally prohibit women’s participation in politics, Morocco has included women in its limited democratic political processes. Moroccan women remain underrepresented in key positions in politics and government and still suffer from bias and discrimination in politics, but ordinary Moroccans broadly support women’s rights to participate in Morocco’s politics.

Some focus group participants say education is vital to women’s political participation. When asked if women can participate in politics, vote, and run for office, a common response among participants is “if she is educated.” Other participants connect women’s political participation to the second right covered above—women’s right to work. One younger woman in Rabat says, “If a woman works, then she is supposed to be present in political life as well.” Participants view education and work for women as facilitating and in part justifying their participation in politics, but few say that a woman must have an education and a job as a necessary condition or ticket to enter into Morocco’s limited democratic political processes.

General Acceptance of Women as Leaders, With Some Reservations

The increased presence of women in Morocco's politics, Parliament, and government has contributed to a fairly broad acceptance of the notion that women can play a key role in Morocco's political life. Participants offer concrete examples of women serving at important levels of government: Secretary of State for the Family, Solidarity, and Social Action Yasmina Baddou; Minister Nezha Chekrouni; and the king's advisor, Zouleikha Naciri, form a triumvirate of prominent women in Moroccan politics.

Even rural Berber men, the group least open to changes in the status and role of women overall, express few objections about women running as candidates and serving as leaders. Some of these men put a stronger emphasis on a woman being educated before she becomes a leader, but the dominant view even in this most conservative demographic group is expressed by one older man from the towns of Ait Ourir: "It is natural for women to be candidates."

There are differences of opinion about whether women can serve in the highest positions in government; for example, several ordinary Moroccans have more questions about whether a woman could serve capably as a prime minister. In discussing women in leadership positions, a number of conflicting stereotypes about women emerge. On the one hand, some participants describe women as harder working; more helpful, caring, trustworthy; and less corruptible than men. On the other hand, other participants describe women as too sensitive, irrationally emotional, weak, and passive. These stereotypes cut across gender, class, and regional lines. Some women say that women are too weak to serve in top positions like Minister of Interior; some men say that a woman would be better than a man as a leader because she would be less likely to accept bribes, and she would be less selfish and egotistical than a man.

However, despite these conflicting views on women's capacity to serve as leaders, one interesting common point emerges as focus group participants are asked whether women could capably serve in a range of government positions: if participants can point to concrete examples of women serving in the position, then there is general acceptance that women could capably serve in that position.

Focus group participants express broader acceptance of women serving in positions where they are already present and express more doubts about a woman's capacity to serve in positions where women have not served. For example, the focus group participants broadly accept the idea that women could serve as capably as men on local government councils, and the common response was that women are already doing this. This was also the response to questions about whether women can serve as members of parliament, ministers, and advisors to the king—women are already there, and they can do these jobs.

But in the positions where women have never served in Morocco—as mayors and as prime minister—focus group participants are somewhat more divided over whether a woman can capably serve. Some participants agree that women could capably serve in these positions. They ask why, if she does a good job as a member representing part of the city, she should

be prevented from representing the entire city as mayor, and why if she is a good minister, she should not be allowed to be prime minister. Other participants disagree, offering a variety of reasons why a woman could not do a job such as mayor or prime minister—that these top leadership positions require a man’s strong personality. Still others maintain that women could capably serve in these positions as long as she was available and had a flexible schedule—in the conception of these participants, a married woman with a family would not fit the bill because of her primary duties at home.

Despite the fact that women have served as judges in Morocco for years, a handful of male and female participants believe that women would not be fair or impartial enough to serve as a judge.

“Because women are very weak. In the movies, there are some judges who are easily influenced by their family members. Women are weak and emotional, and they may be influenced by tears and emotions.” [Married urban women, ages 18-24, Rabat]

“I think that women can’t be judges. Because the Prophet said that women have weaker minds, and so they shouldn’t be judges.” [Newly urban men, ages 18-29, Fez]

“If we want to follow the Quran, she should not be a judge. But if we want to get rid of the Quran, then maybe she can be a judge.” [Rural Berber men, ages 45-65, towns of Ait Ourir]

DIVISIONS OVER WOMEN'S FAMILY AND SOCIAL RIGHTS

One issue that has emerged as a profoundly important topic in Moroccan political life is the Moudawana, a set reforms aimed at improving the status of women in the country. Formally introduced by King Muhammad VI in late 2003 and passed into law in early February 2004 after this research was conducted, the new Family Status Code aims to give women and men equal authority in the family. These focus groups provide viewpoints from ordinary Moroccans on one of the most historic legal changes in Morocco.

Some of the specific provisions include giving women the right to get married without the consent of a male relative or authority figure; raising the minimum marriageable age for a woman from fifteen to eighteen; giving women the right to initiate a divorce and secure rights over property acquired during the marriage; requiring the consent of a man's first wife before he marries a second wife; and allowing grandchildren to inherit from their maternal grandfather.

Overall, the participants are generally positive about the new Family Status Code. But as with any major social reform, these changes are not without controversy. Changes to the law that participants perceive to directly address issues already covered by Islam and Sharia (Islamic law) cause the most debate and division.

General Awareness and Overall Views on the Changes to the Moudawana

Most focus group participants are aware of the revisions to the Moudawana, with younger and more educated participants generally better informed about the changes than their older and lesser educated counterparts. Out of all of the groups, women with lower educational attainment in both the rural and urban areas have the greatest difficulty understanding the Moudawana reforms.

