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# Arab Public Opinion & the Environment Report of 18-Country Survey



# **Arab Public Opinion & the Environment**

## **Report of 18-Country Survey**

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### **Introduction**

The survey on environmental trends in Arab countries was organized by Al-Bia Wal-Tanmia (Environment & Development) magazine, in cooperation with the Regional Office for West Asia of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP/ROWA) and the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE).

The survey was conducted between November 2005 and March 2006, on voluntary basis and without interviewers. The questionnaire was distributed through Al-Bia Wal-Tanmia (Environment & Development) magazine, and eight daily Arabic-language newspapers. Those included Al-Ahram (Egypt), Al-Hayat (pan-Arab), An-Nahar (Lebanon), Al-Khaleej (UAE), Al-Qabas (Kuwait), Al-Ayyam (Bahrain), Ash-Sharq (Qatar) and Ad-Dustour (Jordan). The survey was also promoted on the pan-Arab Future TV and the Arabic service of Radio Monte Carlo, and the questionnaire was posted on the website of Al-Bia Wal-Tanmia., as well as being circulated through the offices of the League of Arab States and UNEP/ROWA.

The questionnaire was designed in a sequential manner, starting with asking about the environmental conditions in the immediate neighbourhood, then in the country, moving on to the main environmental problems and causes of deterioration, up to enquiring about readiness to perform personal action to protect the environment.

Responses were received from all 22 member countries of the League of Arab States. Those received from Mauritania, Somalia, Djibouti and Comoros were disregarded as they were too little as statistical sample. Results from all other 18 countries were reflected in the report, as total average as well as per country. The sample analysed included 3,876 responses from: Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen. The listing in the tables and charts followed sub-regional clusters not alphabetical order.

Proportionate samples were selected from bulk responses with identical answers sent from the same address, such as 30 students of the same class, and only one of duplicate responses from the same person was kept. Data entry of responses from Egypt was halted by the statisticians after the first ten days, to preserve the regional balance, as the turn over was very high.

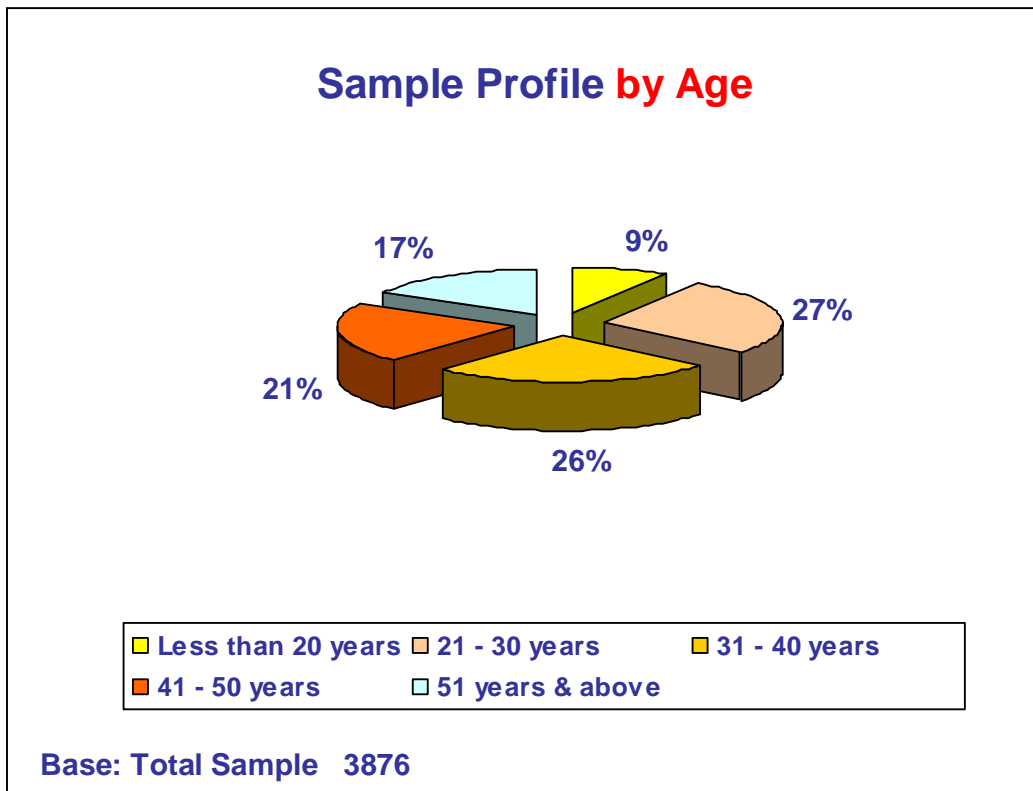
While the majority of respondents replied by mail (63%), it was remarkable that 28% used e-mail, which reflects wider use of electronic media among participants. The remaining 9% replied by fax. As it was not a requirement to use original questionnaire, many answered on photocopied sheets.

The answers were sorted and statistically tabulated by Pan Arab Research Centre (PARC), a Gallup associate. A data base, including socio-economic data and addresses of participants, was prepared. In addition to allowing socio-economic analysis of the sample, it helped to eliminate duplication, as the program deleted multiple answers received from the same person.

