Eight in 10 Saudis want women to drive: Arab News/YouGov poll

85% of women who plan to drive want to buy a car when ban lifted

Half will use vehicle to travel to work more easily, exclusive poll finds

Black, white cars favorite; Toyota named most popular model

The wide-ranging poll of more than 300 adults revealed the model of car favored among Saudis, and found that most think driving will ‘transform’ their lives. King Salman last month issued a decree that will allow women to get behind the wheel by June next year. The current ‘ban’ is considered a social issue, and women polled said they will no longer be dependent on male relatives to travel.

The Kingdom announced last month that it will lift a ban on women drivers from next June. The poll was conducted in October but found that 97 percent of Saudis are aware of the decision to allow women to drive, and 94 percent said they would like to see women driving.

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**Saudi economy set to enter the fast lane**

From greater car sales to an upturn in GDP, the decision to allow women to drive is sending all the right signals, analysts say.

**Rebecca Sbono & Olivia Cuthbert**

**Special to Arab News**

**LONDON:** One of the biggest benefits of allowing women in Saudi Arabia to drive is expected to be the positive effect it will have on the Kingdom’s economy.

That was a key finding of an Arab News/YouGov survey of the Saudi public, in which 42 percent said the main impact of lifting the driving ban is that it will enable more women to find employment, which should boost the overall economy.

A third said the most significant impact would be an increase in household income. — personally, presumably due to women being able to find new forms of employment, as well as families no longer having to pay for drivers.

The economic effects of the move to allow women to drive — which comes into force in June — were viewed as more significant than women’s fight for gender equality. Just 29 percent of the poll respondents said the biggest impact would be enabling more women to vote and running for election, which should boost the political arena.

The initial economic effects of the decision will be felt by car producers, said analysts. In the short term, a main discernible impact will probably be a temporary jump in car purchases as families buy additional vehicles, boosting consumer confidence, said Jason Tuvey, Middle East economist at Capital Economics.

Economists agree with the Arab News poll findings, which suggest that women driving could give a long-term economic boost. “The decision should make it easier for women to seek and acquire employment, which should help to boost the female labor force participation rate which, at around 20 percent, is among the lowest in the world,” said Tuvey.

As of the third quarter 2016, there were a total of 12,759,999 people employed in Saudi Arabia, including non-Saudis, according to government statistics. Women accounted for just 1,482,284 of those employed, of which 835,726 were Saudi nationals.

Hala Kudwah, Saudi Arabia financial services consulting leader at PwC, forecasts a cultural and socially.”

The Saudi population is more accepting because it sees the strategic and economic benefits clearly,” she said.

The tangible economic benefits of the decision could go some way to making the Kingdom a more palatable among members of Saudi Arabia’s more conservative society, analysts suggest.

The ban on women drivers has been sensitive, particularly on an issue that has given rise to concerns about women being able to travel freely, going to work or university, or meeting with friends outside the family. Women have driven a car in Saudi Arabia. women rush to pass the test.

Vitali Bielski, senior consultant at consultancy firm Frost & Sullivan, said he expects there to be some lag given that things take time. It’s not just a matter of issuing licenses in Saudi Arabia. driving instructors will be able to start driving as quickly as possible.

An Arab News/YouGov poll of 1,482,284 women found that 75 percent of Saudi women plan to apply for a license, three-quarters of whom want to do so as soon as the driving ban is lifted next year.

Close to a quarter of Saudi women have driven a car in another country, with 45 percent in possession of a license obtained outside KSA, the poll found. Tighter regulations for women drivers to hit the road, analysts expect there to be some lag given the licensing requirements. “It could potentially take a while for women to get the necessary driving lessons and go through the bureaucratic hurdles of getting a license in order to actually start driving,” said Tuvey.

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Black or blue? Honda or Hyundai? Arab News/YouGov poll reveals favorite models among Saudi women

GREG WILCOX

ARAB NEWS STAFF

LONDON: A boom in sales of budget motors is forecast in KSA, according to an Arab News/YouGov poll that revealed 85 percent of Saudi women who intend to drive say they will buy a car.

One finding of the poll, which was conducted in early October, was that 85 percent of Saudi women plan to get a driving license once the driving ban is lifted next year. Small, cheap sedans are the vehicles of choice, according to the poll.