Focus group participants living in rural areas have heard the least about it. Many of the men in the rural areas say that they have not heard about these changes, and only slightly more women in these areas say that they are aware of it. Those rural Berber women who say they have heard about the changes do not seem to be very informed about what they are. One middle-aged Berber woman from the towns of Ait Ourir says, "Because we are not educated, when I hear about things like the Moudawana, I just listen but I can't concentrate and understand." Another woman mistakenly calls it the "Moudawalla." A third middle-aged Berber woman from the towns of Ait Ourir, describing what she knows about the Moudawana, simply says, "I hear that women are like men. There's going to be a law that makes women like men."

On the whole, the focus group participants have a generally positive outlook on the changes to the Moudawana. Unprompted, several participants say that the Moudawana represents one of the things going in the right direction for Morocco; it is yet another manifestation of the limited progress Moroccans sense. It will help address problems that exist in Moroccan families, and according to a few participants, the changes will help erase negative perceptions that other countries might have about Morocco.

“This new Moudawana, the Moudawana for the woman, I think this is a very good thing. This is one of the best things, it can help Morocco progress. Even here in this area, we are living in circumstances that are not so good, but I think it will be better in Morocco because of this.” [Married rural Berber woman, ages 18-29, towns of Ait Ourir]

“The Moudawana is one of the best things happening now. Inside and outside of Morocco we are proud of it. The Moudawana shows that Morocco is taking care of women, family and children’s issues. Morocco is no longer put down because of women’s issues.” [Urban men, ages 30-44, Rabat]

“If we followed the king’s plan [for the Moudawana], we would have less divorce, less violence, and fewer children in the streets.” [Urban women, ages 30-44, Rabat]

“[The Moudawana] is going to be great because we are going to have fewer divorces.” [Urban men, ages 30-44, Rabat]

“Men before weren’t afraid of being bad to women; but I think now with this new Moudawana, they are going to think twice.” [Married rural Berber women, ages 19-29, towns of Ait Ourir]

Arguments Opposing Changes to Moudawana

Top-of-mind reactions to the overall changes to the Moudawana are not all positive. Some younger men dismiss its importance, with one younger urban man in Rabat saying that it is “just some silly stuff.” Though some participants say it will lead to fewer divorces, older Berber men from the towns of Ait Ourir and younger men in Rabat worry that the Moudawana will discourage people from getting married in the first place.

The most strident arguments opposing the general changes to the Moudawana are grounded in cultural and religious arguments. One younger man in Rabat blames international organizations such as the World Bank for the Moudawana, saying that they have “forced” Morocco to introduce this to “change our religion and change our culture.” Though it is not the dominant view, a handful of participants maintain that the changes to the Moudawana directly attack and seek to change Islam. A few participants—both men and women—say that according to Islam, women are necessarily subordinate to men and that attempts to equalize them in terms of rights contradict Islamic religious principles.

“This Moudawana is trying to change Islam—it is directly attacking Islam and putting it to the side, and this is not ijthad.”² [Newly urban men, ages 18-29, Fez]

“I like nothing about this new Moudawana. It is against our religion. If [the Quran] says that women should be subordinate to men, we should follow this. I mean, I know that women need their rights, but this new Moudawana needs to be balanced. I don’t like the fact that husbands are supposed to share their property with their wives—I think this is too exaggerated, because these things are not in our religion. If it is not in our Book, I don’t think that it should be in our laws.” [Urban women, ages 18-24, Rabat]

“I think that the new Moudawana is controversial. Some of it is adopted from the family code in France. If we think about the family code in France, it is not perfect, because their religion is different.” [Urban women, ages 18-24, Rabat]

“We are a Muslim country, thank God, and we follow the Islamic doctrine. Men have rights given to them by Islam. The Quran says that the man is responsible for the woman.” [Urban man, ages 18-29, Rabat]

“Women will never be equal to men. It says this in the Quran. Not because God preferred men to women, it’s just that women are more patient, shy, and emotional; men are more forceful than women.” [Urban women, ages 30-44, Rabat]

“I think that women have more rights than men. The new Moudawana grants more rights to women than men. A woman can get married by herself, and ask for half of the assets. I can’t believe that this is going to happen. What happens if I get married?” [Newly urban men, ages 18-29, Fez]

Again, these religiously and culturally based arguments against changes in the Moudawana do not seem to represent the dominant view of the focus group participants, and many of the comments above arguing that the Moudawana contradicts Islam are met with counterarguments from participants in the same groups. One younger man in Fez, a recent arrival to the city from rural regions of Morocco, says, “The Moudawana committee contains a lot of imams and religious scholars, so changes in the Moudawana have contributions from those scholars.”

General Support for Increasing Minimum Age of Marriage for Women

One of the changes to the Moudawana increases the minimum marriageable age from fifteen to eighteen. There is general consensus that girls at the age of fifteen are not physically or

² Ijthad is an Arabic word sometimes translated as “personal interpretation,” but it does not mean an overall reinterpretation of basic principles of the religion of Islam. In this case and throughout this report, ijthad refers to the dialogue among Muslims about how they understand and interpret the different sources of their religion. Sometimes defined as exegesis, ijthad is the process practiced to discover or deduce secondary divine laws or principles concerning everyday life.

mentally mature enough to handle pregnancy and raising children. As one unmarried urban woman in Fez says, “At the age of fifteen, she is just a child. All she can think of at marriage is the bridal dress, the henna night, and the wedding ceremony. After that she would see real life—responsibility and children.” A number of urban men, both in Rabat and Fez, want to raise the minimum marriageable age even higher than eighteen, saying that a woman does not have the ability to make the right choices on marriage at eighteen. One younger man in Fez says, “I know this woman who is nineteen, and she tells me that she wants to play and behave like a child. I think that at eighteen or nineteen, women are still teenagers and can’t get married on their own.”