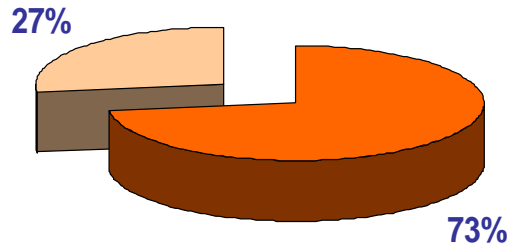
The combination of voluntary respondents through a regional environmental magazine and eight leading daily newspapers, reaching both specialized readers and the general public, combined with internet access and promotion via radio and TV, ensured a sample from a wide range of social, economic and educational backgrounds, that reflected broad spectrum of views.

The respondents, who came from 18 Arab countries, have the following major characteristics: 75% possess university level education, 73% are males and 27% females, 38% were above 41 years old, 9% below 20 and 53% between 21-40 years, 70% are city-dwellers, while 30% live in a suburb or a village. Respondents were asked to classify their income group compared to the prevailing level of income in their country; 66% said they have average income, 28% above average and 6% below average. It is to be noted that people with low-income and lower education levels were not proportionally represented. But as the sample was analysed on socio-economic basis, it was possible to track differences in attitudes among different categories.

The regional averages adopted as reference in this analysis were calculated by giving equal value to each of the 18 countries. Results were in line with those obtained by taking averages of the total sample, producing similar set of priorities in both cases.



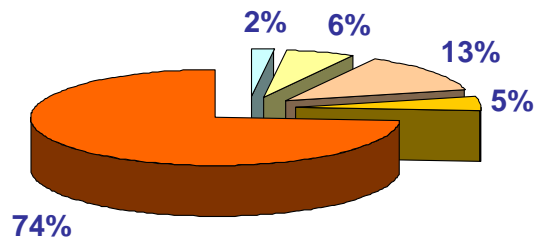
## Sample Profile by Gender



Male Female

Base: Total Sample 3876

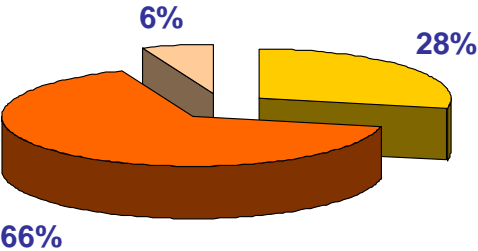
## Sample Profile by Education



Elementary Intermediate Secondary Technical University

Base: Total Sample 3876

# Sample Profile **By Household Income**



■ Above Average ■ Average ■ Below Average

Base: Total Sample 3876

## **Arab Environment Public Opinion Survey 2006**

### **Summary of Results**

The statistical report, prepared by PARC, shows results for each question by: total sample, country, gender, age, education and income level. Separate statistical reports with complete socio-economic analysis were produced for the 8 countries where local media partners participated in the survey.

Most of the respondents (60%) found that the state of the environment in their country was getting worse, while 30% thought that it was getting better. The portion of those in the Levant countries that thought the situation was deteriorating was, across the board, higher than in other regions. This was not restricted to Iraq and Palestine, but was equally true for Syria and Lebanon. It was noted that the negative evaluation of the state of the environment increased with the increase in income and education. Higher percentage among those surveyed in rural and suburban areas, compared to city dwellers, thought the situation became better.

The majority of respondents said that their main source of information about the environment was from newspapers, followed by television, specialized magazines and the internet. While 95% said they were willing to comply by tough environmental legislation, only 68% were willing to pay taxes to help protect the environment.

The four main causes of environmental deterioration chosen by the respondents were: non-adherence to legislation, inadequate awareness programmes, bad environmental management and weak environment protection agencies. In some Levant countries, the majority of respondents included insufficient public expenditure on the environment among major problems.

Evaluating the level of urgency of environmental problems in the country, air pollution scored the highest across the board, as 80% of the total considered it a major problem. This was true not only for the regional average, but in individual countries and inside sub-regions as well. Hazardous waste scored second, health hazards from pesticides and fertilizers third, followed by weak environmental awareness and solid waste. Fresh water resources, industrial and coastal pollution also scored as high priorities. It was obvious that the public is more sensitive to problems directly related to the human health. However it was remarkable to note that 71% thought that weak awareness of environmental problems was a major threat.

Remarkably, respondents from all countries, regions and socio-economic backgrounds were nearly unanimous (95%) that their countries should do more to protect the environment. Qatar was notable in scoring only 75% of those who demanded more action, while 25% thought their government should do the same to protect the environment as it is doing now. This was followed by Tunisia, where 81% thought that the government should do more to protect the environment, and 19% who thought it should do the same. In all other individual countries, over 90% thought more should be done.

## **Arab Environment Public Opinion Survey 2006**

### **Detailed Analysis**

#### **1- How do you evaluate the state of the environment in your country at present, compared to the past ten years?**

The majority of respondents thought the environmental conditions in their country have deteriorated over the past ten years. 60% of the total sample said it became worse, 10% thought it did not change, while 30% found that it became better.

Those who said it became worse were over 50% in 15 out of 18 countries. Tunisia scored the highest percentage of those who found that the situation became better (54%), followed by Qatar (53%). In Morocco, 40% said it was better, 15% no change and 45% worse. Understandably, 93% in Iraq said that the environmental situation deteriorated, representing the highest discontent figure. In most Gulf countries other than Qatar, there was a near 50/50 split among those who thought the situation became better or did not change, and on the other hand those who said it deteriorated. The most extreme evaluation of the environmental situation in a Gulf country was in Bahrain, where 72% said it became worse. Although this is higher than in other Gulf countries, it is comparable with Lebanon where 71% said the situation deteriorated.