The Arab News/YouGov poll of more than 500 Saudis suggests that millions of women will look to buy a car — although cheaper makes proved most popular of the female respondents who intend to buy a car, 46 percent said their expected budget was SAR 48,000 ($12,666) or less.

Medium-sized sedans were named as the top models, with Toyota, BMW and Jeep chosen as the most popular makes. The poll revealed Black and pearl white cars are the favorite, followed by silver, the respondents said.

Analysts agree that vehicle sales in KSA in general are set to rise in Saudi Arabia — but said the jump might be more modest than the poll suggests.

"Saudi families are big, 5.8 people per household, and must already have more than one car. So while 85 percent seem poised to purchase a new car I think in reality the figure will be much lower," Emmanuel Darku, Middle East and Africa analyst for IHS Markit, told Arab News.

One example of a car that could do well would be the Renault Symbol," Oakley said. "This would bring the Saudi market into line with the UAE, which is already very popular. Furthermore, the majority of the sample — 80 percent — were from the age group most concerned by the decision (25-39), with most married, highly educated and employed, reflecting a level of awareness and reasoning. Coming from the huge media coverage that followed the royal decree to allow women to drive, it is not surprising that the majority of those surveyed said they were aware of the decision.

More than half of the respondents said they feel happy, as well as relaxed, encouraged, inspired or empower ed about the move to allow women to drive; only 14 percent said they feel offended, angry or sad. This is surprising considering the vehement opposition voices, which remain. Indeed, the false impression that the majority of Saudis are against, or would object to, women driving.

This raises questions about the findings of previous surveys on "controversial" social issues, some of which claimed that the majority of Saudis are against women driving.

The Arab News/YouGov survey, on the other hand, found that more than three quarters of Saudi nationals support the decision to allow women to drive.

Slightly more women than men agreed with the move, but the difference in the percentages was negligible. This disputes another commonly held belief, but false view that Saudis are old fashioned, and against women driving.

The rest respondents gave as approving or disagreeing with the decision were not so surprising. Many of those in favor of women driving based their opinions on a belief in individual freedom and rights, indicating a high degree of awareness of the issue from the legal, social and financial angles.

On the other hand, those who disagree with the decision to let women drive said their reasons were based mostly on collective social beliefs and personal opinions, followed by religious and economic factors. Of course, many esteemed scholars have long refuted claims that there is any religious justification to prevent women from driving. Half of those polled who said they disagree with women driving cited safety concerns; yet this can be addressed through traffic laws and anti-harassment legislation targeting male drivers, with steps being taken in that direction. The other reasons cited by those who disagreed with the move to allow women to drive are simply based on male-centric opinions that might change over time. It is understandable that many respondents expect women driving to positively impact the economy; employment rates and household incomes. Clearly, women have waited long enough for this decision, with many of the poll respondents saying they will apply for a license and start driving as soon as the decree takes effect.

About a quarter of Saudi women said they have already driven a car in another country, which is not in a big proportion as one might expect. This suggests that the growing awareness among women about their right to drive, and the importance of it, is not solely led by those with experience of getting behind the wheel.

Saudi women expect a major transformation in their lives once they start driving — and their reasons for want ing to drive are exactly the same as those for other women around the world. It is a great feeling to know that you have the choice and ability to drive. For those who do not plan to drive, for whatever reason, that is their choice too.

*Maha Akeel is a Saudi writer. Twitter: @mahaakeel1

Bumper forecast for budget car sales

WHICH CARS SAUDI WOMEN PREFER

MOST SAUDI WOMEN WHO PLAN TO DRIVE SAY THEY WILL PURCHASE THEIR OWN VEHICLE

Plan to purchase a car

Expected car budget

Budget buyers: Almost half looking for a car worth less than SR40,000 ($10,666)

Less than SR 40,000

44

SR 40,000 - 75,000

27

SR 76,000 - 100,000

16

SR 101,000 - 150,000

9

SR 151,000 - 250,000

5

Above SR 250,000

4

Type of car to drive

Vehicle color

Preferred model/brand

Medium size sedan

Black

Toyota

12

Toyota Corolla

12

BMW

8

7

Mercedes Benz

17

Toyota

15

Hyundai

15

Kia

6

Lexus

5

Audi

4

Ford

3

Infiiniti

2

Nissan

2

Other

6

I don't know

18

Large SUV

Black

Toyota

12

Toyota

12

BMW

8

7

Mercedes Benz

17

Toyota

15

Hyundai

15

Kia

6

Lexus

5

Audi

4

Ford

3

Infiiniti

2

Nissan

2

Other

6

I don't know

18

Small sedan or supersized SUV? Types of cars favored by Saudi women
Support for women driving shows public on board for Saudi reforms

• Women are a priority’ in Saudi Arabia, commentator says
• Other social changes include introduction of physical education classes in schools and review of guardianship law

OLIVIA CUTHBERT
SPECIAL TO ARAB NEWS

LONDON: Saudi society supports a recent decision to lift the ban on women driving, according to a recent Arab News/YouGov poll.