There are a few rare objections to this new provision. One middle-aged woman in Rabat says that girls of fourteen and fifteen make better wives “because they are more submissive.” A middle-aged Berber man from the villages of Abadou says it is better for a girl to get married at an early age because the husband “can still raise her in his own way.” These two objections to this change represent an outlier opposition to a provision that generally receives broad support in the focus groups.

Positive Reactions to Granting the First Wife the Right to Refuse a Second Wife

Similarly, the amendment to the Moudawana requiring the consent of a man’s first wife before he marries a second wife generally receives broad support. Predictably, women more strongly support this provision than men, but the level of support seems relatively strong among both men and women. Some cite cases in the recent past when the first wife did not even know about the second wife, which led to many problems later on, including incestuous relationships between half-brothers and half-sisters who did not know each other.

The issue of polygamy itself is not strongly debated among ordinary Moroccans—there is general acceptance that polygamy is permissible, especially in the instances when a man’s wife is sick or might not be able to have children. Islam permits polygamy under very specific conditions, according to participants. Several women in the focus groups note that Islam allows a man to take more than one wife, and a few women state that this is acceptable under certain conditions—if the wife is sick or unable to have children, for example. The revision to require the first wife’s consent before her husband takes another woman as his wife does however lead to a debate over the practicality—rather than the permissibility—of polygamy in this day and age. A number of younger urban men say that one wife is more than enough. One younger married woman in Rabat says that unless his first wife is unable to have children, “he can dream on” about getting a second wife.

“Not many men can afford to have two or three wives nowadays. Very few can. It’s very rare today. Men today can’t even provide for one wife! If she has many children, like six or five or four, what are they going to eat?” [Rural Berber women, ages 30-44, towns of Abadou]

“I think if the woman is giving the man everything he needs, he should not think about a second wife.” [Newly urban men, ages 18-29, Fez]

*“I think there should be only one wife. We men don’t have enough energy for more than one.”
[Rural Berber men, ages 30-44, towns of Abadou]*

“It is a good thing if the first wife is fine with it. But tell me, where is this woman who would agree that her husband could get a second wife? The religion says that the man can do this, but what woman would accept this?” [Married urban women, ages 18-24, Rabat]

*“No, she shouldn’t give him the approval. If they can’t have children, then he can get married again, because human beings always want to have children. Why does he want to get married? Because he has a little more money? God gives him more money, and he wants to get another wife.”
[Newly urban women, ages 45-65, Fez]*

Measured Approval for Giving Women the Right to Initiate Divorce

Though some revisions to the Moudawana relating to divorce begin to tread on territory explicitly covered by the Quran and traditional Islamic doctrine, participants in the focus groups generally support the idea of requiring formal legal proceedings for a divorce and ensuring alimony and child support. Although a few participants worry that dishonest women might take advantage of this revision to steal a man’s money and then divorce him, the support for this new provision is fairly broad.

Opposition to Giving Women the Right to Marry Without Parental Approval

On the whole, focus group participants express opposition to the new change that allows women to get married without the consent of a male authority figure in her family. The main argument presented in opposition to this revision is that it would break down Moroccan family ties, which help bind and strengthen marriages. A handful of participants argue that allowing a woman to get married on her own goes against Islam, but the opposition to this clause is generally presented in family and social terms, rather than religious doctrine. Some say that this provision would serve as a disincentive to marriage. Family support and approval provides protection to women getting married, according to the focus group participants; without the family’s approval, a divorced woman would be set adrift on her own.

“I don’t like the fact that an eighteen-year-old woman can get married without the approval of her parents. This could create chaos in our society.” [Married urban women, ages 18-24, Rabat]

“I don’t like the point of giving the daughter the right to get married without permission from her father. I don’t think daughters should get married without their parents’ permission.” [Urban women, ages 30-44, Rabat]

“A woman shouldn’t get married at the age of eighteen by herself. If I did that, I would get married to the first stupid guy that would come my way. Come on, if I’m eighteen, I can’t choose the appropriate man. You will see what would happen, men and women would get married and then get divorced.” [Unmarried urban women, ages 18-24, Fez]

“If a woman gets married all by herself, and there is a divorce, where is she going to go? That is the reason why I disagree. Her parents must be there. Even if she is educated, they must be there.” [Rural Berber women, ages 30-44, towns of Abadou]

Generally Negative Reactions to Changing Inheritance Laws

According to the new Moudawana, Moroccan children would be able to inherit from their maternal grandfather, something not permitted under current law. The initial reaction to this provision is positive; but after some thought and discussion, participants—mostly men—express concerns that it might not be in-line with what Islam says.