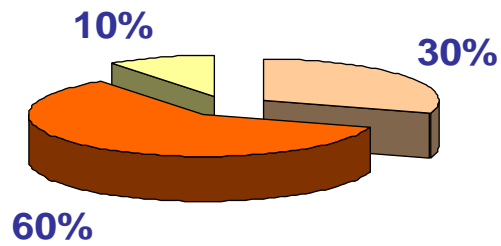
While the negative evaluation in Iraq (93%) and the Palestinian territories (81%) can be attributed to war and occupation, other factors should be considered in Syria (90%) and Lebanon (71%). While those results might reflect higher level of awareness of the problems among the public, they might also show different perception: as the Levant countries are historically greener and have more natural forests, man-made developments might be viewed as infringement on the natural environment, while development activities, including greening, in mostly desert countries, are perceived as an enhancement.

The results were consistent across the board, with no major variations found among location of residence (city/suburb/village), gender, age or level of income. The only significant variation was in the level of education: negative evaluation increased with higher education. The corresponding results were:

- Elementary: 49% better, 39% worse, 12% no change.
- Secondary: 39% better, 51% worse, 10% no change.
- University: 29% better, 61% worse, 10% no change.

This might reflect the fact that higher education brings better awareness of environmental challenges.

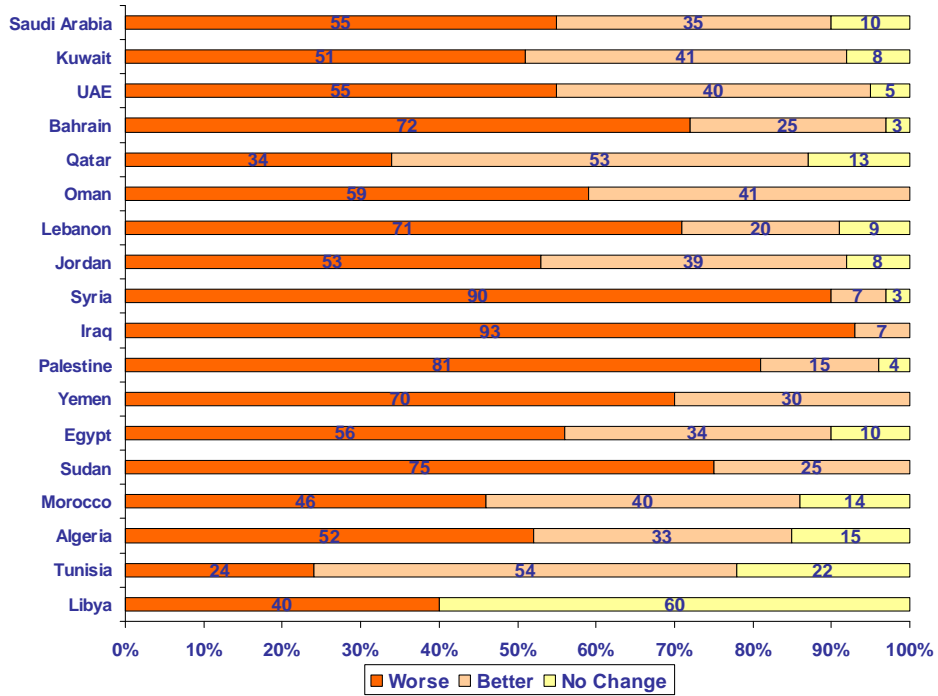
## Evaluation Of The State Of The Environment Average of 18 Countries



■ Better 
 ■ Worse 
 ■ No Change

Base: Total Sample 3876

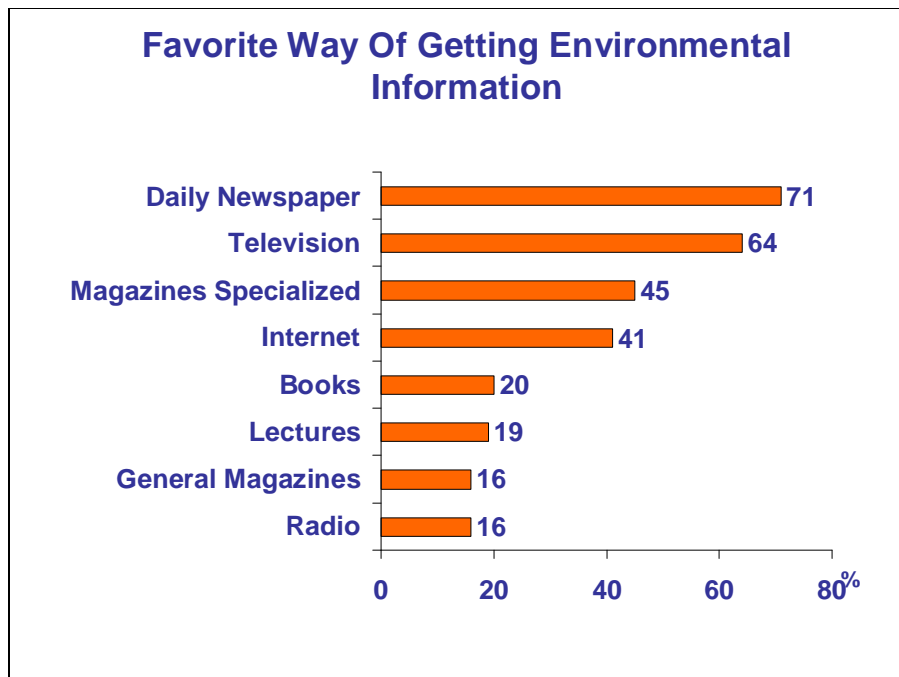
### Evaluation Of The State Of The Environment