The survey of more than 500 Saudis residing in the Kingdom showed 82 percent of women and 71 percent of men were behind the decision.

Commentators said the move to lift the driving ban — one of many social and economic reforms underway in Saudi Arabia — shows the Kingdom is modernizing, but in a way that does not abandon its traditions.

"Conservatives saw the ban on driving for women as a way to resist progressive policies. To them, reversal of the policy would mean a bow to Westernization," said Ola Salem of the Arabia Foundation.

"Saudi Arabia is nonetheless making it clear that the direction of change is toward an order of modernization without abandoning traditions and customs the country holds dear," she said.

Senior Saudi religious figures were among those voicing their support in the aftermath of the announcement, including the imam of top Islamic clerics, which tweeted, "May God bless the king who looks out for the interest of his people and his country in accordance with Sharia law."

Sheikh Khalid al-Shub, a professor of religion in Saudi Arabia, also tweeted: "Women driving is not against Shariah and women will decide what will best suit them."

More freedom of movement and easier access to employment for women were among the main reasons cited in the poll for supporting the move, done by some in a major step in a series of far-reaching reforms being ushered in under the banner of Vision 2030.

Part of the plan is to harness the capacity of women to drive a modernized Saudi economy, with an initial aim to increase female participation in the workforce to 30 percent.

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"From the introduction of physical education in government schools to reviewing the country’s guardianship law, to allowing women into stadiums to celebrate national day, these changes show that women are a priority in the country today," she said.

"Limiting the economy was another reason cited for supporting the move, done by some as a step toward a step in a series of far-reaching reforms being ushered in under the banner of Vision 2030."

"Driving the ban on women driving is part and parcel of Vision 2030, which is all about building sustainable economic and social structures that are uplifting for all," said John Sfakianakis, director of economic research at the Gulf Research Center in Riyadh.

The benefits are likely to resonate through all aspects of life in the Kingdom, where traditionally male family members have had to set aside time for driving-related errands or allocate income to hiring people to do it on their behalf.

"There’s this productivity black hole where male members of the family take time off to collect kids from school, respond to emergencies, pick up the groceries etc. When women are able to drive, it will increase the efficiency of the system."

"Planning transport logistics can be quite demanding, particularly if your husband is busy or there are no men available to drive," she added.

Despite the advantages, 21 percent of participants in the poll expressed their disconformity with the decree, with many claiming that driving women is un-Islamic and thus in the face of local cultural traditions.

Other factors included concerns that it will create too much freedom in society as well as a belief that women should be accompanied by a male relative in the public, while some said women driving violates religious teachings.

The announcement that the ban on women driving would be lifted generated a huge response on social media, with many expressing their congratulations.

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More women support the move than men

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How the poll was conducted

YOUGOV

As part of the extended partnership between YouGov and Arab News to provide insights within and about the Arab world, YouGov conducted an opinion poll among Saudi nationals for women wanting or not wanting to drive in the Kingdom.

The survey was conducted using an online interview administered among members of the YouGov Plc panel of panelists, stated, are from YouGov.

The questionnaire included a total of 10 questions applicable per respondent groups, none, however, different as they were filtered mainly based on gender.

The total sample size was 951 Saudi nationals who reside in the Kingdom.

The sample was representative of the urban adult Saudi population in terms of gender, age and city of residence.

The margin of error is 18 percent, which is under the admissible level. The questionnaire included a total of 21 closed-ended questions.

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The sample included residents of Riyadh (33 percent), Jeddah (19 percent) and Dammam (9 percent) and other cities in Saudi Arabia.

There was an even gender split among respondents, with 58 percent males and 59 percent females. Light in 10 of the sample group fell between the ages of 20 and 29.

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