“I’m not sure if it is part of the religious doctrine. If it is, then it is ok. But if it is not, then it is a problem.” [Urban men, ages 18-29, Rabat]

“The Quran is the constitution of the Muslims. For that change they are not relying on the Quran. If they start changing those things, they will change our Quran, which would defile the Quran.” [Married urban men, ages 18-29, Fez]

“Inheritance laws are clear in the Quran. If there is something different from what is in the Quran, it shouldn’t be enforced. It would change the creed—it would be Americanization of our laws, and it would be like the policies of the American administration.” [Urban men, ages 30-44, Rabat]

“God said in the Quran certain things about the inheritance. If we are going to change the laws of inheritance, that means we are trying to change God’s word in the Quran, and we can’t do this.” [Urban women, ages 30-44, Rabat]

Questions about Enforcement of the Moudawana

At the time of the focus groups, the changes to the Moudawana discussed in the focus groups were only proposals. At that time, several focus group participants who were aware of the changes describe them as a *fait accompli*—there was an assumption among some that since the king announced the proposed reforms, they had already passed. As noted, the reforms did not become law until February 2004.

Nevertheless, participants raised several questions about whether the Moudawana would actually be properly enforced. Among several ordinary Moroccans, it seems that laws are not the major problem, rather it is enforcement of laws. This is the case with the Moudawana, with participants expressing worries and skepticism that the government may not have the capacity or the will to enforce the law.

“The Moudawana has changed things, and the king said he was going to change these things, but it is not enforced.” [Urban women, ages 30-44, Rabat]

“Laws should be enforced. Because on television and in the media, they keep talking about women’s rights, but nothing is ever enforced. It is all just written in books, and the power remains in the hands of men. We have the rights according to laws, but it is not enforced.” [Urban women, ages 30-44, Rabat]

“Let’s hope at least this new Moudawana will be enforced.” [Married urban women, ages 18-24, Rabat]

QUESTIONS ABOUT WOMEN'S LEGAL RIGHTS AND ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Skepticism and questions about enforcement are present when participants in the focus groups answer questions about whether men and women have equal legal rights and access to justice. There is some disagreement about whether the laws on the books in Morocco treat men and women fairly—with men tending to say that women are equal to men or even more equal than men, and women inclined to say that more legal enhancements are necessary.

For most women, and a few men too, the main issue is not what the law says about women's legal rights, but how it is implemented and enforced. There is a debate over whether the testimonies of women should be equal to men's testimonies in court, but according to a number of women in the focus groups, Moroccan women have difficulties obtaining their legal rights because of bias and a lack of support in the justice system. Several women talk about prolonged court cases involving divorces in which women are prevented from obtaining what is rightfully theirs because of a lack of proper execution of the law.

Weak Protections from Abuse of Women

One point of consensus among most focus group participants, both men and women, is that Moroccan women face problems of violence and abuse, and that Moroccan society and government have not offered sufficient protections for women. When asked if women suffer from certain types of crimes more so than men, participants talk about violence and abuse in broad terms, with a definition ranging from verbal harassment of women in the street to beatings and domestic violence at home.

For some participants, this violence and abuse is deeply personal and connected to the home; when the issue is mentioned, there are several signs, nods, and anxious silences. Several urban women note that housemaids in Morocco tend not to have many protections against the abuse they suffer. "In-law abuse" came up quite a bit among a number of female participants—women who live with their husbands' families face abuse from them.

“There is so much divorce because of violence against women. Men are no longer patient with their wives.” [Urban men, ages 30-44, Rabat]

“There is torture by the husband at home, being beaten in front of the children. I think if a woman is at home with her husband, even if there are no in-laws, and she disagrees with him on the slightest things, he would start to beat her. If you said anything against his will, he would start beating her.” [Married rural Berber women, ages 18-29, towns of Ait Ourir]

“If a woman lives with her husband’s family, when he comes back home, they would tell him bad things about her. Then he would just beat her up, without even asking for her side of the story. He would just beat her up, instead of asking, ‘Why did you say this to my mother?’ When you live with his family, the mother-in-law and sister-in-law cause problems, and they would tell him things. It used to happen to me and now I’m fine because I no longer live with them.” [Married rural Berber women, ages 18-29, towns of Ait Ourir]

“There are women who suffer violence from her in-laws, especially her mother in-law. Even if the husband is nice with her, the mother-in-law might be violent. Some women would rather divorce their husbands and live away from her in-laws.” [Married urban women, ages 18-24, Rabat]

“There is an issue with maids—there is a lot of violence against young maids. I know that a twenty-four-year-old maid who was abused by her employers . . . That’s a case where there should be associations to help those women.” [Married urban women, ages 18-24, Rabat]

When asked what kinds of crimes women tend to suffer from in Morocco, participants mention that Moroccan women face a great deal of violence, abuse, and sexual harassment outside of the home; some reasons offered for this situation include perceptions about women being passive, societal norms such as covering up rapes rather than offering support to raped women, and insufficient enforcement of the laws.

“Men think women are passive and weak, and they can be subjected to all kinds of violence, including sexual violence, inside and outside of the house. They think of women as things, and all people can play with this thing.” [Urban women, ages 30-44, Rabat]

“Women are abused in the streets, they are raped, and the police comes and nothing is done. Where are their rights? People take her and abuse her in the streets. They ask if there are witnesses when there is abuse and rape, like there would be witnesses with crimes like these. Morocco is so stinky. It stinks so much. The reason is unemployment—the young men, and this is why they are so lawless.” [Newly urban women, ages 45-65, Fez]

“I think that’s a right that should be granted to our women because they are humiliated. They are robbed and raped in the streets, and when she goes back home, she doesn’t dare talk about it to her parents. In Morocco, when a woman is raped, the family doesn’t take this man to court. They are afraid of the scandal. Our society is so ruthless—the raped woman is looked down on. She should know that she has support from society, and we should talk about this. At home, if a woman is beaten by her husband, she wouldn’t dare talk about this. She just tries to think about her family and children, and tries to heal herself and get over it.” [Unmarried urban women, ages 18-24, Rabat]

These focus groups demonstrate that there is a slice of Morocco’s population that does not define violence and abuse in the same way that other Moroccans do, and a few participants offer justifications for beatings and violence against women.