**2- What is your favourite source of environmental information? (Choose only 3)**

Daily newspapers were the main source of environmental information for the respondents (71%), followed by television (63%), specialized magazines (45%) and internet (41%). Books, public lectures, general magazines and radio scored between 20% and 16% successively. There were no significant variations per socio-economic categories, except for higher use of internet among the below 31 age group (50% compared to 41% of the total sample and 32% of those above 41).

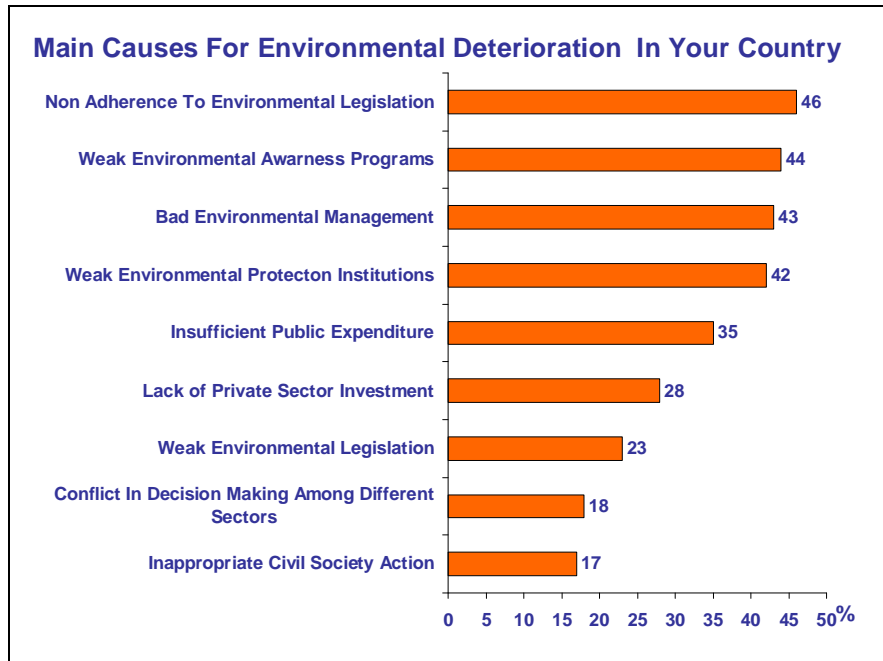


**3- What are the main causes of environmental deterioration in your country? (choose the 3 most important ones)**

Non-compliance with environmental legislation was on top of the main causes of environmental deterioration, according to 46% of the respondents, followed by weak environmental awareness programmes (44%). Bad environmental management scored third (43%), a rank closely shared by weak environmental protection institutions (42%). Respondents from Iraq were nearly unanimous (89%) in choosing bad environmental management as major cause of deterioration.

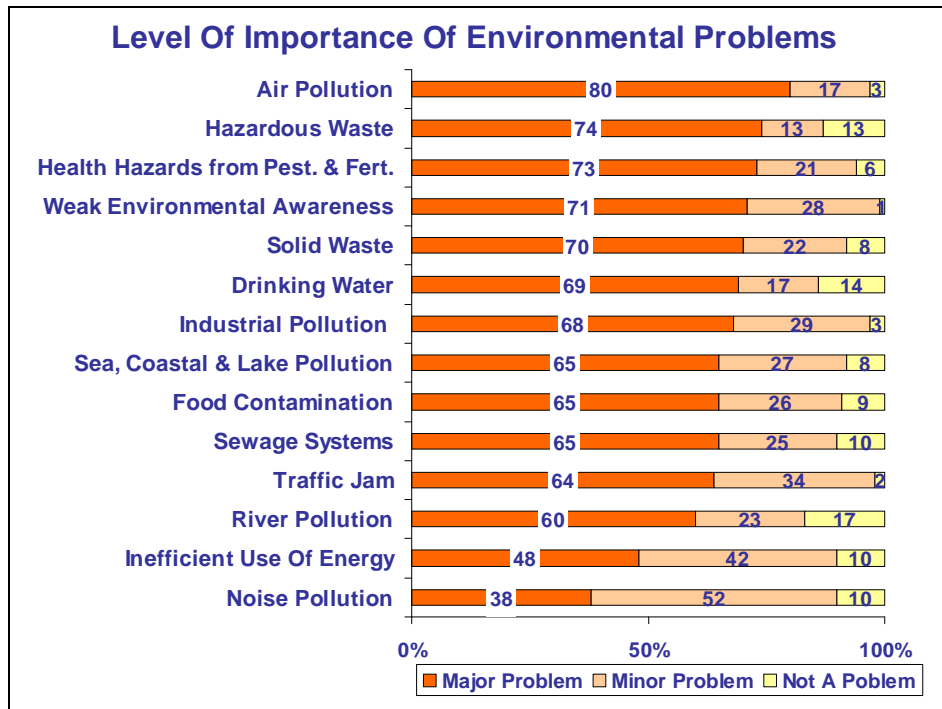
It is noteworthy that near unanimity exists in viewing non-compliance with environmental legislation and weak enforcement of existing laws, as having precedence over weak environmental legislation itself (the first scored 46%, compared to 23% for the second). This is a clear message that people consider the main problem to be lax law enforcement rather than the law itself.