“Most women don’t deserve getting beat up. But some women deserve to be beaten up. Some women are illiterate and are unaware.” [Married urban women, ages 18-24, Rabat]

“Some women actually look for it. If she goes out at night, she is looking for it.” [Urban men, ages 30-44, Rabat]

“I’m telling you that some women suffer from violence. If a woman creates problems in the household, she is looking for it, and the husband goes mad and beats her. We always think that the husband is bad when a woman is crying. There are some women who actually look for it.” [Married urban women, ages 18-24, Rabat]

“A woman should never be beaten up unless she deserves it. If someone tries to abuse her, she should be protected. If she changes her behavior, you shouldn’t beat her. But you should punish her if she doesn’t change her bad behavior.” [Rural Berber men, ages 45-65, towns of Ait Ourir]

“There are some women who are at the beginning just like honey, and after that, they start making problems with your brothers and your family. You would tell her, ‘Don’t go there.’ And she would say no. Some women just look for [violence].” (Rural Berber men, ages 45-65, towns of Ait Ourir)

Despite these voices, which either justify violence and abuse against women or seek to ignore it, the overall sense in these focus groups is that Moroccan women suffer from violence and abuse and are not offered sufficient protections. This limited qualitative opinion research project cannot purport to uncover how widespread and endemic the problem of violence and abuse against women in Morocco is—it can only note that this is an issue that many ordinary Moroccans raise in discussions about the status of women. In the exercise in which participants choose two issues from a list of eight concerns relating to women, the protection of women from violence comes in as one of the top two issues in seven of the eleven focus groups in which the exercise was conducted successfully (one group of older illiterate women was unable to successfully respond).

Numerous participants express a desire for more to be done to protect women against violence, abuse, and harassment. Some of the suggestions involve tougher legislation, and other suggestions focus on proper implementation of the law. Still others connect the problem to broader social ills, such as unemployment and a lack of education, and they note that in order to improve the status of women, men have to change. As one younger unmarried woman from Fez says, “No matter how many associations and laws we have, it is a matter of changing men’s way of thinking. When a woman walks in the street, and a man says something to you, this verbal abuse, and it is a kind of violence. It will only change if men change.”

Questions about Women’s Equal Rights to Testify in Court

One point of debate in the focus groups connected with women’s legal rights and access to justice, as well as with the concerns about violence and abuse against women is the issue of a woman’s testimony in court. According to most focus group participants, the testimonies of two women are needed to equal the testimony of one man in Morocco’s courts. Several participants say that this is based on clear guidance from Islam and their understanding of what the Quran says about testimony,³ but others argue that this understanding is not correct and does not make sense in this day and age. For a handful of female participants, this obligation of having two women testify is too onerous and makes some instances of alleged violence against women difficult to prove in a court of law—particularly in the case of domestic violence.⁴

“Women’s testimony should be taken into consideration. When a man beats up his wife, why should he be heard, and her not heard? She needs a certificate from the doctor and she needs witnesses to say she is abused. Where is she going to bring these witnesses from? Only God is her witness.” [Urban women, ages 30-44, Rabat]

“Women have no rights if we look at the constitution. We find women married with children and divorced. When she goes to court, she doesn’t get heard. Let’s talk about violence. When she is beaten at home, the judge says she needs witnesses to prove the beating. How can you bring witnesses if she was beaten in the house?” [Married urban women, ages 18-24, Rabat]

“It’s impossible to not listen to the woman’s testimony. Come on! If a woman witnesses something and a man didn’t, then why should they listen to a man who has seen nothing and not listen to the woman who has seen it all?” [Urban men, ages 30-44, Rabat]

³ One main source is Surah Al-Baqarah (Surah 2, 282) of the Quran, which addresses the issue of testimony.

⁴ An important source on the right of testimony in disputes between spouses is found in the Quran in Surah Al-Nur (Surah 24, 6-10)

“If a woman sees a cup on the table, she will say, ‘I saw the cup on the table,’ just like a man. We keep saying women have the right to education and work, but come on. On testimony, it is just a matter of reporting what one sees, and we are saying that women have bad sight in one eye?” [Newly urban men, ages 18-29, Fez]

“I think that a woman’s testimony should be the same as a man’s. They are both human beings. If she has seen something, why can’t she give her testimony?” [Married urban men, ages 18-29, Fez]

As with the discussions on inheritance and other issues that participants perceive to have been already clearly addressed by Islam, a number of participants reject the rationale that the testimony of men and women should be equal, with some reverting back to stereotypes of women being too emotional, while others base their arguments on their understanding of Islam.

“If women start testifying in court, it means we are throwing the Quran away. Women shouldn’t go to court.” [Rural Berber men, ages 45-65, towns of Ait Ourir]

“I think that women are emotional. She never forgets that she is a wife, and when a woman sees someone oppressed, she tries to change her testimony. When religion says she lacks mind, it doesn’t mean she is mad, it just means she is sentimental. Morocco is a Muslim country, and its laws are based on Islam. Women are emotionally and psychologically different.” [Urban women, ages 18-24, Fez]

“Men are better than women in giving testimony. They say that men’s testimony is taken into consideration, and a woman’s testimony is useless. It is ok, a man is a man. Why is he a man? Because he’s a man. God said that men are better than women. Women, poor things, are lower. This has been this way forever.” [Newly urban women, ages 45-65, Fez]

DIALOGUES ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND REFORM IN ISLAM

There are three main findings on women's rights and reform in Islam from this broad inquiry into popular perceptions on women's economic, social, political, and legal rights:

1. Islam serves as a vital source for how ordinary Moroccans understand and engage in questions related to change in their lives and society, including changes in the role of women. Although Morocco is beginning to undergo a series of changes and reforms aimed at making closer economic and political connections with the rest of the world, these focus groups underscore that the values system of ordinary Moroccans remains strongly informed by the rich and deep traditions of the Muslim faith. Even among the younger urban participants with higher educational attainment—many of whom have assimilated some aspects from other societies such as the way they dress and their favorite forms of entertainment—Islam remains a vital source of how they make decisions and interpret change.

Although it is risky to draw too many conclusions from demographic segments in a modest qualitative research project such as this, it seems from these focus groups that the younger generations are more animated by the questions related to the interpretations of Islam. The younger focus group participants tend to make more references to religion in the context of these discussions on the role of women in Moroccan society. Comments such as the one from a younger married woman in Rabat who said, “We are a Muslim country, so we should apply the Sharia and the law of God,” tend to emerge among groups with younger participants. It would be informative to test this observation using more quantitative measures.

Since Islam is an important part of the discussions related to change at all levels of Moroccan society, actors from inside and outside of Morocco seeking to advance the cause of women or promote change in other sectors should engage in these efforts with a deep understanding of the traditions of the Muslim faith. In order to have a constructive impact, organizations and individuals should seek to understand the depth and complexity of how ordinary citizens interpret this important source of their values.

Certain freedoms and rights are universal, and many of these are embodied in international conventions and agreements, but the frame for how ordinary people understand and interpret these rights and freedoms will be informed by their values systems and the religious and cultural forces that have shaped their lives. This basic factor has a practical impact on the process of change and reform, and it is a factor that cannot be trivialized.

2. Ordinary Moroccans' views on how to interpret the various sources of their religion and how to apply it in today's life are diverse. These focus groups demonstrate that a strong and lively debate exists among ordinary people on matters such as ijtiḥād and how the essential principles of Islam should be applied to new situations that did not exist previously. This dialogue is essential when it comes to a society such as Morocco's that remains deeply traditional and is at the same time on the verge of experiencing a great deal of change from internal and external forces. For instance, as noted above, there is dissension among focus group participants about how to apply the essential principles of Islam with new situations in today's society; participants struggle with how to interpret the meaning of the religious faith that is important to their lives in the context of new proposals to change laws covering the family and matters such as inheritance.

These discussions on various aspects of women's rights are in many cases wrapped up in a broader debate of ijtiḥād. Participants in this set of focus groups are generally divided over the question of whether the doors of ijtiḥād are open or closed; rural and lesser educated individuals had great difficulty understanding the nuance involved in discussing how religious sources are interpreted. Among participants with higher educational attainment, there was genuine disagreement about whether ijtiḥād in Islam in light of new events was permissible, and if so, who are the proper authorities when it comes to ijtiḥād.

The more educated focus group participants, and those living in urban areas, find it easier to engage in the nuances and complexities involved in thinking about how to apply core Islamic religious principles to new changes. In this set of focus groups, lesser educated individuals and those living in more isolated areas with less exposure to a diversity of information sources tend to disengage and rely more heavily on religious doctrine as it has been explained to them previously.

A conclusion that can be drawn from this second point is that popular views on how to apply the principles of Islam in a changing society are not static and in fact are open to dialogue, accommodation, and change, given new realities. This is not surprising, given that other major religious traditions have undergone and continue to experience such dialogues.

The diversity of views on how to apply the essential principles of Islam in today's world influences the dialogue in these focus group discussions on women's freedom. Religious sources are referenced to argue for and against change. A number of focus group participants are quick to make the point that Islam promotes women's rights.

“The religion has given positive things to women. Before Islam, people used to bury their daughters alive. Islam has given women dignity and status in society.” [Urban women, ages 30-44, Rabat]

“Islam calls for education and literacy for women.” [Urban men, ages 30-44, Rabat]

“Men and women are equal, but why does this Muslim society allow men to have more power than women, and don't respect women? Now they are both working, and they have income, and they should be more equal. Mothers and wives have fewer rights than men, but Islam conveys a different message than this. Islam says that men and women have the same rights.” [Unmarried urban women, ages 18-24, Fez]

But as noted throughout this report, when participants discuss many of the issues related to women's rights, particularly the revisions introduced in the Moudawana, the debate centers on what Islam says and how these eternal principles should be applied in today's context. Some participants argue that change is necessary. As one younger unmarried man says, “So many things have happened. The old ways of saying that women should stay at home are not what we see today. I think we need to modernize and develop Islam.” Others make reference to religious principles to argue against particular changes. As noted above, some participants believe that the overall changes to the Moudawana run contrary to Islam, particularly the changes to inheritance and giving women the right to make their own decisions on marriage.