While no major differences were observed among various socio-economic groups, some variations in specifying priorities were clear among individual countries. Bad environmental management was chosen as the top cause of deterioration in Iraq, scoring 89% of the respondents. In Yemen, Lebanon and Jordan, the percentage of those who gave high priority to insufficient public expenditure on the environment was significantly higher than the regional average, as well as other individual countries. While it scored 87% in Yemen, 53% in Lebanon and 48% in Jordan, the regional average was 35%, and moving within 12% - 30% range in other countries. It was remarkable that respondents from Iraq comparatively high score (57%) to weak environmental awareness programmes as major cause of environmental deterioration.



**4- In your opinion, what is the level of importance of environmental problems?**

Respondents were asked to classify 14 issues as being: ‘major problem’, ‘minor problem’ or ‘not a problem.’ Matters directly related to human health scored highest, such as air pollution (80%), hazardous waste (74%) and health hazards from pesticides and fertilizers (73%). Those were directly followed by weak environmental awareness (71%), municipal solid waste (70%) and fresh water (69%). Other issues, scoring over 50% of the votes as being of major importance, included industrial pollution, food contamination, sea pollution, sewage systems, traffic jam and river pollution. Two issues scored significantly lower: inefficient use of energy (48%) and noise pollution (38%).



### A- Air Pollution

Air pollution was the undisputed principal environment problem as viewed by the respondents from countries across all Arab regions. While 80% of the total sample classified it as major problem, higher scores were obtained from countries belonging to different regions: Saudi Arabia, Oman and Lebanon (91%), Egypt (94%) and Morocco (88%). Results were consistent across different socio-economic groups, with no significant variations.

### B- Hazardous waste

At 74%, hazardous waste was second on the priority list. Percentages from countries in different parts of the Arab world were consistent, as those who considered it a major problem were 88% in Saudi Arabia, 86% in Lebanon, 85% in Morocco and 80% in Egypt. It was notable, though, that only 52% of the respondents from Iraq considered hazardous waste a major problem, which might reflect weakness in the level of environmental awareness, as well as concentration on the more direct daily needs. This is obvious in that 93% of the Iraqi respondents considered fresh water a major priority, 85% selected solid waste and 63% sewage systems. Those are more directly felt problems than chemical pollution or contamination from depleted uranium.

### C- Health hazards from pesticides and fertilizers

The third major environmental concern to the respondents was health hazards caused by pesticides and fertilizers, identified by 73% of the total sample. It scored over 75% in 13 out of 18 countries. Remarkably, a mere 22% of the

respondents in Iraq thought it was a major problem, while 74% considered it a minor problem, and 4% thought it was not a problem at all. It can be understood that this would not be considered a priority under the present circumstances in Iraq.

#### **D- Weak environmental awareness**

Although it is not a materialistic threat, weak environmental awareness was chosen by 71% as a major environmental problem. Figures comparable to the total were collected from countries across the Arab world: United Arab Emirates and Lebanon (76%), Egypt (79%), Tunisia (73%). Percentages per socio-economic classification were consistent with the average percentage of the total sample.

#### **E- Municipal solid waste**

Garbage was voted as the fifth major environmental problem, scoring 70% of the total sample. Results were consistent across Arab countries: Saudi Arabia (78%), Lebanon (84%), Egypt (83%) and Morocco (84%). The highest percentage of those who did not consider solid waste a major problem was scored in Bahrain at 50%.

#### **F- Fresh water**

Fresh water resources and drinking water scored 69% on the scale of major problems. Results were largely consistent across the regions: 74% in Egypt, 69% in UAE and Algeria and 68% in Lebanon. Higher percentages of village dwellers and females thought that fresh water was a major problem. It was remarkable that relatively high percentage of respondents from countries poor in natural fresh water resources, and largely depending on sea water desalination, said that water was not a major environmental problem. Those who thought water was not a major problem or no problem at all included 64% in Bahrain, 52% in Tunisia, 41% in Qatar, 35% in Oman and Kuwait and 31% in UAE.

In Iraq and Sudan, both rather rich in water resources, over 90% thought that fresh water was a major problem. What seems like a contradiction is explained in the fact that people who get their basic daily needs of water do not tend to consider it a problem, regardless of how that water was obtained and how scarce it might be. Those who do not have access to clean water, like many in Iraq and Sudan, consider fresh water a major problem, as they do not have easy access to it, regardless of availability.

## **G- Industrial pollution**

An average of 68% classified industrial pollution as a major problem. The figure was perceptibly higher in countries with oil industry, scoring 87% in Saudi Arabia, 83% in Bahrain and 85% in Algeria. While 72% in Egypt found industrial pollution a major problem, the figure reached 75% in Lebanon.

## **H- Sea, coastal and lake pollution**

65% of the respondents thought that sea and lake pollution (according to location) was a major problem. Figures were considerably higher than the average in countries with longer coastal lines, such as Morocco (96%), Lebanon (90%), Saudi Arabia (85%), Qatar (78%) and Kuwait (76%). UAE, Oman and Tunisia scored near the total average, at around 68%.