3. Several ordinary Moroccans find the diversity of views on how to apply Islam's principles to change and new realities challenging and sometimes confusing. Though these focus groups primarily address issues related to women's rights, they also reveal a diversity of opinion on how Muslims interpret their religion on a range of other issues. In one of the few places that terrorism is raised in these discussions, this debate emerges over how other Muslims are interpreting their religion.

Two younger married men in the Fez focus groups disagreed on whether Muslims in Morocco were generally interpreting Islam in its proper sense. One said that Islam was one of the positive things about Morocco, and another one strongly objected, saying,

“I disagree because Islam is not understood in its proper sense. Some people are trying to give Islam a different interpretation that is not good. There are some people who in the name of religion committed terrorist attacks. So there is a good Islam and a bad Islam. There are some people who came and started exploiting Islam to introduce things that are alien to our religion such as fundamentalist ideas that led to a different interpretation of Islam.”

One older Berber man from the rural towns of Ait Ourir says, “What we need to change about Islam are those people who are extremists. We need to change the way they think

about Islam. Islam is democracy; people shouldn't be stubborn when they think about Islam." Another man in Fez complains that Morocco is underdeveloped because "we always go back to the Sharia and the Sunna [the Prophet's traditions]. Instead of trying something new, we stick to this. Why don't we use democracy and our own thinking?"

These questions are vexing for some participants—one younger man in Fez says that Morocco followed one school of Islam in the past, but "now people are permitting what they want to permit, and prohibiting what they want to prohibit. There are so many contradictions." Another younger man in Fez says that the new Islam is "cluttered in small groups," and that each of these groups interprets the religion in their own way.

Among those who are open to the notion of finding new ways to apply Islamic principle to today's life, there is a diversity of views on who should do this—some say only the religious scholars, and others indicate that individuals can do this. A few participants say that it makes sense for religious scholars or others to look at new situations and things that did not exist during the time of the Prophet Muhammad and come up with interpretations that can guide individuals as they make moral choices in life; as one man says, "We shouldn't discard the past altogether, but we also shouldn't be blind and concentrate only on the past." As long as interpretation does not fundamentally seek to change the basic doctrines of the religion, then it is fine with some.

Others choose to reject new attempts to apply the principles of Islam to today's world altogether, saying that it is completely unnecessary. As one middle-aged woman in Rabat says, "I don't think that there are different interpretations. If you can open the book of God, it is clear. The only time that people have different interpretations is when they don't go back to the book."

BACKGROUND ON RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

This report is based on twelve focus groups conducted January 3–10, 2004 with a broad cross section of Moroccans in three different locations: Rabat; Fez; and Berber towns surrounding Abadou and Ait Ourir, southeast of Marrakesh. Each group contained 10 participants.

Specifications

Date	City/Area	Area Type	Gender	Ages	Class Level	Additional Specifications
January 3	Rabat	Urban	Women	30-44	D/E/F	
January 3	Rabat	Urban	Men	30-44	C	
January 4	Rabat	Urban	Women	18-24	C	Married
January 4	Rabat	Urban	Men	18-29	D/E/F	Unmarried
January 6	Fez	Urban	Men	18-29	D/E/F	Married
January 7	Fez	Urban	Women	45-65	D/E/F	Arrived in city from rural area in last five years
January 7	Fez	Urban	Men	18-29	D/E/F	Unmarried; Arrived in city from rural area in last five years
January 7	Fez	Urban	Women	18-24	C	Unmarried
January 9	Towns of Abadou	Rural	Women	30-44	D/E/F	Berber
January 9	Towns of Abadou	Rural	Men	30-44	C/D/E/F	Berber
January 10	Towns of Ait Ourir	Rural	Women	18-29	C -	Berber, Married
January 10	Towns of Ait Ourir	Rural	Men	45-65	C -	Berber

Rationale for Specifications

The starting point for defining the scope of research was available demographic data on Morocco, which remains quite limited. Using available information, Freedom House attempted to mirror the country's overall demographics, which is possible only a very limited way given the small numbers of individuals involved in a modest qualitative research project such as this.

In order to enhance the comfort level of participants, each of the twelve groups was recruited to be relatively homogeneous. In this manner, each participant is more likely to feel that everyone's opinion matters equally, that there is no need to defer to another person, which encourages frankness and participation. Homogeneity of each of the groups also helps us understand the diversity of opinion that may exist within certain demographic groups. The focus groups were stratified by gender, age, class, and in some cases marital status.

- **Geographic location.** Slightly over half of the participants came from an urban setting, roughly reflecting recent population estimates. In an attempt to understand a key segment of a population that is becoming increasingly urbanized, two of the twelve focus groups were held with “newly urban” participants—individuals who came to live in Fez in the last five years.
- **Gender.** Half of the groups consisted of women, and half were with men, reflecting the basic overall demographics of the adult population.
- **Age.** Like most countries in North Africa and the Middle East, Morocco has a relatively young population. Therefore, half of the groups were conducted with participants under the age of 30, four were conducted with participants between 30 and 44 years of age, and two groups were with participants aged 45 and older. This scheme is intentionally and slightly biased towards the younger generation when compared to available statistics, in order to get a sense of the emerging attitudes that may impact longer term trends in the country.
- **Marital status.** In the lowest age brackets used in this research, we also screened on marital status, on the assumption that the life experiences of men and women who are married in their late teens and twenties versus those are unmarried in that same age bracket are different.
- **Class.** The research intentionally excluded the two highest class levels of individuals in Morocco and sought to get a balanced mix of opinions from individuals in classes C -, C, D, and F. The class demographic is strongly correlated with educational attainment, with F representing the lower end of the scale.
- **Minority Groups.** Four of the groups were with people from rural Berber communities southeast of Marrakesh, including two groups with participants from the rural areas of Abadou,⁵ and the two other groups with participants from the towns and villages surrounding Ait Ourir.⁶ All of the participants in the four Berber groups spoke Arabic.