## **I- Food contamination**

Another direct threat to human health, food contamination, was chosen by 65% across the Arab countries as a major environmental problem. Big differences were scored among different countries on this issue, ranging from 22% in Yemen to 88% in Algeria. The level was over 75% in half of the countries surveyed. Percentages were consistent among various socio-economic groups.

## **J- Sewage systems**

65% of the respondents said that sewage systems were a major environmental problem. Results from Kuwait, Qatar, Egypt and Morocco fall in line with the regional average, hovering around 70%. On the other hand, over 80% in Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Sudan and Libya classified sewage systems as major problem, while under 50% in UAE, Bahrain and Tunisia thought so. Sewage systems were considered bigger problem in rural areas (77%) compared to 66% in the cities.

## **K- Traffic jam**

Traffic jam was considered a major environmental problem by 64% of the respondents. Results from different regions were consistent: 72% in Saudi Arabia and Jordan, 69% in Egypt and 77% in Tunisia. Less than 50% of the respondents from the Palestinian territories, Sudan, Morocco and Libya found traffic jam a major problem, while Kuwait, UAE and Bahrain scored over 80%. This reflects rapidly expanding traffic in the latter three countries. For the issue of traffic jam, big variations were observed between cities and villages: while 70% of city dwellers found it a major problem, only 55% of those living in rural areas thought so.

## **L- River pollution**

60% considered river pollution a major problem. Obviously, the figure was higher in countries with important rivers, exceeding 80% in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Morocco and Algeria. Remarkably, only 40% in Iraq considered river pollution a major problem versus 60% who found it minor problem. A higher percentage of those living in rural areas found river pollution a major problem (81%), in comparison to city dwellers (75%).

## **M- Inefficient use of energy**

Inefficient use of energy was largely considered a minor problem (42%) or no problem (10%), while only 48% of the respondents said that it was a major problem. Those who considered it a major problem were divided among both oil producing and oil consuming countries, scoring just over 50% in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Sudan and Algeria. These results reveal that inefficient use of energy in the region, from electricity to fuel, is underestimated as one major cause of environmental deterioration.

## **N- Noise pollution**

Noise pollution scored low in most countries on the list of environmental priorities. While the regional average of those classifying it as major problem was 38%, there were considerable variations among countries: reaching the highest at 66% in Syria, 64% in Egypt, 60% in Algeria and 52% in UAE. In all other countries, the score of those who considered noise pollution a major problem was under 50%.

## **5- Are you willing to: A) Participate in environmental awareness activities? B) Comply with environmental legislation and laws? C) Participate in voluntary civil society activities to protect the environment? D) Contribute to a local or national fund to protect the environment? E) Pay extra taxes to protect the environment?**

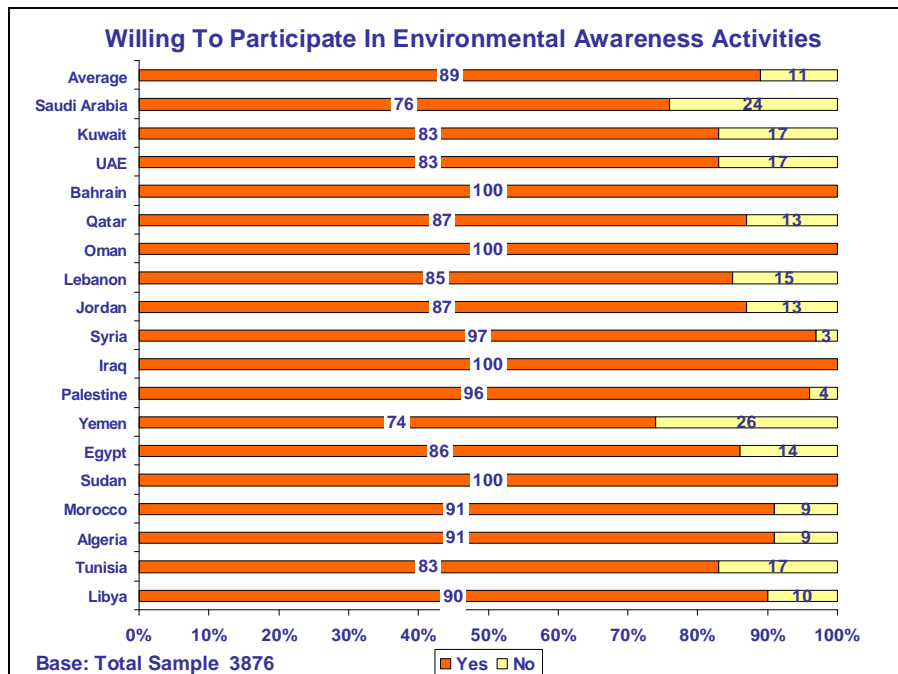
Questions under this category were meant to measure the level of personal action respondents are prepared to undertake in order to protect the environment. 95% said they were ready to comply with environmental legislation and 89% said they would participate in environmental awareness campaigns. 68% were prepared to pay extra taxes to protect the environment.

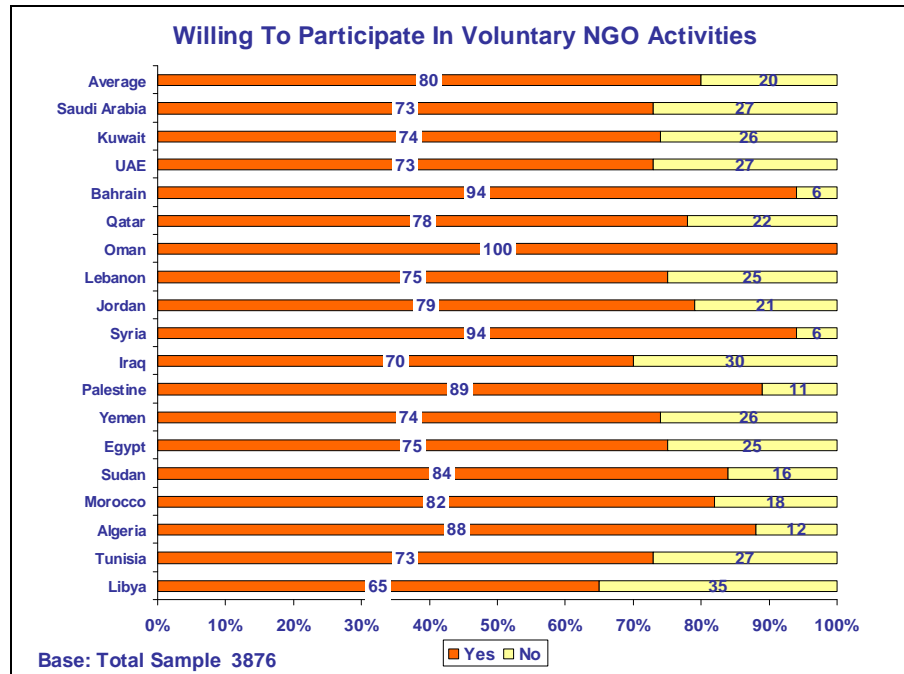
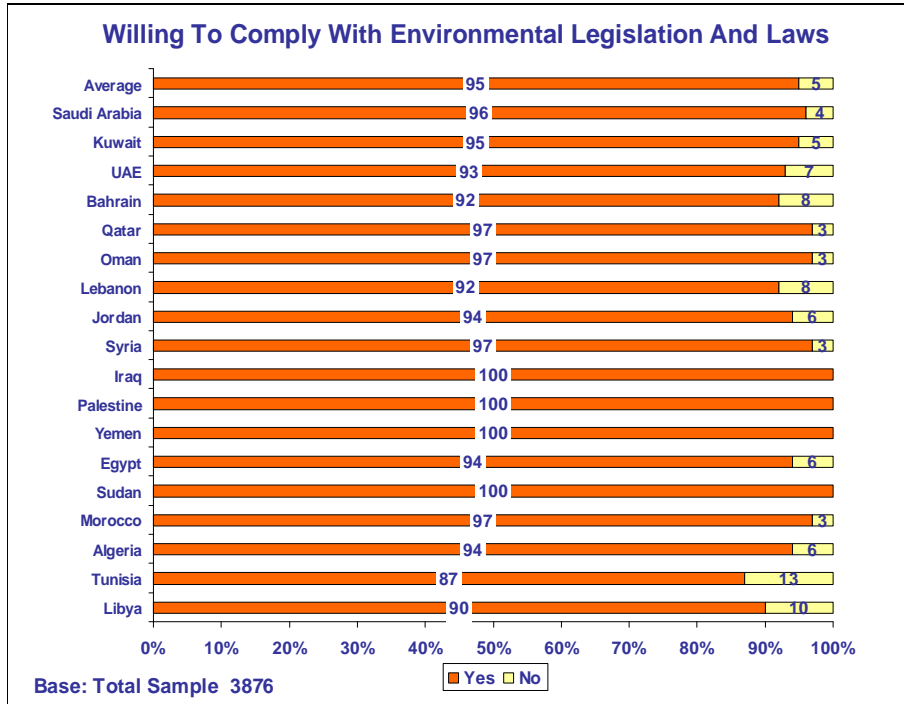
The rate of those ready to participate in environmental public awareness activities ranged between 100% in Oman and Bahrain, to 91% in Morocco, 87% in Jordan, 85% in Lebanon, 83% in Kuwait and UAE, and 76% in Saudi Arabia, against 89% of the total sample, which reflected an overall high level of willingness to be part in awareness action.

At 80%, the percentage of those willing to participate in NGO/civil society activity, though over 70% in 17 out of the 18 countries, was 10 points lower than that of those ready to participate in unspecified environmental awareness activities. Results were consistent among socio-economic categories in relation to the total sample.