The local research partner took these specifications, developed a short demographic questionnaire, and trained recruiters to use a random approach pattern to avoid “cluster sampling” in the recruitment of participants. Invited participants were re-screened before the start of the session to ensure the quality of the initial screening.

⁵ Participants in these two focus groups were recruited from the following towns and villages: Douar Imin Ogou, Douar Ichmrahn, Douar Ait Abdella, Douar Albour, Douar Imzin, Douar Ait Alaalam, and Douar Chemmah.

⁶ Participants in these two focus groups were recruited from the following towns and villages: Douar Chems, Douar Zentou, Douar Tafriat, Douar Ait Faska, Douar Ait Molay Ali, and Douar Amanouz.

On Focus Groups

Focus groups are semi-structured group interviews that proceed according to a careful research design. Focus groups are useful in helping understand the language that people use when they discuss particular ideas or concepts. They are also useful in gaining a deeper appreciation for the motivations, feelings, and values behind participants' reactions. It is a flexible form of research that allows one to probe into issues important to the sponsors, while also permitting participants to raise other issues or concerns that might not have occurred to the researchers.

As an organized group discussion, it provides a form that enables participants to stimulate each other in an exchange of ideas that may not emerge in individual in-depth interviews or quantitative surveys that rely on one-on-one questionnaires. When done well, they are free flowing, open-ended, and often unpredictable. They are designed to elicit a wide range of ideas, attitudes, experiences, and opinions held by a selected small sample of recruited respondents on a defined topic.

Focus groups such as these can help us better understand the many shades of gray—hesitations, enthusiasm, anger, or uncertainty. Focus groups are first and foremost concerned with understanding attitudes, rather than measuring them. In countries like Morocco experiencing societal change, focus groups can be a valuable tool for understanding attitudinal complexities that lie beneath the surface.

Because of the small numbers involved, however, focus group participants cannot be expected to be thoroughly and statistically representative of the larger population from which they are drawn, and findings ought not be generalized beyond the small number of participants. They offer insight into emerging ideas and popular attitudes on key issues, but it would be unsound to extrapolate to firm conclusions about what all or most Moroccans believe based on such a small sample of individuals.

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The round of focus groups in Morocco was the first in a series sponsored by Freedom House's Survey of Women's Freedom in the Middle East and North Africa, which aims to facilitate and support national and international efforts to empower women in the Middle East and North Africa region through a comparative evaluation of women's freedoms in 20 selected countries and territories. The *Survey of Women's Freedom*, with a projected publication date of December 2004, will provide an overview of women's freedom throughout the Middle East and North Africa and identify critical issues relevant for policymakers, experts and activists.

Freedom House's Executive Director Jennifer Windsor and Freedom House staff members Sameena Ford, Michael Goldfarb, Jonathan Haddad, Mikaela McDermott, Amy Phillips, Jane Stockman, and Christopher Walker contributed to organizing the research and editing the report.

Thomas O. Melia, Director of Research at the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy at Georgetown University, was instrumental in designing the research project and offered many thoughtful comments on the draft report.

The People's Mirror, a qualitative research center of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) in Morocco, conducted the fieldwork for these focus groups. NDI's research center did an excellent job from start to finish, offering advice on the demographic composition and geographic location of the groups, recruiting participants in a methodologically sound fashion, and moderating the focus group sessions. Under the direction of NDI Resident Director Maryam Montague, NDI has a top-notch research team consisting of Resident Focus Group Program Manager Abla El-Khattabi, Program Coordinator Driss Choukri, and Program Assistant Hanan Khaoua.

The only center of its kind in the Arab world, the People's Mirror works with international and Moroccan partners, including ministries, the parliament, political parties, civil society organizations, and the media. The NDI center specializes in democracy-related issues and aims to create a better link between decision-makers and Moroccan citizens. Based in Rabat, Morocco and the People's Mirror is funded by the National Endowment for Democracy

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ABOUT FREEDOM HOUSE

Founded in 1941 by Eleanor Roosevelt and others, Freedom House is the oldest non-profit, non-governmental organization in the United States dedicated to promoting and defending democracy and freedom worldwide. Freedom House supports the global expansion of freedom through its advocacy activities, monitoring and in depth research on the state of freedom, and direct support of democratic reformers throughout the world.

Advocating Democracy and Human Rights: For over six decades, Freedom House has played an important role in identifying the key challenges to the global expansion of democracy, human rights and freedom. Freedom House is committed to advocating a vigorous U.S. engagement in international affairs that promotes human rights and freedom around the world.

Monitoring Freedom: Despite significant recent gains for freedom, hundreds of millions of people around the world continue to endure dictatorship, repression, and the denial of basic rights. To shed light on the obstacles to liberty, Freedom House issues studies, surveys, and reports on the condition of global freedom. Our research is meant to illuminate the nature of democracy, identify its adversaries, and point the way for policies that strengthen and expand democratic freedoms. Freedom House projects are designed to support the framework of rights and freedoms guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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