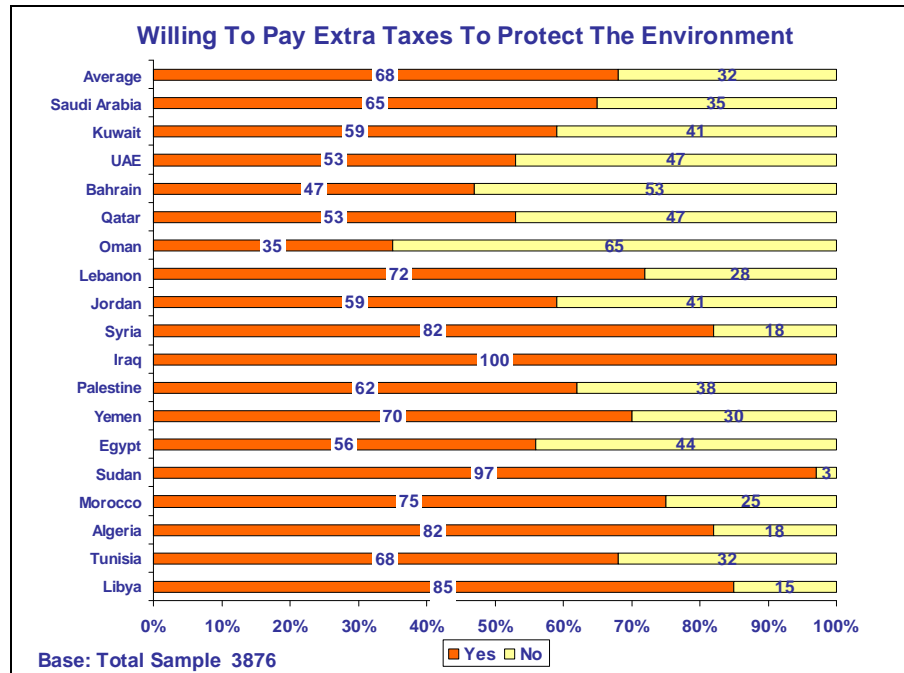
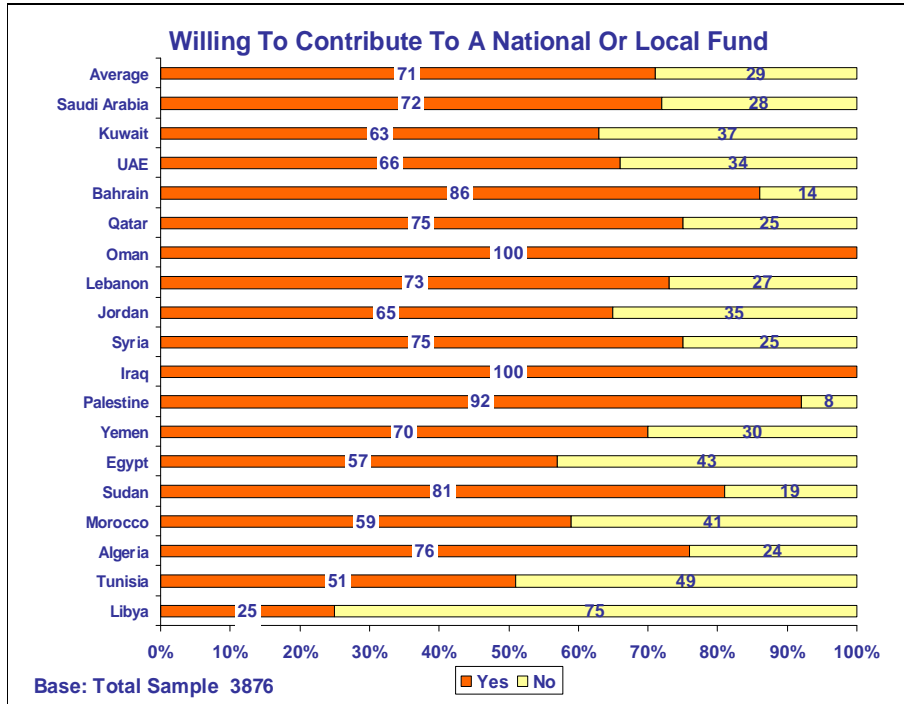
Willingness to pay extra taxes to protect the environment was typically lower in the Gulf countries than in other regions. Those who were not ready to pay environment tax in various Gulf countries ranged from 65% in Oman, 53% in Bahrain, 47% in UAE and Qatar, 41% in Kuwait, down to 34% in Saudi Arabia. In other regions, only Egypt and Jordan registered such significant levels of unwillingness to pay environment taxes, at 44% and 41% respectively. Otherwise, rejection rates were lower across the board, such as in Tunisia (32%), Lebanon (28%) and Morocco (25%). The results can be attributed both to the lack of the culture of paying taxes (like in the welfare countries of the Gulf), or economic hardship in some other countries. This might explain why the majority of those in the Gulf countries, who were unwilling to pay environment tax, were prepared to contribute to an environment protection fund (Oman 100%, Bahrain 86%, Qatar 75%, Saudi Arabia 72%, Kuwait 63%).

While no significant variations were recorded as relating to the place of residence, gender or age, major differences were obvious among different income and education groups: 62% of those with income above average were willing to pay environment tax, compared to 54% of those below-average income. While 53% of those with elementary education were ready to pay environment tax, the percentage among university graduates increased to 61%.









**6- Do you think that your country should do more, less or the same as it is doing now to protect the environment?**

In 15 out of the 18 countries surveyed, respondents were nearly unanimous in demanding more action from their governments to protect the environment, with over 95% of the total voting for this option. This was true across the regions, reaching 100% in Bahrain, Oman, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, Yemen and Morocco. The following group included Lebanon and Egypt (99%), Saudi Arabia and Algeria (97%), Jordan (96%), UAE and Sudan (94%).

In Tunisia, 80% of the respondents demanded more environmental action, while 20% thought that the country was doing enough, and should continue to do the same. In Qatar and Libya, 75% of the respondents thought that the country should do more for the environment.

The consistency of results among different socio-economic groups was remarkable for this question, whereas percentages of different categories conformed to the average of the total sample with slight differences of less than 2 percent.

